

The Effects of Amenity Migration on Ethnic Minorities in the Alps

Case Study: the Italian Alps

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the impact of current demographic changes on ethnocultural processes in the European Alps. Given their distinct population development as well as their particular autochthonous ethnic structure, the Alps exhibit completely new trends in ethno-demography and settlement development in European high mountains. The contribution presented here builds on earlier research, as well as on two theses forming the core focus of a current research project at the University of Innsbruck's Department of Geography. The material below seeks to provide basic information about this project and its initial findings. The study used open, qualitative interviewing, and analyses of official statistics, and cartography. The project builds on important, related research results presented by Innsbruck geographers in the last decade (e.g. *Steinicke et al., 2006; Löffler & Steinicke, 2007*). Both analytical method and findings may be of value not only to other researchers, but also to other communities experiencing similar ethnocultural change.

Ethno-linguistic minorities in the European Alps

It might be advantageous to begin with some insights into the ethnic structure of the Alps (*Salvi, 1975; Steinicke, 2007*). Nowhere else in western Europe is there a greater ethnocultural diversity than in the Alps, especially in the region of the Eastern Alps, with its small ethnocultural patterns. In this area Europe's three most important language families — Slavic, Romance, and Germanic — meet. Within the Alpine region, no fewer than nine distinct ethnic groups, majorities and minorities, have settled next to each other, and sometimes mixed in an overlapping pattern. It appears hopeless, however, to offer a map representing the whole autochthonous ethnic structure of the region in a satisfying way. Apart from technical presentation problems (tiny language pockets vs. relatively wide minority regions), there are different perceptions of ethnicities (e.g. in the Ladin-Venetian-Italian and the Piedmontese-Provençal-Italian linguistic contact zones), as well as "diffuse ethnicities" (*Steinicke, 1991a: 178-181*).

Moreover, it is impossible to find a generally accepted definition for what constitutes an "ethnic minority" (*Veiter, 1984; Steinicke, 2007*). Being a construct, the definition may differ from country to country and among cultural groups. Thus, guest workers and immigrants from Turkey or southeastern Europe do form ethnic groups in the countries of the Alps, but they are not designated "ethnic minorities," unlike countries such as the Netherlands, the U.S.,

Great Britain, and Canada, where immigrants may be readily grouped into distinct ethnic categories. In the European Alps the various ethnic groups may be distinguished from each other through linguistic characteristics. Thus, in the eastern part of these Alps (here the Eastern Alps), in order to be more precise, the term “ethno-linguistic group” should be preferred over the less specific term “ethnic group.”

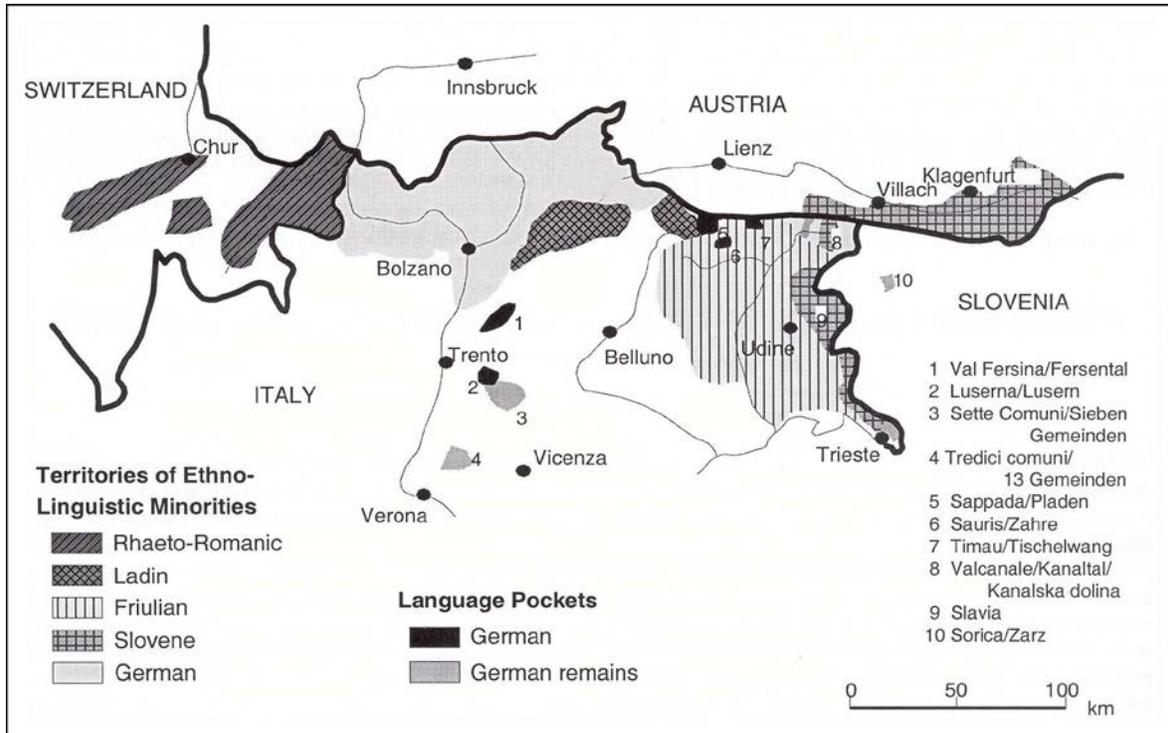


Figure 1. Ethno-linguistic minorities in the Eastern Alps (Steinicke 1998, 2001)

Apart from Italians, French, Germans, and Slovenes representing the majority populations in the various states, in the Alpine region we find numerous ethno-linguistic minorities that may be grouped as follows:

- **National minorities:** These are groups whose main area of settlement lies in neighbouring countries, where the centre of their culture and language is located. They find themselves in another country as a result of arbitrary borders or border changes. South Tyrol, the Valcanale, and Venetian Slovenia (Slavia) are national minority areas in the Italian part of the Eastern Alps; the Slovenes in the southern part of Carinthia, however, constitute a national minority in Austria.
- **German-language pockets:** Because of distinct, subjective factors of ethnicity, the population of the various German-language pockets in the Alps may only conditionally be regarded as national minorities (Steinicke & Piok, 2003), although the core area of their language lies in another country. All of them exist as a result of the expansive settlement policies of the High Middle Ages — when Allemanic (from the Valais Valley) and Bavarian (from Tyrol and Carinthia) colonists were settled to the south of the homogeneous German-speaking lands.
- **Indigenous (domestic) territorial minority groups:** An indigenous territorial minority group is an individual ethnic group within a given state whose area of

settlement forms the core of a distinct language and culture. Contrary to national minorities and language pockets, such a group is generally self-reliant, with few or no prospects for assistance from any other country or region. In the Alps, such minority groups include the Occitans (Provençals) and Valdotains (Franco-Provençals) in the western portion, the Friulians in the eastern parts, the Ladins in the Dolomites, and the Rhaeto-Romanic speakers in Switzerland.

