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# Two Close-to-Nature Lifestyles, One Benefit for the Cultural Landscape: Comparing Lifestyle Movers and Lifestyle Farmers in the Remote European Eastern Alps

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Increasing affluence permits economically induced mobilities from mountain valleys in the European Alps downward to (urban) lowlands. Research on crosscurrents beyond economic constraints is still

in its infancy, especially in the remote Eastern Alps. Hence, I studied 2 conscious lifestyle mobilities in 3 remote regions of Alpine Austria and Italy: those of lifestyle movers who relocated to a mountain community and lifestyle farmers who entered mountain agriculture without a farming background. I interviewed 25 movers and 24 farmers on their challenges and opportunities on site and their engagement with the local cultural landscape. The results show that their spatial or social mobility enables them to have a close-to-nature lifestyle; housing and land access are key

challenges they experience. Due to sociocultural assimilation, lifestyle movers—mostly extra-Alpine urbanites—tend to reproduce the cultural landscape that motivated their relocation. Most lifestyle farmers are locals, which empowers them to rethink conventions and regenerate agriculture. By consciously maintaining the cultural landscape, both groups foster the preservation and development of local socioeconomic and cultural structures that are vital to surviving in the Alpine periphery—and thus key to the survival of the Alpine cultural landscape. Spatial and, even more so, social lifestyle mobility in mountain regions holds significant potential that is often neglected by demographic research and not clearly perceived by local policymakers.

**Keywords:** lifestyle mobility; lifestyle farming; mountain agriculture; cultural landscape; European Alps.

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## Introducing Alpine lifestyle mobilities and their impacts—a regional dichotomy?

Increased mobility promotes temporal and spatial flexibility and permits a variety of “lifestyles and choices about places to live and work” (McIntyre 2009: 230)—even in European highlands. While locals tend to abandon their rural residences and agricultural professions in search of better socioeconomic prospects in agglomerations in the valley bottom or on the Alpine fringe (Bätzing 2015: 131–246; Bender and Haller 2017: 136 f), others move from lower-lying areas to the highlands, indicating a renaissance of rural and remote mountain regions in Europe (Membretti, Krasteva, and Dax 2022). In this light, spatial, symbolic, and functional disparities between metropolitan and mountain areas are gradually dissolving, which fosters metro–montane relationships (Barbera and De Rossi 2021).

Crosscurrents along the European Alpine arch are not solely economically driven, as illustrated by studies on amenity migration (Bender and Kanitscheider 2012; Löffler et al 2016; Mayer and Meili 2016; Beismann et al 2022), lifestyle migration (Boscoboinik and Cretton 2017; Friedli and Boscoboinik 2023), as well as leisure migration and multilocality (Borsdorf 2013; Sonderegger and Bätzing 2013;

Perlik 2020; Bourdeau 2021). These studies address conscious, (semi)permanent relocation for a better way of life (cf Benson and Osbaldiston 2014) that is linked to tourism, leisure, and consumption (Torkington 2012) and thus to the concept of lifestyle mobility (McIntyre 2009; Casado-Diaz 2011; Cohen et al 2013).

Lifestyle mobilities in the European Alps tend to have different social and environmental impacts depending on the number of newcomers, the length of their stay, and the socioeconomic character of the destination. Graf's (2021) observations suggest significant disparities in mobility patterns between intensive tourism agglomerations and the rural periphery. In predominantly Western Alpine winter resort regions, the negative impacts of lifestyle mobility seem to prevail: Rising real estate prices, stress on local supply and disposal infrastructures, and displacement of traditional building stock related to multilocal dwelling are trends of “Alpine gentrification” (Perlik 2011; Boscoboinik 2018; Cretton 2018). The southern European Alps present a more positive picture, with small numbers of in-migrants moving to formerly abandoned remote communities and reviving local traditions, business, and infrastructure (Löffler et al 2016; Beismann et al 2022). Further east, Austria—the country with the largest share of Alpine area (Alpine



Convention 2018: 13)—lags behind in lifestyle mobility research. A rare exception is the study by Bender and Kanitscheider (2013) on return, age, and amenity migration in East Tyrol.

The lifestyle mobility trend may not yet have hit the Eastern Alps, as it relates to industrialization and subsequent tourism (cf Moss 2006; Casado-Díaz 2011), and hence spreads from west to east (Löffler et al 2014). Alternatively, lifestyle mobility might be determined by the accessibility of Alpine scenery and proximity to urban agglomerations (cf Perlik 2006; Dematteis and Corrado 2021), which are scarce in Austria's easternmost Alps due to inheritance patterns and widespread monotonous forest areas established during the feudal era (Čede et al 2018).

