

## **ABOUT THE NO TAV MOVEMENT AND BEYOND ... A COMPREHENSIVE ESSAY**

*PresidioEuropa No TAV - February, 2014*

---

PAGE	THEME
1	1 – HOW A LARGE POPULAR MOVEMENT WAS BORN AND CONTINUES TO GROW
4	2 – THE SUSA VALLEY AND THE TAV PROJECT
6	3 – RESISTENCE PRACTICES ADOPTED
7	4 – 2011 -2013 : OPEN CONFLICTS WITH INSTITUTIONS
8	5 – THE ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT: 2005 , THE CRUCIAL YEAR
9	6 – A DEMOCRATIC MOSAIC
11	7 – A HUMAN MOVEMENT
12	8 – INTO CHURCH WITH FLAGS
12	9 – INTERNAL DEMOCRACY OF A POPULAR MOVEMENT
13	10 – POLITICAL COMMITMENT : YES OR NO ?
15	11 – MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN THE TAV CASE
18	12 – A MILITARY ENCLAVE IN THE EARTH OF EUROPE
20	13 – THE POLITICAL USE OF JUSTICE OR THE JUDICIAL REPLY TO THE NO TAV MOVEMENT
22	14 – DESIGNING A NEW SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS
24	15 – THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FORUM AGAINST UNNECESSARY IMPOSED MEGA PROJECTS

---

### **1 – HOW A LARGE POPULAR MOVEMENT WAS BORN AND CONTINUES TO GROW**

---

Starting mentioning Alex Langer seems essential because we can affirm that the No TAV struggle in Susa Valley (Italy) was in some way conceived in Trento in September 1989 after a conference that had been organized by him as European parliamentarian and whose issue was the non-sustainability of freight transport across the fragile alpine ecosystem.

An issue that would take years: through the determination of certain participants it developed into a sense of dignity and of struggle and not just an elaborate study, demonstrating how much Alex's intuition was ahead of its time regarding these concepts.

Today the word "sustainability" is one of the most over-used words in the vocabulary of political decision-makers: it is used excessively and without hesitation. Everything becomes "sustainable" if the ultimate aim is to further enrich that one percent who, with the need to increase the value of their own stock options, didn't hesitate in hastening the globe's longest and most complex financial crisis of the modern era. A crisis whose cost (should it be possible to arrive at a final sum) will be paid entirely by the 99 percent. A crisis in which politicians are called upon to play a role that is increasingly secondary and is slowly, but inevitably, bringing citizens to the point of not having alternatives for survival that are not self-representative.

Self-representation which, by an accident of history, the citizens of a small strip of land wedged between the Alps in the extreme north-west of Italy have had to discover before many of their compatriots. An accident that determined a strange phenomenon which is still too young to study scientifically but starts to be old enough to become object of some reflections: a sort of spontaneous twinning among citizens who are generally residents in large metropolitan areas of the most modern cities in the western world and – in particular – with those in the same areas who denote contradictions, hardship, injustice and the progressive opening of the gap of inequality which seems to want to set back the hands of time; before the promulgation of the rights of man, before the conquests that caused rivers of bloodshed during the French revolution.

\*\*\*

A lot has been said and written about Susa Valley. In particular, there has been preaching about its vocation as a transit point to justify the escalating infrastructure development which began more than half a century ago with the construction of one of the largest hydroelectric basins at a

high altitude in Europe. It transformed the valley into one with the highest square meters of infrastructure per capita. This fact on its own would explain the rebellion against the TAV (*Treno ad Alta Velocità* or high-speed train), the last of a long list of projects.

What is certain is that we are talking about a valley that has been culturally contaminated from a long way back: that same area that is militarized today, and was devastated to set up a work site for an “exploratory tunnel” aimed at discovering the consistency of the rocks on the Italian side where the international TAV tunnel should be caved, is the site of a Neolithic village that existed more than 4000 years ago. Since then, the valley has been contaminated by the transit/invasion of all the populations moving across Europe in these last 4 thousand years. It is may be worth to mention, as it was the last episode of reaction to these invaders, the large and capillary partisan organization who was protagonist of Resistance during the last World War.

An antique “contamination”, therefore, but nobody could have foreseen the recent, devastating and engrossing repercussions from and for the valley. Nobody would have bet a dime on the cultural contamination that has formed in the last 20 years, thanks to an imposing collection of data against this large, unnecessary and imposed project, which sparked an operation of popular dissemination that is unprecedented.

A success that could not have been hoped for by the founders of the Habitat committee of Susa Valley, a small group of citizens who began meeting in the early 90s bringing together the best interdisciplinary capabilities concerning the territory to conserve what was left of its quality of life.

The No TAV movement has, since the beginning, adopted a nonviolent position, helped by the fact that, since the early seventies, a group of Gandhian origin had been present and active in the valley. The occupation of the sites that are the object of controversy is in line with a nonviolent approach: such sites become places for gatherings, meetings, debates, conferences and concerts.

All the layers of the population are involved: the initiatives are attended by teachers and students, factory workers and white collars, pensioners and housewives, doctors and firemen, priests, families. What started – and goes on endlessly – is a process of self-consciousness as a community. While refusing the imposition of a mega-project coming from the top this community underwent a process of discovering all its human richness and potentiality.

The starting point of the critique – a lack of environmental sustainability – bit by bit was replaced by the lack of economic sustainability. From a denunciation of the consequences for a minority of citizens in the national community it quickly moved to denunciations of the irreparable damage caused by the so-called “TAV System” to the already disastrous public finances of the nation.

This allowed Italians to have a more thorough understanding, well ahead of 2008 and the Lehman Brothers crash, of the fact that sooner or later we would be asked to offset a debt that someone else incurred, precipitously, in our name.

Thanks to a patient and methodical analysis of the motivations that support the project we were among the first to denounce the inexistence of a private capital contribution in the “TAV” initiative on the national railway network. This is a fact that is entirely documented and precedes the analysis of the successive umbilical cord-like project in favor of the TGV empire (the *Lyon-Turin Ferroviaria* company, LTF) which is destined to never achieve a balanced budget if not through the total transference of its costs to the public debt.

We have also brought to the surface the part beneath the iceberg top represented by bank interest rates which are destined to become a dead weight in the costs of management and maintenance, at a much higher rate than what has been estimated.

All information that none of the promotional brochures distributed to political decision-makers and public opinion would ever disclose. This in a situation where timely dissemination that is respectful and transparent should have constituted the dominant factor with regards to communication.

The politicians, either belonging to left, centre or right parties, enrolled to promote the project. They seemed to read exclusively the documents prepared by the project promoters: a bizarre phenomenon if one considers that over the course of those same years the very same politicians thundered against the conflicts of interest of a man destined to govern Italy for twenty years! All of this while technical experts, mayors and citizens started looking for newsstands (and subsequently the Web) that were better supplied: the reports of the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times that indicated a chain of failures for the companies involved in the ill-conceived Eurotunnel ...

The scandals that swept one after another of the managers of the Italian railway system didn't surprise those who posed questions regarding the opportunity of betting on the TAV while running our children and grandchildren into debt and, in particular, the financial system's structure.

The engineer Ivan Cicconi, a leading expert in accounting for Italian state and public tender procedures, or at least the only independent source among experts from the factions that populate the field, took the initiative of explaining what shady interests determine the depraved choices which have led us to where we are currently. Other university professors explained the environmental impact, the health risks and the enormity of the project itself. The magistrate Ferdinando Imposimato enquired over corruption and the connections between mafia and politics in such kind of mega-projects, in which billions of Euros are involved.

The originality of this approach has also led us to take a look across borders beginning with our French neighbours: the last few months show the lack of sustainability of the debt incurred by the *Société nationale chemin de fer* (SNCF), the French railway system, and the impossibility of moving forward on an expansion plan that former President Nicolas Sarkozy had unwisely set in motion. We have thus understood that Europe, the old and indebted continent, is the most capacious place for questionable and contradictory choices.

This research led us to discover that the regulatory mechanisms for the realization of "large projects" might differ in the cost per kilometre (incomparable in the Italian case, on average four times more than the majority of other countries) but do not exhibit substantial differences in the ritual series of formal acts that are without content.

The 'birth-act' of an international relationship between struggles was "The Charter of Hendaye", a document fruit of the tenacious and ambitious work of many activists who wrote a common text on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 and delivered it to the Presidents of the European Parliament on May 18 of that same year. The Charter reclaims the right of citizens – even if they constitute a minority – to have the last word on the realization of an initiative which infringes on fundamental rights, above all the right to healthy living. A document that begins with the definition of "large unnecessary projects" to identify plausible criteria that allows one to evaluate the costs, benefits and desirability especially today, at a time when there are great restrictions to the "common good as a public resource", when establishing spending priorities can become a decisive democratic factor if not one of survival!

This led the No TAV Movement to set up a net of movements from different countries opposing to unnecessary and imposed mega-projects: the Forum against the UIMP (Unnecessary Impose Mega Projects).

A trial for "active citizenship" which reveals the ambiguous roles and bogus connections of the present political class with what remains of the real economy, as well as financial gambles masqueraded as investments that are "necessary for the growth of the GDP" and for which public resources are diverted from the social sphere: principally public education, health and social security.

From this perspective we see the importance of underlying also the role of communication in the NO TAV case study, that is founded on the analysis of a contradictory path to promote one of these large projects which, since its inception, has been presented as a dream that must be realized at any cost.

In this publication we want to give a contribution which presents, through simple and immediate language, the contextualization of the situation in Susa Valley and the dynamics that allowed the proponents of the TAV to set off a chain reaction that they could use to increase income and power but, like in a happy case of post-normal applied science, the perverse mechanism then tripped up to the point of putting at risk a survival mechanism that appeared to be armour-plated.

