

AND THE FARMER BECAME A GARDENER METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE SWISS ALPS

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the rural and touristic context in which current changes and tensions pose methodological challenges to anthropological research. The canton of Valais, in Switzerland, is a rural mountain region that has undergone deep transformations, particularly during the second half of the 20th century. The Alpine valleys have seen intense construction activity: traditional farming systems have decreased drastically whereas tourist facilities have significantly increased in number. The recent changes in agricultural policies have amplified farmers' discontent and a new law on construction restrictions in mountain settings has brought to light a marked cleavage between the inhabitants of the Swiss Plateau and mountain dwellers. Economic and environmental interests create substantial tensions. Given these tensions, carrying out research in this setting became quite sensitive and politicised. I will present some results of exploratory research conducted in Valais in September 2012, as well as the challenges that have to be taken into account when organising long-term ethnographic research. It is proposed that one way to overcome personal and discipline-related obstacles is to carry out multidisciplinary research with social geographers, specialists of environmental sciences, agronomists and experts in regional planning and land use. Accordingly, interdisciplinarity and the comparison of various rural contexts are crucial in order to achieve relevant results.

Keywords: rural tourism, agricultural policies, anthropological research, Switzerland

1. Introduction

I teach social anthropology at the University of Fribourg, in Switzerland. When I told my students that we would conduct an anthropological research in Switzerland, they were somewhat surprised and probably disappointed, possibly because they chose to study social anthropology thinking they would research exotic places and cultures. For a long time, anthropology was indeed defined by the exoticism of its subject matter and by the cultural and geographic distance that separated the researcher from the researched group. I went on to explain to the students that anthropological tools can also be used to study our own societies and cultures and that anthropology is also useful "at home".¹ Regardless of where the fieldwork takes place, in certain cases the challenges it presents may be very similar. In order to give students an insight into the methodological challenges of fieldwork "at home" and introduce them to the sensitive aspects of local issues, my colleague François Ruegg and I organised a summer school in September 2012 in the canton of Valais, a touristic mountain region in the south-west of Switzerland. The subject of the summer school

was the transformation of mountain regions with specific attention to the topics of tourism, heritage and agriculture. Our first aim was to compare the viewpoints of local knowledge to national policies on environment, tourism and heritage. Professors and students from both Switzerland and Bulgaria participated in this summer school, which included conferences by specialists on the main topics, visits to emblematic places and interviews with local actors on the above-mentioned three topics. The interviews done during the summer school were completed with discussions and interviews held by the author between September 2012 and September 2013. Altogether, we taped 18 semi-directed interviews with representatives from different areas: four intellectuals and cultural actors (sociologist, museum curator, heritage expert, actor), two politicians (municipality representative), two entrepreneurs (cheese factory cooperative member), four tourism actors (tourism promoter and travel agents, hotel owner, tourist bureau employee, architect) and six farmers. Thus we were able to gather different opinions and to confront views from various sectors of the population concerning the development and current situation of this canton. Qualitative interviews are an effective method to learn from people what they believe and how events affect their life. The information gathered for this paper has been enriched with newspaper articles, television programs, and debates with students' research in the frame of a seminar on the transformation of rural space held in autumn 2013 at the University of Fribourg. The research method and analysis is thus qualitative, based in an ethnographic approach. The core of qualitative analysis

¹ There are several writings on the subject of anthropology "at home", where "home" may incorporate quite different meanings. For insights into anthropological research at home, see for instance the articles gathered in Giordano, Greverus and Römhild (1999). Some authors now propose to overcome the division between anthropology "at home" and "abroad": for example, Marianne Gullstad in a conversation with Marianne Lien and Marit Melhuus (2008).

lies on three related processes: describing phenomena, classifying it and seeing how the concepts interconnect. Qualitative data are words rather than numbers. Words describe and explain. Our information comes from words and our analysis is based on affirmations, points of view, beliefs and interpretations collected through interviews and also informal discussions. Qualitative analysis involves going through pieces of data to detect and interpret thematic categorisations, search for information, and generate conclusions about what is happening and why.

