In search of a better world in the Swiss Alps: lifestyle migration, quality of life, and gentrification

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1. Foreword: when the researcher is local, and the topic of global concern

In August 2015, during a working train trip to Lausanne, I witnessed a conversation between five passengers next to me: a single British man of about fifty years old, and a French couple with their two children. They were all on their way to Geneva airport to fly to London on the 12:50 pm Easy Jet flight. The five of them arrived from Verbier, a well-known ski station located at 1,500 metres of altitude, fifteen minutes away from Martigny where I live.[1] They spoke in French with a family and a housekeeper about the lifestyle in Verbier, business in London, and a new job in New York. They talked about commuting with plane and train. The middle-aged man explained he had worked as a volunteer for nine hours at the Swiss mountain bike race marathon that took place the previous weekend.[2] The couple said they went out for dinner to a well-known restaurant there. The three adults also exchanged views on sporting goods stores in Verbier, the ski bindings they recently bought, and a shopkeeper who never gave discounts, despite the amounts they spent in his shop...

I remember that on that day, I felt as if I was attending a living play in the train compartment! As a female researcher native to the area, and growing up in the lowlands from a working-class background, I was astonished at the way

[1] A small town in the Swiss Alps, at the cross roads of Italian and French Alps.
[2] Called 'Grand Raid', see http://www.grand-raid-bcvs.ch/index-en.html

these upper middle class people relate to the place: with commuting, outdoor activities, and shopping![3]

My personal insights as a native from the Swiss Alpine region affected the interest I developed in the study area. Indeed, the specific region where I grew up, the Valais, was long regarded as a rural and peripheral zone populated by primitive mountain people (Cretton 2012; Kilani 1984). As a native, I was often perceived as a stereotypical mountain dweller – living in harmony with nature and animals, being cut-off from the outside world, sometimes backward, sometimes simple-minded – commonly portrayed in discussions with urbanites, media reports, or several ordinary representations of the way to live in the Alps.

This chapter proposes to overcome the common belief on living in the mountains while analysing the recent phenomenon of lifestyle migration to the Swiss Alps. Indeed, 'for the past few years, the term "lifestyle migration" has been used to refer to an increasing number of people who take the decision to migrate based on their belief that there is a more fulfilling way of life available to them elsewhere' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a: 608). That is the case of the Alpine region that became, over the course of thirty years, a privileged place to dwell (Perlik 2008; Petite and Debarbieux 2013; Clivaz 2013).

As we will see, in the nineties, the deregulation of European airspace led to increased individual migrations in the Alps. Peoples' accommodation preferences have changed in the area, for example having several homes at the same time and during a lifetime, and having a seasonal residence (Camenisch and Debarbieux 2011; Stock 2006, 2007). This social transformation has to do in part with individuals and households who are attracted to a way of life they consider superior to living in cities. Yet, new ways of living in the mountain regions in industrialised countries are not specific to the (Swiss) Alps. They have been reported in many parts around the world, from North America to the Andes (Otero *et al.* 2006; Borsdorf and Hidalgo 2009), through Australia

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[3] The *upper middle class* refer to senior managers, university professors, business men, liberal professions like medical doctor or lawyer (cf. Bosc 2008: 25). It is defined as the wealthy or privileged class. Bosc refers to *lower middle class* to define the petty-bourgeois: small companies bosses, merchants, 'white collar' workers (ibid.).

and New Zealand (Fountain and Hall 2002; Thulemark 2011), and Africa (Tonderayi 2000). They can be considered a phenomenon of international concern that is closely intertwined with economic and market globalisation.

This chapter will consider the embodiment of this worldwide tendency and its aftermath in the Swiss Alpine region. It will reflect upon the social embeddedness of quality of life in the Swiss Alps, at the intersection of class privilege, identity projects, and constructed representations of the mountain.