A mechanism in which politicians have substituted technical experts and vice versa on both fronts. This within a scenario configured on the one hand of citizens who refuse the lucrative consulting positions or “guaranteed” political career repeatedly offered, opting instead to contribute out of pocket to the divulgation of the enormous amount of knowledge acquired through an in-depth study of the project and the systemic unravelling of the superstructure consisting of pure propaganda; on the other hand an elder-comedic nomenclature rendered even more arrogant by the fear of losing consolidated privileges and an undeclared standing in the game that no longer only has to do with this or that territory, the north or south of Europe or the Euro-Mediterranean basin, but with the promulgation of the debt or the privatization of water and other resources of humanity on a global scale.

For this reason those of us who, in the here and now, continue to fight against “our” large unnecessary project are convinced to fight a common battle. We sustain that even if we were to win without the frame of reference changing we may not even celebrate our victory anymore.

Winning alone is no longer enough: we win or we lose together.

And together, we have to fight for the changing of the frame.

But changing the frame necessarily means that we have to individuate towards which new frame we want to move. Designing a common different future is the real challenge for our days and - undoubtedly – the most exciting part of the story.

## **2 – THE SUSA VALLEY AND THE TAV PROJECT**

---

### ***The Issue of High-speed Rail as an Emblematic Case. The Susa Valley – A “Corridor” Filled with Variety***

The Susa Valley is located in Northwest Italy at the border with France, from which it is separated by the Alps, 3600 meters high. It is the widest valley in the Western Alps; in fact, it is a natural corridor stretching from East to West. The two sides of the valley benefit from different sun exposure and this makes them quite different from one another. The left side is dry, while the right side is humid, shady and cold. The natural environment, and particularly the flora, are deeply affected by this peculiarity, resulting in a valley with extremely variegated and interesting sites and habitats. The Dora Riparia River runs through the valley, and there are abundant springs and superficial aquifers. In the high part of the valley there are pastures, while at lower heights (1300–1800 meters) there are steep crevasses. The Susa Valley is the most infrastructured of the alpine valleys. It hosts two main roads directed toward two international passes (Monginevro and Moncenisio); a motorway and an international railway, each one with a tunnel at the Fréjus; two electric lines and three hydroelectric dams; many tourist and sport resorts (the valley was the base of the 2006 Winter Olympics). There are many industries, including mining, and many military roads built in previous centuries that are currently international tourist attractions for walkers and cyclists.

The valley has about 90,000 inhabitants, and it is divided into 39 councils. There is a well-established tourist industry, as is evident by the “second” homes, hotels and heavy motorway traffic. Notwithstanding the heavy human presence, the Susa Valley features wide semi natural and wild areas, which host many examples of alpine fauna (deer, chamois, roe deer, wild boar, eagles, hawk, partridges and wolves) and a very rich diversity of flower species: there are four natural parks, two natural reserves and many sites of communitarian interest. Sheep rearing, which was flourishing until the end of World War II and subsequently in decline, is now in a new phase of growth, albeit slow, and it consists of about 7000 cattle, 10,000 sheep and 500 goats.

The Susa Valley has a very ancient history, and many signs of the past are still visible: archaeological sites, Roman villas, churches and abbeys, and castles and fortresses, which attract thousands of tourists every year. At the time of the Romans, the alpine crossovers of the valley acquired strategic and military importance: it is believed that Hannibal trespassed in 218 BC and Julius Caesar crossed over in 61 and 58 BC, marching towards Gallia. After the fall of the Roman Empire, different populations succeeded each other: Goths, Byzantines and Longobards, and in 774 ACE, Charles Magnum descended to Italy from the Susa Valley. Toward the end of the twelfth century, abbeys were founded that are well preserved and open to visitors today. Between 1600 and 1800, the Susa Valley was crossed by many armies. In 1854, the Turin-Susa Railway was opened, followed in 1871 by the Fréjus tunnel. After the World War II, the valley remained part of Italy, but the Valle Stretta and the Moncenisio were handed over to France.

In conclusion, the geographical location of the Susa Valley makes it a site of extreme wealth of natural resources, which have supported economic and cultural development over many centuries. However, the history of the valley also suggests that this has always been an area of conquests, conflicts and political appetites.

### ***The High-speed Rail Project and the Evolution of the Conflict***

The Turin-Lyon high-speed rail line is part of the “Trans European Network,” which has been planned by the European Union for the next 20-30 years. It is a section of the so-called Corridor n. 6, which in origin should, by means of one single rail track, connect Portugal with Ukraine from Lisbon to Kiev and across central Europe. Today start from Algeciras in Spain and arrives only to Ukraine west border.

A rail connection already exists, but the technical characteristics of the railways in each country are different and the trains’ speed is thus reduced. For such reasons, a brand new line, modelled on the French high-speed trains, was planned. This would consist of dedicated tracks and infrastructures, separated from previously existing lines. A fundamental point in the project is concerned with the passage through the Alps, which – according to the proposers – should involve the Susa Valley and the construction of a 57-km-long tunnel.

### ***The First Signs of Conflict***

The controversy originated at the beginning of the nineties with the formation of the committee proposing the construction of the Turin-Lyon high speed rail link. The committee was originally constituted by a group of industrial people. A year later, the Committee Habitat, consisting of about 60 members including technicians, doctors, professionals, factory workers, lecturers of the Turin Politechnic, mayors and valley civil servants, was formed. In 1994, after studies and discussions that lasted a few years, the Committee Habitat expressed a negative view of the high-speed rail, marking the start of the conflict.

In the following years, long pauses, during which it seemed that the conflict had settled, alternated with episodes of resumption: a few Molotov bombs in the Susa Valley; activation of a national network against high-speed trains; meetings and conferences on “High Speed and shady businesses.”

Between 1999 and 2004, the summits amongst the proponents of the high speed trains multiplied. In parallel, meetings and demonstrations against the high-speed trains also grew in number. The local administrators of the Susa Valley took sides with the “NOTAV” movement and had to deal with the local and national representatives who had been taking inconsistent positions: in 1999, the ministry of the environment declared, “Forget the High Speed rail, it won’t happen”; a short time after, the President of the Piedmont region and the mayor of Turin remarked the high-speed Turin-Lyon train line as a priority.

The conflict gradually grew in intensity: gatherings, public demonstrations and roadblocks accompanied the spreading of documentary information related to the network and the works that had been foreseen.

The European Commission put the Turin–Lyon high-speed rail among the priority items to be funded and this decision triggered a public demonstration organized by 38 mayors and the President of the Comunità Montana. This was followed by another rally, which included 37,000 people. The opposing forces, Pro and Against the construction of the new railway track, consisted of the Government and regional management organs on the one side, and citizens' organizations and nongovernmental organizations on the other side.

### 3 – RESISTENCE PRACTICES ADOPTED

---

Now NO TAV Movement, opposing to TAV project, is near to celebrate its **25 years of struggle**.

Along these years, its ways to protest have been many. Some are common to basically any other protest, but some are definitely peculiar. Here we list them in alphabetical order, for the sake of easy classification:

academic research, activity of documentation, articles on national and international journals, bibliography analysis and collection, books writing and publishing, branding (No TAV flag has become a well-known symbol of citizenship's participation), camping and land occupation near the worksite, celebrations, collective purchasing of land impacted by the project, comics, concerts, conferences, coordination between *Presidi* (organized groups of protesters defined on geographical or objectives basis), coordination with other movements against imposed and unnecessary projects, contacts with journalists, creation and management of a dedicated group of experts in all interested fields, dedicated websites, direct involvement of all possible stakeholders, documentaries, involvement of entrepreneurs for a networking and an ethical approach to business (ETINOMIA organization) based on cooperation and sustainability, legal challenges, local committees, marches and rallies, merchandising, meetings, movies, open letters to authorities, organization of the Movement by the *Presidi*, organization of the Forum against UIMP (Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects), pickets, pictures exhibitions and public lectures, referring to experts, regular picture-taking to document militarization and works, seminars organization and attendance, sit-in, slogans ("A Sarà Dura" – it will be hard – now echoes all over Italy), songs, support by artists, surveillance of the territory, writers, musicians, and world of culture in general, use of social networks...

It might be the case to explain what *presidio* means: it is a physical place (usually a wooden house or a container equipped with a kitchen, a stove, tables, chairs) where people organized in shift stably stay and organize activities. It is fundamental to establish a constant presence on the territory, for surveillance and conviviality, to exchange ideas, diffuse information, cement friendship and cooperation and invent new ways to oppose and resist. In the Susa Valley there are, nowadays, six permanent *presidi*.

All of this on voluntary basis and without any funding, to create a clean, sustainable environment and convince public opinion against the TAV project.

#### THE FREE MADDALENA REPUBLIC

Among the many methods adopted by the No TAV Movement to resist against the TAV project, a special mention goes to the period May-June 2011, during which the *presidio* called "Free Maddalena Republic" was installed. Free, because it was a totally self-organized village-like life, with its own rules and roles and, at the same time, totally open to anybody willing to participate and help. Maddalena, from the name of the place in the territory of Chiomonte, close to the social cave and the archaeological museum. Republic because, although a micro-reality, it was a real experiment of participated democracy which worked out perfectly. It lasted for about 40 days until the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, when a massive intervention of military forces occupied the area abusing of violence, toxic gas and water jet. All the structures we had built (camping tents, the large tent of the kitchen and its equipment, coverings for the restaurant area, assemblies, exhibitions, tables, chairs) were destroyed. The archaeological museum was transformed into the headquarter of the military force, which still is. The social cave since then is unreachable and the wine is toxic due to the

massive use of toxic gas of the CS kind (forbidden by the Geneva Convention for use in international war sceneries).

