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Amenity Migration in the New Global Economy: Current Issues and Research Priorities

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Amenity Migration in the New Global Economy: Current Issues and Research Priorities

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Drawing from a panel session held in June 2013 at the 19th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management in Estes Park, CO, this article offers a review of the current state of research on amenity migration and calls for future research to more comprehensively address critical gaps in the literature. We highlight five promising avenues for future research on amenity migration: international patterns—both domestic outside the Global North and across national borders, inequality, interdisciplinary investigations, the importance of policy contexts, and the effects of contemporary social, economic, and demographic factors.

Keywords amenity migration, inequality, international migration, migration, political ecology

Scenic vistas, outdoor recreation, and other natural amenities motivate seasonal, permanent, and retirement migration in particular locations around the world (McGranahan 1999; Glorioso and Moss 2007). Relationships between amenity migration, environmental conditions, and natural resources are complex, with important implications for natural resource management (Charnley, McLain, and

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Donoghue 2008), community change (Schewe et al. 2012), social justice (Park and Pellow 2011; Winkler 2013), and ecological function (Gurran 2008; Kondo, Rivera, and Rullman 2012). For these reasons, amenity migration has become an important multidisciplinary subfield of scholarship in *Society & Natural Resources*, evidenced by more than 30 articles addressing this topic published in the journal since 2000.

Given the relevance of this topic, the authors convened a panel of experts to discuss the current literature on amenity migration and to identify directions for future research at the 2013 International Symposium on Society and Resource Management (ISSRM). Participating in the session were Jesse Abrams, University of Oregon; E. Helen Berry, Utah State University; David McGranahan, USDA Economic Research Service; David Matarrita-Cascante, Texas A&M University; and Richard Krannich, Utah State University. The themes discussed in this article are informed by that panel and by continued discussion among the authors and literature review. Our purpose is to identify opportunities for enhancing amenity migration research, setting an agenda for future study.

International Amenity Migration

We echo calls to broaden the international context of amenity migration research (e.g., Abrams et al. 2012; Matarrita-Cascante and Stocks 2013). Amenity migration research has predominantly focused on the Global North, with most of this work done in the United States, Western Europe, and Australia (Abrams et al. 2012). The panel discussion identified two distinct but complementary avenues to expand the international perspective of amenity migration research: studies of domestic amenity migration outside of the Global North and studies of amenity migration across nation-states.

A small body of work examines domestic amenity migration in nations outside of the Global North. Scholars have described migration toward localities in close proximity to national parks and protected areas throughout Latin America and Africa (Wittemyer et al. 2008; Davis 2011; Fay 2011; Hoffman 2011), mirroring that of American gateway communities (Howe, McMahon, and Propst 1997). Amenity migration in the Global South raises particular concerns regarding inequality in nations that are highly stratified and attempting land reforms and other mechanisms to reduce inequality (Klepeis and Laris 2008). Expanding this avenue for research could broaden conceptions of what is considered an amenity and offer the opportunity to examine the importance of diverse policy, social, and ecological settings.

Studies examining amenity migration across nation-states offer a particularly relevant direction for research. Scholarship in Western Europe identified unique issues that arise in the context of international amenity migration (Henshal 1970; Romeril 1984; Gustafson 2002), highlighting increased cultural conflict between migrants and long-term residents. Migration from rich countries into less-developed nations may further increase cultural conflict. For example, Matarrita-Cascante and Stocks (2013) find little social integration among amenity migrants and local Costa Ricans, limiting potential avenues of community development. Gordon et al. (2010) posit that international amenity migration also raises unique socioecological questions, as international migrants bring diverse social constructions of nature into ecological systems with differing levels of ecological and social vulnerability. Others have examined international migration into the Global South (Chaverri 2006; Otero et al. 2006; van Noorloos 2013); however, the phenomenon is often difficult to

observe distinct from tourism more broadly (Nepal 2000; Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan, and Luloff 2010), a challenge for this line of research. Ultimately, the ground to cover in this topic is large with considerable room to provide important contributions.

Inequality

Amenity migration is associated with inequalities and stratification both between places and between peoples within amenity destinations. We are only beginning to understand relationships between amenity migration and inequality, and the extent to which amenity migration increases or decreases various inequalities under diverse contexts remains unclear. Much of the current literature on amenity migration and inequality has centered on rural gentrification processes that increase rents and pose affordability challenges for long-term and lower income residents (e.g., Hammer and Winkler 2006; Costello 2009). These studies draw attention to the importance of understanding the role of growth machine actors (Molotch 1976) in demand-shaping and the ways in which growth machine processes affect which places and regions get developed as amenity destinations and which do not. Further, Golding (2014) argues that we must consider the socioenvironmental context (and potential disamenities serving to “push out” migrants) in sending communities to fully understand spatial inequalities in sociocultural and environmental conditions.

Recent research has begun to explore how amenity migration perpetuates social exclusion with attention to its effects on actors who have mostly been hidden and ignored in research, policymaking, and planning efforts. It is important to recognize that not only wealthy individuals migrate to amenity destinations, and that class dynamics in amenity migration are complex. Nelson and Nelson (2010), for example, suggest that Latino immigration may correlate with amenity migration but Latinos have mostly been overlooked in studies of amenity migration. Park and Pellow (2011) demonstrate how environmental privilege and social exclusion work together to create social and environmental injustices in Aspen, CO. Winkler (2013) shows how amenity migration segregates communities by income and age and shapes social and political support in favor of elite (and retirement-oriented) interests at the expense of lower income younger adults in a Minnesota lakes destination. Perspectives from political ecology, for example, Walker and Fortmann (2003), might also inform theorizing and research on power relationships and competing discourses of nature in the amenity migration context and provide a lens through which marginalized voices can be heard.

