

Improving paths to rediscover the mountains; the project “Upkeep the Alps” is beginning

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Rediscovering the mountains by walking or cycling along the paths. This is the aim of the “**Upkeep the Alps**” project, which unites Italy and Switzerland in one great plan to develop the Alps and slow tourism. The project, which is financed with inter-regional funds, brings together Lombardy Region, the Institute for Wood Plants and the Environment, the Italian Alpine Club and *our* “Campo dei Fiori” Park, and seeks to promote the entire network of paths that run through our mountains.

“**With the funds, we’ll be able to create ad hoc training courses and routes for those who plan and maintain the paths,**” the President of the Park, Giuseppe Barra, explained, “and in so doing, we want to promote the eco-sustainable vitality of our mountains.” The cross-border, mountain territory has a lot to offer tourists, thanks to its network of paths, but often, what there is is penalised by the low level of maintenance of the network, which suffers the effects of exogenous agents. The local councils invest resources in maintaining the paths, which often benefit the companies that intervene with high-impact construction techniques, and it is precisely this that the project seeks to oppose.

“**The path is a cultural asset because it transforms a simple piece of land into a territory,**” explained Annibale Salsa, an expert in alpine culture and the former President of the Italian Alpine Club. “We need to improve cultural literacy, with respect to the mountains.” To this end, what Salsa describes as a rebirth of the appeal of “nearby” may help. “Globalisation has killed the idol of ‘faraway’, and so, in a large Asian, American or African city, the same things can be found. **Today, the exotic, intended as the complete other, can be found in places nearby that are no longer well-known.**”

And so, “Upkeep the Alps” seeks to enhance the maintenance sector, which is a low-tech activity, insofar as professionalism is often achieved by applying good practices, which have been transferred in an inorganic way. Thus, the project seeks to create professional training courses for mountain operators, which, by reducing the technological divide, will make their skills organic, thereby enabling their specialisation to be formally recognised.

This is a small step to oppose the depopulation of the mountain regions, which also seeks to create job opportunities that are still to be established. This is why, on Wednesday, 14 November, experts and technicians in the sector met in Ville Ponti and, with a number of workshops, discussed how to set up this project. The event also saw the participation of Luca Mercalli, who has predicted that climate change will increasingly drive people to live in the mountains.

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