Local Contention, Global Framing: The Protest Campaigns against the TAV in Val de Susa and the Bridge on the Messina Straits

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For a Twinning of NO TAV – NO BRIDGE:

For the sovereignty of inhabitants in places from the North to the South of Italy, there emerges a single struggle: moratorium on large-scale public works, abrogation of the framework legislation on public works; participatory programming on transport and infrastructure plans. We have affirmed and repeated that the peaceful revolt of inhabitants and their mayors in Val di Susa regards all those who love their territory, and in particular those who in recent years have opposed the realization of these useless and damaging large public works, from the TAV (‘high velocity trains’) to the Mose (flood protection system in Venice), to the Bridge on the Messina Straits. The coordinators of the ‘Rete No Ponte’ (‘Network No Bridge) and the Rete Meridionale del Nuovo Municipio (‘Southern Network for a New Municipalism’), both of which oppose the realization of the project of the Bridge on the Messina Straits, have in turn proposed a twinning programme with the ‘No Tav’ committee and the mayors of Val di Susa...The peaceful revolt of the inhabitants and the mayors of Val di Susa has placed the question of democracy and justice at the centre of political debate in Italy. That which has been frequently defined as a particularistic interest – whether of the community of Val di Susa or those that live within the area of the Messina Straits – is instead the expression of the sovereignty of populations that reside within that territory, who are re-claiming their legitimacy to decide own their own future and those of their children....What is happening today in Val di Susa is a question that concerns the whole nation, because in play here is the desirable model of development to be pursued. The struggle in Val de Susa is the same as the struggle against the Bridge on the Messina Straits, against incinerators, against nuclear plants; it is in line with those who are concerned at the signs of imminent environmental crisis in the world; of those who proposes a sober future and seek to make the most of limited resources; and of those who think that all mankind has the right to enjoy what the earth offers (DME17, 29/12/05).

* The interviews in Val di Susa have been led by Massimiliano Andretta and Eugenio Pizzimenti, who have also helped with the collection of newspaper articles and written documents.
1. Local conflict between interest and identity: a definition

The leaflet that publicises the alliance between the far North and the far South of Italy is signed by the network ‘No Ponte’, which unites various associations and committees from the area of the Messina Straits that are opposed to the construction of a Bridge between Calabria and Sicily. The twinning is proposed above all with the ‘No Tav’ committees in Val de Susa (close to the border with France), who oppose the construction of a 57km tunnel to allow the building of a new high-speed rail link. In this paper we will analyse these two conflicts relating to Locally Unwanted Land Use (LULU), discussing also the principal hypotheses from the sociological literature on local conflict, but also its relevance to the literature on global movements, within which some of these mobilizations can be located.

If the aggregation of needs and interests within a territory are certainly not a new phenomenon, in the early 1990s scholars’ attention has focused on new forms of local protest. Studies on the environmental movements have confirmed that while environmental organizations at national level have become institutionalized (to a greater or lesser degree), protests at local level have certainly not diminished (della Porta & Diani, 2003). These are however at least partly different to those protests in the 1970s and 1980s, in that a principal role in these protests is played by citizens committees, that is, organized but weakly structured groups formed by citizens that re-unite on a territorial basis and which prevalently use forms of protest to oppose interventions which they retain will damage the quality of life within their territory, or otherwise to demand improvements in their environmental surroundings (della Porta, 2005, 7).

The presence of these localized conflicts has frequently been perceived with alarm – above all when, in the beginning of the 1990s, there was an increase in protests against the installation of incinerators or mobile telephone masts, seen as obstacles to the realization of collective goods and a potential source of economic damage. With the demand for a ‘disinterested’ action, normally not applied to other collective actors, citizens re-united in committees have often been accused of being solely interested ‘in their own back yard’, and of masking this by an avowed preoccupation with natural or artistic heritage.

The LULU conflicts have been seen and recognized within the sociological literature primarily as NIMBY (‘not in my back yard’) protests, associated with conservative attitudes and motivated primarily by selfish resistance to social change. Above all in analyses on the production and implementation of public policy, with particular regard to the realization of collective goods, the objections at local level have been perceived as perfect illustrations of ‘free riderism’, that is, the refusal to pay the necessary costs for attaining collective goods. The citizens committees re-united at local level have in fact been defined as a “specific organizational form which accompanies the NIMBY syndrome” (Bobbio, 1999, 196), characterized by the “limited range of their requests and claims. They do not fight in favour of the ‘great causes’ in society, but to defend material interests that are very specific and restricted” (Buso, 1996, 197).

The concern over these types of ‘egotistical’ protests is accentuated by the fact that they are frequently successful in their aims. Concentrating on the threat (real or perceived) can
favour the aggregation of those who feel unfairly targeted and those who feel a strong sense of injustice, and when this is combined with a material threat, can even push some towards radical forms of protest. Above all, given the territorial structure of representation, these protests are often capable of achieving the support of local politicians. These may fear a loss of electoral support, and are then willing and able to press for a re-location of the “public bad”, pushing elsewhere the troubled question of allocation.

Precisely in view of these observations, a part of the research on the NIMBY syndrome has proposed procedural changes in the forms of involving citizens in decisions on the allocation of proposed infrastructures, especially those perceived to have a major environmental impact. The aim is to overcome the ‘but why here?’ syndrome (Bobbio et al., 1999) not only through transparency in decision-making, but also through a process of elaborating the criteria of attribution for LULU projects, which legitimizes the process of allocation through shared procedures, if not necessarily leading to commonly agreed outcomes. Among others, Lindblom (1980, 123) defined these processes as “those in which citizens choose for themselves, no matter how stupidly”.

