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Métropoles alpines. Vers une nouvelle alliance entre villes et montagnes ?

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# Trento Social Commons. Community Engagement as Tools for New Physical and Cultural Relationships Between Rural and Peripheral Spaces

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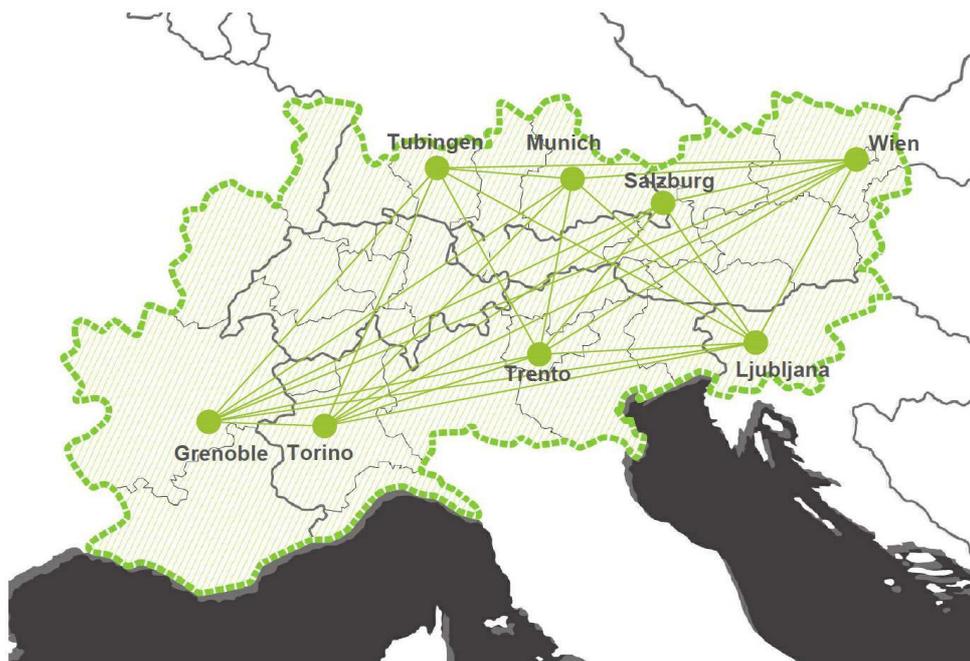
*For sharing the experiences of their territories we are grateful to Francesca La Greca and Maria Quarta (Regione Piemonte) and Sylvia Pintarits (City of Munich), partners within the Alpine Space Project “LOS\_DAMA!”*

## Premises: on-going discourses on alpine territories and cities

- 1 Expanding urban development has changed the features of cultural landscapes in many countries in Europe. We find that for many cities growing land use pressure is a common challenge related with current development.
- 2 Natural and cultural assets of urban and peri-urban spaces in metropolitan areas, also at alpine level, are strained by various phenomena related to structural densification, migrations, changes in traditional lifestyles and, somehow, by their strong capacity to attract people and businesses (ESPON, 2006, NORDREGIO 2004, Segretariato Permanente della Convezione delle Alpi, 2015).
- 3 Within this context, how political territorialities and management strategies can be put in place at both the local and transnational levels to shape new relationships between rural and peripheral spaces? Which tools and institutional innovations are needed?

