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

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The Mountain Metropolis's Land Design Project. Grenoble, from Plain to Slope

Charles Ambrosino and Jennifer Buyck

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- 1 Mountains are both an intangible geomorphological condition of and a structuring identity marker for a good number of activities in the Grenoble region. And yet, they stand out because of their absence from metropolitan policies, which are more inclined to strengthen technopolitan activities than to renew their strategic content (Ambrosino *et al.*, 2016). Such an absence calls the Grenoble metropolis project and its cultural basis into question – all the more so because the ambition “to assert its status as a mountain metropolis” and “to rethink its relationship with the mountains and their slopes in all its aspects and specificities” (Grenoble Alpes Métropole, 2016, p. 17) is an objective that is clearly stated in the planning documents. A careful reading of the *Projet d'Aménagement et de Développement Durables* (PADD – Sustainable Spatial Planning and Development Project), which forms part of the *Plan Local d'Urbanisme Intercommunal* (PLUi – Intermunicipal Urban Development Plan) that is currently being drafted,¹ reveals that the image of the mountains, as used therein, has not escaped the concepts imposed by modernity: They are presented as a nature reserve to be preserved, an emblem to showcase and a recreational activity area surrendered to tourism. Beyond what can only be described as a functionalist vision of an Alpine city, that is, a view that considers the mountains merely as objects among many others, what urban planning activities have actually been rolled out? What do they tell us about the representations of this “mountain metropolis” under construction, its narrativisation and its goal? And more generally, what do they teach us about the direction that the processes are taking and about our conception of the landscape?
- 2 We propose to answer these questions by making use of the work that has resulted from the many urban project workshops held at the Urban Planning and Alpine Geography Institute (IUGA), as well as the notion of “progetto di suolo” (“land design”,

i.e. urban planning of open spaces) that Italian urban planner Bernardo Secchi developed in the 1990s. The metropolitan level is all the better suited to this concept as “land design” seeks to combine “city and territory in a unitary design of open natural and urban spaces expressing social practices in continuous evolution” (Bianchettin Del Grano, 2016, p. 225). In the words of Paola Vigano (2016, p. 243), land design is the “design of the space between things, beyond objects and their introversion”. Hypothesising a land design project for the Grenoble metropolis also provides an opportunity to design the contemporary Alpine city not just as a specific object but also as a network of connections with highly diverse forms (spatial or otherwise), scales and issues.

Does the Grenoble metropolis have a “land” of its own?

- 3 The evolution of the Dauphiné capital has been shaped by the interdependence of urban development and the exploitation of its mountain setting. In turn, the story of Grenoble – fiefdom of “white coal”, capital of the Alps, Olympic city and technopolis – includes the overlapping of innovation, science and nature to such an extent that, over the course of the 20th century, the city turned itself into a technological, urbanistic and tourist demonstration area. But the image and very status of the mountains have evolved: Initially regarded as storehouses for economically exploitable natural resources, they were gradually transformed into a product assimilated by the tourist industry and have become little more than a backdrop.

Grenoble’s mountain resource and “spirit”

- 4 Throughout the 19th century, nature’s continued domination honed humankind’s genius at least as much as its confidence in a victorious modernity (Ambrosino, 2016). Despite its remoteness, the modest little military town wasted no time in starting on its industrial transformation to become the “capital of the Alps”, which its city councillors went all out to celebrate in 1925 by mounting the International Exhibition of Hydropower and Tourism (Guibal and Vincent, 2015). At the time, the mountains played a threefold role: Besides being a destination favoured by a foreign elite infatuated with travelling to the Alps, they were also a tremendous source of profit – whether for the development of cement works and precast concrete or the use of glacier water to create hydroelectricity – and offered geographical support for a national political ambition that would subsequently position Grenoble at the centre of a new economic region, the “French Alps” (Veitl, 2013). Nonetheless, through a somewhat original interpretation of history, it was not so much Grenoble’s “Alpiness” or landscape that enhanced the “urban myth” it was beginning to be the star of but rather the “spirit” of the place (Boumaza, 1997). Mastering water and, above all, taming the mountain environment: These were the historical catalysts for a local acculturation with regard to community, challenge and rebel entrepreneurship. It is a powerful story whose narrative springs – effectively combining economic dynamism, innovation and performance culture – are still active (Ambrosino, 2016).

