

# Farewell to the peasant republic: marginal rural communities and European industrialisation, 1815–1990<sup>\*</sup>

by Fernando Collantes

## *Abstract*

This paper provides a comparative analysis of economic evolution in the upland communities of Switzerland, Scotland, France, Italy and Spain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the start of European industrialisation, these communities were mainly composed of peasant families which combined the income and resources from their small farms with the earnings from off-farm activities. Industrialisation brought into play three mechanisms which substantially transformed these economies: farm specialisation, the emergence of employment opportunities in industry and services, and rural-urban migration. The timing of the impact of these mechanisms is shown to have varied from region to region.

Economic and social historians have always been interested in the least Panglossian facets of industrialisation. English workers' living standards during the Industrial Revolution have probably been the most frequently visited (and revisited) of these topics but certainly not the only one. In his economic history of modern Britain, Eric Hobsbawm not only focused on some of the social costs of economic change but also devoted a chapter to what he called 'the other Britain'. A straightforward review of the difficulties encountered by the Scottish Highlands contrasts with the general story of Britain's long-run economic success. Adam Smith had already pointed out that even intensely prosperous countries could witness the decay of certain economic branches or geographical spaces. And indeed, according to Sidney Pollard, by the First World

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MAP 1. Selected upland regions in Switzerland, Scotland, France, Italy and Spain

Key: 1: Swiss Alps; 2: Scottish Highlands; 3: French Alps; 4: Massif Central; 5: French Pyrenees; 6: Vosges; 7: French Jura; 8: Italian Alps; 9: Apennines; 10: Cordillera Cantábrica; 11: Spanish Pyrenees; 12: Spanish inland ranges; 13: Cordillera Bética

War several marginal regions in the most industrialised European countries were still waiting to be incorporated into the 'peaceful conquest'. Not only there was another Britain – there was indeed another Europe.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and empire: an economic history of Britain since 1750* (1968), ch. 15; A. Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* (1776), II, ch. 3; S. Pollard, *Peaceful conquest: the industrialization of Europe, 1760–1970* (1981), p. 246.

This article provides a comparative exploration of the economic evolution of marginal Europe during industrialisation. The focus is on the case of upland communities in Switzerland, Scotland, France, Italy and Spain during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Map 1). Section I identifies this topic as one of the relatively blank spaces waiting to be filled in a historiography whose recent progress has concentrated on the early modern period. Section II gives an economic overview of marginal Europe at the start of industrialisation and argues for a qualified depiction in terms of peasant economies. The rest of the paper is about the transformations linked to industrialisation and the subsequent demise of peasant economies as such. Section III provides a comparative chronology of rural change and section IV offers a synthesis of the economic mechanisms driving change. Those mechanisms related to economic and demographic links between mountains and their regional and national environments are particularly highlighted. Section V concludes and makes some suggestions for further research.

## I

Literature about marginal Europe is abundant. In the first place we can draw on a large number of studies that focus on a single district or region and provide detailed accounts of its economic and social structure and evolution over time. The Highlands in Scotland, the Alps in any one of several countries, the Massif Central in France, the Apennines in Italy, the several mountainous regions in Spain, all have their own carefully conducted local studies. Perhaps because these local studies are abundant, the literature on marginal Europe is composed of a remarkable number of studies covering long time periods and vast spaces. This tradition starts from Fernand Braudel's seminal book on the Mediterranean world and extends up to recent innovative research such as the volume on the history of the Alps by Jon Mathieu.<sup>2</sup>

Braudel's account of peasant mountain economies in early modern Europe focused more on their similarities than on their differences. His account, which is discussed in the following section, became the basis for the established interpretation in several academic disciplines. Subsequently, some of the fundamentals of the Braudelian model were challenged by new research carried out in the 1980s by Pier Paolo Viazzo, whose revisionist work covered the whole of the Alpine range. Meanwhile, the evolution of historiography on the Mediterranean mountains was fostered by the global vision provided by John McNeill, who also found significant commonalities between his case studies in Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey and Morocco. Research on marginal Europe was further deepened both in thematic and analytical terms during the 1990s by the publication of important books by Pollard and Mathieu. By showing instances of marginal economies temporarily moving to the forefront of European economic change and mountain regions capable of population growth and agricultural intensification, the more static and pessimistic views of marginal Europe were definitively left behind.<sup>3</sup>

However, the historiography on marginal areas has developed in quite an uneven way. The

<sup>2</sup> F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949); J. Mathieu, *Storia delle Alpi 1500–1900. Ambiente, sviluppo e società* (Bellinzona, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> P. P. Viazzo, *Upland communities: environment,*

*population and social structure in the Alps since the sixteenth century* (1989); J. R. McNeill, *The mountains of the Mediterranean world: an environmental history* (1992); S. Pollard, *Marginal Europe: the contribution of marginal lands since the Middle Ages* (1997).

last couple of decades have witnessed a remarkable intensification of academic debate, but concentrated on the early modern period to a much greater extent than the industrial era. Braudel's analysis never went beyond the pre-industrial period and the technological and institutional features associated with it. Mathieu traces interesting continuities between the early modern period and the first stage of industrialisation, but the substantial changes brought about by the twentieth century (and, more generally, by industrialisation as a long-run process) fall outside his scope. Pollard covers a very long period from the Middle Ages to the first stage of English industrialisation, but he does not consider developments in subsequent stages or the issue of what happened to marginal areas in other European countries as a result of industrialisation. Viazzo's and McNeill's accounts of rural transformation in the Alps and the Mediterranean mountains during the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century are peripheral to their main research contributions. Although Collins' book on the economic history of upland Britain to 1950 remains a distinguished exception, it seems that the great changes undergone by the economy of marginal Europe during industrialisation have not generally interested historians.<sup>4</sup>

Such a lack of balance in the time focus persists side by side with spatial disequilibria. More specifically, few comparisons have been made between marginal areas facing very different environmental constraints. Viazzo, McNeill and Mathieu have made comparisons within the Alps and within the Mediterranean mountains that enabled them to detect thought-provoking interregional and international contrasts. But comparison between the Alps and the Mediterranean uplands has not been so common. In fact, Pollard excluded the whole of the Mediterranean area from his analysis arguing 'reasons of relative homogeneity'.<sup>5</sup> But what happens if we abandon this assumption? The incorporation of additional environmental variety and an extra set of national and regional patterns of industrialisation promises to open explanatory paths that would otherwise remain hidden.

