

Post-Urban Life in the Italian Alps during a Pandemic: New paradigm or ephemeral phenomenon?

Maria Anna Bertolino

Centre régional d'études des populations alpines (CREPA), Switzerland

Correspondence: maria-anna.bertolino@crepa.ch

Peer review: This article has been subject to a double-blind peer review process



Copyright notice: This article is issued under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution License**, which permits use and redistribution of the work provided that the original author and source are credited.

You must give appropriate credit (author attribution), provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract

In the twentieth century, depopulation in the Italian Alps was the result of the vision of a mountain world as isolated and of the persistence of stereotypes such as that of the 'poor mountain dweller'. At the same time, mountains were exploited by cities in order to be transformed into a place of leisure for mass tourism. Consequently, the agro-pastoral activities related to this world were neglected as a symbol of backwardness. However, over the past decade, the Alps have been affected by return migrations. The interest in rural world comes from the redefinition of the urban-rural gap and the leaving behind of the urbanism paradigm. Although this phenomenon is not new to social scientists, with the onset of COVID-19 it is assuming unexpected dimensions and accelerated developments. Images of escape from cities, when lockdown was announced in Italy on February 2020, clearly demonstrate that new visions of rural territories were emerging in the Western World. This article aims to inquire about the contemporary perception of the Italian Alps and their rediscovery during these pandemic times, to ask ourselves about the nature of this rediscovery, to what extent the representations are affected by a nostalgic attitude and how they can contribute, if well managed, to the development of a new post-urban living model.

Keywords: Italian Alps; marginal areas; post-urban life; return migration; pandemic times

Frightening or Tempting: A brief overview on the representations of the Alps and their inhabitants over the centuriesⁱ

It was not so long ago that the Alpine world was believed isolated and that only the modernisation and urbanisation that followed the Second World War had unchained it from a thousand-year history of poverty, closed-mindedness and economic backwardness.

Today we know that this was a city point-of-view (**Kilani, 1984**): common academic imaginaries about mountains have always been allochthonous, i.e. coming from the outsiders, and not from the mountain inhabitants themselves, who previously have never felt isolated or poor at all. The actual image of the Alps is a political construction (**Debarbieux & Rudaz, 2010**) made up of a succession of representations and concepts, which were rather created to convey a certain vision. The history of the perception of the Alps is encumbered with socio-cultural and economic-political consequences for the present. In particular, the succession of positive and negative images – given both to the Alps as a physical geographical context and to their inhabitants since the Greek-Latin antiquity – has led to different attitudes towards them. Some images are therefore worth drawing attention to in this discourse as they re-propose certain categorisations that have been taken up over the centuries.

One of these, the rugged and wild land, marked the initial Roman's point of view about the Alps (**Giorcelli Bersani, 2019**). Romans imposed a political and economic domination through a network of cities, fortifications and roads. But nevertheless, initially mountains were experienced as '*montes horribiles*', i.e. frightening mountains (**Bätzing, 2003: 19**). After a positive attitude toward movement, pilgrimage and new settlements in the Alps during the Middle Agesⁱⁱ, the image of the Alps as the 'natural guard of Italy' was progressively discovered again after Renaissance (**Cuaz, 2005: 11**) until the Alps became an actual frontier during the seventeenth century. From this period, the Alps were first and foremost considered as a geographic problem transfigured into a cartography of borders and military relations (**Camanni, 2002: 28**), reinforcing the strong fear of the plain and the cities inhabitants toward them. For this reason, the Alps became 'a distillation of all that was inimical to humankind, a region through which one passed swiftly' (**Fleming, 2004: 52**). And this feeling increased more and more among the population due to the emerging political borders of the centralist European monarchies, which turned the Alps into an 'appendix' territory. With the Treaty of Utrecht signed in 1713, which led to a new international political order, the old self-sufficient economies and the ingenious local autonomies of

the *Ancien Régime* – such as the *Escartons* of the French-Italian Western Alps – fell, and the process of marginalisation of the Alps began.

The Enlightenment offered a contrasting imaginary of the Alps. Even if their sinister reputation was maintained, scientists cultivated curiosity for material data such as orography. Beside the attraction for the natural worlds, another image about the mountain dwellers emerged. Alpine communities were compared to the extra-European '*sauvage*' populations by writers, philosophers and travelers, which contributed to the construction of their 'otherness' (Kilani, 1984: 27): the virtuous mountain dweller became the equivalent of the 'good savage', as in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's point of view, whose existence would be based on a harmonious relationship with nature, far from the corruption of moneyⁱⁱⁱ (Cuaz, 2005: 28).