Does mountain air set you free?

- 5 Immediately following the Second World War, as the technopolitan system was coming into being, the mountains came to be seen as an increasingly attractive urban amenity. But this time around, the media, tourist and recreational exploitation of the slopes that prevailed. As Guy Saez points out, the Thirty Glorious Years inaugurated an era during which “the mountains progressively became objects of pleasure and identification, a living environment and source of emotional investment for scientists and other members of the educated classes, whose values permeated local society as a whole” (Saez, 2018, p. 191) – so much so, in fact, that the city’s hosting of the 10th Winter Olympics in 1968 merely capped “the glory that is Grenoble” (Frappat, 1979). And so, Grenoble’s “spirit” lives on. By becoming the setting for collective activity, the mountains crystallise an original form of “social capital”: “presenting yourself as a lover of mountains, a true Alpine, is a bit like acquiring an integration certificate, whether you were born and bred in Grenoble or are a more recent arrival” (Saez, 2018, p. 192). In this context, the image of the Grenoble engineer preferring his anorak to a suit and tie is a symbolic expression of the interaction between urban activities linked to technological development and the recreational activities to which the mountains so readily lend themselves (*ibid.*). Symptomatic of a local society that regards itself as open, fluid and at odds with conservatism of every flavour, this configuration is as much the result of a sophistication of the technopolitan myth – with the added notion that the sense of freedom aroused by the mountain environment increases the ability to innovate – as of any subjugation of natural elements.

A “backdrop” devoted to inspiring wonder?

- 6 The current situation raises a question: If it is now accepted that the city’s mountain environment – and nature – has always participated in structuring the city’s narrative, what about its aesthetic and, thus, relational aspects?

“When people are awestruck by Grenoble, it is not so much its urban context they think about but rather its mountain environment and reputation for dynamism. (...) It doesn’t take long for wanderers who stop there to notice that the city’s only real attraction is the Grenoble-Bastille cable car, which has no other purpose than to scoop up its city passengers and, a few minutes later, drop them off on top of the mountain, from where the city is no more than one more feature in an awe-inspiring mise-en-scène.” (Frappat, 1979)
- 7 The term “mise-en-scène” is a clear enough indication of the problems the city has in integrating elements from a nonetheless fertile imagination into its “land”. It is clear enough that the idea that mountains are ultimately nothing more than a vision – visual gratification devoted to inspiring awe – is neither satisfactory nor workable. Grenoble’s relationship with its environment is somewhat more complex. After all, the mountains would not seem quite so awe-inspiring without the presence of the city they provide a setting for. We must then go beyond this naturalising approach to the mountains (Descola, 2005) – a backdrop that is to be admired and looks back at us – that are exploited and define us as a community. How, then, is the “Capital of the Alps” to be anchored in its territory and go beyond its dominant relationship with the mountains? The existence of a territorial culture specific to the Grenoble metropolis obliges today’s city councillors to adopt new development strategies likely to overcome the

“environmental amnesia” (Khan, 2002) characteristic of Anthropocene societies. Well-being, the incorporation of natural features and agriculture into urban development, health, sport and food are all orientations that transcend public action split up into sectors and draw on a (mountain-dweller?) identity whose promotion is yet to be defined. At all events, there is nothing straightforward about transiting from the Alpine technopolitan myth to “mountain metropolis” land design. We therefore hope to participate here in its inclusion in the real world in order to see new modes of sharing and reconnection emerge that will favour a sustainable territory henceforth based on a real “concern for nature” (Fleury & Prévot, 2017).