This typology is applied to understand the process of assimilation, which is more intensive within German-language pockets and domestic-territory minority groups. The three categories, however, are not characterized by demographic differences, as this study shows.

Apart from the South Tyroleans (and the Trieste-Slovenes), none of the minorities mentioned above have been counted by the state since the Second World War. Based on the estimation of Salvi (1975) and on personal assessments (*Steinicke, 1991b; Steinicke & Piok, 2003*), the sum total of the ethno-linguistic minorities in the Alps (minus the French part) may amount to a population of some 550,000, with the Germans (350,000), Friulians (65,000), and the Franco-Provençals (60,000) constituting the largest groups.

Nowhere in the European Alps can we find an ethnic-minority group whose territory is expanding (*Steinicke, 2007*). Territorial constancy can be found with the German- and Ladin-speaking groups in South Tyrol. However, all other groups are suffering from territorial regression, with a simultaneous shrinking of the minority population. Up to the present, the minority groups in France and Italy (except the Germans and Ladins of South Tyrol, as well as the Franco-Provençal and German-speaking populations of the Aosta Valley) enjoy few cultural privileges. As a result, we witness a marked numerical decline of the various minorities. As shown above, there are distinct framework conditions which hamper the preservation of minorities — this is the case with the Ladins outside South Tyrol, the Friulians, the Slovenes, and the German-speakers in the language pockets of northern Italy. Apart from both the process of assimilation into the majority population, and the condition of diffuse ethnicity analyzed and presented already in other studies (*e.g. Steinicke, 1991a, 2007*), the decrease in minority populations is closely related to demographic developments in the Alps after the Second World War.

First thesis: the biodemographic dilemma

Thesis 1: In Alpine areas with population losses, the negative migratory balance will no longer be decisive; instead, biodemographic factors (e.g. high proportion of older people and related birth deficits) will become more relevant. Mountain depopulation, which is largely based on biodemographic trends, seriously threatens the existence of ethnocultural minorities. A core area typifying this development is the Friulian Alps.

Bätzing (2002) summarized population development in the Alps based on the community level for the period 1951 to 2000. Figures 2 and 3 seek to illustrate the development of the regions with demographic problems in these mountains.

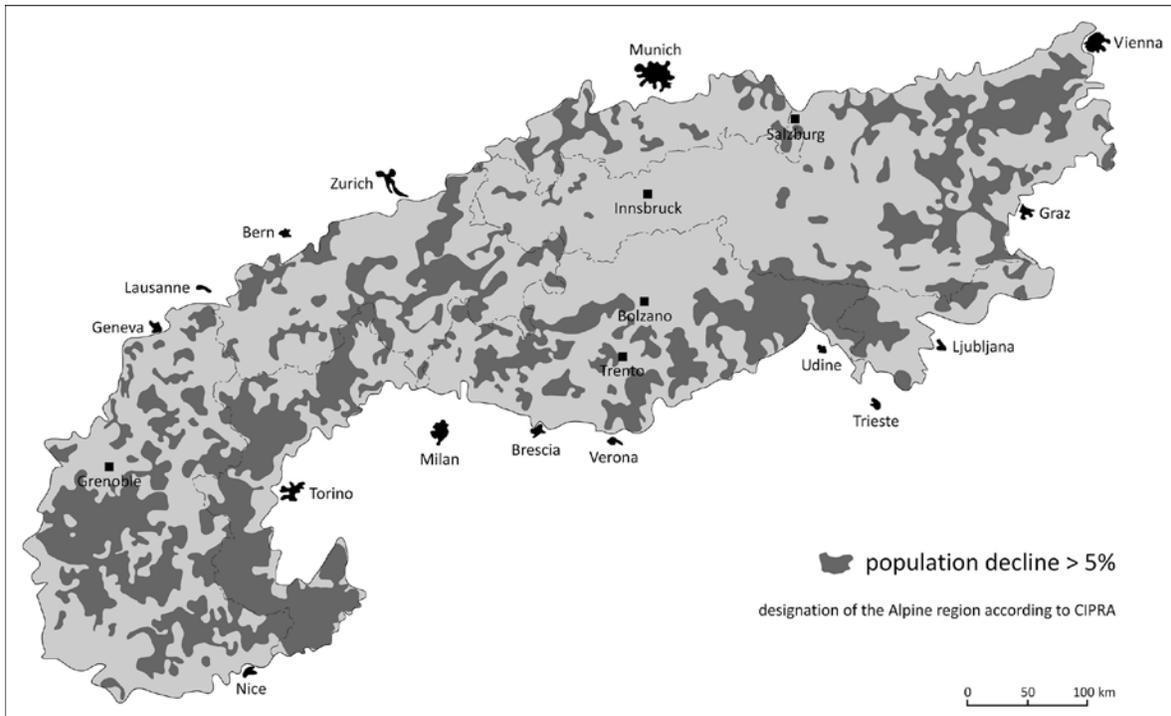


Figure 2. Alpine areas with depopulation between 1951 and 1981 (Steinicke & Löffler, 2007, modified by the authors)

Between 1951 and 1981, great parts of the Alps were affected by population losses, especially the French and Italian Alps. Substantial areas of the Swiss and Slovenian Alps and the eastern portion of the Austrian Alps as well, were characterized by a significant population decrease. In the 1960s, the emergence of mass tourism and steadily improving infrastructure were the initial factors that halted the emigration process in various rural high mountain zones, specifically in most parts of Tyrol, Vorarlberg, South Tyrol, and Bavaria, as well as in some Swiss Alpine regions. During this period, numerous tourism-oriented second homes and apartments were established (Comité National Français de Géographie, 1984; Bartaletti, 2004; Borsdorf, 2005).

