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Giuseppe Dematteis

Translator: Translated by the author and revised by Luigi Genta Traduzioni

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The Alpine Metropolitan-Mountain Faced with Global Challenges. Reflections on the Case of Turin

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Introduction

- 1 During the years 2015–2017 the Dislivelli Association of Turin carried out a study (Dematteis and Di Gioia, 2017) on the flow of persons, goods, services and money resulting from exchanges between mountain communities and urban agglomerations within the Turin Metropolitan City (*Città Metropolitana di Torino*, former *Provincia di Torino*). This institutional territorial entity, measuring 6,827 km² (2,636 mi²), comprises 316 municipalities, with 2.3 million inhabitants. 60.5% of it consists of an Alpine mountain area stretching from the foothills to 4000m a.s.l. . This paper uses certain empirical evidence of this study and other unpublished data in order to identify the general characteristics of Alpine spaces included in a metropolitan system and to discuss the key to a better integration between rural mountain and surrounding urban areas. This perspective will be analysed with reference to predictable responses of the Alpine contexts to the impact of global changes concerning environment, technology, and neo-liberal economy. The last section will be dedicated to a reflection on the specificity of metropolitan Alpine regions intended as a bi-polar territorial systems

The Alpine mountains in the system of exchanges of the Metropolitan City of Turin

- 2 Table 1 provides an overview of the mutual exchanges between the two parts in which the metropolitan territory of Turin is divided: the mountain area (M) and the urbanized piedmont area (U). The first consist of the 150 municipalities classified as “mountainous” by the Piedmont Region Administration. It covers an area of 4,130 km², with 280,000 inhabitants. The second covers an area of 2,697 km², with 1,970,000 residents, divided in 165 municipalities. The Turin functional region is slightly larger than the *Città Metropolitana*, but the latter includes in its boundaries the majority of local exchanges between the Alps and the Turin metropolitan conurbation. The last column gives a measure of M’s dependence on U.

Table 1. The main exchanges/year between the mountain area (M) and urban foreland (U) in the Città Metropolitana di Torino

Good/services/ persons exchanged	Flow M =>U	Monetary counterpart U=>M (EUR million)	Flow U =>M	Monetary counterpart M=>U (EUR million)	Exchanges by M with the rest of the world (% of monetary value)
Water supply	2,800 billion m ³	0.3 Payment of concessions 15 Sale of bottled water	Investments in infrastructure	-	57
Regulation of ecosystem services	Environment maintenance	17 Compensation by public bodies	Preventive and remedial works	-	5
Hydroelectric power	2,970 GWh Released into national grid	0.4 Take-up by U	-	-	97
Mineral resources	Extraction and sale	0.4 Concession fee 15.5 sale	-	-	75

Other natural resources (game, fish, mushrooms etc.)	Catching, collecting and sale	2.2 Licenses and sale	Payment of permits	-	17
Agricultural products	Sale of fruit, wine, potatoes etc.	7.3	Purchases	-	20
Livestock products	Sale of milk and dairy products	48.7	Purchases	-	16
Wood products	Wood sales	0.7	Purchases	-	22
Labour (commuting)	40.000 commuters	979 Wages and salaries	14,800 commuters	344 Wages and salaries	4
Goods and services for families	Travels for purchases and access to services	-	-	661 (245)	10
Goods and services for businesses	Demand	-	Supply	572 (112)	43
Tourism (business)	Accommodation and other tourist services,	213 (155)	5.8 mln tourists	-	36
Free cultural ecosystem services	Offer of environment, landscape, and heritage	-	Green, "soft", eco-cultural tourism	-	10
New residents	2,800	No estimate	3.700	No estimate	No estimate
Total (EUR million)	-	1,330 (1,175)	-	1,559 (701)	7,059 (4,800)

NOTE: THE TABLE ONLY CONSIDERS RECURRENT FLOWS, EXCLUDING THOSE RELATED TO EXCEPTIONAL OCCURRENCES. THE MONETARY COUNTERPARTS BETWEEN M AND U (FIGURES IN NORMAL FONT) INCLUDE GOODS NOT PRODUCED IN M NOR IN U. THE FIGURES IN ITALICS AND BRACKETS EXCLUDE SUCH GOODS. ALL DATA REFER TO YEARS 2016-2017.

