

Designing Transformative Processes in Mountain Realms

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Abstract

Alpine territories are experiencing a period of new dynamism in which relations with the urban environment play an important role in terms of cultural redesign of values, physical and functional connections with local areas and the creation of rurban-mountain networks. This contribution aims to highlight the challenge to trigger a long-term territorial strategy for the Valtellina area – in the Italian Alps – from short-term actions and processes to lead local heritage and cultural production and make stakeholders part of this collective visioning and design practices. Actually, this article illustrates the approaches and methodologies applied to two research and educational projects – involving international students from the School of Design of Politecnico di Milano and the Alta Scuola Programme of Politecnico di Milano and Politecnico di Torino – which resulted in design actions on the territory in terms of temporary experiments for Mega Events and urban regeneration possibilities in Valtellina Area.

Keywords: Temporary Mountain Experimentations, Mega Events, Design for Social Innovation, Legacy for Rurban Areas

Introduction

Since the post-Second World War period, a significant part of Italy's inner areas has gradually undergone a process of marginalisation marked by a decline in population, sometimes below the critical threshold, a reduction in employment and land use, a dwindling local supply of public and private services, social costs for the entire nation, and the degradation of the cultural and landscape heritage (Gaspari, 2016). At the same time, some inner areas have been space for good policies and good practices, as a result of which: the population has remained stable or grown, municipalities in

the area have cooperated to produce essential services, and environmental or cultural resources have been protected and enhanced (European Union, 2011).

This article demonstrates the approaches and methods used in two research and teaching projects prototyping new systems of urban regeneration – temporary cultural experiments and new opportunities for long-term experiential tourism – developing on different project scales. The first one consists on “Alpine Experimentations”, from TUS (Temporary Urban Solutions) elective course of Master Degree of School of Design at Politecnico di Milano. More than thirty international students with different disciplinary backgrounds were involved between April and June 2022 to analyse the dynamism of the mountain context and set up a design process with the aim of prototyping five new temporary spaces, installations in public space for the enhancement of the Tirano town – still in the context of Valtellina in the province of Sondrio – involving local actors including in particular one social enterprise that are active in the area and citizens. The second project lasted one year and ended in September 2022, is focused on how to use the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympic Games 2026 challenge to re-design a long-term territorial strategy and new proximity systems, particularly for the Valtellina area, which is one of the areas to host the Winter Olympic Games in 2026. It is one of the research projects proposed within the Alta Scuola Politecnica programme for Design, Architecture and Engineering students at the Politecnico di Milano and Torino, where six academic tutors and six students actively participated through an interdisciplinary approach (Design & Engineering, Integrated Product Design, Architecture and Urban planning, Interior and Spatial Design, Environmental and Sustainability Design). This project, HOST2026 (HOST2026 - Sustainable and HOSPitable Territories and services: the case of Winter Olympic Games Milano-Cortina 2026), questions how to manage the Winter Olympic Games long-term legacy in a sustainable way for the mountain area of Valtellina. The research analysis and linked set of hospitality guidelines attempt to understand the context and its needs and ensure durable integrated interventions based on the Valtellina ecosystem.

Systematising both projects as design best practices, it is supportive of understanding how much potential these inner areas have and how they can be regenerative through the installation of both instantaneous and permanent interventions for social and widespread long-term impact. The following paragraphs will better understand the details of the project premises just stated, starting with the description and enhancement of the reference context: the Valtellina area.



The Valtellina Ecosystem and current communities' activism

The mountain – the Alpine macro-region – is a territory full of contradictions and subject to epochal changes that can put communities in crisis. Among the contradictions of the mountain, there is the relative wealth of co-evolved natural resources with an equal cultural richness accompanied by relative scarcity or greater difficulty of economic development due to geographical issues (limited flat spaces, steep slopes, instability of the slopes and of the hydrographic network) and policies (e.g. disparity between large urban centres of the plains and decentralised mountain territories). The imbalance in terms of job opportunities and availability of services between urban and rural mountainous areas is amplified by depopulation processes (Rotondo et al., 2020) and by the acceleration of ageing, which is significantly greater than in urban areas (Reynaud et al., 2020). Nevertheless globalisation, digitalisation, demographic and climate change, and the shocks of the global financial crisis and the current pandemic crisis are profoundly shaping the economic landscape of rural communities (Dax, 1996), especially for mountain realms. Thus, demonstrating the unavailability of the general process of marginalisation and the ability of these territories to contribute to processes of social innovation, growth and cohesion. This also applies to the mountains regions that are experiencing increasing change, impacting both the global and local levels.

