Università della Svizzera italiana | Accademia di architettura | **Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi LabiSAlp**

International Workshop

Improving Mountain Agriculture? Debates and Reform Projects (1750–1850)

Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi (LabiSAlp), USI-Accademia di architettura, Mendrisio, Switzerland

7-8 June 2027

Call for Papers

In Europe, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, agriculture became an increasingly important political and intellectual concern across a range of institutional, social and geographical contexts. Administrators, economists and jurists, alongside parish priests, scientists and landowners, regarded agricultural practices and policies as essential to preventing famines, raising crop yields, boosting tax revenues, maintaining a viable demographic balance between town and country, and ensuring an abundant supply of high-quality raw materials for manufacturing.

In recent decades, the discourses and reform projects that grew out of this engagement with agriculture have attracted considerable scholarly interest. Historians of ideas and of economic knowledge have reconstructed not only theories of agricultural development, but also their organic connection with the practical expertise of the rural world, from agronomy and botany to taxation, law and land surveying.

Within this body of scholarship, however, a gap remains: mountain regions – despite the longstanding and continuing interest they have attracted in economic and social history – have received comparatively little attention as sites in which agricultural ideas and projects were devised. Yet a work such as Joseph-Alexis Costa de Beauregard's *Essai sur l'amélioration de l'agriculture dans les" pays montueux, et en particulier dans la Savoye* (1774) testifies to the existence of such reflections and ambitions.

This workshop accordingly aims to foster dialogue among researchers studying how the challenges and opportunities of agriculture were addressed in these contexts from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, during the so-called *Sattelzeit*.

Sources such as the records of Economic and Agricultural Societies, local periodicals, printed works, correspondence and administrative reports offer a rich basis for investigating debates and reform proposals concerning mountain agriculture, including not only crop cultivation, but also livestock farming and forestry. Drawing on these and other sources, the workshop seeks to address several questions, including but not limited to:

- The perception of the environmental specificities of mountain areas
- The treatment of customary use rights and common lands in reformist thought, and its role in shaping conceptual and legal understandings of property
- The links between agricultural issues and broader political and social concerns
- The forms of agency and practices of negotiation through which local social and institutional actors protected and promoted their agrarian interests, and the ways in which these initiatives shaped the agendas and governance of political authorities
- The circulation, reception and adaptation of models of rural reform tailored to the morphological, economic and cultural specificities of mountain regions

Organisation: Aris Della Fontana (Università della Svizzera Italiana – Swiss National Science Foundation Fellowship). With the support of the Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi.

Accommodation costs will be covered for participants without institutional funding.

Proposals in English or French, including an **abstract of 200-300 words** and a **short biography**, should be sent to aris.della.fontana@usi.ch by 31 December 2026. Applicants will be notified about the outcome of their submission by 15 January 2027.

A publication is envisaged.