

Tourism-led Amenity Migration and the Transformation of Place: Issues of Affordable Housing

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Abstract

Global economic and political change has stimulated an explosion in tourism-led migration flows resulting in unprecedented transformation in the form and condition of impacted communities (Woods, 2006). This increase in human migration to areas of high quality recreational and tourism resources is referred to as 'amenity migration' and includes both permanent and second home residents (Hall and Williams, 2002; Moss, 2006). In this paper I first present a conceptual discussion of amenity migration within a sustainability framework. I then employ this framework to examine issues of affordable employee housing – one of the major problems that can impact the quality of life for residents in tourism communities where there is a high level of amenity migration (Gober et al., 1993).

At the broadest scale amenity migration can be conceptually framed within the new paradigm of mobility that includes consideration of movements in people, capital and knowledge (Sheller and Urry, 2006). These mobilities have far reaching transformational effects on impacted communities. Changes may be perceived as either positive or negative depending on the meaning and values individuals attribute to place. Invariably, different stakeholder groups hold differing views and new migrants introduce new power relations and political structures. Transformations are effected through a variety of mechanisms of interaction that, dependent on the politics of place may include contestation, conflict and/or negotiation. The sustainability of place will depend on how effectively vulnerabilities can be recognized and mitigated and how opportunities can be recognized and implemented.

The impacts caused by a rapid influx of amenity migrants are raising concerns amongst local and regional governments around the world (Moss, 2006; Hall and Muller, 2004; Hall and Williams, 2002). Williams and Hall (2002) identify two basic forms of tourism-related migration: *consumption-led* and *production-led*. The former includes the influx of several definable groups of migrants to places of high amenity: second home owners (Hall and Müller, 2004), retirees (Williams et al., 2000) and other lifestyle migrants whose occupations are not place-based. Jenkins (2000) suggests that consumption-led residential mobility reflects a societal shift in values that emphasizes tradition, heritage, subjective well-being; environmental protection and other quality of life concerns. With an emphasis on quality of life values, the blurring of boundaries between

tourism/leisure and other aspects of individuals' lives is a marker of post-modern society. Concurrently production-led tourism migration has created large labour pools and entrepreneurial personnel in tourism regions in both the developed and developing world. It is at the intersection of these two types of tourism-related migration movements that the issue of affordable housing for employees becomes particularly evident.

One of the most commonly observed markers of amenity migration is rising real estate values. Residents who already own property see their housing equity grow but the problem of affordable housing for workers attracted to the emerging new economy is a major problem faced by tourism destination communities (Moore et al., 2006). Policy responses to the issue of affordable housing in tourism areas are evident in some resort locations. However, the implementation of policies often lags behind development and may be difficult to introduce where growth is the dominant paradigm.

In a North American context, the mountain resort of Whistler, British Columbia provides an example of forward thinking in seeking to address the affordability gap. Following rapid real estate development and escalating property values in the 1990s the lack of affordable housing for employees presented a serious problem resulting in many workers having to commute long distances from other communities. In 1997, the RMOW established the Whistler Housing Authority to develop and maintain employee restricted housing. The construction of employee-restricted housing is funded by a works and services charges on all types of new development. Further, changes to local bylaws encourage home owners to provide employees rental accommodation. A waitlist process is used to equitably distribute rental and ownership housing opportunities to Whistler's active and retired workforce. The goal of the WHA is to provide 75 percent of employees with accommodation within the community. The forthcoming Winter Olympics in 2010 has presented an opportunity to develop housing that after the Games contribute to meeting this target.

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