DATA SOURCE: DEMATTEIS AND DI GIOIA. IN THE LAST COLUMN UNPUBLISHED DATA COLLECTED IN THE YEARS 2016-17

- 3 The M-U interchange shows a number of mutual dependencies. The mountain (M) depends on the urban metropolitan piedmont (U) mainly in terms of goods and services (for families and businesses) and commuting to work. But it also depends to a certain extent on demand of tourists and on trade of agro-forestry-pastoral products.

Oppositely, the unequal allocation of natural capital generates a strong dependence of U on natural services such as water supply, ecosystem regulation, and cultural ecosystem services (recreational, aesthetic, educational). These mutual dependencies and their potential evolution are summarized in table 2, in which the degree of dependence is related to the replaceability of current exchanges with potential exchanges with origins and destinations outside of the M-U territorial system.

Table 2. Mutual dependence of mountain area (M) and urban foreland (U) in the Città Metropolitana di Torino (indicative scores from 0 to 5)

Good/service exchanged	Dependence of M on U	Dependence of U on M	Possible growth (+) and decrease (-) of mutual dependence	Possible growth (+) and decrease (-) of the exchanges of M outside U
Water (supply and control)	1	4	++	+
Cultural ecosystem services	1	3	++	+++
Agro-forestry-pastoral production	2	1	++	+++
Labour (commuting)	3	1	⊖	⊖
Goods and services for families	3	0	⊖	+
Goods and services for business	4	0	⊖	++
Tourism	3	2	++	+++

SOURCE: DEMATTEIS AND DI GIOIA 2017, REVISED

- 4 Despite the general trend to substitute local interactions with remote interactions, the physical M-U proximity remains binding for essential needs such as water supply and control, easy access to what is missing in the urban agglomerations in terms of environment and landscape, and, in M rural areas, in terms of goods and services. In addition, some proximity relationships are not coercive but dictated by convenience, trust, sense of belonging, topophilia etc. It is important to notice the increase of short food supply chains for the sale of agro-pastoral products, currently becoming a key component of metropolitan food planning (Dansero and Pettenati, 2015). For this reason, even if socio-economic inequalities were reduced, a certain degree of mutual

dependence would remain, due to natural constraints, economic requirements, and cultural choices.

From the case of Turin to a conceptual model of the Alpine “metropolitan-mountain”

- 5 The Alpine mountain area of Turin appears as a relational space whose economical, social, and cultural characteristics result from interactions with a highly urbanized foreland. It presents three macro-areas: (1) lower mountain (1,787 km² hosting 250,390 residents), partly industrialized, with valley floors reached by peri-urban expansion of the bordering agglomerations; (2) few areas of large ski resorts located in the high valleys (567 km² with 10,124 residents); (3) remaining rural areas of the high and medium valleys (1,774 km², hosting 15,588 residents), demographically and economically weak (Corrado 2014).
- 6 As is well known, the peculiarity of the Alpine mountain comes from its vertical dimension of living environments with its ecological specificities. As results of long-term co-evolutionary interactions, these environmental features are also associated with certain characteristics of local societies, regarding settlements, farming practices, cultural expressions, management of collective goods etc. In our case, these characteristics have largely disappeared in areas (1) and (2), where urban life styles are now prevalent, and the natural environment has a less practical relevance compared to that of constructed and artificialized spaces. The weak rural areas (3), despite suffering from depopulation and abandonment, retain certain traditional characteristics, especially in their landscape features. Therefore, they appear as territories riddled with empty spaces (Viazzo and Zanini 2014), prepared to accept persons attracted by its environmental values and eager for new recreational, housing, and working experiences (Corrado 2016).
- 7 These economically weak areas also present the experience of hosting and subsequent settlement of immigrants and asylum seekers facing persecution or fleeing poverty (Membretti 2015; Membretti, Viazzo and Kofler 2017). Overall, such spaces are very different from those of the peri-urban mountain, where new settlers are attracted by lower cost of housing or by rural environmental conditions not very different from those of the nearby piedmont plains. Instead, the “empty” mountain spaces seem to be the potential laboratories of settlement experiences attempting to combine the advantages of the city with those of a specific natural and socio-cultural environment. In such areas, landscape marketization, typical of the Alpine gentrification (Debarbieux, 2008 ; Perlik, 2011), plays a minor role. Rather, these inland areas appear to be the theatre where a small (but growing) number of new settlers are combining a new urban way of life to the radical diversity of the mountain environment. In the Italian Alps, the new residents have profiles varying from individuals seeking their roots to nomadic experimenters.
- 8 This process is favoured by the spread in the collective consciousness of what Aldo Bonomi (2013) called “new mountain centrality”. This means that the diversity of the mountain environment is now perceived as a set of economic, cultural, aesthetic, and existential values, not only complementary but also partly alternative to the urban values. Thus, the “new centrality” is attracting not only vacationers, but also new