Only few studies deal explicitly with the lifestyle-led social mobility of newcomers and their integration into the local labor market in the Western Alps (Holland and Martin 2015; Mayer and Meili 2016). An exceptional type of social mobility—newcomers entering the agriculture sector—is evident in the southern European Alps (Battaglini and Corrado 2014; Fassio et al 2014; Wilbur 2014; Gretter et al 2019), shifting “the role of agriculture from economic production toward environmental care, and . . . the concept of family away from the parental structure and inheritance . . .” (Varotto and Lodatti 2014: 324). Against the background of decreasing numbers of Alpine family farms and increasing land abandonment (Streifeneder 2010; Flury et al 2013; Dax et al 2021), newcomers who consciously adopt a farming lifestyle must be studied in detail.

The apparent west-east dichotomy in lifestyle mobility research along the Alpine arch, its prominent focus on spatial mobility, and the underrepresentation of the Eastern Alps (Bender and Kanitscheider 2012: 240) reveal significant regional and contextual blurs. Thus, I focused on 3 peripheral regions of the Eastern Alps (Vorarlberg, Montafon, East Tyrol, and Vinschgau), where I examined 2 types of lifestyle mobility before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic: lifestyle movers (LM), representing spatial newcomers who consciously relocated permanently or seasonally to the study region; and lifestyle farmers (LF), representing socioeconomic newcomers who entered full-time or part-time agriculture in the study region and who did not have a family farming background. In this article, I elaborate on the challenges and opportunities of LM and LF on site as well as their impacts on the local cultural landscape. In this study, “cultural landscape” refers to the visible landscape (re)shaped by biophysical processes and human interaction, as well as its immaterial assets—knowledge and practices (re)produced by sociocultural ascriptions of locals and visitors (Rapoport 1992; Micheel 2012: 108; Tieskens et al 2017: 30).

## Conceptualizing spatial and social lifestyle mobility

Lifestyle is a set of adopted practices and attitudes to satisfy an individual's utilitarian needs and shape identity (Giddens 1991: 81). Mobility ultimately allows individuals to enter places and professions that represent an envisioned lifestyle, or to leave these places and professions at any time with the “intention to move on, rather than move back” (Cohen et al 2015: 167).

McIntyre (2009: 232, 241) defined lifestyle mobility as voluntary movements by people to pursue a better way of life, including associated flows of capital, expertise, knowledge, creativity, information, and goods. Regions and practices in which the “mainstream” population sees few future prospects are venues for various pro-rural lifestyles and mobilities of national and international origin (eg Kordel et al 2018; Membretti, Krasteva, and Dax 2022) to mountain regions (eg Glorioso and Moss 2007; Borsdorf 2009; Corrado et al 2014; Graf 2021) and agriculture (eg Pinto-Correia et al 2015; Monllor i Rico and Fuller 2016; Gretter et al 2019; Helms et al 2019; Grubbström and Joosse 2021).

### Lifestyle moving

Affluent urbanites, free from economic constraints, deliberately relocate to the countryside (Benson and O'Reilly 2016: 24) for its “spaces of rest, community, cultural belonging, stability, home and connections with nature” (Milbourne and Kitchen 2014: 335). Beyond these frequently romanticized sociocultural comforts, natural amenities of coastal, lake, or mountain regions (Moss and Glorioso 2014) are equally strong drivers. As a voluntary “voting-with-feet” decision, lifestyle-led relocation differs markedly from migration by force or necessity (Gretter et al 2017; Perlik and Membretti 2018; Perlik et al 2019) and seems to be more related to countryside consumption—utilizing its manifold recreational opportunities (Torkington 2012: 74)—than to productivity, which motivates labor migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2016: 21).

Growing prosperity and infrastructure promote faster and cheaper travel, second-home ownership, and telework, leading to a convergence of tourism, migration, and work (Perlik 2020). Thus, contemporary career-related relocation tends to follow a desired lifestyle rather than vice versa, serving either to finance that lifestyle or to start a related business (Holland and Martin 2015: 37). As lifestyles are “never simply taken off-the-shelf” (Barcus and Halfacree 2018: 196), the presence of mobile individuals varies and may be temporary (tourism, seasonal migration) or long-term (in-migration or return migration) (Benson and O'Reilly 2009: 621; Cohen et al 2013; Kordel 2017).

### Lifestyle farming

Halfacree (2022) highlighted the nexus among relocation, career change, and a sustainable life, drawing on the back-to-the-land movement. Here, people from typically urban origins seek the countryside “not just to access rurality but to establish deeper living and working connections with the land” (Barcus and Halfacree 2018: 218)—a farming lifestyle beneficial for health and recreation (Pinto-Correia et al 2015: 68).