2. Introduction

As a recent example of social transformation, lifestyle migration appears to be a case in point to reflect upon gentrification in the Swiss Alps. This process can be defined as a process in which some previously remote regions are developing into affluent and segregated neighbourhoods (Perlik 2011: 9). It enlightens the gap between the idyllic representation of the Alpine landscape (based on quietness, authenticity, wilderness – mostly rooted in the past) and the current practices of place and belonging in the Alps (based on mobility, flexibility, activity – arising from globalisation).

Lifestyle migration is inseparable from the worldwide context of neoliberalism in which it evolves. Indeed, it can be considered as an individual life project, generated and influenced by a broader social and economic framework. Following Boltanski (2006), the 'culture of project' constitutes a key concept of neoliberalism, understood as a new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). From this view, the whole society is socially structured and organised following managerial ways of ruling, through *projects* (Boltanski 2006: 21). Boltanski speaks of the 'projective society' to describe the functioning of (post) modern globalised societies for which the core value is mobility. In this conception, lifestyle migration speaks to a broader socio-economic structure, which is based on a managerial model that matches a general organisation of the society today, by *projects*. From this perspective, the mountain or the Alpine territory can be seen as a business object in the service of an economic and international elite.

On one hand, in recent years, outsiders have initiated several projects – tourism, real estate, or artistic – in the Valais's region. For example, the co-founder of a luxury project business in the hotel industry (*Montagne Alterna-*

tive) provides customers with ways to 'connecting with nature' to 'develop self-awareness', or to 'become a conscious actor for creating a better world'.[4] As well, the co-founder of a non-profit organisation dedicated to creating contemporary art (*3D Foundation*) wants 'to create a residency which reflected *the power of the mountain'*.[5] These kinds of projects reflect the personal ideals of their founders, while considering the mountain and the region as a place where all possibilities come to life. On the other hand, many individual lifestyle projects to live in the mountain area are achieved in the Valais's region. In fact, in the last two decades, the fast development of public transport – especially the British airline Easy Jet's entry in Geneva – has accelerated the process of gentrification in Swiss mountain areas.[6] As an outstanding case of globalisation, European air transport deregulation in the 1990s and the arrival of low-cost air companies impact the Swiss Alpine space while increasing individual lifestyle projects in the region. New access to mobility enables people to work 'in the big peri-alpine metro-regions, dwell in a small town in the Alpine foothills and commute several times a week between these two places' (Perlik 2011: 3). Indeed, it is not unusual in 2017 to work in the city and reside in the mountains, both linked via commuting, like the anonymous passengers I met in the above reported train trip. Besides mobility, these ways of life embody other core values of neoliberalism, like flexibility and autonomy (Bourdieu 1998; Boltanski 2006).

Lifestyle migration appears 'as a process through which classed identities and practices are played out, reproduced and transformed' (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 14). This process is embodying the culture of project, understood as a basic vision of neoliberalism (following Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). Lifestyle migration emphasises the relationships between global economy and on-going identity-making projects in the Swiss Alps. Indeed, as a consequence of globalisation, lifestyle migration reflects the ability to privi-

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[4] http://www.montagne-alternative.com/en/about-us/our-concept

[5] http://www.3-dfoundation.com

[6] Easy Jet Airline was born from the deregulation of the European airspace, between 1990-1995. The first flight between Geneva and Luton took place on 18 December 1997 (Geneva Airport's release, 5 April 2011).
https://www.gva.ch/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-437/1150_read-8725/.

lege a lifestyle that is inseparable from the economic circumstances and global contexts (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 3).

To develop how the idea of 'quality of life' is closely related to an idealised representation of mountains in Valais, the first part of the chapter will present the data and fieldwork. Second, it will discuss the notions of amenity migration (Ullman 1954; Moss 2006) and lifestyle migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a, 2009b; Benson 2013; Benson and O'Reilly 2016). Both notions have been developed to understand new forms of migration, as distinct from forced migration due to war or political troubles. Both have taken into consideration perceptions of environmental quality and the valorisation of rural areas in terms of lifestyle choice. They offer a relevant support to reflect upon past and current representations of rurality and 'alpiness' in the Swiss Alps. Third, I will give voice to the interlocutors in the field to explore the ongoing process of gentrification in the Swiss Alpine region. This process is based on a specific middle and upper middle class imagining of the mountains. The guideline of the analysis will concentrate on the quest for authenticity embedded in the desire to live *in* nature. I will argue that in a number of cases, practices of nature work as a way to embody a class privilege. As well, in a number of situations, lifestyle migration embodies an individual quest for utopia, by the search for another way and meaning of life, elsewhere.

