

POLITICAL ECOLOGY, TERRITORY AND LOCAL RESISTANCE: THE CONFLICT OVER THE NEW RAILWAY BETWEEN LYON AND TURIN

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decades, several environmental conflicts have spread across Italy, dealing with a massive wave of infrastructures planning and implementation. Our focus is on the high-speed railway between Italy and France, specifically between Turin and Lyon (now known, even though improperly, by the acronym TAV), and on the grassroots protest movement which has grown parallel to the development of the “Trans-European Network (TEN) project” over the last twenty years. From the geographical point of view, the TAV conflict can be seen as a conflict about different territorializations. In particular, focusing on French and Italian literature on Raffestin’s notion of ‘territory’, our analysis aims at integrating political ecology sensitivity for scale issues with a more nuanced account of actors’ territorial rationalities and claims.

KEYWORDS

Political ecology; territorialization; Raffestin; Turin-Lyon railway; NIMBY

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INTRODUCTION

The planning and construction of major infrastructural works has recently given rise to a multitude of environmental and territorial conflicts in Italy (see, among others, Bobbio and Zeppetella, 1999). Over recent years, problems have ranged from localizing landfills and incinerators – which became dramatic with the waste disposal emergency in Campania between late

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2007 and early 2008 – to the construction of the new Dal Molin NATO base in Vicenza, and from the controversy concerning the bridge over the Strait of Messina to the railway connection between Turin and Lyon. All these conflicts seem to magnify the difficulties inherent in the management of decisional processes, and the tensions between national, regional and local interests, deconstructing the ideology that sees major public works and infrastructures as boosters of development. This conflictuality has ended up orienting the political debate, but also the scientific and academic debates, towards seeking practical *problem solving* solutions that may serve to mitigate past conflicts, but not to understand the dynamics that make environmental conflicts one of the fundamental aspects of contemporary society.¹

In this sense, the debate that has raged over the past decade within Anglo-American *political ecology* is indubitably a useful key to contextualizing and understanding environmental conflicts. For instance, Robbins explicitly identifies the ‘environmental conflict thesis’ (2004: 13-16) as one of the four key issues constitutive of the dominant discourse of political ecology. Emphasizing the dialectics between scientific narratives and power relationships, political ecology contributes to highlighting the very political and economic roots of environmental conflicts, the role played by corporate, state, and international authorities and ‘the undesirable impacts of policies and market conditions, especially from the points of view of local peoples, marginal groups, and vulnerable populations’ (Robbins, 2004: 12).

More importantly, from a geographer’s standpoint, political ecology emphasizes the role of scale in addressing the making of environmental conflicts (Bryant and Bailey, 1997; Keil et al., 1998; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Zimmerer and Bassett, 2003). As Bryant and Bailey notice, ‘the existence of a whole host of environmental problems at different scales cannot be adequately understood without recognizing simultaneously that different actors contribute to, are affected by, or seek to resolve environmental problems at different scales’ (1997: 32).

Nevertheless, there are clear limits in applying the political ecology template to the study of current environmental conflicts in Italy. Despite the fact that political ecology is no longer restricted to Third World empirical applications and that there is now considerable literature concerning Northern contexts, both urban and rural,² little or no attention is paid to the issue of planning and

¹ For a review of the problem solving approach to environmental conflicts, see Blackburn and Bruce, 1995; Lewicki et al., 2003; MacNaughton and Martins, 2002; Sidaway, 2005.

² For an account of the debate on urban political ecology, see: Heynen et al. (2003), Keil (2003) and Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003). For a more general account of the use of political ecology in addressing First World non-urban environmental conflicts, see Walker (2003) and Schroeder (2005).

building infrastructures as a source of environmental conflict.³ While focusing on different aspects of First World environmental conflicts concerning resources (Kaika, 2003; Martin, 2005), land use (Darling, 2005) and nature conservation (McCarthy, 2005), issues such as Lulu (Locally Unwanted Land Use) and Nimby (Not in My Backyard) campaigns are not commonly on the political ecology agenda.⁴ As a consequence, while engaging in dialogue with political ecology theories in the background, we shall rely consistently more on French – and secondarily Italian – literature on environmental conflicts related to planning and building infrastructure. In addition to the specific contribution of French theory to the (further) development of political ecology (Whiteside, 2002), in particular of Bruno Latour (Latour, 2004), we are going to focus on two relevant streams of reflection about the nexus linking environmental conflicts and space. On the one hand, we shall rely on the work of the French-Swiss geographer Claude Raffestin on power and space⁵ (Raffestin, 1980; Raffestin and Turco, 1984) and of his Italian fellow scholar Angelo Turco on environmental conflicts (Faggi and Turco, 2001; Turco, 1998). On the other hand, we intend to focus on the conspicuous French and Italian literature concerning environmental conflicts for infrastructure developments (Dematteis and Governa, 2001; Melé et al., 2003; Perulli, 2005) and, more specifically, high-speed railways, such as the *TGV Méditerranée* (De Carlo, 2004; Lolive, 1999; Ollivro, 1997) and the *TGV-Nord* (Ducoing, 1989; Menerault, 1997). The reason for focusing on French and Italian literature is not only due to the fact that high-speed railways have been a sort of obsession for French policy-makers since the 1950s (Klein, 2001; Meunier, 2002), while they are quite marginal in the Anglo-American debate. More significantly, both these streams – the ‘theoretical’ and the ‘empirical’ – of French and Italian geography converge on the centrality of the notion of *territoire/territorio* in addressing the conflictual dimension of spatial interactions.

