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Luigi Lorenzetti and Daniela Delmenico



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The tourism transition of a “village resort”. Multipositionality and land management in Champéry (Valais), 1870-1970

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Introduction

- 1 During the two decades straddling the 20th and 21st centuries, the Alpine tourist economy experienced a paradox. While many localities suffered a decline in stays and income, prices in the local land and real estate markets steadily increased¹, reflecting a constant or even rising demand. This paradox was largely due to the transition in Alpine tourism, less and less linked to the provision of hotels and more and more dependent on second homes.
- 2 This transition originated in the rise in winter sports, which in the inter-war period triggered the spread of new models of enjoying the mountains, as well as the reinterpretation of vacations and their accommodation (Brusson, 1996; Vernes, 2006; Granet-Abisset, 2011; De Rossi, 2016: 87-158). It was consolidated during the boom in winter tourism in the 1960-80 period and has continued to the present day, even though the intensity and the spread differ depending on the tourist locality, with the

most prestigious sites registering prices now disconnected from the demand and the true land and real estate values (Andereggen, 1993).

- 3 In Switzerland, the spread of second homes resulted in federal regulation which, since the 1960s, has tried to reduce real estate speculation and curb the uncontrolled urbanization of tourist localities: first, by limiting the access to ownership by individuals not resident in Switzerland (Delley *et al.*, 1982; Nahrath, 2003)², or by trying to promote territorial zoning (Clivaz, Nahrath, 2010); then, more recently, by fixing a maximum threshold of 20% of second homes of the housing stock of each municipality and by correcting the planning laws through strengthening the protection of agricultural land and the more rigorous control of urban sprawl (Clivaz, 2013).
- 4 In the context of the long history of Swiss Alpine winter tourism and its rise from the mid-19th century, the federal State has long remained detached from any interference in territorial management and the regulation of the land and real estate markets of tourist regions. The boom in Alpine tourism both during the *Belle Epoque* and after the Second World War took place within a framework in which the jurisdiction of territorial management remained the responsibility of local and cantonal authorities. However, this jurisdiction was very discreet; if the initiatives of the Embellishment Societies, which spread at the end of the 19th century on the wave of the aesthetic ideals of the *Heimatschutz* (Le Dinh, 1992), are excluded, few municipalities adopted planning measures before the 1960s-70s (Nahrath, 2000). In the case of Valais, the first construction law, adopted in 1924³, was confined to authorizing municipalities to issue regulations on building policy (art. 4) in order to ensure "a rational and harmonious development of localities". Although its scope was rather limited, this law provided the opportunity for some municipalities prematurely affected by tourism development to put in place, from the 1930s-40s, the first instruments designed to ensure the integration of second homes in the local residential fabric (Bétrisey, 1976; Deslarzes, 1998).
- 5 Within this context, and by focusing on Champéry, a pioneering center of Valais Alpine tourism, the following analysis tries to verify whether, and how, the transition of a tourism model based on the provision of hotels to a model centered on stays in second homes has been influenced by the local social and political system and by the functioning of the land and real estate market. These two elements structured a community which, when tourist activity began, retained many characteristics of *closed corporate communities* including a high degree of societal endogamy and the presence of mechanisms (more or less restrictive and formalized) controlling access to the land and its types of management (Viazzo, 1992).
- 6 This study follows on from the analyses of P. Sibilla and P. P. Viazzo (2009) who, rather than considering the effects of tourism on the social structures of Alpine communities, investigated its influence on tourism models. Focusing on four localities in the western Alps (Gressonay, La Thuile, Zermatt and Alagna), these two Italian anthropologists highlighted the role and impact of tourism entrepreneurs and local community organizations in the definition of their various tourism pathways. In the case of Zermatt, for example, the native inhabitants have long been able to manage tourism development according to their wishes by ensuring that the *Bürgergemeinde* (namely the civic community of families originating from the locality) maintains control over large areas of land resources. In Alagna, in contrast, the sale of plots by residents,

subsequently occupied by second homes, has prevented the community from guiding the local tourism development, whose momentum has gradually waned.