3. Data collection and fieldwork

The imagery and symbolism that are behind the Alpine world – like the idea of a socially just and equal society that lives in harmony with nature, or the vision of an area unaffected by the passing of time – have been highlighted and questioned by Swiss ethnologists (see Chappaz-Wirthner and Mayor 2009). The research made in Valais since the end of the nineteenth century simultaneously trace the history of the regional Alpine ethnology. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, the ethnologists, like the artists, have become fascinated by Alpine rural life. They focused exclusively on the lifestyles of the Alpine peasantry by looking at 'archaism' and 'authenticity'. In fact, it is not an exaggeration that the scientists have viewed the Valais as a kind of Alpine laboratory. As well, the notions and methods used in Alpine studies show the evolution of the various perspectives on mountain: from a

romantic reification of Alpine societies (with the idea of lost and wild valleys, isolated from the rest of the world), to the recognition of their historicity with particular consideration for the economic and social transformations (Centlivres 1980; Mathieu and Boscani 2005).

In order to reflect upon recent social changes in the Alpine region, I refer to interviews conducted in 2011 in the western part of the Swiss Alps with individuals who had settled there from outside of the region.[7] Unlike most studies on lifestyle migration, this one was not interested in following a single population group, homogenous in terms of origin, for example 'the British'. Instead, the focus was on collecting interviews from a diversity of individuals who had settled as migrants ten, twenty, or thirty years ago, to the specific Alpine location of Valais. The original survey gave voice to twenty-five men and women from India, the Netherlands, Russia, Australia, Mauritius, Portugal, France, Chad, Germany, Senegal, and Quebec. All of them arrived as 'foreigners' but in between, twenty become Swiss citizens, and five hold a residence permit (type C).

Fieldwork was undertaken in the places interlocutors chose for settlement, including sixteen Alpine villages located in Valais, the smallest being less than 1,000 inhabitants and the biggest, on the plain, having more than 8,000 inhabitants. I have stressed elsewhere that reasons for migrating are diverse (Cretton 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Most of the time, economic, social, and personal structural lines are closely interwoven within migration routes.

During interviews, most of the social actors referred to 'quality of life' as an important reason they settled in Switzerland, emphasising the importance of job opportunities and economic stability. They linked the concept of 'quality of life' to such things as the physical and social environment, social and political stability, climate, quietness, 'natural' mountain conditions, skiing or climbing, income, and the standard of living in Switzerland. This chapter focuses on analysing the narratives of interlocutors who invoke 'quality of life' as the primary reason they migrated or reason causing them to stay in their new environment after migrating.

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[7] Original fieldwork was carried out in collaboration with Thierry Amrein (2014), Jean-Charles Fellay, and the CREPA (Centre Régional d'Etudes des Populations Alpines), see Cretton *et al.* (2012).

4. Amenity migration or lifestyle migration?

The movement of people to places they consider to be of the best environmental quality has been developed in the 1950s into the notion of amenities (Ullman 1954). It has been 'conceptualized as amenity-led migration and interpreted as a change in values and preferences towards rural areas' (Perlik 2011: 2). Moss (2006) defined amenity migration as a 'movement of people to places, permanently or part time, principally because of the actual or perceived higher environmental quality and cultural differentiation of the destination' (Moss 2006: 19). The main features to determine such migration include landscape qualities such as quietness, natural environment, length of sunshine, spectacular views, the possibility of outdoor activities, as well as specific ethnic environments and foreign cultures (Moss 2006). Stewart (2002) also noted the importance of contributing socio-economic factors. For instance, amenity migrants tend to be more mobile, earn from several independent sources while giving priority to amenities and the choice to pay for them (Perlik 2011). This type of migration has often been motivated by a quest for 'paradise on earth' (Kuentzel and Mukundan 2005).