Newcomer farmers often have no prior experience or generational ties to agriculture (Monllor i Rico and Fuller 2016: 534–537), resulting in inadequate access to land, local knowledge, and networks or policy support (EIP-AGRI Focus Group 2016: 15; Eistrup et al 2019). Lifestyle-led farmers tend to lack a farmer identity and consider farming a nonprofit or recreational activity, and so scholars and authorities often dismiss them as “hobbyists” or “unofficial” farmers (Sutherland et al 2019: 481; Gennai-Schott et al 2020: 4). However, they engage in agricultural practices in



areas that have been abandoned by professional farmers (Gennai-Schott et al 2020) or maintain amenity values on the urban fringe after retirement (Song et al 2022). Although lifestyle farming might not abide by economic rules, related sustainable land management fulfils a significant but hidden role in compensating for the loss of professional farmers (Wilbur 2013; Gennai-Schott et al 2020; Song et al 2022).

### Effects of international migration to rural and mountain areas

In rural Europe, foreign immigration “is a widely neglected phenomenon” with essential demographic and economic implications (Hansson et al 2022: 43). Even the European Alps provide refuge for international migrants (Perlik et al 2019).

Entering the rural periphery, newcomers may initially experience physical and cultural remoteness. This apparent void, in turn, provides ample space for innovative engagement with (in)tangible communal resources (Viazzo and Zanini 2014; Gretter et al 2017: 402; Membretti and Lucchini 2018: 203; Ravazzoli et al 2019: 10; Membretti, Dax, and Machold 2022: 21). Immigration by third-country nationals offers challenging but rich opportunities for rural communities, boosting sociocultural exchange and demographic stability across generations (Battaglini and Corrado 2014; Machold and Dax 2017; Gretter 2018; Pereira and Oiarzabal 2018; Bergamasco et al 2021; Morén-Alegret et al 2021). While lifestyle mobilities rest on accumulated social and financial capital that enables individuals to develop economic niches within a chosen destination (Benson and O'Reilly 2016: 10 f), international migration relies more on socioeconomic gaps left by outmigrated locals, as revealed in self-employment in local handicraft, retail, or food businesses (Gretter 2018; Löffler and Steinicke 2018; Gilli 2022) or restoration of abandoned houses (Gretter et al 2017; Membretti and Lucchini 2018; Gretter et al 2019).

Albeit rarely, due to land access restrictions, immigrants also adopt farming activities and employment (Pereira and Oiarzabal 2018; Farinella and Nori 2020) or take over entire farms (Grubbström and Joosse 2021). Using “new farming” approaches (Gretter et al 2019), these “new pioneers” (Beismann et al 2022) innovatively recombine local past knowledge and practices with exogenous resources to foster wellbeing and advance socioeconomic relationships among locals, newcomers, and visitors to marginalized mountain communities.

### Research area and applied methods

Research on LM and LF was mainly conducted in the Montafon (47°2'11.18"N; 10°0'30.76"E) and East Tyrol (46°53'7.94"N; 12°32'17.33"E) regions in Austria and the Vinschgau (46°39'0.86"N; 10°45'16.06"E) valley in Italy (Figure 1). All 3 regions are predominantly rural mountain areas (Eurostat 2021; Laine et al 2021) characterized by low population density and great distances to urban centers.

The fieldwork was carried out in several phases. The ground was set by examining LM in the Austrian regions between 2015 and 2016, where some participants were already engaged in farming activities or were just entering agriculture. A detailed study on LF in both regions followed between 2020 and 2022. Entering agriculture was not a mainstream movement there, so available data were

conspicuously rare. Vinschgau was then added to gain data saturation (Saunders et al 2018) after prior evidence from colleagues and online research in regional media and blogs had indicated the presence of LF there.

Previous interviews with 24 experts in local politics, tourism, and agriculture facilitated initial contact with LM and LF participants, who then established additional participant contacts. Snowball sampling was continued in this hard-to-reach population (Sadler et al 2010) until no further contacts were gained. Both participant subgroups were clearly defined as follows, albeit with overlaps, as indicated in the results:

- LM are nonautochthonous residents who voluntarily relocated to a study region and are actively engaged there. Relationship migrants were not considered, as partnership with locals generally assists integration.
- LF voluntarily entered agriculture in a study region without having a family farming background. Hobby farmers cultivating their home gardens were not considered.

In total, 25 LM and 24 LF participants were interviewed, focusing on the challenges and opportunities they encounter in the community and/or in agriculture. Extra sociodemographic and socioeconomic data were collected after each semistructured interview. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with software assistance, applying Strauss and Corbin's (1990) techniques of open, axial, and selective coding.

As Gruber et al (2022) stated, the COVID-19 pandemic strongly disrupted mobility patterns and their impacts in rural mountain regions. Although I conducted some postpandemic fieldwork (especially on LF), all participants had made their mobility decision before the pandemic. Hence, all findings reflect prepandemic lifestyle mobility.