On a different note, passing from the focus on ‘output’ to a focus on ‘input’, the LULU conflicts can be seen as expressions of different types of social movements (della Porta, 2003). As Chiara Sebastiani (2001, 111) has observed, the citizens committees which act at local level have a “hybrid character, half-way between interest groups and social movements, oscillating between lobbying activities and participatory actions”. From this point of view, such local mobilizations have been perceived as the exercise of active citizenship, expressions of resistance to projects of intervention which seek to mask their own particularistic interests as broader causes for the ‘common good’. In fact, “their horizon is not always particularistic” (Bobbio 1999, 198), and they appeal to universal values (William & Matheny, 1995, 183).

Even in the literature on social movements, local conflicts can be perceived as a threat, but also as a resource for democracy. On the one hand, it is argued that in cases where parties no longer function as mediators of consensus, or as intermediaries between the population and the government, there now emerges a tendency for citizens to organize themselves and campaign directly. Not forming part of more elaborate ideological discourses, this local mobilization of interests is often presented as particularistic and fragmented. However, these mobilizations do not express individual egotism but rather the action of ‘citizen-workers’, who by exercising their rights as citizens defend the quality of life within their community (Gould et al., 1996).

The transformation of forms of social movements can be derived from changes in the social structure present at the territorial level. In particular, it has been theorized that there is now an emerging conflict between ‘urban regimes’ (or growth machines), that is, informal/formal networks and agreements between public and private actors, that are primarily interested in economic development (Stone 1993, 3), and weakly structured coalitions of various types of groups that seek to resist change. In the United States as in Europe, the crisis of the welfare state has accentuated the territorial competition for economic resources, above private sources of investment (Thomas & Savitch 1991, 7). Coalitions of local politicians (interested in further electoral success), local business (interested in profit), public bureaucrats (interested in expanding their own autonomy),
would unite together to attract economic investment within the territory (Elkin, 1987, 36). These ‘urban machines for economic development’ (Logan & Molotch, 1987) would in fact tend to be controlled by business elites, in alliance with land and property owners, bankers, financiers, businessmen, local press, professionals, and are often supported in this by universities and cultural associations. They would tend to find most opposition in voluntary associations, which may see funds cut for social assistance to marginalized groups, or by organizations of local residents, who may perceive the projects of urban transformation as damaging. The increase in control by economic interests on public decision-making is thus contrasted by the development of movements that propose alternative models of development (Levine, 1989).

In such a perspective, it is important to underline the weak capacity for mobilization of diffuse interests within a community, which defend the rights and use of their respective territory, against the forces of economic interest, which privilege the value of exchange. It emerges from a comparative analysis of different forms of local conflict in the United States, that “all of these citizen-workers founds themselves locked out of processes, outmatched by other participants and unable to gain legitimacy for their concerns” (ibid., 164). In fact, “control over public awareness and over the political agenda still rests heavily in the hands of treadmill institutions” (ibid., 170) – i.e. local and extra-local developers and elected politicians that support large infrastructural projects.

A characteristic of both these strands of literature is to consider interests as exogenous. In our research we would instead seek to concentrate on definitions which the actors themselves give of the conflict – thus re-constructing the identity of the challengers. Previous research on territorial conflict has underlined that those who protest are able to overcome the NIMBY syndrome. The local committees which oppose the undesired use of their land in fact seek to adopt a rhetoric which distances them from accusations of particularism, shifting wherever possible from a local discourse to a global one. They respond to authorities that accuse them of opposing the common good for particularistic reasons by developing a ‘NOPE’ (not on planet earth) discourse (Trom, 1999). Often the generality of the conflict is affirmed by the use of a rhetorical procedure that defines their own activity as an opposition to the abuse of powers or the lack of transparency in the public decision-making process, in addition to attacking the collusive alliance between government and business (Gordon & Jasper, 1996). The sense of community, increased through the action, then offers to the activists a basis for belonging, facilitating solidarity and construction of an identity (Lichterman, 1996).

In our research we concentrated in particular on the transformations of local conflicts into incidents of global protests. As can be read in the leaflet on twinning No Tav and No Ponte, the rejection of large-scale public works tends to be linked to an alternative conception of how political decisions should affect the environment. As we will see, this definition of the protest emerges through cognitive conflicts on the definition of what is at stake. In this sense, we refer above all to the literature on ‘framing’. In our research we have (on the basis of the printed press, documentary evidence and interviews) re-constructed the ‘frames’ (or interpretative schemes) which “place the individual in a position to localize, perceive, identify and label events that occur in their daily life and more generally in the world”, allowing them to give meaning to their actions (Snow et al, 1986, 464). These frames permit them to attribute significant meanings to distant
phenomena, to identify social problems, but also to “propose solutions, hypotheses on new social assets, new forms of regulations and relations between groups, new procedures to develop consensus and exercise power” (della Porta & Diani 1997, 87). One of the accusations against the urban growth machine is that of considering economic growth as the primary objective, subordinating to this environmental concerns. Against these conceptions of development, in these local conflicts there emerge frames on the defen e of the environment, but also on the right to oppose large-scale public works presented as economic launch-pads, but which are perceived by residents as immediately pernicious to their quality of life. We will observe that the evolution of frames on local conflict occurs through a process of networking that allows them to overcome the discourse of risk for the community. This creates a process of contagion in action, through mechanisms of multiplying individual belonging and organisational networking, which facilitates the transformation of identity, frame bridging, and creation of binds of trust (della Porta & Mosca, 2006).