- 7 These results suggest that the tourism transition that affected Champéry between the 1930s and the end of the 1960s (before the municipal development plan was established) may be seen as the result of changing relationships between the stakeholders of tourism and the management of land and real estate resources.
- 8 In this respect, in later years, various studies have focused on the recent dynamics of the land and real estate market in several tourist resorts in the western Alps (Marcelpoil, not dated; Duboeuf, 2006; Clivaz, 2007; Duvillard, 2010; André-Poyaud, Duvillard, Lorioux, 2010). However, there are fewer studies taking into account the periods before the implementation of market regulation and planning norms, often adopted following the proliferation of second homes. In general, they highlight the turning point of the 1950-70 period during which there was a significant transfer of land ownership to the benefit of non-residents (Balseinte, 1959; David, 1966; Cognat, 1973; Knafou, 1987). In the case of Valais, this movement has been related to the abandoning of agricultural activity and the discovery by the “mountain people” of the added-value of the land, which led to the proliferation of second homes (Andereggen, 1993; Hoffmann, 1993; Soncini, 2004; Guérin, 2005; Bridel, 2006; Roy, Guex, Sauthier, 2016). These are relevant explanations but it is important to remember that these two phenomena are not necessarily concomitant and challenge the role of the agricultural sector which, depending on the case, can be seen as being responsible for or the “victim” of the tourism transition after the Second World War.

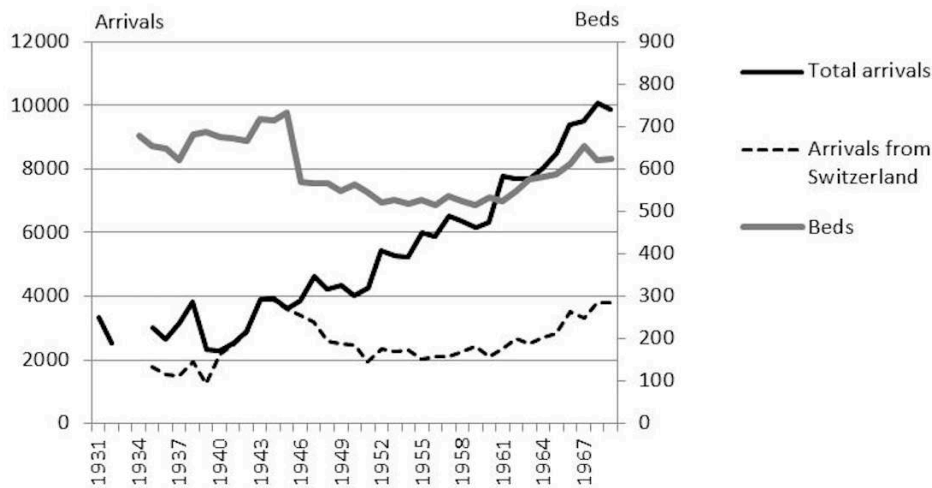
Champéry: a “village resort” in transition

