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Year-round Living in Alpine Arc Resorts Facing High Tourism Intensity and Seasonality

La dinámica de vida comunitaria en el entorno de las estaciones turísticas del Arco Alpino ante la masificación y la estacionalidad del turismo

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Abstract

Some winter sports resort communities in the Alpine Arc appear to have been weakened by a demographic downturn, while others still report an increase in their permanent population. This article examines the causes of these contrasting situations in France (Les Deux Alpes, Les Belleville, Montvalezan, La Clusaz), Switzerland (Nendaz), Austria (Kitzbühel), Italy (Badia/Abtei), and Slovenia (Kranjska Gora). Based on interviews with local stakeholders, an analysis of socio-economic data and a review of the relevant literature, we analysed the year-round dynamics in these communities. The high tourism seasonality tends to attract temporary residents. While real-estate pressures exist in all the areas studied, other factors also affect the ability of communities to maintain local year-round living dynamics. Our findings raise questions about the role of public initiatives in striking a balance between promoting tourism for a clientele that changes weekly and providing a living space for year-round residents.

Keywords: Year-round living dynamics, tourism seasonality, tourism intensity, winter sports resorts, real estate, second homes.

Resumen

Algunas comunidades locales del entorno de las estaciones de deportes de invierno en el Arco Alpino parecen haberse visto debilitadas por una recesión demográfica, mientras que otras aún reportan un aumento en su población permanente. Este artículo examina las causas de estas situaciones diversas en Francia (Les Deux Alpes, Les Belleville, Montvalezan, La Clusaz), Suiza (Nendaz), Austria (Kitzbühel), Italia (Badia/Abtei) y Eslovenia (Kranjska Gora). Basándonos en entrevistas con actores locales, un análisis de datos socioeconómicos y una revisión de la literatura relevante, analizamos la dinámica anual en estas comunidades. La alta estacionalidad del turismo tiende a atraer residentes temporales, pero ello no es óbice para que no existan presiones inmobiliarias en todas las áreas estudiadas y otros factores que también afectan a la capacidad de las comunidades para mantener una dinámica normal de vida local

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durante todo el año. Nuestros hallazgos plantean preguntas sobre el papel de las iniciativas públicas para lograr un equilibrio entre promover el turismo para una clientela que cambia semanalmente y proporcionar un espacio vital para los residentes permanentes.

Palabras clave: Dinámica de vida local, estacionalidad turística, intensidad turística, estaciones de deportes de invierno, sector inmobiliario, segundas residencias.

1. Introduction

Winter sports tourism is an activity that draws in population when it is in the development phase (Veyret-Verner, 1956), creating wealth and employment (Préau, 1963), but this is no longer the case to the same extent when it reaches “cruising speed” (Gauchon, 2019). The decline in population observed in recent years in many Alpine resort communities is giving rise to public concern about maintaining year-round living. Real-estate pressure and the expansion of second home ownership are some of the main causes highlighted in the media and political debates as posing a threat to permanent residency (Marcellin and Colonna, 2022). Circumstances around access to housing for the labour force appear to be the key challenge for managing mountain resorts in a sustainable manner. The buy-to-let economy which is taking over from the tourist economy (Fablet, 2013), the shift upmarket (Piquerey, 2016) and also seasonality to some extent, appear to be having detrimental effects and are damaging activity spaces that support these destinations, and will ultimately impact the economic performance of resorts.

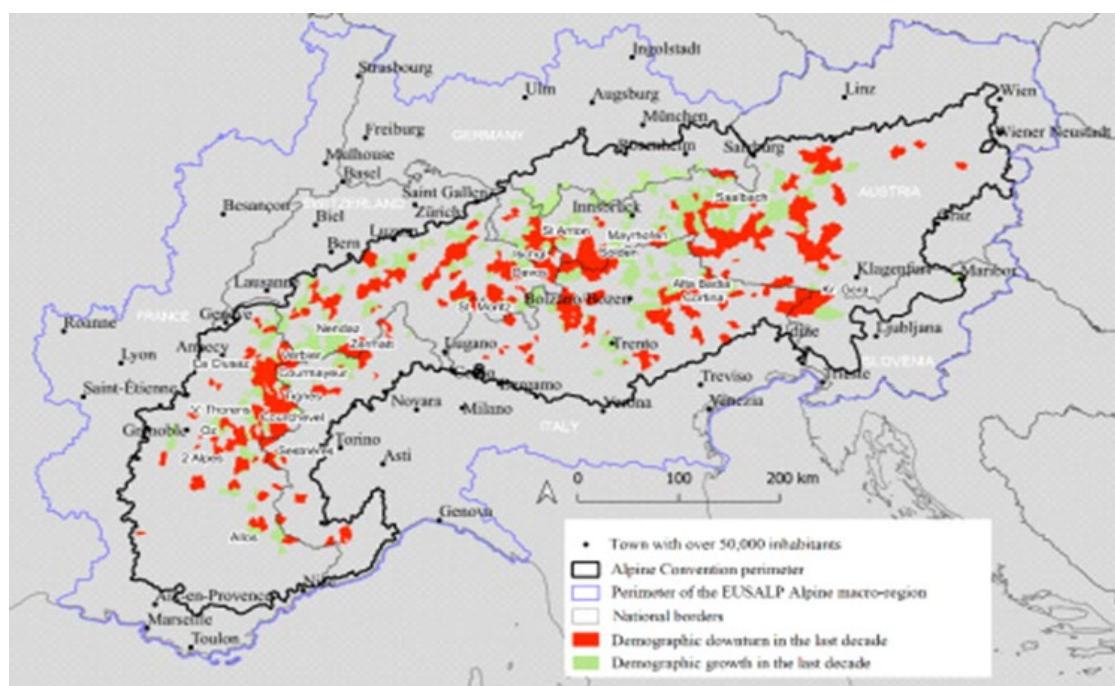
Within the framework of our PhD thesis (Drouet, 2024), we set out to understand the demographic imbalances encountered in resort communities with high tourism seasonality and intensity. Investigations in four areas in France, in Switzerland (Nendaz), Italy (Badia/Abtei), Austria (Kitzbühel) and Slovenia (Kranjska Gora) made it possible to carry out an in-depth analysis of the interactions between year-round local living, second homes and public initiatives in various socio-cultural, institutional and legislative contexts. Our analysis is based on interviews with stakeholders in the territories, documentary analysis, and data processing.

