

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Despite the long-lasting processes of territorial marginalization and socio-economic exclusion that hit mountainous regions particularly hard, it seems that mountainous remote places in Europe are experiencing an unprecedented momentum (Membretti, Dax and Krasteva, 2022). Within the framework of climate change and diversified population movements (internal and international migration, part-time living, smart-workers, amenity dwellers, etc.), the recent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of social distancing, different perceptions and uses of space are contributing to a re-thematization of remoteness in spatial and socio-cultural terms. An enhanced value - especially expressed by metropolitan populations - is beginning to be attributed to remoteness as a 'natural' space with low population density, and spaces far from overcrowded and unsafe urban areas. At the same time, ongoing urbanization and agglomeration trends are accentuating processes of spatial and cultural 'remotisation' (Membretti 2021) with respect to many mountain regions, like the Alps: on one hand, this phenomenon tends to coincide with increasing social exclusion, territorial inequality, and widespread resentment expressed by the inhabitants of the 'places that do not matter' against the elites of 'central places'. On the other hand, mountainous remote places show a huge potential in terms of innovation, creativity, and attractiveness, that other territories, perceived as peripheral, usually do not possess. This is because they constitute - at least in urban imaginaries - a category different from that of 'periphery', representing an alterity, strongly connected to a potential of counter-specification (Ardener, 2012). Therefore, it seems that conditions are being created for a new and creative dialectic between urban and mountain dimensions (e.g., within a "metro-montane" approach; Barbera and De Rossi, 2021), while new conflicts may arise around different visions of remoteness and access/use/exploitation of remote places and resources. Based on the empirical data collected in the H2020 MATILDE project and on the positions expressed in the MATILDE Manifesto ("The Renaissance of Remote Places", 2022), this presentation will focus on the new role that Europe's mountainous remote areas can play for the future of the continent, offering an unexpected and unique occasion to restore places and spaces to the people, putting territorial equity at the very core of 'next generation Europe'.