residents, multiple residents, new farmers, and innovative entrepreneurs. This new positive vision of the Alpine mountain as a “laboratory” (Brun and Perrin 2001) is also shared by the well-learned native youth, and it has the potential to generate a cumulative growth of residents, employment, and services, destined to change the traditional relationships with the foreland cities. In this way, the new Alpine *cultural* centrality could become the key factor in reducing the *functional* peripherality of large mountain areas.

- 9 In recent decades there are signs of this trend in Piedmont (Dematteis 2011) as well as in the rest of the Italian Alps (Varotto, 2013; Corrado, Dematteis, Di Gioia 2014, Corrado 2016), and in other Alpine countries (Cipra, 2007; Messerli, Scheurer and Veit, 2011; Bender and Kanitscheider, 2012). In the Italian case we have proven, at least as a tendency, the thesis formulated by Manfred Perlik (2011) according to which the classic centre-periphery model is dissolving, but for now this is not only due to peri-urbanisation or a massive mountain gentrification. Currently, the only example of the latter cases in the Italian Alps is the competition for positional goods (club goods), related to architectural excellences and real estate values in certain well-known mountain resorts such as Cortina d’Ampezzo, Madesimo, Courmayeur, Sestrière, and few others.
- 10 In the case of the Turin metropolitan region, the weakening of the centre-periphery model tends to produce a bi-polar relational structure in which each of the two poles – the metropolitan agglomeration and the Alpine core – has its own different centrality, so that a negative gradient from city to mountain is balanced by an another reverse gradient from mountain to city. This is related to residential choices not only dependent on local amenities, but also on remote working facilities and on an innovative use of local natural and cultural assets¹. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves to what extent this optimistic scenario is compatible with the changes taking place on a global scale.

The Alpine metropolitan-mountain in a global relation system

- 11 What is changing in the afore mentioned metropolitan-mountain representation if there is a change from a metropolitan relational system to a multi-scalar system of relationships within a global context? The answer must take into account the epochal shift of what has been called “second modernity” or “great metamorphosis” (Beck, 2016), in which the Alpine mountain faces two major challenges mutually dependent: firstly, the threats to the global ecosystem due to climate change, air, soil, and water pollution, biological and cultural mass extinction; secondly, the direct and mainly indirect consequences of the neoliberal financial economy.
- 12 Climate change and the threat to the integrity of ecosystems have certain direct effects on mountain environments and indirect effects on the new image of the Alpine mountain as an alternative to metropolitan living. In the last decades the reaction of a growing part of the population to such environmental threats and to their side effects helped to raise a widespread awareness of the importance of environmental values for existential needs and daily well being.