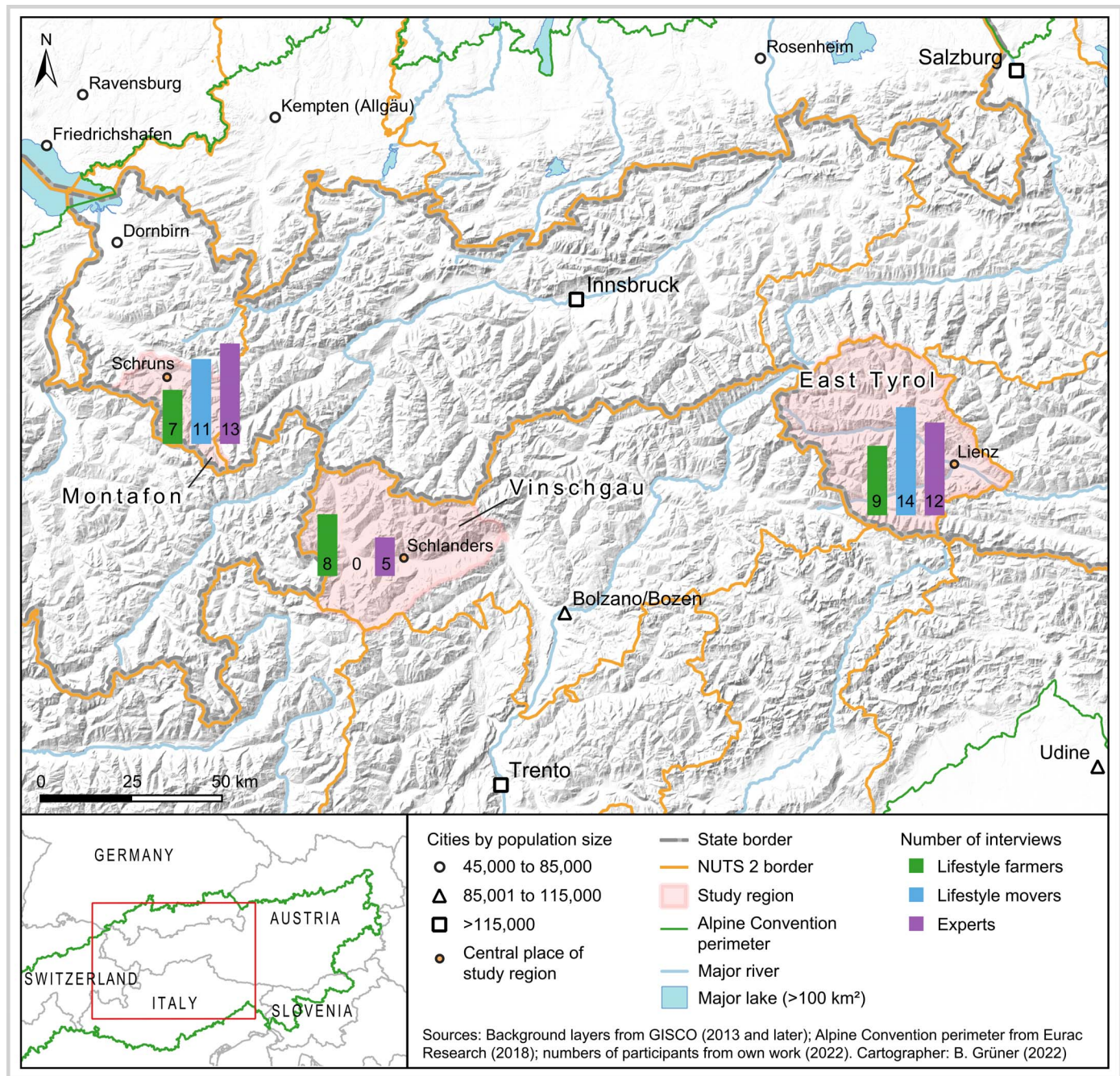
### Key findings

Most LM migrated from urban, nonalpine areas of Western Europe (eg Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium) to the study regions (Figure 2A). A few participants in-migrated from rural lowlands to the Alpine highlands; Bender and Kanitscheider (2012) labeled them “new highlanders.” I also identified 6 temporary LM, who visit their second home frequently for (long) weekends. Local experts clearly distinguish them from conventional tourists due to their community engagement (event participation, membership in local associations). In contrast, most LF grew up in or remigrated to one of the study regions (Figure 2A). There are also some dual newcomers who are new in the community per se and new to farming.

