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Pathways of Immigration in the Alps and Carpathians: Social Innovation and the Creation of a Welcoming Culture

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Outmigration from rural territories is a worldwide phenomenon that is visible in many mountain regions and creates a perception of a landscape of abandonment. Nonetheless, a counterprocess has also occurred over the past decades of increasing immigration into marginal areas, including mountain areas in Europe. This article compares case studies from mountain municipalities in Austria, Italy, and Romania that have experienced an increase in immigration. Despite their common spatial features, these towns have shown different approaches to managing immigration. This study compared the responses of local communities to immigrants from various backgrounds. Each case study concentrated on the most relevant group of new arrivals in that municipality and provided an analysis of the background conditions and main influences on the integration process. The focus was at the municipality level, supplemented with a broader regional view where possible. The case study in Trentino, Italy, focused on internal migrants who were mostly young people, the study in Romania on amenity migrants, and the study in Austria on asylum seekers. Bearing in mind the diverse starting points and immense cultural diversity in the study areas, the manifold experiences of the integration performed by community action on both sides (new arrivals and local residents) point to 3 main aspects as crucial to integration: the presence of a supportive social environment, the engagement of local actors who broker contacts between the groups, and the availability of appropriate meeting spaces.

Keywords: *European Alps; Carpathians; immigration; integration; rural development; Italy; Austria; Romania.*

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Introduction

Over the past century, the mountain regions of Europe have largely been perceived as regions of outmigration and landscapes of abandonment. Nonetheless, in the past 2 decades a counterprocess has occurred of increasing immigration into rural areas. The most important driver of this shift has been international immigration, which has increased for both economic and political reasons (Bauer and Fassmann 2010). In the Alps, a population increase, mainly fueled by immigration, has occurred in the past decade in more than 70% of all municipalities; this is also the case in some mountain districts of Eastern Europe (Kasimis et al 2010; Löffler et al 2014; Alpine Convention 2015).

Until recently, most immigrants came in search of seasonal or long-term work in key economic sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, extractive industries, and manufacturing. Such labor migrants have now been joined by increasing numbers of amenity migrants, former emigrants returning home, people establishing second or third homes, and refugees of diverse origins (Perlik 2011; Bender and Kanitscheider 2012; Dematteis and Membretti 2016, Membretti and Viazzo 2017). Migration may be temporary, long term, or permanent. Some people choose to migrate to a mountain community (eg amenity migrants and tourism workers), while others are compelled by need (economic migrants) or policy (eg asylum seekers assigned to the location).

To better understand the sociocultural and economic impacts of immigration on mountain communities in Europe, it is important to look at different kinds of immigrants and analyze their movements by addressing the different territorial peculiarities and their contribution to local resilience (Moulaert et al 2007). We therefore conducted 3 case studies of municipal-level

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FIGURE 1 Location of the 3 case studies. (Map by Alberto Di Gioia, DISLIVELLI)



welcoming and inclusion processes in regions with a net population gain from immigration in Austria, Italy, and Romania (Figure 1). The different national contexts and the diverse forms of immigration occurring in the 3 locations provided a wealth of information on the potential of such processes in different settings. The focus of our analysis was on new ideas and initiatives with the potential to promote positive social change in mountain environments. Our findings suggest that 3 key factors in the success of welcoming and inclusion processes in these sparsely populated mountain regions have been (1) the presence of a supportive social environment that enables the development of relationships between newcomers and long-time residents, (2) the presence of local brokers who are able to bridge the gaps between different social and ethnic groups, and (3) appropriate locations in which new arrivals may settle down and find support.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Our inquiries were based on recent sociodemographic research on the ways in which increasing immigration counters depopulation and economic recession, which for a long time had characterized many parts of the Italian and Austrian Alps and the Romanian Carpathians (Iorio and Corsale 2010; Mihailescu 2011; Bender and Kanitscheider 2012; Demochange 2012; Machold et al 2013; Corrado et al 2014; Membretti 2016).