1.1. Year-round local living in Alpine resorts experiencing high tourism intensity and seasonality

Resort communities act as catalysts for the real estate pressures and the effects of seasonality which in turn raise questions about the capacity to accommodate and maintain a year-round resident population. Constraints on demographic growth (Bausch, 2017) in these tourist areas and the porosity of the status of year-round residents, seasonal residents and tourists invite us to define year-round local living in order to understand the dynamics at play.

1.1.1. Considering depopulation of resorts in the light of demographic censuses.

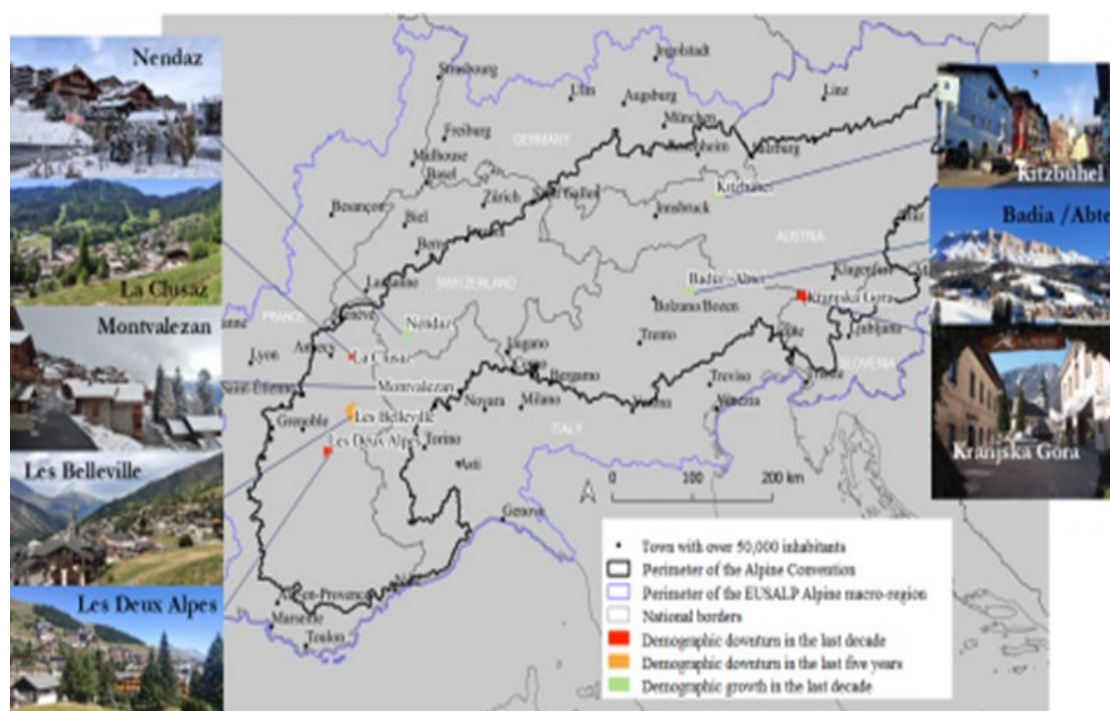
Leveraging the scientific literature and our statistical observations allows us to qualify the phenomenon of widespread depopulation across all resorts. The census data for 478 major resort communities within the Alpine Convention perimeter was processed. This made it possible to establish an estimate of recent demographic growth across the municipalities presented in Figure 1 as a whole. Based on censuses carried out between 2019 and 2022, nearly 1.57 million permanent residents live in large resort communities. These same municipalities had 1.43 million inhabitants in 2001 and 1.53 million between 2008 and 2012, which represents an overall population growth in these territories.

Figure 1. Demographic change in communities within the Alpine Convention perimeter

Author's own figure. Sources: ESRI Relief, 2019; Alpine Convention, 2020; Eurostat NUTS 3, 2013; opensnowmap.org and contributors, BFS, 2001, 2010, 2019; INSEE, 2001, 2008, 2019; ISTAT, 2001, 2012; Statistik Austria, 2001, 2010; SURS, 2002, 2010, 2022; Zensus, 2001, 2010, 2022; INSEE, 2019; ISTAT, 2020; Statistik, 2020; Statistisches Bundesamt 2011, 2021.

Within countries, there are distinct contrasts in the situations in municipalities between Alpine regions and massifs. In terms of migration change, previous research had highlighted a wide variety of flows in recent decades (Camenisch and Debarbieux, 2011). These migrations include a rural exodus from mountain villages to Alpine towns (Schuler et al., 2006), movement related to employment opportunities in sectors such as railways, tourism and hydroelectricity infrastructure (Fontaine, 2005), as well as the migration of young graduates (Egger et al., 2003). Other migrations are associated with periurbanisation around Alpine agglomerations (Perlik, 1999). Lastly, amenity migration, which occurs when new or multi-local mountain dwellers settle in an area renowned for its landscape and leisure opportunities, contributes to demographic redistribution (Martin, 2006; Perlik, 2011). The gentrification of a tourism destination can lead to population movement to higher altitudes al., 2011; Barrioz, 2020; Drouet and Barrioz, 2024) and from ubac (north-facing slope) to adret (south-facing slope).

For our research, 8 municipalities were selected in total (Figure 2). Our analysis takes supra-municipal and valley dynamics into consideration in order to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms at work. Furthermore, using the municipality scale can reveal very different realities through administrative zoning, as some ski areas encroach on several municipalities or even countries (Espace San Bernardo ski area). Sometimes municipalities can support several resorts (Les Belleville with Saint-Martin, Les Ménuires and Val Thorens), or a ski area can be spread across several municipalities (the Alta Badia ski area which spans Corvara in Badia/Kurfar, Badia/Abtei and La Villa/Stern). Our research therefore involves setting the areas selected in perspective rather than taking a comparative approach.

Figure 2: Resort communities studied

Author's own figure. Sources: ESRI Relief 2019, Alpine Convention 2020, EUSALP 2020, Eurostat NUTS 3 2013.