- 4 Missing an overall European or pan-alpine strategy, in the last years some collaborative projects has tried to give an answer to these questions. RURBANCE, an Alpine Space project, summed its activities recognising that the role of extra-urban territories and their linkages with valleys are crucial. Thus defining a balanced model of development must include the dynamic side of metropolitan areas with the peculiarities of mountain territories (RURBANCE, 2015).
- 5 Recent experiences developed within the Italian Alps transfer into cities' governance the collective management of mountain resources and its principles, such as responsibility, sharing and resilience. Additionally, the on-going discourse on cities suggests following an experimental way according to landscape contexts and expectations of citizens. In fact, specific challenges for Alpine peri-urban areas and the intention to unleash the opportunities they offer call for transdisciplinary and inter-municipal collaboration and planning policies. Exploring how commons, as cooperative management of resources between public and private actors, can widen the scope of action is therefore extremely important.
- 6 The maintenance of cultural landscapes in Alpine areas requires human stewardship. This has been realized in most of Alpine collective properties, throughout their long history as socio-ecological ecosystems. Relationships between communities and natural resources in Alpine cultural landscapes are based on a recognized and normative history since XI<sup>o</sup> Century at least. Nowadays multiple scale changes in mountain societies and ecosystems pose challenges in terms of maintaining traditional (ecological) knowledge and norms (cultural resources), nurturing trust and reciprocity in management of commons (ecological resources), and of anticipating the desired futures or possible shocks to be prepared for. (Gretter et al, 2018)
- 7 According to what above stated, collective forms of management are effective not only in preserving natural assets, but also to strengthen social capital in certain territories. The cultural relevance of this way of managing territory is still embedded in the local population and of absolute actuality.
- 8 The basis of this manuscript rely on the convergence, from different disciplines, of understanding how innovative activities of participations and collective management of collective spaces are connected with traditional system of governance of Alpine resources. The real examples and exercises developed within a series of initiatives offer a further opportunity for analysis and reflection on how narrative and practice are linked.
- 9 In the last section we present the empirical case in the city of Trento that explore these concepts and approaches as adopted to urban territories towards new political and management strategies and its relationship with surrounding territories In accordance with the European Landscape Convention, one of the main aims is to develop a new cultural and ecological paradigm through which peri-urban areas can be integrated into an ecosystemic vision of urban settlements and their surroundings (Council of Europe, 2000).

Figure 1. Maps of the Cities partners of LOS\_DAMA! Project



SOURCE: PROJECT COORDINATION.

## Tradition of collective management in the Alpine area

- 10 Examples of collective management in the Alps are indifferently related both to Latin (“*res nullius*”) or German (“*Gemeinschaft*”) customs and traditions and were supportive in conserving most of the features of the multiple use of agricultural, grazing and forest land and related buildings. These systems of communitarian governance and collective properties have been investigated by various authors since the late 1960s with a focus on the Swiss and Italian experiences (Cole and Wolf, 1999, McNetting, 1981, Viazzo, 1989) and still nowadays their historical and cultural backgrounds are valued as a leverage of local mountain development (Bender and Haller, 2017).
- 11 In the Italian Alps, where most of the 1.5 million hectares of the national collective lands are located, the role of land and goods of collective property (mainly forest and grazing areas) has been re-invigorated in recent years through recognition of the increasing relevance of the environmental functions embedded in the interaction between the social and ecological systems (De Martin, 1990, Merlo, 1995). In particular, the processes of management adopted are of particular interest and present differences from the most economically efficient solutions from both public and private management, as stated by Ostrom (1990). These systems, in fact, have historically been able to adapt to change over time, promoting well-being of communities, social cohesion, long-term vision, sustainable resource management practices, including the management of landscapes as whole, and innovative solutions to challenges typical of mountain areas.
- 12 One key element is the social capital which arises from interacting networks of local actors materializing contributes to economy, culture and community identity. Common goods and social cooperation are the two pillars to be reinterpreted as “the set of current

and potential resources related to the possession of a stable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1983).

- 13 Nowadays these relationships are experiencing a new life and can be exported beside the ancient communities’ borders into the urban realm.

## A novel vision of territorial relationships

- 14 In Italy the definition of commons is related to the process of Constitutional review that in 2001 introduced the principle of “horizontal subsidiarity”. According to this principle national and local governments promote autonomous initiatives of citizens, both individuals or associated, to carry out activities of general interest (Italian Constitutional Chart, art. 118). This article recognizes that citizens are able to activate processes of regeneration and management of collective goods. In this sense, commons are goods that are recognized as such by society and they are considered according to their collective value rather than as economic resources. Moreover they have a social function or are the result of social processes. The article 118 of Italian Constitution introduces a legislative platform on which to build a new model of society characterized by widespread presence of active citizens establishing an alliance with public administration in taking care of common goods. LABSUS, literally “LABoratory for Subsidiarity” was created with this aim (see [www.labsus.org](http://www.labsus.org)). Actually about 120 municipalities in Italy joined the network, including Trento. The main tool of LABSUS network is the Regulation for shared administration of common goods which identifies sharing as the key to the future of urban areas. This led to the introduction of a concept as presented by McLaren and Agyeman (2015). They propose a new “sharing paradigm” to envision models of contemporary cities that are not always commercial but also social and collaborative. “Shareable city” is an emerging paradigm connecting needs and belongings. A Shareable City enables residents to efficiently and safely share all kinds of assets – from space to cars, skills or utilities – to create stronger, healthier and more connected communities.
- 15 The spectrum is larger and goes beyond cities entering the peri-urban area. In fact, peri-urbanity is not a physical condition, but rather “an abstraction that defines a design and relational character of space” (Mininni 2012). Generically it can be defined both by characteristics of urban and non-urban areas and it can be found in-between them. For this reason, its definition can’t be found within an oppositional logic between city and country, but rather in a multiplicity of sense generated by the apparently paradoxical relationship between these two.
- 16 The project of peri-urban areas is structured following the logic of scaling up, it is an adaptive and incremental logic. This requires a new ecological rationality, but also new capability to intercept each time that individuals and communities are involved at all levels. It concerns not so much an urban or rural community, but what Donadieu defines as the “landscape society” (Donadieu, 2001). It is a society that shares an idea of living comfort that is realized within the agro-urban territories bridging inner mountain villages with the valley towns.
- 17 Regarding the Italian cases other normative elements must be taken in consideration. Despite some authors declared that “mountain areas are a product of territorial reorganization or reconstruction and are gaining a special status” (Rudaz, 2009), in Italy this statement is not fully recognized. Some mountain territories are granted with a

