Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

103-3 | 2015
Les territoires de montagne, fournisseurs mondiaux de ressources

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Publisher
Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine

Electronic version
URL: http://rga.revues.org/3142
ISSN: 1760-7426

Electronic reference
Manfred Perlik, « Mountains as Global Suppliers : New Forms of Disparities Between Mountain Areas and Metropolitan Hubs », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 103-3 | 2015, Online since 14 March 2015, connection on 03 October 2016. URL : http://rga.revues.org/3142

This text was automatically generated on 3 octobre 2016.

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source: https://doi.org/10.7892/boris.96525 | downloaded: 12.10.2024

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An Introduction

Manfred Perlik

EDITOR'S NOTE

All the English texts in this issue were edited by André Crous, except for the article by Heino Meessen *et al.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Acknowledgements: This thematic issue was inspired primarily by an international workshop organised in Nainital/Uttarakhand (India) in November 2011, hosted by the Mountain Research Initiative, on issues relating to the urbanisation of mountain areas. Participants in this workshop included: Jürgen Breuste, Salzburg, Austria; Kirsten Valentine Cadieux, Minneapolis, USA; Bernard Charléry de la Masselière, Toulouse, France; Greg Greenwood, Bern, Switzerland; Maya Ishizawa, Cottbus, Germany; Alison Kohn, Chicago, USA; Manfred Perlik, Bern, Switzerland; Hugo Romero, Santiago, Chile; Thomas Feldhoff, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Vishwambhar Sati, Aizawl, India; Pankaj Thapa, Thimphu, Bhutan; Prakash Tiwari, Nainital, India; and Ismael Vaccaro, Montréal, Canada. A collective article on the aspects of cities and agglomerations in mountain areas is currently being prepared.

The common thread

1 It can seem almost incoherent at first that a single thematic issue deals with mining, water, housing and wilderness. However, the commonality rests in the fact that these goods and services are all specialised economic activities – specialities that define the mountain-specific characteristics in a new way and question the typical and long-prevailing multifunctional and diverse economies. These specialities are not new to mountain areas, but they are gaining new importance in the context of globalisation. They are only possible on the basis of large market catchments. In low-populated areas, this means an intense relationship with globalised markets and urban agglomerations with a high population. Specialities of mountain areas concern especially those resources that do not exist or are rare in metropolitan regions. It therefore appears justified to treat new uses in mountain regions under the heading of the supplier or subcontractor of global decision centres that Saskia Sassen identifies as global cities and that we call metropolitan regions, and with which we try to address the associated impacts.

2 Formerly rural and especially mountain regions have functionally been transformed into peripheries or "supplementary spaces". Regional consultation bodies recommend that their economic approaches be innovation-driven and offer-oriented. Marginal regions should have more specialised economies that would help them to develop unique selling propositions in order to ensure their offer – at least in the short or medium term – has a temporary monopoly and to avoid direct competition with low-cost economies. If the region chooses its specialisation correctly (i.e. if it can create enough demand), its economy will achieve increasing returns and be able to cover costs even if it faces disadvantages such as steep relief, a lack of cultivable surfaces or sparse population. In this respect, all the regions presented in this thematic issue share the same problems. They accept the notion of abandoning certain qualities (like open space) and sacrifice value chains (like pastoralism) or even the existing population (through gentrification) because the old assets have lost their prestige and are in competition with other uses or are regarded as having no potential. Irrespective whether this is mining, water, housing or wilderness: If the local and regional decision makers accept the new strategies as specialised suppliers, they expect a revaluation of their economic space, a stabilization of their population, a better position within the national hierarchy and an increased acceptance by the majority of the population which lives outside the mountains.

3 Metropolitan regions are the most diversified territories because of their size, their historical trajectory and the structure and significance of their economic activities, even in a flat environment. Within the framework of global metropolisation, this characteristic has multiplied, while small towns and peripheries have undergone depletion and monostructural specialisation. Because of their demographic and economic weight, metropolitan regions can already offer their populations a variety of social and professional interactions. Metropolitan areas close to mountains have an additional asset, as mountains offer landscape amenities, security in water supply, a positive image and specialised jobs linked to the mountains. They obtain a supplementary diversification – in other words, a unique selling position.