## II

The historiographical revision undertaken over the last two decades has affected the way in which we look at economies in marginal Europe in the late pre-industrial period and the early years of industrialisation. Braudel described mountain societies as 'peasant republics' in which relatively homogeneous peasant family units struggled to make the best out of a seriously disadvantaged environment. Braudel underlined at least two features of this economic life: the low degree of market involvement by peasants, and the way in which migration was a crucial safety valve when population grew excessively in relation to a rigidly constrained stock of natural resources. Mountains became then 'fabriques d'hommes' helping populate the lowlands.<sup>6</sup>

This picture has been seriously challenged by rural historians in the last twenty years.<sup>7</sup> Now, for instance, we know that in spite of geographical obstacles (or maybe just because of them),

<sup>4</sup> E. J. T. Collins, *The economy of upland Britain, 1750–1950: an illustrated review* (1978).

<sup>5</sup> Pollard, *Marginal Europe*, p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> Braudel, *Méditerranée*, ch. 1 (i).

<sup>7</sup> Some anthropologists called in question the image

of a closed system even earlier; see an example in J. W. Cole and E. R. Wolf, *The hidden frontier. Ecology and ethnicity in an Alpine valley* (Berkeley, 1973, 1999), pp. 20–3.

the economic reproduction of peasant families depended on their performance in a network of markets for commodities, services and inputs that connected them to the lowlands. Some basic examples are the emergence of peasants as suppliers of livestock and livestock products, of transport and petty trade services, and of labour to be used seasonally in the lowlands. Demand-side involvement could also affect crucial products such as grain.<sup>8</sup> We also now know that agrarian dynamics in the uplands were not necessarily driven by the Malthusian narrative evoked by Braudel. Instead, a Boserupian path of agrarian intensification following population growth has been found for the early modern Alps.<sup>9</sup>

This change in historiographical perceptions about the degree of economic openness in peasant communities and their potential for agrarian growth has unavoidably affected the way in which migration is seen. Migration does not now seem to be a simple precautionary check to Malthusian crises but one of the set of elements upon which the family strategy of economic reproduction was built. Braudelian causality has been inverted to suggest that temporary migrations were not a consequence of overpopulation, but rather one of its economic supports. Temporary migration was in fact a strategy of accumulation for certain social groups. Indeed, to talk of social groups raises the question of what ever happened to the concept of relative homogeneity in peasant societies. The historiographical emergence of markets and Boserupian paths inevitably led to a critique of Braudel's egalitarian picture. In this new, more dynamic scenario, it was more plausible to find social and economic differentiation within the peasantry. Furthermore, research on market involvement by peasants found them belonging to commodity chains dominated by other social groups, some of which were internal to upland communities.<sup>10</sup>

However, this does not mean that the peasant family or the peasant (local) economy are no longer useful concepts, especially when trying to account for changes in the long run. In contrast to the new kind of economy that industrialisation would bring about, upland communities featured a high proportion of unpaid family labour in the total labour supply. In addition, and in contrast to the highly specialised farmers to be found in mature industrial economies, the economic reproduction of upland peasants depended on the success of complex, adaptive strategies of multi-activity. These two features are considered in turn.

<sup>8</sup> D. Albera and P. Corti, 'Movimenti migratori nell'arco e nella montagna mediterranea: questioni e prospettive per un'analisi comparata', in D. Albera and P. Corti (eds.), *La montagna mediterranea: una fabbrica d'uomini? Mobilità e migrazioni in una prospettiva comparata (secoli XV-XX)* (Cuneo, 2000), pp. 7–27; R. Domínguez, 'De reserva demográfica a reserva etnográfica: el declive de las economías de montaña en el área cantábrica', in J. L. Acín and V. Pinilla (eds), *Pueblos abandonados. ¿Un mundo perdido?* (Zaragoza, 1995), pp. 35–54; L. Fontaine, *Histoire du colportage en Europe (XV<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris, 1993); M. Gray, 'The Highland potato famine of the 1840s', *EcHR* 7 (1955), pp. 357–68; L. Lorenzetti, *Économie et migrations au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: les stratégies de la reproduction familiale au Tessin* (Bern, 1999), pp. 15–37;

McNeill, *Mountains*, pp. 8, 109–12; Pollard, *Marginal Europe*, pp. 128–41; H. Rosenberg, *A negotiated world: three centuries of change in a French Alpine community* (Toronto, 1988), ch. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Mathieu, *Storia*, pp. 29–141.

<sup>10</sup> L. Fontaine, 'Données implicites dans la construction des modèles migratoires alpins à l'époque moderne', *Histoire des Alpes* 3 (1998), p. 30; id., 'Les sociétés alpines sont-elles des républiques de petits propriétaires?', in Association des Historiens Modernistes des Universités, *La montagne à l'époque moderne* (Paris, 1998), pp. 47–62; D. J. Siddle, 'Migration as a strategy of accumulation: social and economic change in eighteenth-century Savoy', *EcHR* 50 (1997), pp. 1–20; Viazzo, *Upland communities*, pp. 143–52.