- 9 Situated at the end of Val d’Illiez (Valais), Champéry is an Alpine community that for centuries based its economy on agriculture, livestock farming and emigration (Grob, 1996: 18-19).
- 10 Its tourism industry began in 1857 when the “*Grand Hôtel de la Dent du Midi*” opened for business. From this moment and up to the First World War, the modernization and demographic growth of the village (which rose from 517 inhabitants in 1870 to 821 in 1910) kept pace with the development of tourism. Nevertheless, Champéry remains attached to the model of the “village resort” based on the convergence between tourist attraction and local initiative (Préau, 2002: 186). After the construction, in 1865, of the new road linking the village to the bottom of the valley, it was thanks to the initiative of local tourism promoters that Champéry was equipped with telegraph (1870) and telephone (1892) lines (Grob, 1996; Olsommer, 1957), that the village was connected to the electricity grid (1900), that the Monthey-Champéry-Morgins railway line was built (1908) and that the local authorities granted the right to cars to drive on the municipality’s roads (1910). Like other “village resorts” in Valais (Perriad-Volorio, 1996; Roy, Guex, Sauthier, 2012; Sauthier, Guex, Roy, 2012; Sauthier, 2016) and the western Alps (Cole, 2002; Anderson, 2016) where local initiative was able to guide the tourism model, even in Champéry the various tourism initiatives were a home-grown affair coming from the main families of the locality and some of their representatives. Thus, in 1911, Champéry already had fourteen hotels. Of the eleven whose owners are known, only one was a “foreign” entrepreneur⁴. The others were the result of projects of families rooted in the local economic life – notably the Exhenrys, the Berras and the

Défagos (Olsommer, 1957) – who, at the same time, played a leading role in the municipal (and sometimes cantonal) political scene (Grob, 1996; Delmenico 2016). This multipositionality – namely, the superposition of different roles (political and economic) in the hands of the same stake-holder (or a small number of stake-holders) – is a striking feature of “village resorts”, which has characterized the tourism boom of various localities in Valais (Sauthier, 2016). This includes Champéry, where the birth of tourism relied on the close links between its local promoters and the municipal Council. Thus, between 1870 and 1970, twelve people succeeded one another to the presidency of the municipality, eight of whom were directly linked to the tourism industry: seven were hotel owners and one was a board member of the cable car company (Delmenico, 2016: 255-256). The hotel owners were continuously at the head of the municipality from 1869 to 1904, then from 1909 to 1912. After that, the multipositionality decreased, with new stake-holders, not directly linked to the tourism economy, appearing on the local political scene.

- 11 This first tourism surge in Champéry was momentarily halted by the war and the ensuing crisis. Nevertheless, during the 1930s, the sector was already becoming reoriented toward winter sports. It was in this phase that the first signs of the tourism transition were recorded with the construction of second homes – there were already more than fifty in the mid-1920s (Tamini, Délèze, 1924). In 1939, thanks also to the financial participation of the municipality, the Champéry-Planachaux cable car was constructed, which laid the foundations for the relaunch of tourism in the locality after the Second World War (Delmenico, 2016). The transition was consolidated in the 1950s, when several hotels ceased operating. During this decade, when the municipality experienced a temporary fall in population (from 861 to 810 inhabitants between 1950 and 1960), Champéry saw a decrease in its tourism level⁵, which went from 0.99 in 1930 to 0.83 in 1941 and later fell to around 0.66 between 1950 and 1970. In parallel – although it is not possible to quantify the scope – from 1950 to 1960, the locality saw the construction of many second homes, which accompanied the boom in winter tourism.
- 12 The statistics do not recount the evolution of tourism during the century between 1870 and 1970. Some information in the local press mentions that around 2,000 tourists stayed in 1910, a figure that continued, albeit with marked variations, up to the Second World War after which the number of stays steadily increased (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Evolution of tourism in Champéry, 1931-1969



Source: Annuaire Statistique de la Suisse, various years.

- 13 The trends that emerged from the 1930s onward show quite clearly the gap between the stagnation in the number of beds (notwithstanding the slight recovery in the 1960s) and the fairly steady rise in holidaymakers reflecting the lengthening of the tourist period that, after the Second World War, included the winter season. At the same time, the stays record revealing changes in the origin of tourists. There is no precise information about their provenance at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, but various clues suggest the presence of many English people⁶. In January 1912, for example, 463 of the 572 tourists staying in the locality were English⁷ and this proportion was confirmed at the beginning of the 1920s when there were around 1,700 tourists per year. After the interval of the Second World War when almost all the guests in Champéry were of Swiss origin, their proportion fell sharply in the following years so that in 1961 only 30% of arrivals were Swiss. Overall, in 1950-60 the rise in the arrivals at the local hotels was fairly moderate⁸ and went hand in hand with a certain stability in the number of beds. This reflects the transformation of holidays in the Alps, which was characterized by shorter stays in the hotel sector⁹.

