Amenity-led change in mountain regions: maintaining ecological integrity of the distant brought nearby

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Abstract

An overview is given of a relatively new, significant force for change in mountain regions of the world – amenity migration, whereby people relocate permanently and part-time because of comparatively rich concentrations of Earth's remaining natural environment and differentiated culture. The phenomenon's biophysical, economic and socio-cultural effects are outlined. This change has benefits, however to date it is characteristically degrading mountain ecologies and aesthetic, accompanied by positive and negative socio-cultural outcomes. It is proposed amenity migration can be more beneficial if substantially better understood and managed for ecological sustainability, and strategic means are outlined to assist attaining this objective.

Keywords: amenity-led migration, amenity migrants, economic migrants, second homes, strategic planning, place rooted-ness

Introduction

Amenity migration is increasing in mountain regions around the world. It is both a vehicle for, and outcome of societal and biophysical global change. Amenity migration refers to the permanent and part time movement of people to places principally because of their actual or perceived higher environmental quality and cultural differentiation. Others who move primarily for economic gain may be called economic migrants, and the term amenity-led migration is suggested when considering both amenity migrants and economic migrants (Moss 1994 and 2006, Glorioso 1999). From especially a planning and management perspective, capital that follows without its owners migrating also needs to be included (Green et al. 2005, Gill & Clark 2006, Glorioso & Moss 2007). To date knowledge about contemporary human movement to mountain regions and its management focuses on tourism. But, amenity migration is now an equal or greater societal force – one much less is known about, and also one often confused with tourism.

Amenity-led change is both a benefit and threat to mountain regions. To date however, it seems that as we humans diminish the quality of our natural environment and homogenise our cultures, paradoxically many value these amenities more highly, resulting in increasing amenity migration which is further degrading mountain ecosystems and cultures. This is a process detrimental to the inhabitants of both mountains and lowlands for they share a dependence on mountains for utilitarian and intrinsic benefits. Yet, continuation of this degradation is the probable future if we do not substantially improve our understanding of amenity migration and our

capability and determination to manage it in a sustainable manner (Moss 1994 and 2006, Powers 1996, Glorioso 1999 and 2006, Glick & Alexander 2000).

From analysis of this phenomenon and my related policy and planning work, a pattern appears to have emerged of it being driven by a coalescence of key motivating and facilitating factors. There are two meta-motivators of this change agent: higher societal valuing of the natural environment and differentiated culture. And nested within these are the motivators of leisure, flight from the negative conditions of large cities, economic opportunity and learning (including spiritual and aesthetic motivation) (Moss 2006 9–12). The economic factor referred to here is not the primary one driving economic migrants. In 2007 I added to the earlier construct the motivator climate change. With further analysis and its increase climate change may unfold as a more general reason for resettlement in mountain regions (Moss 2006 317). The set of key factors facilitating this late-modern migration are: improvement in access-facilitating technology, discretionary wealth, discretionary time, and destination comfort amenities (Moss 2006 12–13). In addition, I recently included land availability as a key facilitator.

Figure 1 illustrates this construct, in particular representing the North American condition in approximately 2007. The gradation in typeface size indicates comparative importance of the key factors at this time; larger for greater importance. Factor significance has changed over time. Some two decades ago the importance of discretionary time and spiritual motivation were seemingly greater (Moss 1994 and 2006 Ch 1). Also, comparatively high land availability at low cost has been a strong facilitator of amenity seekers, but particularly in wealthier countries this factor is shifting to a negative value in high amenity mountain locations, with lower availability and higher cost reducing access for many. The construct has the drawbacks of a generalization, especially because much of world's mountain amenity migration has only been identified, not analysed. Nevertheless, it still seems useful for both understanding and getting on with managing its effects.