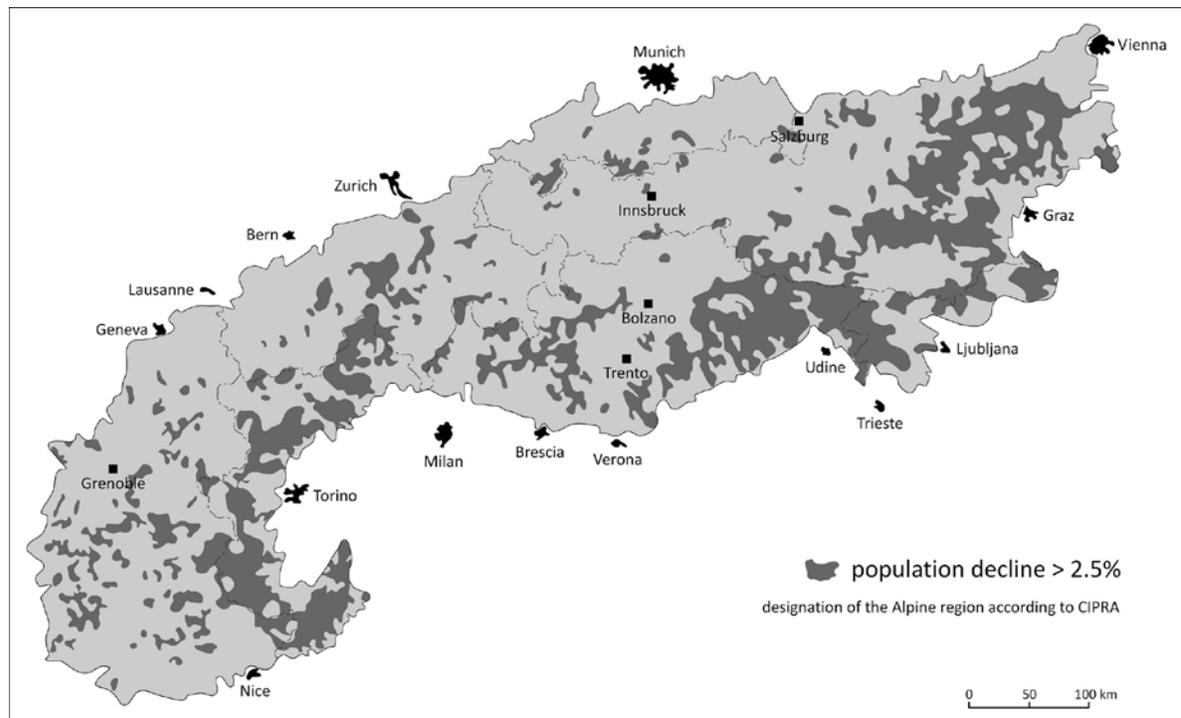


Figure 3. Alpine areas with depopulation between 1981 and 2000 (Steinicke & Löffler, 2007, modified by the authors)

Between 1981 and 2000, positive migration balances stopped the population decline in various regions of the Alps — primarily in the south and west of the French Alps, as well as in most parts of Switzerland and Bavaria. The situation in Tyrol and South Tyrol, however, did not change: most communities still reported considerable population increase. Nevertheless, in Styria, Carinthia, the Slovenian Alps, and specifically the Italian Alps, the majority of communities are still affected by population decrease, although many of them have become in-migration areas (see below). This phenomenon does not appear in the Figure 3 map, because large waves of emigration have left unfavourable biodemographic structures in their wake, causing further population losses.

The Venetian mountain region is an appropriate example to demonstrate these demographic changes (Steinicke, 1991b; Čede & Steinicke, 2007). It has not shared in the economic upswing that the foothills and the southern plains have experienced since 1970. In 1990, most of its sub-regions, in particular the Friulian Alps, belonged to those Italian areas that suffered the heaviest population losses since the Second World War. While lately it has been possible to expand job opportunities considerably, demographic figures still show a downturn in the mountain region's population. In some parts of the Friulian Alps there is even a concentration of completely abandoned villages ("ghost towns," see Figure 4). Although the large waves of emigration have already tapered off, they have left behind a skewed ratio of older people to the population as a whole. This, in turn, has been accompanied by rising death and falling birth rates. The population losses in the Friulian Alps, however, have decreased (Table 1; see also Figure 5).

Period	Population losses p.a. (%)	Period	Population losses p.a. (%)
1951-06	1.18	1981-91	0.97
1951-61	1.05	1991-01	0.72
1961-71	2.29	2001-06	0.28
1971-81	1.09		

Table 1: Depopulation in the Friulian Alps (1951-2006)

Source: ISTAT 1964; www.demo.istat.it; calculations by the authors

In fact, the depopulation of the Italian Alps promises negative effects not only for smaller minorities such as Slovenes and Germans; the local population as a whole is diminishing. This has exacerbated population losses to such a degree that in some valleys of Friuli the local population has vanished altogether. There are parallels in the Italian Western Alps (*Bätzing et al., 1996*) which particularly affect the valleys populated by Occitans. Smaller ethnic groups such as the German-speaking language pockets have been halved. Some valleys with Slovene and Friulian settlements are losing their last residents at present (*Steinicke & Piok, 2003; Čede & Steinicke 2007*).

The next phase of this research project will map the distribution of all the autochthonous ethno-linguistic minorities and present them on a map. As mentioned already, this cartographic activity has not yet been done in a satisfying way, so the project attempts to close this gap. Moreover, as one result of this research we will seek to estimate those minorities whose population size is still unknown (Occitans; German-language pockets; Ladins of the Bellunese; Slovenes in the Friulian Resia, Torre, and Natisone valleys).

