

Michael Obrist  
Antonietta Putzu  
(eds.)

Contemporary  
phenomena  
and strategies of  
living in Italy



# THE LAST GRAND TOUR

**Introduction**

The Last Grand Tour 12  
Michael Obrist, Antonietta Putzu

**Reflections about the Grand Tour**

Beyond the eyes of gods 17  
Michael Obrist

Return to the Sun of Nothing 18  
Carolina Sartori

Reflections on contemporality 32  
Michael Obrist and Antonietta Putzu in conversation with Pippo Ciorra

The anti-city and us 40  
Michael Obrist in conversation with Stefano Boeri

Italy: Love it, or Leave it 43  
Michael Obrist and Antonietta Putzu in conversation with Luca Ragazzi and Gustav Hofer

A diagonal overview on beauty, places and change in Italy 46  
Michael Obrist in conversation with Massimo Bricocoli

On the road 56  
Michael Obrist and Antonietta Putzu in conversation with Gianni Pettena

On the radical normality of emancipatory alienation 65  
Michael Obrist in conversation with Wilfried Kuehn

On geography, politics and form 69  
Michael Obrist in conversation with Pier Paolo Tamburelli

Detours to Italomodern 74  
Martin Feiersinger, Werner Feiersinger

The importance of being Ernesto 89  
Shumi Bose, Roberta Marcaccio

Deceitful Habits in a Human's Soul 93  
Michael Meier, Christoph Franz

Tourism in the cracks of the Italian economy 95  
Sarah Gainsforth

Regenerating Rome and Europe through the practice of hospitality 99  
Lorenzo Romito

**The Alps**

Through the Alps: A photographic account of the changes in the Alpine landscape 104  
Viviana Rubbo, Alessandro Guida, Davide Curatola Soprana, Isabella Sassi Farias

Landscapes 124  
Ursula Aichner

Reading the Alps 128  
Alberto Winterle

Reusing the historical architectural heritage inside UNESCO's Dolomites 134  
Gianluca D'Inca Levis



# Reusing the historical architectural heritage inside UNESCO's Dolomites

Gianluca D'Inca Levis

## A regenerative vision and practice for the territory – and for the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics

'Ingenuity is seeing possibilities where others don't.'  
Enrico Mattei

Since 2011, Dolomiti Contemporanee (DC) has been working within the scope of territorial regeneration towards the experimental reactivation of large abandoned or underused sites inside the Dolomites, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2009. The work involves former plants, factories and villages, or entire territorial areas, hitherto lacking in development and adaptation to contemporary needs.

One example of this process centres on the peculiar building which used to house the former elementary school of Casso, in the Vajont Dam area where, on 9 October 1963, a landslide detached from a mountain, setting off one of the worst tragedies in the history of Italy (the Vajont disaster).

In 2012, the former elementary school building, damaged by that tragic event and, since then, having remained closed for almost half a century, was reopened by DC, which has made it a Centre for the Contemporary Culture of the Mountain and the Landscape. This acts as one of the hubs from which we work on the construction of an intellectual, cultural and functional collaboration for creating a contemporary mountain, one which is neither vapid nor automated or self-cannibalising, one which must never be understood as a mere place of enjoyment (and enjoyment which is mainly stubbornly touristic), but rather is a privileged workshop for people in tune with the environment and the research that is carried out on it. In essence, seeing the mountain as a privileged

place wherein to produce and experiment – that is, something very different from a simple place merely to be consumed. We see the mountain itself as a self-transforming construction site. And a construction site is not a cutting board. And a resource is not a bread basket.

Let us consider the symbolic value of DC's presence in the Vajont Dam area. For those who declare that they wish to reopen closed-up spaces, both thinking of the space and critically *meaning* it, this location is extraordinarily emblematic. Here, in 1963, almost 2,000 people died. So, it is not easy to break through this place, still so very marked to this day. It is not easy to declare, in such a place, that culture, art, vision and design are necessary tools, rather than merely decorative ones, through which people renew themselves and their habitat, refounding it when necessary. It is not easy to move beyond the commemorative sentiment gripping the Vajont – which equally must absolutely not always coincide with the identity of these places and those who inhabit them. It is not easy, remaining here; but this is the exact type of place where one must remain when one declares one wants to deal with the regeneration of the landscape and the territory.