The high share of unpaid family labour was a direct consequence of the prevalence of small family farms, the relative ease with which rural families could secure land, and the relatively small numbers of landless workers. Braudel probably exaggerated the degree of equality in these communities, but we should concede that economic and social inequality tended to be less acute than in the surrounding lowlands. In the mid-nineteenth century, there were 95 land owners out of 100 families in the Swiss Alps (where the national average was falling below 80).<sup>11</sup> Similar calculations have provided similar results for upland France, and small peasants certainly feature prominently in studies of marginal areas in France, northern Italy and Scotland.<sup>12</sup> In Spain, there were 52 owners out of every 100 families in the mountains but only 39 in the lowlands. If we add the significant number of families that gained access to a small farm by means of tenancy, only about 20 per cent of upland families had no access to land. In much of the Cordillera Cantábrica (in the north of the country) this percentage was even lower and nearly three out of every four peasant families owned cattle, which was the main asset in these communities as they increasingly specialised in livestock raising.<sup>13</sup> Inequality was more significant in the Cordillera Bética, in southern Spain, but even there, more than half of the families had access to land (and many of them did so in a direct way). This last figure is low if compared to other parts of marginal Europe but it stands out in a macro-region where latifundia societies prevailed.<sup>14</sup> The same perception emerges if we compare peasant communities in the southern Apennines and the far more polarized rural societies in lowland southern Italy.<sup>15</sup> Similar contrasts in agrarian structure have also been detected for the uplands and lowlands in Britain.<sup>16</sup>

These small farms were massively reliant on (unpaid) family labour. The share of family labour on Swiss Alpine farms was 83 per cent in 1888. The data for the French and the Italian Alps c.1900 shows a quantitatively similar predominance of family labour over wage labour.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Département Fédéral de l'Intérieur, *Tableaux de la population de la Suisse dressés d'après les résultats du dernier recensement* (Bern, 1851). Swiss Alps here include the following cantons: Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Nidwalden, Glarus, Appenzell (A. Rh. and I. Rh.), Graubünden, Ticino, and Valais.

<sup>12</sup> G. Désert, 'Bilan économique à la veille de la Première Guerre mondiale', in E. Juillard (ed.), *Histoire de la France rurale*, III, *Apogée et crise de la civilisation paysanne de 1789 à 1914* (Paris, 1976, 1992), p. 430; H. Clout, *The Massif Central* (1973), pp. 13–7; Cole and Wolf, *Hidden frontier*; G. Coppola, 'La montagna alpina. Vocazioni originarie e trasformazioni funzionali', in P. Bevilacqua (ed.), *Storia dell'agricoltura italiana in età contemporanea*, I, *Spazi e paesaggi* (Venice, 1989), pp. 495–530; A. Fel, *Les hautes terres du Massif Central. Tradition paysanne et économie agricole* (Paris, 1962); Mathieu, *Storia*, pp. 161–86; A. Howkins, 'Peasants, servants and labourers: the marginal workforce in British agriculture, c.1870–1914', *AgHR* 42 (1994), pp. 49–62.

<sup>13</sup> R. Domínguez, *El campesino adaptativo. Campesinos y mercado en el norte de España, 1750–1880* (Santander,

1996), gives a detailed analysis of the peasant economy in this region.

<sup>14</sup> Junta General de Estadística, *Censo de población de España, según el recuento verificado en 25 de diciembre de 1860* (Madrid, 1863); F. Collantes, *El declive demográfico de la montaña española (1850–2000). ¿Un drama rural?* (Madrid, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> F. Bettoni and A. Grohmann, 'La montagna appenninica. Paesaggi ed economie', in P. Bevilacqua (ed.), *Agricoltura italiana*, pp. 585–641; McNeill, *Mountains*, pp. 106–7; P. Tino, 'La montagna meridionale. Boschi, uomini, economie tra Otto e Novecento', in Bevilacqua (ed.), *Agricoltura italiana*, pp. 677–754.

<sup>16</sup> A. Howkins, *The death of rural England. A social history of the countryside since 1900* (2003), pp. 7, 166–73; L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Family farms and capitalist farms in mid nineteenth-century England', *AgHR* 53 (2005), pp. 158–91. Pollard, *Marginal Europe*, pp. 95–108, extends the argument to upland areas in Europe as a whole.

<sup>17</sup> Eidgenössisches Statistisches Amt, *Eidgenössische volkszählung, 1970* (Bern, 1971–4); Mathieu, *Storia*, p. 265.

According to the Swiss data, it does not seem that this pattern changed during the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Quantitative evidence about labour organisation in Mediterranean mountain farming is scarcer. In the mid-nineteenth century, the proportion of agricultural labourers in the labour force did not exceed 20 per cent in the Apennines.<sup>19</sup> A similar figure can be estimated for the Spanish uplands around 1960, a time when (as we shall see in the following section) they remained basically peasant communities. Data for the early 1980s show degrees of labour commodification that are very similar to those obtained for the Swiss Alps. The qualitative information does not suggest that the situation was substantially different at earlier dates.<sup>20</sup>

However, whilst family farms predominated in marginal Europe, such farms were not big enough to sustain a whole family. In 1900 the vast majority of Alpine farms consisted of less than five hectares. In extreme cases, such as those of the Alpes Maritimes in France or the provinces of Trento and Belluno in Italy, about one half of the farms were smallholdings of under one hectare.<sup>21</sup> According to data for the Spanish uplands in 1962, more than 60 per cent of farms were under five hectares (including both arable and non-arable land), and it has been estimated that the average peasant family in the late nineteenth century had no more than four livestock units and access to four hectares of arable land.<sup>22</sup> Similar evidence can be found for other Mediterranean upland communities.<sup>23</sup> Such a small farm size was plausibly aggravated by the lower yields that have already been documented in international comparisons of northern and southern European agricultures, the latter being more constrained by environmental factors.<sup>24</sup>

As a consequence, it is not surprising to find peasant families engaged in multi-activity strategies that allowed them to complement the income and non-income resources obtained from their small farms. In the way of Richard Wall's 'adaptive family economy', several resources were combined from both market and non-market sources by family members whose off-farm work was allocated according to criteria such as gender, age and marital status.<sup>25</sup> This implied the combination of agrarian activities with others in manufacturing, trade, domestic service and so on. This also implied that income from commodity, service and factor markets combined with farm resources for self-consumption. By the mid-nineteenth century, off-farm sources of income have been estimated to represent more than half of peasant earnings in some villages in the Scottish Highlands.<sup>26</sup> Slightly lower figures for the Italian Alps during the inter-war period suggest that multi-activity patterns continued after the onset of industrialisation.<sup>27</sup> As a matter of fact, the recent stress on complex family strategies is not as

<sup>18</sup> The share of family labour in Swiss Alpine farms even rose slightly to 85–90 per cent during the twentieth century; Eidgenössisches Statistisches Amt, *Eidgenössische Bundesamt für Statistik, Eidgenössische volkszählung, 1980* (Bern, 1981–5).

