EXISTENTIAL AMENITY MIGRANTS IN PUCÓN COUNTY, REGION IX, LA ARAUCANÍA, CHILE: REINVENTING THE SELF AND INNOVATING SOCIAL LIFE[1]

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Abstract

In this communication we tackle mobility based on the framework proposed by the literature on amenity migration, whose terminology is the most used in the southern cone of Latin America (principally in Chile and Argentina). On the conceptual realm, we discuss the extent to which the framework provided by the "amenity migrant perspective" is useful to inform the case under scrutiny. It is argued that this theoretical corpus is too rigid to depict the complexity of the phenomenon and its inability to read and capture the variety of reason why people migrate. In fact, data collected by the authors show that there are a diversity of amenity migrants, each one aiming towards reaching different ends and deploying a variety of territorial and socio-cultural strategies. In particular, two focus group conducted on mid June and July 2010 and 20 in-depth interviews conducted in December 2010 showed that a significant proportion of the people that have settled in the Area of Pucón during the last ten years do so to reinvent themselves and challenge – at least at the discursive level – the way of life and costumes prevalent in a late-capitalist society. As well, we point out that several cultural innovations are – to an extent – changing the socio-cultural landscape and groups of amenity migrants are organizing and gaining the capacity to exert power at the level the local government. We end up our discussion, reflecting on the new territorialities and the extent to which the particular migrants can be a factor to make local democracy stronger and affect deeper cultural and social structures.

Keywords:

Amenity Migration
Territoriality
Culture
Social Change

Opening Conceptual Issues: ¿Amenity Migrants in the Pucón Area?

Amenity migration is the term used by most scholars to describe the process through which individuals migrate permanently or temporarily to locations characterised by actual or subjectively perceived attributes, and whose objective is to take advantage of the superior environmental quality or cultural differentiation offered by the destination. This type of migration has recently been analyzed in various mountainous regions of the world, such as the United States, Canada, Costa Rica, Argentina, the European Alps, Norway, Sweden, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand (Moss, 2005, 2006). Studies carried out for the cases of Costa Rica, Argentina and Chile (Otero et al, 2006; Hidalgo, Borsdorf and Plaza, 2009; González et al., 2009; Hidalgo and Zunino, 2011, Zunino and Hidalgo, 2010) show that amenity migration has arrived in Latin America.

Some researchers has depicted amenity migration as a problematic process given that migrants look to replicate urban customs and access services only available in the large metropolis, thus putting strain on the social, cultural and environmental fabric of the host community. Following this logic, spaces subject to amenity migration will inevitably undergo gradual transformation into spaces of production and consumption, as their resources become exhausted through the degradation of landscape and natural attributes, undermining the local culture, affecting the natural landscape and setting new burdens to local governance (see, for example, González et al, 2009; Gossnell and Abrams, 2009).

Although we do not challenge these results, we claim that amenity migration, under certain conditions, can be a source of cultural innovation and environmental awareness, as well as setting the basis for exerting power on the decision taken by the local government. To assess the degree to which migration can produce (or not) these outcomes, it first seems necessary to the characterize the migrants in order to capture their specificity in terms of their motivations to settle, their aims and problems, and how do they conceive their relation to local governance. Implicit is our recognition that amenity migration is not a general process whose outcomes can be modelled or even predicted. Quite the contrary, we conceive amenity migration as a context-dependent and non-neutral process. Outcomes can be predicted only if we can understand the point of view and sentiments of the people who actually migrate.[2]

As the research on amenity migration has proceeded, several concepts have emerged adding depth and complexity to the findings. One of these concepts that has driven our attention for its explicit focus on the context-dependent nature of migration an on the construction of identities is "lifestyle migration". The pioneer work of O´Reilly (2007) define lifestyle migrants as relatively affluent individuals moving to countries where the cost of living is cheaper and places which, for various reasons, signify something loosely defined as quality of life. She emphasizes that the main reason for moving is not motivated by the search of