From mountain as object to mountain as landscape

- 8 At first sight, the term “mountain metropolis” may seem paradoxical. Work carried out on processes of visualising city and mountain makes it clear that the two belong to consubstantially antagonistic geographical categories (Debarbieux, 1999): Their attributes, spatial delimitation and the identity values to which they refer develop in a relationship of alterity that characterises modern representations of the world – civilised *versus* untamed world. Indeed, the idea that towns located in the mountains might constitute unique spatial, cultural and political entities continues to be a subject of academic debate (Racine, 1999). Take, for example, the recent reification of “the Alpine city”, (re)presented both as an urban utopia and a political project seeking, among other things, to try out new “sustainable” ways of creating interaction between ecology and development (Fourny, 1999). Let us assume that, as far as Grenoble is concerned, the idea of a “mountain metropolis” enables the renewal of interaction between city and environment.

Contemporary city and mountain as object

- 9 In his analysis of the images of mountains used in various emblematic urban projects, Bertrand Debarbieux (2012) identifies three ways in which the city is paired with the mountain:
 - The first may be termed “naturalist”, in which the mountain acts as a reserve, a milieu that is organised in accordance with ecological associations and dynamics very different from those of the city and must be sheltered and protected through special accommodations. We shall call it the “mountain as reserve”.
 - The second may be termed “aesthetic”, in which distancing from the mountain is achieved via work on revelation (by preserving perspectives) and urban composition that takes care to highlight such a monumental emblem. We shall call it the “mountain as emblem”.
 - The third may be termed “marketing”, in which the mountain becomes a signal, one might even say a marker, of spatial and functional distinction (in particular, via tourist and recreational activities) with the aim of ensuring its territories’ attractiveness. We shall call it the “mountain as attraction”.
- 10 Each of the three cases above accommodates the idea that the mountain is an independent object whose uniqueness justifies some form of special planning, representation or *mise-en-scène*. From this point of view, reading the document that preceded the Grenoble metropolis’s Sustainable Spatial Planning and Development

Project (PADD) makes it clear that each of the three pairing modes determines the way in which the project of the “mountain metropolis” is formulated (see Table 1).

Table 1. Images and formulation of the mountain metropolis project in the PADD

Images of the mountain in the urban project	Formulation of the “mountain metropolis” project
The “mountain as reserve”	“The great variety of landscapes and heritage is another indicator of the strength of metropolitan diversity. The protection and promotion of these two essential components of the living environment are of key structural importance to constructing a mountain metropolis that draws strength from its diversity. Asserting the metropolis’s mountain character should contribute to the territory’s integration and metropolitan coherence.” (p. 20)
The “mountain as emblem”	“As the mountain slopes descend as far as the city itself and are so apparent wherever you are in its territory, it would be wise for the metropolis to assert its status as a ‘mountain metropolis’ and, in so doing, rethink its relationship with the mountains and their slopes in all its aspects and specificities.” (p. 17)
The “mountain as attraction”	<p>“Asserting the special identity of the ‘mountain metropolis’ as a vector of economic development and dynamism.” (p. 40)</p> <p>“Through actions ensuring quality public areas, the development of a green/blue infrastructure, the preservation and promotion of heritage, and an original, attractive tourist offer based on the ‘mountain metropolis’ identity, tourism should enjoy fresh momentum in the metropolis.” (p. 46)</p>

Source: Grenoble Alpes Métropole, 2016

- 11 This series of statements serves to corroborate Bernardo Secchi’s hypothesis that the contemporary (and, *a fortiori*, Alpine) city is above all fractal. Our urban environment is made up of multiple fragments, so many heterogeneous materials – autonomous or connected to a greater or lesser extent – that evolve, exist and operate at their own pace, in line with their own way of organising (Secchi, 2006). Together, they give rise to many different residual areas, forestland, wildernesses, cultivated land and abandoned areas, all on standby, waiting for a real land design project to come along and include them in a wider open-space system. From this point of view, the Dauphiné capital’s urban organisation is enlightening: A city of the valley rather than of the mountains (unlike Innsbruck or St Moritz, for example), Grenoble has always played the role of being a “gateway city” that is distinct from the mountains surrounding it but is well-suited to channelling traffic and granting access to them (Fourny, 2000). Such distancing from the mountain as an object has had a lasting impact on the territory’s morphology.