Then again for us, here, in the Terre Alte, the High Lands, we want to climb, to scale; and, in fact, we can say it like this, too: DC is a cultural mountaineering project. Scaling is understood, here, with the double meaning of both climbing and measuring things, redefining their value, quality, residual utility, functional transformability. Regenerating lost structures, making a series of new territorial reactors inside the network is, in fact, equivalent to remeasuring the potential and value, and to activating them in a networking practice (with its territorial and extraterritorial alliances, DC has almost 500 partners and supporters, both public and private and related to research, both in Italy and abroad), leading to their recovery.



Former Eni Village Corte di Cadore. The main hall of the Colonia under Mount Antelao. Credit: Giacomo De Donà



Inside the main hall of the Eni Village of Borca. Credit: Giacomo De Donà



Eni Village of Borca. The Colonia ramps in the hypertrophic forest of Borca. Credit: Sergio Casagrande



But we are in the mountains here – pushing the mountain, which means contributing to the co-generation of the Alpine landscape. This landscape is not a gift from God; it does not pre-date humans, it must be built, always responsibly, by humans themselves. So, this scaling which we're referring to is a decisively forward projection, without nostalgia for what remains of the past and for the nostalgia of industrial archaeology.

Let us recall the definition of landscape by Edoardo Gellner, the architect who, in the 1950s, created the Eni Village of Borca di Cadore, another one of the extraordinary sites whose regeneration DC has been working on ever since 2014 (Progettoborca.net): the landscape is the sum of both natural environment and human action.

And so: if one works well, with a vision, on research, then the landscape always moves, rises and is transformed. If one works badly, it is broken. It is paramount to have a will, and the ability to project that will.

Otherwise, these great sites, these amazing factories of the '50s, '60s or '70s, rather than being reborn to new life, will truly die, and will be preyed upon by the atrophying mechanisms of nostalgia, memory or mere heritage protection, instead of being updated, transformed, reactivated.

So, here's the crux of the matter. Inside the Dolomites, as is true for the Alps in general, landscapes that have been preyed upon or disfigured by opaque governance, short-sightedness, as well as the deadly grail of badly managed tourism (leading to overload of both infrastructure and landscape), all suffer, stop, lie still like fossils. Instead, they should be turned inside-out, protected and driven forward (it is not enough to just protect them: they must be moved forward). Significant historical sites (both architecture and heritage in relation to the environment) that have been closed down and extinguished by historical or critical events, these crisis sites, craters of the human landscape, which may show special transformability characteristics (the actual regeneration potential of large real-estate sites must be assessed very carefully before any action is taken in their favour), must be transformed into opportunities.

This activity of rethinking, refounding and refunctionalising critical or problematic sites and contexts is a responsible and necessary action.

So, how do we operate in practice? Since 2011, we have worked on about twenty problematic sites, which are, for those who decide to notice them, precious depressed resources inside the Dolomite Mountains. These sites are striking, in their architecture's relationship with the environmental context, in their history and aesthetics, and in their high residual potential for transformation and regeneration. They are the unresolved sites, those where both policy and public funding for redevelopment projects have failed in their meagre attempts of a restart. They are heritage and, as such, they must be rekindled.

The main institution around which the practice of DC is articulated consists in the residency which animates the regeneration construction sites. The residency is always active within the sites' hubs during the proactive reactivation work phase. Every year, hundreds of artists, architects, designers, researchers, students and environmental experts live and work within the territory, getting to know it directly, and developing with us, in their projects and partnerships, regenerative designs.

DC's experimental and innovative practice is conducted and demonstrated, as well as in the field work on the structures it addresses, through participation in events, platforms, displays, conferences and other initiatives on the themes of urban and Alpine regeneration.

DC participated in the Venice Architecture Biennale XVI (*Arcipelago Italia*, 2018, curated by Mario Cucinella) and XVII (*Resilient Communities*, 2021,

curated by Alessandro Melis), on both occasions opening the Italian Pavilion and putting forward its developed themes. In both 2017 and 2018, DC received a special mention from the Italian Ministry of Culture following its participation in the European Council Landscape Prize. In 2013, this concerned Progettoborca (the platform which, as mentioned, since 2014 has been regenerating the extraordinary former Eni Village of Borca di Cadore); in 2020, the recognition came for the vision developed in the Vajont Dam area, in particular for the Two Calls for Vajont, the international competition which will lead to the creation of an anti-commemorative piece on the Vajont Dam (twocalls.net), which, despite being the symbol of the 1963 tragedy, must not be considered eternally as a gravestone, a symbol of death.