At the time of the summer school, in 2012, the Agricultural Policy for 2014–2017 was not a question of debate. However, in March 2012 an initiative restricting new constructions which will be discussed further on, was accepted by the population, raised discontent in touristic regions and is still today a heated topic among the population. Thus, political decisions and new laws engendered several tensions presenting challenges that need to be faced in anthropological research. I will first present the context, the recent changes and the discussions that ensued in order to better understand the implications for a methodological empirical research, which is the goal of this paper.

2. Farmers² and tourism

The Valais where we carried out our small-scale research presents a combination of touristic attractions (ski resorts in winter, trekking in summer, natural landscapes and spa resorts in both seasons) and a farmer/agrarian context. The fact that tourism is developed in a rural environment allows us to introduce the notion of rural tourism. Usually rural tourism is used as a form of tourism or travel in a traditionally rural area that can no longer survive solely on agriculture or “traditional” land exploitation. Tourism and tourism related services or “attractions” are a possible alternative when farmers need to diversify their activities to get more income. Rural areas are now places to be consumed and production is based on establishing new commodities and rediscovering places for recreation and tourism (Hall and Page 1999: 180). The idea of rural tourism is usually linked to authenticity, to life as it once was and as a means to improve the welfare of local communities by bolstering their economic and social development. Ideally, therefore, rural tourism is an activity that promotes employment as well as economic and social development, inasmuch as it acts as an alternative income source for farmers and social sectors living in difficult economic situations (Bessi re 1998, 2000; Dumas et al. 2006; Gr nnewald 2002; Iorio and Corsale

2010). Moreover, rural contexts display huge differences in terms of available resources (infrastructural, economic and cultural) depending on the country in which they are located. Consequently, rural tourism options vary considerably from one country to another and from one location to another.

For all those who enjoy nature, Switzerland offers a wide range of possibilities, from an adventure in the straw, a tipi or yurt rental or a house in a vineyard to accommodations in a holiday apartment by a lake, a chalet in the mountains or a cottage in a rural setting (www.tourisme-rural.ch). The country’s natural and cultural landscape attracts many tourists. Coupled with the beauty of its scenery, Switzerland has maintained the image of a rural country with farmers at the core of its national identity. Swiss Enlightenment philosophers played a major role in shaping and strengthening the notion of Swiss identity by drawing on the image of “godly, virtuous, modest and peaceable farmers” (Marchal 1992: 39). Swiss national identity is centred on foundation myths linked to the valorisation of farmers and Alpine communities, as shown in several works (amongst others, Tanner and Head-K nig 1992; Marchal and Mattioli 1992; see also Droz 2004 for an annotated literature on Swiss rural studies). Though possibly a clich , the character of “Swissness”, i.e. of what is authentically Swiss, is linked to land virtues and to a particular mountain landscape. This relation between landscape and national identity construction has been extensively explored by the historian Fran ois Walter (1991, 2004, 2011 amongst other titles).

As in other rural contexts, contemporary farmers in Switzerland also need to diversify their activities. Political decisions concerning agriculture are changing the farmer “ethos” (Droz and Mi ville-Ott 2001), thus they need to explore other sources of income, namely through tourism. Besides the range of accommodations, rural tourism includes catering facilities (*table d’h tes*) and wine tasting, the selling of home-made and local produce, educational farms, open air activities, vineyard and farm tours, as well as the chance to participate in rural festivities and traditions.

However, tourism and traditional rural economy followed opposite trends: wherever the former increased, the latter decreased. According to the Federal Statistical Office, agricultural areas are decreasing. Since 1996, 32,000 ha are no longer exploited. On average, approximately 2000 ha have been abandoned per year (<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/07.html>). Moreover, habitat areas and infrastructure have expanded at the expense of agricultural land (<http://issuu.com/sfso/docs/002-0902#>). In the Alpine valleys, traditional farming systems shrank drastically during the 20th century, whereas tourist facilities increased heavily in number. There was a shift from an exploitation of the land to an exploitation of the landscape. From being the core of Swiss identity, where farmers historically played a central role, they became “gardeners of the Alps”, as the

² There is usually a question about how the population the anthropologist is working with should be named. The preferred term is the one used by the population itself, in our case ‘paysan’ in French. I have opted for the term ‘farmer’, which translates the French ‘paysan’, German ‘Bauer’ and Italian ‘contadino’ as found on the Internet site of the concerned group (<http://www.sbv-usp.ch>).

farmers themselves say today. Legislation on agriculture and dairy production is regulated by article 104 of the Swiss Federal Constitution, voted by the population on June 9th 1996. This article designates agriculture as a pivotal sector for the conservation of natural resources, the upkeep of the countryside and the preservation of the country's decentralised population in rural areas.