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[2] Our point of contention with the mainstream literature is that it tends to treat amenity migrant as a homogeneous unit, failing to capture the diversity of migrants. While many may indeed migrate to satisfy hedonistic needs, others may do so for existential motives which go beyond the mere consumption of amenities

work – work is a mean to achieve such ends as slower and relax way of life. In many cases, such search may represent an instance to reinvent the self and construct new ontological basis to live in community. Earlier work conducted with amenity migrant that moved to in the last 10 years to the City of Pucón, Chile, an its vicinity , showed that an important proportion of them are seeking to life in alternative way, "in connection with nature". Most of them earn their living working on non-conventional occupations as painters, musicians, handcrafters and healers (Zunino and Hidalgo, 2010).

It is problematic, however, to translate the concept "lifestyle migration", to Pucon´s socio-cultural context. In the first place, this term has been use in international migration, not intra-national migration that predominates in our study case. Second, although it opens avenues to study the reinventing of the self, it is defines in such a fuzzy way that "anything goes". Finally, lifestyle migration has been restricted to more or less affluent people, which is not necessarily the case in the Pucón area. To study some specificities of lifestyle migration in Pucón we suggest using the expression Existential Amenity Migrants (EAM), pointing out to individuals occupied in the conditions of existence, of what means being in the world. These individual and collectives reflections get concrete expression in particular practice as alternative healing method (including shamanism), religious practice not common in Chile (Buddhism), biodynamic agriculture, and Waldorf-oriented teaching methods. As early research has shown, all these practices are related to a more or less developed eco-centric discourse.

These individuals are a potential source of cultural innovation and a possible positive influence in conserving the location's natural attributes, since they hold relatively developed eco-centric positions. We also ask the degree to which they can permeate the local government. In the Lakes region of the Araucanía, particularly within the area which includes the Municipality of Pucón, (figure 1), preliminary studies carried out by the authors in 2007 and 2008 (whose result were published in Zunino and Hidalgo, 2010) corroborate the recent and growing movement of individuals and families who wish to live in harmony with nature, construct an imagined collective-symbolic ethos which realises the symbiotic relationship between society and nature, and create alternative lifestyles to those suggested by modernity.

It is important to consider that, on the one hand, by no means we want to mystify EAMs. This specific type of migration may have no major impacts on the long-run, extinguishing as fast as it flourish. On the other hand, as we will develop below, there are no a-priory reasons to assume that there are no possibilities to challenge existing power structures, as does sustaining mass-consumption and destructive forms of tourism. As Foucault (1995) notes, movements from below – despite isolated and sometimes incoherent – are rarely given the importance they deserve:

> "....*sometimes* these movements originated from below, spread and attract the attention of more highly placed persons who, taking them up, give them a new dimension..." (Foucault, 1995: 62, our emphasis)