Initially we will seek to present a synthesis of the main concepts already mentioned in this brief introduction and, in particular, the notion of territory in French and Italian geography and the dialectics of territorialization/deterritorialization. Subsequently, our attention will focus on how these concepts of geographical reflection can be utilized to interpret environmental conflicts as

³ The recent article by Monstadt (2009) addresses the role played by infrastructures from an urban political ecology perspective, but the author largely underplays the conflictual dimension of the process of infrastructure design and planning.

⁴ For an exception, see Zografos and Martinez-Alier’s account of environmental conflicts about the establishment of wind-farms in Catalonia (2009).

⁵ For an analysis of the relationship between French and English geographical understandings of power and space, see, among others, Fall’s (2007) recent comparison of Raffestin’s seminal *Pour une géographie du pouvoir* (1980) with the more recent *Lost Geographies of Power* (Allen, 2003).

related to the construction of large infrastructures and, in particular, transportation infrastructures. The second part will focus on the analysis of the case of the Turin–Lyon high-speed railway, in the belief that a geographical perspective may succeed in making an important contribution to the understanding of environmental conflicts. In particular we shall consider both the opponents’ and the proponents’ concerns and strategies as part of a territorialization process, where specific projects about what ‘the territory should be’ are legitimized through discourses and practices..

TERRITORY AND TERRITORIALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH GEOGRAPHY

Although this is not the place for an analysis of the relationships between French and Anglo-American geographical traditions (Chivallon, 2003; Claval, 2004; Fall, 2007; Fall and Rosière, 2008; Gilbert, 1988; Hepple, 2000) the false equivalence between *territory* and *territoire* is one of the main geographical misunderstandings across the Channel (Debarbieux, 1999; Giraut, 2008). As Debarbieux notes, in Anglo-American geography, territory makes reference either to a political and juridical meaning – the territory of the state (Delaney, 2005) – or to a ethological denotation – territoriality as an expression of human behaviour (Sack, 1986) – with little or no overlapping between the two meanings (1999: 34). On the contrary, in French geography⁶, the notion of territory follows a different path, addressing a broader and more complex – and maybe more ambiguous⁷ – meaning (Vanier, 2009). For instance Lussault observes that:

A territory emerges as a bounded area, appointed with a territorial ideology that attributes the status of ‘territory’ to a portion of space, hence limited, continuous, marked by poles and consequently valorized. Every person included in such a territory can experience and assess the contiguity, the scansion, the delimitation and the value, the congruity of all the components into a consistent meaningful organization (2007: 113).

⁶ The French account of *territoire* is largely mirrored in the Italian notion of *territorio*, in particular in the work of Dematteis, 1995 and 2001. For a review of the fortune of the concept of *territorio* in Italian policy discourses and practices, see Governa and Salone (2004).

⁷ Giraut summarizes three streams of critique to the notion of territory, qualifying it as *reducteur* (reducing/reductionist), *obsolete* (obsolete) and *mystifiant* (mystifying) (2008: 57-58). More recently, Pecqueur has addressed the issue of the *extenuation* of the notion of territory from an Economic Geography standpoint (2009).

In particular, Raffestin's notion of territory is especially meaningful :

A territory is a 'state of nature' in Moscovici's account of this concept; it refers to human action applied to a portion of space which, in turn, is defined with reference not to human action but to a combination of mechanical, physical, chemical and organic forces and actions. The territory is a re-ordering of space, whose order is to be searched in the informational/cognitive systems which are available to a human being in that he/she belongs to a culture. The territory might be considered as space *informé* (shaped, informed) by the semiosphere (1986: 177).

As Fall observes, 'Like his conception of power, Raffestin's concept of territory drew upon Lefebvre's idea of the production of space in order to spatialize his relational approach. [...] In this, his distinction between space (pre-existent to any action) and territory⁸ (produced relationally) was fundamental' (2007: 199). Territorialization should be seen, in a far more complex manner, as a set of territorializing actions that are expressed on different levels – symbolic, organizational, functional – however interconnected they may be.

In particular, territorializing actions, according to Turco (Faggi and Turco, 2001), may essentially be traced back to a tripartite typology that allows us to distinguish, at least theoretically, three levels on which each territorialization process is articulated: symbolic production and control (denomination), materials (reification), and organization (structuring) of the territory. These three forms of territorialization are distinguishable only in theory, for in practice they are necessarily bound together in a manner that is difficult to distinguish, with each depending on the others. While it is true that organizing the territory appears more important, as it directly involves the planning abilities of those concerned and their power to transform the territory in keeping with these projects, and while materialization, in the form of material production, is one aspect of its ability to produce effects that have medium- and long-term effects, it is also true that neither of these two processes of territorialization can be conceived of without the production of territorial meaning. The ways in which these activities of territorialization interact are of course both multifaceted and contingent – in other words, they depend on the rationality that all those involved in the process of territorialization bring to bear at any given time and in any given area as a result of their wishes and plans.

⁸ For a different, and partially antagonistic, account of the relation between space and territory, see Brenner and Elden (2009).