Young urbanites who seek to embrace new lifestyles and work environments away from the city, foreign immigrants keen to take up agriculture and animal husbandry, retirees who return to their home villages, and residents who turn their cottages into guesthouses represent the primary agents of these innovative physical and symbolic transformations (Moss and Glorioso 2014; Membretti 2015). However, the presence of such diverse population groups raises questions about their impact on local identities, mountain communities' cultural heritage, and pathways of reproducing the cultural landscape (Steinicke et al 2010; Viazzo 2012; Bender and Haller 2017). In all cases, newcomers seem to play an important role in triggering economic, social, and landscape reconfigurations in mountain areas (Dematteis 2011; Varotto and Castiglioni 2012), contributing to increased sociocultural diversity in local communities (Membretti and Viazzo 2017). This transformation process, which is often referred to as a threat to traditional trajectories and regional identities, also has the potential to promote innovation in regional development (Depner and Teixeira 2012). As migrants and local people deal with the daily challenges of living together, social innovations that include different actor groups are needed and may lead to new forms and practices of social organization (Christmann 2017). A "culture of welcoming" could help to minimize resistance to changes in social relationships, empowerment, and participation among members of the community. (For a critical reflection on social innovation, see Moulaert and van Dyck 2013 and Novy 2017.) To achieve this, a new understanding of the role of migration is required that contributes to enhancing the attractiveness of regions as living and working

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environments (Aumüller and Gesemann 2014; Machold and Dax 2015).

The aim of our research was to contribute to this new understanding from 2 perspectives: amenity migration and refugee migration. While tourism development influenced sociodemographic and cultural transformations in the first case, in the second case it was the arrival of refugees. In the Italian Alps, and more recently in the municipalities we studied, newcomers had been promoting sustainable tourism for at least a dozen years (Varotto 2013). In the Romanian case-study village, this phenomenon was more recent and limited (Merciu et al 2011; Mihăilescu 2011). In the Austrian case-study village, refugees as an immigration group that had only gained significant interest in the past 10 years but had been a topic of confrontation at the municipality level for the past 7 years (Machold et al 2013).

The analysis focused on the municipality level and used multiple methods to collect data. First, sociodemographic and economic data on the study areas were collected and analyzed, and literature on amenity migration and social innovation was reviewed. Second, ethnographic fieldwork, based on direct observation, was conducted in each study area, in particular to identify the key elements of local culture, social organization, and economic activities. Third, semistructured interviews were conducted with key local actors. Interviewees were selected according to the role they played in the different sectors and in relation to their position in the social network. The sample mirrors the diversity of newcomers and local inhabitants of each case-study population. Migration and socioeconomic data on the study area are presented in Table S1, and details of the methodology in Table S2 (*Supplemental material,* http://dx.doi.org/10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-17-00031.S1).

Case studies

Tesino and Vanoi, Italy

The autonomous province of Trento in northern Italy has experienced a steady growth in population since World War II. Most inhabitants live in the Adige River valley. The upland valleys are characterized by tourism but still form a traditional rural landscape. In the province, economic migration from outside Italy gained relevance in the 1990s. Since then a continuously high number of individuals have arrived from the Maghreb and Eastern Europe with a maximum presence of more than 50,000 individuals (about 10% of the province's population) in 2013. The 2008 economic crisis hit the Trentino with a delay and led to a slight decrease in the local international immigration rate. In the more remote areas of the province, migrants come primarily from other parts of Italy.

Tesino and Vanoi are adjacent districts in a remote mountain area. They are widely classified as areas with production difficulties in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors, thus generating emigration (Grosselli 2007). Historically, this was also due to natural hazards, with the last flood catastrophe occurring in 1966. Nowadays the main source of emigration is related to lack of services and qualified working opportunities. The population in the study area in 2015 was 3776, half of what it was 50 years earlier. The presence of foreign residents is still minimal, but in recent years the 4 municipalities of the study area (Canal San Bovo, Castello Tesino, Cinte Tesino, and Pieve Tesino) have recorded a positive net migratory balance, which has counteracted the negative natural balance (with deaths outnumbering births).