Between city and mountain, taking “interface areas” into account

- 12 The topography of the metropolitan territory clearly defines the location and distribution of its urban functions (Novarina, 2013). Three types of areas may be

distinguished. First of all, the Isère and Drac valleys and their hillsides. These are typified by extensive human occupation, accommodating not only much of the territory's urbanisation (75% of the population in the metropolis) but also most of its economic activities (84% of jobs), the main transport services and a full range of agricultural activities. Second, the hills and plateaus, which have seen a distinctly more rural form of development, with the preservation of farmlands and natural areas. Typified by development of individual housing, these areas cover a fair number of planning issues; this is the case in particular with the Champagnier plateau, which lies to the south of Grenoble. And finally, the mountains bordering the metropolis (the Vercors, Chartreuse and Belledonne ranges). These nearby natural areas play a major part in ensuring the territory's reputation with regard to tourism, local recreational activities and the promotion of the landscape.

- 13 As they are not seen as structuring, these “interface areas” are all too often left on the sidelines in urban planning documents. “The difficult relationship between the agglomeration and neighbouring territories can be seen in how the hillsides and valleys that act as interface areas are disregarded. With regard to the city, such abandonment may be explained by its largely utilitarian relationship with the mountains (as areas for leisure activities), while the mountains themselves are governed by protectionist logic in the face of an agglomeration deemed to be expansionist” (ibid.). There is no doubt that these intermediate territories also have a hard time finding their place in Grenoble's urban landscape because of their close proximity to the regional nature parks, where development policies – largely focused on the mountains – do not play much of a role in the construction, homogenisation or unification of a mountain metropolis. Acting as cornerstones, they crystallise the dynamics, in part immobilising evolution of relationships between metropolis and mountain. Hills and valleys end up being marginalised by this system, even though they concentrate so much of the (natural, nourishing and agricultural) potential that is required for future metropolitan territorial cohesion.

In the folds of the mountain as landscape

- 14 Long regarded as margins, borders or even limits, these interface areas should also be seen as centralities – landscapes in the making – because they concentrate so much of the potential for renewed interconnection between city and mountain. They must once again be given the importance they deserve. Gilles Deleuze's works are enlightening in this regard (Antonioli, 2012). He suggests that we not regard complexity as the possession of many parts but as “what is folded in many ways” (Deleuze, 1988). In other words, it is the mountain metropolis territory's many folds we should learn to see in order for us to conceive of, experiment with and create its land design project. Here, such recognition of the landscape project as a territorial project (Buyck, 2009) is the result of a dual movement: one to reveal “latent urban resources” (Lapenna, 2016) and the other to reveal the urban “bioregion” (Magnaghi, 2014). It is therefore a question of two different levels of intervention. The first bears on revealing these invisible micro-territories that nonetheless qualitatively nourish a metropolis's metabolism: a discovery of hitherto hidden folds. The second consists of highlighting a system of interrelationships on a wider scale: what might be termed the interactions between one fold and the next. They both stem from a renewed understanding of landscape as a “taskscape” (Ingold, 1993) where “human practices are not simply carried out on the

landscape but give shape to the landscape via a process of incorporation” (Brayer, 2013). From this point of view, the modern opposition between city and nature fades away to make room for the landscape’s metabolic aspects. Hence, the mountain, previously simply regarded as a resource, becomes the embodiment of action and experience, i.e. subject, and, in this sense, landscape. This new relationship between metropolis and mountain should result in less artificiality and abstraction. Mountains, backdrops of metropolitan urbanities, would then be able to shake themselves free from their supporting roles and take their place as key actors in the narrative of the metropolis in the making.