This interpretation of the process of territorialization should not make us think that it is some kind of mechanistic causation that precedes the intentions of those involved and moulds a malleable and ductile space that has neither shape nor name. In particular we claim that such a process of *territorialization* is quite different from the territorialization of the Nation State, which historically leads to the establishment of a naturalized notion of scale as spatial fixity, or as frozen space. In Raffestin's account, the production of territory must be read as a continuous cycle of territorialization-deterritorialization-reterritorialization, which is also evident in the contemporary rescaling process of State sovereignty (see, among others, Brenner, 2004).

INFRASTRUCTURES, TERRITORIALIZATION AND CONFLICTS

Our analysis begins with infrastructure planning abruptly exploding onto a consolidated territorial framework, the fruit of past territorialization that represents our *status quo*. Regardless of its nature, any infrastructure is bound to produce a territorializing effect that may schematically threaten past territorialization – or in other words, the existing balance between different rationalities that share a common territorialization project – whether coherently or disjointedly. In the first case, we are dealing with an infrastructure that finds itself, more or less spontaneously, in harmony with the basic needs expressed by the past territorialization: this is mainly the case of local infrastructure of collective interest (a school, a hospital, a university), but may also concern 'critical' infrastructure like a motorway, provided that the significance and the function of the infrastructure can be easily shared by the residents. Otherwise, and probably more often, we are faced with a detrimental effect of the infrastructure on the past territorialization, above all if the infrastructure implies significant environmental impact. In other words, from a geographical point of view, we can say that the imposition of infrastructures triggers a re-territorialization process: it de-territorializes the existing territorial structure and imposes new ones, either explicitly or implicitly (Offner, 1996).

What escapes most observers, as Melé (2003) noted, is the fact that the conflict is in and of itself a process of territorialization. In other words, the stakes of the conflict do not consist of a return to the starting point, but rather the production of a territory that cannot avoid being different. In this sense, the conflict implies a re-territorialization equivalent to the infrastructuring process that unleashed the entire process. This implies that the solution to the conflict should not pass as a compromise between a past territorialization and a new one, but between two ongoing territorializations. This detail implies an increased complexity of the entire question, since the territorializing rationalities in this face-off are both in a potential status, they do not involve a territory, but rather a project for the territory (Dematteis, 1995). At this point, it becomes clear that

an approach in terms of impact and/or effects does not seem capable of guaranteeing the composition of conflicts, precisely due to the fact that the stakes are neither the defence of an existing territory nor its mere material transformation, but rather the future territory, or something that does not yet exist, or exists in a largely implicit form, in the rationality of the contenders.

From this standpoint, the relationship between conflict and territory can be understood better by considering the environmental conflict as an actual territorialization process. This process may take two directions: on one hand, it may act as a reinforcement factor for an existing territoriality, which is to say territorial ties that can be interpreted in terms of belonging, appropriation or territorial identity; on the other, it may trigger the production of new territorialization processes, thereby creating new forms of territoriality. These processes are not mutually exclusive, but may coexist and overlap according to the configuration of the development of the conflict, while their temporal and spatial intensity depends strictly on the degree of social proximity that the sharing of the same risk is capable of developing.

The latter is certainly the most interesting aspect, as it refers to what we have emphasized in outlining a general scheme for the interpretation of the relationship between territory, infrastructure and environmental conflicts or, in other words, the fact that the conflict is not limited to absorbing energy from the past territorialization and reinforcing the significance previously attributed to the territory, but more significantly undertakes the task of re-territorialization (Melé, Larrue and Rosemberg, 2003). In particular, the re-territorialization induced by the conflict occurs, as does the one dictated by the new infrastructure, on all three levels of logic identified in the previous section:

- (i) *symbolic*: the moment in which the conflict pushes the residents to shift from a merely spatial proximity to more complex forms of social proximity also implies a redefining of one's own identity in relation to that territory (Turco, 1995). In this sense, the re-territorialization produced by the conflict often overlaps with the so-called 'patrimonialization', in which not only the existing and recognized territorial assets are mobilized, but efforts are made to produce new assets through an increased awareness of the territory and deeper knowledge of the historical relations that connect past forms of territorialization with the current process (Lecourt and Faburel, 2005);
- (ii) *reifying*: the conflict normally implies a material transformation of the territory, even if in a less obvious and permanent manner than the reifying produced by the infrastructuring. The moment of the resident's reification and of opposition movements to the project often assumes the likeness of a symbolic reification through signs and other forms of communication on the territory that identify the area under contention more precisely. In its

- more extreme, yet always more frequent forms, reification may be interpreted as a material occupation of the territory, in particular in the zones surrounding construction sites of the contested project, to the point of assuming the form of sabotage or passive resistance;
- (iii) *structuring*: the maximum effect of conflictual re-territorialization is obtained when a passage to the structuring act occurs. This is when the protests succeed in coagulating into an organized protest movement capable of establishing a more effective and direct dialogue with the forms of territorial structuring undertaken by syntagmatic actors⁹, like the European Union or the public administration. This is a process that has gained particular relevance in France, where protests of the *riverains* have led to the defining of new laws calling for community participation beginning with the initial phases of projects. In some specific cases, like those reported by Melé (2004), the structuring power is driven to produce new parcelling and zoning of the territory that has taken on a prescriptive and legal value. The structuring moment is fundamental for passing from a project contested by some isolated social actor to a full-blown conflict that requires some form of structured opposition.