The area of study situated within the Araucanía region of the Chilean Andes is characterized by offering a wide variety of tourist resources, such as Lake Villarica and the volcano of the same name. Over the past decade Pucón has received strong investment in the hotelier, gastronomy and specialised tourist service sectors. A large part of this tourist activity is concentrated in the summer season, particularly of the "sun and beach" variety. During the "off-season" (April-November) Pucón County undergoes a drop in population, although its dynamism is maintained, owing to recent settlement in the area by the so-called "amenity migrants".
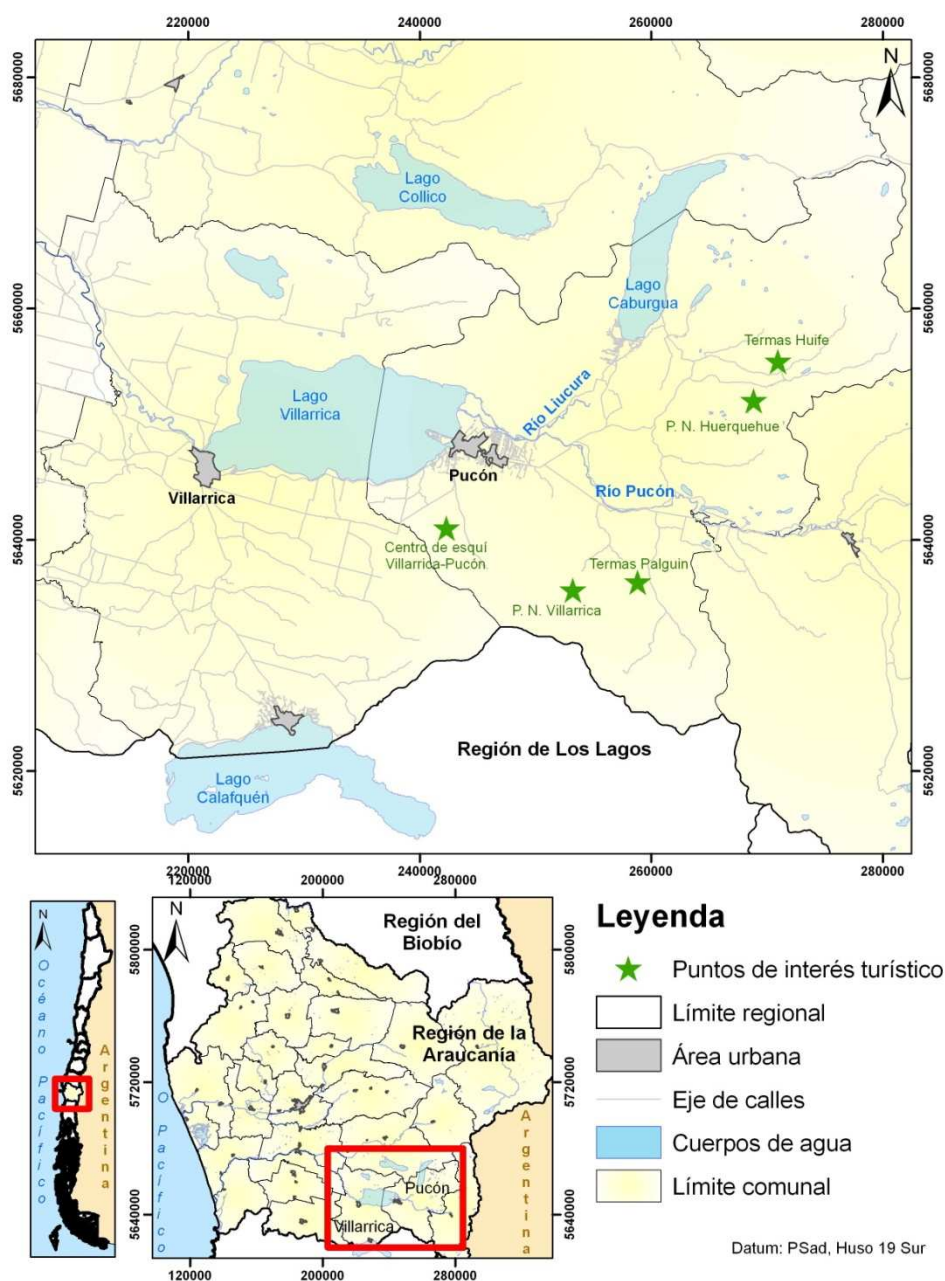
In this context, this paper attempts to characterise the Existential Amenity Migrants (EAMs hereafter) in terms of their motives for migrating, level of territorial integration, and sustainability of their ideals represented over time.

