

Casa della sostenibilità



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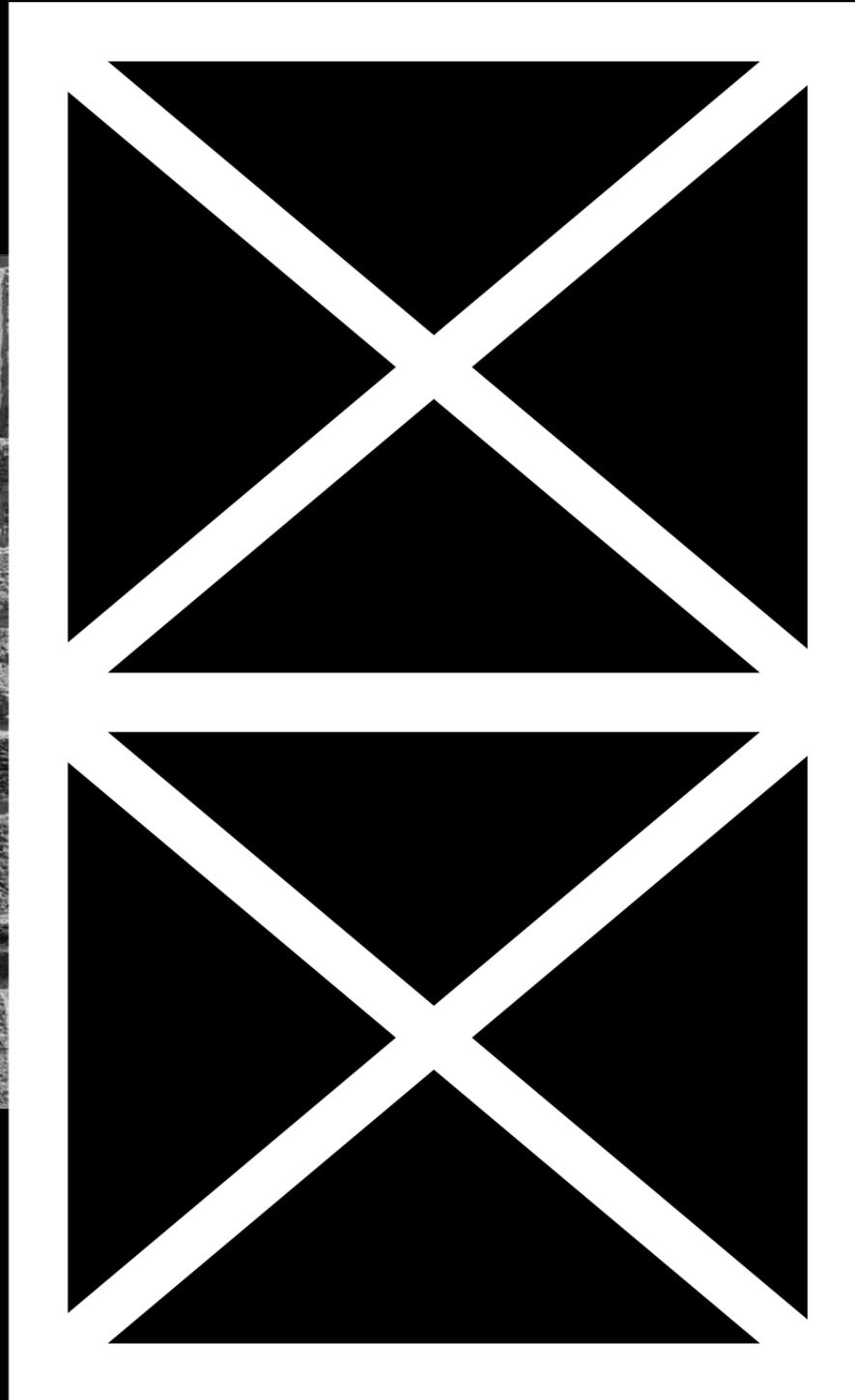
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Lorenzo Cantoni
Vice Rector of USI

Universities are one of the most sustainable institutions: they are concerned with future generations, how to prepare them with adequate knowledge to face the challenges they will encounter. The Casa della sostenibilità at the University of Lugano wants to make sustainability a concrete experience. At this location - in a region where it is possible to experience a lasting balance between nature, society, and culture - Bachelor students will be able to explore the various dimensions of sustainability through an innovative course that, starting from the Alta Leventina region, combines theory and experience. A first step in this direction is the renovation and enhancement of the former post office in Airolo, a building designed by the renowned architect Rino Tami, which upon completion will be returned to the area as a meeting place and social space.