Swiss agricultural policy has changed enormously over the last 20 years. In 1993, Parliament introduced the concept of direct payments, a key element in current Swiss agricultural policy, which represent remuneration for services provided by farmers for the common good. There is a distinction between general direct payment and ecological direct payment. The first one is used to remunerate services such as the protection and maintenance of rural landscape, ensuring food production and the preservation of natural heritage. In hilly and mountainous regions, the demanding farming conditions are compensated through payments for steep topography and animal husbandry under difficult conditions. The ecological compensation takes into consideration efforts with regards to the environment and livestock. The federal authority aims to promote biodiversity in agricultural areas, reduce the use of fertilisers, promote in particular animal-friendly conditions for livestock and ensure the sustainable use of summer pastures, amongst others. This is the policy makers' discourse. The perspective changes when we listen to farmers. In Switzerland, most farms were traditionally small-scale and family-run. For this category of farmers all these obligations are very hard to meet and are perceived by them as quite unfair. They feel they are subject to numerous controls that prevent them from properly executing their traditional job. They feel politicians and urbanites impose particular conditions on them that weigh down their already demanding everyday work. Moreover, some Swiss farmers we talked to also take issue with what they perceive as a kind of hypocrisy. In their opinion, the government imposes very strict regulations on how their work has to be done, either with livestock or agriculture, whereas foodstuff imported from various countries undergoes less control and is often sold at lower prices. Many of these issues were also presented in the interviews with farmers taped for the television report aired on January 16th 2014 on the situation of Swiss farmers (RTS 2014).

New changes were introduced by a new Agricultural Policy for 2014–2017 adopted by the Swiss Parliament. The main goals of this policy are to improve the competitiveness of Swiss agriculture, increase services provided by farmers to the community as well as the efficient use of resources in agricultural production and minimise the negative effects of farming on the environment. In other words, the farmer's chief job is no longer to provide nourishment for the population, but to contribute to many other different tasks, in line with the idea of the multi-functionality of agriculture. Therefore, the farmer's main role is not agrarian production, but environmental

and settlement control as well as keeping the "garden clean and tidy for visitors". This idea was and still is relayed regularly in different media as for instance in the journal *Le Matin*, with an article entitled "Le paysan sera payé pour planter des geraniums" [The farmer will be paid to plant geraniums] (*Le Matin* 2012). These changes not only influence the economic context, but also deeply affect the identity of the farmers who feel that their traditional labour is neglected by authorities and overlooked by the urbanites who sustain these policies by their vote, as some of them declare. The political system in Switzerland is a semi-direct democracy where referenda, initiatives, changes to the constitution and law amendments are voted and need to be approved by the population. For an initiative to be accepted, the so-called double majority is required, i.e. it has to be accepted by a majority of votes at the national level and by a majority of cantons.³ Anyone can launch an initiative provided that the number of required signatures is reached.

If farmers were once traditionally paid for their products, and thus the price of the product rewarded their work, they are now paid for other "services" rendered to the community such as maintaining biodiversity, taking care of the landscape, land management and ensuring social life in the countryside. To some farmers, being paid for these tasks means "being paid for doing nothing" (see Droz and Miéville-Ott 2001: 15–16) because for them it is not linked to productive work. Moreover, in interviews and discussions they complained that "In addition to all the work on the farm, [there is] all the paperwork", since now most of their work also involves filling forms, keeping daily records, writing down each farm activity.