The few migrants from outside Italy have been attracted by the availability of cheap housing and temporary work. But after a short time they usually move to the valley floor, primarily to large urban centers where there are more employment opportunities, including for young people. Migrants from within Italy are primarily returnees, amenity migrants, and business-oriented migrants. Agriculture and tourism are the main economic opportunities, but these sectors cannot be accessed easily by migrant workers due to traditional property rights. The highly fragmented nature of local land and property ownership is a serious barrier to development for both long-time residents and newcomers, whether the latter have local kinship ties (as in the case of returnees) or must first build trusting relationships with local landowners before they can rent land from them.

In the past, some local institutions engaged in strategies to halt depopulation and land abandonment. In Canal San Bovo, an economic bonus was granted to people who decided to move there and to have children (EUR 1000 for each newborn). Locally, lack of access to land and estate development has prevented settlement plans. Support to overcome these limitations sometimes came from individual local politicians' initiatives instead of as a strategy planned by the local council. In some cases, resistance to new ideas has stalled the urbanization process or even caused people to depart the region.

Whether or not they have previous ties to a community, newcomers tend to bring innovation. Some, usually those from other parts of Italy, are establishing small-scale but high-quality enterprises, mostly involving animal husbandry, herb farming (Figure 2), recreation, or education. In Tesino, young locally born adults, as well as descendants of 19th-century emigrants, are creating, and leading, tight linkages within the community capable of enhancing local culture through new social and economic activities. Since 2014, a number of projects have been launched to engage members of multiple generations in efforts to preserve traditional ecological knowledge and set the basis for revitalizing local agriculture, trying out new modes of transforming products from natural resources and offering a new model of hospitality. Schools, the local museum, retirement facilities, and

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FIGURE 2 Local residents and tourists visit an herb farm created by a young woman who had emigrated from Vanoi and later returned. (Photo courtesy of L'Orto Pendolo)



private homes are the centers of this expanding initiative. Recent changes in local governance, with younger administrators and the implementation of new development strategies, are now combined with individuals' ideas about how to pave the way for new in-migration in the form of new local economic opportunities.

Bezau, Austria

Bezau is the main municipality in the Bregenzerwald region in the district of Bregenz, a typical mountain area in the Austrian state of Vorarlberg. The area has a lively economy with more than 60 small-scale commercial and artisanal enterprises. It is also an attractive tourist destination due to its location within a small structured agricultural area of meadows and Alpine pastures and its vicinity to ski resorts and hiking trails. Besides tourism and trade, a large wood-processing company in the neighboring municipality is the most important employer and has attracted labor migrants since the 1970s, primarily from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. Bezau is economically important for the whole Bregenzerwald region, with half of the people working in Bezau coming from neighboring villages. On the other hand, half of Bezau's local working population commutes to work outside the municipality, mainly to the nearby Rhine Valley, Vorarlberg's economic center.

In 2014, of the 2004 inhabitants of Bezau, 16% had foreign citizenship; in other rural and mountainous areas in Austria, the share of foreign residents is about 6%. Since 2002, a consistently slightly positive birth rate and a positive international migration balance have led to a population increase. In a continuation of the pattern established in the 1970s, about half of the foreigners in Bezau are from Turkey or the former Yugoslavia. The remainder of the migrant population comprises over 35 nationalities.

The establishment of a refugee home in the town center in 2005 (Figure 3), with a capacity to host about 30 people, currently serving mostly families and women, brought immigrants with completely different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to Bezau. Although the local population was skeptical and even frightened about hosting refugees in their community, the municipal council wholeheartedly supported the establishment of the refugee home. The Christian organization Caritas, entrusted with the accommodation of refugees in Vorarlberg, conducted an information campaign at the beginning of the process and then hired a local woman who was well integrated in the social network to help with the organization of the refugee home.

In the same year that the refugee home opened, flooding hit Bezau, and the refugees participated in the flood response. This was highly appreciated by local people and helped to turn public opinion in favor of the

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FIGURE 3 The refugee home in the town center of Bezau. (Photo by Elke Kager)



refugees. Under the Caritas program Neighborhood Support (*Nachbarschaftshilfe*), refugees without a labor permit were able to offer services voluntarily to private people or the municipality for a small fixed remuneration. (The option to work for private individuals has since been adapted due to legal restrictions.) These activities, along with the location of the refugee home in the center of the village, have enhanced the visibility of the refugees.