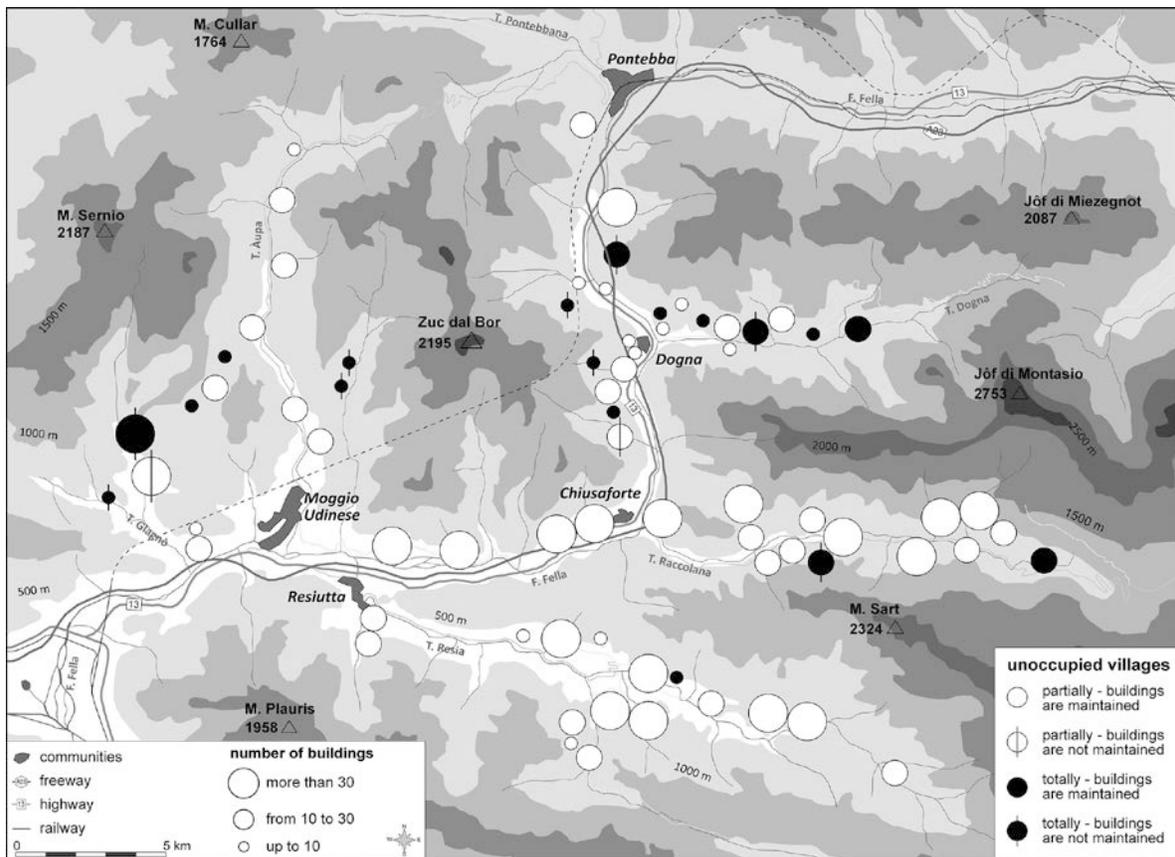


Figure 4. Ghost towns in northern Friuli in 2006 (Steinicke et al., 2007; modified)

Second thesis: Amenity migration

Thesis 2: Most of the numerous abandoned Alpine valleys offer themselves as areas for resettlement. The main pull factor for this new process will likely be an amenity migration-attracting real estate market, with provenances of the newcomers being urbanized areas outside the Alps. This process will change local ethnic structures. However, amenity migration will not reach all peripheral high-altitude regions. As a result, in the next 20 years the Italian Alps will experience a fragmenting development within the following two extreme positions: expanding amenity-based settlements, and “ghost towns.”

As this research is in an initial stage, the amenity migration aspect has not yet been addressed sufficiently. Nevertheless, first analyses show that from the mid-1990s onwards, a new demographic trend has developed in the Italian Alps, with a resettling of peripheral high-mountain regions as a completely new process. In the French parts of the Western Alps, this process has already resulted in population growth (Coy & Steinicke 2007; Figures 2 and 3). This current tendency of reverse migration to remote areas in the entire Alpine region, which of course does not occur in all high-altitude zones, shows marked similarities with ongoing amenity migration in the Californian Sierra Nevada (Löffler & Steinicke, 2007). An essential

aspect of our research project will be to analyze the impact of amenity migration on the ethnocultural processes in the Alps.

The phenomenon of “amenity migration” constitutes a relatively new area of research. By this term, Moss refers to “people moving into the mountains to reside year-round or intermittently, principally because of their actual and perceived greater environmental quality and cultural differentiation” (Moss, 2003). According to him, amenity migrants typically come from highly urbanized centres, are motivated by a desire to escape from negative metropolitan conditions, and commonly become acquainted with their new place of residence through initial leisure-based experiences. Tourism, however, is not seen as a part of amenity migration. Tourists typically visit without the intention to reside or earn a living in their destinations, while amenity migrants intend to settle in their destinations permanently, seasonally (one or more periods in a year), or intermittently (moving among their residences more frequently). Nevertheless, tourism plays an important role because it is often a first step to amenity migration (Price *et al.*, 1997; Moss 2003, 2006).

Exurbanization processes are typical for settlement expansions in the major valleys or the foothills of the European Alps around/next to the major cities (e.g. Verona, Trento, Marseille, Munich, Innsbruck, Salzburg, or Ljubljana). Amenity settlements, however, are situated clearly beyond daily commuting distance, and therefore do not include the expansion of urban areas (“suburbanization”) and the growth of settlements just outside the suburban belt (“exurbanization”).

In the European Alps generally three basic patterns of amenity settlement exist. First, in some areas amenity migration has already led to population growth and settlement expansion. Second, due to persistent unfavourable biodemographic conditions in many Alpine regions, this immigration has not yet resulted in any population gains. Finally, there are other peripheral areas maintaining unfavourable demographic structures, with low or no net immigration and high natural losses, resulting in population decreases. Thus, in some valleys of the Friulian Alps, “ghost towns” are unlikely to disappear in the near future. Nevertheless, research suggests that even in these peripheral areas, a demographic countertrend has begun: analyses of population statistics indicate that there is no longer a migration deficit. Since the end of the 1990s, northern Friuli has been confronted with more in-migrants than out-migrants (migration balance 2000–2006: +0.23%). As partially structured interviews in the Resia Valley showed, newcomers to the Friulian Alps represent an urban community from outside the mountain region (Steinicke *et al.*, 2007) — similar to the situation in California Sierra Nevada.