**Maria** says: in 2011, when popular participation gave raise to the Free Maddalena Republic, I had the chance to live from within its peculiar social and human intensity and to observe it from a special point of view: the kitchen.

A girl from Liguria with a bottle of olive oil has come, her name is Viola. Stefano comes from Marche, another Italian region. Margherita from Rome arrives late at night under the rain with its viola 'to play something that could help you'. Somebody else leaves 25 Euros as a contribute. Pasta, coffee, flour, sauce, salad arrive from everywhere. We have no more room for all this food. We receive also pans, medicines, and home-made bread. Next to the kitchen, around a table, the legal team prepare the documents to contrast the expropriation of the land properties.

This is the true humanity, who support end encourage us.

**Mariano and Sandra** remember: during the Free Maddalena Republic all those who visited the place and spent some time there felt brotherhood. We were all part of a new, large community. Although the site is, since then, included into the military working area, we remember those days as among the most meaningful and shining of our lives. That experience cemented our confidence in each other and its souvenir still give us optimism and strength.

As long as the No TAV flag waved at the Maddalena, it was a place for dialogue, meeting and especially for culture. Seminars on history, philosophy, medicine, geology held by university professors and foreign language lessons took place, and much more. But I want to tell you about one episode that in my opinion constitutes the best example of what the Free Maddalena Republic had been.

We noticed that the fence around the archaeological museum was old and damaged, and we decided to remake it, in sign of contribution to the public patrimony. There were two old men experts in wood work. I remember them teaching to the youngest Rasta-haired guys and explain, with great patience, how to proceed. The guys executed carefully the instructions of the old experts. It seemed almost impossible, but it was happening here. With an entire Sunday of common work the fence was renewed, and we all felt satisfied. We had offered time and material to the community, it was like if we had paid a tax, but we had done it with joy.

#### **4 – 2011 – 2013: OPEN CONFLICT WITH INSTITUTIONS**

---

The events that took place in 2005 left signs on both sides: the Government in charge and those who followed understood the determination of the No TAV people. As a consequence, far from lowering the conflict level approaching the issue with a scientific method (that is, a honest examination of the relationship between costs and benefits of the project) planned a much stronger military occupation that started in 2011. In parallel, they raised the degree of manipulation of mainstream information and a systematic criminalization of the activists started.

Almost 20 years have passed since the beginning of the conflict. The documentation that has been produced about the project is extensive and it is clear to all those involved that this is an extremely complex issue for which – according to Funtowicz and Ravetz (1999) – the uncertainty of the system is evident and the stakes are high.

The TAV project (as it often happens for all large-scale constructions) is characterized by progressive concentration of private financial, economic and political power, and uncertainty and ignorance are not accidental and temporary conditions, but they are intrinsically and radically embedded in the matters to face.

During the summer of 2011, Lyon-Torino Ferroviaria (LTF the Italian French company in charge of the preliminary planning) occupied the area in the Municipality of Chiomonte destined for the work site of the exploratory-service tunnel for the future extensive tunnel under the Alps. To achieve this, a No TAV protest camp, called 'Free Maddalena Republic', was cleared out using massive police force. Since then until today the area has been fenced in with barbed wire and is

guarded 24 hours a day by the military (army, *carabinieri*, police, *guardia di finanza* and forest rangers). In addition, patrols survey the woods and mountains around the area and identify and sequester at will. During 2013 the site has been enlarged and the first excavating works have begun.

The No TAV movement has repeatedly organized protest demonstrations which sometimes were transformed into physical and violent attacks at the fence perimeters. Elected representatives, environmental groups and lawyers have presented dozens of charges for various breaches. The courts have investigated and, in some cases, arrested about fifty opponents of the project who were considered violent or potential terrorists, some of whom were foreigners. The proceedings are in course. The tension is, therefore, high and the current situation seems blocked, stalled.

One part of the movement, however, has produced documentation, written books and information material, and has undertaken creative actions: the most recent one is the campaign "Buy a seat in the front row." Whoever signs up to this initiative buys, at a symbolic price, a square meter of the land through which it is planned to build the high-speed rail. The aim is that of obliging the proponents to carry out hundreds of expropriation practices and to be present in legal and democratic forms at the start of the construction works. The initiative has gathered more than 2800 signatures (August 2008) and has been repeated for new land that will be affected by the project in autumn 2012.

## 5 – THE ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT: 2005, THE CRUCIAL YEAR

---

Between 2004 and 2006, there were direct clashes between the parties: technicians from the Italian Rail Network attempted to open a building site in order to undertake geognostic measures, but they were obstructed by the local people. Subsequently, after having sent letters of repossession to some inhabitants of Venaus, a small village in the high Susa Valley, technicians from Lyon-Torino Ferroviaria (LTF), escorted by the police, tried to reach three testing sites. They were forced to go back by the NO TAV people. One of the sites was fenced off overnight; this act triggered further protest in the days that followed.

In the summer of 2005 the first three *presidi* were set up by the population in order to permanently survey and defend the territory. The one in Venaus will be the centre of the conflict in December and, since then, it is considered as the symbol of the NO TAV resistance.

On the night of November 29, 2005, hundreds of men and military forces reached Venaus and surrounded the area, impeding access to anyone. Local people and police confronted each other for the entire day at the Venaus crossroad. In the evening, the block was dispersed and the people reached the area of the future building site, which was defended night and day without interruption.

On the night of December 6<sup>th</sup>, the police occupied the area of Venaus, violently forcing back the people and using caterpillars to take down tents, barricades and the *presidio*. The technicians fenced off the land with nets. In the following two days people blocked the roads, the highway and the railway thus almost isolating the valley from the rest of the country. On December 8<sup>th</sup> 50,000 people marched from Susa toward Venaus, headed by the town mayors. Once they went past the roadblocks, they reached Venaus and took down the fences, regaining their land.

This regaining was an episode that confirmed the NO TAV people into its conviction to be united, strong and able to continue a resistance that was no longer only conceptual but could, eventually, become also physical. Moreover, the episodes of military occupation and conflict had a deep echo on the media, thus permitting to the rest of Italy, for the first time on such a wide scale, to hear about the Susa Valley and its issue. Although mainstream information was not objective, some curiosity around the Movement started to spread and the reasons of the Movement began to circulate, although almost exclusively in the internet.

The government called the mayors to Rome and withdrew most of the troops. Many more actions of protest followed in December: demonstrations, concerts and congresses. The agreement of mutual help, the local attempts at dialogue and the initiatives from the top. The demonstrations



continued, not only at the local level, but also in connection with other similar situations of protest against big construction enterprises planned in other regions in Italy.

A *Patto di Mutuo Soccorso* (Pact of Mutual Aid) brought together all those who were opposed to big construction projects: the NO TAV movement took part in rallies in Vicenza to support a protest against a US base, and in Sicily, against the bridge over Messina canal. They were present in Piedmont to demonstrate against the nuclear waste, and in Naples to participate in a national rally on the waste emergency.

In September 2006, the work of the Torino-Lyon Technical Observatory started. This was an official discussion forum opened to all stakeholders with the purpose of considering the shared understandings and getting the controversy under control. It is anticipated that the documents produced during the discussion will be published. In the meantime, the current Italian government has repeated its intentions to build the Torino-Lyon railway.

While the NO TAV movement in the summer of 2007 has gathered 40,000 signatures with the petition “Against TAV without if’s and without but’s” and handed them over to the European Parliament, the Italian government has applied for a grant of 750 million Euros from the European Parliament for the construction of the Torino–Lyon rail link. A preliminary project has been presented with a new track for the tunnel.

## 6 – A DEMOCRATIC MOSAIC

---

In January 2014, a collective writing workshop with members of various Italian protest movements was conducted within the medieval walls of Bologna, Italy. Activists from movements such as no Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) at the heel of the Italian boot to NO *Treno ad Alta Velocità* (TAV) – or high-speed rail – at the peninsula’s northwest boundary, recounted their experiences and challenges in combating unnecessary and imposed mega projects. At the halfway point, a discussion broke out regarding who to vote for in the upcoming European elections. While certain activists insisted on the necessity of a collective voting strategy, members of the NO TAV Movement firmly asserted that the people of Susa Valley would not promote any political candidate or party collectively. Herein lies a key aspect of the type of democracy that the Movement represents.

For more than 20 years, the citizens of this alpine area just east of the French border, have been battling against a high-speed train project linking Turin to Lyon. Activists at the two-day workshop referred to the NO TAV as “the mother of all movements” and “the example for everyone”. Its longevity is certainly key to this perception as it has been a point of reference for years. However, a primary reason for its survival and growth is the nature of the democracy inherent to the NO TAV Movement which is reflected in a desire for active citizenship and democratic participation in an exceedingly direct and dynamic manner.

The various committees that make up the NO TAV Movement are mainly geographically based. Almost each town will set up a committee consisting of local citizens. Each committee sets its own agenda and plans its own events within the ethical parameters of the Movement, which embodies the concepts of anti-fascism and anti-racism, and does not embrace any organized political preferences. Some have constructed “*presidio*’s” or protest meeting sites where events also take place (*see the meaning and origin of ‘presidi’ explained in other sections of this publication, namely in the tale*). They are normally simple wooden structures heated with a wood stove and built collectively. Three of the eight in the Valley have been burned to the ground by unknown perpetrators. These acts, more than many words, explain their significance and high symbolic value.

A few committees are theme oriented like the Youth Committee, Catholics for the Life of the Valley, NO TAV Women and *Presidio Europa*, which works to create links with movements locally and globally and maintains contact with institutions like the European Union. Others are not strictly geographical such as *Spinta dal bass* (Driven from Below) in Avigliana and *Lotta popolare* (Popular Struggle) in Bussoleno. Some NO TAV activists are not part of any committee.