- 13 Since the 90s, influential public actors as UN, FAO, UNESCO, EU, the Alpine states, and a number of NGOs, began to establish a new image of the mountains from the cultural, economic and political points of view (Debarbieux and Price, 2008). This created a cultural orientation that attached a higher quality of life in the rural mountain areas compared to that offered by large urban agglomerations. This is a radically different view from that which in the past century had led to consider the mountain values as complementary to urban values, through exploitation of natural resources and tourist use of its landscape, recreational, and health benefits (De Rossi 2016). The cultural change may be linked with the “emancipatory reaction” (Beck, 2015) to the threat of environmental degradation and climate change that leads citizens to adopt a more responsible behaviour implicitly or explicitly contrary to the current unsustainable development model. Currently the aesthetic and recreational appreciation of the mountain environment, which explains the *amenity migrants* phenomenon (Moss 1996), is always present, but it is no longer sufficient to explain the construction of a “new centrality” of the Alpine mountains and the behaviour of a significant portion of their new settlers, belonging to a “second modernity”.
- 14 Other indirect effects of climate change beneficial to the metropolitan mountain area are the promotion of renewable energy sources and the birth of a carbon credit market, which may give an economic value to carbon capture and storage. Certain direct effects are instead variable. Climate change has a negative impact on biodiversity, the melting of glaciers, and permafrost. Drought threatens summer pastures and reduces hydroelectric production, though on the other hand increasing the value of mountain water reserves. Rising temperatures reduce the number and extension of the ski facilities, while the use of artificial snow collides with economic and environmental sustainability issues. This financially damages the tourism economy and real estate values in many winter sports resorts. On the other hand, the rise of altitudinal limits due to temperature increase promotes the extension of valuable crops such as olives, fruit, and grapevines. The hydrogeological risk is worsened by the increasing frequency of extreme weather events that threaten the urbanized piedmont, thus drawing attention to the care and maintenance of the mountain territory, and consequently the fact that it should continue to be populated.
- 15 Economic globalization favours the opening of mountain economies to international markets, but in its current extractive and expulsion version (Sassen 2014) it acts predominantly in a negative sense. By using finance and monetary policy to drive economic processes (Mazzacurato and Jacobs, 2016), it enhances inequality (Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2013) and imposes severe limits to public spending. By making the geographical distribution and the management of public services market-dependent, it tends to depopulate low-demand mountain areas. The reduction of public spending on welfare and services goes in the same direction. Moreover, the global economy encourages a financialisation of water and energy resources, which reduces the independence of local businesses. An even more serious issue is that, by investing in an ICT infrastructure that is dependent on demand, the market logic limits the development of teleservices and teleworking, which is essential in transforming depopulated inner mountain areas in alternative living spaces. Finally, the obsession with short-term financial returns prevents strategic longer-term visions required by projects in favour of development. Therefore, neoliberal globalization appears directly or indirectly as a major obstacle to the triggering of the cumulative process by which

the new cultural centrality of the inner mountain areas could lead to a reduction of its functional peripherality. The metropolitan-mountain rebalancing model outlined above will thus only work if there is a reaction to the global financial threats capable of producing effective counteraction at different scales, similar to the reaction it already has in opposition to climate change

- 16 In this regard, the example of the No-TAV movement in Susa Valley (Bobbio and Dansero, 2006; Aime, 2016; Sutton, 2016) is particularly instructive. According to the movement, the crossing of the valley by the Lyon-Turin high speed train and the construction of a new transalpine tunnel – as a result of European and national decisions – are considered damaging to environmental values, health of the inhabitants, and local interests. Even apart from these reasons, the case is interesting because the threat comes from an easily identifiable adversary. This allowed the mobilization of a large part of the resident population based on shared interests and perspectives. It produced a valley identity that was not there before. It allowed to overcome individualism and provincialism and thus has made it possible to build a common strategic perspective. In this way the movement, starting from a challenge that could seem restricted to NIMBYs, has given rise to a non-hierarchical network, engaged in a number of proactive actions ².
- 17 This example suggests that it is probably difficult to have sufficient mobilization in support of counteractions if the responsibility of processes with negative effects remains abstract and cannot be attributed to specific actors. In terms of the marginalized mountain area, it is not a matter of reacting to something that threatens consolidated interests or well-defined collective expectations, but to counter mechanisms which prevent, indirectly and not clearly, the generation of possible future collective advantages through complex and uncertain projects. Therefore it is more likely that counteractions may arise in response to the threat of something that already exists, such as single local projects on which there is already a certain level of investment in hope, energy, and resources. Projects of this type are abundant in the Alps, but in order to effectively be realized, they require a common awareness of their emancipatory power and the networking ability of the political system at the metropolitan city level and beyond.