Art, contemporary culture, the intellectual elaboration of design and existential models, as well as an unsweetened and non-fatuous image of the mountain ... These, together with the vast participatory networks which we utilise every day, are the main tools through which we work on the recovery and rekindling of sites – which aren't dead at all, but dormant, if that. To wake them, sleeping isn't the answer, but rather thinking and doing. It is the *logos*, lo and behold, which guides our action.

At the moment, as everyone is well aware, much is being said about Milano Cortina 2026, and the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics. Up until now, inside the Dolomites, the work hasn't proceeded well: no planning or ideas, no sensitivity to the issues of regeneration and land saving.

But what are they, the Olympics? Are they useful for the territories in which they take place?

The Olympics are not simply a sporting event, but an opportunity (and therefore also a risk), still, for the host country. Events of this magnitude must help to produce territorial development: ultimately, they must serve this purpose. Infrastructure, visibility, tourism, relaunch trends: the Olympics can be a great inspiration for growth for large areas, and for the entire country.

To be clear: it is the Olympics that, if well managed, should constitute a 'service' in favour of the territory, and not the territory's role to serve the sporting event. Seems simple, right? However, until now, this has not been the case (things have been a little better in Milan, where regeneration has been taken into consideration).

For several years, while networking with both the territory and the universities, we have proposed a solution to the issue of the Olympic Village which must be built in the Dolomites by 2026.

The former Villaggio Eni di Corte, in Borca di Cadore, is 16 kilometres from Cortina d'Ampezzo. This is the great design by Enrico Mattei who, in the 1950s, when he was the president of ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi or National Fuel Trust), commissioned Edoardo Gellner to create this innovative welfare essay in the heart of the mountains of the Cadore territory. A cradle of modernism and an innovative vision of Italy, the extraordinary creation of Mattei and Gellner (with the collaboration of Carlo Scarpa for Our Lady of the Cadore Church) is, today, still at least three things: the symbol of an era during which Italy worked and truly innovated, permeating the world in culture, architecture, design and business; a work of art, architecture and exceptional environmental sensitivity; a remarkable available square footage, too, which could accommodate thousands of people, and in which is already active, ever since 2014, a major regeneration site, operated by DC together with Proprietà Minoter. This is, more precisely, Progettoborca, a project of functional reconceptualisation of this semi-stranded station.

Since 2014, we have been reflecting publicly on this, as well as on other high-potential sites in the



Former Eni Village Corte di Cadore. Artist in residence, Sandra Hauser. Credit: Giacomo De Donà

Dolomites landscape. For instance, the Trampolino Italia ski-jumping hill in Zuel, a symbol of the 1956 Winter Olympics, and therefore, not only just in theory, a natural torchbearer for the 2026 games.

The former Eni Village, the Trampolino Italia: two extraordinary sites, which the Olympics could help to recover and which, in turn, could make them a less foolish project than they have seemed to be so far. Our idea, in fact, is to 'use' the Olympics to carry out the restoration of these huge sites. So that it may be possible to temporarily host those functions which are essential for the sporting event, as well as the people. Temporarily, of course. Because the idea, and the territorial negotiation (we must reiterate, both cultural and functional – the two terms should be considered as synonyms), is wider and more serious. The restored structures, with the participation of both the public and the private spheres, at the end of the Olympics would become a service and research Dolomiti hub.

The Colonia (summer camp building), one of the structures that make up the Borca Village, alone housed a population of 1,000 people up until the early 1990s. This complex architecture in fact can count over 20,000 square metres of internal space, and is now being used experimentally by DC, which is searching for options for its ultimate recovery. After hosting athletes, then, from 2027 onwards, it could host, on a more long-term basis, a thousand researchers, scholars, creative companies.

The needs of the territory are already intercepted by our practice: they should be catalysed here. The idea, always only vaguely mentioned, of those who, up until now, should have been planning a smart and sustainable Olympics, was this: to create a temporary modular architecture in a free meadow near Cortina d'Ampezzo, and then disassemble it in the aftermath of the sporting event. What an idea! But what about sustainability? Let's see if it changes. We want to change it. Onwards.