<sup>19</sup> Bettoni and Grohman, 'Montagna appenninica', pp. 619–20.

<sup>20</sup> Collantes, *Declive*, pp. 119–22.

<sup>21</sup> Mathieu, *Storia*, p. 264.

<sup>22</sup> Collantes, *Declive*, pp. 118, 169.

<sup>23</sup> P. Vitte, 'La montagne italienne', *Annales de Géographie* 563 (1992), p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> P. K. O'Brien and L. Prados de la Escosura,

'Agricultural productivity and European industrialization, 1890–1980', *ECHR* 45 (1992), pp. 514–36.

<sup>25</sup> R. Wall, 'Work, welfare, and the family: an illustration of the adaptive family economy', in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. Wrightson (eds), *The world we have gained: histories of population and social structure* (1986), pp. 251–94.

<sup>26</sup> T. M. Devine, 'Temporary migration and the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth century', *ECHR* 32 (1979), p. 348.

<sup>27</sup> Perini, 'I fattori economici e sociali della montagna alpina', *Rivista di Economia Agraria* 13 (1958), p. 332.

path-breaking as might seem, Adam Smith having noticed significant multi-activity in marginal European areas.<sup>28</sup>

Smith himself provides a theoretical insight that may be useful for the analysis of upland peasant communities during the era of industrialisation. He argued that multi-activity was characteristic of poor countries in which the extent of markets was small and therefore insufficient incentives existed for deeper (functional and spatial) divisions of labour.<sup>29</sup> Industrialisation greatly expanded, created and integrated markets for many commodities and services, the result of which was a multiplication of incentives for economic specialisation. By means of several different mechanisms (which are considered in section IV), the upland economy then became something very different from the peasant economy that witnessed the beginnings of industrialisation. The next section deals with the chronology of such transformation.

### III

Historians know only too well the limitations of census data concerning occupational structure. One of the most important of these shortcomings has to do with the problems raised by attempting to take the straightforward distribution of population in primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors back in time. This kind of distribution is fully operational only when specialisation has advanced enough to constrain the numbers of those engaged in multi-activity strategies. Until such a threshold is crossed, the number of agriculturalists recorded in the census overestimates to a greater or lesser extent labour input in agriculture, which may lead to an underestimation of labour productivity and other important indicators.<sup>30</sup>

Marginal Europe, with adaptive family economies as basic cells, was certainly affected by this sort of problem at the beginning of industrialisation. Viazzo, for instance, has suggested for the Alps that the great decline in the share of agrarian employment shown by census data for the twentieth century exaggerates the real magnitude of occupational change because many of those originally classified as engaged in agriculture allocated significant fractions of their work time to non-agrarian activities. The observation could fit the Mediterranean uplands equally well once we realise how crucial multi-activity was to their economic reproduction.<sup>31</sup>

The argument here, however, is that these shortcomings in census data may become virtues when different questions are posed. In the case of marginal Europe, the percentage of agriculturalists according to censuses may be misleading when trying to assess the share of agriculture in the local economy, but can provide an quantitative estimate of the proportion of peasants (and their adaptive, complex strategies) in the community. Decreases in the share of census-type agriculturalists thus offer a chronological overview of rural transformation that

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Wealth of nations*, I, ch. 3; Clout, *Massif Central*, pp.15–6; Cole and Wolf, *Hidden frontier*, pp.160–8; Lorenzetti, *Économie*, pp.1–9; McNeill, *Mountains*, pp.103–5. Causality worked in the other way as well – availability of off-farm earnings could lead to an even greater fragmentation of holdings; Cole and Wolf, *Hidden frontier*, p.182.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *Wealth of nations*, I, chs. 1–3.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance E.A. Wrigley, 'Country and town: the primary, secondary, and tertiary peopling of England in the early modern period', in P. Slack (ed.), *The peopling of Britain* (2001), pp. 217–42.

<sup>31</sup> Viazzo, *Upland communities*, pp.100–4.



goes beyond the agrarian and non-agrarian dichotomy. Of course, such an interpretation of census data could never do for regions in which land was very unevenly distributed and day-labourers were a substantial part of the population, but it appears to be legitimate for the type of economy described in the previous section. It should be kept in mind, however, that these data are blind to the important changes which the average census-type agriculturalist experienced during the period. Such changes include the gradual transformation of peasants into farmers, as they gained access to new markets for many of their inputs and became highly specialised.<sup>32</sup> This issue is dealt with in the following section about the mechanisms leading to the demise of peasant economies.

Tables 1 to 4 use census data to present the long-run evolution of the percentage of 'agriculturalists' for several regions in marginal Europe. The earliest transformation took place in the Swiss Alps and the Scottish Highlands (Table 1). In the Swiss Alps, by 1870 the basic social structure remained peasant, but the transformation was already underway in small industrial cantons such as Glarus or Appenzell (where the share of agricultural employment was as low as 17 per cent). By the First World War, peasants already formed less than one half of the total active population, the canton of Valais remaining as the only exception. The Highlands in Scotland were going through a similar structural change, Inverness being usually one step ahead of counties such as Sutherland. After an inter-war period of slow but persistent change, by 1950, rural society in the Swiss Alps or the Scottish Highlands presented a very different morphology from the one prevailing before industrialisation began. The process was completed in the following two or three decades.