Conclusions

- 18 The Turin metropolitan region offers a good example of a vast mountain area with characteristics and development trends common to many other Alpine regions functionally dependent on foreland urban agglomerations (Dematteis, 2009). The analysis of the exchanges between rural inland mountain areas and their urban piedmont shows a mutual dependence in support of a metropolitan-Alpine integration. The awareness of the “new centrality” of the Alpine environment gives rise to an emancipative reaction to global environmental and economic threats. In an optimistic hypothesis this reaction can entail a virtuous circle of growth of new residents, employment, and services, implementing the idea of a new Alpine urbanism, less dependent on external urban poles. Nevertheless this perspective must take into account the same global threats generating, as a response, the image of a new Alpine centrality. As they are for the most part indirect, the effects are not easy to tackle, and the responsibility of any possible counterpart remains distant and difficult to find.

Therefore, in addition to actions aimed at increasing a general cultural awareness, mobilizations in defence of local interests and concrete projects will be decisive, especially if networked together.

- 19 Whatever should happen, current trends show an onset of a city-mountain relationship different from that which has characterized twentieth century modernity (Corrado and Durbiano, 2017). In the case of Turin, a bi-polar integrated Alpine region is emerging, resulting from the interaction between two imbricated subsystems, but each with different and partially unshakeable characters: the metropolitan conurbation and the metropolitan-mountain subsystem. The latter should be understood as a natural, socio-cultural, economic, and political entity, that – with its specificities – operates as an agent of differentiation within a multi-level relational space.
- 20 The example dealt with in this paper shows that the Alpine metropolitan regions differ from other metropolitan systems that cannot enjoy the exchanges and benefits of a mountainous hinterland. The concept of the Alpine metropolitan system prevents the Alpine urban agglomerations (towns, cities, metropolises) from remaining considered as self-contained territorial bodies, distinct from the surrounding rural areas or even opposed to them³. On the other hand, the inclusion of mountain territories within the metropolitan limits should be seen as an important competitive advantage to the whole system.
- 21 The mutually beneficial exchanges between urban agglomerations and their mountain hinterland, within a metropolitan system, ensure that policies to make the rural metropolitan-mountain liveable and accessible are in fact urban policies. For the same reason, mountain policies at a regional, national, and European level should overcome the rural reductive vision that still characterizes their approach. The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), which covers both the Alps and their bordering metropolises, is a good opportunity to promote such metropolitan-mountain integration in the European public opinion and to create an appropriate multilevel governance system. The preconditions to do this exist, but its activation, in a context strongly dependent on unfavourable global impacts, requires enforcement and corrective actions dictated by medium and long-term strategies.

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NOTES

1. See, for example, the feasibility studies collected by M. Cavallo Perin and M. Viano in the supplement to the *Dislivelli* magazine, Feb. 2017 (http://www.dislivelli.eu/blog/immagini/foto_febbraio_2017/torinoealpi_ricerche_def.pdf)
2. Among the most important: reuse of abandoned farmland, replanting vineyards and orchards, community buying groups, short food supply chains, tourist hospitality, preservation of historical heritage, waste treatment, community services, and creation of the Etinomia network which brings together hundreds of local entrepreneurs (Aime, 2016)
3. Upon presenting a research on the Alpine urban network at the XXI Italian Congress of geography (Verbania, 1971), I argued that 'we should be prepared to recognize cities that are in some way "Alpine", even outside of the Alps" and that an "Alpine" city must be "the product of a culture that can be defined as Alpine' (Dematteis, 1974, pg.9). Broadly speaking, I believe this may still be applicable to today's Alpine metropolitan regions, in that their specificity depends on ties with a mountain hinterland where new forms of Alpine metropolitan culture are experimented.