The methodology applied consisted of the following steps: A) Assembly a listing of Amenity Migrants (AMs or AM hereafter) that have settled in Pucón between 2000 and 2009. To accomplish this task an insider (an actual amenity migrant) asked potential AMs their motive to migrate ¿Why did you take the decision to migrate? If the answer suggested that he/she settled for the existing natural and cultural amenity it was labelled AM and were asked to complete a short survey. This allowed us to identify and locate de place of residency of 96 amenity migrants. B) From this data-base we selected a sample of 10 AM of different backgrounds and social conditions to participate in two group interviews that were aimed at characterizing and differentiating AM from EAM. In particular the themes the guided the interviews where directed to describe the lifestyle and the relations with other individuals including local governmental official. Using the responds to the survey applied at the beginning of the study in December 2010 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with EAM (phase C). They were aimed at grasping the lifestyle of EAMs: daily routing, aims and aspirations, social interaction, political involvements.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section we examine the socio-spatial effects of amenity migration in the study area. Next we shall analyze the relationship between territory, cultural change and social change. Following this, we shall set out and discuss the main results of focus group and interviews conducted with the EAMs. In the final section we reflect on the possibilities open for EAMs to permeate local social and political structures.

Territory, Culture and Social Change

Capitalism and possibilities for change

A number of authors have noted that the capitalist system has been "naturalized", mystified and converted into an "entity" invulnerable to political action (see Fairclough, 2000; Prosorov, 2004), making social change on any scale seem impossible or unrealistic. Taking up these ideas, Escobar (2000, 2005) argues that the re-appropriation of place converted into territory constitutes the basis for any alternative, in the sense that common people can construct more human worlds, whether in their environmental, social or economic dimensions (see also Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). It is within this context that we perceive the EAMs as a potential source of change and social innovation, in that they can appropriate a territory, develop their culture and increase their political influence on local governments,

using the democratic channels open to them. By a similar logic, Bramwell and Meyer (2007) argue that political networks are permeable and occasionally present "strategic openings", which open up possibilities for collective action and rupture with the social, spatial, cultural and economic patterns rooted in the dominant society.

The notion of territory or territoriality is central to any understanding of the cultural and political relevance of the EAMs. At the first level of analysis the notion of territoriality is understood as the appropriation of a delimited space, putting in relief the nexus between nature and human being. In this sense, following Giménez (1996, 2001), it is useful to distinguish between utilitarian-functional and symbolic appropriation. Utilitarian appropriation – dominant in our current culture – gives territory a material meaning, with space understood as a good endowed with a use value and an exchange value. The EAMs – as we shall see further on – escape this logic, as for them territory has a symbolic and cultural meaning, it is a place where a history is inscribed (even though of only short duration), it has locations recognized as sacred, it inspires collective visions of varying types, and a strong link with nature is manifest. This is what Giménez denominates symbolic appropriation. Both territorialities may coexist, there being no reason to consider them antagonistic or conflictive. Territoriality, then, may constitute the basis for social relations in which cooperation amongst the actors comes to prevail. This brings us to the notion of "social capital" developed by Putnam (1993), which refers to ties based on mutual trust and reciprocity as a basis for the process of development. Following this logic, symbolic appropriation of place goes hand in hand with the construction of identities, which represents an incentive for the formation of local networks which can act strategically at the moment when the right openings occur (see Dewsbyry and Cloke, 2009).

We should not, however, over idealize the EAMs' potential to trigger processes of socio-cultural and political development at local level. It must be borne in mind that local agents do not act in a vacuum and nor are they disconnected from a series of power relationships which, at best, limits their ability to act (see Bramwell and Meyes, 2007). Since the very establishment of human communities, the use of territory has, in effect, been an inevitable source of tension amongst social actors who seek to obtain various kinds of benefits. In contemporary social geography, attention has been centred for some time on elucidating how individuals and organizations possessing particular territorial interests employ a range of strategies to organize space and produce a landscape adequate to satisfy certain demands; a process which affects the population differentially. Hence, space – socially constructed – reflects power relations amongst a range of actors involved in the process of territorial development (see Jacobs, 1992; Healey, 1997, 1999; Huxley, 2007; Zukin, 1991; Zunino, 2006; Zunino e Hidalgo, 2009). One of the basic premises behind this research, then, is that in every socio-territorial development process, power relations exist amongst social actors who employ a range of strategies to achieve a socio-spatial and cultural organization in accordance with their interests.