Available data for marginal France are less clear cut, perhaps because the administrative map less readily divides upland from lowland. The long-run view given by Table 2 shows that in the same way as the Swiss Alps or the Scottish Highlands, the peasant economy was eventually replaced by a more specialised economy in which industry and services prevailed. By the early 1980s the process was finished in the Alps, the Vosges and the Pyrenees, but was still under way in other uplands such as the Massif Central and the Jura mountains. However, complementary figures (as well as qualitative evidence) suggest that rural transformation took place in marginal France later and more slowly than in the Swiss Alps or Scottish Highlands. Marginal France retained its peasant character during the nineteenth century and trends towards another type of rural economy emerged only in a slow and spatially concentrated way. Alpine departments, for instance, had hardly reduced the share of agriculturalists below 60 per cent by 1900.<sup>33</sup>

In any case, Alpine transformation continued during the twentieth century. By the end of the Second World War, not even in the small villages of the Isère department were peasants more than 50 per cent of the active population.<sup>34</sup> By 1964 peasant proportion had fallen below 20 per cent in the northern Alps.<sup>35</sup> Even in the southern Alps (where transformation had been taking place more slowly) peasants accounted for less than 50 per cent by the 1950s.<sup>36</sup> Quantitative

<sup>32</sup> J. de Vries, 'Peasantry', in J. Mokyr (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History* (New York, 2003), pp. 173–7, gives a general overview of this issue.

<sup>33</sup> Mathieu, *Storia*, p. 263.

<sup>34</sup> M. Gervais, M. Jollivet and Y. Tavernier, *Histoire de la France rurale*, IV, *La fin de la France paysanne depuis*

*1914* (Paris, 1977, 1992), p. 340.

<sup>35</sup> L. Reboud, 'La région franco-italienne des Alpes du nord', *Économies et sociétés* 5 (1971), p. 684.

<sup>36</sup> R. Blanchard, *Les Alpes occidentales* (7 vols, Grenoble, 1938–56), VII, p. 253.

TABLE 1. Percentage share of agriculture in employment in the Swiss Alps and the Scottish Highlands

	1888	1930	1950	1970	1990
Swiss Alps <sup>a</sup>	49	34	27	12	5
Scottish Highlands <sup>b</sup>	51	28	22	12	7

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Cantons: Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Nidwalden, Glarus, Appenzell (A.Rh. and I.Rh.), Graubünden, Ticino, and Valais;

<sup>b</sup> Counties: Caithness, Inverness (including the current districts of Skye-Lochalsh, Lochaber, and Badenoch-Strathspey), Nairn, Ross-Cromarty, Sutherland; the dates are 1881, 1931, 1951, 1971 and 1991.

Sources: Eidgenössisches Statistisches Amt, *Eidgenössische Bundesamt für Statistik, Eidgenössische volkszählung, 1990* (Bern, 1995); *Ninth decennial census of the population of Scotland taken 4 April 1881, with report* (1883); *Census of Scotland, 1931* (1932); General Registry Office, *Census 1951. Scotland* (1951–6); id. *Census 1971. Scotland* (1971–5); General Register Office for Scotland, *1991 Census. Report for Scotland* (1993).

TABLE 2. Percentage share of agriculture in employment in upland France

	1866	1982
Alps	75–80	5–10
Massif Central	65–75	30–40
Pyrenees	70–75	5–10
Vosges	70	5–10
Jura	66	15–25

Sources: F.Furet and J.Ozouf, *Lire et écrire. L'alphabétisation des français de Calvin à Jules Ferry* (Paris, 1977), p.178; P.Estienne, 'Évolution de la population des montagnes françaises au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Revue de Géographie Alpine* 77 (1989), pp.399–400; J.M.Muller, 'L'industrie dans le Massif vosgien', *Revue de Géographie Alpine* 83 (1995), p.161; P.Perrier-Cornet, 'Le massif Jurassien. Les paradoxes de la croissance en montagne: éleveurs et marchands solidaires dans un système de rente', *Cahiers d'économie et sociologie rurales* 2 (1986), pp.61–121.

information provided by local studies shows that many Alpine villages remained overwhelmingly 'peasant' as late as 1950 or even 1960, but these villages were no longer representative of the region as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

Other marginal areas in France, particularly the Massif Central, witnessed an even slower transformation.<sup>38</sup> Similar regional contrasts can also be found in the case of Italy (Table 3). Economic change in the Italian Alps was similar in some respects to that on the French side. Change was slow when compared to the Swiss pattern but clearly under way before the Second World War. By 1900, only the provinces of Imperia and Belluno showed some signs of change, while others like the Aosta Valley or Sondrio retained a peasant share of around 80 per cent.<sup>39</sup> However, transformation became more general during the inter-war period and by 1950 the

<sup>37</sup> See that kind of village-level data in B.Barbier, C.Durbiano and C.Vidal, 'Le tourisme dans une haute vallée de montagne: les transformations de Vars', *Méditerranée* 26 (1976), p.13, and J.Richez, 'Renovation rurale et tourisme. L'exemple de Ceillac en Queyras', *Méditerranée* 9 (1972), p.57.

<sup>38</sup> P.E.Ogden, 'Analyse multivariée et structure régionale: transformations socio-économiques récentes dans le Massif Central de l'Est', *Méditerranée* 33 (1978), p.47.

<sup>39</sup> Mathieu, *Storia*, p.263.

TABLE 3. Percentage share of agriculture in employment in upland Italy

	c. 1870	1936	1951	1971	1991
Alps	75	60	39	15	5
Apennines	77	75	67	36	15 <sup>a</sup>

Note: <sup>a</sup> Interpolated from Nordic Centre for Spatial Development, *Mountain areas in Europe: analysis of mountain areas in EU member states, acceding and other countries* (2004), p. 91.

Sources: J. Mathieu, *Storia*, p. 263; E. Bettoni and A. Grohmann, 'Montagna appenninica', pp. 619–20; U. Giusti, 'Le dépeuplement des régions montagneuses en Italie', *Bulletin Mensuel du Renseignements Économiques et Sociaux* 34 (1943), pp. 302–3; M. Mazzoleni and G. G. Negri, 'La situación de la montaña en Italia', *Ciudad y Territorio* 1 (1981), pp. 26–7; U. Tappeiner *et al.*, 'Structural Atlas'.

TABLE 4. Percentage share of agriculture in employment in upland Spain

	1887	1960	1981	1991
Cordillera Cantábrica	89	83	42	29
Pyrenees	77	68	21	14
Inland ranges	83	85	41	27
Cordillera Bética	83	84	55	39
Upland Spain (total)	85	78	41	28

Source: Collantes, *Declive*, p. 88.