We will firstly present two periodizations of the campaigns under analysis, observing above all the stages of a process of amplifying and redefining the social basis of the protest (Part 2). We will then look at the effects of mobilization on the emergence and evolution of frames relating to the definition of the identity of the actor (Part 3), of the diagnosis and prognosis of the problem (Part 4), and finally the motivation of the action (Part 5). The design of the research is based on the binary comparison of two cases which have the common object of mobilization against public works, as well as a similar time-frame, which coincides with the development of the global justice movement. However, the two cases differ significantly in terms of the context of mobilization, particularly with regard to the social structure (the industrial North of the Val de Susa protest; the ‘backward’ South for the Messina Straits protest) and the political traditions (strong leftist subculture in Val de Susa; weak traditions of associationalism and protest in the Messina Straits). The confrontation between these different contexts will be primarily oriented towards highlighting common dynamics. The reconstruction of these two cases is based on three principal sources: printed press, analysis of documents and websites of the organizations which participate in the protests, and semi-structured interviews with activists.

2. Campaigning and networking: two periodizations

Local conflicts go well beyond the mobilization of pre-defined interests. In fact, the definition of the prize of the game follows a process of aggregation of protest beyond the initial actors whose frames (environmental and local) contaminate with other discourses, in a network that is always more cross-issue and supra-local. This is what occurs in our two campaigns, with a progressive extension of the territorial dimension of the mobilization.

Beginning with the No Tav campaign, three principal time-periods can be identified. The protest begins upon the emergence of the first information on the decision to build a high speed rail network. In 1990, concurrently with the foundation of a Committee to promote the High Speed Torino Lyon rail link (presided by Umberto Agnelli, one of the owners of Fiat, and by the then president of the Piemonte region, Bertrami), Coordination of
environmental associations (that had already mobilized in the valley against the construction of a highway and an electrod) criticized the project (IVS5). Thus begins a very long phase of incubation of the protest, marked by initiatives to inform the affected population by the environmental groups Habitat (founded by Legambiente, WWF and Pronatura), and organized weekly meetings involving citizens of Val di Susa, environmental activists and counter-experts (IVS5). Almost immediately, the mobilization from below finds support in the local institutions—from the mayors of the involved towns and the Comunità Montana (mountainous community) of the lower Val di Susa. In addition to numerous conferences and public assemblies, some more innovative forms of protest emerged, among them the reproduction in public of the sounds produced by a high-speed train, and the gigantic lettering ‘No TAV’ placed on the top of one of the mountain surrounding the valley.

It is above all from 2000 that the mobilization grows, in first place in the valley: in January there is a No Tav procession in Turin, followed by hunger strikes, photographic displays, No Tav parties, but also a blockade in October 2002 of the tunnels of the Frejus and the Monte Bianco. From 2003, even the least sympathetic press to the protest begins to recognize the capacity of No Tav to mobilize the local community, involving all the different social actors present in the valley. In a 3 hour march on the 30th May 2003 (with a symbolic occupation of the streets and highways of Bussoleno), among the 20,000 participants are priests and park wardens, 50 Coldiretti tractors, and the local policemen that carry the banners of the 40 mayors at the head of the procession. The CUB union mandates a strike in the schools, even if the confederal (official) unions do not take part. The music of the bands from the countryside mixes with those of the young people from the social centres, and the drum-beating of children from the elementary schools (R 31/5/03). At the end of 2003, on the local pages of La Republica the No Tav are described as characterized by a thousand voices, of teachers, housewives, pensioners and workers. This image of transversal protest will successively remain: the blockades of the sites where the first drillings are planned, on the 30th October 2005, hit the national pages of La Repubblica, which describes them as a “random and slightly improbable army”, “a protest of people composed of entire families”, of peaceful pensioners and young people (R 1/11/05).

The capacity to hold together such different groups of people is underlined by the No Tav activists: “It has been possible thanks to the contribution of everyone, making enormous strides in the reciprocal knowledge, but also a step back by everyone when we needed to develop common positions that were often restricted due to diverse and not always coinciding motivations” (Margaira 2005, 39). This slow process of gaining consensus is described as being favoured by an intensification of communication and the interaction in the course of the mobilization. At the beginning, local public administrators and committees “stuck together especially because the one needed the other. The committees to understand what was happening and the politicians to understand what to do and with whom to do it” (ibidem, 138). However, the coordination of the protests remains flexible. As an activist noted, “at first via e-mail we managed to create a primitive but efficient form of Coordination of the committees and associations opposed to the Torino-Lyon line, later we organized officially with frequent, periodic meetings. Then we managed to transfer data, concepts, knowledge, organizing everything methodically through websites... Internet allowed us to realize things that were unthinkable until a short while
ago. But what we have done till now passed first from the heart then to the reciprocal confrontation, always” (ibidem, 63).