Oscar Wolfisberg
Mayor of Airolo

The projects finished in the last years have led Airolo to be known as a municipality that cares about the issue of sustainability. New projects capable of redesigning the area and the quality of life are currently underway or have been implemented, such as the important redevelopment of the valley floor or the certification as an "Città dell'energia." The presence of the Casa della sostenibilità is an opportunity not only for Airolo, but for the entire Alta Leventina region, which will no longer be recognised as a peripheral area but as a place that contributes to the education of young people and international research. Thanks to this USI campus, the cultural offer of the region will be increased, and synergies will be created for the development and revalorisation of the valley. An operation that will undoubtedly have positive effects on the image of the town, but also on the allied industries, particularly restaurants, services, and local businesses.



The project in brief

USI in the Alps

Thanks to the cooperation between the Municipality of Airolo and USI, and the support of several organisations, the "Casa della sostenibilità" project was born. It is intended to be a cultural venue for training and reflection on issues concerning sustainable development. A centre intended primarily to welcome all USI's Bachelor students for an innovative training course that combines theory and practical experience in the Alpine region. The house will also become the base of USI's Sports Service for outdoor activities and will be available both to the USI community and to third parties wishing to promote educational and cultural initiatives related to sustainable development.

Why sustainability?

Sustainable development has become an inalienable vision for every sector of society and must become an opportunity for reflection and education for all under every aspect: political, social, economic, scientific, and ethical. In this sense, universities must also be able to play a leading role in what has become an indispensable strategy for the future of mankind. The project proposes, within the university programmes, an interdisciplinary educational course that allows the culture of sustainable development to grow and to promote attitudes, strategies, and lifestyles useful for the future of our planet.

Why Airolo?

The decision to open a "House of Sustainability" in Airolo is no accident. In fact, there are multiple reasons that define this area as significant for the analysis and study of the major challenges of the future. These include, for example, the Piora region, the Gotthard wind farm and hydroelectric power stations for the energy theme; the presence of disappearing glaciers for the climate change theme; the new motorway tunnel and railway for the transport theme; the ski lifts and Alpine huts for the tourism theme; and, of course, being an iconic location in Switzerland and a key route on the south-north axis.

The new venue

The project envisages the renovation and enhancement of an important building located in the centre of Airolo: the former postal building, designed in the 1950s by the Tami architects and currently not in use. The renovation project, conducted by Studio Gendotti SA in Airolo, envisages the creation of 23 beds, seminar spaces, a kitchen with a refectory area as well as spaces for small exhibitions.

The Alpine seminars

The project will make it possible to offer about 25-30 2.5-day courses each year for around 500 students from all USI faculties who will explore various sustainability-related topics in depth. The courses, which are compulsory and recognised with 1.5 ECTS credits, include a general introductory theoretical part, followed by an in-depth thematic part with the scientific contribution of invited professors or experts active in the field studied, and specific experiences in the area.

Culture and sport

The versatility of the building's spaces makes it possible to accommodate different proposals. It will be possible to set up small exhibition open to the public, and it can be a meeting place for cultural initiatives in collaboration with other institutions of the region. The house will also function as the base for the summer and winter outdoor activities of the USI Sport Service.