Theorizing power

Evidently, in order to evaluate the real capacity for change it is essential to theorize power and how this may, eventually, be exercised to stimulate processes of socio-cultural change in local territorial spaces. Following the best known theorist of power, Michel Foucault (1980, 1992, 1995), power does not constitute "a thing" that is possessed, but rather it is something that only acquires reality insofar as it is exercised through the employment of tactics and strategies which construct truths and give rise to realities. An essential aspect of power is that it operates or circulates on different scales in non-deterministic form (see also Clegg, 1987, Zunino, 2006). This means that at the general, macro-sociological level, it does not impose a determined "architecture of power"; the structural factors acting at general levels do not give rise to a simple, mechanical "condensation" of local power relations defined by the dominant ideological, cultural and political conditions. Based upon and by extension of Foucault's work, Clegg (1989) has coined notions termed the "agency" and "structural" sides of power. The structural side of power is understood as a set of general, existing, socio-economic conditions which determine the authority, or command capacity, which particular social actors eventually employ to influence decisions which affect the territory. By the agency side of power, Clegg (1989) refers to the capacity retained by agents operating within a specific realm, and which is manifest in their ability to organize and act politically.

The structural context, therefore, does not determine what occurs at local level, nor does it produce a mere condensation of power relations from "top down". Rather, the general context establishes a series of restrictions and possibilities for agents acting within the local sphere. Neither free men nor slaves but "structured or situated agents", as Giddens (1984) would say, postulating that individuals are not the result of general denominational structures but rather are themselves responsible for the creation and reproduction of the said social structures. Following Foucault (1995), power exercised at local level within the most mundane and immediate sphere of life has historically been minimized. The power of social macro-structures has effectively been given too much importance, with an almost obsessive emphasis on the capitalist structure of production and consumption. For Foucault, however, power has a "capillary" character, in other words, in order for a particular form of domination to be maintained over space and through time, this must be reproduced in the local sphere. At the moment in which local actors cease to behave in accordance with the rules which prevail at the general level, a "systemic fault" occurs and it is precisely at this space-time juncture that possibilities for gradual or sudden social change open up. It may therefore be affirmed that each revolution begins with local centres of resistance, clusters of resistance points which can gradually filter upwards to affect macro-structural levels.

It is in this context that the EAMs have the capacity – as structural agents – not only to organize but also to "construct reality" either through action at community level or through direct political action aimed at reinforcing the ideals they represent and which define their group identity.

Socio-Spatial Dynamics in Pucón and its Catchment Area

Owing to the growing profitability of tourist activity and the need to extend its benefits to a broader sector of the population, the Government of Chile has, in recent years, paid particular attention to the foment of tourism through promotional activities coordinated by the National Tourism Service (SERNATUR), which has allowed for a substantial increase both in visitor numbers and in average daily spending per tourist (see Pearce, 2001). This strategy of touristic positioning has been sustained by advertising campaigns abroad and by the country's participation in several international tourism fairs (Blanco et al, 2007). The policy has been further reinforced through the Chilean Government's tourist programs in the Pucón County catchment area, which include initiatives such as the *Sendero de Chile* (National Pathway), the promotion of special interest tourism, and special programs for senior citizens.

The City of Pucón has become a major summer season tourist destination, attracting national and international visitors with large disposable incomes, who fully occupy the scarce hotel rooms and rented accommodation, paying more than 150 US dollars per day in some cases. Summer Pucón and winter Pucón coexist with clearly marked social, economic and cultural differences between them (Municipality of Pucón, 2004). Pucón may be characterized as a services enclave strongly linked to tourism, in which the majority of the county's workforce is employed in tertiary activity. It must be noted that while the old distinction between a summer Pucón and winter Pucón remains valid, a much more complex town has been consolidating during recent years. Systematic observations carried out in the field by the present authors during this time corroborate a heavy and incipient urbanization in the rural area surrounding the town of Pucón, consolidating as an attractive sector both for amenity migrants and for developers investing in residential and tourist schemes for an international market. The process of transformation in rural land use can be understood as an urbanization process of the peri-urban areas: areas bordering the consolidated town centre which maintain a functional relationship with neighbouring towns (Dematteis, 1998; Hidalgo, Zunino and Álvarez, 2007; Monclús, 1999; Zunino and Hidalgo, 2009).