LM were on average 10 years older when entering the community than LF when entering agriculture; both are highly educated (Figure 2B). The nonretired LM work in the study region in similar professions (health, advertising, hospitality, technology, law) as before their relocation (Figure 2C) and maintain infrequent business relations to the region of origin. Most LF initially worked in services or industries or are still working there part-time while being permanently present on their farm. With sidelines (in health, finance, engineering and construction, media, hospitality, retail, or law), they resemble the majority of family farmers



**FIGURE 1** The Eastern Alpine study regions: Montafon (Vorarlberg, Austria), East Tyrol (Tyrol, Austria), and Vinschgau (South Tyrol, Italy). NUTS 2, Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics level 2. (Map by Bernhard Grüner)



in the study regions who also derive their main income from off-farm activities. Since LF generate at least part of their income from agriculture, they cannot be classified as hobby farmers.

Agriculture and especially animal husbandry demands spatial immobility and permanent presence from LF. This is underlined by the fact that only one LF—a forester—maintains a temporary presence at the farm. Interestingly, some LF had chosen a career in agriculture before they had taken over a farm, despite their lack of generational roots in farming. Regardless of demographic background, the majority of LF on Austrian territory have completed

agricultural training in an agricultural college (*landwirtschaftliche Fachschule*) to obtain land access.

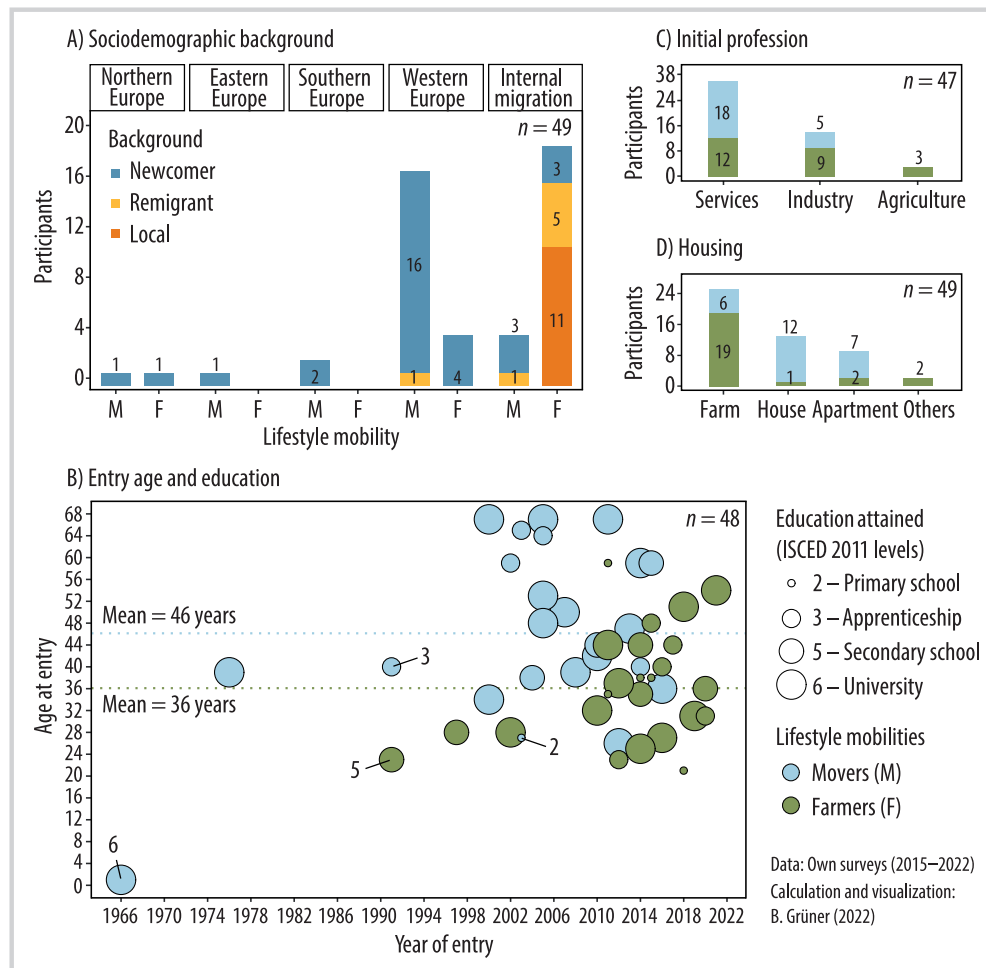
Both LM and LF have gained expertise in management, accounting, marketing, or research and development. LM use such knowledge mostly for community participation and integration, and LF use it mainly for product marketing.

#### **A close-to-nature lifestyle—an opportunity for newcomers**

By relocating and/or switching their profession to farming, LM and LF fulfilled their desire to live or work close to nature. These are 2 close-to-nature lifestyles that participants had previously sought in vain.