Timing and opening

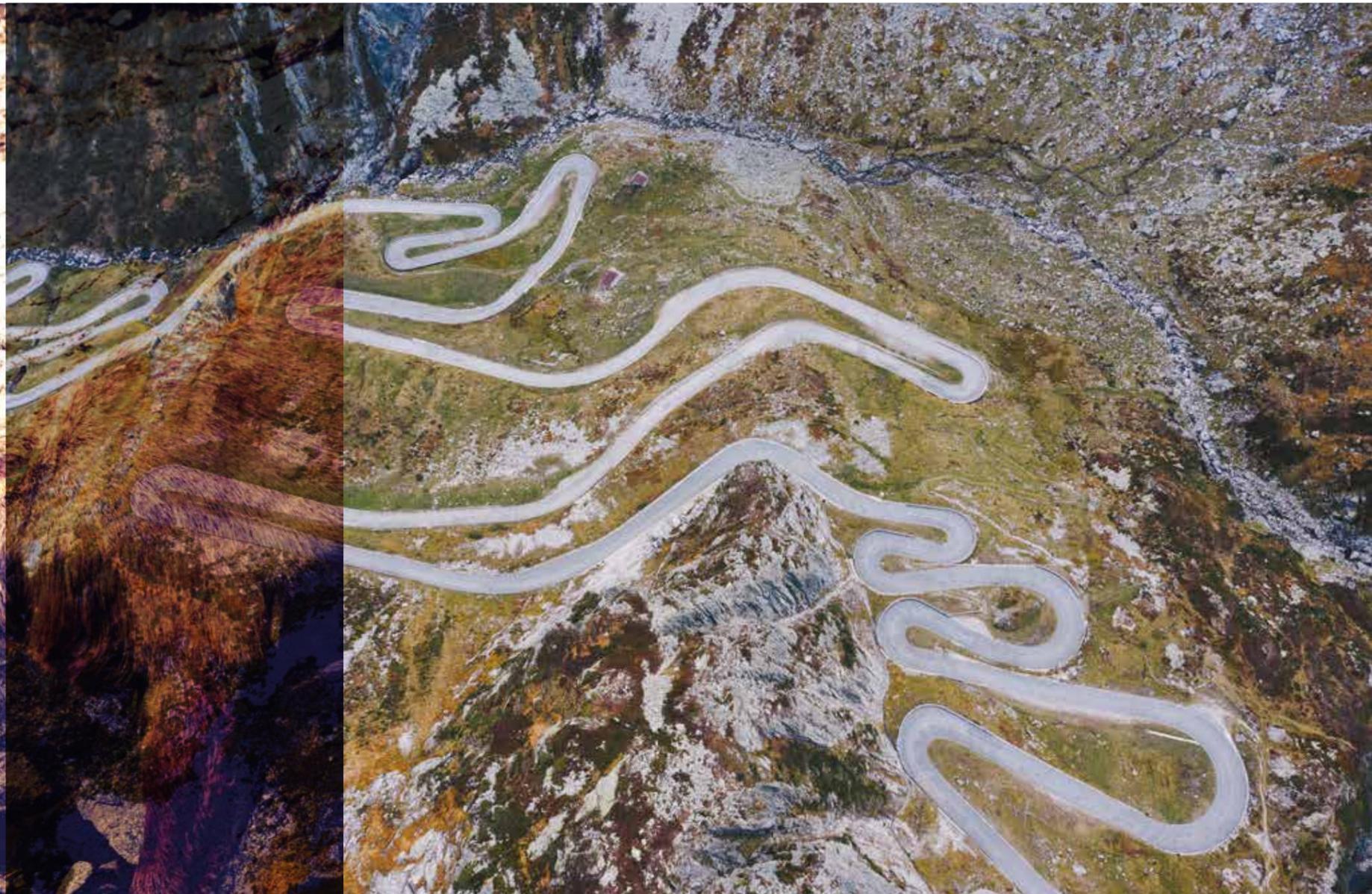
The house is scheduled to open during the academic year 2023-2024. Renovation work began in December 2022. During 2023, the content of the courses and activities of the Casa della sostenibilità will be defined.

Conclusions

The project will have beneficial repercussions both for the municipality of Airolo and the Leventina Valley region, as well as for USI and its students. With this initiative, USI is placing itself in an innovative position on the Swiss universities' scene, offering all its students a valuable opportunity for training and encountering a particular territory just a few kilometres from its headquarters. The approx. 500 students per year who will come to Airolo will be able to take advantage of the tourist infrastructures and services in the region, an opportunity to introduce the valley to a new international audience. Jobs will also be created to manage the house and the courses.

The alpine region

If, in the last century, the countries bordering the Alps considered mountain regions to be "problematic areas", incapable of keeping up with progress and modernity, increasingly, in recent years, the Alps have emerged as spaces of innovation where new strategies capable of responding to today's environmental problems, as well as shaping new models of economic and social development, take shape and are being tested. Today, the Alps are seen as a place where historical and cultural heritage coexist, but capable of dialoguing with contemporary challenges. Already years ago, the historian J.-F. Bergier, invited us to consider the Alps as a "space to be lived" - and not only as a space to be crossed - i.e. a territory that over the centuries has been able to express social and economic models and a civilisation based on a close and original dialogue between man and nature. The Swiss historian's invitation is now more relevant than ever.