The search for a better quality of life, like a safe environment for family, a peaceful and relaxing place, a personal project, or a specific job, are some of the reasons that bring urban dwellers to the mountain area. Older people seem to be mainly attracted by the opportunity to live in a comfortable residence adapted to the care for seniors. As for younger people, they would mostly be business owners, lawyers, architects, or exercising another liberal profession that enables them to practise teleworking (Borsdorf *et al.* 2011).

As a concept, amenity migration gave priority to how migration variously intersects with rural development and transformation (Gosnell and Abrams 2009). Research in this area thoroughly considers the influences of such migrant populations on local cultures, economies, and environments. Such research attempts to identify which 'natural and cultural amenities' (for instance leisure or metropolitan living conditions) are the main motivators to migration and which 'modern political-economy' factors (like access to technology or land availability) are the main facilitators (Moss 2006; Moss and Glorioso 2014).

To contrast, the sociologists and ethnographers Benson and O'Reilly (2016, 2009a, 2009b) focus on people rather than places or contexts, and refer to the notion of *lifestyle migration* to point at the process of the identity-making project at the heart of the migration process:

> Lifestyle migration is a novel extension of a phenomenon with a history, made possible as a result of the global developments of the past fifty or sixty years. It relates specifically to the relative economic privilege of individuals in the developed world, the reflexivity evident in the post-/late modernity, the construction of particular places as offering alternative lifestyles, and a more general ease (or freedom) of movement. (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a: 12)

Benson and O'Reilly (2016) have clearly conceptualised the distinction between amenity migration and lifestyle migration in terms of methodology. They differentiate both notions with consideration to the specificity of different field methodological approaches within the social sciences that entails the distinct origins of both heuristic tools:

> Amenity migration and counter-urbanisation, at least in their contemporary rendering, emerge out of demography (or population studies) and geography, and therefore have a tendency to focus on place and to use methods of enquiry that include surveys and structured interviews. In contrast, lifestyle migration research originates in the interpretivist traditions of much qualitative and ethnographic research, focusing on people (rather than places) and revealing the identity-making projects that are embedded in these migrations. (Benson and O'Reilly 2016: 23)

As an anthropologist, I prefer the use of 'lifestyle' rather than 'amenity' migration. My aim is to highlight how people who have settled in the Alps voice their ideas of a 'better quality of life' after migrating, and disseminate various representations of living in the mountains. Lifestyle migration takes into consideration the meanings and imaginings that have 'the power to shape reality because people act on them in the ways they live after migration' (Benson and O'Reilly 2016: 29). For instance, Benson (2013) has analysed how British people, who have migrated to France in search of authenticity, acted after migration in order to realise the dream they purchased. 'To become part of the

rural idyll, to achieve authenticity, migrants need to work at it' (Benson 2013: 509). Therefore, their everyday life actions and practices within the destination country are made to fit with the ideal they had before migrating. For example, she observed the efforts made by the lifestyle migrants to mingle with their French neighbours, in order for them to better experience the feeling of living in a rural community.

Similarly to what Benson observed in France, Osbaldiston remarked in Australia that 'Australian lifestyle migrants who shift to the coast demonstrate a desire to be close to the beach which represents, especially in that nation's context, a slowing down of life, a relaxing aesthetic (the sights and sounds of the ocean for instance) and a shooting balm to the ills of modernity' (quoted in Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 9). In the Swiss Alps, I observed that people sometimes alternate indoor and outdoor activities during their working day, from working in the office to skiing during lunch time for example, in order to better fit with the value of 'living in nature'. For illustration, a highly-qualified woman who settled in the Alps after living in Berlin, explained:

> I wanted to be close to a skiing location, and I live just three minutes from the ski cabins. So when I talk to my friends, you know when I wanna go to ski, I just look through the window if the weather is good and I tell my secretaries: 'Listen, move my appointments to 1 pm today and I will go skiing from 9 to 12 pm.' Who else can do this? (Medical doctor, native of Germany, valley of Entremont, July 2011).