If the No Tav actions remained for a long time mainly in the valley and concentrated on the theme of defence of the environment, already in 2000 there can be seen consolidated contacts with collective actors mobilized on different themes, as well as with actors external to the valley. As a journalist observes: “This movement, at first isolated, from a certain point aroused great interest from people that were at first uninvolved”, with “an always more lively coming together between its diverse components, which in turn had a contagion effect on the institutions, the committees” (IVS6). First of all, new groups, beyond those of local residents and environmental associations joined, and the protestors became more and more networked. The protest, defined by the local press as “noisy” and “colourful”, in occasion of a meeting at the Royal Palace in Turin on the 30th of January 2000, already re-unites a broader range of actors. Beyond 27 mayors from the lower valley, there are present squatted social centres, the farmers’ union Coldiretti, the “critical” union Cobas, Legambiente, the Green Party, the Refounded Communist Party (PRC), the Party of the Italian Communists (PdCI), as well as to French activists from the Franco-Italian Committee against TGV projects. Above all, contacts become visible with the globalization movements. The petition of Legambiente Val di Susa against the Tav: “Because the Tav is not an improvement of services, but a colossal lie of figures and information”, was signed by one of the most visible figures of the globalization movement, father Alex Zanotelli, already involved in the actions of solidarity with the South of the world (R 3/11/02). Similarly, another charismatic figure of the global justice movement Don Vitaliano della Sala supported the protest, stating that “it is not possible to make develop massive projects on the skin of the people and against the will of civil society and local administrations” (R 8/12/05). In this process, the theme of the Tav begins to intertwine with social themes. For example, in 2002 banners against the Tav are brought to a procession of solidarity with the workers of Fiat, to which 70,000 participants take part, representing local institutions, unions, environmentalists, girotondini anti-smog associations and movements of the inhabitants of the Val di Susa against the high-speed trains (R 23/11/02). In general, the discourse tends to extend itself: from the presentation of the electoral List ‘No Tav- let’s defend the future’ at the 2004 provincial elections, to the protests organized by unions, political parties, social centres and No Tav committees against the presentation of candidates by a group entitled “Fascism & Liberty” (R 23/5/04; R 31/5/04).

In this phase, the mobilization is also promoted by the local committees, rooted in the territory, even with different characteristics. As an activist of the Askatasuna social centre that is involved in the valley remembers: “After the formation of the first committee of popular struggle in Bussoleno, spontaneous committees were born in every town and village in the valley, formed spontaneously by citizens, public administrators and activists” (IVS1). Together with the committees focused on the theme of the high-speed trains (‘Comitato control il Tav di Venaus’; ‘Comitato almesino No-Tav’) there can be

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1 Literally, those who play ‘ring-a-ring’, it refers to a form of protest used in a wave of protest against what was considered as an attack against the Constitution by the center-right Berluconi’s government; the protestor, that also criticized the moderation and inefficacy of the center-left opposition, encircled symbolic places such as Justice Palaces, schools or the public broadcasting headquarters.
added those more political (like the ‘Comitato pianazzese contro il G8’, or ‘Spinta dal Bass’) (R 3/12/03). At the same time, with the intensification of institutional decisions on the Tav, the activism of the institutional Committee of mayors and the mountainous community in turn also intensifies.

At the beginning of 2005, with the decision of the authorities to effect the first checks on the territory in spite of the opposition of the mayors and the two mountainous communities (of the higher and the lower valley), a third phase emerges characterized by a protest which increasingly goes beyond a local dimension. In the words of an interviewee, “there we realized that people were much more involved than before; there was not just the usual people...and people began to get angry, you couldn’t stop them any more, they began to occupy roads and highways: the people, not the associations” (IVS5).

On the 20th March of that year, the mayors of 37 communes brought their protest to Turin, convoking their communal councils in the open air in Piazza Castello. In the march from Susa to Turin (3 and a half kilometers) on the 3rd of June 2005, among the twenty thousand participants were 40 mayors, the metallurgic workers of the Fiom-Cgil and the farmers of the Coldiretti; the environmental association Legambiente, WWF, Pro Natura, Italia Nostra; one of the largest left-wing association, the Arci; political parties such as PRC and the Greens, young people from school collectives and squatted social centres, activists of the social forums and 15 priests (R 2/6/05; 5/6/05). Mayors and young people from the social centres, but also committees from other parts of Italy (such as the tuscan Mugello), are also present in the blockades which will oppose, from the beginning of June, the burrowing of the earth (for which there is foreseen a tunnel 10 kilometres long and 7 metres wide) in the 3 communes of Borgone, Bruzolo and Venaus (R 31/10/05). It is with the blockades – and the debate, the parties and the meetings- that the protest in Val di Susa is transformed more visibly into an action against large-scale public works, even with banners against the high speed train in Tuscan Mugello and the Bridge on the messina strait (R 2/11/05).

Above all, the violence of the police intervening to unseat the occupants on the 1st of Novemeber will give a national dimension to the protests in the valley. Attention will remain focused in the successive days, characterized on the one hand by the presence of what the No Tav will define as the ‘militarisation’ of the valley, with the organizations of blockades by the police forces, and a series of rail and road blockades by the No Tav. On the march of the 16th November 2005, when “teachers, farmers, priests, bankers, students” repeat “we are demonstrating to defend our way of life” and re-occupy the places emptied out by the police, among the 50,000 participants a fifth were said to represent “a type of front against large-scale public works that have joined from all over Italy” (R 17/11/05). In the general strike of the 25th November 2005, there will also participate environmentalists and social centres, unions and Fiom, priests and Coldiretti – “Lega Nord and Democratic Left (Ds) supporters, priests and anarchists: the faces of a movement without a leader” (R@@ ) – with a projection of the protest at national level. It is not a coincidence that on the No Tav website (www.No-Tav.it) it can be read that in November “the confines of the valley have expanded and many people from all over Italy participated”. The month of November closes in fact with a ‘white night’ organized by Turinese students to protest simultaneously against the Tav and the re-organisation of the educational system proposed by the minister Letizia Moratti.
In December, the No Tav protest (according to the little sympathetic newspaper La Repubblica) spreads out over Italy. On the 7th December there is a manifestation outside La Scala of Milan, with the Nobel Prize winner and actor Dario Fo. On the 8th December – while 30,000 protestors march in the valley from Susa to Venaus and block streets, highways and railways – in Palermo there is a No Tav demonstration at the train station; the train platforms are blocked in Naples (“no tav, no incinerators let’s unite the rebellion”); disobedients, social centres and other bases organizations protest outside the seat of the regional television in Bologna; in Mestre there is an irruption at the headquarters of a firm involved in the tunnel construction, the Rtf, and manifestations take place in Florence and Genoa (R 8/12/2005). At the same time, a No Tav committee is formed in Turin with the participation of the former local councillor Paolo Hutter, the secretary of Fiom, of the Cub union, and the europarlamentarians near to the global justice movement, Chiesa and Agnoletto (R 8/12/05).

