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ENTRE-DEUX. THE CONSTRUCTION OF EXCHANGING PLACES IN THE METRO-MOUNTAIN TERRITORIES AS DEVICES OF URBAN-MOUNTAIN REBALANCING



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A well-established historical narrative has led us to look at city and the mountain as opposing concepts governed by imbalanced and disadvantageous relationships: indeed, the mountain territory is exploited for energy, tourism, and labor by the urban areas.

In recent decades, economic, environmental and political changes have challenged this oppositional narrative and revealed its flaws, especially in managing the Covid-19 pandemic at a territorial scale. It became evident that the separation and functional specialization of territories resulting from the past planning policies have weakened both mountainous and urban areas, especially in the metro-mountain region where they intersect.

While the mountain has suffered from a subordinate relationship with the city, becoming a place that needs to be "adapted" with a lack of planning for the future development, the density of the city has reduced its attractiveness highlighting the negative aspects of urban life such as pollution, unemployment, and insecurity.

As a negative representation of increasingly blurred boundaries between the city and the mountain, the emergence of the metro-mountain territory exemplifies recent social and economic crises. It is a consequence of policies and development programs that have ignored or even exacerbated the differences between the city and the mountain disregarding their complementary and mutually beneficial relationship and the spaces that accommodate them.

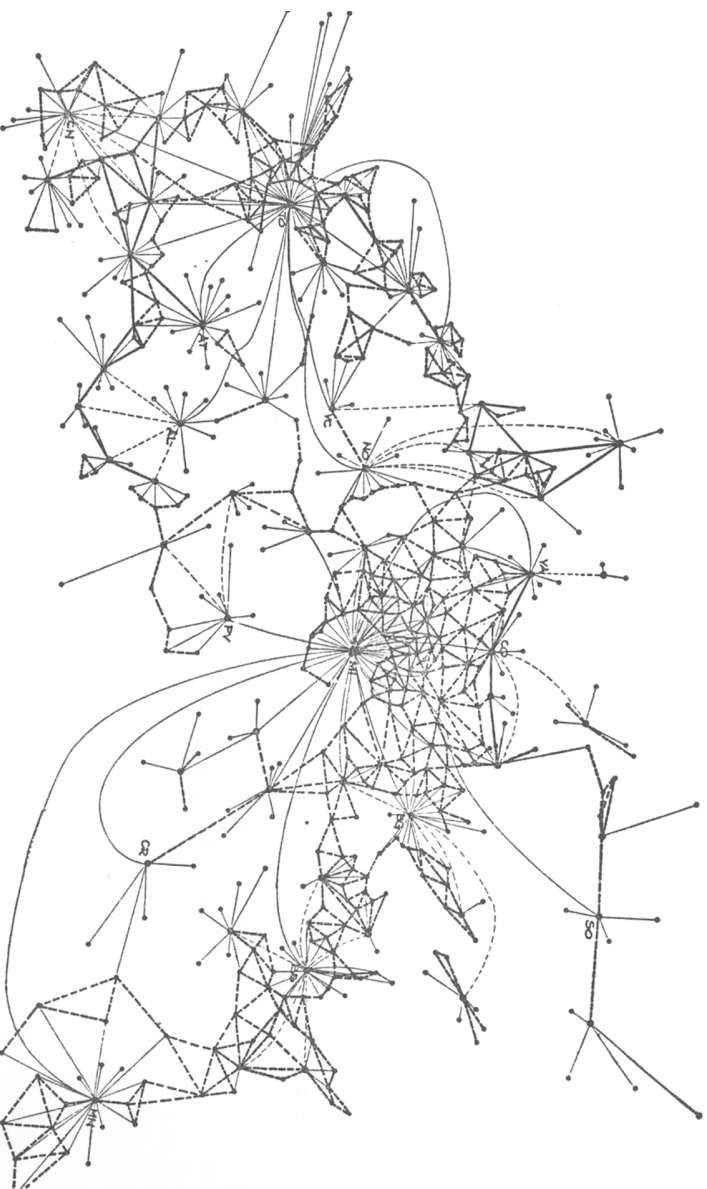
In Italy, where 12 out of 14 metropolitan cities include mountainous areas, and many provincial capitals (with more than 50,000 inhabitants) are within 15 km of a mountain region, the in-between spaces, known as "en-

tre-deux" have been crucial for the country's industrial development since the mid-20th century.

However, by the end of the last century, these intermediate areas seemed to lose their centrality as a result of the economic decline and the migration of the younger generations to cities and highlands. Today, the need for a new balance between the city and the mountain offers a second chance to metro-mountain territories, becoming a stage for new opportunities in local development.

This geographical and territorial scenario, where the in-between lands assume strategic importance, extends beyond Italy. Numerous cities and metropolises along the Alps have crucial connections with neighboring mountain areas. The result is an alpine city-territory that incorporates mountain territorial systems into a spread urban morphology that acts as a cohesive and transitional space for metro-mountain areas.

Within this complex territorial, economic, and political context, architectural practices play a crucial role in shaping the connection between different areas. It is indeed possible to envision architectural interventions in the "in-between areas" as transformative spaces that can



Strutture urbane reticolari in Piemonte e Lombardia, relazioni di interdipendenza
© Giuseppe Demattis

activate mutually beneficial relationships and foster a healthy dependency between the city and mountain regions.

This research focuses on the urban-mountain relationship in the Western Alps, encompassing three nations: Italy, France and Switzerland. The focus is on analyzing how architectural practices within these intermediate territories have generated new connections and cooperative frameworks between the city and the mountain.

The study seeks to understand how architectural interventions can act as catalysts for change, facilitating the exchange of ideas, resources, and experiences between urban and mountain communities, promoting interaction,

collaboration, and mutual support. The research examines successful examples of urban-mountain synergy where architectural interventions have revitalized intermediate territories and established exchanging relationships. By identifying and analyzing these case studies, the research aims to provide examples that can influence future architectural practices and policies, supporting balanced and mutually beneficial urban-mountain relationships in the Western Alps and beyond.