Figure 5 seeks to visualize this transformation. Most of the symbols representing the population balance of the various valleys of Friuli since 1972 are shifting to the right and upper side of the graph, i.e. toward sectors of growing population.

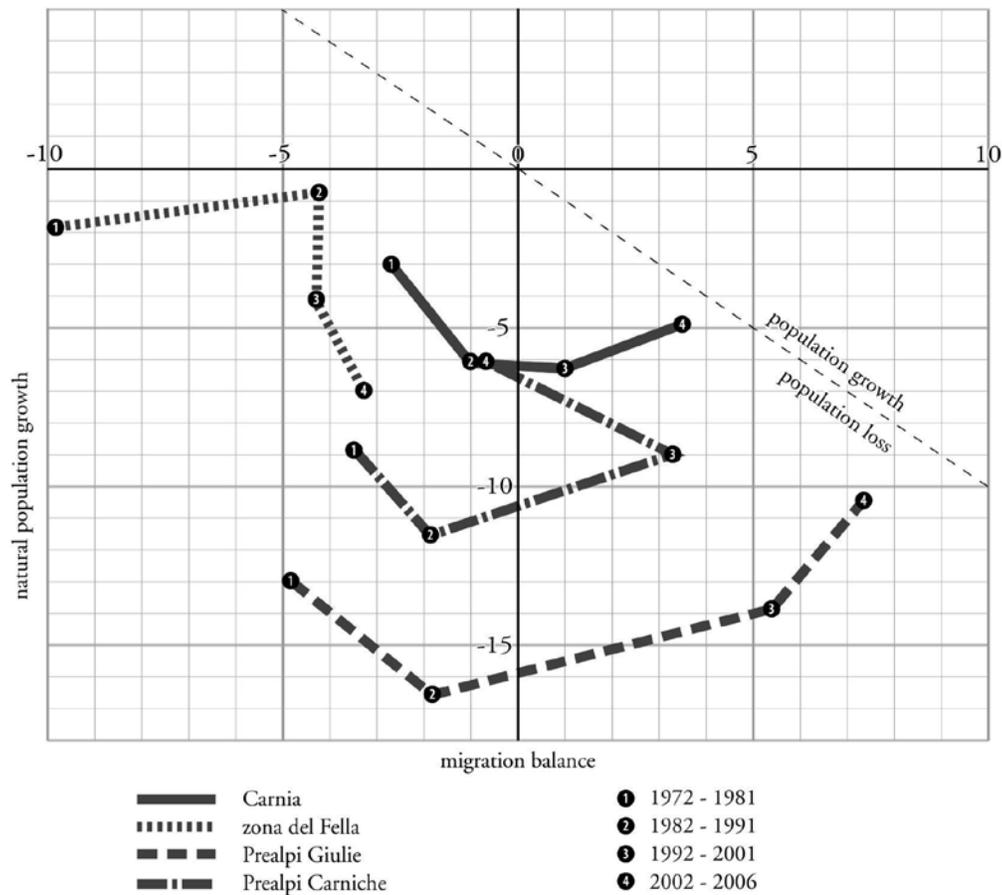


Figure 5. Migration balances in the northern Friulian sub-regions (Friulian Alps) since 1972 (%)
 Source: ISTAT – Popolazione e movimento anagrafico dei comuni / Statistiche demografiche 1972ff.
 (www.demo.istat.it); calculation and presentation by the author

Conclusions, Solutions, Perspectives

This research indicates that processes of depopulation and resettlement of peripheral regions carry potential for considerable ethnocultural conflicts. Amenity migration leads urban refugees to the various Alpine valleys, where they enhance change of the ethnic structure. This process includes the scenario whereby smaller autochthonous ethnic minorities may gradually disappear altogether. The French parts of the Alps will represent an appropriate test region. There, after long periods of emigration and subsequent biodemographic-based population losses, amenity-driven migration has led to a (small) population growth in the last two decades (Figures 2 and 3).

Strategies designed to ensure the survival of minorities, i.e. to counteract assimilation, include a spectrum of protective measures in the areas studied here, ranging from cultural concessions and democratic participation to economic and cultural autonomy. Nevertheless, the impact of urban refugees on the assimilation process in an area with a high proportion of older people and depopulation promises to be dramatic. In order to mitigate their effects, exceptional legal instruments and strategies must be applied. Therefore, it would be wise for

other groups in the Alps to adopt at least the underlying South Tyrolean concept of minority protection: having knowledge of both the majority language and the respective local (regional) language. This should bring decisive individual economic advantages, perhaps enough so that many immigrants will voluntarily learn the minority language.

Furthermore, this research project needs to analyze how additional risks may arise from possible resettlement of allochthonous ethnocultural groups and, consequently, to conceptualize strategies for minimizing them. Since in the depopulated and partly abandoned peripheral mountain villages the real estate market is presently large and favourable, i.e. housing costs are low and stock significant, the probability of immigrating Eastern Europeans, Asians or Africans is real. Without any doubt, such a process could mitigate depopulation. On the other hand, the maintenance of the autochthonous minorities would also continue to be in jeopardy, although the Alpine space would become even more “multicultural”.

Post-Banff 2008 conference advances in knowledge

Amenity migration in the Italian Alps

Discussions at the 2008 Banff Conference clearly demonstrated the difficulty of defining amenity-led migration. However, there was broad agreement that this phenomenon represented - without going into detail - a type of mobility leading to permanent migration, as well as to multi-locale dwelling. It builds on the model of counter-urbanization, which describes the rediscovery and re-evaluation of rural areas as residential space, raising the question of whether amenity migration can be separated from the second-home phenomenon, and thus from tourism. Our three-year project (2009-2011), “The Impact of Current Demographic Transformation on Ethno-Linguistic Minorities in the Italian Alps,” supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), was more concerned with empirical findings and local case studies as an essential prerequisite for any subsequent conceptual research (e.g. on multi-locale dwelling).