With regard to the demonstration of 17th December in Turin (50,000 people according to the organizers, 30,000 according to the police), La Repubblica writes that “the change is in the organized participation of the Italian movements”; “the many No’s of the peninsula: Sicilians opposed to the bridge, citizens of Acerra opposed to the incinerator; the No Tav committees of the Mugello” (R 18/12/2005). Thereafter, the Olympic flame will be contested by slogans against the Tav in various cities in Italy, and the headquarters of CMC, the company responsible for the digging in Val di Susa, occupied (R 19/12/05). After a national protest in Turin on the 17th December, the president of the mountainous community affirms that “the protest gave us greater strength”, while the President of the Piemonte Region, Mercedes Bresso of the Democratic Left (Ds), sustains that the No Tav “are now weaker because it has become a noglobal battle” (R 19/12/05). It is above all in the last two months of 2005 that manifestations of solidarity take place in Puglia (where the No Tav struggle is connected to actions against new highways and gas pipelines) and in Trieste (where the Corridor 5 of the High Speed Railway is planned to be built).

Even the transnational dimension of the protest is gradually growing in strength. Contacts with the French committees in the interested territories on the Turin-Lyon line are present from the start. For example, in September 2002 at the party of ‘Radio black out’ against the Tav, there are debates between the committees and French environmentalists (R 21/9/02). In October of the same year, during the anti-Tav blockade of the Frejus tunnel, for half an hour around 200 protestors simultaneously block the Monte Bianco tunnel in protest at the reopening of the tunnel to heavy goods lorries (R 6/10/02).

It is above all in the final phase that the protest becomes more explicitly directed at the European institutions. In February 2004, a delegation of Val di Susa politicians goes to Brussels for an audition in the European Parliament, to explain that European environmental regulations have not been respected (R 18/2/04). According to an activist, “It is evident that if Chiamparino, Bresso, Ghigo and Lunardi [national and regional administrators] sought frequently to obtain funding for the project from the European Parliament, even we should go to Brussels as soon as possible” (Margara 2005, 90). At the picketing of Venaus there are present also French mayors that oppose the project (R 29/11/05). Mayors from across the Alps opposed to the Tav and in favour of strengthening existing rail lines are presented at the procession of the 18th December (R 18/12/05). A delegation of the petitioning commission of the European Parliament are present in the valley during the pickets. The Cardinal of Turin asks to reopen dialogue,
“and asks that the European Union guarantees to mediate between the two sides” (R 8/12/05).

It was in this period, between the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006, that the No Tav struggle and the No Ponte one weld together, beginning from the proposal for twinning from the Rete No Ponte and the Rete Meridionale Nuovo Municipi (RMNN) to the No Tav committees (DME17, 29/12/05), the participation of a Sicilian and a Calabrian delegation on the 16th January 2006 in Condove (Val di Susa) at the Public Forum ‘Solidal Municipal Federalism, for Val Susa, for a Sustainable Development, for the Defence and the Life of the Valley’, and the considerable presence of No Tav committees in the national demonstrations against the Bridge on the Messina Straits (22nd January 2006). This presence is emphasized by the national and local newspapers: “Against the Bridge ten thousands are in procession. Direct links between the protestors and the No Tav militants of the Val di Susa” (R 23/1/06); “in 15,000 against the Bridge and the Tav” (GaS 23/1/06) “And in Messina is born the Bridge of No” (Si 23/1/06).

Even with regard to the No Ponte campaign, we can identify three principal phases. In the second half of the 1990s begins the informational campaign against the bridge. In October 1997, during the Higher Council of the Ministry of Public Works, the Prodi centre-left government approves (even with a number of reserves) the project for the bridge presented by the group “Stretto di Messina” s.p.a. (SdM). This decision was supported by a press campaign led by the main local newspapers, including “La Gazzetta del Sud” of Messina, whose director is also the President of SdM. In opposition, between 1997 and 1998 a committee of intellectuals and Calabrian university professors gathered together and formed “Between Scilla and Cariddi”, to which adhere the Greens, PRC and the main environmental organizations both national (Legambiente, WWF, Italia Nostra) and local, which appealed among others to UNESCO “for wisdom to prevail”, asking that the United Nations take responsibility for protecting the area of the Messina Straits.

The real beginning of the protest campaign only occurs in the spring of 2002, with the mobilization of citizens committees, social forums, social centres, environmental organizations and local parties opposed to the Bridge. That is, only a few months after the approval (in December 2001), of the so-called ‘Legge Obiettivo’ (Law n. 443/01) in which the bridge becomes defined as a strategic infrastructural project by the Berlusconi centre-right government. In May 2002 the citizens committees of Messina ‘La Nostra Città’ (Our City) promotes a petition against the construction of the Bridge (DME2). In the first week of July, the MSF) organizes the first ‘national camp against the bridge’, which ends in a procession on the Sicilian coast of the Straits, while concurrently the ‘Coordinamento Calabrese control il ponte’ and the social centre ‘Cartella’ of Gallico (RC), promote a series of symbolic and informational initiatives on the Calabrian coast.