4 Especially second-tier agglomerations may profit from this asset when mountain areas transform their agricultural-handicraft profile by establishing value chains based on the new commodity, "landscape". Key factors for these activities are the availability of

constructible land and knowledge about external markets to create new service offers for an urban clientele primarily located outside the mountains. Metropolitan areas may also profit from a traditional supply of tangible resources like water or food, which allows population growth without dangerous shortages. In other cases, this abundance leads to a tremendous overuse and oversized growth, as is the case of La Paz, Bolivia, located within the Andean mountain range, whose water supply is completely dependent on a small glacier and endangered by the polluted brownfields resulting from mining activities (Hoffmann, 2013). Cities within or near mountains may also profit from the mining sectors if they allow them to base their regional headquarters and business services there. But this might persist only as just as long as the exploitation of the exploited sites, as historic examples show, e.g. Spokane, Washington, near the Rocky Mountains, in the late 19th century.

5 The mountain assets mentioned above allow second-tier cities to maintain their stature in an urban hierarchy that has turned from the administrative Christallerian type to a system of commercially acting metropolitan areas. Mountain resources help them to remain resilient amidst global competition.

6 In the collective interest of these cities that represent the majority of the population, it seems clear that the mountain areas nearby should be used to benefit them. At first sight, this seems to be a fair and efficient approach, also in ecological terms. Upon closer inspection, however, this spatial division of labour produces new forms of territorial disparities. This seems paradoxical, because at least in the European mountain areas the usual indicators (regional GDP per capita) show only relatively small differences in prosperity for the lowlands. This can partly be explained by the problem of scale levels (see the contribution of Yves Rousselot) but also by the inhabitants (see the contributions of Carla Marchant *et al.* and Cristina Mattiucci). Therefore, the character of the disparities today is different than it was in the past and can rather be stated by an asymmetric distribution of future opportunities (Perlik, 2012). In this thematic issue, this problem is addressed by Nathalie Bertrand *et al.*

7 The articles selected for this issue reflect the range of the most important specialities. It turns out that the local mountain population recognises the supplier's role and views with a critical eye; there is an idea that the commercial relation might not be "sustainable" because it puts the socio-economic survival of the local actors in danger because its resources are squandered when they are given away too cheaply. The articles reflect this awareness: It is no longer a question whether mountain areas function as suppliers – this can be taken for granted. The question now concerns how to deal with it and how mountain stakeholders can engage and argue for better conditions in this relationship (rapport) of mutual but asymmetrical dependence.

The new specialities of the mountains

Mining for the thirsty global village

8 The global hunger for raw materials in the world has, among others, resulted in the possibility that poor countries in general and mountain areas in particular might suddenly benefit from changed conditions of offer and demand. This concerns mainly rare earths, precious metals, other ores and fossil fuels. In particular, the production of natural gas through fracking has enjoyed a temporary boom, which in the United States

in many regions previously affected by a severe decline in jobs has driven new economic growth. It has already emerged that this new hope is very fragile and only temporary.

9 Many of these sites do not have a good prospects because they are only of limited use. Either their workforce is too poor to invest any further in these places through personal engagement, knowledge or financing, or, by contrast, technicians and engineers are well paid and flown in for each working tour because the living conditions – similar to those on oil rigs – are not appealing enough for them to stay. The relations of dependence are clearly visible: There is rarely an interest in these areas beyond extraction. Yet these sites are of elevated importance because the lack of social control and of an interest in development encourages environmental and social dumping (Romero *et al.* 2012). Whenever catchment areas are polluted at the level of the headwaters, environmental change will not be visible until the hysteresis effect of accumulated environmental impacts affects the downstream riparian zones, e.g. in the form of groundwater contamination, flood, drought or an industrial accident. Social dumping leads to dangerous and poor working conditions. The local population lives on call, and even the prospect of development over several generations does not suggest the feasibility of sustainable development. In this issue, Marie Forget shows that regional authorities also practise such a development strategy. This is the exact opposite of what one might think at first, and it demolishes the myth that regional authorities act more in the interest of a peripheral region than a distant central government. This is a strong argument against the oft-stated position that mountain regions would make wiser and more sustainable decisions if they had more regional autonomy and subsidiarity and did not depend on the interests of the federal state. So it is not automatically the external actors that determine eco-social dumping but a precise constellation of local, regional and external stakeholders.

