

CHAPTER 27

FORALPS: BUILDING AN ALPINE MIGRATION NETWORK OF RESEARCHER AND PRACTITIONERS TO PROMOTE INTEGRATION

ALESSANDRO GREYTER

In response to the important yet not adequately addressed issue of immigration to the Alps we are establishing the trans-disciplinary and international network ForAlps (Foreign Immigration in the Alps). The group was conceived at an initial meeting of about fifty interested researchers, public administrations, and representatives of non-profit organizations at Bicocca University, Milan, in November 2015. They participated in a seminar focusing on the demographic, economic, cultural, and social factors affecting foreigners and immigrants living in the most remote parts of Italy's mountain areas and the provision for these territories within national strategies. An open discussion at the end of the meeting, which aimed at better analyzing the phenomenon and designing a working agenda, paved the way for the ForAlps network. From its very inception, ForAlps was perceived as “a network on the move” to cut across diverse Alpine territories and disciplines including academia, non-profit organizations experimenting with innovative integration paths, and local administrations.

ForAlps tries to unify movements of solidary action under the aspects of reducing the reasons of involuntary migration and an amelioration of the conditions of those who migrate. In this sense annual meetings play an important role. With the choice for the locations the network reflects the emergence of new practices of citizenship, new forms of territorial governance, grassroots movements or solidary political action. The premises of Salecina Foundation at the Maloja pass in the municipality of Bregaglia (Grisons, Switzerland) was chosen as the network's first public meeting in 2016 as the Foundation tries since the 1970s to unify sustainable tourism, self-governance and political debate, and more and more, also to

contribute for the regional development of a sparsely populated Alpine valley. This latter aspect was particularly important, as Salecina is indeed at the crossroads of different Alpine experiences in the cultural, historical, social and political field. The network's first official seminar was attended by twenty participants from a variety of backgrounds with different experiences and trajectories: young students, researchers, and practitioners gathered under the same roof as eminent professors and retirees now operating in the non-profit sector alongside professionals who provide material and moral support to asylum seekers and refugees on a daily basis, creating a welcoming culture through art. The local community was also invited during the event's public meeting and their active participation was encouraged to help build exchange experiences with migrants from different territories. Participants shared some common views about forced migration in the Alps, especially the wish to find equitable and mutually satisfying hosting practices for asylum seekers and municipalities in mountain areas. The event's rich mix of influences contributed towards building a balanced, forward-looking network.

The group's next meeting, which focused on an Italian publication about immigration in the Alps, was held in Bolzano/Bozen in November 2017. As in Salecina, particular attention was paid at this event to the various everyday experiences that make asylum seekers, refugees, and foreign migrant support a concrete process.

In May 2018, a second seminar event was held in Pettinengo, a municipality near Biella in the Piedmont Alps renowned for its local, non-profit organization, Pacefuturo Onlus, which since 2004 welcomes asylum seekers and refugees turning migrant support practices into integrating them as active citizens. On this occasion, the seminar entitled *Alpine Refugees: From local reception to community resilience* brought thirty experts who had already participated at Salecina together with asylum seekers, refugees, and members of the local Pettinengo community. This was an opportunity to acknowledge in practice how the daily co-habitation and support initiatives works.

More recent events include the COST (European Cooperation in Science & Technology) international academic workshop, *Tackling the Migration and Refugee Challenge*, held on November 22 and 23, 2018, in Trento, Italy, which was organized by the EMES International Research Network in cooperation with Euricse and the University of Trento's department of sociology and social research. This event involved around fifty researchers and practitioners from sixteen countries. A special session of the workshop was dedicated to migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers living in mountain and rural localities with a view to explore the determinants of inclusion

versus exclusion processes. As a follow-up to this academic activity, a national stakeholder meeting was held the next day which gathered around 300 researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the same city to focus on key policy topics, including migration in remote areas.

Alpine Refugees: Immigration at the Core of Europe is the first ForAlps network's published outcome. The book provides analyses and critical insights to help its readers better understand the complex issues connected with global mobilities. Various perspectives that drive migration are presented from humanitarian viewpoints to those that include economic, religious, political, and climatic factors. Diverse reception systems that have been implemented in specific Alpine territories to welcome newcomers are also thoroughly analyzed throughout its pages; indeed, the system of hospitality, the degree of freedom, and the boundaries of constrictions that asylum seekers and refugees find in alpine countries significantly differ from territory to territory. Despite the small spatial scale, notable variations emerge especially in relation to the legal frameworks, backgrounds, and modalities of each country's management of the current migration challenge. Reception and integration paths that have been trialled by state agencies, local municipalities, and local non-profit organizations in Austria, Switzerland and Italy are also briefly described.

The ForAlps network is open for all working practically or theoretically on the field of migration. It calls for the design, maintenance and support of pathways, actions, and projects that can generate social and territorial innovation with the active engagement of host communities. The importance of defining an agenda that proposes research and political action in relation to migration flows emerges as a result. Key discussion topics include the economic and spatial development, and modification of the constituent elements of institutions and, importantly, local power structures.

The urgency of this agenda has risen dramatically recently. Europe is part of the global North. In this position it acts in a global competition to other parts of the world and - as those - it reproduces and fuels the mechanisms of voluntary and involuntary migrations. It produces an increasing social and territorial cleavage between local residents, between migrants and between both. A movement in the sense of more solidary societies is necessary.

In order to be update about the continuous activities of ForAlps, please visit its Website: <https://www.foralps.eu/home/>