Through national policies, Swiss farmers are thus encouraged to transform their farming activity into a "landscape" activity, often for tourism purposes. A green scenery with cows is created for tourists to consume. Many farmers we interviewed confirmed the large drop in number of farmers over the last 50 years. This reality is not strictly linked to new legislation, but rather to a general trend in the agricultural world where relatively small family farms are disappearing to make way for housing development or increasingly large farms, as documents provided by the statistical office (<http://issuu.com/sfso/docs/871-1300>) confirm. One farmer we interviewed stated that most farmers nowadays are quite elderly, and that young people are not interested in taking on the family farm. Aged farmers or not, the decline of farms is attested regularly in official documents (cf. Swiss Farmer's Union and Statistical Office internet sites), which indicate that between 2011 and 2012 the decrease was by 1,042 farms, which corresponds to the disappearance of three farms per day.

The United Nations has declared 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming to stimulate policies for the sustainable development of farmer families and to

³ A concrete example of an initiative will be provided later.

increase public awareness of the importance of family farms, which are decreasing across the globe. In Switzerland, the reasons behind this decline are varied but mostly linked to the policy changes concerning agriculture and the changing role of farmers. One of the reasons given by the interviewed farmers is that work on the farm is not as valued as in the past: what counts now is the aesthetical aspect and landscape preservation. Two farmers we talked to confirmed what Droz and Miéville-Ott had already recorded more than 10 years before: it is absolutely unacceptable for a farmer to become *solely* a landscape gardener (Droz and Miéville-Ott 2001: 17). In order to better understand the farmer's discontent about becoming a landscape protector, it should be recalled that the research made by Miéville-Ott also pointed up that farmers have different perceptions about what landscape is and how it should be, depending mostly on gender, but also on their aesthetic criteria and experiences (2001: 59–101).

Probably some young people would prefer to continue working with livestock or pursuing agriculture and being paid for it, instead of being subsidised to keep the landscape beautiful. To pay farmers for working with livestock and sustainable agricultural activities is precisely what the government policy aims to achieve with the direct payments, but this is not how the farmers perceive it. As mentioned above, the farmers with whom we discussed do not perceive agricultural policies in the same way as policy makers. The farmers also stated that there is almost no profit in family farms and that they are working at a loss: "Despite all the work we do, without counting our work hours, we do not have any benefit". As another farmer claimed, "compared to the country's lowest wages, our incomes are clearly lower. We are the poorest of Switzerland and even if we work, we feel like beggars with these direct payments".

3. Cows and tourists

While agriculture declines, tourism industry flourishes and the farmer is almost forced into job reconversion. This is not a new fact. Until around 1950, the population in Valais lived on traditional Alpine economy, but after that date they began working in the construction industry, either on dams that were being constructed in that period or in tourism infrastructure. Construction and tourism are two economic activities that developed rapidly in this region.

However, farmers are not yet completely extinct even if they are endangered. This image was used in the title of a television coverage "Paysan, une espèce en voie d'extinction" [Farmer, an endangered species] (RTS 2014). In this TV program, farmers affirm they are no longer understood and are barely tolerated for tourism advertising. Indeed, farmers, their occupation, their cattle and their land are needed for tourism purposes. Tourism promoters

need cows in the landscape, plus some genuine products, including farm products (called *produits du terroir*), to sell to tourists. In other words, the tourist industry needs farmers to maintain "the garden" and sell the traditions expected by tourists. These expectations are nourished by the picture-postcard images that Swiss tourism offers linked to watches, chocolates and landscape. This last one includes lakes as well as mountains, ski resorts and idyllic scenery as in "Heidi", a novel written in 1880 by Johanna Spyri about the life of a young girl in the Swiss Alps, translated to several languages and largely known through films and animated TV series. The Swiss type of landscape needs to be preserved as an "organised meadow", as stated by one of our informants, thus agriculture fulfils its landscape function. Indeed, there is almost no wasteland in Switzerland and farmers make it a point of honour to take care of their land and keep it clean. As one farmer declared, "You know, we have always worked the land well, mowing the edges to clean the field. The meadow must be well mowed". Yvan Droz and Jérémie Forney mention that to mow borders is only slightly justified from an economic point of view. This activity makes sense in an ordering of nature, a struggle against wildness and disorder (Droz and Forney 2007: 69). Since they deem to have always maintained the landscape "clean and tidy", a "cultivated nature" as opposed to a "savage nature", together with all agricultural labour, they do not understand why they are now being paid to do that and only for that. As one of them stated, "And I have always done that without anyone asking me to do so. Now they ask me, and they even pay me for that, but there are also a lot of inspections that we didn't have before". Of course, one could argue that the authorities (finally) realised the value of what farmers do, thus now they get money for it, but if they complain, they come across as ungrateful. Here again we can notice the tensions created by diverse perceptions of the situation. Moreover, this misunderstanding highlights the consequences of the same notion, in this case landscape keeping, with different connotations and significance for distinct actors.