Water supply and hydro-energy as appropriation of public goods

10 Global change generates large-scale imbalances between water demand and water supply, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. As a result, covetousness leads to the complete commodification of the domestic use of water, that is, to change from a regime of municipal fees to a regime of private profitable companies. In most European countries, water is still seen as a resource that has the features of a public good and whose access is considered a human right, paid for through fees and taxes. This meant that water was not sold for profit and prevented large-scale export to locations where the reservoirs have been overused or degraded. This practice comes under pressure and is a process that is highly contested. The Chartreuse case study of Bérangère Serroi and her collaborators, as well as Yves Rousselot's case study of Lesotho and the Johannesburg metropolitan region, shows severe conflicts of interest but at different scales. The resulting spatial hierarchies between resource-owning territories and consuming territories are the expression of socio-economies hierarchies and the relations of power underpinning them.

11 Both examples show that spatial demarcations are politically and socially constructed and that the conflicts of interests do not allow a solution that is "objective" and favourable to both. In fact it is the selected scale that ensures that the conflicts of interest become visible. This selection is arbitrary and depends on the power relations between the main societal stakeholders. Their strength and negotiating position defines what is called "win-win" and what, on the other hand, is defined as asymmetric. Therefore it is

clear that, in a situation of a polarised population distribution and value adding, the security of supply to the metropolitan areas will always be a priority. The urban stakeholders will claim their dependence and inferior position towards the mountain areas, even though the producing mountain population earn less.

12 One can conclude that a regionalisation along the lines of "mountains versus lowland" is not helpful under the criteria of sustainability. Mountain autonomy with the arguments of subsidiarity will not alleviate the functional hierarchy. On the contrary, as they remain in a weak position, they often adopt the logic of market regulation, that is, selling their specific resources as a niche product at a high price – a strategy that generates an incentive for overuse and whose long-term consequences cannot be estimated.

Specialised housing in prestigious landscape

13 Over the past two decades, the well-developed and accessible areas of high mountains have become increasingly specialised for dwelling (among others: Moss/Glorioso, 2014; geojournal 2011, vol. 76; JAR/RGA, 2011 vol. 99(1) & 2014, 102(4)). Here, two trends can be highlighted: On the one hand, the extension of mountain-proximal metropolitan areas to the slopes of the mountains in the form of advancing peri-urbanisation applies particularly to the mountains in densely populated parts of Europe, where high spatial and social mobility has made hour-long commutes the rule for qualified professionals. On the other hand, tourist destinations are being converted into specialised residential areas for multi-local living families and their friends. These new patterns are related to the new demands from urbanites who want to buy or who have inherited real estate in the mountains. It is also related to new offers as the tourism sector lacks profitability and is undergoing a complete transformation. These new residences are no longer basic apartments to stay in for outdoor holidays but now fulfil the same roles as the main homes: They allow a change in the preferred environment, serve the purpose of "living apart together", make it possible for the (multi-generation) family and private or professional friends to meet and enable Internet-based work in a calm and cosy place outside town (Schier *et al.* 2015).

14 The European paradigm of internal city growth (instead of sprawl) is supplemented by the search for otherness that is possible thanks to enlarged multi-local living practices. Mountains are a location where tourism is replaced by real estate activities and where new patterns of commodification arise through the valorisation of the landscape and new forms of social differentiation by means of second homes. Such a development towards a multi-locally used residence takes place in the major alpine resorts but also in municipalities that have maintained their "rural" appearance at lower altitudes. Both resort towns and peri-urban village form part of the new metropolitan areas. They become functionally integrated as a socially segregated "neighbourhood" ("Alpine gentrification") or as part of the amenities of the whole region, within the framework of international competition between cities (Perlik, 2011). The contributions by Carla Marchant and Cristina Mattiucci treat different aspects of this topic. The cases from the Italian Alps and the Chilean Andes show that the search for landscape amenities has become a topic of global importance for the established and the emerging middle classes.

“Large protected areas”: Between Noah’s Ark and Disneyland

15 The farthest peripheries can also be described as global suppliers that open up new market niches such as large protected areas. Basically there are two concepts: the original American national park concept, where the men must not intervene, and the Europe approach, where the cultural landscape produced through human intervention is integrated into a park concept. Neither concept is popular among the local population where the mountains are populated.