special autonomy (Trento, Bolzano/Bozen and Aosta) but most of them are not (also in the autonomous regions like Friuli Venezia Giulia). Since mid 1990s at national level various instruments have been introduced (from the “Territorial Pacts” until the most recent strategy of “Inner areas”) that could be applied at the mountain scale but no specific policies are recorded. More relevant, instead, is the reform activated with the Law n. 56/2014 which abolished the Provinces and Mountain Communities and instituted other territorial system of governance (namely *Città Metropolitane* and *Unione di Comuni*) which could exploit under a regulatory umbrella a relationship between cities and mountains.

## The role of cities in the Italian Alps

- 18 In the Alps cities and towns of medium-large size lie at mountain-like altitude (i.e. above 800 meters). Most of them are located in the western side as in France, in Switzerland and Austria. The metropolis just outside the Alps (namely Munich and Milan) and other con-urbanizations are playing a relevant role in shaping the regional economy and governance not only within a limited spatial radial but further behind, either on a global scale.
- 19 Within the Italian context there are few towns of large dimension (intended as above 100,000 inhabitants) that are located in the Alpine territory. Namely only Bolzano/Bozen and Trento are the unique closer to mountain area encompassing high altitude zones and with remote valleys placed into a short-distance travel (Gaido, 1999).
- 20 When referring to relationships with metropolitan environment in Italy the Metropolitan City of Turin represents the most evolved example. Turin is the capital of Region Piedmont and its population is about 900,000 inhabitants. Since the early years of 2000s the local authority (at the time the Province and not only the municipality) started a process of dialogue with the mountain territories located in its western side (Di Bella, 2015). The *Comunità Montane* and municipalities were involved in initiatives which tried to develop a synergic approach in relation to supply of goods (not only food but either water and more) and services (health and education beside recreation). Valle di Susa is one of the territory involved in this process and the evidences have been presented in various publications at national level (Corrado, 2015). With the reform of 2014, as anticipated above, the metropolitan area has included more than 300 municipalities outside Torino and about one third are located in mountain territories. This could represent an opportunity, if fully realised, to operate on an inter-municipal level in the sector of planning, landscape conservation and ecological connectivity. System of compensation and transfer in the governing tools could enhance the synergies in the relationships between the city of Torino and the peri-urban, rural and mountain communities.

## The experience of Trento: an empirical case

- 21 Autonomous province of Trento is one of the northern-most territories of Italy. Its size is of about 6,200 km<sup>2</sup> organised in 176 municipalities and with an overall population of 538.604 (ISTAT, 2018).

- 22 Within the province almost 60% of the overall surface (around 370,000 hectares) is collective property with designated rights called “*uso civico*” (a customary right embedded with the properties of communities and villages). This kind of management is rooted in centuries of practice of setting participative bodies within communities. Most of the managing bodies have been recognised by law already since XII° Century, endorsing a multi-centennial management history. Their relative independence lasted until the beginning of the XIX° Century when, in spite of various historical events (French Revolution, Habsburg Empire, Fascism and Italian Republic), it has been reduced but still recognized thanks to the adoption of various laws at local level.