Italian Alps could not be depicted as a peasant society – at least if the peasant society prevailing in 1850 is taken as a reference. The decline of peasants and mountain farming became definitive during the post-war boom in Italian economic growth. By 1981, those in agricultural occupations constituted no more than four per cent of the economically active population in Alpine Lombardy.<sup>40</sup> The rest of the Italian Alps was moving in the same direction, even if small areas like the Gorizian uplands (with farmers accounting for nearly one third of the active population in 1991) seem to have done so in a slow way.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, the trajectory followed by the Apennines more closely resembles that of the Massif Central in France. By the end of the Second World War, the Apennine region remained basically peasant except for some non-representative exceptions. Local data for the Apennine districts in Tuscany, Emilia, Rieti and the Aniene valley give figures from 60 to 75 per cent of peasants that fit well with the general figure given in Table 3.<sup>42</sup> The great rural transformation

<sup>40</sup> G. G. Negri, 'Les montagnes de Lombardie', *Revue de Géographie Alpine* 81 (1993), p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> U. Tappeiner, G. Tappeiner, A. Hilbert and E. Mattanovich, 'Structural Atlas of the Alps', CD in *The EU agricultural policy and the environment. Evaluation of the Alpine region* (Berlin, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> E. di Cocco, 'Equilibri territoriali e settoriali nella storia recente dell'Appennino tosco-emiliano', *Rivista di Politica Agraria* 14 (1967), p. 7; P. L. Zatta, 'La

cooperazione nella zona Montana e pedemontana – piccola proprietà contadina con particolare riferimento alla provincia di Rieti', *Rivista Italiana di Economia, Demografia e Statistica* 10 (1956), p. 593; B. Christenson, 'Aspetti della economia agricola in relazione allo spopolamento dell'alta valle dell'Aniene', *Rivista Italiana di Economia, Demografia e Statistica* 9 (1955), p. 457; Merlo, 'Agricoltura e integrazione economiche nella montagna italiana', *Rivista di Politica Agraria* 21 (1974), p. 51.

took place in the second half of the twentieth century, and it happened very quickly when compared to the protracted Alpine experience.

The Apennines seem to belong to a Mediterranean pattern of rural transformation shared with the Spanish uplands (Table 4). In Spain, upland communities retained their peasant character during the early and intermediate stages of the country's industrialisation, from around 1850 to 1950. Between 1950 and 1975, the rate of growth of the Spanish economy increased from an annual 0.7 per cent to 5.4 per cent and it was only then that peasant communities began to be substantially transformed into something else.<sup>43</sup> The share of agriculture in rural employment fell below 50 per cent as late as in the 1970s (maybe a little earlier for the Pyrenees). In the southern uplands of the Cordillera Bética, such a threshold was not crossed until the 1980s.

Therefore, there were substantial spatial contrasts in the chronology of transformation in marginal Europe during industrialisation. These contrasts fit well with parallel contrasts in the space-time patterns of industrialisation itself. It would not be very useful to see upland communities in Switzerland and Scotland by the First World War as exclusively peasant (or even farming) communities. The same holds for the French and the Italian Alps by the Second World War. Things were different in those marginal areas whose regional and national environment was characterized by a slow progress of industrialisation. The Apennines and the Spanish uplands remained peasant economies in 1950, after which they witnessed a sudden transformation as an equally sudden transformation took place in their economic environment. The next section reviews the implications that such connections have for analysing the mechanisms driving rural transformation.

#### IV

The evolution of marginal areas was dependent on the transformations brought about by industrialisation. This section reviews three mechanisms of change: agrarian specialisation by peasants, the emergence of capitalist enterprises in industry and services, and demographic decline.

From the early stages of industrialisation onwards, peasant communities faced incentives and pressures for agrarian specialisation. The outcome was a trend towards what Teodor Shanin has called the 'farmerization' of peasant societies, implying capital-intensive agriculture and incorporation into new commodity chains organised by oligopolistic agro-business.<sup>44</sup> This was, in the first place, a consequence of crisis in some of the complementary sources of income which together made the adaptive family economy. For instance, in several districts in the Spanish inland mountain ranges, the decay of textile proto-industry forced peasant families to depend on their farms to a greater extent – with disappointing results as a consequence of the environmental constraints and a poor transport infrastructure that hindered them from reaching urban markets. In fact, peasants from all across marginal Europe had to face, sooner or later, backwash episodes in their complementary activities in manufacturing, trade or transport.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Growth figures taken from L. Prados de la Escosura, *El progreso económico de España (1850–2000)* (Bilbao, 2003), p. 185.

<sup>44</sup> T. Shanin, 'Introduction: peasantry as a concept', in T. Shanin, *Peasants and peasant societies* (1988), pp. 1–11.

<sup>45</sup> Clout, *Massif Central*, pp. 16–7; Collantes, *Declive*, pp. 149–64; Coppola, 'Montagna alpina', pp. 529–30; Devine, 'Temporary migration', p. 345; Gray, 'Highland', pp. 358, 368; McNeill, *Mountains*, pp. 222–32; Tino, 'Montagna meridionale', pp. 738–54.

Increasing farm specialisation was also a consequence of the incentives created by spread effects. Growth in urban demand and the decrease in the transport costs brought about by industrialisation fostered the increasing specialisation of Alpine peasants in cattle-raising. In the 1950s, up to 90 per cent of peasant income in the Swiss Alps came from this source.<sup>46</sup> This was, in fact, the continuation of a trend whose roots can be loosely traced back to the late Middle Ages.<sup>47</sup> Marginal areas endowed with low humidity indexes but high temperatures and sun exposure, such as the Cordillera Bética in Spain or the southern Apennines in Italy, evolved towards agricultural specialisation in a number of Mediterranean crops for sale in regional, national and even international markets. These are just two very different examples taken from a wide set of similar trends that have been found across marginal Europe.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the different versions of agricultural price support policies implemented in Western Europe during the twentieth century probably contributed to the consolidation of specialised, capital-intensive farmers, even if marginal areas lagged behind the lowlands in making this transition.