The land and real estate market: from concentration to opening up

- 14 Supported by the decline in the agricultural economy and by fewer cases of multipositionality, the tourism transition of Champéry also crossed and overlapped with the change in the access to land and real estate resources. In this sense, the market exchanges are an essential indicator to understand the role of the main Champéry families in the transformation of the village's tourism industry.
- 15 Our analysis is based on the reconstitution of land and real estate exchanges concerning the territory of Champéry between 1874 and 1969¹⁰. During this period in the municipality, a total of 1,023 transactions were recorded, 216 (21.1%) of which were concluded between 1874 and 1914, 218 (21.3%) between 1915 and 1944, and 589 (57.6%) between 1945 and 1969. The market thus showed a clear acceleration in exchanges

from the 1950s, although it had already started in the 1930s, simultaneously with the first winter tourism boom and the first infrastructure development projects for winter sports.

- 16 The analysis of stake-holders active in the market shows that the exchanges remained for a long time concentrated in the hands of a group of ten family names originating from the village (P_1)¹¹ including all the main stake-holders of local tourism, some of whom, as previously mentioned, were also prominent in the local political life. This group was responsible for 60.3% of sales and 41.0% of purchases concluded between 1874 and 1969. Nevertheless, these proportions demonstrate significant variations over time (Table 1).

Table 1. Proportion of land and real estate transactions related to the ten most active family names (P_1) in the market of Champéry (in %)

	1874-1914	1915-1945	1946-1969
Purchases	67.6	52.8	26.1
Sales	66.7	72.5	53.0

Source: Archives d'Etat du Valais, notarial records.

- 17 Thus, before the First World War, two thirds of transactions were made by members of group P_1 , but this proportion dropped dramatically after 1945 so that from 1946, only 53.0% of sales and 26.1% of purchases concerned them directly. Like in other tourist resorts in the western Alps, after the Second World War there was a transfer of land and real estate ownership from local families to new owners, most of whom were not living in the village at the time of the purchase.
- 18 Until then, the community had kept strict control over the access to local land and real estate resources; this was also due to the agricultural activity and livestock farming, which, in the inter-war period, still employed almost two thirds of the active population and represented nearly 60% of companies listed in the municipality¹². On the other hand, the specific nature of the local land structure, characterized by an average farm size markedly larger than the cantonal average and by less land division (Table 2), probably curbed the alienation of agricultural land and its acquisition by individuals wanting to build their holiday home.

Table 2. Structure of the land ownership in Champéry and Valais, 1939 and 1965

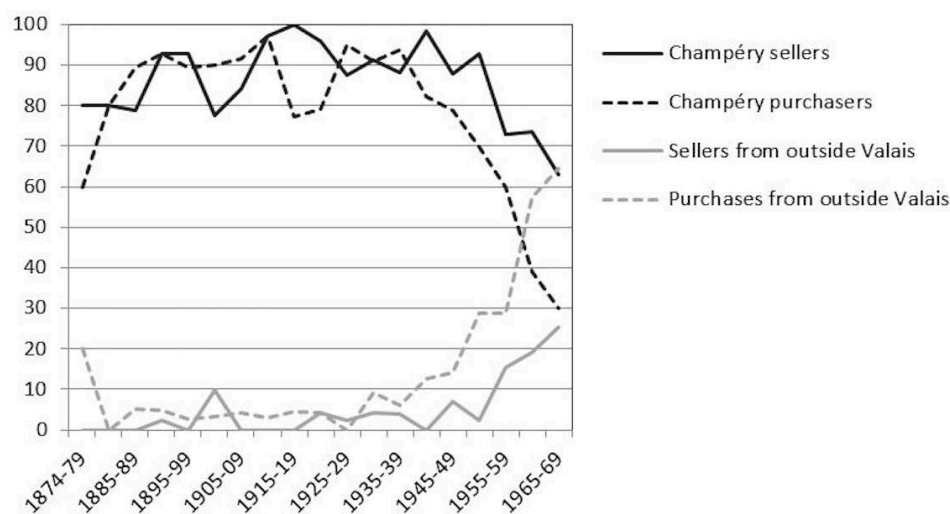
	1939		1965	
	Valais	Champéry	Valais	Champéry
0-1 ha	26.0%	12.8%	39.7%	7.0%
1-5 ha	61.2%	45.4%	51.1%	50.0%
5-10 ha	10.8%	27.7%	7.4%	32.6%