Further, scholars might reconsider amenity destinations within the context of broader national and global processes, such as globalization and neoliberalism, which increase inequalities among people and places (for reviews see Sayre 2011; Gosnell and Abrams 2011). Reflecting from this macrolevel perspective, we can imagine that rather than (or in addition to) creating inequalities, amenity destinations serve as microcosms where we see broader social inequalities playing out in particularly visible, salient, and extreme forms.

Interdisciplinary Investigations

We also see an opportunity for further interdisciplinary collaboration with natural scientists to examine ecological components of amenity migration. Although the literature has widely speculated on environmental impacts (Abrams et al. 2012),

empirical studies have only touched on such relationships. Some studies suggest amenity migrants promote environmentally protective attitudes and behaviors (Marsh and Griffiths 2006), while others question these conclusions (Matarrita-Cascante, Sene-Harper, and Stocks 2015). Kondo, Rivera, and Rullman (2012) for instance, show that through isolation, preferences, and land use, migrants may diminish ecological function. Partnerships with natural scientists would enable more empirical evidence and comparison of the broader impacts of amenity migration. This is particularly critical given the propensity of amenity migrants who live in proximity to ecologically sensitive areas.

In particular, we see potential for analysis of long-term land use changes using remote sensing and longitudinal ecological data. Interdisciplinary partnerships would allow research to address a number of central questions related to both the environmental causes and consequences of amenity migration. Interdisciplinary teams could extend evidence of the role of natural amenities in driving population change and development (McGranahan 1999; Hansen et al. 2002; Marcoullier, Clendenning, and Kedzior 2002), examining a wider range of environmental variables and potentially addressing unexplained variation in amenity migration. They would also be better equipped to answer questions about the impact of amenity migration on environmental outcomes such as land use, water quality, wildlife, and other potential effects. Because amenity migrants often locate in fragile and disaster-prone areas, there is considerable potential for integrating scholarship on hazards research with scholarship on amenity migration to better understand socioecological implications of amenity migration (for an example see Collins 2008). Again, political ecology (Zimmerer and Bassett 2003) may provide a model for this interdisciplinary work.

Policy Contexts

A complex set of local, regional, and national policies related to migration, housing, land use, and environmental management likely mediates relationships between amenity migration and social and environmental conditions, yet scarce attention has been paid to the implications of such policies. Studies identify significant variation in the impacts of amenity migration on communities, particularly economic (Shumway and Otterstrom 2001; Jackson-Smith 2003; Hammer and Winkler 2006) and fiscal impacts (Green 2001; Travis 2007), but there has been little discussion of the role that policy may play in that diversity. Within the United States, for example, municipalities, counties, and states have disparate policies regarding land use, zoning, and housing. This may lead to very different patterns of development and to diverse socioecological implications of amenity migration in destination communities.

Internationally, policy variations may be even more dramatic, with even less understood about their implications. Many nations, for example, restrict land ownership by noncitizens. This could significantly change the patterns of second-home ownership and migration. Throughout Scandinavia (Kaltenborn, Haaland, and Sandell 2001; Müller 2004), different zoning regulations apply to permanent than to second homes. Understanding differential policy contexts could have critical implications for shaping new amenity migration policy.

Contemporary Factors Affecting Amenity Migration

Socioeconomic and ecological contexts are ever evolving such that recent and emerging factors could slow, reverse, or otherwise alter amenity migration patterns.

The most recent global economic recession, peaking in 2008, resulted in loss of wealth, increasing inequality of wealth and incomes, and decreases in median incomes, with only the very top having recovered from these losses (Smeeding 2012). It is unclear what impact this recession might have on amenity migration. Will migration generally, and amenity migration specifically, continue at the same rate? Might destinations shift toward lower costs areas? How will effects vary internationally?

Demographic trends also have potential for changing amenity migration. In the years ahead, the older Baby Boom generation (born in 1946–1955) will be followed into retirement by younger Baby Boomers (born in 1955–1965), Generation X, and the Millennials. It is predicted that younger cohorts will enter their retirement years with less financial security than the older Baby Boomers (Pew Charitable Trusts 2013). Already, growth has slowed in traditional retirement destinations, and intercounty migration has slowed among older generations in the United States (Mather and Jarosz 2014).

Finally, future research must consider the impact of climate change on amenity-rich places and migration patterns (Bremner and Hunter 2014). Fires, floods, and temperature extremes can make amenity destinations less desirable, and these changes may moderate recent migration patterns toward the South and West. Again, scholarship on hazards research may facilitate understanding the implications of climate change for amenity migration and its outcomes.

In sum, scholarship on amenity migration has proliferated over the last few decades, but it has largely failed to address complex global migration patterns, to satisfactorily explain relationships with multiple dimensions of inequality, to take advantage of opportunities to integrate natural and social science, and to differentiate policy contexts. We believe that within these gaps lie critical keys to understanding the causes and consequences of amenity migration at multiple scales, and we challenge future research to move the subfield toward these new directions.

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