1.1.2. The notion of year-round life in spaces with high tourism intensity and seasonality

The presence of a stable population and maintaining year-round local living more generally represent a significant challenge for tourist resort communities due to the effects of seasonality. R. Knafo (1991) refers to the “off-season”, a period when hotels and businesses are shut, seasonal workers have left and permanent life is restricted to a small number of places as the resort appears to go into hibernation. Clivaz (2007) highlights the loss of village atmosphere in Switzerland as social and community life is curtailed and the centres of resorts are deserted. He believes that snow is no longer enough to attract visitors. Clients are becoming increasingly aware of the need for municipalities to retain local charm in order to preserve appeal. Seasonal fluctuations and intense concentrations of visitors not only affect the local area's ability to host visitors, but also the stability of the resident population. The discontinuity between the tourist season and the low season is all the more pronounced as high visitor footfall is accompanied by a strong daytime and night-time economy (après-ski social activities) (Suchet, 2013). This confirms the notion of high tourism seasonality and intensity. In statistical terms, tourism intensity is the ratio of overnight stays booked in tourist accommodation relative to the total permanent resident population (Plettner, 1979; Dax and Tamme, 2022). This indicator makes it possible to define the spaces studied. It embodies the dichotomy between tourism activity and the permanent population, which is the focus of this article. Suchet (2013) has studied the temporal and spatial rhythms of tourists' and residents' social activities and their interactions in winter sports resorts in the French Alps.

The proliferation of and variations in the rhythms of life of residents have prompted us to broaden our observation of the permanent population and to take a year-round living approach. This research approach allows us to encompass the residential practices and local

activities which constitute permanent living, which is impacted by seasonal fluctuations. The phrase “year-round local living” is not a formal academic or institutional definition. However, several studies carried out in tourist destinations approach this issue using a variety of terms including “permanent living”, “living community”, “living territory” or “liveability” (Chardon, 1986; Rieucan 2000). In this article “year-round living” refers to the set of residential practices and socio-economic, cultural and leisure activities which contribute to the local dynamic throughout the entire year. It is distinct from practices that are exclusively seasonal. This notion of year-round local living goes beyond a purely demographic analysis of tourist destinations. It involves analysing factors which impact annual activity dynamics generated by the practices of different types of resident, whether they are inhabitants registered in the municipality, residents with second homes, seasonal workers or tourists. Irrespective of whether residents are permanent or intermittent, it is possible to look beyond the administrative or tax status of their homes. This status does not necessarily reflect the multidimensional relationships they have with the spaces or accommodation in question, as is shown by the epistemological field of “living” there (Lazarotti, 2006; Stock, 2003). Barrioz (2019) suggested going beyond the idea of living and favoured the expression “settling and living”, which gives a better sense of roots, the spaces experienced and residents’ sense of attachment to a territory.

The challenge of maintaining year-round local living can take different forms, depending on the origin of the resort and whether it grew up around a pre-existing village or town or was created from the ground up. The thoughts of the Manager of the Tourist Office in Saint-Martin-de-Belleville when Les Ménuires was being built are quite enlightening in terms of the questions around local life that can be raised by new tourist resorts:

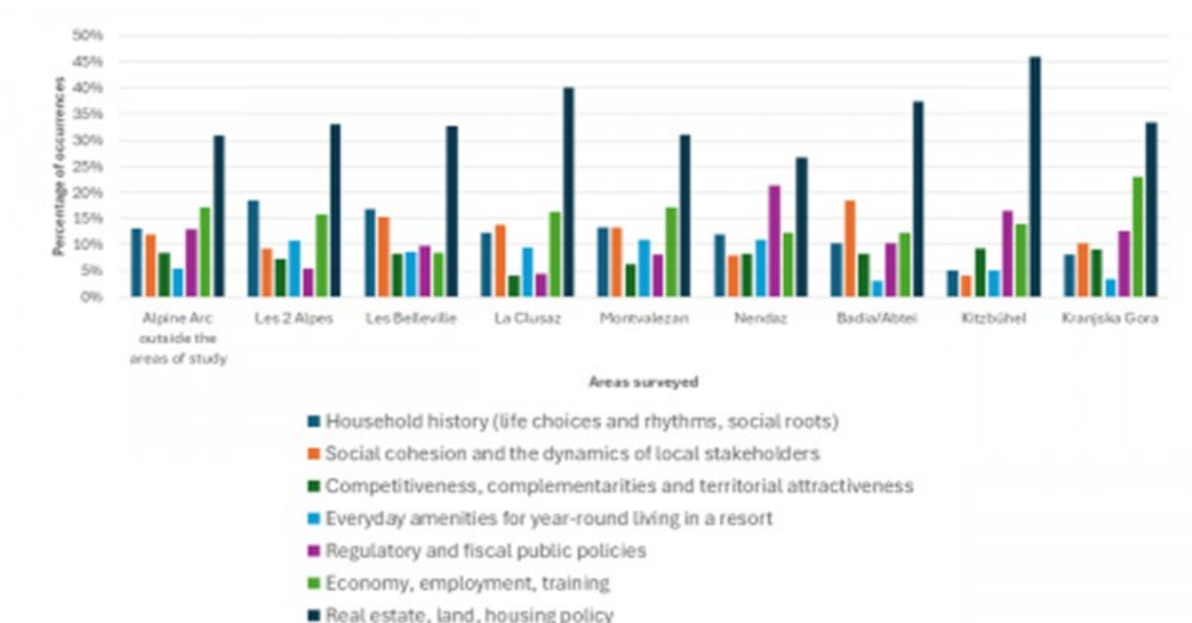
“Without these efforts to revitalise the community [in terms of funding and imagination, in order to allow a human bond to grow between winter visitors and those who serve them], the tonnes of concrete erected run the risk in future years of being nothing more than the mausoleums of an ephemeral civilisation which was not capable of breathing life into its work, and leisure estates which lack that essential factor - *joie de vivre*.” (J. Gueret, 1970, p. 4).

1.1.3. Identifying the main factors that promote year-round living based on eight resort communities

The 119 interviews conducted collected the views of local and supra-municipal stakeholders, as well as those involved at other levels in the Alpine Arc outside the study areas (elected representatives, employees of the municipality, tourist offices, social housing landlords, real estate agencies, government departments, institutional services, voluntary sector organisations, economic stakeholders, second home owners, permanent inhabitants, and seasonal workers). The information gathered allowed us to identify the factors influencing the maintenance of local year-round living. We also conducted interviews with stakeholders in the Alpine Arc who are involved at different levels in order to enrich our empirical data beyond the municipality context. These comments are perceptions and personal opinions or professional stances which have been cross-referenced with analysis of other data or documentary content. The interview content was coded under 56 sub-themes. Using the MAXQDA software tool, our analysis was able to quantify and compare shared and specific areas of interest.

Our analysis factored in potential bias, notably the slant of discussions due to their semi-structured nature, and the influence of external factors such as professional interests or topical issues. For example, certain themes may not be mentioned if they do not occur to interviewees. Figure 3 groups the distribution of the 2,849 occurrences obtained for the 7 main thematic areas.