Contrary to the current academic literature, our project team discovered that from 1990 onwards, the population in most Italian Alpine communities has grown because of in-migration (*Walder et al., 2010; Steinicke et al., 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012*). Even areas located at the periphery have progressively shown a positive migration balance since the 1990s. Regardless, the effects of unfavorable bio-demographic factors (birth deficits) resulting from the previous out-migration period can still be observed in many mountain communities. But for the first time, more and more municipalities in the Italian Alps that were characterized by population losses in the last decades now show remarkable influx and population gains, with approximately 33,000 net in-migrants per year since 2001 (Fig. 6).

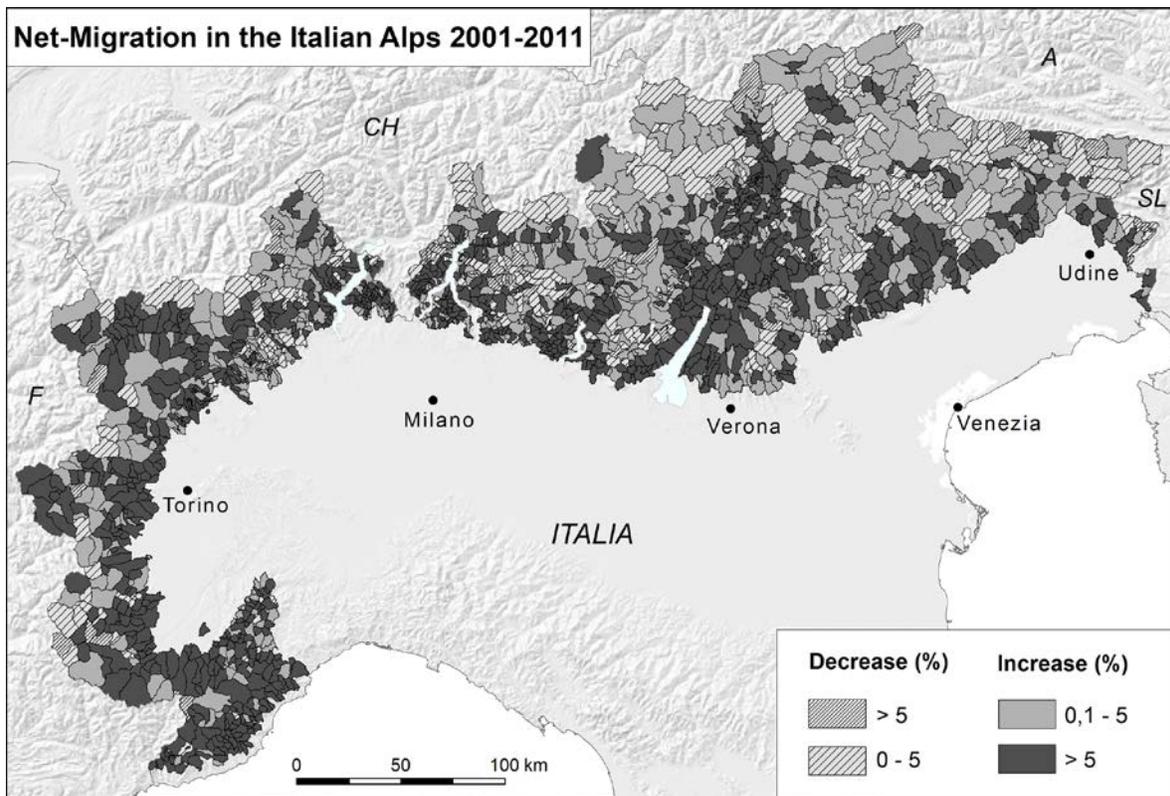


Figure 6: Newcomers in the Italian Alps 2001-2011 (Steinicke et al., 2012; modified by the authors)

Distribution of Residents according to Location Model of an Italian Alpine Valley

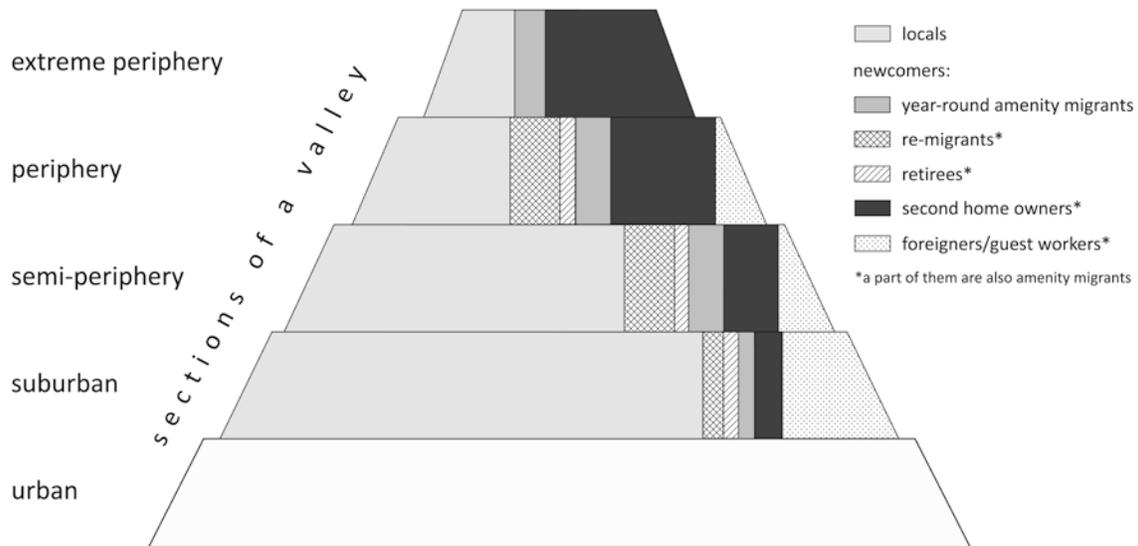


Figure 7: Locals and newcomers – model of an Italian Alpine Valley (Steinicke et al., 2012; modified by the authors)

Examining significant research results of the aforementioned project, the model in Fig. 7 shows that the percentage of newcomers is small in the foothills or in the lower parts of a valley. The population gains there can be explained through suburbanization or exurbanization (with daily commuting), typical for settlement expansions in the foothills of the Alps around or next to major cities. In the interior of the Alps, specifically in the former depopulation areas of the peripheral zone, newcomers have not only led to stabilization or even revitalization of local structures, but now constitute the majority of the population. Most of the new arrivals represent “urban refugees” from outside the Alpine region. On the other hand, newcomers are also work- or leisure-oriented re-migrants, retirees, second-home owners, guest workers from abroad, and other non-natives; any of them could be an amenity migrant (Fig. 8).