Fundamental reservations remained about refugees and migrants, particularly with regard to the integration of children who hardly speak German into the school system. Efforts to overcome these reservations and promote mutual understanding have included meetings and other exchanges within the community, open-house days at the refugee home, and New Year festivities (Machold et al 2013). Individuals who are respected by the different ethnic and social groups have played a significant role in building local trust, resolving misunderstandings, and promoting inclusive community relations. This has been important not only for the refugees but also for all of Bezau's foreign migrants.

Fundata, Romania

Romania's population fell by 3 million between 1992 and 2012 due to outmigration and reduced birth rates. Thus, the experience of Romanian mountain municipalities is particularly instructive for analyzing changing migration patterns. With large parts of the population moving toward rural areas, including mountains, at the time of the economic crisis after the end of the Ceauşescu regime (Mihăilescu 2011), the development trajectory in Romania was completely different from that of the Alpine regions. Local economic systems, based on subsistence agriculture, could not integrate the inflow of new peasants. In a second wave of migration after Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, most of the Romanians who had moved to the mountains left for destinations abroad, leaving the highlands populated mainly by elderly people.

Fundata, a Transylvanian village in the Carpathian Mountains in Brasov county, Roma, is the highest-elevation permanently inhabited locality in Romania. In the socialist era, Fundata preserved much of its interwar population: in 1966, 300 of the 1903 inhabitants of the village commuted daily to industrial jobs in nearby towns and supplemented household consumption through

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FIGURE 4 A new guesthouse on the outskirts of Fundata. (Photo by Bogdan Iancu)



small-scale farming (Pepene and Popovici 2012). The peasant-worker (Beck 1976; Randall 1976; Kideckel 1993) was the cornerstone of Romanian socialism, which sought to bridge urban and rural environments. However, after the fall of socialism, the population of Fundata dropped drastically; it was 839 in 2011 (Pepene and Popovici 2012). The prevalence of the peasant-worker declined with deindustrialization; many villagers now work most of the year abroad and return in the summer to carry out household chores in their village of origin.

Under current conditions, rural tourism appears to be the main vector of change. This phenomenon emerged in the late 1990s, when some Bucharest-based tourists, who had visited the village during the socialist era, decided to build their holiday homes there, benefiting from privatization and the deflation of land values. Later, they turned these homes into guesthouses, often with funds from European programs (in particular European Structural and Investment Funds). Shortly thereafter, other tourism entrepreneurs coming from Bucharest and Costanza built guesthouses in the vicinity, living there themselves (usually temporarily during the tourism season but sometimes permanently), always maintaining strong economic and social linkages with their hometown. This nucleus of tourist lodging has continued to expand (Figure 4). Many of the guesthouse owners and managers maintain significant relationships with Fundata villagers, either because they employ local youth (who constitute a cheap labor force) or because they buy local dairy products to serve to their guests, many of whom are attracted to the area by its traditional and natural food. Many local residents nonetheless see new residents and tourists alike as fluctuating economic resources that offer no long-term guarantees for local development. The area where the guesthouses are concentrated, which is distant from the historical part of the village, is known as the "outlanders' place." An annual mountain and sheep-farming festival seems to be the only real occasion of mixing between long-time residents, new residents, and tourists.

The penetration of urban lifestyles and tourism-related commodification risks the annihilation of local traditions and cultures, together with the possibility of land grabbing (Visser and Spoor 2011) and increasing socioeconomic disparity. However, in a context lacking in endogenous entrepreneurship, amenity migration and tourism may be able to ease the economic transition from subsistence farming to multifunctional agriculture (Muică and Turnock 2000; Iorio and Corsale 2010; Membretti and Iancu 2017), as has occurred in some Alpine communities

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(Dislivelli 2017), and to help reconnect the mountain with the city and rejuvenate the local economy.

Discussion

The case studies presented here show how different communities have experienced the interactions between newcomers and long-term residents. Table 1 summarizes the key findings of each case study.