Moreover, rural heritage is incorporated into the tourist product and includes not only landscape or agriculture heritage, but also construction heritage (vernacular architecture), art and folk traditions (local music, local cuisine, local handicraft, festivities etc.) that have a potential to attract tourists. As Dewailly mentions, "a general overview of rural heritage demonstrates the wide variety of its constituent elements, but suggests also some problems which are bound up with its commodification as a tourist product" (Dewailly 1998: 124). In the Valais region, traditional products offered to tourists are related to apricot trees, vineyards, cheese, rye, Blacknosed sheep and Herens cattle. These last deserve a further comment. The cows of the Herens breed, considered a true symbol of mountain life in the Valais, have an aggressive nature. The natural confrontation between cows of this breed has led to the organisation of a major event called "Queens

fighters". This festival, in which the cows, divided in different categories, fight against each other by locking horns, is held every spring before the climb to the high mountain pastures. The winner is called *La Reine des Reines* (the queen of queens), increases greatly in economic value and gains a higher standing in a hierarchy within the herd. As such, she will lead the herd during the summer. The cow fighting, nowadays surrounded by folk festivals, attracts numerous stockbreeders and an increasing number of spectators beyond the breeders' world.

A further traditional mountain festivity linked to cows that constitutes another attraction to tourists is the "*Désalpe*", an event that takes place in different regions of Switzerland between September and October and involves the descent of a herd of cows to the plain after about four months spent grazing in Alpine pastures. The cows are decorated with garlands on their heads and coloured cowbells around their necks. A parade, traditional music and a market with local products take place on this occasion. The cows' procession, accompanied by the farmers and the herdsmen wearing traditional costumes, continues with Swiss Alpine traditions such as flag throwing, which involves swinging a flag and then throwing it into the air and catching it as it comes down; the sounds of the Alphorn, which is the traditional herdsman's instrument; and yodelling, a form of singing that probably developed in the Swiss Alps as a method of communication between mountain peaks. The festival brings together local farmers and guests to celebrate Alpine traditions.

All the elements mentioned above illustrate the development of heritage products attracting both local population and visitors. Moreover, as stated to us by the president of a municipality in Valais, they show a complementary relationship between tourism and agriculture: each one needs the other. According to other informants of ours as well, agriculture can survive thanks to tourism, but at the same time is in its service: it is an agriculture for tourism purposes. Accordingly, agriculture and tourism are linked in a mutual relation: each one is essential for the survival of the other. Farms become bigger and less family run (see Federal statistical office). Yet, there are fewer and fewer farmers engaged in agriculture because they are becoming increasingly involved in tourism activities and other jobs in the tertiary sector. Those who remain mostly linked to agricultural jobs are not always happy to see the arrival of tourists and the waste they generate.

4. Land and houses

The increase of tourism went together with an increase in constructions in rural areas all along the second half of the 20th century. Environmentalist movements and citizens began being concerned with what they called the "*bétonnage des Alpes*" (literally, concreting the Alps). In the Swiss semi-direct democracy, the ecologist Franz

Weber in 2006 launched an initiative called "Put a stop to the invasive spread of second homes". The initiative focused on three principal aspects: save nature, preserve heritage and protect local population. On March 11, 2012, 50.6% of voters and most of the cantons voted in favour of the initiative. This initiative limited the number of second homes by 20% in each municipality. In the Valais some municipalities have already between 70 and 80% of second homes. Many of them are empty most of the time because their owners come only for a few days or weeks a year and the accommodation units are rarely available on rental.

