

Steinicke, E. (2000): Counterurbanization in der kalifornischen Sierra Nevada. Das Hochgebirge als neuer Siedlungsraum. *Die Erde* 131, S. 107-124

Abstract

The progressive population exodus following the demise of the 'Gold Rush' and the subsequent rise of deserted settlements ('ghost towns') in California's Sierra Nevada, were reversed through tourism-oriented innovations in the late 1920s. The increasing significance of tourism in these high-altitude regions led to a renewed growth of population and settlements outside designated nature preserves. From 1960 onward, the High Sierra counties rank among those Californian regions with the strongest relative population growth. This study seeks to demonstrate the influence of winter sport resorts on present population dynamics in the Sierra Nevada and to highlight the resultant re-evaluation of peripheral areas. California's scattered winter sport centers have become focal points for permanent mountain settlements over the past decades. A case study in the Lake Tahoe region demonstrates the strong effects of tourist centers on demographic expansion at different altitudinal levels. Similar processes can be found in many other California ski areas. The new year-round residents are predominantly affluent whites who immigrated from the urbanized areas around the San Francisco Bay Area, the northern Central Valley, and Southern California. They have found or created favorable living conditions in these high-mountain regions. Predictably, tourism provides the majority of job opportunities. However, a certain degree of economic diversity exists which is rarely found in other tourism regions. In order to counter negative ecological developments, it will be necessary to control the enormous sprawl of human settlements through wise zoning policies.