The mountain regions have recently entered a time of renewed vitality, during which relationships with the rural environment are crucial for reshaping cultural values, establishing physical and functional ties with the surrounding areas, and development of rural-mountain networks (Giordano et al., 2016). A substantial change in the nature of work is taking place (World Economic Forum, 2016) and the global demand for tourism has been growing for decades – in spite of economic and health crises – addressing mountain destinations (Wen et al., 2020), for which potential conflicts can be envisaged between recreational uses of the mountain (Scolozzi et al., 2014), different types of tourism, tourists and local resident communities (Schirpke et al., 2020). In its contradictions, the Alpine macro-region also presents significant opportunities that depend and will depend on the adoption of a long-term perspective and a systemic vision capable of promoting local anticipatory governance, which at the same time addresses social, economic and environmental uncertainties. A change of point of view that is reflected, at the territorial scale, also in the theorizations around the idea of *Metromontagna* (Barbera and De Rossi, 2021), understood as a territorial device capable of overcoming the traditional contrast between urban and mountain spaces, in favor of forms of interdependence and collaboration between cities and inland areas.



In addition, the emergence of the pandemic made a radical, immediate change tangible and necessary, allowing the application and experimentation of already consolidated urban strategies on a different scale. Resilience has consistently been recognised as the strength of communities to deal with environmental, economic and social crises constructively and innovatively, involving a system of knowledge and behaviours that characterise the ability to react to the unexpected to create new equilibriums around an idea of community: associations, circles of friends, inhabitants from the same flat or of the same neighbourhood. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic might further challenge the established principles and practices on urban infrastructure planning and management (Nahiduzzaman and Lai, 2020): *territorialized innovation* linked to the enhancement of proximity networks (Tricarico and De Vidovich, 2021). The public notice of “Piano Nazionale Borghi” provided by the PNRR (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza), dedicated to small historic villages, is aimed at promoting projects for the regeneration, enhancement and management of the great heritage of history, art, culture and traditions in small Italian towns, integrating the objectives of protecting the cultural heritage with the needs of social and economic revitalisation, revitalisation of employment and combating depopulation (<https://cultura.gov.it/borghi>). This notice represents a significant opportunity to promote the regeneration of boroughs and rural areas. Its aim is to transform a dispersed heritage into a widespread one through cultural and social regeneration. bring positive economic, social and spatial dynamics (especially in smaller places). Through the regeneration of public spaces, infrastructure and the development of local services and recreational facilities, the means can be provided to transform the local rural landscape and, by extension, improve the image of existing places (Epstein et al., 2018) and related services.

The whole heritage of the Valtellina area derives from centuries of political, economic, and religious turmoil. The valley has the unique concentration of villages, churches, castles, museums, and historic buildings that tell the story of the area's identity, culture and traditions. The high part of Valtellina is characterised by Alpine valleys known for natural beauty, winter sports and a lot of sporting activities to be practised in summer from trekking to rock climbing, canyoning but also biking. A holiday in Valtellina can therefore provide a lot of different experiences such getting to know the local traditions in craftsmanship, historical palaces or castles, itineraries of the first world war or religious ones, or the world-famous prehistoric engravings.

In the last four years, and according to the wider phenomena *about* mountains and rural areas above mentioned, Valtellina has been involved in a variety of bottom-up initiatives useful to prove the renovated roles of local communities about their own self-determined trajectories of development. Just a few examples are:



- **Montagna 4.0 FutureAlps** project is led by SEV (Società Economica Valtellinese) and funded by local authorities. It started in 2019, rooted in already previous edition, and the first collective envisioning process that engaged scholars – mainly – and local stakeholder re-imagining and design together the future of the alpine arch looking at 2040. The common vision in background is the Mountain 4.0 (as the last step of the historical evolution of mountains' perception: Montagna 1.0 may refer to the "subsistence" age; M-2.0 concerns the Industrial Revolution's effects, with the first industrial activities and factories; M-3.0 relates to the intensive exploitation of natural resources and a strong relationship with the city) (Author, 2021) thus opens up new scenarios for the potential of the green economy, digitalisation and innovation that can unlock regions. <https://futurealps.it>
- **Stargate: cultural resonances in the valleys**, a project funded by MIC - Italian Ministry of Culture thanks to "Creative Living Lab" programme and led by a partnership of non-profit organisation in alpine arc (Forme social enterprise, Cramars social cooperative, TSD association; technical partners Studio Shift and La Capagrossa); Stargate had the aim to improve local communities cultural initiative, offering an open-source online school (the AniMakers School) and three Local Labs (D.I.T. Do-It-Together workshop) enabling youngster in particular to design and co-produce temporary micro-installation for the promotion of local events and cultural performances. <https://www.formecoop.org/cosa-facciamo/forme-di-welfare/stargate-nelle-alpi>
- **Sondrio Domani** stands for the first organised group of Valtellina Innovators; the association has just launched a series of collaborative events with the aim to co-design the next 10 years of work-life in Valtellina valley asking directly to professionals. The topic they convey about is the new life-work perspective that rural localities offer to digital nomads and -more in general- to smart working professionals looking for better context of life and downshifting.
- **VisionAlps**, it's a programme created and organised by Innovabilify (an innovative startup that provides matchmaking and sales accelerator services for high-tech Startups and SMEs) aiming to become suppliers of large traditional companies or looking for technology and business partners: a Business Accelerator for Enterprises, especially SMEs, and a Sales Accelerator for Startups. The provocation, within Winter Olympic games in background, is to accelerate the debate between the main localities in Italian



Alps around the topic of digital transformation and drive the change of these territories toward a new vision of remote living wellbeing culture.

<https://www.visionalps.com/en>

The challenge of Milano-Cortina Olympics Games is further offering to Valtellina's area the pretext and conditions to shape a medium-term vision and concrete actions to boost local development, answering both to Mega Events demands and local communities long term desires, as above stated. For these reasons all our research and didactic experiences have been located in Tirano, we consider -geographically- as a crucial pivot. Tirano is the last train stop of the italian public railway; it is very well known as the location of a great UNESCO patrimony (first stop of Swiss famous red train) and, since 2008, is also part of "Cittàslow" network.

Tirano offers holidays between sport and nature, dedicated to outdoor activities, such as trekking and cycling routes, skiing, mountaineering, snowshoeing and snowboarding. It is possible to rent bikes and start mountain paths from the city. The Tiranese area also presents significant opportunities that will depend on the adoption of a long-term perspective and a systemic vision capable of promoting local "anticipatory" and participative governance, which at the same time addresses social, economic and environmental uncertainties. We trust and prove the role of design can be to convey and collectively shape a process in which every artefact, tangible or intangible, could represent an approved and economically valid vision for future activation and belonging. In our interventions we practised Design, including envisioning and a variety of participatory modes, to involve citizens, final users of design solutions and local stakeholders, becoming a political act. In fact, at the root of the concept of design activism is the philosophical and ethical position that design is at the service of society and, indeed, of democracy.

Thinking about places, today and specifically in reference to rural and urban areas, is an emblematic exercise of democracy if the direct involvement of all the realities concerned is foreseen, as opposed to acting by representation. According to Fuad-Luke (2009) "we need to practise a *Beauty* that knows how to adapt to the changes that the future has in store for us, without de-empowering it; a *Beauty* that speaks of an open, courageous, genuine and welcoming future for the growth of humanity".

The concept is reminiscent of what Manzini (2018) would define as a community of "transformative social innovation". Again Manzini, in his *Politiche del quotidiano* (2018), reflects on the forms of democracy with an appeal to "design democracy": bluntly siding in favour of localism (cit. "*productive and service systems [...] endowed with autonomy and defined by choices made and implemented locally*") over which communities have full decision-making power. In this frame, project democracy



would constitute the preferential form through which the community can develop its own project; a *collaborative democracy* which necessarily also becomes one of co-responsibility. Finally, according to the concept of *deep democracy*, all the voices are important: central and marginal, in the different levels of awareness, bearers of plural frames of reference.

Enhancing local rural communities throughout short-term actions

Communities flourish when they invest in people and look to the future to improve the area while considering the social and environmental effects. Investment in education, in the capacity to keep people together, is especially vital for mountain communities, which are becoming increasingly open communities with no defined borders, capable of integrating and confronting old and new, within and outside (Ravazzoli and Valero, 2020). This hybridisation, on the cultural front, is very important because it brings different pieces together and can produce significant results on the path towards a quality future: identifying and envisioning growth collaborative strategies, it is possible building a “system of products and services capable of transforming ideas into tangible actions within a certain territory” (Villari, 2012). In local communities the unmet needs, for which Design for Social Innovation seeks to find an answer to, may include both social and economic collective needs that have not met through traditional solutions such as the provision of child or elderly care services, the need to offer professional or economic opportunities to the young, the integration of migrant, the need to protect the environment, etc (Slee et al., 2022). In all of these examples, Design for Social Innovation addresses local issues through collaborative activity and creates a knowledge and learning foundation that can be useful to the community.