Demonstrating this contrasting attitude, arts and literature of the Romantic period worshipped Alps as 'terribly wonderful' (Bätzing, 2003: 20). The natural world was idealised and sublimated^{iv}. Scientific exploration paved the way to the creation of touristic destinations^v: the period from 1760 to 1880, defined as pioneering, was mainly marked by English visitors. The new image of the Alps was so powerful that it altered the routes of the Grand Tour, especially for the English elite. To the hymn 'The Alps, the Alps', the English travelers made the Alps a picturesque attraction for artists, poets and scientists in search of uncontaminated and wild nature (Camanni, 2002: 40-41). Once again, it is in painting that the new spirit manifests itself, as in Caspar David Friedrich's *The Traveller above a Sea of Clouds* of 1818. With the advent of tourism there was a cultural revolution, that turned the Alps into the 'Playground of Europe' (Stephen, 1871). In the mid-nineteenth century, the image of the 'good mountain dweller' was therefore completely overturned: the town dwellers became the example of the 'good citizen' and the model to be followed, while who lived in mountain villages was described in a condition of wildness and backwardness, whose life were marked by the natural rhythms of the seasons and barely touched by the great events of history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, geographer Ellen Semple wrote of these areas as 'far from the great currents of men and ideas' (qtd in Viazzo, 2000: xii). In 1966, the historian Fernand Braudel wrote of the mountains as 'a world set apart from civilisation' and 'whose history was to have no history' (qtd in Viazzo, 2000: xii)^{vi}. The consequences of this process became evident after the Second World War, with the further political marginalisation of the traditional settlements and the agro-pastoral economy, and the continued transformation of the Alps into a place of leisure. This representation affected the self-representation of the mountain people until the end of the twentieth century, and led them to a feeling of inferiority (Camanni, 2002).

With the neglect of entire alpine areas, specific skills related to the agropastoral activities and to the forestry economy disappeared, and with them the transmission of knowledges and know-how embedded within the peasant society. The traditional mountain world appeared to be forgotten and the mountain dwellers to be defeated by modernisation (**Revelli, 1977; 1985**). With the spread of the mass tourism industry, the Alps were finally transformed into a 'Disneyalp' (**Crettaz, 2011**): a place of leisure to be used during free time (**Bätzing, 2003: 19-31**).

Recent Shifts in Imagination and a New Habitability of the Italian Alps

The set of constructions, discourses and ideals that have been built over time had had a strong influence in the contemporary processes of alpine marginalisation. In particular, the colonial figure of the 'mountain dweller' seems to be perpetuated, such as in other mountainous part of the world (**Sacareau, 2017**).

However, the Italian Alps have been experiencing unforeseen demographic and socio-economic changes since the early 2000s. After a consistent depopulation, a trend reversal have taken place, which is well documented by an international transdisciplinary literature about the return to the mountains of the so-called new inhabitants (**Bender, Kanitscheider, 2012; Maurer, Wyrzens, 2012; Corrado, 2014; Alpine Convention, 2015**)^{vii}. They are people attracted by mountains and determined to move there for different reasons: landscape, quality of life, close to nature, job opportunities, and or outdoor activities.

Rediscovery of the Alps as a place to live goes hand in hand with a new global sociological trend (**Donchevsky, Klimenko, 2015; Haas, Westlund, 2018**): the renovated interest in rural world, which comes from the redefinition of the core-periphery dynamics. Certainly, new representations and imaginaries of the mountains stand out, as the demographic movements of revitalisation of these areas often adopt lifestyle models that run counter to those of the urban-metropolitan areas. As other rural places, Italian Alps are also the landing ground for city-quitters (**Rosenkratz, 2018**) with new ideals and values related to rurality and 'alpinees'^{viii}.

For the modern declination of the new ruralism in the 2000s, I suggested the emergence of a fourth phase (beside the three described by Jean-Didier Urbain in 2002) which began in 2008 after that the economic crisis generated a noticeable discrepancy between job supply and demand, and lead to a growing discontent for city life and to a perception of it as alienating and impersonal. This fourth generation of new-rurals have a slightly different profile from the 'escapists' because they choose to

permanently migrate to rural areas in search for a new lifestyle, and they are deliberately seeking interaction and integration with the resident rural population (**Bertolino, 2014**).

In recent years, the relationship between these subjects and the old inhabitants has triggered virtuous processes of local development and new creative ways in terms of living and doing business in marginal areas (**Bertolino, 2021**), often based on retro-innovation practices (**Stuiver, 2006**). For example, the migrations to uplands have led to the renovation of vernacular architecture to save land use or to the restoration of agro-cultural landscapes by landowner associations which gather fragmented terraced properties, giving new attention to the commons and launching new green entrepreneurial activities. They are good examples of social innovation, also powered by new technological possibilities, which are growing all over the mountains, not only in the Alps or in Italy (**Secco et al., 2021**).