THE TAV AND THE VAL DI SUSA: CHRONICLE OF THE CONFLICT

The hypothesis of a new railway connection between Italy and France, via Turin and Lyon, is not a new one and therefore boasts a long and intricate history – or better yet, two chronicles, one official and one unofficial from the No-TAV point of view, which present a limited number of similarities (Sasso, 2005)¹⁰ – of which we will recall only the essential points here for our purposes¹¹. At the end of the 1980s, the first hypotheses of a high-speed (AV) railway connection were outlined as an offshoot of a purely technical debate, which had been going on for some time, involving the updating and upgrading of this stretch of railway. The subsequent insertion of the new Turin–Lyon railway connection into the political agenda occurred thanks to a dense interweaving of

⁹ By this expression, Raffestin means that ‘territory is generated from space, it is the outcome of an action performed by a syntagmatic actor (an actor who is realising a program) at some level. Taking possession – either physically or symbolically – of such a space, the actor territorialize the space’ (1983, 129). Hence the syntagmatic actor is the one who has both a project and the power to accomplish it.

¹⁰ For more information, see the detailed chronology by the No-TAV movement on the official website www.notav.com, accessed on 20 February 2010.

¹¹ This article is the result of a work started in the year 2001 and conducted in different phases which included the analysis of official documents as well as of *grey*-literature, interviews to key stakeholders and an extensive field-work in the areas more involved in the conflict.

infrastructural programmes on a European and national scale, and pressure on a regional scale from the two regions predominantly involved (Piemonte and Rhone Alpes) (Dansero and Nervo, 2001).

On a European level, the project of crossing the Alps and the high-speed connection between Italy and France leapt to the first page in 1990, when the Turin–Lyon stretch was officially included among the main 15 rail-rings of the European high-speed train network (Planning Scheme of the European Transport Network). In 1992 its strategic importance was confirmed by the Trans-European Network (TEN) project and by the Christophersen Group, which numbered it among priority infrastructural projects approved in 1994 on the occasion of the European Council of Essen (Capineri, 2006).

During the early 1990s, the idea of the high-speed railway connection between Turin and Lyon first received an official consecration through a series of meetings among the representatives of the two governments, beginning with the Italian-French summit in Viterbo in 1991 and ending in 1994 and the summit meeting of Essen with the Italian and French defining the decisional structure of the project. On a political level, the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) was instituted in 1996; on an operational level the railway companies of both nations, with the mandate to carry out the necessary studies for planning the line, created Alpetunnel in 1994, which was later transformed in 2001 into the LTF (*Lyon–Turin Ferroviaire*). Alpetunnel continued along the tracks of the first exploratory study formulated in 1990 by a mixed task force, the FS-SNCF. This study, in which the basic technical hypotheses were outlined, affirmed the need for a new transalpine tunnel of considerable dimensions (54 km long) so as to reduce the excessive slope and narrow curves of the historical route, which was incompatible with a high-speed line. From this study onwards, the numerous plans hypothesized that followed all rotated around the so-called ‘base tunnel’, measuring over 50 km, between Saint-Jean de Maurienne and Venaus (near Susa). However, it was never discussed at length, for years to follow, until 2006.

At the same time, since the early 1990s, opposition began to take shape through the creation of local environmental committees, the organization of events, counter-studies, and demonstrations in the valley and then in Turin, little by little enlarging their ranks to constitute the No-TAV movement (Giliberto and Giudici, 2006; Giustizi, 2006).

The situation took a significant step in January 2001 when, for the occasion of the XX French-Italian summit in Turin, the Italian and French Ministers of Transportation signed the International Agreement for the construction of the Turin–Lyon railway. In December 2003, it was once again included in the list of 30 ‘Quick Start’ infrastructural projects by the Council of Europe. At the end of 2003, the IEPC (Interministerial Economic Planning Committee) approved the preliminary project, while studies proceeded for the Val Susa (Bussoleno)–Turin stretch (Figure 1).

The year 2005 witnessed a progressive escalation of the conflict, starting with the tender for the works to build the first exploratory tunnel until, in November 2005, following massive demonstrations, the opposition reached the point of occupying the construction sites for the first exploratory tunnel at Venaus, an occupation that concluded with the forced removal of protesters by the police and the militarization of the valley. The situation had reached an impasse (Cedolin, 2006).

At the end of 2005, the Berlusconi administration decided to shift strategy towards a more consultative approach with the constitution of two institutions. One was a political Table, open to the local Val di Susa institutions, and the other a technical Observatory, presided over by the Government Commissioner, architect Mario Virano, and including the technical representatives of the government and various ministries involved, of railway technical structures, of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) and of local Piedmontese organizations, with all the towns that would potentially be involved in the project. The creation of the Observatory is a key moment in creating trust around the technical expertise (Horowitz, 2010) which has been critically contested by the opponents. The work of the Observatory did not formally commence until late 2006, and would mark a radical change of approach. However, while the Observatory seemed to establish its own credibility between both the parties, in July 2007, Italy and France presented a request for financing to the European Union in response to the announcement offering European financial contributions for TEN (Trans-European Networks) projects during the period 2007–2013. This made the activities of the technical Observatory more difficult, as it had to deal with technical issues concerning diverse scenarios despite the fact that in the meanwhile a project has already been submitted to Brussels, and had to continue working while demonstrating notable capacity for institutional equilibrium.