Figure 3 : Distribution of occurrences for each area of study by broad thematic area and sub-theme (as a percentage of the distribution)



Author's own figure. Sources: based on interviews with stakeholders and the MAXQDA software

The quantity of sub-themes addressed reflects the diversity of the issues and potential factors which could be implicated in the capacity of a municipality to maintain year-round local living. Real estate, land, public housing policy, regulatory and fiscal measures and employment are the themes which occur most frequently across the areas of study. Badia/Abtei stands out because of the predominance of the social cohesion and stakeholder dynamic theme. In the next two subsections, we will develop the sub-themes which occurred most frequently in the interviews.

2. Controlling the availability of affordable permanent housing in a highly competitive real-estate market

2.1. The expansion and uses of second homes

Second home ownership is the sub-theme which occurs most frequently in the thematic analysis of our interviews. The concurrence of rising property prices and the ever-increasing demand for second homes, which was heavily reported during the COVID-19 pandemic, has increased the concerns of local inhabitants and elected representatives about the future of living in a resort. It is also raised in our interviews and in media articles (Caouissin, 2021; Marcellin and Colonna, 2022; IGA-IGEDD-IGF, 2022). Second homes are alleged to be prompting the departure of permanent residents in tourist areas, as well as threatening the tourism performance of resorts due to under-occupancy compared to housing for professional people (Genevray, 2015). In order to enrich the perceptions of stakeholders recorded in our interviews, we supplemented our analysis with a review of scientific literature on the impact of second homes. Second homes have been the focus of scholarship for several decades (Coppock, 1977). There is no global scientific definition of a second home (Hall and Müller, 2004; Drouet and Koderman, 2023). These homes are used for a variety of purposes: leisure, remote working,

family gatherings, for loan to friends and family, and as tourist or seasonal rentals. They can be privately-owned dwellings which are not declared as a main residence and for which the duration and type of occupancy varies, but remains predominantly residential. Controversy surrounds their impact on the environment and landscape heritage (Koderman, 2017), public services (Larsson and Müller, 2019), the identity of territories (Friedli, 2020), and competition with main residences. Historically, second homes have fostered local development in rural and mountain areas by bringing in fiscal revenue and supporting tourism (Perlik, 2011; Gerber and Tanner, 2018). Our scientific literature review highlights the ambivalent effects which make it impossible to reach a definitive positive or negative conclusion about this type of housing. These are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Positive and negative effects of second homes

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Tax revenue	Additional public expenditure (connection to utilities, site preparation and access works)
Contribution to creating local jobs and new services	Land consumption, and landscape and heritage impacts
Economic benefits of renting out property	Reliance for the performance of the resort on private housing stock
Second home owners are ambassadors for the destination	Increase in everyday local costs
Increase in the value of local real estate	More competitive housing market
Economic offsetting of tourist development initiatives	Financial real-estate windfall in the tourism economy
Increases in the population at specific points	Under-occupancy of property, “cold bed” effect
Additional social capital for the local area	Tensions around changes in local identity

Author’s own figure. Sources: Academic literature review.

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2.2. Increase in value and the lack of available property

The rise in real-estate prices in major resorts accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Skoczek et al., 2023). The current residential housing stock is the result of a tourism model based largely on private dwellings owned by individuals in France and Nendaz, such as furnished rental apartments for tourists and second homes. In La Clusaz, for example, hotel and hotel-type beds account for just 15.5 % of available accommodation compared to 60% in Badia/Abtei.² A weekly clientele is an attractive proposition as it creates employment and enhances the profitability of rental property, and pushes up land values across the market as a whole. This profitability has reduced local stakeholder and external investor interest in marketing property for seasonal workers and permanent residents. They now favour tourist rentals. Some operate monopolies and pursue rental income, and others perpetuate the status quo of under-occupancy and retain the freedom to use their property. Since housing stock is predominantly privately owned, the choices made by owners are critical in terms of access to permanent housing. On another level, investment inequalities in terms of capital and eligibility for bank loans accentuate the disparities in access to housing even though land is available for development (Aveline-Dubach, 2005; Friggit, 2015). Availability of land therefore rarely guarantees that new permanent residents will settle.

As a result, incoming residents are sparse and many households cannot access property in the same municipality due to the lack of properties that meet their requirements, especially when family plans require larger surface areas. The gap between prices and local households' buying power is growing, making access to property ownership difficult. The aspiration to become a property owner one day is forcing some households out of the municipality and even out of the valley, despite the initial appeal of life in a mountain resort and family ties.

2.3. Statutory planning decisions and public housing policies

The study of areas in the Alpine Arc with a more restrictive approach to the growth of second home ownership has made it possible to identify a moderating effect through statutory town planning, but without actually demonstrating complete control of private residential use. When these measures alone to restrict second home ownership are implemented, they do not help people trying to buy a principal home, as the price of principal homes remains high or is actually rising. Municipalities supporting access to property are trying to find solutions to avoid land speculation, but their powers are limited due to the regulatory framework and a lack of resources to implement checks. Residents' agility in terms of current and future uses makes the

prospect of long-term checks unlikely without encroaching on peoples' privacy. Furthermore, the economic benefits associated with second homes, such as construction, taxation and employment, continue to unite public and private interests and hinder the implementation of regulatory measures. (Clivaz, 2007; Fablet, 2013; Gerber and Tanner, 2018). From an investor perspective, a number of evasive strategies are being deployed as legislation becomes more stringent, sometimes also benefitting local resellers. Moreover, other stakeholders such as employers of seasonal staff or supportive family members can be involved in permanent housing solutions, either independently of local authorities or in partnership with them.

In La Clusaz, getting on the permanent property ladder is still a major obstacle to households settling there long-term, despite the appeal of the resort in terms of leisure activities, services and employment. Housing policy, which is still in its infancy, is struggling to turn the demographic tide and tourist rentals exacerbate the situation. Public initiatives around housing, of which there are just a few, run the risk of simply playing a palliative care or occasional support role which is unlikely to reverse the demographic downturn. The late adoption of more restrictive urban planning legislation and the implementation of more recent housing policy in certain territories restrict the ability to assess the effects of public action. However, in Les Belleville, Kitzbühel and Badia/Abtei, public policies which have provided significant support for access to home ownership for several decades have yielded more visible results. By contrast, we have not identified a specific policy to support first-time buyers or year round rental tenants in Nendaz even though the municipality has been experiencing population growth for more than a decade. This counter-example of population growth in the absence of a policy to support housing invites us to consider other economic, territorial and social factors.