Project(s) for the mountain metropolis

- 15 Recent debate on the thinking in urban planning (Carriou, Ratouis, 2014) has led to a renewal in the previously accepted theoretical framework that pitted two well-established models against each other: one culturalist and the other progressive (Choay, 1965). The projectual approach (Vigano, 2014; Delabarre, Dugua, 2017) must certainly be considered one of the most promising perspectives. Its advocates postulate that projects are tools for thinking about, conceptualising and producing knowledge “of the territory, the city and its interface with society, the economy and institutions” (Secchi, 2008, p. 9). Neither purely inductive nor deductive, the project stems from a reformulation of the real – a change in viewpoint that brings new possibilities, latent potentialities, into view and encourages urban planning activities. It operates by testimony and creation alike, as it does by both description and mutation. This is our goal here in the final section. By drawing on the results of urban project workshops carried out in partnership with local authorities (City of Grenoble and the Municipality of Saint-Martin-d’Hères) and the Grenoble Region’s Urban Planning Agency (AURG) (see inset below), we hope to present a few of the hypotheses that might serve to outline the mountain metropolis’s land design project.
- 16 The three urban project workshops on which this article is based were conducted between 2012 and 2017 with students in the first year of their master’s degree course in Urban Planning and Development at the Urban Planning and Alpine Geography Institute. Such workshops are a preferred teaching format in the master’s degree programme and are held over two semesters, divided between work on territorial diagnosis, formulation of issues involved and strategic orientations on the one hand, and the production of urban projects on the other, whose implementation is validated by a sponsor who takes part in a number of intermediate sessions organised throughout the academic year.
- 17 The first workshop (held in 2012-2013 and supervised by Charles Ambrosino, Jennifer Buyck, Gilles Novarina and Gabriella Trotta) followed on from a commission on the part of the City of Grenoble and focused on “The city in a mid-mountain range, or how to inhabit the Grenoble metropolis’s natural space”. The site under study was the Chartreuse urban fringe (from the Voreppe cross valley to the entrance to the Grésivaudan Valley via the emblematic Bastille site of which Grenoble itself is only one part). The aim was to examine the Grenoble metropolis’s identity along with the urban and peri-urban future of its territories in their multiple relationships with the mountain slopes.

- 18 The second workshop (held in 2014-2015 and supervised by Charles Ambrosino and Jennifer Buyck) followed on from a commission by the Municipality of Saint-Martin-d'Hères and focused on the drafting of a "masterplan for public spaces". The idea was to take a closer look at the municipal territory's urban structure through a detailed analysis of the various types of public and collective spaces it is composed of. Special attention was paid to the Mûrier hill and, more generally, the interface with the Belledonne range.
- 19 The third workshop (held in 2016-2017 and supervised by Charles Ambrosino and Jelena Stamenkovic) followed on from a commission by the Grenoble Region's Urban Planning Agency, which was in the process of drafting the Intermunicipal Urban Development Plan (PLUi). In this context, it was a matter of exploring "*the metropolitan Deep South*" and looking ahead to future axes of development of this extensive territory (made up of plains, valleys and hills) threatened by peri-urbanisation, de-industrialisation and inadequate metropolitan connectivity.

Making interface areas visible

- 20 As proposals are made, a whole range of landscapes emerge that had previously been invisible in urban planning documents. We are witness to a diversification of the metropolis's descriptive repertoire, going beyond the "urbanised plain"/"green lung" mountain pairing and bringing glimpses of new objects,² as well as unprecedented relational systems: Anticlinal valleys (residential), plains and plateaus (agricultural), hills (recreational) and valleys (mobile) help to substantiate the complexity of the Grenoble territory's formulation with regard to the activities carried out across it and create solidarity among some of its parts that previously had little in common, as well as with the rest of the metropolis (Figure 1). In the light of such projections, the Champagnier plateau (the metropolis's barycentre) is transformed into a full-scale agricultural park. Previously regarded as little more than a gentrified "village" (Perlik, 2011), this fragment, ideally located between the metropolis's dense heart and the centrality of the southern part of Grenoble (Vizille), becomes a territory devoted to producing and selling food and raising public awareness of the issues involved in its supply. The focus is not just on its economic aspects (agriculture and pastureland) but also on the heritage (promotion of Fort de Montavie), recreational (golf, riding and hiking) and nourishing (markets and educational farms) aspects of this little world whose newfound metropolitan function is no longer in doubt. In addition, the prospect of turning RD5 into a "scenic route" for tourists, developed so as to highlight the landscapes of the plain and the densely built-up city (to the north) and the more diffuse landscapes provided by Vizille and its château (to the south), only adds strength to the hypothesis of a change of scale in perceptions and uses of the plateau. In much the same vein, the Reymure plain, wedged between the motorway to Gap (to the south) and the River Drac, sees its farmland preserved from the assaults of peri-urbanisation. An area where hillsides (those of Vercors), plain and hydrographic network interconnect, this half-forgotten space shakes off its anonymity to become a major centre of organic farming, market gardening and birdwatching (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Grenoble's plains and slopes