**FIGURE 2** Sociodemographic background (A), participant entry age and education (B), initial profession (C), and housing situation (D). Note that the visualization of quantitative data allows no direct conclusions about phenomena beyond this sample. ISCED, International Standard Classification of Education.



As interviews revealed, LM relocate primarily for the attractive and diverse Alpine scenery, the pleasant climate, or simply the remoteness and associated benefits for mental and physical health provided by various sports and leisure opportunities. “Social proximity,” in the sense of an unspoiled, well-functioning community, completes the image of rural idyll—another mobility trigger, especially among urbanites. Consequently, nature is perceived not only through consumption of the natural assets of Alpine destinations but also via the social and cultural commodities of village communities:

*I was fascinated that [the villagers] still have so much knowledge—about herbs, weather forecasts—that I did not know from cities ... They are still connected to animals and nature, and are so integrated and self-sufficient ...*

(LM, mid-50s)

Hence, the quest for a close-to-nature lifestyle aims at authenticity, which LM hope to achieve by following the sociocultural lure of the mountains. Figures 2D and 3 show that their longing materializes in the revitalization of abandoned agricultural building stock: a trait of the home-making process that Kordel (2015: 113) similarly observed among multilocal retirees in the Mediterranean.

Authenticity is also crucial for LF, as living and working on a farm promises independence from conventional employment and the agri-food system. Given uncertain future prospects in general, LF participants are striving for self-sufficiency in food, of which they can control the quality and treatment themselves:

*Standing in the field while raking hay and ... looking around is a priceless luxury. The physical work just pleases me ... In the city you don't have anything yourself ... Here, I have my own potatoes, strawberries, and especially milk—you really work for something of which you see the outcome. When I sit in an office, I work for money.*

(LF, early 50s)

As illustrated above, nature signifies self-determined work with soil and animals, and thus the reconnection to experience food production. Interviewed LF participants who in- or remigrated from urban regions in particular experience the practical work as an enriching contrast to their previous dependency-based employment. In this light, farms provide sufficient (free) space to turn alternative ideas into practice (cf Koop 2020).

#### Land access—a major challenge for newcomers

Access to housing and land proved to be a major challenge for LM and LF. It is informally restricted by a



**FIGURE 3** Preserved traditional building stock on the exterior (A) and on the interior, illustrated by a wood-paneled parlor (B). As the grand piano shows, living close to nature does not call for utter renunciation of previous lifestyles and amenities. (Photos by Bernhard Grüner, 2016 and 2021)



nontransparent real estate market or by law and naturally constrained by mountain topography.

Given the Alpine location, building plots in all study regions are topographically limited and further constrained by claims of local industries and tourism. In-migrant newcomers in particular face further challenges in accessing land for building and housing (cf Viazzo and Zanini 2014; Membretti and Lucchini 2018; Gilli 2022), due to a lack of information on where and when real estate is available at a locally usual price. Consequently, access to housing or land frequently involves a long, bureaucratic process in the study regions. Mayors, pastors, landlords, or, for LF, relatives are essential gatekeepers.

While LM only had to seek housing, LF needed a farm with buildings and land. In the Montafon and East Tyrol, the transfer of agricultural land and buildings among domestic residents and foreigners is regulated by land transfer laws aimed at preserving family farming and, thereby, the cultural landscape (Tyrolean Land Transfer Act, see RIS 2023a; Vorarlberg Law on Land Transfer, see RIS 2023b). Interested parties without roots in family farming—such as the LF I studied—must demonstrate several years of agricultural practice or education before land access is permitted. Whether LF meet this requirement is assessed by a land

transfer authority comprising local and regional representatives from the fields of law, agriculture, and politics. At this point, unambiguous laws often become arbitrary decisions:

*[E]verything was actually good, except for the last assessor. He wanted an exorbitant deposit so that we would manage the farm for the next 5 years exactly as we had stated in our operating plan. Then we reached the point where we said: “No, that’s going too far!” And that is when [the farm transfer] almost failed.*

*(LF, mid-50s)*

In-migrant LF are even more exposed to this lack of transparency than locals, who are better connected to the authority and know their scope of action.

In the Vinschgau, land tenure is not legally restricted; however, like in the other 2 study regions, it is generally limited by farm transferors. Retiring farmers without family successors usually rule out a handover to LF for fear of them breaking with long-established farming practices. Therefore, land transfer to nonfamily members is hampered in all study regions, a phenomenon that is evident even in nonalpine agriculture (cf McGreevy et al 2019; Zollet and Maharjan 2021). Due to the transferors’ emotional attachment to family property, LF mostly purchased previously abandoned farms (Figure 2D) in unfavorable areas where there is no family farmer interest.