Moreover, the 'Alpark model' is now living a crisis linked to the climate changes. Sky resorts struggle to face the unpredictability of snow. Beside this, some catastrophic events have grabbed the attention of the press in recent years. In 2018, Vaia windstorm in the Dolomitic Alps caused an unprecedented blowdown of timbers and considerable damages to the natural landscape and forestry economy of this area, but overall it brought into the local communities a reconsideration of the relationship between humans, natural elements and anthropisation. Recently, the threat of the Planpincieux Glacier – located on the Italian side of the Grandes Jorasses in the Mont Blanc massif of the Alps – over the homonymous hamlet (Courmayeur municipality) due to the detachment of melting blocks, have led to an increasing ecological awareness which stress on the need of sustainable practices, especially in the Alpine tourism industry (**Alpine Convention, 2013**). It is also thanks to these catastrophic events that nowadays it is more and more evident that 'the history of our mountains is that of long-lasting co-evolutionary interactions between local societies and their natural environments' (**Salsa, 2019**), including non-human (**Krauss, 2018**).

Post-Urban Life in Pandemic Times: New representations of the Italian Alps during COVID-19 pandemic

As people interested in marginal areas keep growing in numbers, the new imaginaries of the Alps as a place where living have leaked into press (**Dematteis, 2020**). More often mountain areas and their 'borghi' (i.e. villages and hamlets) in Italy have been described in international magazines and newspapers as the logical place to move after lockdowns (**Iman, 2020; Ann Hughes, 2021**). Actually, when Italy shuttered for the

first lockdown, it was natural to see them – and in general the Italian rural areas – in antithesis with the city as a place of infection, and as a stereotypical place of health which is recurrently repeated over the centuries (see Boccaccio's *The Decameron*). Many majors of winter locations have defiantly used these images to invite city inhabitants to join them during the first lockdown, or to stay in their second homes.

The pandemic has triggered a reappraisal of urban living, with increasing numbers fleeing cities in search of green spaces and undercrowded villages. Archistars^{ix} and magazines made speeches and covers about the rethinking of 'Italian's borghi lifestyle' (Iman, 2020). One example: the cover of *Millionaire* (January 2021), an Italian business magazine. In the cover, drones, wi-fi hotspots, a bakery 4.0, and solar panels are drawn next to the ancient stone buildings. The picture nourishes a storytelling about the Italian villages based on the stereotypical imaginaries that hid the complexity of the repopulation phenomenon. Another example of journalistic sensationalism is the media campaign about the phenomenon of buying old houses for just one Euro. But the two cited imaginaries totally forget that most of the Italian villages are difficult to reach and blighted by both inadequate infrastructure investments and chronic depopulation (Sloan, 2018). Two territorial inequalities that have also influenced the management of the pandemic in inland areas in Italy.

These are gaps on which different organisations and associations, such as UNCEM (Unione nazionale comuni comunità enti montani) or Riabitare l'Italia, are actually working on (Cersosimo & Donzelli, 2020) and on which the Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne (National Strategy for Inner Areas) has been facing since its launch in 2012 by the Italian Ministry for Territorial Cohesion. Nowadays, in light of the impact of COVID-19, new policies seem to be undertaken in order to assist the economic and social recovery of these areas, also through tax breaks and incentives. At European level, many policies insist on repopulating rural areas through these instruments and on renovating the interdependence between urban and rural areas, especially in response to COVID-19. One of these is the Irish government's Future Rural Plan, which introduces relocation subsidies and tax breaks to attract workers from cities to rural towns, while putting in place some arrangements to integrate newcomers. There is a special focus on home working through the creation of remote working hubs with high-speed broadband, but also – and more importantly – on enabling rural communities to take over local services or amenities at risk of closure and to give people the opportunity to stay in their homeland areas (Government of Ireland, 2021).

Because apart from the journalistic sensationalism, it's true that the city is at stake, as an important festival born in Turin (Italy) and called Utopian Hours titled its 4th edition in autumn 2020^x. Life in the big cities has proven difficult during an extended pandemic: the prohibition to live a proper social life actually has removed what has always been the lifeblood of a city; being so close to hundreds of thousands of other human beings – which many city-lovers previously advocated as the best part of a big city life – has suddenly become useless and even perceived as dangerous, because each neighbour is perceived as a potential contagion; the main reason which drove people in the last decades toward the outskirts, a job, from one day to another has faded in a world where only hospitals and the food chain have been preserved; sadly, many people lost their job, as the economic fabric has fallen apart. Compressed in their thousands in such a suffocating concrete environment, it is not hard to understand how people started looking for alternatives: no more, no less than any city in any plague in History. And the Alps were quickly targeted, the only place where Nature could be experienced without trespassing the regional border imposed by the first months after the harshest lockdown. The Alps imaginary was chosen essentially because it was accessible with just a car, but also because it was known, with many citizens being the descendants of those young forces who left mountains from the '50s to '70s.