Territorial characteristics and contextual factors influence considerably the emergence and the development trajectories of social innovation initiatives, as well as their evolution and scaling. The contextual factors refer to the existing set of contextual material and immaterial resources: natural, financial, social, and cultural characteristics that enable or constrain social innovation. In addition, one of the significant strategies in achieving sustainable development goals is by involving people at all levels in social, cultural and economic actions, and designing solutions based on social innovations (Cunha et al. 2022). The existing context significantly influences the actors’ capacity to mobilise and transform existing resources. For instance, social innovation is likely to appear due to local leadership and local people’s trust in that leadership and due to collaborative action driven by social capital (cooperation and collaboration).



Particularly relevant is the relationship between different stakeholders involved in the same process of designing social innovation, such as students as designers, local community, and local associations and third sector organisations. The third sector is often viewed as an important force in Design for Social Innovation, indeed according to Goldenberger (et al., 2009) “in communities, the no-profit sector plays a vital role in social innovation”. The main purpose of the described process is, by strengthening the social fabric and generating new ideas of citizen well-being, to increase the quality of a particular social and physical context in a collaborative manner with creative actions which aim to create new forms of community and new spatial changes that are of a higher value. Particularly in extra-urban areas far from the city centre – as in this case of giving importance to inner territories – the re-occupation and re-design of public and urban spaces are increasingly frequent, which is also thanks to co-design and co-participation with the inhabitants of the (neighbourhood) context that promotes activities and new scenarios (Camocini and Fassi, 2017).

In this essay, new activation rural solutions, scenarios, and tactics are offered to bring the resident population and small regional communities into relationships in order to develop synergies and new processes of inclusion and social innovation in rural contexts; with the involvement of students as design discipline moderators which involved one social enterprise operating in the area and specifically in Tirano: Cooperativa FORME. It generates different forms of social enterprise in the Valtellina area, capable of designing and implementing care services for people, community welfare interventions in support of children and young people, including those with disabilities, teenagers and young people, adults in difficulty, migrants, elderly people and families. Designing and promoting the regeneration of spaces and services, including commercial ones, to enhance the area in which the cooperative operates. The collaboration activated, between Cooperativa FORME and Politecnico di Milano for the research and teaching project *TUS - Alpine Experimentations*, shows that the main key goals are to design temporary, reversible and eco-sustainable solutions, paying attention to the assessment of the social and environmental impact of each aspect of the project, responding to the objectives of the local stakeholders involved as partners in the activity.

Pilot Project 01: TUS - Alpine Experimentations

As already mentioned in the previous sections, this contribution wants to give stage to a teaching and research project that starts with the collaboration of different actors such as the small local communities of Tirano who protagonists of the elective TUS course will be, called Alpine Experimentations. The role of the design discipline is to exploit the fertile context of Valtellina Area, particular attention for Tirano zone, by proposing new activating rural solutions, scenarios and strategies, and connecting



the inhabitants by using the skills of design students to create synergies and new processes of social inclusion and innovation in this fragile contexts.



Figure 1. Valtellina Area. Graphic map by authors

The challenge is to create a new dialogue with the various multifaceted and identities of the Valtellina contexts, through the involvement of five local non-profit groups related to Cooperativa FORME, that are based on the principles of equity and sustainability, care, educate, work, regenerate, generating social cohesion and innovation, through their activities on territory. First of all it should be clarified that, the course in its duration was taken by students divided into groups with the aim of

- Research on existing and potential territorial resources (landscape, heritage, museums, food, popular traditions, etc);
- Design of strategies for local development (territorial eco-system of offers from short-term to long-term);
- Co-design envisioning sessions with Cooperativa FORME and citizens;
- Spatial, service and virtual prototyping;

Referring, in the first place, to one of the target audiences and consequently to one of the activities related to the schedule that the cooperative puts into action in the Valtellina area. Among the various activities we find:



- Family 2.0 (Target: kids 0/10y and their families) is a service dedicated to families in the area, with the aim of activating new community welfare interventions aimed at families to help improve their quality of life. The main problem we want to answer is to facilitate the everyday life of young families who need help in care and work-life balance. The main objectives are: to test a new service for families; respond to needs through new forms of collaboration between and same families; contribute to improving the quality of life of families; decrease the level of social isolation in which families live and raise awareness of public and private actors in the promotion of family welfare.
- Fare Estate (Target: children 11/21y) aims to meet the needs, difficulties, skills and ideas of adolescents. It offers specific guidance and learning tools, complementary to the traditional training system, such as the educational methods of "learning by doing". Among the proposals, it is possible to find individual educational and psychological paths; experiences of regeneration of common goods of territory through workshops, soft skills courses within schools; different summer camps for middle school children and for teenagers.
- Io Leggo, Tu Leggi, Noi Leggiamo (Target: readers and non-readers) intends to pursue is to expand the community of readers of the city of Tirano, increasing the habit of readings in "weak readers" or attracting against those who have strayed from it; in other words, bringing non-readers a series of opportunities to discover the world of books and reading. The intention is to create an ecosystem of books by creating some environments *for* and *with* citizenship; in which the book is physically present, visible and recognisable.
- Stargate (Target: teenagers and families) intends to link three organisations respectively operating in Piedmont, Lombardy and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions. These organisations are born and work in the mountains – for years – bringing culture, training experiences, and social innovation. It is in their valleys, seven micro-locations in total (we consider them as laboratories of emerging creativity and innovation) that it intends to focus our attention and re-contextualize in a new way the phenomenon of tactical urbanism. The *Stargate* project proposes a transalpine animation and self-construction school, whose aim is to design a new cultural profile, able to listen to the needs of local communities to engage them in co-creation activities.
- Local Hub (Target: kids 0-6y and their families) is a co-working space, in a central area of Tirano, dedicated to young students, professionals and



startuppers. The space is open to the whole community also for the promotion of new local future opportunities. In this context, there is a space entirely dedicated to children (0-6 years old) that aims to promote – in experimental services – socialisation and work-life balance, particularly taking care of the needs of families.

Consequently, the choice of the target audience and the initiative to work for, posed the next step of locating itself within the public spaces of Tirano in order to display the spatial and service prototyping resulting from the course design process. A designer can make an impact on people's lives through motivating activities, engaging stakeholders, and building "framework spaces" that will expose and question current social configurations and conditions. Additionally, there is a chance to switch from designing *for* communities to designing *with* communities and to empower communities to develop *on their own* (Brown, 2009).