It should also be noted that not only rural, coastal or alpine living meet the expectations of authenticity. This view has been broken, for example, by Griffiths and Maile's (2014) study in Berlin and London, focussing on the emplacement of a better way of life onto a city space. Here, authenticity also matches self-development, self-discovery, individuality, freedom, and independence (ibid.). It overcomes the rural or the regional as the focal point for migration. Such research raises 'questions about the role of the materiality of environments on affective responses to destinations' (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 10). How does the idea of 'quality of life' embody lifestyle practices? What does searching for a 'better' way of life mean to a medical doctor, physiotherapist, housewife, communication manager, shop owner, scientist, or

tourist information officer? Let us see how the practice of nature works in the Alps, in Valais.

5. The practice of nature and place

Most of the time, from the survey, the sense of a 'better way of life' refers to the natural Alpine environment that differs significantly from that in the city: the air is more pure and less polluted, nature is more accessible and closer, and the Alpine village is less populated than the city, with less traffic and thus offering a more relaxing and healthy way of life. Those imaginaries of Alpine nature and Alpine villages are located at the intersection of various utopian representations of Swiss Alpine rural spaces that contrast with the pressures induced by increasing global mobility. For the passengers I met in the working train trip quoted above, on the one hand, practising outdoor activities in the mountains appears like a way to relax and decompress from a hectic life in the city. On the other hand, they are kept very busy with a heavy leisure schedule and time loss commuting! As Benson and O'Reilly (2016: 22) have shown, 'destinations are often valued because of the contrast they offer to what was left behind, their natural and cultural environments significant because of what these offer by way of improving quality of life'. Compared to rushing across different world capitals, dwelling in the mountains is experienced as a stylish and healthy way to live *in* nature. Here, privilege is embedded at the intersection of Alpine landscapes (as opposed to urban cities, reflecting nature and health) and the specific standard of living of an upper middle class (based on economic and social mobility). Indeed, 'privilege not only structures migration, it might also structure and be structured by experience within the destination' (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 15).

Obviously, the 'cultural significance of place' and the 'social dimensions of these characterisations of place' (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014) can differ, following origin and class. For example, living in nature in the Alps does not mean practising outdoor activities – like skiing, walking, or climbing – for everyone. On the contrary, a woman from Mauritius reported: 'skiing and I are two very different things!' This research participant was working as a waitress in a restaurant in Mauritius before she settled in the Alps thirty years

ago.[8] She explained: 'Me, I had to care for the cows when I arrived, but I knew nothing about them. During the whole winter, and here winter goes on for seven to eight months [laughs], so every morning at four o'clock, waking up' (in Bagnes, July 2011).

In contrast, the individuals from the upper middle classes express their social privilege in terms of living close to nature and practising activities, like this former communication manager: 'Here [compared to Holland], we have nature around us. I am not a great mountaineer, but I like to walk, I like to ski, everything off-road, wilderness, I enjoy this very much!' (a woman, native of the Netherlands, settled in Trient's valley, July 2011).

Both of the women's stories above embody, in their own ways, a different dimension of class structure within the migration process. 'The class structures and practises that characterise life before migration are carried over into post-migration life even if these are transformed in the process' (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 14). Indeed, the research participant from Mauritius changed profession after migration. Being a waitress before migrating, she became a peasant after marrying a Swiss mountain farmer, changing social status and achieving economic progress. The Dutch communication manager, however, was offered a managerial position in Switzerland *from* the Netherlands. She was posted at a well-known multinational company in Neuchâtel before settling down in Valais where she started a business. Class background not only impacts migration, 'it is a dynamic at work in post-migration life' (ibid.).