A laboratory for sustainable development

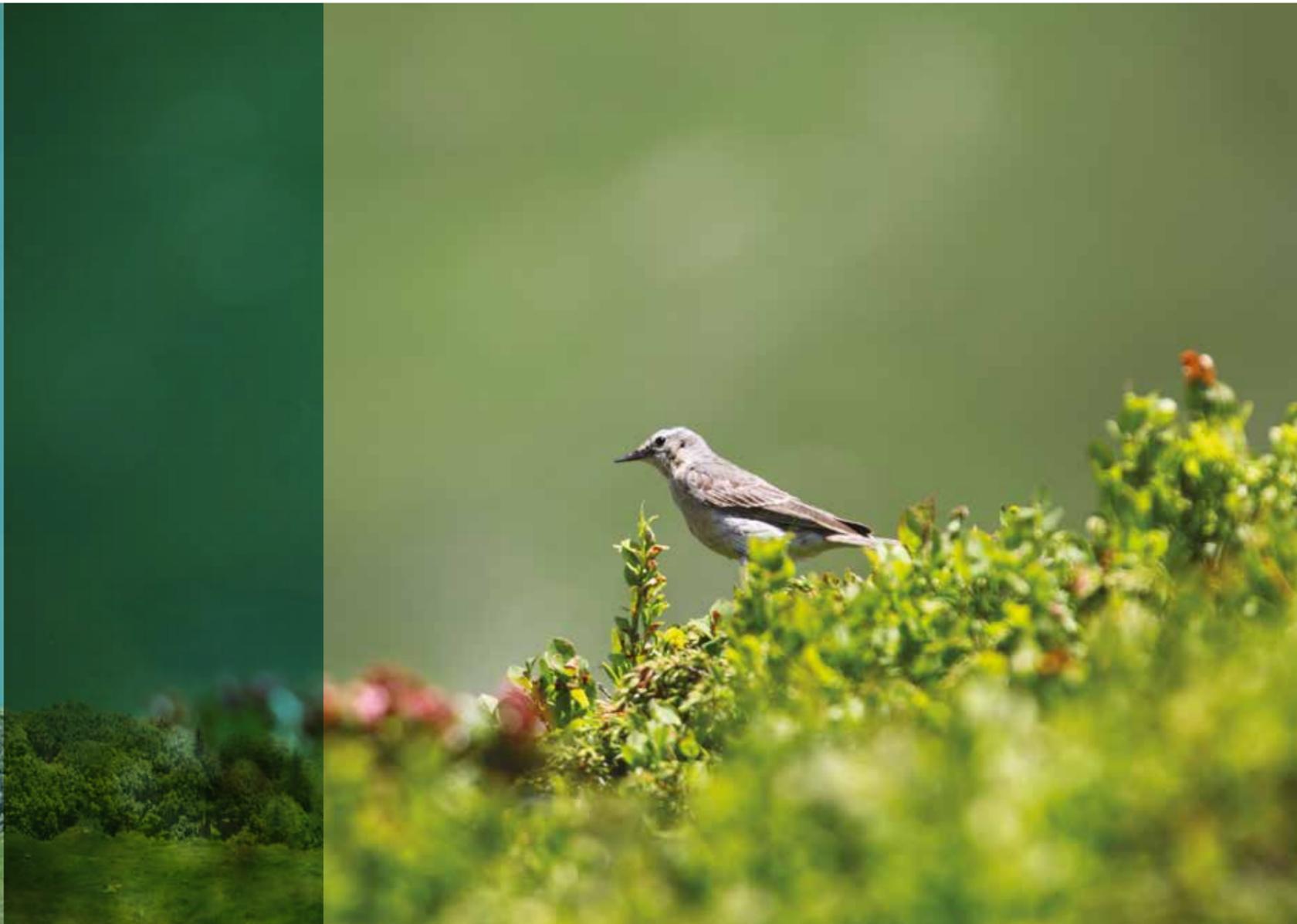
Our consumption and way of life now far exceed the resources available on Earth. We therefore need to imagine new models. It is precisely in this that the Alps can be a place of education, observation, and experimentation. In fact, in the Alps there are practices born around new ways of living, working, and inhabiting, aware of the potential of the territory and the importance of its valorisation, but also of the limits posed by its characteristics. The University, through this project, intends to play its indispensable role in raising awareness of sustainable development, by providing future generations with education and training that will enable them to contribute to safekeeping the great balance of the natural environment and life, by touching the beauty and diversity of landscapes, places, and traditions.

A privileged opportunity to reflect on how to create a “well-functioning society” capable of improving the living conditions of citizens without compromising the lives of future generations.