Starting from February 2020, the imaginary of a pristine and unpolluted area compared to cities during the Pandemic has brought to both new tourism and new tourists as well as a new dimension of migration in the Alps. Increased tourism, as soon as national lockdown restrictions were loosened during the summer 2020, has been the first herald of such rediscovery of the Alps: with the block on international travel maintained, mountain paths became overcrowded with people looking for the social distance and open spaces, in the end fresh air after months of constriction behind masks (**Brunello, 2020**). But this unexpected over-tourism can bring to serious consequences, because the Alps are a very fragile environment. Overtourism is a term that describes a situation where a place attracts too many travelers for sustainable management to be possible, and to an extent that became unbearable for inhabitants (**Screti, 2020**). Many international organisations such as Cipro International have been working since the early 2000 in order to engage civic society and local institution to put in place some actions to reverse the negative impact of tourism^{xi}. But overtourism seems to bring other features. Firstly, overtourism in remote areas is often underestimated until it becomes undeniable. Secondly, the media and social networks play a fundamental role in tourist flows, and in the last years a massive campaign has invested the remote areas of the Italian Alps. Finally, mountain areas are

experiencing a paradox: the more isolated they are, the more tourists want to visit them (**Screti, 2020**).

Furthermore, backed by the political attempt to push the economy with the old-fashioned tool of building, many real estate advertisements promote the restoration of single huts or entire hamlets for tourism through the imaginary of the rediscovery of the 'real' and 'authentic' mountain life. One of the examples is the Troncea hamlet in Val Chisone (Italian Western Alps) on sell from January 2021. These huge project, which require international venture capitals, are often described with many stereotypes which perpetuate a cannibalistic use of the land in the Alps. As the Swiss anthropologist Vivianne Cretton writes on lifestyle migrations in her homeland, the Valais: 'from this perspective, the mountains or the Alpine territory can be seen as a business object in the service of an economic and international elite' (**2018: 109**). As drawn some years ago by Cretton for the case of Valais, also for Italy some locations in mountain areas are reinvented by urbanities, in particular by some luxury accommodation projects. Here, the architectural aspects – stones and wooden houses in a small hamlet – seems to increase the ideal of 'authenticity'. Always following Cretton, the quest of authenticity finds some sources in the Romantic period and in its exacerbated fascination with the mountains (**2018: 121**). At the same time, a big conflict emerged: you cannot stop people moving to uplands simply because this can spark a resurgence in the economy; and, you cannot deny it could be the very occasion to finally see the awareness of these marginal areas growing.

For what concerns the new dimension of in-migration and uses of the Alps, modern technology has boosted the phenomenon: while simply ten years ago the internet connections and the digital infrastructure were unable to support an actual living and working from distance, up to date technology makes it easy. The stage for return migration is set: the 'Alpark' can be enjoyed every day, with the necessity of traveling to the overcrowded city only restricted to a minor part of the work week. One prediction is what I would call an 'intermittent habitability' of an upper-class, with capitals to invest, which decided to buy a second home and to work from it, settling in general in the big ski resorts (**Andruetto, 2020**). The phenomenon is part of a more general trend towards the alpine gentrification (**Perlik, 2011; Boscoboinik, 2018**) and – at the same time – part of a multilocality by different social actors (**Friedli, 2017**). This multilocal living is not exclusive of the Alps but it can be found in different places and for many reasons (**ARL, 2021**). However, the pandemic has moved the phenomenon towards the Alps, placing it in an 'ecological' framework (**Andruetto, 2020**). The expression that I suggest derives from the French 'habiter intermittent' used to indicate a new model of living in the Alps of some retirees (**Cholat et al, 2020**). What I proposed here is to extend the expression

‘intermittent habitability’ to indicate a use of the second homes by working-age people who are not only interested in leisure. Although it remains a semi-touristic form of multilocal life (ARL, 2021: 4), the boundaries between being a tourist and a resident are becoming more and more blurred (Bourdeau, 2012; Elmi & Perlik, 2014). In a long-term dynamic, people who have decided to temporarily relocate in mountains, in order to be able to eventually manage lockdowns, have discovered the new habitat as a way to escape the climate warming with extreme hot days in the summertime (Mercalli, 2020) but also increased pollution levels in the big cities. The strong purchasing power of these intermittent inhabitants contributes to shape the territorial development through their presence but also through their absence (ARL, 2021: 7). The first effect is always a rise in house prices¹², pushing away the locals from the real estate market, but some important effects could also affect the local services (such as medical cabinets, schools but also shops) because an intermittent inhabitant could tend to favour the use of services in the city (Cholat et al, 2020) and this could make the uplands economy unable to survive.