The Observatory continued in its work, in spite of the difficult equilibrium between opposing stances of closure between the uncompromising *Sì TAV* (Yes-TAV)¹² and the relentless No-TAV. The conflict exploded violently at the end of 2009 with the start up of new enquiries to explore the hypotheses of new routes in the Val di Susa. The new hypothetical plan, presented at the time of writing this article, in February 2010, is more sensitive to the needs of the territory. In particular, this new plan calls for an international station in Susa and a connection with the

¹² In addition to institutional, public and private actors and political lobbies, such as the so-called *Comitato Transpadana* (www.transpadana.org), which strongly support the implementation of the TAV between Turin and Lyon, the ‘Sì TAV’ group (www.sitavtorino.net) represents the attempt to organize a formal pro-TAV movement, which so far has tried to mobilize public opinion and organize public demonstrations to support their interests.

intermodal freight transport centre in Orbassano (see section 5.1 below). In particular, in the words of Government Commissioner Virano, the project is conceived of as a territorial project and not only as a transportation project. On the eve of an important electoral deadline (regional administrative elections are set for March 2010), political forces are now somewhat bound to sustain the project and that line of decision, but also fearful of sparking a conflict – perhaps even a violent one – with a movement that is increasingly in the hands of the extreme faction of No-TAV hardliners.

THE VAL DI SUSA CONFLICT AS A TERRITORIALIZATION PROCESS.

Territorialization as seen by the proponents

What are the positions concerning the territory adopted by the promoters and supporters of the work? Their actions can be interpreted in terms of the geographies they will produce in the future. The Turin–Lyon is shown in the strategic plans as a ‘missing link’ that needs to be filled in, so as to bring about the space-time reduction that is clearly shown by a map drawn up in 1992 on the basis of time and distance to show the various possible results that would have been achieved by high-speed rail links. The idea of the missing link has great power in terms of symbolism and performance, and it gives a good idea of the inevitability of the decisions made. In these plans, the Valle di Susa is simply a transit corridor in a ‘territory of exchanges’, where the main problem appears to be that of reducing time and distance, which requires the construction of a long tunnel far deeper than the present one. Significantly, the joint-venture company set up by the two railway companies was named Alpetunnel. The main perspectives are that of the small-scale map, which is indispensable for far-reaching strategic decisions, and a technical-transport perspective that does not consider the territory, but rather a network that rests on and passes through a space. The environmental, social and cultural complexity of this space is not considered other than in terms of the impact, which would be left to a later date (if it could not be avoided altogether), when work would be carried out on a more detailed map. The fact is that, when the strategic decision was made, these became details that could not have been of concern to the decision-making scale above the local level. This is therefore a techno-centric vision that closes itself in a self-referential perspective. It confines territorial diversity (in other words, the interaction of the physical, social, institutional, economic, and cultural environments) to the realm of detail, as well as postponing it to a later date.

These new territorialization is linked to other plans on a continental scale, and especially to the pan-European transport conference in Prague (1991), which laid the foundations of a project for

east–west pan-European links. Mainly based on geopolitical concerns, this was designed to bridge the gap left by the Soviet regime by building suitable forms of communication immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall. A conference in Crete (1994) and another in Helsinki (1997) established ten pan-European transport corridors. This process transformed the Turin–Lyon line from a mere missing link into an essential part of the westward extension of Corridor 5 (which was originally intended to continue from Trieste towards Kiev) all the way to Lisbon (Figure 2). In the geopolitical representations put forward by proponents and taken up by the Italian press, the Turin–Lyon line thus acquired new importance and value, while Corridor 5 continued to be referred to as Priority Project 6. In an essentially media-powered operation, this therefore brought back into Europe the great T plan, on which the TAV project in Italy is based.

‘We are in Corridor 5’ is one of the expressions most commonly used by politicians and the press to justify this great project. It is worth reflecting on the meaning of this expression. The term ‘corridor’ is often used in transport – and military – parlance and there are some interesting considerations about the need for a ‘corridor’ policy (Priemus and Zonneveld, 2003). Each pan-European corridor is given either a dry, aseptic number, or it is referred to by exciting pictures of hyper-connectivity, even though the infrastructure actually being planned may have nothing like that sort of scope. This reasoning leads us to consider the symbolic dimension of the process of re-territorialization brought about when large-scale transport infrastructure is being planned. What lies behind this metaphor? A corridor is normally a transit area which has no intrinsic value other than the fact that it connects other spaces. Similarly, when we are furnishing the corridor in a house, we naturally tend to place only transit furniture (such as mirrors or coat hangers) in this space. These descriptions are never neutral, however, for they considerably influence the situation that they are themselves transforming.

The image of the corridor becomes extremely de-territorializing with regard to the community that is to live in the corridor and not just pass through it. One need only think of the concept of the ‘natural corridor’, traditionally used by a certain positivist branch of geography to describe the Alpine border valleys, thus attributing a natural function to one that is, on the contrary, symbolic, economic and political (Gregoli, 1999). Together with the metaphor of the corridor, which effectively represents a ‘territory of exchange’, the advocates have based the legitimation of their position on a formal vision of a ‘territory of jurisdiction’, and on the different scales on which planning takes place: EU jurisdiction for drawing up a trans-European strategy, forcing it all the way to the pan-European scale of the corridors; the international jurisdiction defined by the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC); national jurisdictions governed by their own rules and, to continue along these lines, the system of scalar jurisdictions and cross-scale linkups (such as the