A privileged territory

The Gotthard region is a privileged observatory for major topical issues. Glaciers are disappearing at an unprecedented rate; the energy issue is emerging in an area marked by high voltage lines, dams or wind turbines; the rich biodiversity is in decline even in unique places such as the Piora area; tourism is looking for new models of development and use of the mountains both because of climate change and to develop new sustainable models; transport and mobility in the future will be called upon to meet the upcoming needs. Also marking the valley is the management of natural risks. In 2018, UNESCO inscribed avalanche risk management on the list of the intangible cultural heritage of mankind, and Airolo and Val Bedretto offer multiple examples of this. In these transformations, there is a complex interweaving of past, present, and future involving traditions, technological development, and demographic changes. Situated at the bottom of the Gotthard, Airolo is one of the most important Alpine passes for traffic between the north and south of the European continent. But in addition to its history, Airolo is a region in development. New projects capable of redesigning the territory and the quality of life are currently underway, such as the important redevelopment of the valley floor following the construction of the new Gotthard motorway tunnel. In this perspective, this region represents a unique place where students and researchers will have the opportunity to analyse, experiment and interpret models (and practices) of sustainable development.



“The most valuable lesson came from the landscape itself: we were able to understand, unfortunately, how we might soon no longer be so fortunate... The natural world has changed and continues to change.”

Laura, Master of Economics, and International Policy (MEPIN) student and participant in the pilot Alpine seminar in 2021

The Airolo valley floor redevelopment project will restore green areas, thus improving both the quality of life and the landscape.

