

Introduction. Changing Mountain Communities

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Change has been one of the main topics in the study of communities in mountain areas, at least since the 1970s (Bailey, 1971). It has often been understood in relation to modernization, as a linear and irreversible socioeconomical process, which transformed peasants into farmers and tourism managers. It has also been associated with local decline, abandonment, and depopulation. Nevertheless, ethnographic and demographic investigations conducted in Europe and elsewhere in the past few decades have revealed contradictions and variability in change-dynamics, highlighting the impact of recent migration flows, the role of new inhabitants, and the many forms of negotiation on how to live together, including different visions and even conflicts on practices of resource management, sustainability, tourism development, and heritage-making (Bender & Kanitscheider, 2012; del Mármol et al., 2016; Membretti & Viazzo, 2017; Oiry Varacca & Sallenave, 2024). Researchers have underlined the emergence of new political, cultural, and ecological awareness of mountain areas' people fighting against the environmental exploitation of their territories and ecological disasters.

In our current times, marked by multi-crises in health, politics, the global economy and above all climate change, these communities are facing multi-form uncertainties while sharing at the same time the certainty of permanent and various risks. The chapters throughout this book show that certainties and uncertainties, as well as change, are often interlinked in dialectical and complex ways and that what is certain or uncertain changes over time. The chapters suggest that climate change, once regarded as only a possibility, has become a certainty, perceived and experienced in daily life. Climate change is interconnected with social, economic, and political change, which are both at the same time a certainty and an uncertainty. That social, economic, and political patterns change or have to change in order to make our activities and

life more sustainable is certain, but how exactly is not always known, and as such bears the uncertainty of awaiting the yet to come, the need to experiment and to adapt our economy and ways of life. The uncertainties coming together with the certainty of environmental, social, economic, and political change seem also to interact with the (re)construction of collective identities and the preservation and invention of traditions, in which identities and traditions provide the comfort of apparent permanence and certainty. The chapters of this volume present stories, histories, narrations, and processes of the intermingling certainties and uncertainties connected to themes such as climate change, tourism, and emotionality.

Further certainties also refer to both academic and common-sense stereotypes on mountain communities. These entail, for instance, the ineluctability of the process of abandonment and depopulation of mountain areas, as well as their supposed marginality and their assumed traditionalism and anchoring in the past. Even the existence of *close* or bounded mountain communities should be a matter of investigation and scrutiny, rather than a taken-for-granted assumption or certainty. Mountain communities, in fact, are by no means enclosed and isolated entities but are connected at regional, national, and global levels. They could face internal conflicts and contradictions, which may be boomed by frictions with external institutions and powers.

One certainty that mountain communities have to face is, as we have just noted, climate change. In a thought-provoking article on Alpine anthropology in the Anthropocene, Werner Krauß has not only remarked that the Alps are “one of the hotspots and icons of global climate change” (2018, p. 1021), but has also emphasized that humans are not the sole beings to be affected. Indeed, this realization has prompted an epistemological shift which has moved the spotlights of research towards Alpine landscapes, that are now regarded as complex assemblages of entangled elements including human, nonhuman and also more-than-human actors, geological, biological, and meteorological. It has also led to a new environmental anthropology, which is superseding the old ecological anthropology and its anthropocentric focus on the relations between primarily human populations and natural resources. The new approach now encompasses a broader range of issues, including political ecology, the study of indigenous environmental knowledge, and

multispecies ethnography. This epistemological turning point, together with the other significant changes experienced by mountain areas in the past decades, is now forcing adequate conceptual tools to be sought by anthropology and social sciences so that novel and often entangled social settings can be dealt with. All the chapters in this volume fit very well into this new theoretical framework and, when read together, highlight how new conceptual tools may offer a useful interpretative starting point for in-depth investigations.

On the one hand, relevant theoretical and methodological suggestions come from the ethnographic studies conducted in three upland communities (one in the Andes, one in North America, one in the Alps) by a multidisciplinary team led by the anthropologist Ben Orlove (Orlove et al., 2019). Their central notion of *frame*, in particular, appears to be highly effective in making sense of the divergent interpretations of the same scenario (in this case, the retreat of glaciers) that are often expressed by the actors inhabiting the highlands. Indeed, all the authors of this volume explore, albeit from different perspectives and points of view, how mountain dwellers interpret and frame their territory and the complex relationships that populate it. On the other hand, the recent “convivial turn” pivoted upon the conceptual pair conviviality/coexistence (Samanani, 2023) draws attention to the complex and heterogeneous processes that are changing the social and cultural landscape of many mountain communities. The delicate relationships between different categories of inhabitants are a common thread that guides the reader through the various chapters, which provide ethnographic accounts of a variety of situations in which friction, mere coexistence or, rather, attempts at conviviality can be detected.

The discussion that this volume aims to develop further has been inspired by a panel organized by the editors at the international congress of SIEF – International Society for Ethnology and Folklore, hosted at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, in 2023. Some of the authors of the chapters, together with other colleagues, took part in that panel. The conference was a starting point for stimulating dialogue and multifaceted reflections on the certainties and uncertainties faced by mountain communities, which led to the writing of the present volume.