In order to envisage the relevance of the urban growth process and morphological changes in the town of Pucón, it is useful to make a case comparison with the neighbouring county of Villarica, which possesses a far more diversified economy than that of Pucón. Data from the Population and Housing censuses (which reveal population contingents in periods of low tourist affluence), show that the population contingent in Villarica County is significantly higher than in Pucón County (Chart 1).

Chart 1.
Population in 1992 and 2002, Villarrica and Pucón Counties

County	Population 1992	Population 2002	Inter-Census Variation (%)
Villarrica	35,867	45,531	26.9
Pucón	14,356	21,107	47.0
Source: National Institute of Statistics (INE), 1992, 2002.			

This situation occurs as a result of two factors. On the one hand, Villarica is close to the City of Temuco, regional capital and the area's administrative, financial, commercial and cultural centre. Secondly, the fact that the town of Villarica was connected to the main central-southern railway route via a branch line allowed for the location of agricultural machinery sale and repair firms, the sale of agricultural supplies, ironmongers, saw mills, grain silos and a number of other activities. In the nineteen-sixties a furniture factory and a few dairies were located there as part of an incipient industrialisation process based on agricultural and forestry activities. Although the 2002 census data clearly shows a higher level of population in Villarica County, Pucón County shows a much greater population increase in the inter-census period.

Chart 2 suggests that population growth in both counties was based on a sharp increase in the urban areas of Pucón and Villarrica.

Chart 2.
Urban Population 1992 and 2002, Counties of Pucón and Villarrica

County	Population 1992	Population 2002	Inter-census variation (%)
Villarrica	22,569	30,859	36.7
Pucón	8,023	13,837	72.4
Source: National Institute of Statistics (INE), 1992, 2002.			

During the period 2002-2009, this tendency shows a marked change. The number of building permits issued by Pucón local authority for rural areas almost starts to equal the number for urban areas.

Chart 3.
Building permits issued in rural and urban areas of Pucón County

Area	2002	2006
Urban	74.71	44.83
Rural	25.29	44.17
Municipality of Pucón, 2009		

Chart 3 suggests that in the year 2002 new residents were locating to the established urban area, many of whom were amenity migrants. The tendency began to change at mid-decade when a notable increase in residential construction began to occur in rural areas, generally adjacent to the established urban area. This kind of territorial configuration is related to the construction of condominiums in places endowed with environmental amenities, security and accessibility. It is a form of urban development resulting from the application of Decree Law nº 3516 of 1980, which allows the sub-division of arable land in 5000m² estates in rural areas. These residential complexes, aimed primarily at social classes with high or average disposable incomes, develop beyond the reach of legal instruments which regulate land use and are therefore exempt from requirements relating to basic urban infrastructure, as is

required in the case of residential construction within established urban areas. This is set out in each county's urban planning norms, which, amongst other things, fix minimum infrastructural requirements and permitted land use.

A large proportion of the amenity migrants indentified live in condominiums (those with higher incomes) or in residences located in rural subdivisions (in the case of those with lower disposable incomes). It is here where changes in urban morphology connect with amenity migration. Amenity migrants feature amongst concurrent factors in the steady and gradual conformation of the so-called "postmodern city", characterized by socio-spatial fragmentation, horizontal growth and the emergence of "artefacts of globalization", or the imitation of structures existing in other latitudes such as large shopping centres and supermarket chains of national and/or international reach (see Dear and Flusty, 1997). The situation is, however, contradictory. In tandem with these features which typify a postmodern capitalist town, we also find the steady settlement of migrants who offer distinctive products and services which go against a purely consumerist logic: alternative medicine (reiki, acupuncture, natural diets and therapeutic massage for example), organic food, bio-dynamic products and non-conventional religious practices.