**Casa della
sostenibilità**



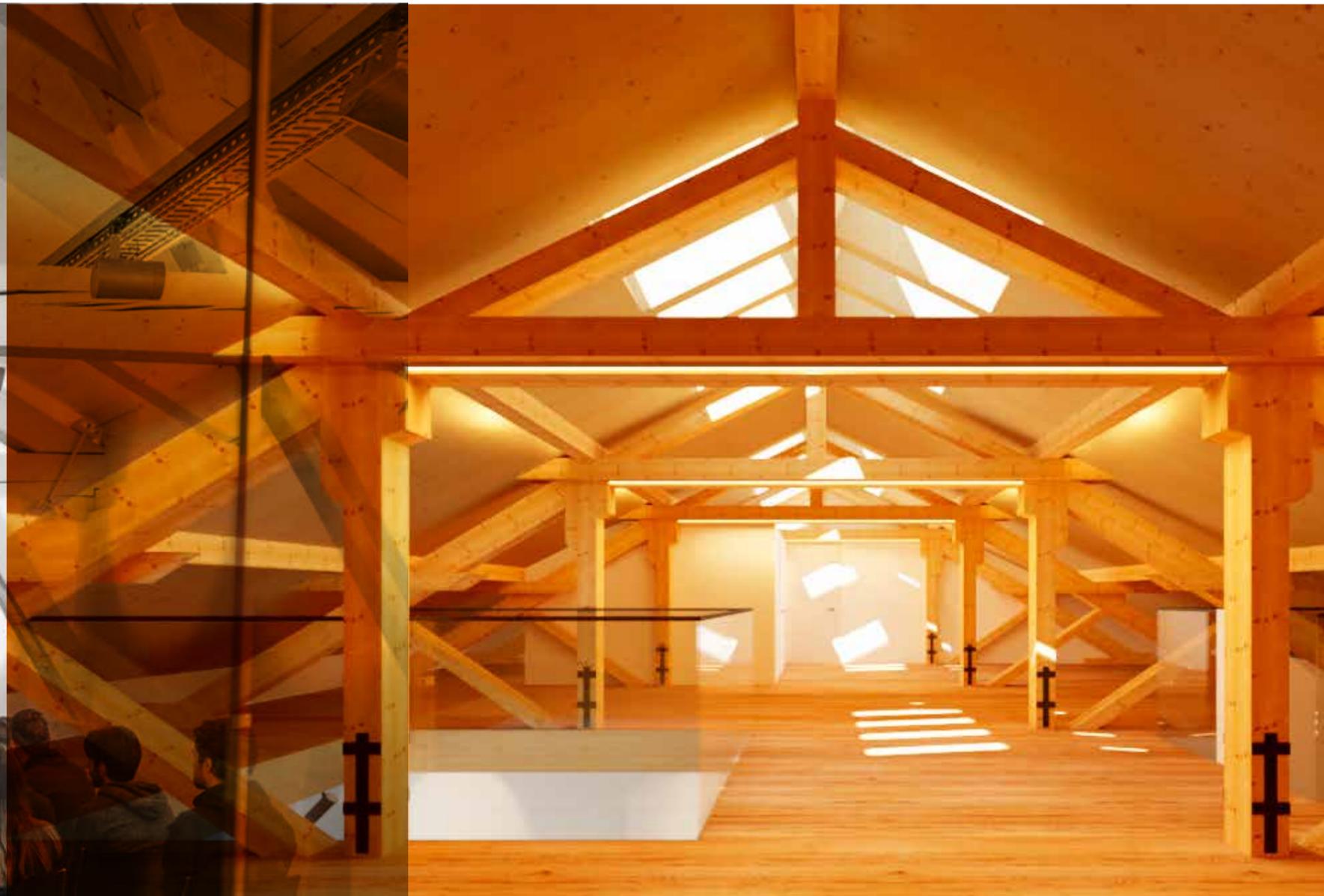
The Casa della sostenibilità

The renovation project

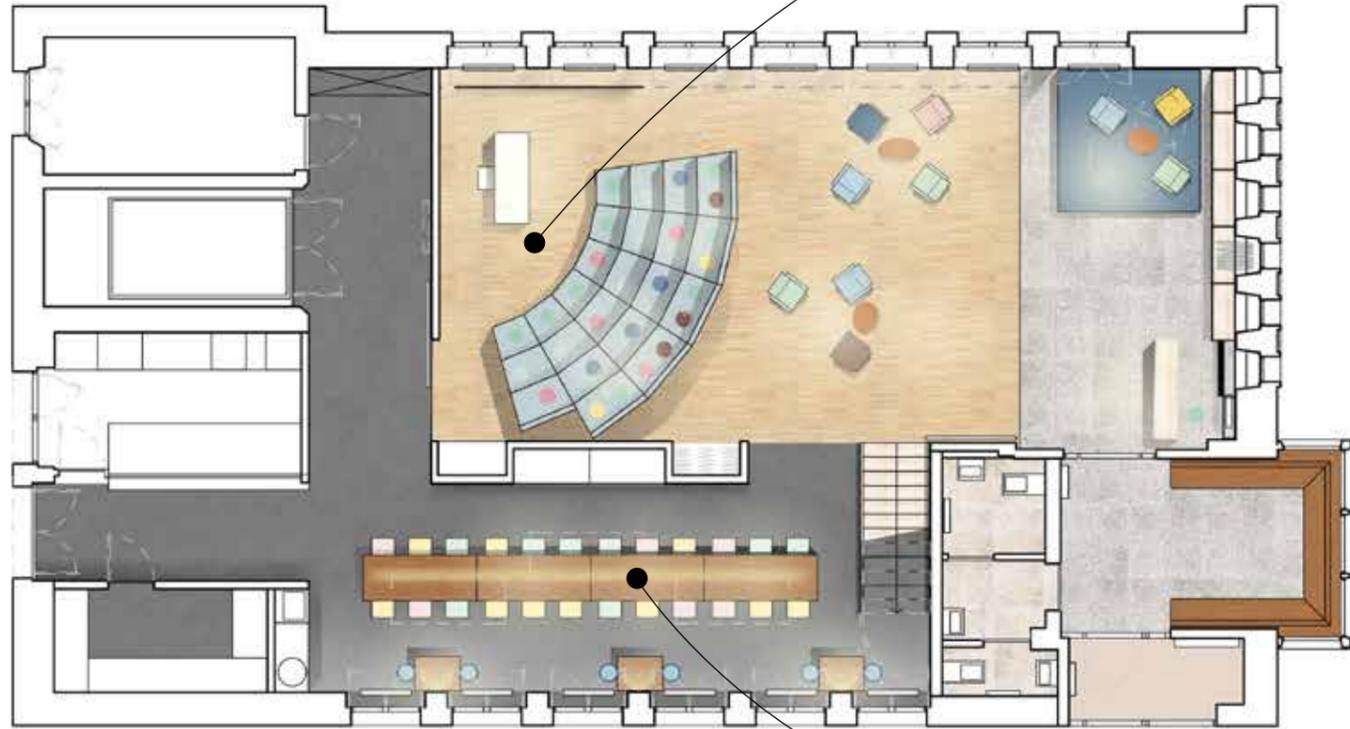
The Casa della sostenibilità is intended to be a place for education in the culture of sustainability, where students can reflect on this issue while interacting with the local area, the scientific community, and the population. A venue that will thus be able to connect the various realities on the territory with the University's headquarter in Lugano. The activities of the Casa della sostenibilità will be ensured by a work team on site, accompanied by a Scientific and Didactic Commission with representatives from all Faculties. The opening of this new venue for USI is scheduled for the academic year 2023-2024 once the renovation work has been completed.