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2 SdM spa was established in 1981, with the scope of finding way ways to carry out the Bridge on the Messina Straits. It was owned by IRI (majority share-holder), ANAS, FF.SS., Sicily and Calabria Regions. IRI (Istituto di Ricostruzione Industriale) was a state-owned entity, as were in those years ANAS and FF.SS, which managed the Italian highways and rail networks.

3 Scylla and Cariddi are the points of the Calabrian and Sicilian coastline at delimit the Straits of Messina, and whose names refers to monsters who (according to Greek myth) guarded the passage of boats between the two sides of the Straits.
In the words of an activist of the Rete No Ponte, the origins of the mobilization is explained: “Four years ago, we, a series of people then belonging to the Messina Social Forum, organized the first camp against the bridge in Messina. On this initiative we immediately launched an opening message which was received, at first by the Calabrians, who already had a coordination which became always more structured” (IME4).

Unlike Val di Susa, it can be noted here that the actions against the Bridge on the Messina Straits tend to almost immediately involve cross-issue actors that bring it beyond the theme of environmental protection. In fact, the presence of the Messina Social Forum, born as other local social forums after the experience of the Genoa Social Forum (which formed part of the organized the protest against the G8 summit in July 2001), together with the Green Party, PRC and environmental organizations, makes this quite quickly a cross-issue protest, and extends itself to actors that are concerned with other themes, beyond solely the defence of the environment. Other significant steps occur in November 2002, with the participation of activists and organizations No Ponte at the European Social Forum in Florence, and in March 2003 the acceptance of the proposal to realize an international camp against the bridge, a proposal presented by MSF, Coordinamento Calabrese and the Rete Sud Ribelle (RSR). The camp was held, together with two protests via ferry between Messina and Villa San Giovanni (RC), on the two sides of the Straits between the end of July and the beginning of August 2003 (DME3; DME6), even if the initiative only finds space in the local press and on “Il Manifesto”, newspaper close to the critical Left (GaS, M, Si 25-24/7/03). The discourse of No Ponte extends itself immediately: not only defence of the environment, but also requests to modernize infrastructure according to principles of eco-compatibility, “of essential services such as Water, Education and Public Research, Health, valuing human, historical, anthropological and environmental resources, through policies that permit the socialization and redistribution of income” (DME3). Therefore, the battle against the bridge becomes very quickly inserted (by a relevant part of its supporters) into the framework of a more general struggle against neo-liberal globalization. “The movement against the bridge in a consistent way is linked to the wider struggle against neo-liberal globalization, obviously with different procedures and accents, as this ‘phantomatic’ non-global movement welcomes such heterogeneity” (IME4).

Beyond social forums, environmental associations and political parties, the mobilization is also promoted by local committees who, within the area of the Straits, present different characteristics: if ‘Tra Scilla e Cariddi’ is formed ad hoc for the battle against the Bridge (DME1), the committee ‘La Nostra Città’ in Messina was already active in campaigns for improving the quality of life for citizens and issues relating to traffic congestion, in particular the crossing of the lorries (Tir). In the same way as the No Tav activists, the No Ponte ones see different people and their political experiences intertwined in various organizational initiatives and campaigning practices: “Since we, as Messina Social Forum, organized the first camp against the bridge, there has effectively been a coupling of forces, where before many actors, associations, environmentalist and others, developed their own autonomous mobilization campaigns against the bridge, these slowly became intertwined” (IME4).

The protest intensified in conjunction with the public decisions on the bridge. At the beginning of 2003, the SdM group approved the new preliminary project for an
unfounded 3,300 metre bridge, with a new Study of Environmental Impact (SIA). In response, during the month of March the Coordinamento Calabrese, the MSF and the RSR, re-launched their mobilization with continuous initiatives, including a march between Villa San Giovanni (RC) and Messina, and the diffusion of the ‘Counter-valuation’ to the SIA, produced by the environmental organizations. The No Ponte mobilization connects itself more generally to the campaigns against large-scale public works, through the participation of activists and organizations from Sicily and Calabria in the national protest in Verona on the 24th October (DME5). An activist confirms: “Certainly the link with the movement against large-scale public works is obvious, from the moment that we say that we are not egotists and we only want to save our own territory, but that the No Tav struggle is also ours, as is the struggle against the incinerators etc.; the problem is that the model which imposes these large-scale public works need to be re-considered, in order to keep up with the times” (IME4).

In 2004, both the public decision-making and the protest movement gather pace. On the 11th March, the European Parliament approves an amendment that excludes the Bridge from the 30 priority works for the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). If on the one hand, the public works Minister Lunardi assures us that the “building sites will be open by 2005”, on the other side the Greens (led by Pecoraro Scanio), claim the vote in Strasbourg is a victory of the Centre-Left, and the Ds (led by D’Alema) interpret it “as a confirmation of the feeling that the project does not have a secure basis” (Me 13/03/04). The European governments confirm, however, that the Bridge should be among the priority projects of the TEN-T (R 13/3/04), and even the European Parliament on the 21st of April rejected on its Second Reading the procedural amendment approved on the 11th of March. In parallel, the protest itself moves to the European level. From the 17th to the 25th of July, the MSF organized their 3rd Meeting against the Bridge in Torre Faro (ME), with assemblies, meeting-debates and a cycle of seminars on various themes: international voluntary work, fair trade and critical consumption, de-militarisation of Sicily, new municipalism and participatory democracy, mafia and large-scale public works, and abolition of the CPT.4 In the first week of August in Villa San Giovanni-Cannitello (RC) there is held the 3rd Camp of the struggle, the second that is international, organized by the ‘Coordinamento Meridionale contro il Ponte’ (Southern Coordination against the Bridge), with assemblies, concerts and initiatives on the territory, some of which are symbolic, such as surrounding with red and white tape the buildings that are to be demolished to allow construction of the Bridge. On the 6th August, there is a protest in Messina and on the 7th one in Villa San Giovanni; despite the fact that the Commune of Messina had invited the shop-owners to close for fear of violence during the procession, there are no incidents. The experience of the ‘Campeggio’ (camp), to which a thousand people participated, is valued positively by the organizational Coordinators. The transnational dimension also emerges in the area of the Straits, not only with the active presence of No Ponte in the European Social Forum of Florence in 2002, but above all with the organization of two international camps in the summers of 2003 and 2004, and the participation of numerous activists coming from other countries.