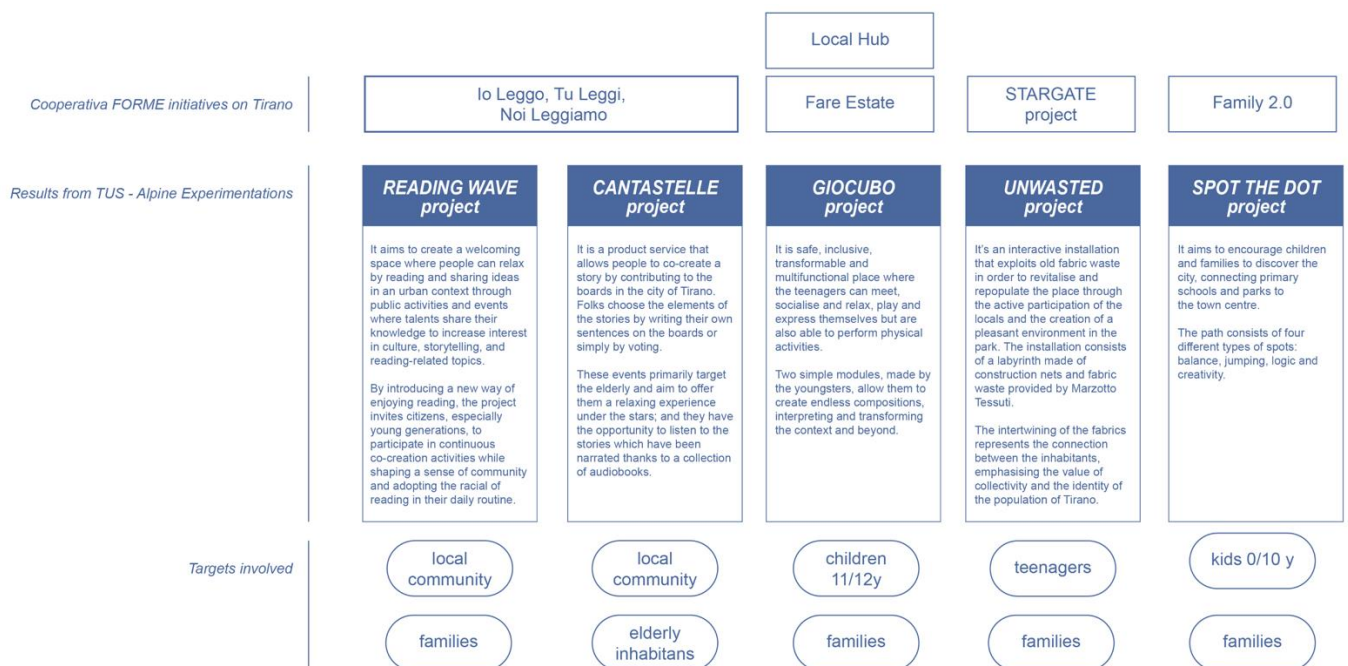


Figure 2. Scheme about projects from TUS - Alpine Experimentations. Students involved are (Reading Wave) Antonio Gandolfo, Shuqi Xiong, Vladislava Ershova, Wang Ce; (Cantastelle) Stefania Aili, Yasemin Çetik, Eryu Ji, Yilong Ying; (Giocubo) Alessia Cerruti, Sara Kashfi, Virginia Laguzzi, Hellen Schieren; (Unwasted) Gioia Pirozzi, Tamira de Souza Beck, Matteo Iotti, Federico Maggi; (Spot the Dot) Carolina Colombo, Francesca Fedele, Jacopo Guidobono, Yanqing Li.



Producing ideas and creating prototypes is therefore necessary for bringing new transformative solutions to the world and sharing what has been done with the individuals for whom one is designing. In relation to what has been said, the results proposed by the students are new windows into the not too distant future with the aim of generating territorial transformations for sure, activating new local networks between the operating communities and healing great planning and organisational doubts that have long been left unresolved.

Long-term territory development through project strategies

Local resources, as well as local participation in dynamic interactions with their larger environments, are critical success factors for social innovation to emerge. At the same time, these processes generate new relationships and forms of cooperation at the local level, having a special role in advancing local governance toward social inclusion (Gerometta et al. 2005) and the achievement of the SDGs. In any case, Design for Social innovations is linked to wider networks, so they do not merely belong to the place where they are generated (local territorial embeddedness) but occur within more extensive, complex networks and spatial interconnections that cover a whole territory. It is also and above all important to valorise the factor of presence in these territories, the users enabling, according to the degree of their involvement, the spatial, service and relational transformation.

The territories can be imagined as a sponge that opens during events and welcomes tourists and visitors, so the positive charge enriches the fabric of the city and its inhabitants by slowly releasing the positive effects in the long term, or *long wave* concept: “[...]built with the intention of lasting, leaving marks, permanent effects on the urban fabric and the collective memory” (Amendola, 2010). This also applies to the regions in the mountains that are experiencing increasingly change, impacting both the global and local levels. In connection with this, the coming of the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympic Games 2026 in the Valtellina Area, will be a major turning point for the host territory and its surrounding communities on the long-term horizon. The events of today have become one of the key strategies of the territory economy. They could be home indeed to different events and entities, and increasingly, the events transform the context, their image and opinions of residents and visitors, as “exceptional events can help (the city) to redefine its development model, and get visibility otherwise unimaginable, [...] reminds them over time” (Ashworth and Voogd, 1995). Already successful in the past, such as the Winter Olympic Games Turin 2006, for which a well-structured and innovative sustainability framework was realised to assess impacts and legacy. Events were distributed mainly in Val di Susa,