Nevertheless, the new vision of the Alps after the COVID-19 pandemic and the experience of lockdowns into the cities, could be the seed of a new movement of return migration of people who are able to work from distance by means of home and remote working or that would leave the impoverished cities to live in place where the ratio between work salary and the cost of living is still better. But if the straw that breaks the camel's back has been the pandemic, nobody can deny that the precondition could only be the already ongoing rediscovery of the Alps as a place to live in the last twenty years.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the post-COVID-19 context, the Italian Alps are facing new challenges related to some imaginaries emerged in the last years. One of these challenges is common to the Alps and to other rural territories in the world. It is part of the reformulation of the duality of the core-periphery relation, as we have known in the sociological literature. If well managed, it may contribute to a new alliance between territories, between cities and mountains, and to a new regulation of eco-systemic goods. As the Italian geographer Giuseppe Dematteis has recently written:

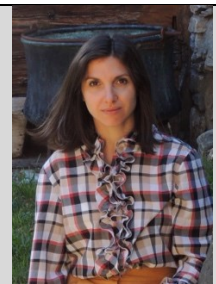
[we are witnessing] a mountain [that] wants to become a ‘city’ without losing its diversity, but associating it with what today are the metropolis failings: the culture of the limit, a public-spirit of community and the values of solidarity and participatory democracy (2020: 4) (free translation from the author).

But the Alps remain a place where different and ambivalent gazes intertwine. These lead to some new reconfigurations of the communities, of the commons, and of the property rules (Viazzo & Zanini, 2020), which have been one of the favourite themes of the cultural anthropology since it landed in the Alps in the middle of the last century. The Alps enter into the reflections on the theme of post-urban life, putting back at the centre those reconfigurations already studied by the discipline but which are now in a complex framework of relations and negotiations of imaginaries and policies on a local, national or international scale. The study of the representations of the Alps in this pandemic period enriches the current literature on territorial reconfigurations and on urban-rural linkages, but it also fits into the debate on the period of crisis that requires the 'de-centering of an anthropocentric perspective and a shift towards a different understanding of landscape' (Krauss, 2018: 1030). New scenarios are therefore opening up for research, not only anthropological, dealing with places of high natural values that are inhabited by people, such as the Alps.

Acknowledgements

The author is really thankful to the Editorial Board and to the two anonymous reviewers for their support and comments on the manuscript. The Scientific Committee of the Conference 'Living in the End Times: Utopian and Dystopian Representations of Pandemics' (Web Conference hosted by Cappadocia University, Turkey. January 13-15, 2021) is also thanked for the encourage in publishing the intervention from which this article derives.

Maria Anna Bertolino is research fellow at the Centre régional d'études des populations alpines (CREPA) in Sembrancher (Switzerland). She has previously held positions at the University of Turin (Italy) where she has been a guest lecturer at the Department of Foreign languages, literatures and modern cultures. She is specialized in alpine anthropology with a PhD thesis on the process of resettlement in traditional out-migration areas in the Western Italian Alps. Her research interests include the demographic changes in marginalised rural areas, the process of patrimonialisation of the Alpine cultural heritage, the agro-pastoral systems and their transformations, and the history of the Alpine tourism.



References

- AA.VV., 1972. Dynamics of Ownership in the Circum-Alpine Area (Special Issue), *Anthropological Quarterly*, 45, 3.
- Alpine Convention, 2013. *Sustainable Tourism in the Alps*, Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention.
- Alpine Convention, 2015. *Demographic Changes in the Alps*, Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention.
- Andruetto, G., 2020. La lenta crisi delle città: l'upper class si trasferisce montagna. *La Repubblica*, 22 December 2020. Available at: https://www.repubblica.it/green-and-blue/2020/12/22/news/la_lenta_crisi_delle_citta_le_classi_elevate_scelgono_la_montagna-279323220 [Accessed: 16 February 2021].
- Ann Hughes, R., 2021. Could Remote Working Revive Italy's Dying Villages?, *Forbes*, 15 February 2021. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccahughes/2021/02/15/could-remote-working-revive-italys-dying-villages/?sh=528b2227b7ca> [Accessed: 22 October 2021].
- ARL-Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association, 2021. *Multilocal living and spatial development*. Available at: <http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0156-01231> [Accessed: 22 October 2021].
- Bätzing, W., 2003. *Le Alpi. Una regione unica al centro d'Europa*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.
- Bender, O. and Kanitscheider, S., 2012. New immigration into the European Alps: emerging research issues, *Mountain Research and Development*, 32 (2), pp. 235-241. DOI: [10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-12-00030.1](https://doi.org/10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-12-00030.1) [Accessed: 16 February 2021].
- Bertolino, M.A., 2014. *Eppur si vive. Nuove pratiche del vivere e dell'abitare nelle Alpi occidentali*, Roma: Metiedizioni.
- Bertolino, M.A., 2021. Agri-cultural resistance and local development: the cases of lavender and rye in the Susa Valley, *Scienze del Territorio*, 9. DOI: [10.13128/sdt-12490](https://doi.org/10.13128/sdt-12490) [Accessed: 12 February 2021].
- Boscoboinik, A., 2018. *Becoming Cities, Losing Paradise? Gentrification in the Swiss Alps*. In: Pardo, I. and Prato, G., eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 519-536.
- Bourdeau, P., 2012. *Visiting/living (in) the Alps: towards a tourist-residential convergence?* In: Varotto, M. and Castiglioni, B., eds, *Di chi sono le Alpi? Appartenenze politiche, economiche e culturali nel mondo alpino contemporaneo*, Padova: Padova University press, pp. 195-204.

