IMMIGRATION IN MOUNTAIN AND REMOTE REGIONS OF EUROPE. A DRIVER FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Andrea Membretti

University of Pavia - Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture

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For a long time, socioeconomic and demographic studies of mountain regions in Europe emphasized out-migration from the highlands to large lowland cities and degradation of peripheral mountain areas, within processes of decline and progressive shrinkage of these territories "left behind". Since the 2000s, however, there has been an increasing emphasis on the opposite trend of neo population: while these studies focused originally on immigration of wealthy and often retired people (the so-called amenity migrants), in the last 10-15 years voluntary internal migration of young and highly educated "new highlanders" has been investigated, together with an increasing attention to international immigration of "highlanders by necessity" (foreign labor migrants) and even "highlanders by force (asylum seekers and refugees), in particular in the Alpine macro-region.

Welcoming and including immigrants (both internal and international ones) inside revitalized local societies and economies can represent an opportunity to empower marginalized areas, within a framework of sustainable development, social innovation and territorial equity, "leaving no one behind".

Moreover, in the face of the radical changes imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, what European mountain and remote regions have to offer in terms of differing modes of settlement, production and consumption is likely to be increasingly sought after, as their local systems are characterized by less anthropic pressure and more circular economies and natural resources. While attractiveness of these territories may increase in a close future, governing immigration flows and the settlement of newcomers within local and regional policies of sustainable development seems a relevant challenge not only for the Alpine macro-region but for the entire European Union.