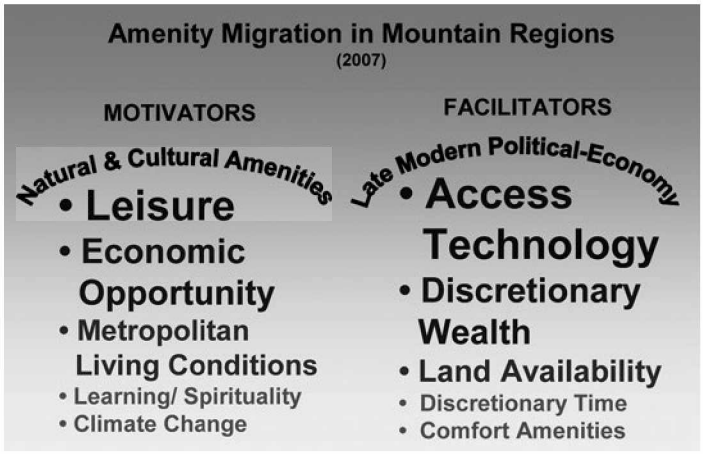

Figure 1: Amenity migration construct indicating comparative significance of key motivators and facilitators in approximately 2007.

Amenity migration's effects on mountain regions

Research on mountain amenity migration has focused on rural areas and their small human settlements, with this information increasing substantially from a limited base in the last few years. Generally in high amenity mountain places we are witnessing a process of rapid urbanisation, wherein rural places take on the physical and socio-cultural characteristics of the city. Contrary to images dear to amenity migrants, or aspiring ones, they are usually moving to urbanising places, and are themselves a cause of this urbanisation. Another component of this change is medium and large city growth peripheral and within mountain regions, such as Baguio, Philippines, Calgary, Canada, Denver, USA, Grenoble, France, Innsbruck, Austria and Santiago, Chile. There is space here only to note that this urbanisation is quite significant, partly caused by mountain amenities and at a relatively early stage of analysis (Worbets & Berdahl 2003, Perlik & Messerli 2004, Glorioso 2006, Moss 2006 Ch 21, Perlik 2006, Romero 2006, Löffler & Steinicke 2007).

While there is considerable variety in the detail of specific places, the emerging pattern of amenity-led migration's effects is outlined below within three somewhat artificial, but hopefully useful disaggregations: biophysical, economic and socio-cultural.

Biophysical effects of amenity migration

In the mountain context of high climate variability and ecological fragility, amenity migrants significantly increase and intensify the use of natural amenities, and to date this use cannot be characterized as sustainable. Especially in comparison to earlier inhabitants, they typically consume considerably more land, water and energy. Their habitation substantially increases the urban-wild-land interface, sprawled and leapfrogged across valleys, up mountain slopes and onto ridgelines, typically shifting land use in an ad hoc manner from watershed, forest, agriculture and wildlands, while diminishing or destroying landscape beauty and fragmenting and reducing open space and wildlife habitat.

This growth typically follows wasteful and otherwise inappropriate flatland suburban settlement form and standards; often at even lower densities (Price et al. 1997, Glick & Alexander 2000, Clark et al. 2006, Greater Yellowstone Coalition 2006, Moss 2006, Travis 2007). Land use for housing and support infrastructure (transportation, water, waste management, recreation) is characteristically extensive and excessive, particularly that of wealthier amenity seekers. It has been accompanied by soil, water and air quality degradation, and exacerbation of natural hazard, particularly from fire. The dominate settlement pattern, accompanied by the considerable recreational use by amenity seekers, increases pressure on the ecological processes and services capability of the land, including parks and protected areas (Power 1996, Howe et al. 1997, Glick & Alexander 2000, Machlis & Field 2000, Gobster & Haight 2004, Dearien et al. 2005, UNESCO-MAB 2005, Moss 2006).