- Brunello, L., 2020. Dolomiti prese d'assalto, dai laghi alle ferrate. In coda sui sentieri (spesso senza mascherina) per una montagna sempre più modello Rimini, *Il Dolomiti*, 15 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.ildolomiti.it/societa/2020/dolomiti-prese-dassalto-dai-laghi-alle-ferrate-in-coda-sui-sentieri-spesso-senza-mascherina-per-una-montagna-sempre-piu-modello-rimini> [Accessed: 15 February 2021].
- Camanni, E., 2002. *La nuova vita delle Alpi*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.
- Cersosimo, D. and Donzelli, C., 2020. *Manifesto per riabitare l'Italia*. Roma: Donzelli editore.
- Cholat, F., Gwiazdzinski, L., Thiriet, L., 2020. *Vivre à la ville et à la montagne. Première approche d'un habiter intermittent*. In: Gwiazdzinski, L., Colleoni, M., Cholat, F. and Daconto, L., eds., *Vivere la Montagna. Abitanti, attività e strategie*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, pp. 50-58.
- Crettaz, B., 2011. *Disneyalp. Riflessioni di un etnografo conservatore museale alpino*. Ivrea-Scarmagno: Priuli & Verlucca.
- Cretton, V., 2018. *In search of a better worlds in the Swiss Alps: lifestyle migration, quality of life, and gentrification*. In: Horáková, H., Boscoboinik, A. and Smith R., *Utopia and Neoliberalism: Ethnographies of rural spaces*, Berlin: Lit Verlag, pp. 107-125.
- Corrado, F., ed., 2014. Nouveaux habitants. Dynamiques de repeuplement en zone de montagne, *Journal of Alpine Research/Revue de géographie alpine*, 102 (3). DOI: [10.4000/rga.2366](https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.2366) [Accessed: 16 February 2021].
- Cuaz, M., 2005. *Le Alpi*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Debarbieux, B. and Rudaz, G., 2010. *Les faiseurs de montagne: imaginaires politiques et territorialités, XVIIIe-XXIe siècle*. Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Dematteis, G., 2020. La montagna italiana da riscoprire, salvaguardare, ripopolare, *Rivista Il Mulino*, 6, pp. 956-962.
- Donchevsky, G. and Klimenko, L., 2015. Value and Identification Grounds of Post-urban Life Activity Forms in Contemporary Russia, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6 (6 S5), pp. 62-69. DOI: [10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n6s5p62](https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n6s5p62) [Accessed: 4 February 2021].
- Elmi, M. and Perlik, M., 2014. From tourism to multilocal residence?, *Journal of Alpine Research/Revue de géographie alpine*, 102 (3). Available at: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/2608> [Accessed: 22 October 2021].
- Fleming, F., 2004. The Alps and the Imagination. *Ambio, Special Report. The Royal Colloquium: Mountain Areas: A Global Resource*, 13, pp. 51-55. DOI: [10.1007/0044-7447-33.sp13.51](https://doi.org/10.1007/0044-7447-33.sp13.51) [Accessed: 16 February 2021].
- Fourny, M.C., 1994. Nouveaux habitants dans un pays de moyenne montagne. *Etudes Rurales*, 135-136, pp. 83-95. Available at: https://www.persee.fr/doc/rural_0014-2182_1994_num_135_1_3486 [Accessed: 16 February 2021].