while Turin represented the main cluster for accommodations and ceremonies. Despite the controversial outcomes of realised structures, the framework behind them had remarkably considered sustainability in the organisation of events and in the assessment of impacts. A project of international importance, which normally requires preparation by the nation or city concerned over a number of years, serves to raise awareness of the image and economy of a tourist destination in the short and/or long term (Brent Ritchie, 1984). These phenomena involve great variability in the scale of economic and infrastructure investments (Guala, 2007). The organisation of this kind of Mega Events has increasingly focused its interest on the design of the legacy of the event itself on the territory involved, from different points of view: spatial, economic, social, environmental. The large flow of visitors and actors involved in a mountain realm characterised by small realities to be protected and enhanced offers an interesting scenario on which to reflect and design in a multidisciplinary approach. In other words, sports Mega Events in virtue of various dimensions, including visitor-friendly attractiveness, destination image and urban transformations, can attract extensive media coverage (Müller, 2015). Therefore, hosting the sports mega-events seems reasonable as highly expected positive socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental effects caused after the act (Greenwell et al., 2019): the territory and its localities became more accessible with the interaction between four components like urban planning system, transport system, opportunities and time constraints, and individual opportunities and constraints. A tourist is a person who travels to places other than his or her usual place of residence and outside his or her everyday environment, for a period of at least one night but not exceeding one year, for a variety of reasons, but not for the purpose of exercising a paid profession. Depending on the role played by the tourist or the user who wants to interact with the context during a Mega Event, we can distinguish different acceptances of the tourism phenomenon that can shape long-term future scenarios:

- Active tourism, i.e. that carried out by tourists. A person who moves for any reason from Florence to Milan and stays there for a week is performing active tourism.
- Passive tourism, i.e. that carried out by the residents of the places where the tourists arrive. It is passive in that one does not move from one's place of residence by staying elsewhere. A citizen of Rome who gives directions to a tourist performs passive tourism.
- Productive tourism, i.e. that carried out by private and public operators who produce and provide tourist services to meet the tourist's needs. A hotel that



provides accommodation or the municipality that cleans the trails of a tourist destination performs productive tourism.

Attractions of actions and innovation can happen in mountain sectors during extraordinary events, such as the Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games. Hosting this Mega Events in a mountain area can be both an opportunity for new developments as well as a threat for excessive anthropic pressures and long-lasting footprints (i.e., over-tourism or unused structures in the post-Olympic). Ensuring long-term legacy (tangible and intangible) is indeed fundamental for the Olympic movement: however, a durable positive legacy would be even more challenging in case of delicate ecosystems: this is the case of Valtellina, which is one of the areas to host the Milano-Cortina Winter Olympics Games in 2026. The project *HOST2026- Sustainable and HOSpitable Territories and services: the case of Winter Olympic Games Milano-Cortina 2026* questions how to manage the Olympics Games long-term legacy in a sustainable way for the mountain area of Valtellina. Despite the few weeks of mega-event, the Olympic impacts need to be strategically exploited in order to enhance and make visible the local potential and offer. Therefore, the main purpose is to use the 2026 Olympics Games challenge to redesign a long-term and multi-scale strategy for Valtellina, having Tirano as a pivotal point for its development.

Pilot Project 02: HOST2026. Sustainable and HOSpitable Territories and services: the case of Winter Olympic Games Milano-Cortina 2026

The project proposal arises from the intersection of consolidated research and teaching themes, by the proposing team and the fortuitous overlap of the same in a real and upcoming event in time: the Winter Olympic Games 2026 which involve the territories between Milan and Cortina. The work team combines the different disciplinary areas, essential for the design of a mega-event, with a view to sustainability and territorial promotion, such as: meta-design, strategic design and co-design, maintenance of assets and territory, sustainable mobility, planning and development of tourist and cultural services.

The project focuses on beneficiaries at a double level: territorial networks, public entities and other local stakeholders for strategic and territorial management outputs; residents, athletes and event staff, tourists for the level of new systemic offer of services in the hospitality, heritage, culture and leisure areas. The project is linked to the network and the activities of the Interreg CONVALORE project (EU project) about the regeneration of heritage and landscape in Valtellina and Valposchiavo areas. Key goals of the research project are focused on how to use the Winter Olympic Games 2026 challenge to re-design a long-term territorial strategy and new proximity