national-regional conferences in Italy). The vision adopted by the advocates also includes a 'reference territory' of hyper-connectivity. This is clearly symbolized in the various diagrammatic maps submitted and, in particular, by that of distance-time. They are drafted on regional and local scales, placing the hubs of the network at the centre of the topological view of globalizing flows. The advocates' vision is clearly not limited to small-scale maps. Both in the surveys and studies carried out first by Alpetunnel and later by LTF, and in the illustrations of the plans at the regional, provincial and local levels, the Turin–Lyon line appears with a different, large-scale cartographic detail. The metaphors used by the advocates are basically the same, and yet on these scales – and especially those at the provincial and local level – we find details that are by no means secondary. In particular, the Province of Turin plays a significant role in producing a more complex vision of the territory. In drawing up a hypothesis for an alternative route, which again partly emerged during a conference in Grenoble at the beginning of April 2008, attention is drawn to the problem of passing through the Valle di Susa and arriving in Turin. In the first Alpetunnel-LTF plan, the new line actually bypassed Turin for freight transport, and thus cut out the intermodal hub in Orbassano, which entered service only after years of planning and colossal investments. The scale on which the territorial conformation is being planned is symptomatic, as is the fact that the planners of the link referred to as the Turin–Lyon should put off the fundamental issue of the hubs until a later date, since they should be the very justification for the project. Indeed the project itself might vary considerably as a result of this problem. So we thus find other possible routes on the regional and provincial levels, just as for a time it was pointed out that there was a risk of being cut off both from the east–west connections to the north of the Alps, and from other possible links with France, which were being promoted by the PACA (Provence-Côte d'Azur) region to the south, via Genoa. 'Outside the corridor' the imagine – and the imagination – is that of marginalization and a peripheral role for the territory. It is hardly surprising that the various versions we find in the planning documents – and especially in those of a strategic nature – all try to exorcise this risk by placing Turin and Piemonte at the geometrical centre of their illustrations.

Territorialization as seen by the opponents

Let us now examine the territorial notions of the No-TAV movement and how it represents them. The No-TAV movement consists of various components – both institutional (mayors, municipalities and mountain communities) and those belonging to a whole variety of environmentalist associations, specially constituted committees, and community centres. These components are not confined solely to the local dimension of Valle di Susa, for the movement has spread partly to the plains and partly to the nearby Val Sangone, and not solely as a reaction to their

involvement in one of the proposed projects. It has involved antagonists in the Turin area and, after the events of 2005, there has been a considerable mobilization of individuals and associations in various parts of Italy. In recent years, the movement has also managed to build up a network of relationships beyond and between local areas, and has even drawn up mutual assistance pacts which have meant that No-TAV members have been on the front line in Vicenza, as well as in Messina, Venice and Naples, in protests against the localization of large-scale infrastructure and plants considered to be devastating for the territory. This variety of actors and the wealth and strength of the movement, on the one hand, and its relative compactness and consolidation, on the other, both make us wonder if we might be in the presence of a similar plurality of points of view, scales of action, and observation. In other words, of rather diverse territorial representations or, on the contrary, if and to what extent there might be a common vision of the territory as a unifying and identifying element in the conflict. As we have seen, the pro-TAV positions reveal a picture of the Valle di Susa as a 'territory of exchange', when viewed from the broader perspective and from that of Europe in particular. It is seen as a transit route that is necessary for an essential linking up of the topological hubs in a European multimodal and rail network.

In general terms, we can see that, in opposing this view, the movement has an overall vision of the Valle di Susa as a place of great value, which has already been considerably compromised by previous invasions of infrastructure works and, as such, it should be defended against a new intervention from on high that is perceived and represented as devastating. It is seen as a sort of definitive defacement and death of the territory (Cancelli et al., 2006; Caruso, 2008). This contrast appears to be fairly predictable and obvious, and it can be traced back to more general and problematic network-flow debates as opposed to place-area debates, pitting the concept of the corridor-transit area against an everyday-life territory.

What alternative visions and territorial values are attributed to the Valle di Susa, and in what way have they become part of the fundamental motives and views of the movement? We need to make a distinction between 'endorsed values' (in other words, those that are institutionally recognized by laws, standards, and scenic, architectural and environmental regulations), and 'recognized values' which are accepted by public opinion, including the No-TAV movement. Like other mountain areas, the Valle di Susa has been the subject of several studies which have set out to rediscover and promote its historical, cultural, scenic and environmental heritage, both to strengthen its identity and with a view to developing a 'soft' form of cultural tourism.

However, if we examine the main 'propaganda' materials published by the No-TAV movement, we find that the explicitly recognized values are extremely few and far between. The analysis focuses on the significance of the works, on their presumed utility and the risks for the

territory and the population (asbestos, uranium, hydro-geological hazards, noise etc.). The opposition naturally emphasizes the risks and threats posed to the territory by the great infrastructure project, contesting expert super-local knowledge put forward by the design studies with a much more detailed topical knowledge which has gradually been accompanied by increasingly informed knowledge of transport issues. In doing so, the No-TAV movement appears to be able to formulate representations on different levels and to speak the language of the advocates, tackling them on the various levels of scale of the 'territory of exchanges' (see also Horowitz' and Knight and Greenberg's studies in this volume). What they contest is not just the feared local impact on health and the environment, but also the impact on transport and the economy on a larger scale. This brings into question the presumed flows of traffic, and the scenarios of supply and demand formulated to support the project, while also proposing full use of the existing line. Even without drawing up a cartographic overview, the movement is able to imagine the territory on other scales, going so far as to contest the cultural and development-based model that lies behind the project for the base tunnel, with processes of dematerializing the economy and, from various points of view, examining the benefits of 'propitious negative growth' (Latouche, 2009). This therefore shifts the movement from reactive defense of a particular territory towards the promotion of the territory and nature as a universal principle that calls for economic and political strategies and decision-making processes to be thought out afresh. Changing scale once again, while the advocates look at the valley with a cartographic eye from above, the movement offers large-scale visions. But there is more, for the advocates' vision (which is governed by the view of a 'corridor'), runs lengthways up and down the valley, moving between east and west, while the movement also sees across it, mentally moving along its own maps of everyday space, considering the mountainsides and the tributary valleys.