The initiative's results have shown a strong cleavage between urbanite plain dwellers and inhabitants of the mountain regions, though some mountain municipalities in long-established tourist regions, such as Engadine, Davos, Flims and Zermatt, also voted in favour of the Weber initiative. The marked geographical split between regions accepting and rejecting the proposal was at first perceived as a true political bombshell, dividing lowland areas from mountain areas (the Alps), urban centres from tourist regions, and the economic core from peripheral areas (Schuler and Dessemontet 2013: 2). Valais rejected the initiative because people of this canton thought (and still think) it would put a stop on its economy. If they could no longer build, there would be unemployment, recession and economic crisis. On the other hand, people from cities supported the initiative in order to protect the landscape: a landscape they want to preserve for their holidays. This statement is clearly reductive and somewhat provocative, but highlights the divergent voices and perceptions. Roughly said, according to those who voted in favour, if promoters go on constructing, the image of a beautiful natural landscape would no longer be available. Opinions from both sides clashed and could be followed on all media. For urbanites, if the construction industry does not stop there will only be houses and no landscape, no traditions, no agriculture. For mountain dwellers, if the construction industry stops there will be unemployment and recession. Mountain farmers constitute still another case: they are already worried about the agricultural policy decided by urban politicians. Schuler and Dessemontet (2013) as well as the other articles gathered in the Forum of the Journal of Alpine research "Issues at stake in the Swiss vote of 11 March 2012 regarding second homes" (<http://rga.revues.org/1856>), provide an exhaustive analysis of this vote's outcome.

The opposition between residents and non-residents of these municipalities with a high number of second homes follows the essential dichotomy between residents who view the community as their place to live, which should be also economically attractive, and tourists and visitors who view the community as a commodified place to consume (Urry 1995). The long debates among Swiss population show the increasingly diverse set of viewpoints of the different interest groups, not only between urbanites and

farmers, but also entrepreneurs, promoters, ecologists, local dwellers, politicians and others, which are linked to the way each group perceives and uses the rural areas. The inevitable outcome of such a variety of viewpoints is a disagreement over the goals and objectives and the policies and methods to achieve such goals (Butler and Hall 1998: 115). Gill (1998) states that opposition to development in rural areas is sometimes strongly expressed by urban, rather than rural residents who are often largely economically dependent on the local area. However, community responses to rural and tourism development are equally varied: not all rural communities actively seek tourism development. Tourism promoters may encounter opposition from local residents who raise objections on the basis of potential environmental disruption. This is however rare in Valais.

The fact is that not only the landscape, but also the hotels suffer from second-home boom, creating further tensions. For instance, a hotel owner declared that many of his hotel's former clients now own a second home in the valley: "Before, people came five, six or seven times at the hotel. Today, customers come to the hotel on their first visit and the last day of their holiday they sign to buy a second home". Owners face many problems in trying to keep their hotels running; in fact, many have been shut down and turned into second homes.

Even if the initiative was not directly linked to risk and vulnerability, these aspects were nevertheless recalled. In stressing the protection of nature and local population, it was somehow implied that their vulnerability increased with the second homes expansion. In the original sense of the term (from Latin *vulnus*, injury), vulnerability expresses the character of something or someone that may be injured. By extension, it is synonymous with fragility in face of a threat. Thus vulnerability covers multiple dimensions: economic, social, territorial, heritage, institutional etc. In this frame, vulnerability is linked to most of them. Focusing on the territorial aspect, would not all these new constructions ultimately increase physical or environmental vulnerability? Vulnerability is not just inherent to physical and geographical conditions, but is also "caused" in particular by inadequate constructions in inadequate places. Even if some actions are made to reduce vulnerability, some other human transformation of the environment, such as constructions in high-risk areas, increase physical vulnerability. Although buildings and materials are subject to stringent regulations, the changes in the environment due to tourism constructions and tourism development can increase conditions of vulnerability (Boscoboinik 2012).

The result of this initiative gave way to many tensions; people from Valais felt misunderstood, rejected and betrayed by the rest of the country. The tension is still palpable; the debates are quite heated, polarised and politicised. They highlight the different visions of rurality, environment, development, tourism and finally of who has the right to decide what and where.

5. Methodology implications

After having introduced the context and the tensions created by different viewpoints concerning rural and mountain areas, the question I would like to address in this section is how all this situation influences an anthropological research and fieldwork methodology. Ethnography, the method of research in anthropology, involves a researcher's direct, personal observation. To begin with, there is no doubt that this context creates an extremely sensitive setting for doing research, in which interests and goals diverge enormously between promoters, politicians, local population including farmers and external population. It is a sensitive field in which conflict may arise also due to the different meanings of place.