- Friedli, A., 2020. Living in the mountains: Mobilities, forms of residentiality and local identities of new inhabitants of a Swiss ski resort, *Via Tourism Review*, 18. DOI: [10.4000/viatourism.5792](https://doi.org/10.4000/viatourism.5792) [Accessed: 23 October 2021].
- Giorcelli Bersani, S., 2019. *L'impero in quota. I Romani e le Alpi*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Government of Ireland, 2021. *Our Rural Future Rural Development Policy 2021-2025*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/#our-rural-future-rural-development-policy-2021-2025>. [Accessed: 2 October 2021].
- Guichonnet, Paul, ed., 1986. *Destino storico. Storia e civiltà delle Alpi*, vol. I. Milano: Jaca Book.
- Guichonnet, Paul, ed., 1987. *Destino storico. Storia e civiltà delle Alpi*, vol. II. Milano: Jaca Book.
- Haas, T. and Westlund, H., eds., 2018. *In the Post-Urban World. Emergent Transformation of Cities and Regions in the Innovative Global Economy*. New York: Routledge.
- Iman, J., 2020. Italy's remote villages now make an ideal escape, *The Guardian*, 22 June 2020. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/jun/22/italy-deserted-villages-ideal-escape-pandemic-post-lockdown-distancing> [Accessed: 22 October 2021].
- Kilani, M., 1984, Les images de la montagne au passé et au présent: l'exemple des Alpes valaisannes, *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde, Archives suisses des traditions populaires*, 80.
- Krauss, W., 2018. Alpine Landscapes in the Anthropocene: Alternative Common Futures, *Landscape Research*, 45 (8), pp. 1021-1031. DOI: [10.1080/01426397.2018.1503242](https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2018.1503242) [Accessed: 20 February 2021].
- de Lalouvière, N., 2021. Conceptualising 'Cultural Landscape Commons': Retracing Ecological Thinking from the Swiss Alpine Landscape to Social-Ecological Systems. *Journal of Alpine Research/Revue de géographie alpine*, 109-1. DOI: [10.4000/rga.8389](https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.8389) [Accessed: 3 October 2021].
- Maurer, O. and Wytzens H. K., eds., 2012. *Demographic Challenges in the Alpine Space: The Search for Transnational Answers*, DEMOCHANGE Midterm Conference.
- Mercalli, L., 2020. *Salire in montagna. Prendere quota per sfuggire al riscaldamento globale*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Perlik, M., 2011. Alpine gentrification: The mountain village as a metropolitan neighbourhood, *Journal of Alpine geography/Revue de géographie alpine*, 99 (1). Available at: <http://rga.revues.org/1370>. [Accessed: 23 October 2021].
- Perlik, M. et al., eds., 2019. *Alpine refugees. Immigration at the core of Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars.
- Revelli, N., 1977. *Il mondo dei vinti*. Torino: Einaudi.

- Revelli, N. 1985. *L'anello forte: la donna. Storie di vita contadina*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Rosenkratz, K., 2018. *City Quitters: Creative Pioneers Pursuing Post-Urban Life*. London: Frame.
- Sacareau, I., 2017. Mountains and Mountain Dwellers of the Global South and the Globalisation of Tourism: Imaginaries and Practices, *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine*, 105-3. DOI: [10.4000/rga.3864](https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.3864). [Accessed: 3 October 2021].
- Salsa, A., 2007. *Il tramonto delle identità tradizionali: spaesamento e disagio esistenziale nelle Alpi*. Ivrea-Scarmagno: Priuli&Verluccha.
- Salsa, A., 2019. *I paesaggi delle Alpi: Un viaggio nelle terre alte tra filosofia, natura e storia*. Roma: Donzelli editore.
- Screti, F., 2020. *Là-haut sur la montagne, était beaucoup trop de monde*, Universitas, 04 2019/2020. Available at: <https://www.unifr.ch/universitas/fr/editions/2019-2020/die-berge/la-haut-sur-la-montagne-etait-beaucoup-trop-de-monde.html>. [Accessed: 4 October 2021].
- Secco, L., et al., eds., 2021. Impact of Social Innovation on Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, Special issue, *Sustainability*, 13(4). Available at: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability/special_issues/impact_social_innovation [Accessed: 18 February 2021].
- Sloan, K. E., 2018. *Re-awakening 'Ghost Towns', Alternative Futures for Abandoned Italian Villages*. Ph.D Thesis, University of Wollongong, Australia. Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses1/437/> [Accessed: 15 February 2021].
- Stephen, L., 1871. *Playground of Europe*, London: Longman.
- Stuiver, M., 2006, *Highlighting the Retro Side of Innovation and its Potential for Regime Change in Agriculture*. In: Marsden, T. and Murdoch, J., eds., *Between the Local and the Global. Research in Rural Sociology and Development*, vol. 12, London: Emerald, pp. 147-173.
- Urbain, J.D., 2002. *Paradis verts. Désirs de campagne et passions résidentielles*. Paris: Payot.
- Viazzo, P.P., 1989. *Upland communities. Environment, population and social structure in the Alps since the sixteenth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Viazzo, P.P., 2000. *Introduzione. Un nuovo paradigma negli studi alpini: il contributo di Harriet G. Rosemberg*. In: Rosemberg, H. G., *Un mondo negoziato. Tre secoli di trasformazioni in una comunità alpina del Queyras*, Roma: Carocci editore.
- Viazzo, P.P., Zanini, R.C., 2020. Le Alpi italiane. Bilancio antropologico di un ventennio di mutamenti, *EtnoAntropologia*, 8 (2), pp. 15-32. Available at: <http://www.rivisteclub.it/riviste/index.php/etnoantropologia/article/view/34>. [Accessed: 7 October 2021].