3. Additional key factors in retaining a year-round residential population

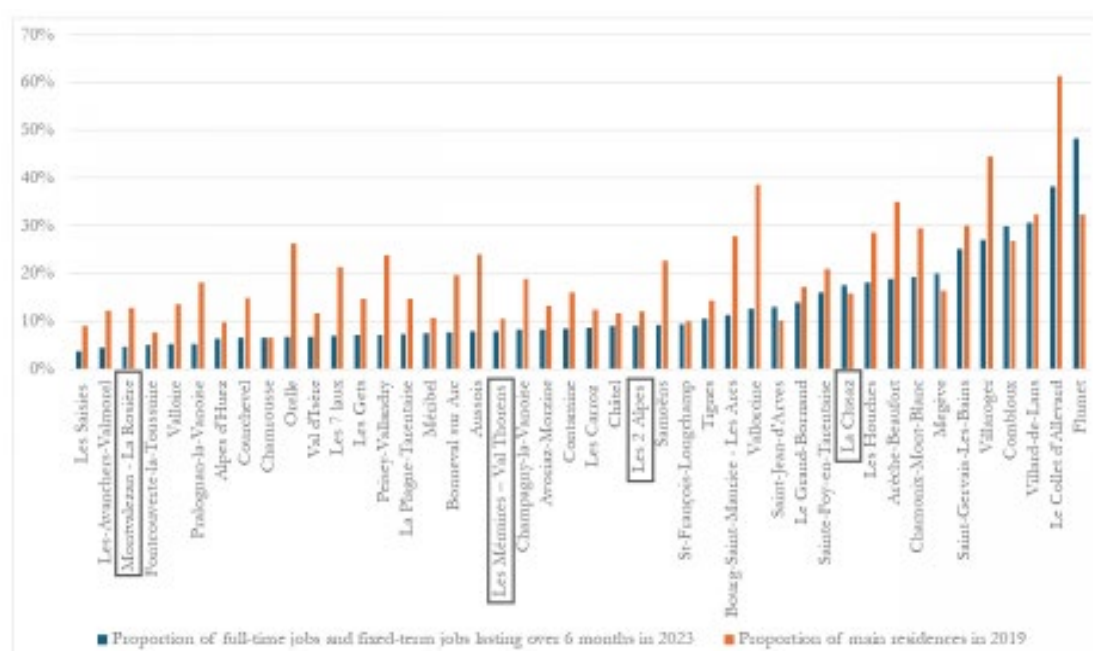
3.1. Economic diversification and annual employment

The role of employment and economic diversification in population dynamics is the fifth most frequently occurring sub-theme in our interviews. Employment in the French Alps is rising at the same rate as in the rest of the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, unlike in the Jura and Massif central where it has stalled since the early 2000s (Anguier *et al.*, 2017, p.23). Outside the COVID-19 period, the communities of municipalities of French resorts studied showed a slight rise in employment between 1998 and 2022.

The employment figures in these spaces need to be qualified as a significant proportion of these jobs are seasonal. INSEE records employment in the municipality of employment or municipality of residence and irrespective of the duration of the employment contract.⁴ Using data on the type of contract which is available from the *Observatoire France Travail de la Région Auvergne Rhône Alpes*, permanent jobs and fixed-term jobs lasting more than six months have been grouped together. The statistical ratio between the proportion of annual recruitment to permanent jobs and the proportion of main residences in a sample⁵ of 44 French resort communities can then be analysed. There is a three-year time lag between data used relating to the proportion of main residences and data for employment as it was not possible to use data with the same reference year. This analysis is therefore based on the postulate of a recruitment dynamic in seasonal employment of equivalent proportion. The histogram in Figure 5 places the municipalities in order of growth of permanent jobs relative to the growth in the number of main residences. The proportions of seasonal and permanent employment appear to vary for different resort communities. The coefficient of 0.75 obtained using Stata software

suggests a statistically significant correlation between the proportion of main residences and the proportion of annual recruitment in permanent jobs and fixed-term jobs lasting more than six months based on a sample of 44 resorts. This observation does not allow us to state a causal link between these two variables, but it invites us to consider the possible influence of an annualised economy on the ability of a resort community to secure a residential population. In order to confirm the link between cause and effect for these two variables, a more comprehensive statistical model must be constructed with other potential explanatory variables relating to the proportion of permanent jobs (churn, level of pay, proportion of employed people, proportion of private and public jobs, proportion of skilled jobs) and the proportion of main residences (availability of property, proportion of working and unemployed people).

Figure 5: Sample of 44 resort communities ordered by annual proportion of permanent jobs and fixed-term jobs lasting over 6 months in the resort community in relation to the proportion of main residences



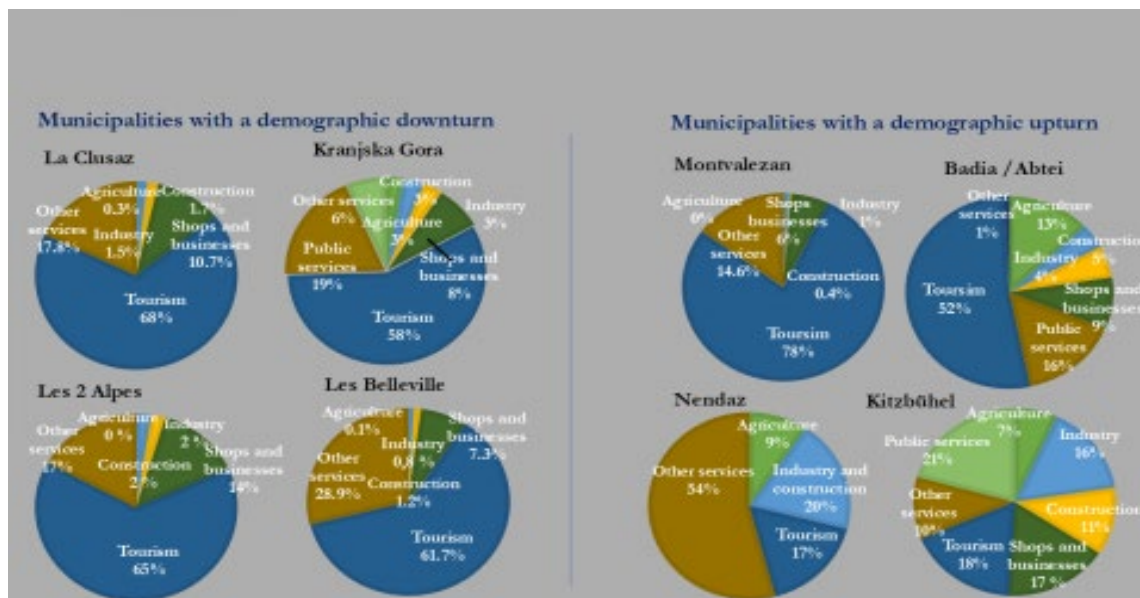
Author's own figure. Sources: Observatoire France Travail Auvergne Rhône Alpes, 2023; INSEE, 2019, Text boxes indicate the resorts in our study.