A place is shaped by the whole relationships and the power struggles of the people involved in a given space. It is primarily a set of relationships, of people, of networks, of friendships and of conflicts (see the articles in Brochot and De la Soudière 2010). In the anthropological sense of the term, a place is, as Marc Augé asserts, a relational and historical space, concerned with identity (1992). A place thus considered has also different meanings according to its use. In our case, the meaning of rural space depends on whether it is used by farmers, tourists, rural dwellers or urban visitors. Places have different meanings for those who live and work there, for those who use the rural landscape for recreational activities and for those who administer it.

Anthropological work done in sensitive settings is not at all new, but continues to challenge how research should be carried out. Accounts of research done in sensitive settings give us some indications of problems that may arise (cf. Di Trani 2008; Gagné 2008). Since Malinowski's introduction to "The Argonauts of the Western Pacific" (1922), much has been said and written in methodological manuals about the figure, role and status of an anthropologist in the field and the way in which his or her personal characteristics could influence the research results. After reflecting on the role of the anthropologist as an observer, methodology literature focused on the anthropologist as the observed. Among the many major transformations in anthropology, a highly articulate population of "native" ethnographers has emerged, including various bicultural inside/outside (Tedlock 1991: 80). In the case of research done in postcolonial countries, anthropologists may encounter resistance to their research not only from local people, but also from local anthropologists, particularly where there are interests concerning who owns the land or who is more qualified to speak about a particular culture or a particular tradition. Now that some anthropologists work at home, anthropologists from "outside" are sometimes looked upon with suspicion (see the various articles in Giordano, Greverus and Römhild 1999; Gagné 2008).

In this particular case, all those not originally from or living in Valais are non-native. Moreover, all urbanites

from the plain are seen not only as removed from both rural and local concerns, but also as having possibly opposite interests. Two attitudes between local people and a non-native anthropologist may surface in this context: one of clear suspicion, mistrust and refusal to cooperate, the other of convincing the researcher to support their cause. The latter represents a way of applying anthropology to defend a particular stance that could be understood as a kind of manipulation of anthropological research. None of these were detected in our short research. Instead of rejection or mistrust, we were able to conduct long and friendly interviews. Probably the fact that we were introduced by the secretary of the regionally-known centre CREPA (Centre Régional d'Etudes des Populations Alpines) and that there were students from both Switzerland and Bulgaria, facilitated our approach. The persons we had the possibility of interviewing (municipality representative, tourism promoter and travel agents, hotel owner, farmers, cultural actors, amongst others) were very much engaged in presenting us their point of view so that we would better understand their region and what is at stake.

Beyond a particular study, anthropologists will face the instrumentalisation of research. Anthropological research is confronted by social tensions and local claims, be it in New Zealand when doing research on the Maori culture, in Canada in terms of indigenous people, or in Switzerland as regards to the development of tourism and landscape.

In sensitive settings, reliable information may be very difficult to acquire: if mistrust is generalized, almost no one will speak openly and honestly. As already said, mistrust was not detected in our short-term research. However, in a long-term research this eventuality should be heeded since the anthropologist is present for a longer time and more frequently. In our pilot research, the region and the opinions about the recent changes were presented to us, and particularly to our Bulgarian colleagues, for a first time. In a long-term research, when there is a need to delve into some topics, the different interests at stake should be taken into account.

One way to overcome personal and discipline-related obstacles is to carry out a multidisciplinary research involving different researchers presenting various points of view. I believe that interdisciplinarity is a must if we want to achieve relevant results. This does not mean that interdisciplinarity is a panacea for all research, but it could help to better understand the impact and consequences of the various changes in this region. The topics presented in this paper are broad and a clear research question addressed from different disciplines' perspectives is required. A joint study with social geographers, specialists of environmental sciences, agronomists and experts in regional planning and land use, together with historians and architects, is essential. It is also essential to compare and contrast what happens in different touristic mountain and rural regions in Switzerland. Moreover,

comparing situations in various rural contexts would provide indications as to different ways of facing political decisions.