Source: Buyck, 2018

Figure 2. Towards a greater metropolitan standing for the Reymure plain: a major farming centre

Source: Urban Project Workshop, AURG (2016-2017), "Grenoble's Deep South"

Reconnecting the metropolis's geographies

- 21 The focus on (re)connecting the mountain metropolis's geographies is evident in quite a number of projects. Although progressive urbanisation of the Voreppe cross valley (to

the northwest of the metropolis) continues the struggle to establish connections with the slopes and keep them at a safe distance, the choice either way is to establish a “green system” (Secchi, 2006) with the threefold purpose of networking various types of natural open spaces (such as parks, gardens, rows of trees, fallow land, riparian woodland and farm tracks), interconnecting green/blue infrastructures and encouraging target incursions into the anticlinal valleys running through the Chartreuse range on the part of urban activities (housing, recreation, neighbourhood shops etc.). The aim is to re-orient the north/south development spurred by the valley’s linearity, which is appropriated and emphasised by major (road, motorway and rail) transport infrastructures in conjunction with the course of the River Isère, in order to create greater east/west porosity with all or part of the network connecting the Vercors and Chartreuse ranges, hitherto distanced from each other by residual and poorly controlled urbanisation (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Voreppe cross valley’s green system

Source: Urban Project Workshop, City of Grenoble (2012-2013)

- 22 It is the very same rationale that drives students when they consider integrating the Mûrier hill (to the east of the metropolis) into the system of metropolitan recreational areas. They focus their attention on communicating to and informing the metropolis’s inhabitants – by producing maps of hiking, driving and mountain-biking itineraries – and on requalifying interface areas between plain and hillside (Figure 4). It is interesting to note that most of the itineraries that have been mapped out start inside the city, thereby rendering the unfruitful city/mountain opposition obsolete. Special attention is paid to accessibility, clarity and promotion of activities carried out on a site that may finally be well provisioned but whose uses, paradoxically enough, remain little-known.

Figure 4. The Mûrier hill, a metropolitan recreational area

DEVELOPPER UNE DOCUMENTATION A DESTINATION TOURISTIQUE

Source: Urban Project Workshop, Municipality of Saint-Martin d'Hères (2014-2015)

The Bastille: the mountain metropolis's natural showcase

- 23 And what about the Bastille? Presented as a rocky spur in perfect alignment with Grenoble's historical centre, this fragment of mountain embedded in the midst of the urban environment is nonetheless psychologically distant from the city it overlooks. Both far-off and omnipresent, the Bastille on its own combines all the ways in which city and mountain are paired: It is reserve, emblem and attraction all in one. And for good reason! There is culture on the hand (the Dauphinois Museum) along with heritage (e.g. fortifications (i.e. military), the former Vicat cement works (industrial) and, of course, the natural kind), symbols (the "bubble" cable cars), emblematic recreational nature activities (via ferrata, acrobanching, hiking and foot racing) and lively residential areas (the Rabot Citadel and the Saint Laurent neighbourhood) – the Bastille makes Grenoble's various "Alpine" representations its own.