The proportion of seasonal jobs filled by locals varies from one municipality to another. In Montvalezan, according to INSEE data, there were 498 working people in 2020 for 540 permanent jobs (2020). It is therefore structurally inevitable that labour will be brought in from outside given the insufficient number of working people (irrespective of their actual availability) in the municipality compared to the number of jobs available. The practice of having concurrent jobs is particularly common in mountain resort communities (Anguier *et al.*, 2017). In Savoie, 36% of farmers have more than one job compared to 28% in Haute-Savoie in 2010, with higher levels in the central zones of the massifs (Laslaz *et al.*, 2015).

The quality of jobs (terms of contract, qualifications) is a potential explanation considered by Gauchon (2019) in his analysis of demographic decline in winter sports stations in Savoie, Haute-Savoie and Isère. He notes in particular a drop in permanent jobs between 2009 and 2016 in resorts which is linked to rationalisation and attempts to improve productivity in the tourism economy. For example, replacing a chair lift can create a reduction in labour costs if the new equipment is more efficient and groups together several ski lifts. In her thesis

on the high alpine valleys, Barrioz had observed that the absence of job opportunities was a significant blocker to new households settling in the area (2019). In the plain, Laslaz *et al.*, (2015) demonstrated that job creation has not increased the amount of residential development of new spaces in Savoie and Haute-Savoie since the 2000s due to urban sprawl.⁶

Figure 6: Breakdown of jobs by employment sector



Author's own figure. Sources: ACOSS, 2022; OFS STATENT, 2020; AMS, 2022; ASTAT, 2022; SURS 2023.

As is shown in Figure 6, Nendaz and Kitzbühel have greater economic diversity than the other municipalities. These spaces have greater urban functionality and higher population numbers; the domestic economy is more highly developed and this balances out dependence on tourist activity. In Nendaz, the hydroelectric plant is the second largest employer after the ski lift company. Furthermore, the mineral water and cordial company Aproz Sources Minérales SA is one of the biggest bottling operations in Switzerland – an activity which is not dependent on tourism. In Val Badia, according to a local elected representative, it is difficult to find work in other sectors. At the start of the winter, 350 of the 400 jobs available according to the local job centre in the Val Badia area are associated with tourism. Some sectors (accountancy, shops and services, real estate, etc.) are also highly dependent on tourism activity (Fablet, 2013).

Although jobs in real-estate construction for leisure in resorts is restricted to local people, it is difficult to assess what proportion of the local population is employed in these municipalities or neighbouring areas. A proportion of workers may be from other French regions or from abroad, as is stated by the Building and Public Works Trade Union in Savoie (Syndicat Général des BTP), for example. According to data from France Travail for 2023, employment in the building and public works sector accounts for 7% of jobs in the Tarentaise Valley employment area, 9.4% in the community of municipalities of Vallées de Thônes, and 4% in the Oisans region. Economic reports from the construction industry (CERC Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, 2023, p.5) and three interviews carried out with stakeholders in the sector (an architect, the Building and Public Works trade union, and the Building and Public Works Federation) reveal a recruitment problem, even though activity in Savoie is lower than before the property crash in 2008. The need to find new projects to maintain jobs is mitigated by the potential for renovation work.

Several resorts are attempting to extend tourist activity at the beginning and end of seasons or to broaden it to additional seasons. However, the organisational habits of the socio-professional classes and the time periods for recruitment and marketing of destinations always revolve around tourism development in summer and winter. Our interviews do not currently reflect any genuine transition to tourist activity across all four seasons in these resorts.

3.2. Intermittent services which directly impact the dynamic of year-round living in resorts

We carried out a survey in different tourist resort communities to assess the level of year-round opening of shops and essential services in the winter of 2022-2023. The sample of 165 establishments was selected on the basis of a grid of 16 types of establishment representing the main commercial zones in the resorts studied. These include businesses such as local shops, bakeries, chemists and cafés, as well as healthcare services and the post office.

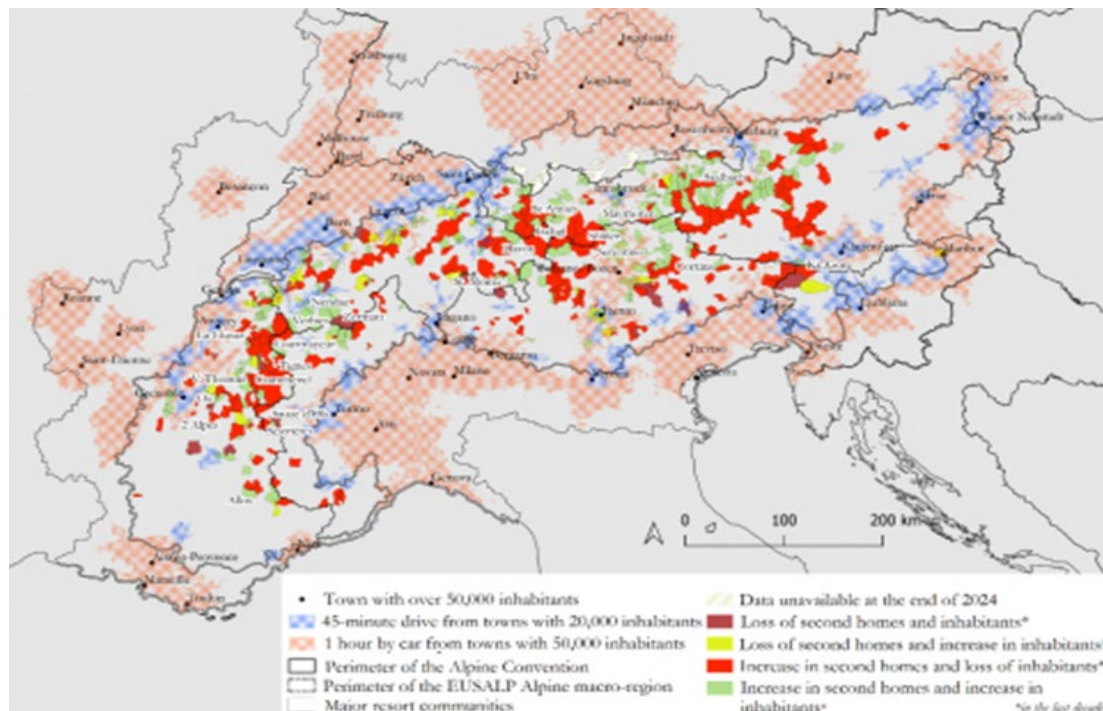
Our analysis reveals some disparities. The proximity of La Clusaz and Nendaz to agglomerations means that they are regularly visited by day trippers and second home owners, which ensures continuity of services and shops and businesses throughout the year. Furthermore, the higher populations of Kranjska Gora and Kitzbühel ensure year-long services, as is also the case in Nendaz, where the municipality supports shops and businesses with a family voucher scheme. Differences are also associated with the history of the emergence of resorts. In second and third-generation resorts, shops and business rely heavily on tourist flows.