Most of the time, people we encountered in their houses in the Swiss Alpine villages consider themselves to be living a relatively privileged lifestyle compared with the life they had 'before' migration, whatever it was. The story of Deepali also illustrates this.[9] A native of India, the young woman married a local Swiss man fourteen years ago. She left India to settle in the Swiss Alpine village of her husband. During interviews, she remembers life in India before migrating:

[8] Following Bosc (2008), she belongs to *lower middle class*.
[9] Not her real name, to ensure confidentiality.

> We slept under a small table with all the papers and we slept there. Sometimes, we ate rotten rice because we were so poor. We had no light in the house. Here, I live in a great house, we have a car, meals, everything we want, it's a luxury, it's really a luxury! (on the plain, July 2011).

However, for the young woman and mother of three children, quality of life and lifestyle cannot only be summed up by economic reasoning. Indeed, Deepali continued to explain: 'with respect to [Swiss] mentality, I don't know, life is very organised, everyday there is no other way, that is a bit frustrating, but otherwise it's a luxury' (July 2011). In light of the above, it can be stressed that practices of nature and place vary depending on the sociocultural and economic backgrounds of the interlocutors.

6. The quest for 'something more' than economic advantage

The fantasy surrounding the lifestyle in mountain areas (as a way to live in nature) embodies a class privilege that entails job facilities, flexibility, and mobility. Nevertheless, this is not only privilege as derived from a position of economic advantage (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014: 13). The search for a better way of life matches the individual identity-making project that entails personal values linked to the wellbeing of the household and social welfare. One research participant, who started her career in England before settling down in a Swiss Alpine village, explained the reasons behind her choice:

> Me, I didn't want to stay in the city in England. I had a social life in England that I did not appreciate very much. If you don't send your kid to a private school, she won't have the chance to enter a good university, and if you are not from a good social background, you will have some difficulties to send your child to a private school, and a lot of things like this. So that was not for me. (valley of Entremont, July 2011)

This medical doctor chose to buy a house in the Alps, especially because she appreciates quietness and safety for her children: 'Yes, it's true that there is an extra quality of life we do not have everywhere. If the bicycle stays outside for a week, we will still find it when we return' (valley of Entremont, July 2011).

Currently, the idea of living in a natural environment conveys a large spectrum of social imaginary that entails a feeling of being secure compared to urban growing sense of insecurity. It is also associated with a healthy way of life that involves eating organic food, and having a slower rhythm of life that is more balanced, more fun, and more ecological. Already in the 1980s, nature was transformed into landscapes for urban citizens (Bourdieu 1977: 4; Kilani 1984). Yet in 2017, we are not so far from the nineteenth century romantic view of nature as an inspirational resource for human harmony. In many ways, the contemporary representation of nature and mountain could be depicted as a kind of spiritual reserve for city dwellers or expatriated business people in search of self-awareness. Some locations in mountain areas are reinvented by urbanites who consume the natural environment as much as they contribute to gentrifying the Alpine region. That is the case of some luxury hotel projects, like *Montagne Alternative,* that organise costly journeys for senior managers in search of their inner-self. That is the matter of some contemporary art projects, like *the 3D Foundation* that hosts New Yorker artists in search of inspiration in the Alpine space in Verbier.

The notion of lifestyle migration helps to take into consideration 'the power of the cultural imagination of place that [upper] middle classes carry with them' (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 11). This has 'a real on-the-ground impact in areas of high environmental amenity through the process of gentrification' (ibid.).

Part of the literature on rural gentrification emphasises the key role played by representations of nature and environment within new migrations in peri-urban areas (Bryson and Wyckoff 2010; Colins 2013). On the one hand, nature is the driving force for migration paths, but on the other hand, the new migrants strive to reshape the landscapes to ensure that their natural surroundings fit with the idyllic image they purchased before migrating. A geographical study of the mountains of Limousin points to the perceptions of the environment being idealised and mythologised on the basis of constructed social representations (Richard *et al.* 2014: 7). The study shows how the gentrifiers are reshaping the piece of land they live on to varying extents according to their economic status. It illustrates the will of some neo-Limousins to succeed in co-constructing and co-realising the idealised countryside that is at the ori-