The change has entailed larger scale land conversion. In mountainous Colorado, USA, annually between 1987 and 1997 57,100 ha of agricultural land was converted

for residential and commercial development (Obermann et al. 2000). In Park County, Wyoming the average rural lot size in 1970 was 0.97 ha, and by 1999 exceeded 4.8 ha. Nearby in Teton County the dominant development pattern was one house per 1.21 ha in 1990, but is now about one house per 14.16 ha. Similarly houses are large; the 1999 median size was 270 sq m. Further north, Gallatin County, Montana in 1980 experienced the conversion of about 13,800 ha to residential development and in 2000 this increased to about 28,000 ha. Between 1997 and 2006 this county lost 55,850 ha of productive farmland to residential use (Greater Yellowstone Coalition 2006, Sonoran Institute 2006).

Economic effects of amenity migration

There is the opinion that an amenity-based economy is a less, perhaps much less environmental damaging alternative to one based on natural resources extraction (Moss 1994, Power 1995, Moskowitz 1999, Johnson 2005). While it is premature to conclude this given the negative effects outlined above, a more appropriate perspective is one of compatibility among integrated multiple values and uses. Some diversification has accompanied economic growth in high amenity mountain places, with amenity migrants creating new and more varied economic activity, particularly self-employment and some jobs for others (Rasker & Alexander 1997 and 2003, Green et al. 2005, Glorioso 2006, Moss 2006, Chipeniuk 2007, Travis 2007). Many amenity migrants do not earn a living locally, but bring funds with them or obtain income from elsewhere in the form of investment returns and transfer payments, such as retirement pensions. This includes those who sold their houses in high priced metropolitan property markets, such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Seattle, Vancouver and Calgary; so-called equity refugees. When generating or earning income locally, many amenity migrants are plugged into the information/communications (IC) based New Economy, but many others have more mundane jobs, such as construction workers, clerks and restaurant waiters and often have several part time jobs. Characteristically the amenity-led migrants derive income from tourism and amenity migration service activities, with a primary driver being property development and speculation (Moss 1994 and 2006, Johnson & Rasker 1995, Rasker & Alexander 1997 and 2003, Green et al. 2005, Chipeniuk 2007, Clark et al. 2006, Löffler & Steinicke 2007).

Second home ownership and the economic activity of the rich and famous has overshadowed the many amenity migrants of modest means, among them renters who cannot afford to purchase real property (Chipeniuk 2006, Moss 2006 Ch 1, Otero et al. 2006). Some, how many we do not know, have taken a considerable risk in their move, and among them are ones who must subsequently leave due to the local increasing cost of living, especially in relation to a lack of adequate and appropriate income opportunities for them. This leads to a more specific consideration of socio-cultural aspects of amenity-led change.

Socio-cultural effects of amenity migration

Compared with information about the biophysical and economic effects of amenity-led migration in mountain regions, much less is known about the socio-cultural ones. US census data indicates there was considerable increase in in-migration to high amenity places, typically from metropolitan areas from the 1970s, and especially in the 1990s. The mountainous West, an area ranking high in the US Dept of Agriculture county amenity index, has been a particular recipient (Rudzitis 1996, McGranahan 1999, Nelson 2006). Attracted by the Rocky Mountains and their Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, the population of Teton County, WY grew more than 60% in the 1990s. Gallatin County, MT grew 34% between 1990 and 2000, and is now the 32nd fastest growing county in the USA. Nearby Park County grew 11% between 1990 and 2000, while further up the Rocky Mountain chain Flathead County, by Glacier National Park, grew 26% between 1990 and 2000 (US Census Bureau 1990 and 2000, Greater Yellowstone Coalition 2006).

Principal towns within in these mountains exhibit similar high growth. For example, Bozeman, and Kalispell, Montana grew 21% and 19% respectively between 1990 and 2000 (US Census 1990, 2000). North in Canada, the Banff National Park and Kananaskis Provincial Park gateway town of Canmore, Alberta increased its population 76% between 1991 and 2001 (Robson & Starke 2006). In the Hazleton Mountains in northwest BC the more remote town of Smithers grew 12.5% in the same decade (Chipeniuk 2007).