3.3. Relationships between a resort and an agglomeration: virtuous complementarity or accentuation of territorial specialisms?

Visits to a daily activity space outside the municipality which vary according to the season were also included in the survey of residents. They may make regular trips to the town further down the valley or to a neighbouring agglomeration, which calls for a re-examination of the notion of year-round local living based on the scale of a resort community. In order to analyse the influence of large employment centres and agglomeration services, buffer zones were defined representing a one-hour drive from towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants and a 45-minute drive from towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants.

These journey times were chosen to reflect the acceptable daily commuting time. Analysis was carried out using the QGIS software package and journey time data from Google Maps (Travel Time Platform). How difficult the journey may be depends on the type of road – mountain roads or dual carriageways/motorways. For example, the journey between Kranjska Gora and Ljubljana, although comparable in terms of duration with Grenoble-Les Deux Alpes, is perceived to be more pleasant due to the motorway. It would appear that the majority of large resort communities are located outside the sphere of influence of an agglomeration.

Figure 7: Zones of influence of agglomerations with resort communities



Author's own figure. Sources: Alpine Convention perimeter, EUSALP municipalities and national border ESPON 2021, INSEE 2011, 2019; Statistik Österreich 2010, 2018, 2020; Office Fédéral Statistique Suisse, 2010, 2017, 2021; Statistični Urad Republike Slovenije 2010, 2022; Agenzia delle Entrate, 2011, 2021; Google Maps journey time data 2022, using the Travel Time Platform and QGIS software package

Ease of access from a resort to one or several agglomerations can be a source of virtuous complementarity or, conversely, accentuate local specialisation in the examples observed. In La Clusaz, we observed that relationships with Annecy, Lyon and Geneva are not detrimental to local shops and businesses, but actually help to support them year-round through visits from day trippers and second home owners. By contrast, relationships with urban areas can create competition in the real-estate market between year-round residents and “multi-local residents”.⁷ A survey carried out in 2022 in the community of municipalities of the Vallées de Thônes shows that levels of commuting between Annecy and La Clusaz (CCVT, 2022) are low. The distance between Annecy and La Clusaz does not appear to be sufficient to create balances between access to well-paid employment in the agglomeration which is commensurate with property prices in La Clusaz. Public transport links, which are less well developed and less well used than in Switzerland and Austria, do not appear to be a decisive factor in La Clusaz in the interactions between the agglomeration and the resort. This context reflects the asymmetric relationships between town and resort identified in the Alpine massifs by Perlik (2011). In the Valais, the resort of Nendaz enjoys positive complementarity with Sion due to their proximity, which is reinforced by regular public transport links. Sion prioritises access to the resort for holidaymakers and also access to Sion as an employment centre for commuters living in Nendaz. The resort retains this hub status all year round, despite the proximity of Sion and we have been able to record daily consumer activity, ongoing health services and employment in sectors other than tourism there. According to a commuting study carried out in Slovenia, only 50 to 100 people travel daily between Kranjska Gora and Kranj, and no flow has been identified to Ljubljana (Bole and Gabrovec, 2012). A total of 3,983 commuters go to Kitzbühel, representing almost half of the total population of Kitzbühel. By contrast, only 1,272 inhabitants of Kitzbühel leave the municipality on a daily basis. This data confirms Kitzbühel's role as a hub and its significance as a year-round employment centre supplementing the tourist sector.

3.4. Households' aspirations and ability to adapt

Households' aspirations to live in the mountains can sometimes be driven by factors other than basic economics (Petite, 2014). Several residents mentioned the plus points of living in a resort community, which reflects the analyses carried out by Debarbieux (2020) on the significance of the social and personal imaginary in the attractiveness of mountains.

According to the data collected, flight of lower-income populations to the lower valleys depends on their aspirations, circumstances and ability to adapt. Research by Jay (2018) in the Belleville valley has already demonstrated the role of seasonal workers' ability to adapt to staying there. Permanent residents have demonstrated their agility when it comes to seizing opportunities which combine work and accommodation in a resort (Drouet and Barrioz, 2024). Adaptations can include reorganising their activity spaces according to the seasons, notably by compensating for the lack of public services by making regular trips to the valley or the nearest agglomeration. The elasticity of these spaces reflects the compromise accepted by some residents between quality of life in the resort and professional opportunities. However, this ability to adapt has its limits, notably for families if basic needs such as secondary schools or childcare solutions are not met. The job satisfaction of both partners is a key issue when making the decision to settle permanently.

Fitting into the community and a sense of local community play a critical role in households' decision to settle in the municipalities studied. How long residents have lived there and their economic role influences local interactions and can lead to a hierarchy of legitimacy when it comes to visiting, residing or living in the resort, with tensions sometimes occurring due to competition for property, and spatial segregation (Piquerey, 2016). Incomers often face issues relating to local identity which require successful social integration.

4. Multifactorial dynamics of year-round local living

Figure 8 presents a summary of all the factors observed which are likely to influence the maintenance of year-round local living in resort communities. The importance of factors varies from one municipality to another depending on specific local circumstances. The main levers for public initiatives identified as contributing to the continuation of the dynamics of year-round local living are shown in the centre of the diagram.

Poirot and Gérardin (2010) demonstrated that the appeal of a territory depends mainly on its ability to attract residents and economic stakeholders. Infrastructure, labour costs, the availability of skilled labour, the market and resources are notable factors in creating appeal. Whether households settle also depends on the fit between individual aspirations, income and the opportunities offered by the local area. They suggest several indicators such as the proportion of full-time qualified jobs, the quality of housing available, services, security, leisure and living environment.