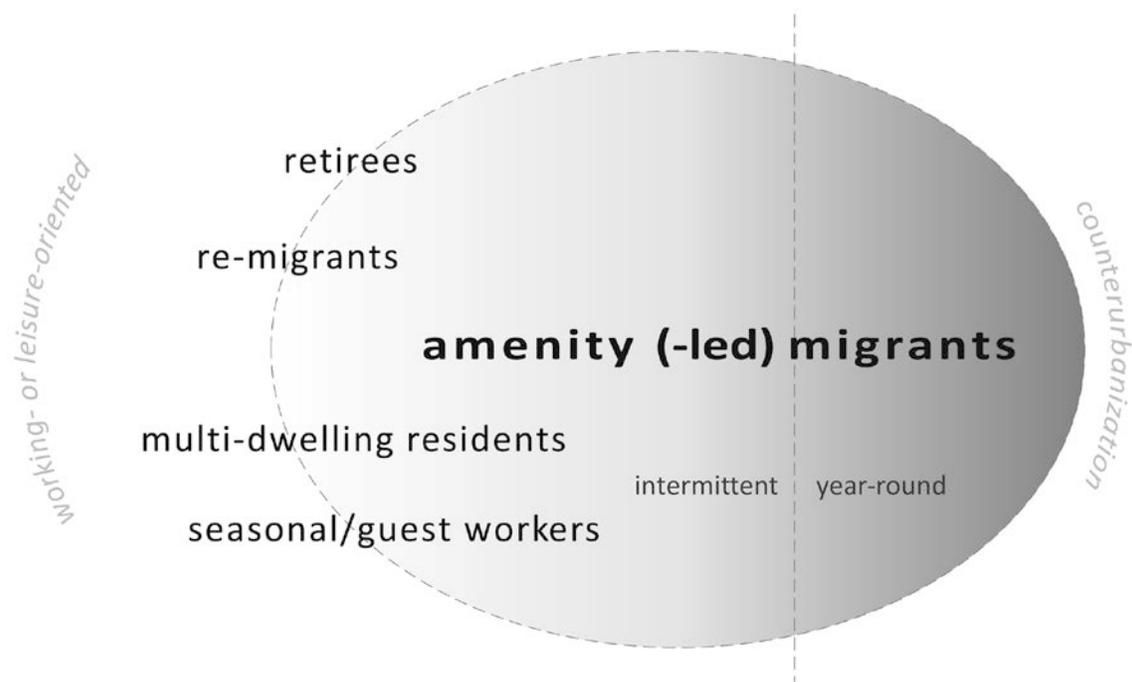


Fig 8: Different types of newcomers (Steinicke et al., 2012; modified by the authors)

Mapping the autochthonous linguistic minorities in the Italian Alps

Apart from schematic and symbolic representations, as well as the map presented in the earlier Banff study (Steinicke, 2009: 152), there was no depiction of the ethno-linguistic minorities in the Italian Alps available until 2010. This discovery was surprising, because nowhere in Western Europe is the ethno-linguistic structure more diverse than there. Thus, it was the first goal of our project to close this research gap. For the first time we could offer a cartographic depiction of this ethnic mosaic as detailed as the community level. Such mapping activity does not solely serve academic interests; it is indispensable for the design of

protective measures intended to preserve the ethnic mosaic. It appeared reasonable to first and foremost work with actual linguistic usage (map presented in *Walder et al., 2010*).

In addition, in Italy a demarcation can also be made on the basis of legal frameworks, viewed in the context of State Law No. 482/99 and associated financial incentives. For this reason it was necessary to create a second map, in which the minority areas were defined according to municipal self-assessment. Thus far, municipalities have actively taken advantage of this opportunity – an expression of the desire for protection of ethno-linguistic identity or an ethnically privileged position. Our research showed, however, that many Italian municipalities regard the new legal situation from a purely pragmatic political perspective. For example, a certain ethno-linguistic self-assessment can be beneficial in gaining federal financial allowances. Determining eligibility for funding is often barely possible, due to missing or unclear demarcations of minority areas. It appeared therefore reasonable to objectively contrast the map of the various language groups with that of all the communities that declare themselves as minority communities according to Law No. 482/99 (map presented in *Walder et al., 2010; Steinicke et al., 2011a*). Thus, the spatial differences between local self-attribution and actual usage of minority languages became clear.

The impact of current demographic transformation on ethno-linguistic minorities

During the course of our work, we sought to emphasize that processes of depopulation and re-settlement of peripheral regions create considerable potential for ethno-cultural change. In the 1970s, when economically-induced migration and/or birth deficits were the chief contributors to the depletion of linguistic minorities, assimilation progressed only insignificantly in peripheral areas. From 1990 onward, newcomers as well as the unfavorable bio-demographic factors resulting from this wave of out-migration threatened the preservation of local ethno-diversity, a fact that up until now has been largely ignored in the academic literature. Even though, through the Italian Law #482 a first important step was taken to preserve linguistic minorities, their advancing regression by territorial as well as numerical criteria cannot be denied. Although amenity migrants play an important role in reinforcing the process of assimilation into mainstream languages, their impact on ethno-linguistic minorities is not as negative as expected (as specifically predicted in the first Banff study). Based on a number of regional and local examples in the Occitan, Franco-Provençal, Walser, and Ladin areas, we were able to demonstrate that new residents are aware of the minority culture, and even engage themselves in cultural issues (*Steinicke et al., 2011 a, 2011b*).

Latest findings - new challenges

Research within the framework of the project in the Italian Alps has shown not only a demographic reversal in this region, but also indications of similar transformations in most parts of other demographic problem areas in the entire **European** Alpine space. In a new

three-year project (2013-2015, "Current demographic changes in the Alps - effects on autochthonous minorities"), again supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), we seek to extend our analyses beyond Italy.