### A city with a pivotal role in the region

- 23 Laying in the valley floor of River Adige (Fig. 2), the municipality lies between 194 and 2,239 meters above sea level and 20% of its territory is classified as agricultural and 50% as forest or pasture land meaning very few space is left to urbanization. With 117,417 inhabitants (December 2017) on a municipal territory of about 158 km<sup>2</sup>, the overall density is of 742 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> but pressure on urban and peri-urban areas is much higher.
- 24 Trento is renowned for its role of catalysator for many individuals. Beside the residents its role of attraction is due to the functional services offered, namely health, education, central bureaucracy and major coordination centres. Although the distribution of services in the valleys and mountains is above the national mean (connected to the status of autonomy of the Province), Trento is attracting (daily) about 25-30,000 individuals. Its influence spread in the river Adige Valley from 20 km in northern direction and about 40 km in southern direction (comprising the town of Rovereto) where the connections are easier. It is most likely that its role it expands further beyond in outer valleys and not only in the Valle dei Laghi or Valsugana which lie, respectively on western and eastern side of the city, and increasingly becoming the residence of previous resident of Trento or of those ones not able to find a cheaper accommodation downtown.

### The multiple systems on operation

- 25 In the case of Trento we should consider different altitude and spatial systems. The central one is the lowland along the River Adige on which infrastructures and most of the productive and commercial activities and services are located. This system include also other municipalities located in the northern and southern area. The hillside with the former villages located at an altitude between 300 and 800 meters (Povo, Villazzano, Martignano, Cadine, Sopramonte, Sardagna); at the upper altitude lies the outermost mountain area which is sparsely inhabited and could be classified as (semi)natural and recreational area. A forth system is represented by the “expanded” conurbation of Trento including the municipalities of Valle dei Laghi and the closer territories of Vigolana Plateau and Alta Valsugana.
- 26 All these above indicated systems are entangled in a network with different kinds of relationships, not all supportive and sometimes conflictual. Public authorities have set in the last years some initiatives in order to increase the positive feedbacks within the systems (in different sector as natural resources and risk governance, agriculture and planning) operating on an increasing engagement of local population

- 27 For example if we consider the conservation of nature it could be valorised both on a horizontal (along the lowland) and vertical scale (along the different altitudes) where are lying different sites of interest. In relation to the second scale the Provincial authority, adopting its Law n. 11 of 2007, has developed a governance tools for enhancing the role of NATURA2000 sites called “Rete delle Riserve”. Related to the case of Trento this bottom-up approach extended its operation on a surface of 1.100 hectares mainly in the Mount Bondone massif. Supported with other previous or running projects (like LIFE Trentino Ecological Network TEN) this initiative acts with the perspective, as indicated by the stakeholders and participants, to build a Natural Local Park where living and working opportunities are foreseen. A similar approach is also intended, but now lying at an earlier stage, to create an Agricultural Park in the lowland area north of Trento (Piana Rotaliana).
- 28 On the other hand, although Trento is the municipality in Trentino with the largest surface designated as agricultural, the variety is low due to the prevalent focus on specialised production like apples (in the lower area) and grapes (mostly in the foothills of the surrounding mountains). The mountains that are located within the perimeter of Trento (Bondone, Marzola, Calisio, Sorassas and partly Vigolana) are mostly perceived as a recreational playground from residents and tourists both in winter and summer. A recognized productive role in the upper altitude is very limited due to the scarce utilisation of pastures and limited private forestry activities. Most of these areas are in fact managed by public or collective bodies which main aim is not the economic one.
- 29 The “Biodistretti” now flourishing in the nearby valleys (namely in Valle dei Laghi) are an example how this territories could be considered the agro-food reserve of Trento, in particular for organic production and foreseen in the multi-functional agriculture a possible future scenario with a relevant role also in ecological and social sphere. Regarding the food production it has been registered recently at the “horizontal system” an increasing interest. The Municipality of Trento, which take the opportunity deriving from the collaborative project LOS DAMA!, has started to support another initiative called “NutrireTrento” for activities of urban farming.
- 30 Most of these activities are playing a multi-functional role. In fact initiatives, either on a micro-scale, support actions of mitigation to climate change, risks protection (mainly from floods and storms), support ecological connectivity and biodiversity conservation alongside helping to valorise itineraries at different altitude and for different targets.

### **Pathways in developments of governance as learned from traditional commons**

- 31 As anticipated in the previous paragraph a large amount of “traditional” collective properties in the mountainous area are part of Trento’s territory. Now they are managed mainly by a Forest Consortium, but traditional uses are still alive and locals are fully involved in their management. Interestingly some small villages now part of the Municipality have recently re-created communal institutions in order to preserve local tradition and support the micro-local social structure based on trust and reciprocity. This last aspect sometimes can give origin to disputes on property and uses. In many cases communities and goods rely on rules that are unable to adapt to new needs or situations related to different interests expressed from cities visitors and local communities (namely in recreation or extraction).