### Reproduction and regeneration—opportunities for the cultural landscape

LM and LF tend to reproduce the ascriptions of nature inherent in the (im)material Alpine landscape that originally informed their relocation. LF not only reproduce traditional agricultural practices and knowledge, but they also regenerate these principles. Through sociocultural assimilation and reflection, both groups beneficially maintain the local cultural landscape.

Most LM stay in their new Alpine residence over the long term, which requires a multidimensional process of integration (cf Gretter 2018; Laine 2022). In particular, their quest for sociocultural assimilation adds to the preservation of traditional knowledge and architecture. The latter is evident in the revitalization of formerly abandoned farm building stock. By preserving original small windows or the widely visible firewood stack (Figure 3), participants send a clear signal to the local community that they are aware of the local cultural and natural environment. According to the interviewed experts, these signals of visible, active integration that resonate with local customs are received positively by the village community. The interviews also showed that particularly urbanites consider the architectural heritage of mountain areas an attractive element of cultural landscape worth preserving (cf Membretti 2021).

Even if LM do not relocate primarily for agriculture, they grow more sensitive to farming knowledge and activities on site by cooperating with the agricultural community via beekeeping, herb processing, or agritourism, for which no special agricultural training is required. Friedli and Boscoboinik (2023) observed a similar identification with rural values among labor migrants in the Swiss Alps after relocation.

The majority of LF, though not raised on a family farm, are nonetheless part of the village community and are thus



**FIGURE 4** High-elevation viticulture in unfavorable terrain, enabling a carpenter's part-time farming lifestyle. His land management mitigates landslides and fire spread on the steep slope. (Photo by Savina Konzett, 2020)



familiar with its social, cultural, and economic particularities from childhood. Being new to the agricultural but not the village community creates an integration advantage that spatial newcomers generally lack. As a result, local LF may engage more critically with long-established practices than in-migrant LF. Most investigated LF introduce new animal and crop species that either were common prior to agricultural industrialization (cf Zagata et al 2020) or are new to the area but equally adapted to the mountain environment (cf Gretter et al 2019). Thus, intensive livestock and dairy farming, which is prevalent in the Montafon and East Tyrol regions, is complemented by breeding of small livestock as well as vegetable and herb cultivation. In the Vinschgau, small livestock, arable farming, and high-elevation viticulture are established as alternatives to the predominant intensive apple orchards.

A comparison of the area cultivated by family farmers and LF showed that the latter manage an average of one third less than family farmers, thus confirming the—also quantitative—significance of LF for preservation of the cultural landscape. Against the background of ongoing climate change, the vegetable and vine cultivation experiments of LF in harsh environments (Figure 4) reflect an innovative and sustainable business strategy that may also gain relevance for family farmers specializing in livestock or apple breeding. Such small-scale, biodiverse farming has already been assessed by Soliva (2007) as a possible future scenario for sustainable development in rural mountain regions.

Family farmers in the study regions were able to specialize their practices over generations, and so the farm constitutes the core of their family and production. LF, having taken over formerly abandoned family farms, lack this intangible legacy (cf Joosse and Grubbström 2017). Devoid of intergenerational bias, they transform the farm from a former production site to a space of interaction,

adding a more social facet to an intrinsically production-oriented sector, as Battaglini and Corrado (2014: 81) equally recognized. In my cases, this transition is evident in farm-gate or web-shop sales, a farm restaurant, or the organization of workshops and excursions for locals and tourists. LF interact with the cultural landscape in a way reminiscent of what Gretter et al (2019: 11) called “new farming,” representing an agricultural initiative utilizing synergies between newcomers and locals, mutual knowledge, and resources, thus propelling further projects that eventually foster sustainable development in marginalized areas. Especially in the Vinschgau, LF tend to exploit such synergies by cooperating with scientific institutions. In the Austrian study regions, such innovative approaches are not yet clearly apparent. Either they are only just emerging and will soon become visible, or, as experts and local LF in the Vinschgau assume, long-term impoverishment of the peasant population due to high land fragmentation (partible inheritance) has established a strong spirit for innovation there (cf Viazzo and Zanini 2014: 6 f).

Interviews with local experts across all study regions revealed that agriculture is viewed as exclusively family farmers' business or at least reserved for locals. In-migrant LF who break with common agricultural practices are often ridiculed by locals, especially by those with a family farming background. However, as my fieldwork indicated, both LM and LF preserve the cultural landscape in times of declining farm numbers and land abandonment.

