Sense of place and resilience in marginal populations of the highlands of Peru

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Abstract

Research in resilience is beginning to engage with the particular challenges faced by societies situated at the margins of dominant society. This paper examines the processes that lead to the persistence of populations in marginal socio-ecological systems and build resilience to combined environmental and economic hardship. This paper argues that the persistence of populations in seemingly marginal locations relates to the criteria on which marginality is defined. Using empirical research from several high-altitude villages in the central highlands of Peru, the paper argues that while agriculture and wages may be sub-optimal, other characteristics of society and location at the margin are highly desirable. The natural environment, which because of the remote location of the settlements scores highly on factors such as air quality and aesthetics. Social networks and attachment to place which due to characteristics of marginal settlements – isolation and small size – are highly developed and represent a strong pull factor. Therefore, the non-marginality and even highly viable nature of both these characteristics, valued by the population, leads to a settlement that is resilient to low and fluctuating levels of income and opportunity. To the residents themselves, the settlement may not seem marginal at all. This abstract forms part of the session "Resilience at the Margin"

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