The first step in this direction has already been taken, with the demographic comparison of the Alpine border areas between Italy and Slovenia (*Steinicke et al., 2012*). In this peripheral area, out-migration still causes the population to decrease. Here, too, the process of amenity migration brings more and more newcomers into the mountains (Fig. 9), but in the overall migration balance they are only slightly noticeable. We could distinctly confirm the new in-migration process, its spread from the Western to the Eastern Alps, and its effects on socio-economic structures. Ghost towns as an obvious feature of settlement regression processes in the Italian border regions, as they were mappable only ten years ago, can now be identified only in isolated cases. As a result of decentralized regional and economic policies in the socialist Yugoslavia of which it was once a part, the depopulation phase of villages in the Slovenian portion of the study area was mitigated, and the population decline started with a temporal delay. At present, assisted by the process of amenity migration that is taking place in the entirety of the border area, adjustments in development and structure are taking place in the settlements of the Slovene municipalities situated adjacent to the Italian study area.

This study highlights the west-east disparity in the Alpine region, in relation to the significance of new in-migration for the current structural change in peripheral areas. Beginning with the demographic turnaround in the French Alps that was noticeable by the mid-1980s, the process of amenity migration spread across the Italian Alps. The Cottian Alps, still threatened by population drain at the end of the 20th century, are presently included in this transformation. Nowhere in the entire Alpine arc, between 1951 and 1991, was the occurrence of depopulation as distinct as in the mountain areas of Friuli, particularly in the border areas along Slovenia. It is therefore not surprising that here in the extreme east, traditional spatial structures still continue to exist. In contrast to the Cottian Alps, net migration has also remained largely negative. Nonetheless, the demographic reversal proclaims itself unmistakably in the Friulian border area, as well as in the adjacent Slovenian Alps.

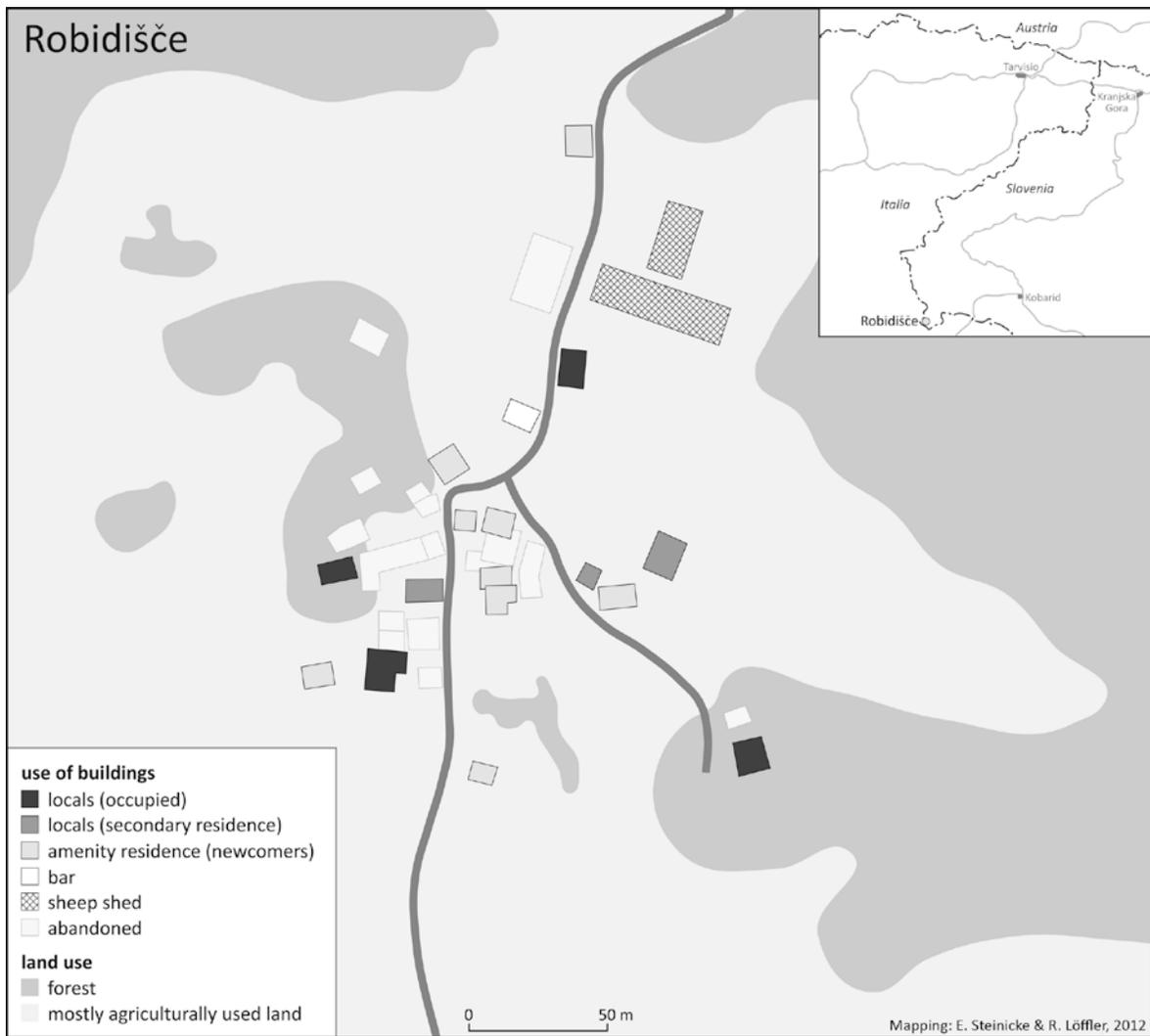


Figure 9: Robidišče (Municipality of Kobarid, Slovenia) - a ghost-town in the 1980s, now being resettled (Steinicke et al., 2012; modified by the authors)

In those regions of the neighboring Austrian Alpine regions (Carinthia and Styria) that are structurally weak and plagued by demographic problems, however, the phenomenon of new in-migrants into the mountain areas is less significant. Causes include the low attractiveness of the ever more densely reforested and therefore not particularly diversified landscape, the difficulty in reaching areas of dispersed settlements, the existence of farming estate structures that are hostile to innovation, and large-scale land-holdings by non-farmers.

Nevertheless, Austria, specifically its western regions, will remain a focus of further research, once we have intensified our newcomer studies in other areas of Alpine Slovenia.

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