There is a growing body of mainly qualitative information about the role and nature of amenity migration in this population growth, reported on to date especially in Green et al. (2005), McIntyre et al. (2006), Moss (2006), Travis (2007). Two recent household surveys in mountain areas of BC, Canada offer a clear picture. The 2005 100% resident owner household survey in the remote Bulkley Valley, including Smithers, in north western BC found that over 12% of the residents had come principally for the region's natural and cultural amenities (Chipeniuk 2007). And in the more accessible southern interior BC Similkameen and South Okanagan Valleys, a 12% resident owner household random sample survey in 2007 indicated that 64% and 55% respectively of those surveyed considered themselves amenity migrants (Glorioso & Moss 2008).

Cultural amenities, such as living folkways and material culture, were found to be a primary attraction along with natural amenities. Related to this, amenity migration has brought about complex socio-cultural change and creates significant societal issues and dilemmas in high amenity mountain communities. Moreover, a typically rapid rate of change adds to this condition (Moss 1994 and 2006, Glorioso 1999, Jobes 2000, Green et al. 2005, Billy 2006, Clark et al. 2006, Glorioso & Moss 2006, Krannich et al. 2006, Nelson 2006, Otero et al. 2006, Perlik 2006, Thompson 2006).

A socio-cultural profile of amenity migrants and their effects may be characterized as follows. Amenity migrants usually come from large cities and typically bring with them, and maintain, values and behavioural traits different from where they settle. They have higher formal education and frequently, but not always, greater dis-

cretionary wealth than earlier inhabitants. In general these amenity seekers tend to upset old rhythms, stress and change often more traditional local values, norms and behaviour. This change is commonly reported as unwanted by many earlier inhabitants, as well as by some amenity migrants, who most often articulate this concern as 'a loss of community', 'diminishing quality of life' and 'the community becoming less friendly'. However, other locals welcome these changes along with the new ideas, worldviews and capital of amenity migrants.

Commonly, this change is accompanied by perceived or real loss of local control. Especially where the wealthy congregate they have strong economic and political influence. A frequent outcome is restriction or displacement of earlier inhabitants from preferred or essential access to social networks, livelihood and recreation due to increased property values, taxes, fees and other restrictions. More generally, the considerable cost of living increase that usually accompanies amenity migration is a stressor for earlier inhabitants, as well as many amenity migrants, and tends to segregate society. Tension and conflict between earlier inhabitants and amenity migrants is frequently reported (Moss 1994, 2006 Ch 1, Glorioso 1999 and 2006, Jobes 2000, Glorioso & Moss 2006; Otero et al. 2006, Perlik 2006, Thompson 2006). Poverty, housing shortage and high cost, large land conversion and other social equity or fairness issues in high amenity places is increasing (Jobes 2000, Green et al. 2005, Billy 2006, Clark 2006, Glorioso 2006, Glorioso & Moss 2006, Golding & Van Auken 2006, Moss 2006 Ch 1).

Detrimental socio-cultural effects appear to be heightened by the impermanence of much amenity migration and a parallel lack of local belonging and involvement. Many earlier residents and some researchers consider this the result of second home owners and their intermittency of residence. In the Rocky Mountain Teton, WY and Flathead, MT counties in 2000 part time occupancy houses accounted for 20.7% and 10.5% respectively of total houses (US Census Bureau 2000). In Canmore, Alberta in 2006 the number was estimated to be 27% (Statistics Canada 2006), and in south central BC the study of the Similkameen and South Okanagan Valleys noted earlier found 25.3% and 11.9% respectively (Glorioso & Moss 2008).

Many of these second homes go on to become permanent or primary abodes. But there is also the impermanence of so-called permanent residents. There are amenity migrants who did not find what they wanted, or thought they wanted, could not 'make it' financially, or felt the urge to seek greener pastures, especially after the present one is degraded (Moss 2006 Ch 1). Also there are those who reside locally whose sense of local belonging is weak, elsewhere or nowhere. What we may be finding is a societal increase in mobility with a reduction in place rootedness, or an expanding cognition of personal living realm. If this change is as significant as it appears, it challenges traditional theories of migration, community, home, workplace and identity, and corresponding presumptions in public planning and administration about residence for census, voting, taxing, social entitlements, and community involvement (Hall & Muller 2004, McIntyre et al. 2006, Moss 2006 14).