The former post office building, built in the 1950s by the Tami architects, is located just a few steps away from the railway station, in a central position also with respect to the activities, services, and businesses found in the village of Airolo. The building transformation project was realised by Studio Gendotti SA in Airolo and given the new destination of the house, was developed considering all three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic), without forgetting the historical/architectural value of the building itself. Thanks to the various measures planned to maximise energy efficiency, the building will also be Minergie-A certified.

The project envisages the creation of 23 bedspaces, with related services, a seminar space, a teaching and exploration area for group activities, small exhibition spaces and a kitchen with an adjoining dining area. The development of the interior design concept was entrusted to Studio It's in Lugano.



A look inside the House

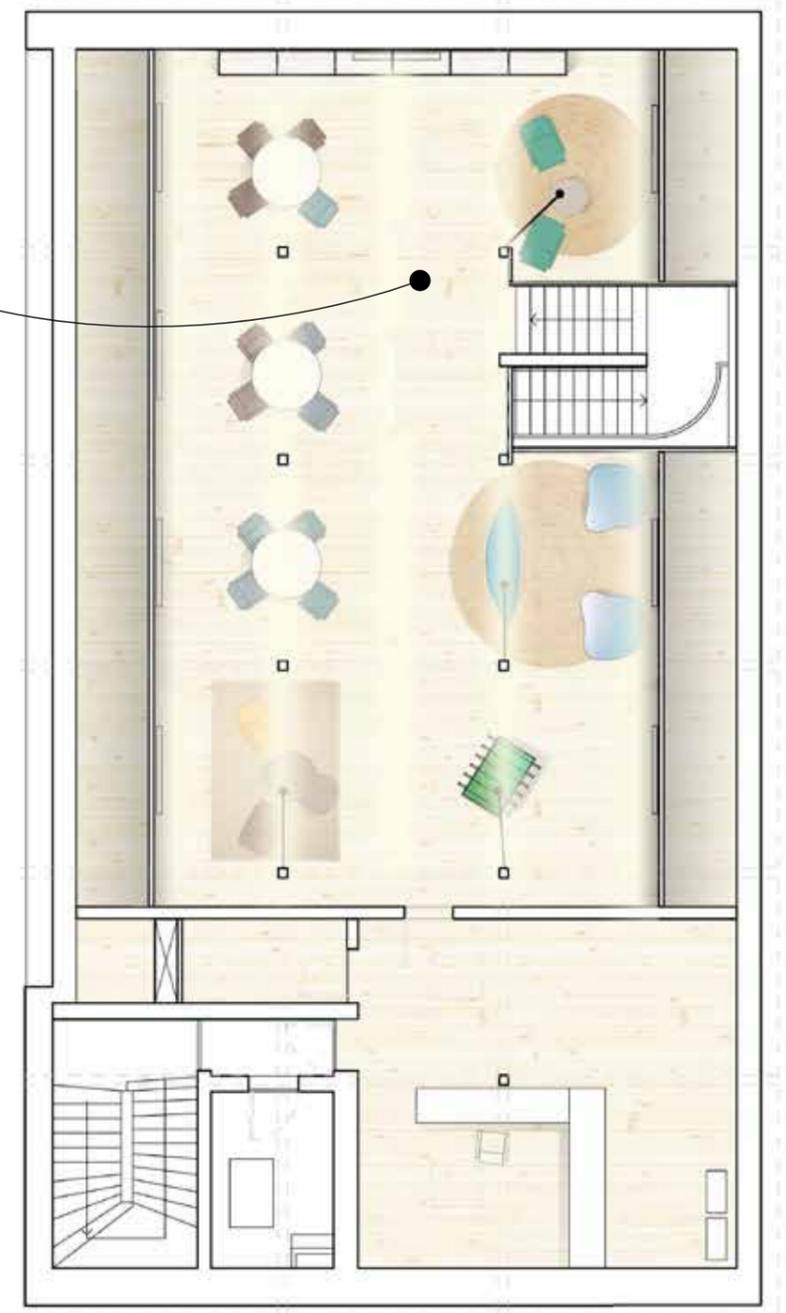
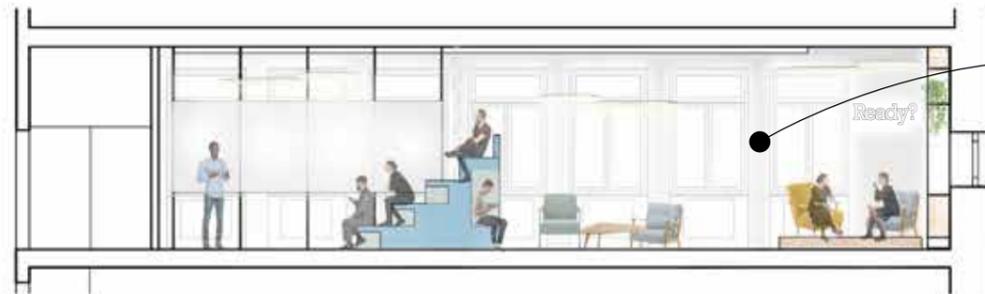