> 10 ha	2.1%	14.2%	1.8%	10.5%
Average surface area of farms (100 square meters)	253	369	215	417
Plots/farm	23	2	14	2

Source: Office fédéral de Statistique, Utilisation du sol en 1939 et culture des champs 1940-43 en Suisse, Berne, 1943.

- 19 However, the decline in agriculture from the 1950s changed the dynamics of the land and real estate market. The drop in the number of workers in the primary sector – from 156 in 1950 to 76 in 1970 (-51.3%) – and the number of farms – from about 120 at the end of the Second World War to 86 in 1965 (-28.3%) – went hand in hand with the growth in purchases by non-local stake-holders, whose relative proportion increased from 13.3% in the decade 1940-49 to 28.8% in 1950-59 and 60.6% in 1960-69 (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Residence of sellers and purchasers of real estate in Champéry, 1874-79 / 1965-69 (in %)



Source: See Table 1.

- 20 This opening up of the market was accompanied by a change in the structure of the exchanges. In fact, after the 1920-1949 period during which a high proportion of exchanges concerned residential buildings (houses and apartments with or without land ownership), from the 1950s onward there was a notable increase in exchanges concerning only land or including rural buildings (chalets, granaries, stables, etc.) (Table 3).

Table 3. Composition of land and real estate exchanges carried out in Champéry, 1874-1969 (in %)

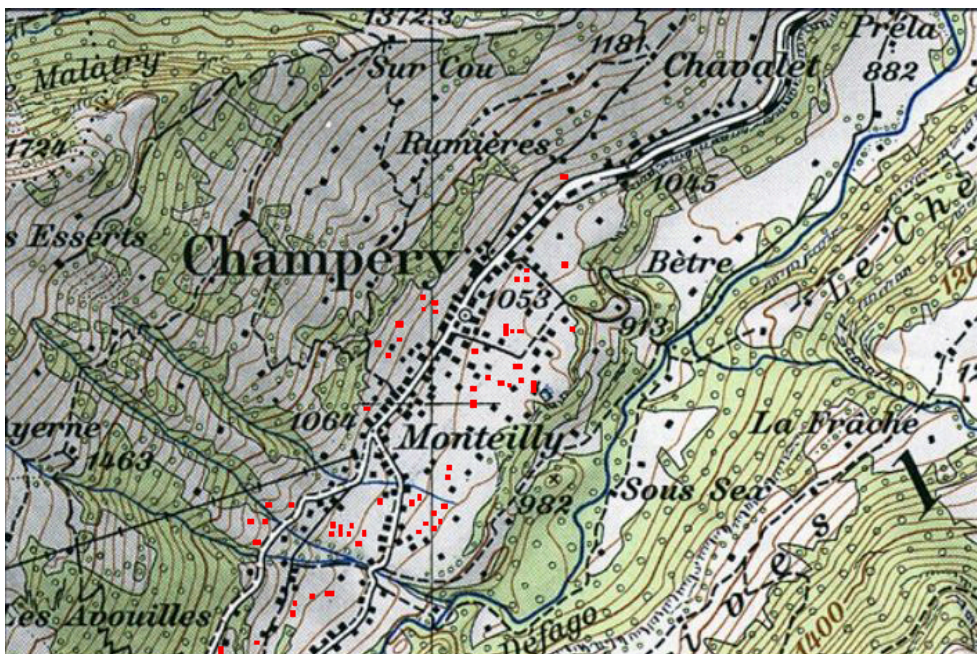
	Land with/without farm buildings	Residential real estate with/without land	Other and undetermined
< 1910	45.6	44.4	10.0