Figure 8: Summary of factors influencing the dynamics of year-round local living in resort communities studied



Author's own figure. Sources: synthesis of analyses

According to Sen (2000), this attractiveness is linked to the ability of the local area to respond to individuals' basic needs (food, accommodation, work, access to education, etc.) and the degree of freedom afforded by services and mobility, which he defines as "the ability to be and act". Barrioz (2019) explores similar factors by analysing the gradients of attractiveness of areas in the upper valley, incorporating the economy, mobility, social life and local specificities.

Research carried out by Le Fur and Roux (2014) suggests that the main reasons why households settle in the Isère massifs (Vercors, Belledonne, Chartreuse, Trièves, Oisans, Taillefer) are retirement or career plans influenced by local factors such as the ability to buy property and leisure activities. Interviews show that these decisions are often motivated by dissatisfaction with urban life and the search for a better living environment while still maintaining links with the city.

Attractiveness is also associated with quality of life, defined by the Alpine Convention as the ability of a territory to support living beings ability to thrive through economic, social and ecological factors. A study funded by the Convention shows that the Austrian and Swiss massifs have a higher quality of life, although some indicators favour better-equipped areas without factoring in demographic density (Sessa et al., 2024, p. 12).

In the context of the climate change crisis, Bourdeau (2021) suggests that local areas should adopt a new approach and move from attractiveness to "liveability". This notion of "liveability" spans multiple disciplines in an attempt to understand the constraints associated with a given space and the ability to live there (Blanc *et al.*, 2022). This involves extending our thinking beyond the material conditions of year-round local living and encompassing

geophysical, geomorphological and biological aspects. Although the environment was mentioned in a utilitarian way by respondents (landscapes, visual amenities, leisure) it was not approached from the perspective of ecosystems or natural risks, as was the case, by contrast, in research by Barrioz (2019) which focused on local areas with lower tourist numbers. This absence of references to environmental issues in interviews reflects the fact that the need for economic development takes priority over environmental concerns (Corne and Goncalves, 2019).

4. Conclusions: towards qualitative year-round multi-season local living

The rise in winter sports resorts in the 1950s was a significant factor in supporting and repopulating the upper valleys. However, since the 2000s the greater demographic contrasts between resort communities are once again raising questions about the role played by tourism in their attractiveness for permanent residents. Complex residential practices mean that population censuses struggle to accurately capture the reality of population and the presence of residents in these local areas. Given the difficulty of quantifying the population in tourist destinations (Bausch, 2017; Terrier, 2009), we suggested expanding thinking to encompass the notion of year-round local living in order to approach the impact of seasonal variations on local dynamics in a more empirical manner. Several articles have approached this issue previously (Chardon, 1986; Knafo, 1991; Rieucou, 2000; Suchet, 2013) using different terminologies which we group together as a single notion.

Interviews conducted with a variety of stakeholders showed that a number of factors interact with the dynamics of year-round local living. The many causes of local dynamics have already been highlighted in previous studies focusing on the attractiveness of territories (Sen, 2000; Barrioz, 2019, 2020), their quality of life (Lippe and Fournier, 2024; Sessa et al., 2024) and also their “liveability” (Bourdeau, 2021). Public action on housing in all its aspects (main residences, tourist beds, seasonal accommodation, second homes) appears to hold the key to supporting the dynamics of year-round local living. It can mitigate the impact of rising real-estate prices, resolve issues of land availability for permanent dwelling, help to boost the creation of affordable housing in line with households’ income, and regulate under-occupancy of second homes. Furthermore, other significant factors have been identified such as the role of permanent jobs, continued operation of shops, businesses and services, and proximity to an agglomeration.

The legacy of public policies implemented when winter sports tourism was developing, notably the very extensive and growing stock of tourist beds, contributes to high tourism seasonality which has an impact on the dynamics of year-round local living.

Tourist activity drives seasonal population variations in resorts. Seasonality causes a lack of continuity in relationships between residents, seasonal workers, second home owners and tourists in the local area. In the light of local marketing practices, which at first glance appear contradictory by seeking customers for one-week stays and year-round residents, public strategy decisions play a central role in their ability either to reconcile tourism intensity and a year-round activity space or conversely to accentuate the imbalances. Seasonal tourism intensity creates temporary jobs and changes the scale of annual opening of services and shops. Tourism specialisation tends to narrow the spectrum of economic areas. This intensity is a strong marker, damaging year-round local living to varying degrees depending on economic, geographic and social complementarities developed in or near resort communities. Nendaz and La Clusaz benefit from the complementarity of an employment centre in an agglomeration in the lower valley which can fill the economic shortfall outside the tourist seasons. In the

communes of Montvalezan, Les Deux Alpes and Les Belleville, we observed a less diversified employment market. However the experiences of households are still equally decisive, irrespective of the advantages of a local area; in areas where the constraints are greatest, only people who are better equipped to adapt will succeed in staying.

Seasonal variations alternating between a local dynamic and quiet spells can also contribute to local residential attractiveness of communities for incomers. Some people can thrive on holding a series of jobs over the course of a year. However the rationale of temporary recruitment can be off-putting. A multi-seasonal economy must be structured so that recruitment campaigns are responsive and employment contracts are designed to provide year-round security and offer long-term prospects for inhabitants. Residents holding more than one job and multi-seasonality in territories could be embraced as a quality of life feature which differentiates resort communities and makes them stand out from other territories.

As has been observed in other works of scholarship, seasonality is a feature of resorts rather than an issue per se. (Hudry, 2019, p. 121). Alpine agriculture has always been a model for seasonality. For this reason, we could reconsider the issue of year-round local living in territories whose attractiveness is also linked to the effect of seasonality. This idea involves a shift from the aim of maintaining year-round local living to the valorisation of qualitative multi-seasonal life in a resort. This development of the paradigm is not equivalent to simply accepting the situation of municipalities whose inhabitants are leaving or which have low occupancy rates outside the tourist seasons.

We have observed the dead end which some territories have hit in their attempts to annualise their economies by looking beyond the benefits of tourism. The prospects for developing areas for artisan activity are severely restricted by land constraints. A few avenues for economic diversification have been trialled with jobs in the digital, care, timber and education sectors.

Future avenues for research will include looking at the circular tourism model consisting of targeting the tourist offer more specifically at multi-local residents and residents rather than focusing exclusively on a clientele coming from far away for a week. This type of tourism could help territories to begin to reduce the undesirable effects of excessively high tourism seasonality and intensity and a shift up-market. This model represents an opportunity to strengthen the bonds with the agricultural, craft, cultural and health and well-being sectors and to commit to reconciling year-round living and tourism activity.

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