Agora Space
Where the challenges of sustainable development are discussed during seminars.

Exploratory area
Where you can learn about local curiosities and browse through books and magazines.

Social Table
A convivial place to exchange experiences, ideas, and projects or to enjoy a healthy meal in good company.

Speaker Corner
Where you can learn about stories, perspectives, data, and projects on sustainability in the company of researchers and experts.



The activities of the Casa della sostenibilità

The activities that will animate the Casa della sostenibilità in Airolo will revolve around several objectives. Its main vocation is to welcome all USI Bachelor students, offering them an Alpine seminar. Secondly, in order to encourage an encounter with the Alps and its characteristics, the house will also serve as a base for the outdoor sports activities of the USI Sports Service, given the many proposals offered by the region (e.g., climbing courses, skiing, MTB excursions, trekking, etc.). There will also be room for initiatives promoted by the USI Community, such as thematic projects, special courses by Faculties, team-building activities for staff, etc. Finally, the house will be open to the local area's population and schools, for cultural events and meetings. During the periods not occupied by the university's students, the house will also be able to host organisations, associations, schools, institutes, or companies interested in learning more about sustainability issues.

- Courses for all USI Bachelor students
- USI Sports Service Base
- USI Community Initiatives
- Cultural activities and courses
- Renting spaces to third parties



Courses for USI students

Course duration in days	2.5
Bachelor students per year	500
Courses offered per year	25-30
Thematic modules	5-10
Recognised ECTS credits	1.5

With the creation of the Alpine seminars at the Casa della sostenibilità, USI wants to offer all its students a valuable opportunity to become aware of today's great challenges, so that these topics can then be integrated throughout their training and find practical applications in the work they will go on to do at the end of their studies. The model chosen is that of a compulsory 2.5-day residential seminar that combines theoretical training, participatory activities, and on-site experiences in contact with nature and the landscape. The experiences may include, for example, excursions to the Gotthard Region, the Bedretto Valley or the Piora Valley, with observation of the Alpine landscape, but also visits to hydroelectric power stations, the wind farm, Alpine huts, and tourist infrastructures. Students will be able to choose the course that suits them best based on the themes offered throughout the year. This promotes the creation of heterogeneous groups of students from all six faculties, who can bring different sensitivities to the discussion, enriching the participants' experiences. The seminar is recognised with 1.5 ECTS credits.



Cultural activities and courses

The Casa della sostenibilità will promote a series of cultural events so that reflections on the topic do not remain confined to the northernmost Ticino campus but are shared with the public and society at large.

To this end, a number of educational activities will be proposed for the public, organisations, and companies; a cultural programme will be developed, which may include lectures, commented films, artistic interventions, excursions, and educational workshops. In addition, a planetarium will be installed inside the venue, which will serve both as a teaching tool for student during seminars and for public and school guided tours with the aim of raising awareness on the fragility of our planet.

The events will be promoted in collaboration with L'ideatorio, USI's Science and Society Dialogue Service and, in the case of thematic excursions, with the USI Sports Service.



A networked project

The aim of the Casa della sostenibilità is to establish a dialogue with the wealth of initiatives and organisations operating in the Upper Leventina valley. Public bodies, science centres, museums, cultural and social associations, private companies, and sports facilities add to the characteristics and history of the Gotthard region, making this area a privileged location. The synergy with the municipality of Airolo ensures good integration in the area as well as the identification and development of partnerships on site.



Acknowledgements

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Casa della sostenibilità

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