Each grassroots committee will meet and discuss pertinent issues and then a representative – a decision based on consensus and who has the time to participate – will go to the coordination meeting, normally held every 15 days, which provides a voice for the various committees. Thus, the agenda for issues to address is set at various micro levels but on a broad scale. The representative that attends the coordination meeting then reports back to his or her local committee. Before big events or when circumstances deem it necessary, popular assemblies open to everyone take place that normally involve hundreds if not thousands of people and continue for hours. It is noteworthy that a single activist can freely propose an idea/action that will be discussed and taken into consideration and will find support if considered useful to the common goals of the Movement.

It works much like Jürgen Habermas's concept of deliberative democracy in action: there is no hierarchy, no boss and generally no vote but an attempt to arrive at a decision through mediation and reaction, which doesn't necessarily result in the originally proposed outcome.

The "Free Maddalena Republic" is a case in point. On 22 May 2011, activists set up a permanent protest site on land in the Town of Chiomonte, near an archeological site known as the *Maddalena*, which would be affected by the exploratory tunnel slated to begin that spring. It became a hub of cultural and social activity with philosophy lectures, archeological visits and a lending library; a collectively-run kitchen, regular assemblies and concerts. On 27 June, Italian military forces moved in and evicted the occupiers using bulldozers, water hydrants and teargas in what proved to be a turning point in the level of state violence imposed on the movement. notwithstanding the abrupt and violent end to the "free republic", no TAV activists did not capitulate.

In fact, there is an ingenuity among the populace; the art of getting by transformed into a sense of empowerment and involvement which enriches the Movement. The people involved are men, women and children of all ages; engineers, homemakers, students, teachers and retirees, and everyone contributes in their own personal way resulting in a sort of mosaic of citizen-activists that form a whole which is the NO TAV Movement.

Consider the methods of protest, not just by the people of Susa Valley but also those who support them: from theatrical works to hunger strikes, from books written to songs composed, from assemblies and conferences to *polenta* dinners, and from races around the work site to spells cast by a circle of women at night. There is room for everyone in this milieu, with small contributions full of significance like the young woman who played the violin on an occupied toll highway, and grand gestures like sitting peacefully before dozens of riot police in an act of civil disobedience risking arrest and more. The result has been a kind of cultural renaissance that reinforces the values of direct participation and democracy.

Nonetheless, from a representative democracy perspective the Movement's force has had an impact. Currently, the only major political party in Italy that supports the efforts of the no TAV is the Five Star Movement (M5S) which received almost 25 per cent of the popular vote in last February's national election, partly because it embodies some of the Movement's ideals. The NO TAV voting bloc had an important impact on local and even regional politics. On a local level, at the 2012 elections held in Avigliana, an important city in the lower valley, Silvio Berlusconi's former People's Freedom Party and the Democratic Party formed an alliance supporting a single candidate to defeat the no TAV civic list. They were unsuccessful.

What is happening in Susa Valley is a living experiment where the agora is truly open to everyone. It is a micro version of a society that recognizes it can't move forward without the street cleaners or the Mayor who's budget pays them. This has led to a notion of civic identity and, as a result, a reawakening of democracy. For in this microcosm there is a real search for consensus and active participation that is without precedent: with traditional methods like assemblies; and the immediacy of Twitter, social networks and live streaming.

This heterogeneity, complexity and dynamism that is the NO TAV Movement provides hope that, in the end, we can and must be the masters of our destiny and not submissive to it. It is an example that should be studied in our search for alternatives to the socio-political and economic quagmire that we find ourselves in today.

## 7 – A HUMAN MOVEMENT

---

The long-lasting existence of the NO TAV Movement has its main explanation into the sedimented culture of self-provided documentation and resistance.

We are informed, we train ourselves to knowledge, we know clearly what we are fighting for: for our health, for our land, for true democracy, the one coming from the people which fuses generations and villages in just one community.

We organize and participate constantly to information events, marches and sit-in; discussions take place in the *Presidio* to get better and better organized. We tour Italy and host visitors from all over the world, from simple pilgrims walking along the ‘French path’ to university teachers, from Union representatives to recent and significant movements defending the right to have a home, from members of the NO MUOS Movement in Sicily to the ones from *la terra dei fuochi* near Naples, and many others. This continuous cultural contamination is very enriching, almost indispensable to renew our proposals.

When we have to assume decisions, after studying and enquiring, we meet in thousands in the popular assembly or in hundreds in the local committees. We listen to each other proposals, evaluate, discuss and make a synthesis. It is a never ending exchange, the secret of its success being in self and reciprocal respect, bringing us that rational and social cohesion which constitutes the real strength of the Valley; a Valley we love because it is beautiful, rich in history, in life, with rare flowers, old plants, wild animals, unique personal and collective experiences.

It is already a consolidated image that the Susa Valley has become a “participated democracy laboratory”. It is much more than this. It is a human territory where we design a new way of life, we try to practice an alternative future, without delegating, in solidarity and equality. It is the social territory where the reciprocal recognizing of the single person mediates with the proposal of walking together without leaving anyone behind. In the name of these aims we became able to put together students and retired persons, men and women, people whose origins, knowledge, cultural level, religious and political convictions could not be more different. Since we have discovered it, we are kind of addicted to this ‘community feeling’ that we are not able to live without it anymore. We are also deeply human, we are not saying neither we pretend to be perfect: we get involved in animated discussions, we dissent sometimes, but it is a fact that we are able to listen to each other and be confident that somebody else’s idea might be better than our own. We are conscious that the strength of each one of us actually resides in the strength of the Movement as a whole, and towards that direction we move. And this is may be the most impressive aspect of our human adventure.

I just want to list here a few meaningful examples of this deep humanity extracted from my personal experience inside the Movement:

June 2005: the 20<sup>th</sup> in Borgone, the 27<sup>th</sup> in Bruzolo, the 29<sup>th</sup> in Venaus, citizens and local mayors occupy the portions of land on which drillings are programmed, preliminary to the opening of future and more devastating working sites. There are men and women of every possible social class, from communists to Catholics. Journalists and military forces are disoriented. Wooden provisory houses are implanted on the grass. They will become definitive and more pleasant. Those self-made shelters will be sources of information, organization, culture, politics. The resistant people invented their own instruments of participation. Friendship, sharing and joy become ineradicable.

November 2005: the military forces had just occupied a portion of the Valley thus isolating the village of Venaus and imposing the identification of every single person who had to move to go to work, school, hospital, take the train or simply go shopping... Immediately, in a few hours, we organized a symposium. That night was snowing densely. The sociologist Marco Revelli and other university teachers exposed their studies in front of a very attentive public, filling the large theatre and standing even more abundant outside under the snow, for hours. It was an unforgettable experience, a demonstration of strong passion and intelligence.

To the violence imposed by institutional power we have always answered by raising the cultural level and the self-consciousness, conjugating the optimism of will to the strength of reason. I'm convinced this is the key of the Susa Valley dignity, which makes us an invincible community.

---

## **8 – INTO CHURCH WITH FLAGS**

---

It was September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, apparently a day like any other, but with one difference: it was the one that the Catholic Church had dedicated to Creation safeguard. An aspect that is becoming more and more important, given the spreading environmental devastation by human.

That month some people belonging to the 'Catholic for the Valley Life' group went to the mass celebrated by the Bishop in the Cathedral of Susa. The aim was to pray together to help growth of the Valley population awareness about the environment and health devastation caused by construction of the new high-speed rail. Nothing special though, except that the Bishop had repeatedly said that, on this subject, he would not have taken position, neither against or in favour. During the celebration we brought in front of the altar some tear gas cans picked up in the woods and the NO TAV activists put their NO TAV flags on their shoulders, as an assumption of responsibility.

The gesture, in its simplicity, was reported insistently by media the next days, as if it was a sacrilege even if happened during a celebration whose main significance was to stress the urgency to take care of Creation! Violent discussions started also in catholic ambiances. Fortunately, two years later, the election of Pope Francis seems to have brought this issue in evidence, since he mentioned our responsibility toward Creation in his very first speech.

Those flags represent our constant vigilance over a territory which is already showing signs of abuse. The woods has been cancelled to install the working site, the fishes have started to die in the river running along due to toxic liquids discharged. Now also extra-thin powders have started to spread due to extraction of rocks from the tunnel. All this in the name of a totally useless project which is precious only for those who participate to the 'great business' party.

As Catholics, we think we have to be in the No TAV Movement. Witnessing is our moral duty. We want to be like 'human' flags, denouncing the situation by our active daily presence. We have to bring the 'eleventh commandment' – take care of Creation – to the catholic world.

---

## **9 – INTERNAL DEMOCRACY OF A POPULAR MOVEMENT**

---

A popular movement born to defend its inhabitant's territory environment, quality of life and health doesn't necessarily need a hierarchical structure or an organized system to decide upon its own action. This need emerges when this kind of movements grow in participation and consensus due to the prolongation of the menace.

The NO TAV Movement of the Susa Valley, born to oppose to the building of a high-speed rail technically useless and extremely impacting, had the chance to experiment such situations and to build an organized resistance system that has been lasting for more than 20 years. Such a long-lasting life, due also to the tenacity of the project promoters who, unfortunately, although not being able to begin the works do not resign to it, nonetheless has created the need to set as widely shared as possible decisional mechanisms.

It is the case to stress that the project unsustainability, arrogant, devastating, based on manipulated data, likely to be infiltrated by criminal organizations, extremely expensive – has favoured aggregation of persons with very different cultural background, religious and political beliefs, trades, on a common goal. The perception of the cruciality of such a goal was somehow felt as stronger than any possible personal difference and distance: this might turn to be the most relevant aspect of the NO TAV Movement's cohesion.