1910-19	62.1	27.6	10.3
1920-29	34.4	57.4	8.2
1930-39	36.2	59.4	4.4
1940-49	18.8	72.3	8.9
1950-59	39.5	55.1	5.4
1960-69	64.2	33.0	2.8

Source: See Table 1.

- 21 This suggests that the construction of second homes largely occupied agricultural plots; a trend indicated by the extension of housing toward the land situated south-east of the old village-street (Fig. 3) and which probably led to the implementation, in 1969, of the municipal development plan that the local authorities thought necessary faced with "the accelerated and sudden development of tourist real estate"¹³.

Fig. 3. Evolution of housing in Champéry between 1952 and 1970 (in red, the buildings constructed between 1952 and 1970)



Source: Office fédéral de topographie (<https://map.geo.admin.ch>). Personal production.

- 22 Moreover, for the latter, the impression is that the tourists have now become "a latent danger for others [the inhabitants of Champéry], and this is why there is an urgent need to take protectionist measures to save 'our neighborhood'"¹⁴.
- 23 The reaction of the Champéry authorities was also a response to the enforcement of the federal norm in 1965, included in the Swiss Civil Code, related to the ownership by floor¹⁵. This norm opened up new perspectives to real estate promoters by favoring the construction of large buildings (Bridel, 2006: 92) in which the apartments could be sold

freehold. In Champéry, this was reflected in the construction of an apartment complex poorly integrated into the local architectural context and which, for this reason, provoked many criticisms as well as the collective awareness of the territorial impact of this type of tourism evolution.

- 24 Far from being an initiative designed to block the development of tourism through restrictive territorial planning, the 1969 plan was rather the reaction to transformations that appeared from the beginning of the 1960s. This was when the market recorded a marked rise in land transactions – from 42 in 1955-59 to 115 in 1960-64 (+173.8%) – as well as in their average unit value, which climbed from 6,150 to 16,737 francs (+172.1%) in the same period. Moreover, it was in this phase that various real estate agencies (six with their head office in Champéry) appeared on the market. A few years later, between 1964 and 1969, they concluded twelve purchase contracts for a total value of more than 1.2 million francs.
- 25 While the transformation of tourism and the decline of the agricultural sector contributed to the “inflation” of the local land and real estate market, it is also important to note the concomitant interruption in the situations of multipositionality, characterized by the overlap between the local stake-holders of tourism (who were also among the main land owners of the village) and the local political sphere. The affinity between these two milieus, which was at the origin of the tourist boom in Champéry, was interrupted after the Second World War (Delmenico, 2016), heralding the end of a tourism model in step with the management of land and real estate, which had now acquired an exchange value higher than their usage value.
- 26 It remains to be determined whether the choices of stake-holders regarding the land and real estate market continued to include the types of regulation specific to *closed corporate communities*, and designed to protect the territory and the landscape characteristics of the “village resort”, often highlighted by the promoters of local tourism and by the authorities. In general, the individuals belonging to the ten most active families in the market (P_1) and the owners belonging to other families (P_2) participated in the same proportions in the increase in land and real estate sales to non-resident purchasers (Table 4). At first sight, the choices of the two groups of sellers did not seem to be dictated by the residence of the purchasers. Differences emerged when the analysis was refined according to the nature of the sales. Throughout the period observed, the proportion of land sold group P_1 was higher than that of the other sellers (P_2). However, during the tourist boom of the 1950s-60s, their land sales were preferentially oriented toward those living in Champéry to the detriment of purchasers living outside Valais (Swiss and foreigners).