In any case, farmerization threatened one of the two features of peasant economies which we mentioned earlier, namely multi-activity, but reinforced the predominance of unpaid family labour over wage labour. This second feature would be substantially altered only by the emergence of new, non-agricultural enterprises, which was often the result of urban-rural capital flows attracted by the strategic resources that could be found in marginal Europe. There were several different waves of investment, ranging from energy-related industries (coal and electricity) to some forms of manufacturing and tourism (particularly mass, winter sports during the second half of the twentieth century). Furthermore, the last few decades in the twentieth century witnessed the increasing role of marginal areas in post-industrial residential patterns, which meant additional opportunities for occupational change (especially in the construction and service sectors). Local communities actively participated in these new opportunities, but most of the leading, linkage-creating investments (such as ski resorts) came from the outside. We still do not have a precise measure of the role of local initiatives in the emergence of new enterprises in industry and services. Nor do we have a precise analysis of the reasons why these new dynamics became more widespread in the Alps than in the Mediterranean mountains. Differences in resource endowment and in the level of urbanization and development in the surrounding lowlands may be expected to have played an important part, but further comparative research is needed here.

Alongside peasant specialisation and the emergence of non-agricultural enterprises, a third mechanism for rural economic change was peasant migration, often leading to the depopulation of marginal areas. In the case of Spain (Table 5), population in the four main mountainous

<sup>46</sup> J. Vontobel, 'Le développement des Conseils d'exploitation dans les régions de montagne de la Suisse', *Revue Fatis* 6 (1959), p. 46.

<sup>47</sup> J.-E. Bergier, 'Le cycle médiéval: des sociétés féodales aux États territoriaux', in P. Guichonnet (ed.), *Histoire et civilisations des Alpes*, I, *Destin historique* (Toulouse and Lausanne, 1980), pp. 163–264.

<sup>48</sup> Bazin, 'Intégration marchande et évolution des

systèmes agraires montagnards. Les cas de Dômes (Massif Central)', *Études Rurales*, 77 (1980), pp. 63–80; McNeill, *Mountains*, pp. 37–40, 252–4; P. Perrier-Cornet, 'Massif Jurassien'. On diversified farming strategies prior to such incentives, see R. A. Dodgshon, 'Strategies of farming in the western highlands and islands of Scotland prior to crofting and the clearances', *ECHR* 46 (1993), pp. 679–701.

TABLE 5. Population change in upland Spain (annual average rate)

	1860–1900	1900–1950	1950–1991
Cordillera Cantábrica	0.1	0.2	-1.0
Pyrenees	-0.5	0.1	-0.6
Inland ranges	0.1	0.0	-1.8
Cordillera Bética	0.2	0.5	-1.3
Upland Spain (total)	0.0	0.2	-1.2

Source: Collantes, *Declive*, pp. 35–7.

regions fell from 2.7 million in 1950 to little more than 1.5 million in 2000. Most of this decrease was due to negative migration balances that became particularly large in the 1950–75 stage of accelerated economic growth in Spain. Members of peasant families and whole peasant families were particularly involved in rural exodus (as compared to non-agriculturalists), with implications that have not been fully explored. Of course, the literature has underlined the fact that migration allowed for an increase in the size of the remaining farms (and thus favoured threshold-conditioned technological change) and diminished the viability of some rural services (such as village retailers). But peasant migration was also crucial in giving upland communities the non-peasant morphology they display today. According to the estimates available, more than half of the census-type occupational change that took place in the Spanish uplands during the 1950–91 period was due to peasant migration rather than the expansion of the manufacturing, construction and service sectors in the rural economy.<sup>49</sup>

The greater part of marginal Europe has experienced the working of this mechanism at a certain point in its evolution over the last two centuries. The main exception is that of the Swiss Alps, where occupational change coincided with a remarkable growth in population (Table 6). Some cantons witnessed short periods of depopulation (Glarus in 1870–1900 and 1960–80 or Appenzell during the inter-war period), but total Alpine population has increased from less than 0.5 million in 1850 to 1.1 million today.<sup>50</sup> The transformation of the Italian Alps, which was underway by the Second World War, took place in a context of demographic stability (Table 7). Several parts of the region were in fact depopulating during the first stages of Italian industrialisation – the western districts were in the migration catchment of the country's main industrial areas and lost population at an annual rate of 0.3 per cent between 1881 and 1936.<sup>51</sup> But the Italian Alps as a whole managed to maintain their population numbers and this contrasts with the pattern in other upland communities that were undergoing some occupational change.<sup>52</sup>

In Scotland, for instance, economic change in the Highlands took place simultaneously with a

<sup>49</sup> Collantes, *Declive*, pp. 164–6; id., 'Les économies de montagne à l'heure de l'industrialisation européenne. Que peut-on apprendre du cas espagnol?', *Histoire des Alpes* 10 (2005), pp. 267–82.

<sup>50</sup> Office Fédéral de la Statistique, *Eidgenössische*.

<sup>51</sup> U. Giusti, 'Dépeuplement', pp. 302–3.

<sup>52</sup> Bätzing's definition of the Italian Alps (less strict than Giusti's) implies even some population growth; W. Bätzing, *Die Alpen. Geschichte und zukunft einer europäischen kulturlandschaft* (München, 2003), pp. 276–85.

TABLE 6. Population change in the Swiss Alps and the Scottish Highlands (annual average rate)

	1850–1900	1900–1950	1950–1990
Swiss Alps	0.7	0.7	0.9
Scottish Highlands <sup>a</sup>	-0.2	-0.4	0.2

Note: <sup>a</sup> Data refer to 1851, 1901, 1951 and 1991.

Sources: Office Fédéral de la Statistique, *Eidgenössische volkszählung, 2000. Bevölkerungsentwicklung der gemeinden, 1850–2000* (Bern, 2002); General Registry Office, *Census 1961, Scotland* (1961–6); id., *1991 Census*.