16 Pratiba Naitthani and Sunil Kainthola show that in the Himalayas, peasants of the Bhotiya ethnicity who practise pastoralism are afraid of being squeezed because they are losing access to the pastures. Even the status of regional autonomy granted to Uttarakhand, which since 2000 has been a federal state restricted along the mountain perimeter, does not help the local population. On the contrary, Uttarakhand, as the legal successor to the British colonial masters, is the biggest landowner. Uttarakhand promotes its modernisation by developing hydro-energy in the valleys and high-end tourism in the high altitudes following the American concept according to which human cultivating practices have to stay out. We see a parallel to mining in Argentina, where the contract permission refers to a similar constellation of regional powers. The example gives reason to think critically about concepts that want to retain the Alps as an island of a rural macro-region in the heart of Europe.

17 However, the concept of large protected areas in cultural landscapes is not favoured either, as it shifts a region’s objectives from a trajectory dominated by production to a development path focused entirely on reproduction. This means a paradigm shift that is seen as problematic in a global economy where productivity and the production of tangible and intangible goods is a key element, and mountain populations do not appear to be strong enough to develop a counter-model to the productivist mainstream. Therefore local people fear that the development gap between highly developed metropolitan regions and sparsely populated regions with declining services will increase even further. From the perspective of the peripheries, that seems logical: As long as the predominant accumulation regime promotes the concentration of wealth, knowledge and innovation capacity (expressed in performant public transport systems, cultural offers, high-end medicine, education and personal networks), any slowdown is detrimental to the peripheries. Heino Meessen *et al.* provide a picture of the Carpathians, a less prosperous mountain region. They show an approach to dealing with conflicts of interest between the local population and the representatives of a strict, protectionist approach. By bringing together the different stakeholder groups, the diverging interests between the local population and the urban-oriented interests of the NGOs and the national administrations become transparent and negotiable (similarly to the case of water supply in the Chartreuse). These are steps that could break the one-sided relationships of asymmetric dependency between metropolitan areas and peripheries.

Institutionalised spatial disparities

18 One result of the renunciation of the Fordist paradigm of equality-focused regional development is the concentration of high-end services and control functions in the metropolitan regions that maintain and increase their diversity, offer attractive jobs and

generate high added value. Sparsely populated areas may be successful in highly specialised niches. In most European countries, the institutions in charge of spatial and regional development have adopted the concept of the region as an entrepreneurial body. This model fuels a polarisation of territorial development, where dynamic mountain areas have to look for new niches in the commodification of their specific landscapes. The unproductive parts ("areas with poor potential") are decoupled from further development, which results in new types of disparities and an asymmetric territorial development (Perlik, 2012). The asymmetry affects the available purchasing power in a region less than it does the future options: Rural regions become functionally integrated in the urban areas as subaltern stakeholders with new spatial functions, while their local centres lose formerly key functions. The European offices for spatial development met these transformations with the elaboration of metropolitan areas as a new spatial category. In her contribution, Nathalie Bertrand and colleagues provide a vivid example of this development in the Geneva metropolitan region (Grand Genève).

Mountain areas as indicators of a global division of labour

19 The contributions show the new functions of mountain areas under the conditions of global change, which is expressed especially in the processes of metropolisation. These new functions are partly introduced from outside the mountain regions but also emanate from a subjective need for change within the mountain areas in the context of high mobility, global sources of information and increasing comparisons between the different ways of life. The decreasing significance of traditional value chains and, by contrast, the experiences that external supports were always tied to imposed conditions encourage regions to follow development models that are based on responsibility: Mining concessions result in jobs for a population suffering from unemployment; the release of water rights allows revenues that, although they are decided by political bargaining, are estimated as a fair price for a resource (even if too low) and do not have the bad aftertaste of being subsidies or charity. Some strategies of modernisation are based on experiences from other parts of the world and take the continuously repeated suggestions of mainstream policies at face value: Thus, the adoption of the American national park concept in the Himalayas promises a move away from subsistence pastoralism that has low productivity towards high-value niche tourism that should attract a wealthy international clientele willing to pay for the production of landscape and biodiversity, in other words, high-end personal services.

20 However, the transformation processes are not running as easily as hoped for by the proponents. The peasants oppose the restriction of their rights and reject environmental tourism as well as their own transformation into greenkeepers. Environmental organisations are fighting for the sake of biodiversity and the conservation of nature- and cultivated-landscape against dams for water storage and power plants. A broad alliance of the population (outside as well as inside the mountains) supports a discussion against urban sprawl and rejects more construction and real estate projects in the mountains. NGOs with social aims act against global commodity traders and denounce tax evasion and the miserable working conditions of their employees.