Very different persons did not identify as a political subject but found themselves in the necessity to dialogue and look for affinities and convergences beyond their normal social milieu, though taking

into account the reduced size of the community and of its territory – about 80.000 people living in 40 small towns – which helped the approaching process.

From this need of dialogue, knowledge exchange, studying and divulgation about the negative effects of the mega-project, a great ability of listening, a great effort to understand far from its own ideas and reasoning were born.

This process happened with surprising facility. Some incomprehension, difficult moment, divergences, even some abandon and betrayal happened, but a strong friendship spirit, a feeling of belonging to a supportive community have, year after year, strengthened the Movement.

The Movement itself has established a system of open consulting with frequent well-distributed meetings along the Valley, during which is always possible to speak for anybody who wants to. With this system any form of delegated representation, creation of elective structures and charges distribution was avoided, keeping the debate internal to the Movement separated from the one going on inside local administrations. The two components have not always been in good relationship, but we have to admit that municipal administrations have always took the Movement into consideration as a peer, even if expression of a non-institutional popular debate.

During assemblies some most representative and listened to figures emerged. Oratorical ability, charisma, personal prestige, academic and professional role have certainly given more visibility to somebody more than others, and had given more weight to some choices rather than others, but the never forgotten goal to reach as large as possible shared choices has always prevailed, thus constituting probably the key for long-lasting life and enlarging consensus.

This brief synthesis, probably a bit auto-celebrative, influenced by the enthusiasm renewing everyday inside us e by the conviction to end up winning our battle, does not presume to indicate a model easily adaptable somewhere else. Instead, it is an encouragement to believe in its own resources and in the strength which is possible to express by enlarging solidarity and links inside our own natural, geographical and cultural communities.

Developing the community concept and taking into proper account its reduced size, it is necessary to recognize that enlarged consultation, chance to let to speak anybody wanting to – which some authors have called ‘from-the-bottom democracy’ – it is hardly transposable on a larger scale without indeed deformation or loss of ‘democracy’ itself.

The experience matured in our Valley, the cohesion which derived, the cultural debate that the Movement has generated, the growth of civil, social, environmental consciousness which have become patrimony of a very large number of citizens, constitute a consolidated enrichment that we would like to see extended/replicated somewhere else. We don’t presume to have invented a new political model (we are sober mountain people!); at the most we have demonstrated and we believe that each community can create it’s own.

## **10 – POLITICAL COMMITMENT: YES OR NO?**

---

### **Direct people involvement is needed and possible**

The Valsusa (Susa valley), like it or not, has become in the last years a national laboratory for social and political issues; historical and geographical reasons did create the background for an open and inclusive environment where different approaches and behaviors are developing and operating together. On this common background the opposition to the new, useless, destructive and costly high speed railway Torino-Lyon (NO TAV) has grown up for over 20 years, involving the inhabitants and the local administrations progressively, earning credibility and participation throughout Italy.

Transparency, independence from political and economical lobbies, direct democracy, diffused leadership and wide popular commitment are the distinctive characters of the long term NO TAV action, which are deployed in every day life through public meetings and discussions, cultural events, conventions, protest marches and a wide list of other public fanciful action forms.

The possibly unexpected result of this situation is a renewed feeling of community and social solidarity and, above all, the clear awareness that it is a loud claim to be involved in the decisions process leaving apart the worn out electoral delegation as well as a strong demand of formal representation and of community membership.

The reaction of all the main national political parties (right, central or left) resulted in a unanimous hostility, a 100% by-partisan obstinacy against the NO TAV reasons, which is at least *unusual* for the Italian historically fragmented politic scenario: the economic interests of the lobbies behind the TAV (acronym for high speed railway), and in general behind all the large public works, are evidently equally spread across the right and left political parties. Only small parties and single local groups of the national parties supported the NO TAV positions, quickly excluded by any government level or isolated among their own organizations.

New national and regional legislation to eliminate any interference of the local communities and administrations in the public contracts (“legge obiettivo” and others) and to avoid any effective control on the use of public money (the Italian way to “project financing” can not be discussed here, but it is a remarkable chapter for the Italian economy difficulties) as well as changes in approval procedures (VIA) and reforms of local administrations authority and tasks to further limit the operating margin of the involved local communities (already a marginal participation to decisions before) had been introduced. And being the Italian territorial oppositions still alive (and healthy) both at popular and administration levels in spite of all such efforts, in the last years the great public works sites had been declared “strategic sites” and submitted to special military constraints. The Italian way to solve any social opposition is more and more becoming a pure public order repressive matter: red restricted areas are popping out everywhere.

Even at local level, every possible effort was spent to transform the opposition the Torino-Lyon TAV into a mere “public order” issue and to force a political “normalization” at any administration level, from regional to municipal, till reforming the “mountain community” statute to prevent common actions of the involved municipalities; a government special observatory (Osservatorio Virano) was also implemented, officially to reconsider the TAV project, actually to provide to the public opinion the pretended impression of a democratic agreement process, while no real discussion took place and the results were written before the very beginning (till allowing the participation only to administrations favorable to the TAV project).

The result in the valley, in terms of regional and national elections, was of course a progressive movement towards the small political forces that, moment by moment, were more favorable (or less hostile) to the NO TAV positions (Rifondazione, Verdi ed M5S), which culminates with the defeat of the center-left Bresso team (Regione Piemonte, 2010) in the former regional elections and with the Bulgarian majority results of the M5S (over 60% in most of the Valsusa municipalities) in national elections 2013.

With this boundary conditions, and considering the specific meaning of local administrations elections, where the direct knowledge among the inhabitants of small towns and the people community membership play significant roles, the discussion about the direct participation of the NO TAV claims to local elections was initiated.

But it was not an easy decision:

- a movement based on people participation must be fully independent by any political organization (even when represented by some of its members);
- the inclusive approach, which allows the different souls of the involved people to cooperate and create effective synergies, must be preserved, respecting all point of views;
- the direct and continuous participation of the population to the decisions making (not only pure final approval) is needed: the people involvement, the transparency and the principle of responsibility of the administrators toward the population must become a pre-requisite. “How” is as important as “what” is done;

- a coordinated action based on commonly agreed basic values is mandatory to help the small municipalities (which are characteristic of the Italian sub-urban territory) avoiding the supremacy of bigger towns and cities, while reaching a minimal critical mass to be part of the decisions process (not only TAV, but also water and wastes management, mobility, renewable energies, health and school, welfare, ...);
- the progressive concentration of decisions at central (national, regional and metropolitan cities) level(s) and the weakening of the local administrations role is progressively destroying the democracy and the people rights framework;

The discussion among the population of the Valsusa resulted in the decision to proceed on the formation of local “civic” lists wherever possible, excluding any direct use of the NO TAV name or logo. In 2009 administration elections, such “civic” lists won in some municipalities, reached government agreements with other lists, or placed a significant minority representatives inside the city councils. And when the reformed Mountain Community members had to be elected, in spite of the reorganization, specifically designed to prevent any annoyance to the TAV approval process by the involved territories, an unexpected joint majority with a clear characterization against the Torino-Lyon TAV was achieved. Such a positive experience will be for the valley a good starting point for the next local elections stage, being all aware that the national legislation evolution since the former election, had dramatically worsened the social and political situation, and that the global crisis and the Italian tragic political scenario deliver today a more challenging environment than in the past (when it was already hard enough for our small forces).

The main tasks for the 2014 local administration elections are:

- to grant the continuity of the institutional opposition to the TAV and to all useless great public works in Valsusa;
- to be present and to enforce the position of “civic” lists in all the Valsusa municipalities, where, in spite of the government advertising distributed by media and the financial flow to the TAV supporters, a significant portion of the population is openly against the TAV;
- to avoid any useless competition actively promoting the cooperation of all the persons and forces which embrace common non-negotiable democratic values and people based sustainable development models;
- to prepare the background coordination for associated services which will replace the deleted/reformed institutions and services (i.e. the Mountain Community will be replaced by associated municipalities) and will try to maintain minimal welfare standards (already almost destroyed by the last banks oriented policies)
- to demonstrate that a direct participate democracy is feasible and effective and that “politic” may still have his proper high meaning
- to be part of a net of interconnected local, national and worldwide experiences which are trying to bring the bottom-up model back to its place, as the basis for a sustainable development, recovering the dramatic representation lack of a wide segment of the population

The Valsusa experience is not finished and will not be deleted.

We have experienced 20 years of hard but creative community growth, which involved at least 3 generations of the Valsusa population, and other will come: we can not delegate to others the government of our territory (nobody should), and therefore the commitment to be actively involved in local administration must be understood as part of the Valsusa community vision.

---

## **11 – MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN THE TAV CASE**

TAV, acronym for Treno ad Alta Velocità meaning “high speed train” (even if it is not the case:

it will be mainly dedicated to transportation of goods... but speed is trendy, and that's it) is the name of a mega project about a railway line connecting Lyon (France) to Torino (Italy) via a 57km long tunnel to be caved under the Alps through rocks filled with asbestos and uranium, largely affecting a so-called protected area, supported by propaganda orchestrated by the three most powerful political parties of Italy, **against the recommendations of any seriously done scientific research** under sanitary, geological, transportation, environmental and economical perspectives.

The cost of this infrastructure has not been calculated in a transparent way, it will be mainly funded by the two states involved and the European Union, and the most reliable calculations tell us that the overall cost will impact the Italian national economy increasing the ratio between public debt and GDP from 15 to 20%.

The company in charge to manage the works has been registered in France, so avoiding the controls requested by the Italian state according to anti-mafia laws (what a coincidence!).

Now, NO TAV Movement, opposing to this project, is close to celebrate its **25 years of struggle**.