## Concluding discussion and future research suggestions

The sociodemographic background of the LM and LF studied varies (cf Battaglini and Corrado 2014; Membretti 2021), yet some commonalities are evident: Both LM and LF



are well-educated, share a conscious desire to live and work close to nature, and tend to have a permanent presence in the community or at their farm. While most LM in-migrated from extra-Alpine agglomerations, LF are primarily locals who entered agriculture part-time from services or industry. Since socioeconomic and demographic contexts, as well as temporal fixations, differ but are all aimed at a better way of life, these spatial and social movements can be conceptualized as “lifestyle mobility” (cf Cohen et al 2013)—a concept scarcely examined to date in the Eastern Alps.

A decade ago, the outmigration of locals left empty spaces, primarily in the Western Alps (Viazzo and Zanini 2014). As I highlight, socioeconomic gaps available for LM and LF to fill also exist in amenity-rich regions of the Eastern Alps. Further studies on Alpine lifestyle mobilities must elucidate their spatial distribution by triangulating official statistics, questionnaires, and mapping.

In-migrant LF, who are new both to the community and to agriculture, face the greatest hurdles in accessing land (cf Gretter et al 2019) due to strict land transfer laws and transferors’ distrust of nonfamily successors. As fieldwork suggests, the newcomers’ lack of intergenerational ties to building stock and land facilitates transfer among newcomers. Additional analysis of the transfer of formerly abandoned (farm) buildings to newcomers may reveal how vacancies in remote mountain regions can be accessed effectively and transparently to prevent long-term abandonment. In addition, already-present newcomers may act as gatekeepers to match locals and new arrivals, especially refugees, with the local real estate market (cf Weidinger 2018).

While earlier research implied that lifestyle-led relocation or farming is primarily recreational (cf Torkington 2012; Pinto-Correia et al 2015), my results draw a contrary picture. Participants’ spatial and/or social mobility is certainly triggered by consumption via housing, farming, and leisure activities. However, fieldwork shows that both close-to-nature lifestyles induced sociocultural assimilation and reflection, resulting in cultural landscape (re)generation. It thus echoes Massey (2005: 50, 107), as space is constantly redefined and reconstructed by new arrivals. LM pursue their desire for integration and belonging to the village community by reproducing traditional knowledge and architecture—amenities of the Alpine cultural landscape that originally triggered their relocation (cf Membretti 2021). Integration is not mandatory for LF, as most are local, which empowers them to rethink conventional agriculture, stimulating diversified small-scale farming and the transformation of their farms into spaces of exchange beyond primary production (cf Gretter et al 2019).

Although forced, labor, and lifestyle modes of mobility certainly all aim at a better life, individuals pursuing lifestyle mobility are usually more affluent (Donoso and Sarmiento 2021: 1916). Their relative affluence is double-edged and may lead either to revitalization (Löffler et al 2016; Gretter et al 2017; Beismann et al 2022) or gentrification of the Alpine cultural landscape (Perlik 2011; Boscoboinik 2018; Cretton 2018). While gentrification associated with consumption-oriented lifestyle mobilities seems to prevail in the Western Alps, I did not identify similar tendencies in the thinly populated, remote Eastern Alps, for 2 reasons: First, the community areas and numbers of newcomers are

manageable for local authorities. Such small-scale structures render integration efforts more visible to locals (Gretter 2018) and facilitate direct involvement in community projects (Matarrita-Cascante 2017). Second, particularly LM tend to stay over the long term, and this constitutes a determinant for the intensity of local impacts (Kordel 2017: 10).

In conclusion, participants’ interaction with the local cultural landscape is intrinsically motivated and not (yet) facilitated by welcoming policies or legislation. As Dax (2001) put it, the preservation of the cultural landscape by the local population is an essential contribution to the development of mountain regions. However, the exogenous potential of lifestyle mobility inherent in the deliberate maintenance of the cultural landscape as well as ties to the lowlands and its metropolitan regions (cf Dax 2020; Barbera and De Rossi 2021; Bona et al 2021; Membretti, Dax, and Machold 2022) cannot be ignored by policymakers and demographic research. Ultimately, local development related to newcomers depends less on the quantity of inputs than on the benefit for local society and the environment (Beismann et al 2022: 81 f). Thus, impacts on the cultural landscape hinge on whether lifestyle mobilities are studied in tourism agglomerations in the valley bottom or in remote communities at the valley end (cf Steinicke et al 2012), as well as on the lens applied for analysis.

To better address the dichotomy along the Alpine arch, there is need for a cross-disciplinary database that tracks rural newcomers and their engagement with the cultural landscape. SIMRA (2022), a web atlas for locating and understanding social innovation in marginalized rural areas, or HIGHLANDS.3 (2020), its equivalent for mountain regions, may provide pertinent templates.

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## DATA ACCESS

Data and documentation material is long-term archived and accessible online at <https://doi.org/10.11587/MWSGOS> (lifestyle movers) and <https://doi.org/10.11587/LCWVFD> (lifestyle farmers).

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