Wolf, E., 1972. Ownership and political ecology, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 45 (3), pp. 201-205.

To cite this article:

Bertolino, M.A., 2022. Post-Urban Life in the Italian Alps during a Pandemic: New paradigm or ephemeral phenomenon? *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 9(2), 1-16. Available at: <http://doi.org/10.31273/eirj.v9i2.831>

Endnotes

ⁱ For a complete overview on the subject, please refer to Guichonnet (1986;1987), Camanni (2002), Bätzing (2005) and Cuaz (2005), from whom most of the information for the drafting of this paragraph is taken.

ⁱⁱ Around the 1200 AD, during the Little Climatic Optimum (a period of relatively mild and warm climate), many valleys were colonised and the economy, made up of transalpine traffic and caravan crossings, flourished (Salsa, 2019: 120). The alpine space was transformed into a 'homeland' by the communities that settled there (Salsa, 2007: 63). During this period, the Alps were also crossed by pilgrims, which shaped a representation of the mountains as a place of redemption and moral test.

ⁱⁱⁱ In *Julie ou la nouvelle Heloise* (1761), the French writer and philosopher offers a sublimated description of the Alps, a vision that strongly anticipates the characteristics of the Romantic imaginary. In this case, the contrast between the Alpine inhabitant and the citizen is used as a social critique against the unhealthy and morally corrupted world of the absolute monarchies.

^{iv} A process that, in isolated cases, can be found even earlier, such as in Francesco Petrarca's singing of Mont Ventoux and in some Swiss Renaissance humanists. However, in the specific case of the end of the eighteenth century, the new imaginary of the Alps became generalised as a result of European modernisation and industrialisation (Bätzing, 2003: 24).

^v The first scientists to climb the alpine peaks were some geologists interested in finding the key to the scientific question of the Creation. For Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, the mountains were a 'laboratory of nature' in which find 'natural documents' (qtd in Cuaz, 2005: 25).

^{vi} These quotations nourished the so-called 'montagnard paradigm' which affirms that: the demography of the Alps has always been 'primitive', i.e. characterised by very high birth and death rates; alpine communities are dependents on the scarce natural resources and they are therefore forced to emigrate because of an endemic poverty. It was only after many anthropological studies in the Alps that a 'revisionist paradigm' replaced the previous one. These studies overcame the stereotypical representation, arguing that: alpine communities are not closed systems; their demography is not primitive; emigration is not an escape from overpopulation or misery; the environment does not completely condition their lives but it is itself conditioned by human action (Viazzo, 1989).

^{vii} For twenty years now – although the phenomenon can be traced back to a few years earlier (Fourny, 1994) – geographers, sociologists and anthropologists have been studying and labelling these new mountaineers in their complexity and variety of stories, trajectories and intentions. Recently, many social scientists have considered the arrival of refugees as 'forced new mountaineers' in the empty spaces of the Alps (Perlik et al., 2019).

^{viii} Although they have changed a great deal, the Alps still appear to be a veritable laboratory for the study of the interactions between the environment and the livelihood strategies (AAVV, 1972). The first modern anthropological approach to the Alps was that of the cultural ecology in the 1960s and in 1970s: it became

clear that the social and cultural aspects are shaped on the basis of the natural resources, but that they also contribute to shape the Alpine landscape in its variety of forms (and cultures) (**de Lalouvière, 2021**).

^{ix} 'Archistar' is a neologism of the Italian language that derives from the words 'architect' and 'star'. It means an architect of international renown, whose notoriety derives from the production of spectacular projects, which make him comparable to the VIP of the show business.

^x See for example the dossier titled *Neve Diversa (Different Snow)* published every year by the Italian association Legambiente (<https://www.legambiente.it/campagna/nevediversa/>).

^{xi} Even if sociological studies are not yet coming, the phenomenon is evident in the press and in the real estate trends (**Andruetto, 2020**).