Many types of migrants come to mountain areas, including amenity migrants, entrepreneurs, returnees of various generations, and refugees (Bartaletti 2013; Corrado et al 2014; Colucci and Gallo 2016). The migrants had different backgrounds and motivations; some had successfully surmounted the barriers to integration through individual or collective action. Responses from local communities varied over time and with respect to the different types of migrants. For example, acceptance of returning emigrants (or of their descendants) and other people with a similar cultural background has been relatively easy, but the challenges imposed by multiple successive waves of migration (such as amenity migrants, foreigners, and, lastly, refugees) are considerably stronger. In any case, it is essential to develop mutual trust between local residents and newcomers based on a supportive social environment.

Child and elderly care and education lead to frequent (and more intensive) social contacts; eventually, these activities lead to lasting integration. Older people are sometimes more involved than working adults in activities of material and cultural transmission (eg language courses, handing on knowledge to young people, and bridging the gap between different social groups).

Acknowledging the opportunities offered by the host region is sometimes not easy for immigrants. Along with social and bureaucratic difficulties, this represents one of the main initial obstacles to inclusion (and then integration) after immigrants arrive. Difficulty finding a house, and understanding local habits and norms, often in an unfamiliar language, could disrupt the ambitions and aspirations of new settlers. Researchers have identified examples of a coping strategy to bypass these difficulties and, in some cases, to offer a system of incentives (mainly noneconomic ones) to welcome new migrants (Löffler et al 2016).

These case studies point to the importance of power. While amenity migrants have substantial financial resources and are able to negotiate with local residents from a position of power, the majority of foreign immigrants have much less negotiating power (Membretti and Iancu 2017). This is particularly true in the case of asylum seekers, whose main asset is their potential to eventually contribute to the regional labor force. In all cases, newcomers profit from the void created in these mountain areas by depopulation, economic crisis, and land abandonment (Remotti 2011). As a consequence, general strategies of integration and development have to be developed according to the local assets and socioeconomic structure. External investments could create opportunities, but they also generate tensions between newcomers and investors as well as local residents and entrepreneurs.

Integrating newcomers in the local society requires a number of conditions, such as adequate services, work opportunities, and willingness of residents to cooperate (Alpine Convention 2015). There is a need for multiple venues and opportunities for immigrants and local residents to meet. This should be followed by a bridging process addressing and meeting the specific community needs. Deliberate action to shape the social environment is required in order to overcome the obstacles to a successful shared existence. In all of the study villages, local facilitators played a major role in the process of creating spaces of cooperation and opportunities for cultural exchange. Public spaces that facilitate exchange are essential to integration, but they are often missing (for historical and sociocultural reasons) in small mountain villages. Such spaces may offer a concrete possibility of negotiation and mutual recognition, allowing long-time residents and newcomers to share the same physical frame. Public spaces seem to be the most important resource to invest in, to avoid the risk of reproducing gated communities even in the highlands (Bagaeen and Uduku 2010). Access to rights and services, in particular to living spaces, is essential. Housing, for example, is an organizational challenge. Some newcomers can have a strong influence on the housing market and new home construction; others will occupy unused or obsolete buildings or be forced, like young local residents, to move outside the community for lack of available housing areas.

Conclusion

In recent times in European regions, including mountain areas, difficulties in accepting new residents have arisen, and hostility toward immigrants, especially foreign ones, has increased substantially. Media discourses contribute to the creation of negative perceptions and fears of newcomers. What actors have the potential to support the establishment of a social environment that could influence these mind-sets? And which actions should be taken in mountain regions to provide the same access to local resources to new arrivals as to long-time local residents? Elected administrators and socioeconomic actors are highly important to the development of a welcoming culture at the local and regional levels. Associations jointly created and led by local residents and immigrants, and individuals active in local community life, have a decisive role in this process; they support recent and future dwellers' initiatives and prevent exhaustion. A combination of actors, steered by leading figures aware of local assets and challenges, recognizing

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TABLE 1 Key findings of the case studies. (Table continued on next page.)