ABSTRACTS

The interchange between the mountain areas and the urbanized piedmont within the metropolitan region of Turin is taken as a paradigmatic example of similar situations widely present in the Alps. The analysis helps to identify some general characters of the Alpine spaces included in metropolitan territorial systems. The increasing mutual dependences between them

stimulates a reflexion on the integration of rural mountain areas in metropolitan regions, starting from new mutual dependences. This integration can lead to a construction of a bi-polar urban region in which the metro-mountain sub-system become an agent of differentiation in a multi-level relational space. This process depends largely on the perception of the inner mountain as a set of economic, cultural, aesthetic and existential values, complementary and partially alternative to the urban. Thanks to them the Alpine mountain could become a laboratory of settlement and business experiences trying to combine the advantages of the urban life with the radical diversity of local environment. The hypothesis that a new cultural centrality could reduce the functional dependence of inner mountain is discussed in the face of responses to the impact of global changes concerning environment, technology and neo-liberal financial economy. The conclusion is that only an organized reaction to these treats can entail a virtuous circle of growth of new residents, employment and services, implementing the idea of a new Alpine urbanity.

Les échanges entre la montagne et le piémont urbanisé dans la région métropolitaine de Turin offrent un exemple paradigmatique qui renvoie à de nombreuses situations analogues dans les Alpes. L'analyse permet d'identifier certains caractères des espaces alpins compris dans des systèmes métropolitains. La croissance des échanges ville-montagne est mise en relation avec le problème de l'intégration des espaces ruraux alpins dans les régions urbaines environnantes, à partir d'une dépendance mutuelle qui n'est plus celle du XX^e siècle. Cette intégration peut mener à la formation d'un système territorial bipolaire dans lequel le sous-système montagnard opère comme agent de différenciation dans un espace relationnel multiscalair. À l'origine de ce processus, il y a la perception de la montagne comme un ensemble de valeurs complémentaires et, dans une certaine mesure, alternatives pour les urbains. Grâce à eux la montagne alpine devient un laboratoire dans lequel les nouveaux arrivants cherchent à combiner les avantages de la ville avec la diversité radicale de l'environnement montagnard. L'hypothèse qu'une nouvelle centralité culturelle de la montagne puisse réduire au fil du temps sa dépendance fonctionnelle est à confronter aux réponses aux changements globaux concernant l'environnement, la technologie et l'impact de l'économie néolibérale. La conclusion est qu'une nouvelle urbanité alpine est réalisable s'il y a une réponse organisée à ces changements, de façon à réaliser un cercle vertueux de croissance des résidents, des services et de l'emploi.

Gli scambi tra la montagna e il pedemonte urbanizzato della Città Metropolitana di Torino sono un esempio di numerose analoghe situazioni presenti nelle Alpi. L'analisi permette di identificare certi caratteri comuni agli spazi alpini compresi in sistemi metropolitani. La crescita degli scambi città-montagna è vista in relazione con il problema generale dell'integrazione della montagna rurale alpina nelle regioni urbane circostanti, a partire da una reciproca dipendenza diversa da quella del XX secolo. Tale integrazione può portare alla formazione di un sistema territoriale bipolare nel quale il sotto-sistema montano agisce come agente di differenziazione in uno spazio relazionale multiscalare. All'origine di questo processo c'è la percezione della montagna come un insieme di valori complementari e in qualche misura alternativi a quelli urbani. Grazie ad essi la montagna alpina può diventare un laboratorio nel quale nuovi insediati cercano di combinare i vantaggi della città con la diversità radicale dell'ambiente montano. L'ipotesi che una nuova centralità culturale della montagna possa col tempo ridurre la sua dipendenza funzionale viene confrontata con le risposte ai cambiamenti globali dell'ambiente naturale, della tecnologia e dell'economia finanziaria neoliberista. La conclusione è che la realizzazione di una nuova urbanità alpina dipenda da una risposta organizzata a questi cambiamenti che riesca a innescare un processo circolare di crescita dei residenti, dei servizi e dell'occupazione.

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AUTHORS

GIUSEPPE DEMATTEIS

Professor emeritus of urban and regional geography, Politecnico di Torino. President of *Dislivelli Association, Turin*
giuseppe.dematteis@dislivelli.eu