An entire section of this publication is dedicated to its **ways to protest**, providing quite an impressive variety of **pacifiresistance methods**.

Nevertheless ((sh)it happens!) **they are called "terrorists"**.

How is this possible? What is the impact of all of this on the Italian media network? And how the media manage this load of information?

Let's spot a light on this quite **dark side**.

The mission of media, in an ideal world, would consist of informing and educating people in the most objective and intellectually honest way, in order to put them in the condition to be critical towards government and to have all the necessary elements to form autonomously their own opinions.

In the real world, **news has to be sold**. News has to tell a story, and story strongholds are based on "newsworthiness factors": timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict, number of people involved, shock value and possible future impact.

When the story is prone to be biased by economic interests, the communication model tends to change still more radically, according to Chomsky and Herman, as outlined in the conclusions of "Manufacturing consent" (1998):

"A propaganda model suggests that the 'societal purpose' of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state. The media serve this purpose in many ways: through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises. We have sought to show that the expectations of this model are realized, and often considerably surpassed, in the actual practice of the media in a range of crucial cases."

During recent years, this model has been particularly easy to adopt in Italy, given the peculiar entanglement of the media in the political system exemplified by the dual role of Silvio Berlusconi as media tycoon and Prime Minister and, therefore, with a strong influence also on state-owned television networks. (Trocchia 2009:26).

For about 90% of the Italian public, as for the citizens of other major European countries, television is the mass communication media that is consulted most often (Censis 2008:9); at the same time Italy, as well as other countries characterized by what Hallin and Mancini (2004) define as the "Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model" of relations between media and politics, traditionally have a low degree of daily newspaper circulation and readership.

The **dominance of television** over newspapers as a source of political information in particular is marked: 78.3 % of Italian electors in 2008 formed their vote choice through information provided



by the former, whereas only 20.8% by the latter; moreover this gap has been increasing in the last few years (Censis 2008:12,4).

The Italian television system developed, for many years, in the form of a monopoly by RAI, the public service broadcaster. Many RAI TV programs, especially in the 1950's and 60's, were aimed at educating the audience in order to modernize and unify the country's culture and language. But the way the public television was managed is also a clear example of entanglement of the media system within the political system.

According to a practice known as "*lottizzazione*" (spoils system), each channel was controlled by a different party. While this mechanism was able to guarantee a certain degree of pluralism of information, it also hindered any possibility of autonomy and independence by the media.

After RAI's monopoly ended in 1976, Italy witnessed a boom of local, privately-owned, television channels. However, by 1984 a single company, Berlusconi's Fininvest, had acquired control of the commercial broadcasting sector over the entire national territory, marking the shift, de facto, from a monopoly to a duopoly (Hibberd 2007:886).

**Concentration in media ownership** raises important issues in democratic societies, because it might hinder the possibility for minority groups to voice their concerns, decreasing the diversity of opinions and points of view made available to the general public (Trocchia, 2009).

During Berlusconi's years as Prime Minister, the reality of a conflict of interest between the media and political roles has become increasingly pressing. In Habermas's words, Berlusconi first exploited the opportunities offered by his ownership of a media empire "for political self-promotion and then, after taking over the reins of government, used his media empire to back dubious legislation in support of the consolidation of his private fortunes and political assets. In the course of this adventure, Berlusconi even succeeded in changing the media culture of his country, shifting it from a predominance of political education to an emphasis on marketing of depoliticized entertainment." (Habermas 2006:421).

In the face of this situation, Italy is the only country in Western Europe whose **press is considered partly free** (Puddington, 2009).

Returning to the selection of topics (Chomsky and Herman, 1998) as a strategy to manipulate public opinion, we present below some examples of how it has been applied by Italian media on the TAV case:

### ***Distribution of concerns***

The easiest way to discredit the No TAV movement in public opinion consists in depicting it as a violent group of dangerous people. The Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni (Lega Nord party) in 2011 presented the movement to newspapers and televisions as terrorists. This strategy enabled TAV supporters to reduce the question to terms of public order, allowing them to face any opposition with military force and police.

### ***Framing of issues***

Media tend to focus on the assumed isolation which Italy would be condemned to without this railway: it should, thus, be considered an absolute priority in the name of the national interest, therefore annihilating any more or less reasonable opposition. On the contrary, media never show a single scientific data about the decreasing volume of traffic affecting the existing line, which runs regularly both for goods and passengers, included a TGV (Train à Grande Vitesse) french train linking Milano to Paris twice a day all year around.

### ***Filtering of information***

Filtering of information has become a disappointing normality in most of the media communication on TAV, and true censorship has been applied in a number of cases.

On April 11, 2012 the militarized site was expropriated, and there were protests going on all over Italy, especially at the site, where only a strict selection of journalists was admitted to report on what was happening: TG3 Piemonte, La Stampa, La Repubblica, Rete 7.

Some other journalists, just outside the site and among the protesters doing a peaceful sit-in protest on the motorway, were violently pushed away by the police.

Unfortunately, hundreds of such examples exist.

### ***Emphasis and tone***

July 3, 2011. At least 70,000 peaceful demonstrators participated in the national rally to protest against the military occupation of the La Maddalena site dancing, playing music, walking.

A minority of around 20 people engaged in physical confrontation with the police (who responded by shooting CS tear gas towards peaceful demonstrators). Media mostly and/or solely reported on this conflict with emphasis and dramatic tones, by the way reporting about 3,000 to 10,000 participants.

### ***Keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises***

This strategy has been implemented by means of the “*Osservatorio per il collegamento ferroviario Torino Lione*” (Turin-Lyon Railway Watch), an organization created in 2006 with the alleged intention of finding common ground for discussion and participation in the decision-making about the TAV project: this intention was amplified by media, despite the fact that the *Osservatorio*'s focus was actually on isolating and eliminating dissent.

On the other side, besides the traditional and, to a certain extent, “official” channels (newspapers, magazines, radio and television), Internet and social networks – Facebook, in particular – have played a fundamental role in connecting people interested in being informed about the TAV project in an independent way, thus developing a level of awareness and participation that would have been impossible just a few years ago.

---

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Censis (2008). “Comunicazione e Media”, in ‘42° rapporto annuale sulla situazione sociale del Paese’.

Chomsky N., Herman E.S. (2008). “La fabbrica del consenso” (Manufacturing Consent). Milano: Il Saggiatore.

Habermas J. (2006) “Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research”. *Communication Theory*. Vol.16, 411-426

Hallin, D.C., Mancini, P. (2004). “Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics”. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

Hibberd M. (2007). “Conflicts of interest and media pluralism in Italian broadcasting”. *West European Politics*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, 881-902

Puddington A. (2009). “Freedom In The World 2009: Setbacks And Resilience”. Freedom House

Trocchia, F. (2009) “Habermas on the barricades. Democratizing the Public Sphere Through Direct Action: a case Study of Environmental Protest in Susa Valley, Italy”. Thesis for Lund University International Masters' programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science

---

## **12 - A MILITARY ENCLAVE IN THE HEART OF EUROPE**

Nowadays, if you take a walk through Susa, a small town in the Susa Valley, in North-Western Italy near the French border, you might easily run into clusters of policemen strolling along the streets in their anti-riot uniforms, carrying guns and batons, casting insolent looks all around.

Susa is not a war zone but is the palpable proof of militarization, a shameful condition this town has been forced to since a few months now.

Since 1991 the Italian Government has tried to build through the Susa Valley a high speed railway which has been opposed by both the local people and many Italian scientists and experts as, according to mere technical data, the new railway would be useless, extremely expensive, devastating for the environment and dangerous for the people's health.

In 2011 the Italian Government decided to speed up the project and to start digging what is meant to be a service tunnel accessory to the main 57 km long tunnel which is supposed to cross the Alps.

In June 2011 the site where they had to start digging the service tunnel had been guarded by the local people for more than one month. The population had actually put up a lot of tents all over the area as they feared LTF (the French Company who is supposed to build the new railway) and the Italian Police would try to fence the place and start working. They thought they would be able to oppose peacefully to the attempt to install the tunnel building site, just using their bodies as they had always done.

Unfortunately, about 3,000 policemen cleared the area in an incredibly violent way. All the tents were destroyed, more than 6,000 tear gas bullets were shot during the assault, the people (even some elderly ones) were forced to leave the area, running through the woods and up to the mountain. The Police went after some of them and beat them up. The building site was installed and the militarization of the territory began.

Despite the place has never been officially declared a military site, since then it has been constantly guarded by about at least 300 policemen and soldiers. Also, it has been gradually enlarged and all around it Israeli barbed wire and high concrete barriers have been installed in order to keep anyone off. Inside the building site there is plenty of military vehicles and at a certain point even UN tanks were seen in there.

The site is situated in a very isolated mountain area. The place is beautiful and wilderness used to be gorgeous there. Before the tunnel building site was installed you could see lots of wild animals such as deer, eagles, boars and lovely mountain flowers. Now everything has been destroyed. At night, animals are puzzled by the powerful artificial lights of the building site that actually never allow darkness to come.

Policemen and soldiers very often come out of the fences and stop anyone who dares to stroll through the wood paths, thus violating the Italian law which allows any citizens to walk freely through the national territory. Whenever they stop you they ask you to show them your documents and they often film you so that, if anything happens, you might be charged with any kind of offence. The police officers attitude is always sulky and even arrogant, if not rude.

Because the tunnel building site lies in an isolated area, since a few months ago you could realize what is going on and experience what militarization means only getting close to the site. Unfortunately, militarization is rapidly spreading – just like a cancer – all over the valley and that's why even Susa (the main town of the area) now starts to be occupied by military forces. People living in Susa fear this might be only the beginning of a complete militarization of the town as the new international high speed railway station is supposed to be built in Susa, as well as the main tunnel opening.