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4 CPT are the Centres for Temporary Accomodation, where illegal immigrants that are caught are then enclosed. These are located mainly along the Italian coast-line (particularly in Sicily).
It is above all from the 8th December 2004, when a National March against the Bridge takes place in Messina, that the protest leaves its initial phase characterized by symbolic and informational actions conducted by a few hundred activists, to enter into a popular mobilization which involves a good part of the citizens in the area of the Straits and which, for the first time, is also reported on by the national press (Ansa, Io, L, R, S 9/12/04). In fact, the procession is around 1km long, and 10,000 people participate, among which members of political parties and environmental organizations, social movements, committees and ordinary students and citizens. A coffin is carried on which it is written “With the Bridge, Messina is Dead”. From this moment the protest is characterized, according to some activists, by “a wider and more transversal social base, which goes from medium-high to medium-low social categories” (IME3); in fact, “the social and generational basis the movement involves everyone, from nursery to 80-90 years, from the fishmonger to the magistrate, from the teacher to the student, from the shop-owner to the doctor. A movement that is absolutely heterogeneous and amongst other things, varies from right to left” (IME1).

The mobilization intensifies again in 2005 – the year in which the tender is put out for the selection of a General Contractor, and 2006 is set as the date for starting the works. On the 12th of March in Messina and Reggio Calabria there are demonstrations, promoted by Legambiente, Italia Nostra and WWF, to protest about the 100 million euros per year that is levied on Railway tickets in order to finance the Bridge, on the basis of a Convention agreed with the Government and the SdM spa (R, 12/3/05; S 7/3/05). Thousands of people participate in the march and the sit-ins; an hen made of papier mache is unveiled to symbolize the construction of the Bridge as “an enormous hen with golden eggs that will be exploited as much as possible” (U 13/3/05). On the 5th of June, during an assembly there is constituted the ‘ReteNoPonte2005’. On the 16th of July, there occurs in the waters of the Straits of Messina a nautical manifestation entitled “wave upon wave, for the Straits against the Bridge”, and organized by WWF. Around 150 boats, around a large ‘feluca’ (the traditional boat with which sword-fish is caught), cross the Strait departing from Cannitello (Calabria) to Torre Farro (Sicily), where the pylons of the bridge should be built. At the same time as a local procession organized by ReteNoPonte2005, there is a ‘24 Hours non-stop oratorical Marathon against the project of the Bridge on the Straits’, organized by Legambiente, in which representatives of associations, groups, movements and citizens alternate without pause, to repeat the reasons for NO to the Bridge. On the 6th of August, in full summer, over 8000 people participate in the 4th National Procession against the Bridge, through the streets of the centre of Messina, organized by ReteNo Ponte2005 (Si 7/8/05). The political and environmental organizations under-write a final document to launch new forms of struggle next autumn and they announce they will block the building sites in case works begin (DME13).

On the 22nd January 2006 in Messina, 20,000 people participate in the manifestation ‘To defend the Strait’, launched by ReteNo Ponte. Beyond the presence of the main environmental associations, with their national leaders, there are almost all the parties of

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5 To this network adhere: Arci, Cobas, Comitato Scilla e Cariddi, Cub, Cartella social centre, Laboratorio contro il Ponte, Legambiente Sicilia, Legambiente Villa S.Giovanni, Messina Social Forum, Movimento Nonviolento, PRC, Verdi Messina, Sud Antagonista.
the centre-left, social movements, committees, social centres and groups which have been fighting for years against the bridges, as well as the participation of two mayors of Messina and Villa S. Giovanni (Genovese and Cassone, both Centre-Left) and above all a considerable group of protestors (around 400) from the No Tav movement in the Val di Susa, as a result of the twinning proposal. The protest is given considerable coverage in the local and national press, both on the television news and the main newspapers, which emphasize the extremely varied political and social composition of the protestors. On the pages of La Repubblica, in addition to the parties and mayors are also displayed the “environmentalists, families, mothers with buggies, schools and scouts, which march from Piazza Cairoli to the Council, but also magistrates…” (R 23/1/06); La Sicilia newspaper emphasizes the ‘tectnicolour’ aspect of the procession “There is the yellow of Legambiente. There is the green of Wwf. Then there is the red of the youth Left, but also the darker red of Pdci and Rifondazione Comunista. And the red and black banners with a large anarchic ‘A’ in the centre. Young people from the social centres, various environmentalists and others. It sees children meet their parents in the square and march together’ (Si 23/1/06).

In what follows we will analyse the effects of progressive anlargment of the networks of the two protest campaigns on the definitions of those who protest, and the reasons and the motivations for protesting. As a No Tav activist observes, “the richness of the movement is above all in this, in the capacity, not only ours but of the people, to succeed in finding a new way to stay together, even in their diversity” (IVS1). As we will see, the widening of the social base for mobilization is reflected in the tensions, typical in the LULU protests, between local identities and global frames; between the defence of the environment and the achievement of common goods; between claims to administrative decentralization and demands for participation from below.