Table 4. Distribution of land and real estate sales according to the group of sellers and the residence of the purchasers, 1950-59 – 1960-69

	1950-59			1960-69		
	P_1	P_2	Total	P_1	P_2	Total
Champéry	64.9	64.8	64.8	38.0	32.2	35.1
Valais	8.5	4.2	6.7	4.7	4.5	4.6

Switzerland, Abroad	26.6	31.0	28.5	57.3	63.3	60.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: See Table 1.

- 27 It was a different story for the other sellers (P_2) who preferred to orient their land sales toward outsiders, while the residents of Champéry and Valais were under-represented in their sales options. In other words, the sales choices of the ten most active names in the land market (P_1) tended to limit the transfer of land (and real estate) ownership into the hands of non-resident purchasers without, however, preventing the transition of the village toward residential tourism. The impression of land management that tried to curb the most negative effects of speculation is corroborated by the value of the transactions. Unlike in group P_2 , the average value of land sales carried out by group P_1 between 1950 and 1969 did not differ significantly between the purchasers living in the village (17'412 francs) and those living elsewhere (16'891 francs). On the other hand, the proportion of the value of sales by group P_1 to non-residents reached only 52.5% (i.e. 1.57 of 2.97 million francs), while it climbed to 73.5% (2.19 of 2.98 million francs) for the sales by group P_2 to non-residents.

Conclusion

- 28 In 1971, G. Veyret expressed her reservations about the idea of "providence-tourism" due to the role of land and real estate promoters who, especially in France and Italy, tended to "deliver their mountains to businessmen not from the mountains who, due to the declaration of public utility and expropriations, acquire the control of lands and development" (Veyret, 1971:15). This phenomenon also partly affected the Swiss and Valais Alps in the 1950s-60s, when many localities were faced with the growing commodification of land and the transition toward a tourism model based on second homes. This turning point was directly linked to the boom in winter sports and the construction of infrastructures designed to increase their attractiveness.
- 29 This was also true in Champéry where, between 1950 and 1970, there was a significant rise in the number of second homes. Although the external real estate promoters did not have the same scope and territorial impact as seen in some better known tourist localities in the western Alps, this evolution nevertheless provoked fears of deterioration of the landscape and led to the municipal development plan of 1969. In this perspective, the awareness of the territorial effects of the transformation of the tourism model reflects the upholding of the image of the "village resort", which the community and its authorities have continued to cultivate and promote, in contrast to the main tourist centers in Valais such as Verbier, Montana and Nendaz. This reaction is probably related to the community's support for local tourism development strategies (Kurt, 2005). However, above all, it is based on land and real estate management that, before the municipal development plan was produced and at the same time as the federal norms concerning the restrictions of real estate sales to foreigners were implemented, expressed types of regulation arising from resource management practices specific to *closed corporate communities*. Far from blocking the tourism transition, they nevertheless show a form of social resilience, which tried to

compensate for the dilution of regulations traditionally assured by multipositionality and its coordinating role in the political and economic sphere within local governance.