Police officers working in shifts guarding the service tunnel building site spend their time off-duty in Susa, where they are hosted in two different hotels. Susa, with its about 7,000 inhabitants, has been literally invaded by policemen going around armed, parking their vehicles in forbidden areas, causing problems to the town traffic and actually raising the level of tension among the people living there.

There have already been some accidents: some police officers (who are mainly young, completely ignorant about the reasons of the opposition to the new railway and totally unprepared to face the hard situation) have quarreled with some local young men, while some others have unbearably badly behaved while having a drink in a bar.

It is not the first time Susa has been turned into a sort of a war zone, though.

Even in 2005, when some LTF technicians helped by hundreds of policemen tried to make some soil drillings near Susa, a large portion of the town territory was completely isolated and nobody could get in there, not even resident people, unless they showed their ID. Kids coming back from school were often stopped by the Police who used to inspect their school bags. Old women going to the churchyard to pray for their dead relatives were rudely sent away as the churchyard was within the forbidden zone. That was the very first sign of militarization.

Up to now militarization has been the only shameful answer the Italian Government has been able to give to the local people's questions. Militarization only means repression and it embodies the Government's incapability to consider why the people are opposing the project. Not to mention the awfully high cost of the whole military apparatus maintenance (90,000 euros a day), which is a scandal in a period when in Italy an unprecedented economic crisis is devastating people's lives.

The Susa Valley is nowadays a real military enclave in the heart of Europe. Despite it is part of a democratic and civilized Country, it is treated as if it were a war zone.

Militarization is humiliating as it limits people's freedom. It is unacceptable since it is imposed onto a whole innocent population. Also, it creates a gloomy atmosphere around our lives. Besides, even worse than that, as time passes, people might grow used to it as if it was something normal and acceptable in the middle of Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

And that would never allow them to get their self-respect back.

### **13 – THE POLITICAL USE OF JUSTICE or THE JUDICIAL REPLY TO THE NO TAV MOVEMENT**

---

*The brief summary below is an extract from the speech of the Lawyer Claudio Novaro at a meeting held in Bussoleno the 7th of December, 2013 focusing on the "Right to Resistance"*

The number of active trials initiated by the Turin Municipal District Attorney's Office against activists pertaining to the No TAV Movement is nearing 80, with 450 activists on trial. While there is no specific legal procedure for trying No TAV activists, all of these proceedings share specific characteristics, all worthy of note if one would strive to grasp the scope and context of the District Attorney's crusade against the Movement.

#### **Aiming at creating a criminal prejudice toward activists**

First of all, the trials are always held under strict police supervision: dozens of agents patrol and control the courtrooms, thus affecting the judge's impartiality, leading him to think of the defendants as potentially dangerous individuals even before the trial actually begins.

Secondly, the press also plays an important role in depicting the activists as criminals, reporting an often distorted version of what goes on inside the court hall: it is not uncommon for the news agencies to present the charges against the accused as if they were proper sentences already pronounced by the judge, while on the contrary it is virtually impossible for the voice of the defendant to find its way to the mainstream media, so that he or she has actually to fight two different battles, one within the courtroom and another one against the journalists whose narration of the events could be labeled as questionable at the very best. All of this has become the norm in Italy, even for those trials which are not connected with the No TAV Movement: what wildly deviates from the norm, on the other hand, is the behavior of the Judiciary Power (here again represented by the Turin Municipal District Attorney's Office), which often combines its legal action with the organization of press conferences intended to convey a partial narration of the judiciary process. There is no need to say that these conferences have a deep impact on the outcome of the following trials, as well as on the version of the facts that will eventually reach the public opinion via the media.

Besides these premises, one should also consider that carrying out autonomous investigations is made extremely difficult by the police, and this despite the fact that our legal system promotes the attorney as a protagonist of the investigation process in search of evidence. As a matter of fact we have been denied this fundamental right, because when we request any document to the authorities (Police, *Carabinieri*, *Guardia di Finanza*, etc.) we never get any answer from them, and we are therefore prevented from carrying out a thorough investigation.

There are two more points which should be examined in depth, because they became the main tools employed by the District Attorney's Office when it comes to trials against NO TAV activists:

the indiscriminate - I would say excessive - usage of A) preliminary detention measures and of B) the charge of involvement in a crime.

### **Extending the use of preliminary detention measures**

The legal framework of our Country considers the use of preliminary detention (both at home or in jail) as an extreme measure, to be adopted when facing serious criminal actions: in other words, our laws say that preliminary detention should be used with great caution.

We should also bear in mind that Italy already got an official reprimand from the EU because of its overcrowded jails, which tend to fill up too rapidly, and that by the end of May Italy will be forced to somehow deal with the situation in its prisons, which is becoming explosive.

“You should take the responsibility for your jails being full and, above all, for this disproportionate use of precautionary measures, which is not comparable with that of other EU countries”: this is the warning coming from the European Union but, in Turin, the opposite is actually happening, and precautionary measures are adopted even for negligible crimes. This is a specificity in the trials against No TAV activists (and, more generally, for trials related to social conflict), where precautionary measures are adopted liberally. Their adoption is so widespread that an external observer can only be astonished in seeing these measures being applied against boys and girls who are barely more than eighteen, with no criminal record and no pending criminal charges. In such circumstances it is highly unlikely that they will have to serve a prison term, but the measures are adopted all the same.

The risk, taking into account the facts which the District Attorney’s office has so far investigated, is that a particularly dangerous process of evaluation exists, focused on the person committing the crime and not on the fact. This process evaluates the potential danger of the accused, and not the gravity of the crime, so that even when facing totally marginal facts, preliminary measures are applied not because the crime is deemed serious by the authorities, but because the perpetrator is considered a dangerous individual.

This is a very dangerous slipping since you don’t make any further reference to what an individual has eventually committed, but to who he or she is, turning the whole set of principles of the rule of law upside down. We are not facing a militarized criminal prosecution here (we have no Guantanamo in Italy, no administrative custody as in Palestine) and the rule of law is still in place but, as far as these trials are concerned, with peculiar, abnormal features.

### **Extending the concept of crime responsibility**

The other question I would like to summarize has to do with the criminal involvement. We have crimes that are basically committed by an individual, and others that are committed by a single person with the involvement of other people. It is typical, on this respect, the crime that takes place during a demonstration, i.e., to get to our trials, “resistance to the public officer”. On one hand, it is the individual who acts, typically using violence or threatening a public officer in order to resist his duties, who has to answer for this kind of accusation. For instance, if I throw a stone toward a policeman while he is complying with his duties, I am committing the crime of “resistance”. On the other hand, the problem concerns those who are participating to the events but are not behaving actively. The question is whether we should construe the mere presence in the place as punishable, or not. To make an example: when two persons go to make a robbery, they have to answer for this kind of crime, but so does the driver who waits outside, since he is participating in the causal process which makes that event a robbery. Do those who simply stand in a demonstration have to answer for the possible throwing of stones by other people? Since a few years the jurisprudence says no, you are not accountable if you are just there and don’t assist the action or strengthen the criminal intent, i.e. giving a specific contribution. In the NO TAV case, though, on a specific occasion (the pacific occupation of offices that belonged to a TAV company) the judge says you are accountable even though you didn’t commit any physical action related to the event. So the space of criminal accountability extends itself to cover individuals who didn’t take action, but were simply in the same area where the others were.

## Terrorists?

Since summer 2013, 12 activists in the first rate, then 4 more starting December, have been in different ways indicted for the crime of “terrorism”. The last 4 are imprisoned since December 9th and a law endorsed in 2005 against the Al-Qaeda emergency has been used against them. On this specific issue we recommend to check the No TAV websites to get further details since the situation is still evolving (*editor’s note*).

Here we confront the trespassing of a very dangerous linguistic boundary, with the introduction of the term “terrorism” related to demonstrations. The history of armed struggle itself, and of the judiciary repercussions that deemed that armed struggle as “terrorism”, is very far beyond No TAV demonstrations.

What I am getting most worried about is the attitude of the judiciary in spite of social conflicts, that are integrated into criminal frameworks. Their complexity and importance for a complex society like ours, disappears. They are reduced to what concerns law and order.

## The importance of contextualization in social conflict

The right to resistance is the perspective taken on by social movements and the No TAV Movement. This perspective is totally avoided during trials, and our action consists in conveying obviously important data as the contextualization of behaviors and the motivations of the accused. The attempt of our judicial counterpart is that of trying to impoverish the context by saying: “We are prosecuting an act of “resistance” here, an act of throwing stones”. What we say is, instead: “That act is not carried out in front of the stadium because there are some supporters they don’t like, but is involved, on the contrary, in a massive resistance that lasts since twenty years. It is a resistance inserted into a local community that carries on a courageous struggle against the high-speed rail project”. We try to underline the fact that if we don’t take into account this framework, we won’t be even able to understand why this or that person is throwing a stone.

What I am saying is that the judiciary has a serious difficulty in admitting this kind of historical reconstruction, because there is the idea that social conflict is something dangerous. One of many meanings of our legal battle is precisely that of regaining dignity for the No TAV activists, for their battles and for the resisting subjects who did their utmost to struggle against the high-speed twenty-years-long project.

*more about the meeting: <http://www.notav.info/documenti/diritto-alla-esistenza-i-materiali/>*

---

## 14 – DESIGNING A NEW SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS

---

### ETINOMIA = ETHICS + ECONOMY

“Is it possible that the social and cultural richness that the No TAV Movement has stimulated within the territory is also capable of influencing and conditioning the economy of a valley as big as Susa Valley?” This is the question that about a hundred entrepreneurs asked themselves in 2011 with the goal of demonstrating how important established community links and solidarity under the umbrella of the struggle against unnecessary mega projects were. In the aftermath of these considerations, Etinomia was founded at the beginning of 2012: the Association for Ethical Entrepreneurs and the Defense of the Common Good. A challenge to the profound economic crisis in a territory, the Italian one, in which business and honesty seem to be antithetical concepts. After two years, however, we can assert that the message was anticipated and desired by everyone: citizens, entrepreneurs, institutions and other associations.