gin of their settlement (ibid.: 10). In the Alpine Frioul in Italy, the *new* inhabitants – second home owners, multi-locality residents, mixed couples, and migrants married to locals, seasonal workers, and other nationals on holidays – contribute to the revitalisation of the local social fabric (Löffler *et al.* 2014). They are described as exercising innovative jobs, often working from home thanks to teleworking, and commuting to urban centres only for scheduled meetings. Sometimes known for being creative, those new mountain dwellers bring stimulation and dynamism to the social and economic life of the community. These mountain people correspond to the type of 'bourgeois-bohemian' (bobo) in search of 'authenticity' described by Benson and O'Reilly (2009b). As well, the gentrifiers we encountered in Switzerland express their new lifestyle in terms of having found a kind of 'authenticity'. One man, a native of Belgium, arrived in the Swiss Alpine region to work as a physiotherapist, was happy to settle down in an old, wooden house located in an Alpine village:

> Here, we have a lot of values and ways of living, I appreciate it a lot. The quality of life we have, it's terrific. There is respect for a lot of things, very strong respect compared to Belgium (…) It's true, I feel well. I find here a wonderful authenticity (Trient's valley, August 2011).

Whatever the ideal of the lifestyle quest was before migration, it has to be considered as an on-going project of identity-making that matches the growing sense of belonging to the place, *after* migration. For example, this interlocutor said: 'Finally we built a house here. This is not a temporary decision' (Trient's valley, July 2011). Another said: 'In the valley now, I am part of the furniture!' (Val Ferret, July 2011). Based on the above, the identity-making project matches the process of reshaping place over time.

7. Conclusion

The growing process of gentrification in the Swiss Alps is closely linked to the easing of international mobility since the 1990s. The fast development of public (air) transport modifies the ways of dwelling in the mountains, also generating repeated lifestyle migration, and multi-locality. The rapid change

in mobility lifestyle favoured and accelerated the internationalisation of the practice of mountains, while facilitating short and repeated stays over the weekends and holidays, any time of the year.

At the heart of the lifestyle migration process, economic and social positions are not separate from emotional and subjective reasons, like the wish for adventure and discovery, the need for change, or the wish to achieve a personal set of values. In the life trajectories of research participants, the gap between the idyllic representation of the Alpine environment and the active practices of place in the Alps becomes increasingly blurred. In many ways, the search for quality of life in the Swiss Alps appears as a mix between class privilege, identity-making project, and a socio-historical construction of the mountain. This phenomenon is not easily reduced to achieve personal economic progress. No matter where they settle in the world, some migrants are seen to gain prestige from migration, others seek excitement and experience, and still others are attracted by freedom and independence (Benson and O'Reily 2016). The migrants met in the Swiss mountains were sometimes in search of tranquillity and social peace, sometimes led there by their interest in outdoor activities and proximity to nature, and often attracted to the standard of living in Switzerland. Their life courses emphasise various ideas of quality of life that articulate individual subjectivities and structural issues, might they be economic, social, or cultural. Such thoughts are part of the lifestyle migration project as an on-going process taking place over time.

The search for another way of life is closely linked to the quest for authenticity, intimately related to a personal inner quest. 'The belief that alienation in modern life leads to the quest for authenticity, with a better way of life available elsewhere' (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014: 7) finds its sources in romanticism, that has also shaped and exacerbated fascination with the mountains. More importantly, lifestyle migration matches Boltanski's (2006) idea of the 'culture of project' by which the key values of neoliberalism are mobilised in support of individual life projects and lifestyle as integral parts of everyday life.

The fantasy surrounding lifestyle migration in mountain areas is diverse according to individual backgrounds, but nevertheless specific to an upper middle class that can afford – economically and socially – to access it. It can

be seen in various combined ways of living – dwelling in a mountain area (while commuting to Swiss or foreign urban centres), shifting from teleworking to outdoor activities during the working week – with the purpose of feeling close to nature while remaining active *within* the global socioeconomic system.

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