Figure 2. Aerial view of the city of Trento



SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF TRENTO.

- 32 These initiatives have expanded the concept of “common good” not only to materials but also to those intangible or digital goods that citizens and administrators feel important for the individual and collective wellbeing, that are more keen to be exploited in the urban territory
- 33 Nowadays citizens launched special initiatives (named “Day of Common goods”) dedicated to take care of public spaces with activities such as cleaning gardens and open spaces, repairing minor damages or tidying buildings. They are just adopting an ancient tradition that in the past was respected by every member of the community. It is not only a matter of maintaining in good condition private properties or respect field borders but also a matter of not creating damages to public goods (fountains, roads, parks) and, according to a rotation plan, collaborate in its management or to be fully responsible of them (a role that any family had to obey).
- 34 What explained above represents a duty related to a specific right linked to the collective property of resources. As previously said, the main point is the idea of overcoming the limitation on accessing resources granted to “native/locals” with the objective to extend the “commons” approach towards a public/collective welfare. If we consider citizens and local resources, there is a clear distinction between rights and services.
- 35 It leads to a dichotomy between a statutory collective property (connected to rights) and an associative approach. At the urban scale the second approach could grant an operational space to many (new) citizens with new opportunities to support the maintenance of resources or adding immaterial activities. In fact green courts, open spaces and community gardens could represent a space where “to perform the dual functions of reconnecting urban residents with nature and strengthening the community” (Neo and Chua, 2017). In the past this linkage was fundamental in particular for self-supporting societies forced to rely on a balanced use of resources, but it seems to have disappeared into the contemporary urban realm. Here an active involvement in the management of land it is not anymore necessary. It has although to be said that opportunities like community gardens or urban orchards represent “a(s) spaces of responsibility” (Neo and Chua, 2017) and highly encourage practices of social inclusion, obviously paying attention to risks of appropriation by small group of individuals.
- 36 Likewise, on the basis of the subsidiarity principle of art. 118 of the Italian Constitution, the City Council assumes the duty to support the autonomous initiatives of citizens,

individual or associated (entrepreneurial or social), in pursuing objectives of general interest.

- 37 With this scope the political and administrative institutions of Trento:
- adopted, amongst the first, a Regulation for Treatment and Regeneration of Heritage Commons in 2015;
  - has set up a new coordination Department in 2016, with specific financial and human resources;
  - is gearing up to not authoritative administrative acts (i.e. Collaboration Pact) as a tool to arrange and give operability to sharing projects;
  - propose, sustain, co-design many collaborative projects and promotion of the Commons, in particular with schools and young people. In this regard it has promoted a project called “FuturaTrento”, with the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and other local players, which led to a web platform (<https://www.futuratrento.it/>) where it is possible to share ideas to be voted and achieved together.
- 38 Many of these projects involve urban green public spaces (parks, open spaces, parking places, social buildings and flower gardens, as represented in Figure 3), with special attention to suburbs where to start initiatives that involve natural and cultural sources on the peri-urban green areas, in a new inter-municipal sharing logic.

Figure 3. Flower Garden management with school's pupils



SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF TRENTO.

- 39 Interest of citizens and associations is more oriented to the production of food and preservation of biodiversity (see Figure 4) through the call for vegetable gardens and definition of green (with bushes and trees) or blue (along water courses) corridors gives the opportunity to generate new life in places that have been abandoned or improperly used. A change in urban development goals recently approved for an area of about 10 hectares by the City Council could offer further opportunities for conjoint initiatives to step in this direction.
- 40 This approach is two-fold useful for the municipal governance: first of all is an option to enhance the civic sensibility and save financial resources. Further recognition for usefulness of a renewed common's approach has been formally acknowledged with the

creation of a specific event where City councillors award the title of “ambassadors of Common Good” for those citizens actively involved in running these initiatives.

- 41 The participation at LOS\_DAMA! Project (2016–2019) raise further opportunities for the Municipality of Trento. The project's timeline is focused on 3 phases. The first phase is called “exploration”. In order to plan an optimal census of existing green areas, their accessibility and to map forms of management it has been set a strong involvement of citizens, with the collaboration of schools, Science Museum and various associations to integrate available technical data supervised by municipality and scientific Observers. The second phase is called “cultivation” and it is focused on implementation of different activities planned: participatory projects, community gardens, hiking maps and peri-urban green festival. All of them will be great opportunities to cultivate social relationships and build educational moments for all citizens. The last phase is called “dissemination” and aims to enhance and spread local and international standards and best practices, involving provincial administrative bodies and neighbouring municipalities in order to replicate virtuous experiences.