TABLE 7. Population change in upland Italy (annual average rate)

	1881–1936	1961–1971
Alps	0.0	0.1
Apennines	0.3	-1.2

Sources: Giusti, 'Dépeuplement', pp. 304–5; Mazzoleni and Negri, 'Situación', p. 27.

long-term demographic crisis that ran from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s. A similar pattern can be found in the French Alps and other marginal regions in France (Table 8). In line with the now well-established view that the nineteenth-century rural population in France was anything but immobile, migration was a general response by upland peasants to the relative slowness of economic change in their home communities.<sup>53</sup> After the Second World War, the consolidation of some manufacturing activity and the expansion of tourism and new residential patterns allowed for a substantial recovery of Alpine population. However, total upland population in France carried on decreasing during this period. In the Massif Central, for instance, depopulation was a major mechanism bringing about the demise of the peasant economy. Rates of population loss in departments such as Haut Loire, Ardèche or Lozère do not fall far short of the high figures found for Spain.<sup>54</sup>

Demographic crisis was even more intense in the Mediterranean mountains during the second half of the twentieth century. This is, in fact, the main reason why their economic transformation has taken place so quickly compared to the Alpine pattern. Data for several Apennine districts during the 1951–1981 period suggest that the 'default' kind of structural change found for the Spanish uplands was also under way in the non-Alpine Italian uplands.<sup>55</sup> In several parts of the Apennines, depopulation figures came close to Spanish levels.<sup>56</sup> No marginal region, however, witnessed a demographic crisis anywhere near as severe as that of the inland ranges in Spain. Poorly endowed in environmental terms, peasant economies in this region were none too prosperous (even by marginal standards) and hence little capital investment took place in order to develop manufacturing or tourism. In just four decades, population in the Spanish inland ranges fell from 600,000 inhabitants in 1950 to approximately 300,000 in 1991. Occupational

<sup>53</sup> See P. Sicsic, 'City-farm wage gaps in late nineteenth-century France', *JECH* 52 (1992), pp. 675–95.

<sup>54</sup> Ogden, 'Analyse multivariée', p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> Cocco, 'Equilibri', p. 7; P. Vitte, *Le campagne dell'alto*

*Appennino: evoluzione di una società montana* (Milan, 1995), p. 537.

<sup>56</sup> Vitte, *Campagne*, pp. 91–157; McNeill, *Mountains*, pp. 181–9; Tino, 'Montagna meridionale', p. 702.

TABLE 8. Population change in upland France (annual average rate)

	1836–1876	1876–1911	1911–1946	1946–1982
Alps	-0.1	-0.4	-0.6	0.4
Massif Central	0.1	-0.3	-0.9	-0.6
Pyrenees	-0.3	-0.4	-0.8	-0.5
Jura	-0.1	-0.2	-0.4	0.5
Vosges	0.1	0.1	-0.7	0.1
Upland France (total)	0.0	-0.3	-0.8	-0.3

Source: P.Estienne, *Terres d'abandon? La population des montagnes françaises: hier, aujourd'hui, demain* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1988), p.270.

change linked to such a demographic crisis had very different implications than the ones that arose in cases of early and robust transformation such as that of the Swiss Alps.<sup>57</sup>

## V

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the economy of marginal Europe underwent major changes. Around the start of industrialisation, it consisted of peasant economies whose basic cells were adaptive family economies with complex household strategies. By the end of the twentieth century, peasants had become farmers but, more importantly, agriculturalists had become a small part of the labour force. This article has provided a long-run approach to this transformation. Comparative analysis of upland communities in Switzerland, Scotland, France, Italy and Spain shows that the chronology of the demise of peasant economies was not the same in every case. As argued by E.J.T.Collins, 'the economic history of the upland zone ... is reflective of changes in the structure of the national economy'.<sup>58</sup> Change took place earlier in those marginal areas whose regional and national environment was also transformed earlier by the development of industrialisation. This was particularly the case of the Swiss Alps and the Scottish Highlands. In contrast, Mediterranean industrial backwardness delayed the impact of those economic effects capable of transforming the upland economy until well into the twentieth century.

Which were those effects? The article has underlined three of them: incentives and economic pressures felt by peasants in order to specialise in the supply of a small number of agrarian commodities, the emergence of capitalist enterprises in industry and services, and peasant migration and rural depopulation. It has been found that these mechanisms were combined in different proportions across marginal Europe. In particular, economic change in the Alps was remarkably robust because it often took place in a context of population growth and expansion of non-agricultural employment opportunities. In contrast, depopulation was a powerful

<sup>57</sup> See a case study in F.Collantes and V.Pinilla, 'Extreme depopulation in Spanish rural mountain areas: a case study of Aragon in the 19th and 20th centuries',

*Rural Hist.* 15 (2004), pp.149–66.

<sup>58</sup> Collins, *Economy of upland Britain*, p.16.



mechanism of economic adjustment in the Scottish Highlands during the century after 1850 and in the Mediterranean mountains during the second half of the twentieth century.

This poses some questions for the research agenda. It certainly seems that rural transformation in the Mediterranean uplands entailed higher social costs than it did in the Alps, with the Scottish Highlands and the rest of marginal France standing somewhere in between. But we need reliable estimates of living standards in marginal Europe (and its evolution in relation to the ever-changing national benchmarks) before solid conclusions can be established here. We also need to know more about the role of political systems in the distribution of the costs and benefits of rural economic change. It seems at first sight that the social costs of transformation tended to be higher in those marginal areas located furthest from the crucial centres of political decision-making, as in centralist Spain or in the Scottish Highlands in relation to English rule. Yet, rural transformation seems to have been much less painful for upland communities in the highly decentralised Swiss state. Is this a coincidence or a promising, additional analytical layer to be explored? Finally, more attention should be devoted to the role of specific political responses to decline in mountainous regions. Most policymakers have proved reluctant to say farewell to the peasant republic, and this has often resulted in a distorted policy mix for the uplands. A better historical understanding of the way in which mountain economies evolved during industrialisation could have been helpful in this context, and probably remains so.