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NOTES

1. The trend ended following the financial crisis of 2008 and, in Switzerland, due to the new law of 2012 on second homes.
2. The first federal decree limiting access to real estate ownership by individuals living abroad dates from 1961 (Von Moos law). It was successively modified by the laws of 1972 (Furgler law), 1985 (Friedrich law) and 1994 (Koller law). Following the bilateral agreements of 2002, all EU and EFTA citizens may acquire real estate located in Switzerland provided that they are resident in the country.
3. "Law on construction policy. Message concerning the law on construction policy", in *Bulletin des Séances du Grand Conseil*, November 1923, p. 62-69 (63).
4. This was P. J. Vultier, a hotelier active in the tourism sector in Lausanne and Geneva and owner, in 1912, of the *Parc de Champéry* hotel (Delenico, 2016).
5. This is the ratio between hotel beds and residents.
6. In 1910, an "English church" was built in the village, probably for visitors of Anglican faith.
7. *Confédéré du Valais*, 6 January 1912.
8. Between 1950 and 1969, the number of tourist arrivals recorded by the hotel sector grew 146.5% while the number of nights spent rose by 116.4%. In Montana Vermala, the levels were 312.7% and 226.8%, respectively, while in Zermatt they were 199.4% and 275.6%.
9. Before the Second World War (1935-39), the average number of nights was 9.3 while from 1965 to 1969, the average was 6.4 nights.
10. These exchanges were reconstituted on the basis of the records of 51 notaries (USA equivalent = attorneys) active in the district of Monthey (Valais) between 1860 and 1970 (Delmenico, 2016).
11. These 10 family names appeared more than 50 times in the real estate transactions concerning Champéry between 1874 and 1969: i.e. Avanthay, Berra, Chapelay, Clément, Défago, Exhenry, Grenon, Marclay, Mariétan, and Perrin.

12. In 1939, there were 231 companies in Champéry, 141 (61.0%) of which were in the agricultural sector and 90 (39%) in the industrial and commercial sector. *Office fédéral de Statistique, Recensement fédéral des entreprises 24 August 1939*, Berne, 1941.

13. *Archives Communales de Champéry, Procès-Verbaux du Conseil Municipal*, 7 July 1969.

14. *Ibidem*.

15. *Code Civil Suisse*, art. 712: "The share in the co-ownership of a building may be constituted in ownership by floors, so that each co-owner has the exclusive right to use and fit out internally the determined parts of a building".

ABSTRACTS

Since the 1960s, Switzerland has introduced a series of norms aiming to curb access to real estate ownership by individuals not resident in the country. Concerning mainly tourist localities, these norms were enforced when tourism in Valais was changing from a model based on the provision of hotels to one increasingly oriented toward owning second homes. The case of Champéry suggests that this transition was the result of a double movement: on one hand, the dwindling of multipositionality which, when the tourist industry was born, had tied the economic interests of local tourism to the local political life; on the other hand, the opening up of the land and real estate market resulting in the transfer of ownership to stake-holders outside the community. The municipal development plan of 1969 reflected the desire to preserve the image of Champéry as a "village resort"; a desire that was also demonstrated by the choices of local residents concerning the land and real estate market.

Depuis les années 1960, la Suisse s'est dotée d'une série de normes visant à freiner l'accès à la propriété immobilière de la part d'individus non domiciliés dans le pays. S'adressant surtout aux localités touristiques, ces normes sont entrées en vigueur lorsque la transition du tourisme valaisan d'un modèle basé sur l'offre hôtelière à un modèle de plus en plus orienté vers l'offre de résidences secondaires était en voie d'accomplissement. Le cas de Champéry suggère que cette transition a été le résultat d'un double mouvement: d'une part le tarissement de la multipositionnalité qui au moment de la naissance de l'industrie touristique avait soudé les intérêts économiques du tourisme local à la vie politique locale; d'autre part l'ouverture du marché foncier et immobilier donnant lieu au transfert de la propriété au profit d'acteurs externes à la communauté. Le plan d'aménagement communal de 1969 reflète la volonté de préserver l'image de Champéry en tant que « station-village »; une volonté qui se manifeste aussi à travers les choix des autochtones sur marché foncier et immobilier.

INDEX

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AUTHORS

LUIGI LORENZETTI

Università della Svizzera italiana, Mendrisio. luigi.lorenzetti@usi.ch

DANIELA DELMENICO

Università della Svizzera italiana, Mendrisio. daniela.delmenico@usi.ch