Response to amenity-led change and development

Local, regional and national public planning and management response to the opportunities and threats of amenity migration in mountain regions generally indicates a slow and partial realization of the systemic causes and effects of what is happening. This situation is compounded by mountain cultures of poverty, scarcity, pride in individualism and independence, and often a marginal concern for these regions in the centres of political-economic power. And seemingly most apparent in the US New West, this is accompanied by a general anti-planning ethic that has resulted in change and growth management that ratifies rather than guides (Moss 1994 and 2006 Ch 1, Rasker & Alexander 1997, Glick & Alexander 2000, Travis 2007).

The above condition is made more complex by the difficulty local jurisdictions, especially unincorporated communities, have in controlling the effects of growth due to their inadequate regulatory power, finances and policy and planning skills. Also, citizens rarely take part throughout the planning and management process, particularly in the implementation of plans through a monitoring and evaluation role. At the same time elected officials are inadequately involved in the planning process. The result of is weak general oversight and determination in implementation, with critical disparity between plans and their actual outcomes. A regional planning and management context and authority, essential for the eco-systemic framework needed to strategically manage amenity-led change, is also weak or lacking. Parallel, amenity rich places usually encourage the inflow of amenity migrants, tourists and capital, and with little distinction among these change agents. (Glorioso 1999 and 2006, Babbitt 2005, Gill & Clark 2006, Moss 2006 Chs 1 & 21, Chipeniuk 2007, Travis 2007).

However, recently there is growing local citizens' articulation of disaffection with, and opposition to the degrading change that has been occurring. Also, more public planners understand the significance of amenity-led migration and looking for the means to address it systemically. This shift appears mainly focused on reversing the loss of open space, landscape aesthetic, farmland, wildlife habitat and biodiversity, along with inadequate and unaffordable housing.

One indication is the intention to use sustainable land use principles and practices that often have their roots in the New Urbanism and Smart Growth planning approaches of the past two decades, and are now being translated from their metropolitan origin to the urbanising rural context. This is at times referred to as New Regionalism or New Ruralism, and is focused on densification of human settlement, including mixed land use, reduction of automobile use, increased energy, water and waste treatment efficiencies, and use of resource-conserving building design and materials. Socially there is an attempt to have local services, such as schools and small shops, in walking distance of the neighbourhood, along with integration of income strata. It is still early, and results vary. One example is the new Gallatin County Commissioner's growth management plan, which intends to protect farms and ranches, open space, water quality, wildlife habitat and property values. It emphasizes locating new growth in existing towns and adjacent suburbs. In subdivisions it will allows up to 4 houses per 64.75 ha, and for the same area on "rural land" the maximum den-

sity will be one house. Clustering of home sites on green-field developments is to be encouraged and given design assistance (Sonoran Institute 2006). However, will such plans significantly affect the high cost of living, especially for shelter, social dislocation and segregation, or energy consumption?

Some comparisons with European and economically developing countries

Information about amenity migration in Europe is substantial and increasing; especially knowledge about the second home type. However, much, or perhaps most is not available within an amenity migration paradigm. Compared with elsewhere, generally in Western Europe short travel time between high amenity mountainous places and residential origins results in a predominance of the second home type mobility. This is mainly due to shorter geographical distances and convenient and rapid transportations systems, especially public transportation. In addition, there is also high density of the built environment, due to use of the considerable magnitude of existing buildings and in-fill in existing mountain settlements, along with generally strong greenfield-land conversion restrictions. A particular attention to sprawl, or Zersiedelung, has tended to control this aspect of development, especially in comparison with the situation in North America and economically developing countries (EDCs). However, there is growing pressure for land conversion from agriculture use in and near European high amenity places, and sprawl now seems more evident, particularly in peri-urban valley bottoms, such as in the Austrian Tyrol (Glorioso 1999, Hall & Müller 2004, Bartoš et al. 2005, McIntyre et al. 2006, Perlik 2006).