	Tesino and Vanoi, Italy	Bezau, Austria	Fundata, Romania
Main groups of immigrants	• Citizens of eastern European countries (Albania, Romania, Moldova, Montenegro) • Former emigrants returning home and/or their descendants • Amenity migrants (from Veneto, Lombardy, and South Tyrol) • Multi-location dwellers (local and external owners of a second or third home)	• Migrant workers from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia and their descendants • Migrants who came from European Union states (particularly Germany) before 2004 as working migrants and amenity migrants • Asylum seekers and refugees	• Amenity migrants • Multi-location dwellers (tourism entrepreneurs from urban areas)
Local responses to immigrants	• Support for those interested in developing new activities with identification of adequate spaces • Creation of housing and employment opportunities under the Regional Support Scheme • Periodic meetings between local residents and migrants in the Forum on Integration to organize events as well as cultural and "hands-on" initiatives. • Activities at the community level to provide information about immigration, conduct cultural mediation at school, and promote integration with local society and culture	• Refugee home for about 30 asylum seekers since 2005 • Until 2016, option for asylum seekers to offer services privately as domestic workers and gardeners (Neighborhood Support) • Primary school project in 2012 on social diversity issues, translator for parent-teacher meetings, language instruction for migrant children • Bimonthly meeting of local residents and migrants to discuss cultural matters	• Construction of guesthouses by entrepreneurs and maintenance of relationships with local population by new residents • Use of personal contacts but no specific action with regard to immigrants
Immigrant-welcoming initiatives	• Financial and fiscal incentives for settling and newborns (late 1990s) • "Welcome desk" and support to manage bureaucratic difficulties operated by local associations' coordination. • "Culture days" each year in a different location with representatives of different nations • Weekly program on a local radio station • Retirees offering voluntary help in cultural and material transmission (horticulture, carpentry, handicrafts) • Informative materials about services and opportunities • Language courses	• Open-house days at refugee home • New Year festivities • Material donations • Voluntary help, in particular with language learning • Brochures (in German only) about community services	• Nedeia Muntilor festival: livestock fair and exhibition for tourists, newcomers, and long-time residents

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TABLE 1 Continued. (First part of Table 1 on previous page.)

	Tesino and Vanoi, Italy	Bezau, Austria	Fundata, Romania
Local facilitators	• Municipal staff (primarily mayors) • Cultural bodies (Ecomuseum) • Two young graduates in social services who founded the TraMeeTErra association with the aim to operate with individuals from different cultures and backgrounds. • Young local residents creating cultural bridges between older and younger people and supporting integration of newcomers within their associations or managing new initiatives (funded projects)	• Well-integrated local woman who acts as mediator between local residents and asylum seekers • Second-generation Turkish woman who acts as mediator between local residents and Turkish migrants, particularly for Turkish women • Local retiree who organizes bimonthly cultural discussions • Director of local primary school	• Established tourism entrepreneurs working to attract new entrepreneurs from urban areas
Government, nonprofit, and private actors	• Mayors and members of the municipal council • Hosting activities of refugees and asylum seekers are governed by central regional bodies but they are operated by local associations • Public and nonprofit agencies that offer business counseling to support agriculture, tourism, and handicrafts projects	• Mayor and members of the municipal council, particularly the social and school committees • Acting manager of refugee home • Staff and volunteers from Caritas, a refugee service organization in Vorarlberg • Staff from *Okay Zusammenleben*, a regional migrant-integration agency in Vorarlberg	• Tourism entrepreneurs

spaces of integration, creating areas of common interest, and finding opportunities for cultural exchange, would provide clear incentives to establish an integrated community. This involves social innovation strategies to nurture transformation and a redistribution of power, at least at the local level, through participatory processes and a different approach to local resources. For example, following the logic of the commons and public goods in order to shift from private ownership of the land (a cause of exclusion) to its common use (increasing the potential for inclusion).

Within the mountain context, it seems important to complement local approaches with regional concepts that are based on national policies supporting inclusive discourses on integration of immigrants. The core task is to ensure that these activities are informed by strategies tailored to mountain regions that enhance a framework of opportunities instead of increasing restrictions and reservations toward newcomers.

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Supplemental material

TABLE S1 Recent migration and sociodemographic trends in the study sites. The year range for the data is 2002–2015 unless otherwise noted.
TABLE S2 Methods used in the 3 case studies.

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