But let’s start from the beginning. For more than its two decades of history, the popular commitment in Susa Valley with regards to the struggle against the Turin-Lyon high-speed rail project has reinforced community links in the population. These bonds are expressed through gestures of solidarity and a profound faith in the acts of your neighbor, whether it’s about marching together during a demonstration, participating in running a protest site, organizing a party, or facing the difficulties of daily life. This struggle has taught us that collaboration and acts without financial gain can offer, over the medium term, stupefying and unexpected results. Mutual trust and the

certainty of sharing important values, remove a large part of the difficulties that block human relations: as businesspeople every day we experience the weight of negating this principle as we conduct our economic activities. Those who had the courage to attempt to give a name and a legal status to this desire decided to take on a very difficult challenge. Can honesty, dignity and collaboration build new points of reference to stimulate the birth of a more humane economic mechanism that respects the environment and the common good? Etnomia's experience seems to indicate that it is possible.

The point of departure was very simple: render the businesspeople who obviously share a series of values and commitments visible. All of this with a dual objective: reinforce the link between consumers and businesspeople and ensure that the network between these entrepreneurs is strengthened. Since the basic values shared come from a struggle to defend a territory, all of this naturally contributed to promoting local entrepreneurialism, commerce and handcrafts. However, as often happens in Susa Valley, an unexpected and moving thing happened: many regular people joined the businesspeople to push the project ahead. The territory and the population (principally close to the No TAV Movement) understood that "defending the common good" isn't an issue that affects a part of the players on the economic scene. Everyone plays a role in creating a context and managing an economy that is more just and more sustainable: an aware consumer, an honest businessperson, an informed client and transparent public institutions. It seems strange to talk about transparent public institutions in Italy. Yet, this is another effect a commitment to the common good can have on a territory, even a difficult one like Italy. In Susa Valley many honest mayors have sought out Etnomia, have interviewed their members to understand how, all together, it is possible to plan a future scenario that is more respectful of the dignity of citizens and the environment. It's a revolutionary fact if you think that in Italy it is usually private individuals who seek out institutions in exchange for favors, perhaps moving things along bribing the politician of the day.

On the basis of these premises Etnomia began its activities immediately forming theme-related working groups: economy, tourism, agriculture, energy, construction, ICT and social assistance, to cite a few. Within these groups, the businesspeople who worked in a particular sector met and exchanged work, offered each other free advice and shared information. Many groups keep Etnomia's office open, easily visible and simple to find in the town that hosts it, Sant'Ambrogio di Torino. In this way, during meetings they can offer free pre-counseling to the local population, listen to project proposals and evaluate and provide direction for new business initiatives. In a moment of profound crisis, sometimes these are the only alternatives for those who have lost the classic permanent position. The network of collaboration between professionals is, in effect, being reinforced. Many are establishing new commercial links and collaborating between colleagues or with suppliers, substituting the previous ones with whom they didn't share the same mode of conduct. Often, the possibility of being able to count on the support of colleagues who are experts in other fields stimulates creativity and instills the courage to face more challenging business ventures.

The Association explicitly stated the values it intends to promote and defend writing an Ethics Manifesto and asking its Members to ascribe to it. In this initial phase, therefore, within the optic of wanting to promote bringing together and sharing ethical and virtuous comportment, trust has been bestowed on the entrepreneurs of Etnomia and their capacity to self-regulate the network. At the end of 2013, Etnomia began working on introducing a "Business Certification for the Common Good": a system to certify and quantify the capacity of entrepreneurs to work (also) for collective interests. The Association will try to use a simplified version of this schema to guarantee the quality and honesty of the businesses that animate and participate in the life of Etnomia.

Over the course of its two-year history, many concrete initiatives have been carried out to promote the local economy while respecting the collective interest:

- Holding courses on organic farming, food sovereignty and defense of the territory;
- Organizing theme-oriented markets of typical products such as handcrafts and food and wine;

- Creating a discount coupon (\$usino) to be used in local stores to reinforce the bond of trust between small businesses and local consumers;
- Promoting tourism initiatives to re-launch the natural and cultural image of the Valley to counteract the destruction the high-speed project's work sites would cause;
- Collaborating with municipalities to create political programs with the objective of promoting a commitment to defending the common good;
- Organizing art and culture events to promote respect for the territory and solidarity among citizens.

At the end of September 2013, Etnomia organized a three-day workshop on Work also in collaboration with the No TAV Movement. About 400 people participated in the event from across Italy. They were divided among eight round-table themes to address the issue of Work in an innovative and original manner. Etnomia and Susa Valley, therefore, demonstrated the ability to be a point of reference and have the means to provide sufficient credibility to call on a group of some of the most brilliant intellectual forces in the country. The hottest themes were those that were linked to the transition towards new forms of development, technological innovation, a citizen income, re-developing the schemes for distribution and consumption and working to care for people and the role of finance and institutions. Massimo De Angelis participated alongside Etnomia's president Daniele Forte and Elena Gerebizza of Re: Common, at the round-table that questioned what direction the push for renewal should privilege. From the animated and rich debates proposals were born which Etnomia will work on over the coming years: eco-sustainable bonds between agriculture and innovation, co-working, creating a complementary currency network, establishing an agency for territorial energy, promoting the sustainable disposal of urban waste, and strengthening networks of ethical commerce and local and group social-justice purchasing. Just to cite a few.

Crazy and impossible ideas? Not any more for a group of honest citizens that wants to change the face of the Italian economy betting on honesty, quality, solidarity and sustainability. It is a challenge accepted by Etnomia, Susa Valley and its citizens to defend the valley from high-speed devastation and destruction.

## **15 – THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FORUM AGAINST UNNECESSARY IMPOSED MEGA PROJECTS**

### *A Historic Necessity*



In many parts of the planet, citizens are rebelling against huge mainly infrastructural projects that have been imposed on their lives.

Their struggles, geographically distant from each other and often mutually uninformed, need, however, to be known largely to increase the chances of being successful. A fight that has no name, a struggle that is little known beyond its scope, has few chance to create solidarity around it and be successful.

These reflections were the basis of the idea of the committee **PresidioEuropa No TAV** [www.presidioeuropa.net](http://www.presidioeuropa.net), mail to [info@presidioeuropa.net](mailto:info@presidioeuropa.net), a group of activists from Valsusa, Valsangone and Turin, to organize in the summer of 2011 the first **Forum against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects (UIMP)** in Val di Susa. It was actually the first time ever that citizens struggling against Mega Projects met on an international level.



The purpose of this first international meeting was to start analyzing the UIMP from different points of view and at the same time allow an exchange of experiences. Economic, environmental, financial, social and democratic items have been discussed and people from all over Europe came to know each other. It was the birth of the international platform we now call Forum against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects. Actually it has become an international network of communities across Spain, France, Italy, the UK, Germany, Romania, Morocco, Turkey and beyond aiming to exchange information on the nature of Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects, and reflect on this paradigm of modernity and progress at full speed.

Movements and associations that collaborate in the Forum against Unnecessary Imposed Mega Projects actively oppose the imposition of massive infrastructure projects such as the HS2 rail scheme in the UK, the new Lyon-Turin rail line, the airport of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, the Stuttgart 21 train station, the tunnel known as Fixed Fehmarn Belt Link, the Bordeaux-Spain high speed train, the high speed rail tunnel under Old Florence, gold mining in Rosia Montana and more.

The symbol of our Forum is a “white elephant” which, in parts of Asia, is an idiom for gifts that are useless, likely to bankrupt the recipient, called sacred, and impossible to be refused. A perfect symbol for so many of the projects that we oppose.

In December 2011, the first European Day against Useless Mega Projects was celebrated and since then it has become a recurring appointment all over Europe.

In 2011, during an organizational meeting in Paris that preceded a demonstration against the project of a new airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, it was decided that the second Forum should take place in the summer of 2012 in France.

In July 2012, this second international Forum of Notre-Dame-des-Landes was a spectacular success, with the participation of thousands of citizens.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Forum took place in Stuttgart, Germany in July 2013 and the 4<sup>th</sup> Forum which will take place from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> May 2014 in Rosia Montana, Romania.

Over the last 3 years, our Forum has participated in a series of international meetings like Firenze 10+10 in October 2012 or World Social Forum in Tunis in March 2013 which gave us more possibilities to meet and organize workshops together.

The [Charter of Tunis](#) is the basic testimony of our work together. In this specific case it has been elaborated by a group of about 60 participants speaking 6 different languages.

Common actions with various and changing participants on a European institutional level have been developed like the participation to the TEN-T days in Tallinn in 2013 and intense information of members of the European parliament on different groups.

But the citizens do not only oppose, they also present specific proposals saying they want:

- The regeneration, maintenance and optimization of the existing, which is the most acceptable alternative solution from an environmental point of view, and with much lower financial costs than the construction of new infrastructures;
- The decrease of transportation, together with a major transformation of the economic and social model, particularly by giving priority to proximity and to re-localizing the economy;
- The restoration of the capacity of making decisions to the most directly affected populations, the foundation of an authentic democracy and local autonomy in front of an imposed development model.

Hundreds of organizations in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the UK and elsewhere have adopted the Charter of Hendaye, which was signed at first in 2010, as a point of reference for their actions.

<http://www.voiesnouvellestgv.webou.net/document/strasbourg/jointdeclaration.pdf>