Figure 5. The Bastille, a living balcony overlooking the city

1. A metropolitan accessibility / 2. Balcony path : a metropolitan public space / 3. Core neighborhood : a local community place / 4. A public space of transition

Source: Urban Project Workshop, City of Grenoble (2012-2013)

Figure 6. The Bastille, an agri-urban laboratory

Source: Urban Project Workshop, City of Grenoble (2012-2013)

- 24 But this ignores the fact that the site remains hard to get to, is scattered with abandoned university buildings and, more generally, suffers from very poor connections to the metropolitan public transport network. Its slopes make it the “natural” showcase of an absence of urbanity that is all the more prominent as the city is one of the flattest in Europe. It is also the departure point for student projects. The Bastille is thereby transformed into a major public area, in the form of either a

“panoramic balcony” (Figure 5) focusing entirely on the city (stretching from west to east, from the Rabot Citadel, served by an urban elevator, to the former university buildings transformed into community amenities) or an “agricultural polarity” open to the city and operating as an agri-urban laboratory (Figure 6). These various proposals show how crucial it is to go beyond the cult of the hill’s (and, more generally, the topography’s) “monumentality” in order to make way for the public areas that it accommodates. Are they not the real “monuments” (Vigano, 2016) of contemporary metropolises – even mountain metropolises?

Conclusion

- 25 The term “mountain metropolis” not only covers the system of relationships between the two entities comprising it but also poses a question – a forward-looking paradigm thanks to which the potentialities of and issues involved in Grenoble’s land design project may be revealed. The various results of the workshops clearly show that nature plays a key role in characterising the projected territories, and that this characterisation is no more “urban” than it is “mountain”. Conversely, a re-examination of the projects shows that no haven is any more “mountain” than it is “urban”: The Bastille’s slopes are open to human habitation while the farmland plains are preserved. In other words, the mountain, like the city, does not constitute a single environment but gains from being envisaged in all its many aspects. The metropolis’s “folds” also cast off their distinguishing geomorphological and aesthetic attributes in order to better assert themselves as so many other distinct landscapes that are no longer subservient to the dense city. By approaching space in this fashion, the students’ work gives substance to the “mountain metropolis”: It transcends the duality of the horizontal city (metropolis) and the high peaks (mountain) of which Alpine cities are so often accused and enables its territories to be apprehended in all their depth. Such perspectives promote the notion of pulling down the backdrop that surrounds the Grenoble metropolis in order to give legitimate consideration to the mountains as natural “land” – an “experience” (Fleury & Prévot, 2017) that should go beyond mere (visual or virtual) contemplation and whose significance should progressively be made tangible.

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NOTES

1. Following passage of the Law on Modernisation of Territorial Public Action and Affirmation of Metropolitan Areas (MAPTAM Act), the Grenoble-Alpes metropolis was inaugurated on 1 January 2015. One of the first decisions taken was to implement a PLUi, which is currently under review.
2. Not for their obvious geographical properties, but rather for their designation as project areas in their own right.

ABSTRACTS

Mountains are both an intangible geomorphological condition of and a structuring identity marker for a good number of activities in the Grenoble region. And yet, they stand out because of their absence from metropolitan policies. Such an absence calls the Grenoble metropolis project and its cultural basis into question – all the more so because the ambition “to assert its status as a mountain metropolis” and “to rethink its relationship with the mountains and their slopes in all its aspects

and specificities” is an objective that is clearly stated in the planning documents. A careful reading of these documents reveals that the image of the mountains, as used therein, has not escaped the concepts imposed by modernity: they are presented as a nature reserve to be preserved, an emblem to showcase and a recreational activity area surrendered to tourism. Beyond what can only be described as a functionalist vision of an Alpine city, that is, a view that considers the mountains merely as objects among many others, what urban planning activities have actually been rolled out? What do they tell us about the representations of this “mountain metropolis” under construction, its narrativisation and its goal? And more generally, what do they teach us about the direction that the processes are taking and about our conception of the landscape? We propose to answer these questions by making use of the work that has resulted from the many urban project workshops held at the Urban Planning and Alpine Geography Institute (IUGA), as well as the notion of “progetto di suolo” (land design project) that Italian urban planner Bernardo Secchi developed in the 1990s.

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Keywords: Grenoble, land design project, mountain metropolis, landscape, latent urban resources, contemporary city

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