Especially in comparison to the USA, in Europe government generally plays a larger role in public and private land management, along with greater public acceptance of this role. The common western European growth and development perspective places high value on protection and conservation of the environment, open space and agriculture, which is expressed in stricter management and greater coordination of the various responsible planning institutions. This includes better coordination of public lands and human settlements management for conservation. Yet, there are signs that this regime is under stress.

Compared to North American and European amenity migration information, there is very little knowledge about amenity migration in EDCs. In early 2007 only fourteen publications on this subject per se were identified, with most focusing on mountain conditions, and the greatest knowledge about the Czech Republic and the Philippines (Glorioso 1999, Glorioso 2006, Glorioso & Moss 2007). Based on this limited material, and my additional field observations, the general condition may be characterized as similar in biophysical effects to that of western North America, but with greater sprawl and ecological degradation. Also, there is much less public funding of planning and management, and where it does exist it is usually focused on the more basic issues of survival.

There also appears to be considerably more economic migration and income disparity, accompanied by greater socio-cultural distress, with greater poverty the most

significant causal factor. There is some evidence that in poorer countries in particular, such as the Mexico, Philippines and Laos, amenity migration, along with tourism, has become a beacon attracting large numbers of the less fortunate from the greater society to high amenity places. A result is a human overwhelming of mountain ecological carrying capacity (Glorioso 1999 and 2006, Moss 2006). A prime attractor for these domestic economic migrants are the foreign amenity migrants locating in EDCs' highlands, such as in Costa Rica, Laos, Mexico, Philippines and Thailand. In addition to the richness of cultural and environmental attributes, the foreign amenity seekers are often attracted by the comparative low cost of land and the greater purchasing power of their currencies. Compared to most local people they have high discretionary wealth.

A strategic framework for eco-living in mountain regions

The above pattern may be considered a 'trends continue' scenario in which there is some recent improvement in addressing amenity migration's threats. These improvements however are still neither adequate nor strategic enough for the objective of maintaining healthy mountain eco-systems, including their human communities. A more aggressively proactive and innovative course of action is essential for changing the dominant growth and development pattern. Critical for ecological living in mountain regions is a considerably better understanding of the amenity migration phenomenon as a global force for change with systemic local causes and effects, and public planning and management needs to adopt the following set of strategic means (expanded upon in Moss 2006 313–318, Glorioso & Moss 2006).

1. Societal values, behaviour and engagement that foster the robust health of ecological systems. The historical course to date has been one-sided adaptation of these systems to human wants and needs, a course that must be reversed in order to sustain these systems, including their dependent human beings.
2. Governance that goes beyond consultation or participation to collaboration among local citizens, public and private decision-makers and planners. This includes greater devolution of decision-making and financial power from political centres to local communities. Also essential for obtaining sustainability and political clout, local communities must integrate their objectives and actions within their common bioregion.
3. Economic organisation and activity that supports a community while sustaining its natural and social amenities or capital, and considerably increases local/regional self-reliance and self-sufficiency. This includes strategic links to national and international external supportive entities.
4. Planning and decision-making based on acceptance of the high uncertainty of global change, and therefore is globally informed while using the best scientific information accessible and strategic planning systems. It must specifically address climate change through minimizing risk from changing natural conditions while reorienting planning strategies to minimize contribution to climate change.

> Community and regional planning must become rooted in ecological planning, having as its touchstone the health of our life-sustaining ecological systems.

In concluding this overview I stress that it will be difficult to adopt these means, demanding determination, and especially political will. The insights of two middle European 20th century thinkers come to mind here. To better understand the predominant state of present amenity-led change in mountain regions Joseph Schumpeter's 'destructive innovation' needs further reflection, while improving the futures of these special places needs in particular serious consideration of Karl Polanyi's limits of capitalism and the social embedding of market forces.

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