There are a number of different visions also within the No-TAV movement, but they have been tending to come together. While many No-TAV supporters see this as a fight to defend their own environment, this vision comes up against that of the community centres and other no-global movements, for which the territory of the Valle di Susa is a theatre of conflict between super-local interests led by a neo-liberal capitalist logic and strategies for local resistance. The same differentiation can be seen in a number of peripheral parts of the movement, with some tending to be of a general political nature and others more linked to defending the territory. From this point of view, the Valle di Susa is a hothouse of contradictions, resistance and active citizenship. Over the years, these visions have become increasingly intertwined, reinforcing a 'resistance identity', as Castells might say (2002).

Going deeper into the consciousness of the movement, as we can learn from some recent sociological surveys (Caruso 2008), nature and territory prove to be potentially fundamental resources for building up a collective identity. This has given the mobilization an eminently territorial nature. References to the territory are constant, but they reveal the fragmentation that is typical of present-day territorial affiliation, even in a territory like that of the Valle di Susa, which is viewed as objectively identifiable. Those who take part in the movement do not appear to have stronger roots or greater integration in local society than others in the valley who do not actively take part (Caruso, 2008: 354). Their relationship with the ‘everyday territory’ does not seem to be special in any particular way. Many of those in the movement live in the valley, but they go to or around Turin for work, and also for this reason the valley – on a more detailed scale than by those who are pro-TAV – is considered and represented as a transit area between home/dormitory and the workplace. The valley is perceived as ugly, or at least certainly not beautiful, and decayed, but this is generally considered to be the result of infrastructure overload, particularly in the form of the motorway. The TAV, according to the movement, would lead to the definitive and irremediable destruction of the territory. While everyday territory was not viewed positively, the valley, the natural environment and, especially, the mountains do indeed play a central role in the ‘reference territory’ for the movement, which has drawn up a whole range of symbols and iconography based on the mountain spirit of its people. It is a reference territory commemorated by the reconstruction of a local history that, over the centuries, has discovered that it ‘resists’ (against Barbarossa, against the French, with the Resistance, and throughout the heated period of the 1970s) and that finds in its historical and natural features a strong, recognized identity, which is also sought by those who come from ‘outside’.

In creating new identities of resistance, conflict leads to territorial production on different levels. No-TAV activists mark the territory with banners, murals and huge scripts that stand out on the sides of the mountains at the entrance to the valley (Figure 3). They take over the valley in a sensational manner with the *Compra un posto in prima fila* (Buy a front row seat) campaign, organizing a great network of associations and a number of pickets that become places for encounter, as well as for social and political interaction that goes beyond the conflict (see Ervin’s case study in this special issue). They write their own history (and have their own martyrs) and a geography (with the most symbolic places of the resistance: the free republic of Venaus, the battle of Seghino). This territorial identity is built up and reinforced in the conflict and in the concept of earning one’s right to citizenship in the valley – *Valsusini si diventa* – (Caruso, 2008) by sharing the core values of the movement even as outsiders. It was around the pickets that people rediscovered a desire to take part, and to share the social interaction of living places, escaping the alienation of

home-work-TV. This led to a new form of territoriality which meant the real outcome of the movement was not so much that it blocked the great TAV project, as that it discovered or reinvented a Valle di Susa that had not existed before.

CONCLUSIONS.

Despite environmental conflicts over infrastructures rely on binary, dichotomic juxtaposition such as proponents versus opponents, outsiders versus insiders, interpreting the No-Tav protest from a geographical and territorial(ized) standpoint can help in overcoming other, more pernicious, theoretical dichotomies such as place versus space (Entrikin, 1991; Merrifield, 1993; Agnew 2005; Cresswell, 2004; Wainwright and Barnes, 2009). Of course we cannot engage here with the broad debate concerning these main concepts in the history of geographical thought. Nevertheless, we believe that the French – and Italian – account of territory and the consequent reading of the Turin-Lyon conflict can work fruitfully to establish a link with the contemporary Anglo-American geographical debate on territory, place, scale, region and network (Marston et al., 2005; Paasi, 2002 and 2004; Jessop et al., 2008). First, we would like to argue that the narrative about environmental protest as place-related and infrastructure designing as more space-oriented is at least simplistic and misleading. Of course from our analysis of proponents' and opponents' discourses and representation it is quite evident that No Tav narratives are based upon a strong encounter between place and identity rather than simply on parochial, egoistic NIMBYism. From this perspective we share Devine-Wright conclusion that opposition to LULU should be interpreted as place-protective action in order to react and cope with a previous place-disrupting action (2009). Nevertheless, place-protection seems to reduce the meaning of protest to the defense a bounded space, as a resistance to the 'flat ontology' (Marston et al. 2005) of flows and networks, somehow enforcing the place versus space dichotomy. On the contrary, the analysis of the No Tav movement highlight that the protest arose from the awareness of the local environment as already disrupted, damaged and menaced by previous developmentalist narratives such as the massive Fordist industrialization of the 50s and 60s. According to the terminology we adopted, protesting and resisting is a territorialization act, establishing and pursuing a project about both place and space, engaging with power relationships at different scales and trying to modify them. Place, hence, is not perceived as an idyllic *status quo* to be preserved from disruptive modernization, but mainly as an offended space, carrying the stigma of the capitalistic production of space and, consequently, as a space for resistance which is political and not only psychological, behavioral or phenomenological as Devine-Wright seems to claim. Hence, No Tav movement does not barricade into places but it engages with