Figure 4. Public vegetable gardens in the suburb of Villazzano



SOURCE: MUNICIPALITY OF TRENTO.

## Final remarks: common frameworks & transferability

- 42 Combining spatial and social dimension must take in consideration the sphere of property. Alongside traditional categories like public or private it could be extended to a collective concept of property itself. In our examples the Municipality of Trento is operating towards this “third sphere” with the common (“*Bene comune*”) as an old/new dimension of public space welfare. Beside a coercive approach, which is not sustainable

anymore, a stronger support towards “bottom up” initiatives has to be confirmed. Education and awareness are the pillars on which develop new initiatives capable to bridge status of rights or services and extend the engagement of citizens.

- 43 The approach the city adopted moved from the city centre to peri-urban areas intended as places of (re)elaboration or “laboratories” on which apply and develop better targeted approaches.
- 44 In order to better govern management and policy processes the municipality started a mapping campaign to identify both in spatial and social terms the main elements to be considered in a strategy for peri-urban areas. From the results a clear request of space for food-growing activities has raised and probably some new communal vegetable gardens could be created in the about 190 hectares of unused areas recently individuated. Despite the small amount of land, this is an example how to support the request of citizens and, in perspective, to engage new initiatives in collaboration with other municipalities.
- 45 The main assumption, as stated by Rudaz (2009) is to promote cooperation between different stakeholders to improve sustainable development, and for Trento, it configures the quality of life in the extended urban environment and the relationship with mountain territories.
- 46 In particular focusing in less attractive areas for a paradigm shift on peri-urban perception and added meanings (as knowledge, design, values, landscape); the goal is to set a new narrative to enable shared development of these areas. Participating to projects and in combination with other initiatives the city of Trento might be able to derive guiding principles for the public sector on how to support bottom-up initiatives or how to improve (re)new(ed) forms of communal green areas management. The objective is to give better answers on how (and to what extent) the public sector might be able to initiate innovative governance arrangements for peri-urban green areas, landscapes and natural resources management (in particular regarding water and agricultural activities). A renewed civic attitude can support also major awareness and support towards initiatives that public bodies will develop. In fact Trento, within its smart approach, is also now calling citizens and actors to support them in design its activity for facing challenges and shape its future. For example regarding the issue of adaptation to climate change. City of Trento could rely on previous experiences and “laboratories” to enhance its role in creating “Blue and Green Infrastructures” with wider territorial relevance than the municipal one (in particular for EUSALP strategy thanks to its position within alpine mobility and ecological corridors). Starting from the adoption of Declarations as the one signed in Munich on October 2018 at EUSALP level, trans-national cooperation will, therefore, foster a process of reconciling cities with cultural and environmental features of mountains (EUSALP, 2017).
- 47 Policy and stakeholders at all levels will benefit from joint learning and a wide range of innovative approaches for cross-sectorial communication, negotiation, mediation and conflict management, also between public and private. Improved planning and governance, sustained cooperation and better skills will successfully boost the valorisation of limited, valuable open spaces, their assets and their emerging roles in the alpine perimeter.

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## ABSTRACTS

Expansion of urbanized areas heavily changed cultural landscapes' features in many European countries. Mountain territories have been hit by such processes too; due to their peculiar social and topographical characteristics these effects have been greater than in other territories. Moreover, urbanization expansion process in the Alps is strongly related with temporary dynamics depending from touristic fluxes, implementation of new spaces of mobility, economic development and living.

In a context of extreme land scarcity like in the Alps, urban sprawl and dwellers' search for nature proximity to homes and residential areas put territorial governance instruments under pressure and opens up complex questions.

Beside other experiences between urban and peripheral spaces, the essay aims at speculating that typical rural communitarian governance models are able to strengthen collective interests over individual ones and can be translated into urban governance models by public authorities. Direct observations in the city of Trento demonstrated how citizens - even where specific collective governance models are not commonly applied - involved in specific projects are able to generate systemic solution and self-develop associative and cooperative models to regenerate open spaces around the city. Such examples can be considered as pilots to be extended to other (alpine) urban territories following an approach that the city of Trento is implementing through different participatory policy instruments or through European projects.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Alpine cities, Commons, Peri-urban valorisation, Multifunctional areas, Communities' empowerment

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