Its chapters focus on the complexity of processes of change, pointing out different strategies and attitudes people adopt to cope with, resist, adapt to,

interpret, and frame ecological, socio-economic, and political transformations in mountain communities and territories. They propose several cases, especially from Europe, looking at the Alps but also at the Apennines, the Carpathians, the Laboreiro mountains in Northern Portugal, the Sardinian inner mountain area, and one from the Argentinean Andes in South America. All the chapters present empirical studies, informed by ethnographic research – even with auto-ethnographic insights (Cretton) – also when including (Boos & Salvucci; Maciel; Szabó) or even prioritizing (Branca & Lai) a historical perspective on change. Many of them propose a comparative approach, for instance between the Alps and the Apennines (Whitaker & Dall’Ò), the Italian, French, and Swiss Alps (Orlandi et al.), villages in the neighboring Italian Alpine regions of Piedmont and Aosta Valley (Bonato & Zanini), or different villages of the historical regions of Barbagia and inner Nuoro in the mountains of Sardinia (Branca & Lai).

Many of the chapters address the effects of climate change and environmental crisis in mountain regions, dealing with the emotional and symbolic reactions to the retreat of glaciers in the Swiss Alps (Cretton) or investigating perceptions and worries of local people, such as smallholder farmers, beekeepers, and hunters, but also entrepreneurs in the sector of tourism and winter sports, facing rising temperatures and the current lack of snow in winter (Whitaker & Dall’Ò). They scrutinize local expectations and social desires regarding new politics and trends toward environmental sustainability and ecological transition (Orlandi et al.) or analyze negotiations and conflicts about uses and misuses of natural resources for production (i. e., agriculture, hunting, and herding) and tourism development in both Europe (Bonato & Zanini; Branca & Lai; Maciel; Szabó) and South America (Boos & Salvucci).

Along with climate change, in fact, controversies related to tourism development in mountain areas are clearly one of the main topics of this volume, since all the chapters deal with it in one way or another. Cretton, as well as Whitaker and Dall’Ò, highlight the relevance of tourism for local economies and how concerned people are about the risk of tourism decline due to climate change. Bonato and Zanini, Orlandi et al., and Szabó underscore potential conflicts and divergencies in expectations connected to tourism management within diverse mountain communities in the Alps and the Carpathians. Maciel stresses possible ambiguities of tourism development and herit-

age-making in relation to the quest for authenticity and identity construction in a mountain village in Northern Portugal that has faced intensive emigration and depopulation processes. For their part, Boos and Salvucci underline how tourism can be perceived by local people and indigenous communities as a possible alternative to extractivism and new mining projects supported by regional governments and multinational corporations in an Andean village in Northwestern Argentina. Hopes and desires of a better future are, indeed, often associated with tourism in the frame of politics of territorial development and heritage-making (Branca & Lai; Maciel), which are often viewed as possible measures to contrast demographic and economic decline of mountain communities (see also Bonato & Zanini; Branca & Lai).

The focus on emotionality is another common thread that connects many of the chapters. Whitaker and Dall'Ò report on the feelings of uncertainty and worry expressed by the interviewees; Orlandi et al. investigate different imaginations of a suitable ecological transition; and Szabó, Bonato and Zanini and Boos and Salvucci pay attention to the diverse and contrasting social desires about the future within mountain communities. Social desires are scrutinized through a study of intimate representations and memories, such as in the case of Maciel's essay, or from theoretical and methodological perspectives that refer to the interdisciplinary field of *montology*, in the instance of Branca and Lai's project, or to the social-ecological system (SES) approach, in the case of Szabó's chapter. In Cretton's text, intimacy is the very methodological frame within which the author studies relations between people and glaciers through sensory ethnography.

As in Cretton's contribution, other chapters deal with relations between humans and nonhumans or other-than-humans. Beside the glaciers in Cretton's study, Whitaker and Dall'Ò describe the relation between humans and bees and Bonato and Zanini refer to the relation between deers and humans, whereas in Boos and Salvucci's piece the Pachamama-Mother Earth – a powerful more-than-human being, conceived of as the all-encompassing environment by local people – is described as taking part in a cosmopolitical arena that includes indigenous communities, ecological activists, researchers, and tourists. The volume starts with the presentation of rituals of mourning for the retreat of glaciers in Switzerland and comes full circle by ending with an ethnographic account of a ritual offering to the Pachamama organized by

indigenous communities in Northwestern Andean Argentina (Boos & Salvucci).

Although the volume is primarily intended for both experts in sociocultural mountain studies (academics, researchers) and students enrolled in courses in anthropology, geography, sociology and demography, political ecology, and history, we hope that it will prove useful also to a broader readership of people interested in upland societies and cultures and their present and future. The innovative value of the volume consists, we believe, in the fact that it collects ethnographic and empirical studies that all focus on the multi-crisis of our time (socio-economic, political, and ecological) and aim at highlighting the complexity of transformations in relation to climate change, social desires, and processes of tourism development in mountain areas. By presenting specific cases but also fostering a more comprehensive comparative perspective, the volume connects Central, Western, and Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean area, as well as to America, thereby aptly fitting into the comparative and multidisciplinary theoretical framework which has been effectively defined by Fausto Sarmiento (2020) as “montology”. Finally, it is worth mentioning that it adds a new contribution to the bu,press’ set of publications about mountains that already has featured titles such as *Cultures in Mountain Areas: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Boos and Salvucci (2022), *Malinowski and the Alps – Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Tauber and Zinn (2023), and *New Horizons for the Alps – Ethnographies, Reshaping Challenges, and Emerging More-Than-Alpine Relations*, edited by Schneider and Tauber (2024).

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