systems, particularly for the Valtellina area and Tirano city, in northern Italy. The research and didactic project will work on two different perspectives: first on the sustainable welcoming and diffuse welcoming of the different populations who will visit and live temporarily in the area, and second will be the involvement of the local stakeholders in the legacy project. Consequently, the second point of interest is involved students, from Politecnico di Milano and Torino, how to drive local development and enable stakeholders (even citizenship) to be part of this collective envisioning exercise and planning: focusing on topics such as public and sustainable mobility, new touristic offer (both heritage and cultural production), participatory governance. The macro-objective is the event legacy project and enhancement of the local area through the temporary adaptation of the existing heritage, the design of temporary, reversible, and eco-sustainable modules. In general, the attention paid to the assessment of the social and environmental impacts of each aspect of the project responds to the objectives of the local stakeholders involved as partners in the activity. As a result, HOST2026 is a strategic multi-sectorial and territorial research to address the hospitality challenge of the 2026 Olympic Games. Two outputs were produced: on one hand, a strategic research analysis at different scales, on the other, a project proposal called *A/oc*, that in the local dialect means accommodation and underlines its community-based soul. *A/oc* aims at enhancing the territory by a complementary experiential offer based on wine culture, which was chosen due to its characterisation for the local economy. The offer adapts for three interlinked scenarios, or rather Olympic, post-Olympic and long-term legacy. *A/oc* is a trans-scalar and territorial system project to define guidelines for an evolving strategy. The proposal, addressed to the municipality of Tirano and Valtellina Turismo, starts from the growing demand for hospitality in the Valtellina area during the Olympics and from a redistribution over time of the expected physical assets. The proposal is based on creating an experiential tourism service in the wine terraces that can become a legacy for the post-Olympic period, not only for tourism but also for addressing community needs. The long-term goal of strategic guidelines in the scenarios is to support socio-economic cohesion, which starts by strategically exploiting the Olympic challenge. Overall, rather than having a defined tangible product, HOST2026 drew systemic research for a complex territory like Valtellina to face and overcome a critical event such as the Olympics.

Results and next developments

Through cultural and social regeneration, these experimentations aim to transform a dispersed heritage into a widespread one, and to bring about favourable economic,



social, and spatial dynamics (especially in smaller places). In addition, through the regeneration of public spaces, infrastructures and the development of local services and recreational facilities, the means can be provided to transform the local alpine landscape and, by extension, improve the image of existing places (Epstein et al., 2018) and related services. Moreover, the development of tourism and cultural industries has created new opportunities for work and consumption. “Contexts (mountains) emerged as increasingly important actors in this general framework, despite a parallel process of fogging, if not dissolution, of the great national systems, with the effect of atomization and fragmentation of economies” (Chilla et al., 2017); at the macroregional level, they create new systems.

According to The World Economic Forum, the travel and tourism industry is continually growing, generating jobs, reducing poverty, driving growth and fostering development and tolerance. Nowadays the biggest hospitality platforms try to offer a palimpsest of local activities and experiences. In this field, design plays a central role, especially in researching and developing disruptive solutions through its methods and tools and with a strong focus on the involvement of local communities and other stakeholders. These experiments are meant to continue with developments in different topics and sectors (welcoming both local communities and non-local youngsters, thanks to universities engagement as in this experience) and geographies (making even stronger the spontaneous and virtuous networking across Alps), contributing to produce both tangible and intangible results, such as shift of mindset, cultural wider perspective, integration of self-perceptions of local stakeholders. We can argue that a community of intention was created, with strong conviction that everyone shares the interest to proceed with planning and prototype, in an open and glocal perspective. We can take co-design as a paradigm of orientation, using its tools to "navigate" in a structured way: promoting ideas and visions on the one hand and enabling synthesis on the other. This endowment facilitates to “go beyond the present”, as skills we focus on proposing and practicing community-centred design. This approach requires that facilitators develop two areas of competence: the ability to learn about the community and its habitat and the power of creatively collaborating with them and finding new ways to include their capabilities and contributions as non-designers. We refer to this collaborative design approach as community-centred design (Meroni and Manzini, 2014), which can prompt or feed the service design mindset (Meroni and Selloni, 2018) that is increasingly characteristic of today's creative communities (Meroni, 2007). Additionally, participatory practices allow Alpine territories to go beyond rhetorical or generic objectives of liveability and competitiveness and develop futures with a deeper awareness of local assets. As the global pandemics challenged traditional



paradigms, any change appeared to be possible, moving beyond centre-periphery in a polycentric approach calling for collective action to open up exciting futures to build.

This suggests that mountain regions have entered a period of renewed vitality, during which relationships with the urban environment are crucial for reshaping cultural values, establishing physical and functional ties with the surrounding areas, and developing urban-mountain networks. In conclusion, the new activation alpine temporary solutions, future scenarios, and territories' tactics and strategies are offered to bring the inhabitants and small communities into relationships in order to develop new processes of inclusion and social innovation to regenerate extra-urban contexts in a long-term perspective.

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