21 One might accept such degradation as a temporary necessity in the interest of overall growth because in the long run living and environmental conditions could improve for a majority of the population, but this position's feasibility has not yet been proved. Even more importantly, however, it raises the fundamental question whether this approach is beneficial (in other words, sustainable) in the long run. Mountain areas with these strategies are betting on providing global urban markets with unique products. With this offer-oriented strategy, they take risks as they rebuild their own infrastructures at enormous cost by sacrificing other options to adapt to global market needs that they cannot survey and are changing rapidly. Thus they cannot be sure that these investments will pay off. If it proves to be the case that the mountain areas' investments in a highly specialised development path missed the mark, not only the investments will have been unsuccessful, but, even worse, the options will have deteriorated, too: Open spaces are built, an existing positive image is destroyed, and the previous strengths of the existing territorial capital (tacit knowledge) will be scattered to the four winds. Money is lost, too. The mountain areas are losing a part of their freedom of action and become tied to the development goals of their peri-alpine neighbours. The metropolitan regions receive a twofold benefit: They retain their diversity of different production clusters, and they expand this advantage by integrating the peripheries as a locational advantage to new residents, new service companies and city tourism. The mountain areas, however, by changing completely their historic trajectory, lose a part of their territorial capital, which had been established slowly over long periods of time and now becomes devalued.

Conclusions

a. Within the framework of global change, traditional mountain-specific economies are becoming less important. Mountains' structural change generates a commodification of new resources, which often means the privatisation of formerly public goods. The increasing commodification of landscape aesthetics converts the mountain areas from a territory of production into a territory of consumption. The business model is rebuilt from being export-based to residential. The criticism of urban sprawl runs parallel with increasing multi-locality. Cities' structures change as they move towards smaller apartments and higher density, but they receive a supplementary neighbourhood as a branch office in the mountains.

b. The frequently expressed thesis that regionalisation along the mountain topography would lead to a more adapted and sustainable economy loses its basis. When areas of high and low productivity are separated on the administrative level, it is obviously even more difficult for the jurisdiction of lower productivity to obtain support and understanding from the outside – one might call it the "Greek syndrome". Poor areas are consequently advised to try to attract foreign direct investments and to adapt to the conditions imposed by the rich neighbour, which they are too weak to reject. Here we see a similarity with the large-scale land acquisitions in Africa known as "land-grabbing". The reasons for accepting the conditions are manifold. Lacking knowledge and nepotism or a combination of both are certainly not rare. Both are an argument not to exaggerate and not to misinterpret the principle of subsidiarity.

c. The concentration of population and the most productive economic sectors outside the mountains means that the power to decide how to use mountain resources is shifting away from the mountains. While affluent purchasing power mitigates monetary disparities, functional disparities between metropolitan regions and its mountain hinterlands are on the rise. The metropolitan growth also generates a growing demand for resources, which often

have to be delivered from mountain sites and create concentrated hotspots of extractive industries without becoming a real diversified cluster.

d. The increased exploitation of old and new resources jeopardises the endogenous regional value chains. The mountain population is aware of this development. Although mountain issues have a position that since the 1990s has been weaker than urban issues, they have also won support from civil society and NGOs concerning social fields like food security and global sourcing. Therefore the conditions to renegotiate the terms of exchange are still valid and practised, as the case studies in this issue show. The peripheral areas obtain new societal functions and in the process become integrated in the leisure and labour markets of the metropolitan areas; they lose, at least in part, their character of being "rural areas". To be successful and counteract the asymmetric relationship, stronger cooperation between mountain regions and metropolitan areas is inevitable but has to be practised in a different way. This means a process in which both sides have to abandon self-centred positions. By contrast, stronger cooperation among the mountain areas alone is unlikely and would probably even be counterproductive as it fuels isolationist ambitions.

22 In summary: The role of mountain areas as global suppliers will only increase. The inhabitants of the mountain regions have realised that they are in this role, that this role is associated with serious disadvantages, and that they have to defend their position against a stronger position of the peri-alpine conurbations. Both sides will only be successful in the long run if they match their divergent interests and make them compatible with each other. This point argues against pure advocacy for the mountain regions as well as against an apologia of the urban way as a superior grade of society, given the critical view taken of this "urban way" (Gintrac/Giroud, 2015[1]).

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NOTES

1. This was the last book by Matthieu Giroud (1974-2015), Assistant Professor and critical geographer educated at Grenoble University. He was killed these days by the monstrous attacks at the club Bataclan at Paris on November 13th.

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