spaces, with their making and remaking. Such capability of moving beyond place is clear in the attempt legitimizing opponents' territorialization projects. In this process, an important role in leaving the Nimby syndrome behind was that of counter-arguments, or the study and revelation of equally legitimate *anti-TAV expertise* from professional, scientific, and academic points of view. The conflict of experts has involved two main areas of dissension. The first, which is of an ecological and environmental nature, insists on the lack of suitable environmental impact assessments and on the potential risk of releasing asbestos and uranium dusts present in the mountains in the course of the proposed excavations. Obviously, however, focusing the opposition exclusively on environmental issues may reveal itself to be a boomerang for the opponents if an assessment and/or modification of the proposed route should manifest the possibility of safeguarding the territory from the potential contamination. This is why anti-TAV expertise has rapidly focused on a second standpoint, i.e. economic issues, maintaining that the TAV would be useless as infrastructure and that the existing lines could sustain the development needs of railway traffic if improved (Bettini, 2006; Calafati, 2006; Giustizi, 2006). By this way, the opponents try to overcome the mere contestation of top-down expertise and to outline what Lolive and Tricot (2004) call an alternative *Alpine environmental expertise*.

Furthermore, speaking of the stakes in political terms, it becomes possible to shift from the negative dimension to the positive one, proposing an alternative narrative of *public welfare* in contrast to the one proposed by TAV advocates. The attempt to settle the local protest through a more general vision of the world and public welfare was, in fact, one of the great gambles of the movement to neutralize the Nimby syndrome, by also proposing a critique of the overall development model underlying the large infrastructure, in contrast to an economy that is increasingly dematerialized and that should be compared with the challenge of negative growth. This discussion plan intends to emphasize that this is the true modernity that the TAV advocates are not able to comprehend, in turn accusing the no-TAV activists of anti-modernism. Moreover, as we have seen, it is clear the adoption of networking as a strategy to move beyond NIMBYism, establishing supralocal connections and displaying behaviours which make No-Tav similar to other protest movements, such as People Global Action (Routledge, 2008). This strategy is evident in the decision to participate in public demonstrations and protests not directly related to the TAV project, ranging from violent opposition against the expansion of the NATO base in Vicenza to the protest march following the fire occurred in 2009 at the Thyssen factory, where two workers lost their life. The no-TAV website even contains news on the relationships that could be created with similar

groups against high-speed networks as far away as China, to emphasize the universality and global nature of their stance.¹³

The same applies to proponents' narratives. It is true that the various actors promoting and sustaining the TAV project convey an image of both Valle Susa and Europe as mere absolute space to be crossed, where spots have to be connected and networks to flow free of any constraint. As we pointed out, this is pretty clear in the use and abuse of the term 'corridor' in EU planning. Nevertheless, such discourses are never purely spatial in their understanding and persuasion. A strong account of proximity and place-making lies behind the emphasis on speed and hyperconnectivity, imagining a Europe as a place spanning from Lisbon to Kiev. At the local and regional level the space-centrism of the pro-TAV discourses is counterbalanced by other discourses emphasizing the need of such infrastructures in order to enhance regional competitiveness, assuming an holistic understanding of the region as a consistent and cohesive bounded place cooperating with and competing against other places with similar endowments (Bristow, 2010). Hence, also from the proponents' standpoint the issue is not really asserting the hegemony of space over place, but rather to enforce a peculiar territorialization project which cross several scales. For instance, the success of Lega Nord in Valle di Susa in the recent ballot vote for the regional government is quite meaningful. Despite the fact that Lega Nord has been promoting the first No Tav protests in the 80s, over the last years Lega Nord participated to the right-wing government which is particularly active in promoting infrastructure-led developmentalism and hence changed its position concerning the Tav, getting a more favorable attitude toward the project. In March 2010 Lega Nord has been successful in the election, negotiating conspicuous compensation in exchange of the consensus and above all linking such compensation to a broader narrative about the devolution of central government sovereignty on taxation and locally generated revenues and the transition to a federal Constitution.

In conclusion, we claim that looking at environmental conflicts through the prism of territorialization offers some useful insights into deconstructing the place-space dichotomy, drawing a more complex understanding of the interplay of fundamental geographical notions – such as place and space, but also network, territory and scale.

¹³ It is also worth noting the creation of the *Patto Nazionale di Solidarietà e Mutuo Soccorso* (National Mutual Solidarity and Aid Treaty) between the No-TAV and other groups fighting against large infrastructure projects, that defines itself as 'a tool to serve those who, in our country, fight to protect their territory against useless large public works and against the waste and ruin of environmental and economic resources' (<http://www.notavTurin.org/>, accessed on 20 February 2010).

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