6. Conclusion

There are increasingly less countries in the so-called developed world where rural landscape involves solely rural activities and agriculture. On the contrary, rural landscape has rather become an arena of different and conflicting interests. New approaches in social theory have argued that rural areas are inextricably linked to the national and international political economy (Hall and Page 1999; Cloke 2013). In Switzerland, the recurrent crises in the agricultural sector and its related policies have resulted in a decrease in the number of farmers and in the agricultural use of space. Rural areas are increasingly valued for their environmental "function". Places that are essentially considered as food producers are also increasingly perceived (socially and institutionally) as reserves of environmental excellence (Horáková and Boscoboinik 2012). Consequently, tourism projects may be conceived as an answer to a new need, where landscape may be promoted in a new way. Some types of rural tourism are projects aimed at fulfilling the ideals and expectations of modern urban citizens, while providing farmers with a way to survive and a solution to their isolation (Iorio and Corsale 2010; Butler, Hall and Jenkins 1998). However, farmers in Switzerland are not always entirely convinced about changing their activity from production to services and they feel left out by authorities and co-citizens. On the one hand, the tourist industry brings money and jobs, but on the other, some farmers are not happy about the arrival of tourists and the waste they generate. Moreover, the "Queen fights" contests may have saved some Alpine pastures and the Herens breed, but the money at stake in the competition creates tensions and jealousies. Farmers sometimes see tourism as a devil to whom they sell their souls, in the form of traditions and landscape, in order to make some money.

Ultimately, when the farming activity is not enough to make a living, the farmers' diversification activities are directly linked to tourism services. Tourism, although not always seen by farmers in a positive light, is useful for agriculture; it may promote it and may help it survive. At the same time, agriculture is useful to tourism because it preserves the landscape that tourists want to see. Tourism could then be useful for the maintenance of landscapes and the conservation of traditions; however, some rural areas may quickly become ecologically fragile if the traditional habitat is turned into second homes and the cultivated spaces become empty and unproductive.

Policies affecting agriculture and tourism define a context of tensions among different actors in the regions concerned (farmers, tourism promoters, local and national politicians, insiders and outsiders). For anthropological

research, the political, economic and ecological interests are so divergent that they pose a challenge to the way fieldwork may be carried out in this region. Therefore, multidisciplinary and multilocality may offer a solution to the difficulties arising from a sensitive context with high interests at stake.

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RÉSUMÉ

This paper analyses aspects of the current changes in a mountain region of Switzerland and the methodological challenges they could pose to an anthropological empirical research. Qualitative research methods are effective to determine the people's opinions and how events affect their lives. However, tensions created by recent changes in agricultural policies and new construction restrictions

should be taken into account in carrying out qualitative research. The article opens by presenting the context and how it became quite sensitive and politicised due to economic and environmental interests that trigger substantial oppositions. We argue that a multidisciplinary research should be carried out in order to obtain better results and overcome personal and discipline-related obstacles.

The first part presents the region's touristic attractions in a mountainous area in combination with a traditionally rural environment, which allows us to introduce the notion of rural tourism in Switzerland. As in other rural contexts, also contemporary farmers in Switzerland need to diversify their income sources, many of which involve tourism-related activities. Some farmers feel that the new agricultural policy's focus on environment has actually turned them into the "gardeners of the Alps" for tourism purposes.

The second part illustrates the tensions created by the diverse perceptions of the situation, which in turn highlight the fact that the same notion, such as landscape preservation, may have different connotations and significance for distinct actors. It is here shown how rural heritage and traditions are incorporated into the tourist product, hence illustrating the interdependence of tourism and agriculture.

The third part introduces another source of tensions sparked by the ordinance limiting the construction of second homes. The extensive debates among the Swiss population show the different interest groups' increasingly diverse set of viewpoints, which are linked to the way each group perceives and uses the rural areas.

The fourth part considers how the different visions of rurality, environment, development and tourism and their resultant conflicts may constitute a sensitive setting for a qualitative research. Reliable information through interviews and discussions may be difficult to acquire in sensitive settings. The possibility of an instrumentalisation of research is also considered.

Finally, it is proposed that the political, economic and ecological interests are so divergent that multidisciplinary and multilocality may offer a solution to the difficulties arising from a sensitive context in which high interests are at stake.

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