The real estate-residential dynamic which characterizes the study area is reflected in the 2,164 building permits issued between 2000 and 2008, no small figure considering that these remain occupied during most of the year and also considering the Town of Pucón's current contingent population. A further aspect which must be emphasized is the rapid increase in vehicle permits issued in the period 2002-2008. While 2,769 such permits were issued in 2002, this figure climbed to 4,357 in 2008, an increase of over 70%, suggesting an accelerated and deregulated urbanization of the study area from 2002 onward. Based on these and other data, the National Institute of Statistics (Municipality of Pucón 2004) is able to project population trends. It is estimated that by the year 2020 Pucón County will have over 40,000 inhabitants, a population level that will present new challenges in terms of the local management of urban and touristic development.[2]

In this context, *Existential Amenity Migration* presents features which distinguish it from Amenity Migration in general. While the "non-existential" amenity migrants tend to settle in the consolidated urban area, the EAMs show a strong tendency to settle in rural areas adjacent to the town of Pucón. Field observations provide strong evidence that the EAMs offer a range of alternative products, contributing to cultural innovation in the study area.

The EAMs: Who are they? What ideals de they represent?

The first of the study was able to indentify 96 AM. In order to evaluate rootedness and sense of belonging, each AM was asked whether they felt identified with: (a) their locality, (b) their county and its surrounding area, (c) their region and (d) their country. Fifty percent of informants answered that they identified more closely with their locality or county, revealing a strong sense of rootedness in their immediate locality, although another important segment felt closer ties with more abstract entities, such as region or country. The strong sense of rootedness is corroborated by answers to the question: Do you feel satisfied with your place of residence? 70% responded in the affirmative, 27% felt partially satisfied and only 3% responded in the negative. This reveals a level of satisfaction which is particularly surprising, especially considering that a large proportion of the population is composed of

migrants whose average monthly family income is approximately 300,000 Chilean pesos (400 US dollars).

The two focus groups conducted allowed us to characterise a group of people depicting values and attitudes that we frame as existential. Informant 1 affirmed that he migrate to the area of Pucón there to live his/her dream of living in connection with nature and to practice meditation in a pristine environment. His/her discourse emphasizes that nature is "one with us" and that we must respect it and live according to its principles. Both of his/her children study at the local Waldorf School who promotes a "spiritual education" in accordance with the inner nature of the students. Informant 2, in turn, emphasized that his/her connection with nature gets concrete expression in a sustainable lifestyle: the vegetables are grown in his/her backyard and are irrigated with natural springs. Similar stories were transmitted by several participants. Informant 3 emphasized that nature was sacred and a living entity, practicing a number of spiritual rituals to honour it. Another group emphasized aspect such as natural beauty.

Using the survey applied to the AMs (phase 1) we concluded that 44% of them could the characterized as EAM. To make the distinction between AM and EAM the key question was the motive to migrate. EAMs migrate to satisfy existential or spiritual needs. Some answers included: looking for a place to be myself, develop my own spirituality, live in connection with nature. AMs, in turn, value the natural environment and the opportunity for a better living. Some typical responds of this group to the key questions were: because the nature is spectacular, there are many things to do here, you can feel as a tourist in your place.

20 in-depth interviews conducted in December 2010 showed that EAMs seek to create a utopia, and many of them are linked to religious activities considered non-conventional in our country (e.g. Zen, Buddhism, and a variety of sects), alternative medicine and mystical movements of varied origin. When asked what motivated them to migrate, all of responses corresponded to one or more of the following factors: connection with nature, better quality of life, development of non-conventional activities and deeper friendships. This indicates that non-conventional factors play a more relevant part in the decision to migrate than factors such as employment, which are considered central to the migration models put forward in specialist literature on the subject. Hence, we find ourselves before an identity group which migrates to satisfy needs linked to the experience of a greater connection with nature and with society. The majority of these immigrants develop non-conventional religious practices or mystical-spiritual activities.

The EAMs' capacity to affect changes in local socio-cultural structures a