2. Framing the Identity: Between Localism and Community

A fundamental element for mobilization is the definition of the identity of those who protest: the ‘us’. The identity component specifies the characteristics of the aggrieved people who share interests and values, so defining the “us” and the “them” (Gamson 1988). The definition of the identity comes prior to the definition of the interest, in as far as preferences are constructed by a symbolic process. Only if I define my own identity, am I able to name my long-term interest (Pizzorno 1993). In local conflicts a tendency often emerges between the increasing solidarity at the level of the local community (stigmatized in the NIMBY syndrome) and the search for external allies.

A central theme in the discourse of local opposition to large-scale public works regards in fact the territorial radius of the contention. The local dimension is stigmatized by supporters of large-scale public works as egotistical. In such a manner, referring to the opposition to the Tav in Val di Susa, the centre-right minister for the Environment, Matteoli, speaks of the “egotism of an instrumentised protest” (R 4/11/05) and the Centre-Left president of the Piemonte regional government, Mercedes Bresso, repeats that “the interest of the few cannot prevail over those of the many” (R 27/11/05), “the important thing is that we overcome the ‘I don’t want it in my back yard’ syndrome: it brings us nowhere” (R 20/11/05). Similarly with regard to the protests against the Bridge,
the minister Matteoli declares that “everybody needs the bridge” and that “the protest is brought by sectoral interests, such as environmentalists or strictly localized groups”, and that “it does not change by a millimetre the nature of the question or our decision to proceed” (GaS 23/1/06).

Defined as localist, those who contest large-scale public works frequently underline a communitarian aspect to their defence of limited territory, which is suffering from external aggression. In the No Tav protests at the start of 2000, the slogans concentrated on the valley: “A train every 3 minutes, goodnight Valdesusans”, “We want to grow with the green of our valley”, “Church of Susa, help us. Tell us the truth”. The first objective of the mobilization is to “save the valley” (R 30/1/00). Still in 2005, the leaflet of the coordination of the committees of Val di Susa that calls the presidio (picket) for the 3rd of October appeals “for the CMC to be opposed and all those who want to destroy Val di Susa” (DVS1).

As in Val di Susa, also in the Messina Straits, there is a communitarian dimension to the defence of a territory perceived as being under attack; in fact, since the first appeal to the Committee “Tra Scilla e Cariddi”, in June 1998, “That wisdom may prevail”, beyond the definitive cancellation of the Bridge project they also ask UNESCO “to assume under its protection the area of the Messina Straits, in such as it is an intangible good and the heritage of humanity” (DME1). Such a dimension to the protest remains unaltered in spite of the long campaign; the ultimate appeal of the large demonstration in Messina (22 January 2006) ends with: “Everyone in Messina to defend the Straits”, a place which is considered by the promoters to be “unique in the history and the culture of the Mediterranean, which must be defended from interventions whose impact would be irreversible” (DME18).

In effect, the campaign against large-scale public works leads to a re-definition of the identity of the community. In the Tav protests it can be observed that during the course of the action, it is “as if an always denied Val di Susa identity is emerging…the valley is rediscovering its soul” (R 14/7/05). This dimension of community is underlined by activists- “All united, without educational, economic or political barriers, or municipal divisions” (Margaira 2005, 37).

In the course of the protests there emerges in fact a positive definition of community, which has historical, political and cultural specificities (della Porta, 2005). Significant in the definition of local identity is the reference to the partisan history of Val di Susa-the president of the mountainous community talks of a “valley with a history. Here were the partisans” (R 9/12/05); the Valsusa filmfest of 2003 concentrates on the partisan memory (R 18/4/03); at the No Tav demonstration of June 2005 a funereal monument in the Val Cenischia is inaugurated, paying homage to the partisans (5/6/05). The partisan past is often evoked by testimonies of the will to ‘resist’ of the inhabitants of Val di Susa. One of the mayors of the valley (in office for 28 years) remembers: “I was a member of the 42nd Garibaldi Brigade. My motto is ‘resist now and for always’. Yesterday against the Nazi occupation, today against the diggers”. During the blockade by the police forces, the Mayor of Mompantero affirmed that “I am here to ask for solidarity for our little village. The first to be anti-fascist, the first to be occupied” (R17/11/05). The activists, which take up the picketing with the slogan “Suma torna si” and “La Val di Susa resiste”, remember the 8th of December 1943 exactly in the valley where the partisan Resistance was born (R
9/12/05). The partisans are recalled in the logo within the No Tav banner; in particular “the old man with the closed fist has been invented by the committee of Bussoleno and remembers the grandfather who fought in the Resistance and who shouted ‘You will not pass here’ (IVS4).

Less felt that in Val di Susa, also for historical and geographical reasons, the identity of the community is also present in the area of the Messina Straits. Not only are frequent appeals and references made to the Italian Mezzogiorno (South), to the notion of being southern, but the activists also talk of the “opposition of the people of the Straits”, making reference to past battles against the carbon-fuelled reactors in Calabria (DME21). The communitarian dimension of protest is recognised, among others, by the secretary of the PRC (Fausto Bertinotti), who affirms that “nowadays many problems do not pass through party channels, they quickly pass straight into the communitarian dimension, they grow through parishes, neighbourhoods and squares. We must confront ourselves with this phenomenon of community” (R 7/11/05).

The reference to community however presents the risk of isolation, if conceived in an exclusive sense. In the course of mobilization, the search for alliances with externals brings about a process of “bridging” between local and global identity. It is the same people that oppose the Tav which underline a change in the frames during the evolution of the protest, with a progressive widening of the horizon beyond the valley. According to an activist, “it is true that the initial opposition to the Tav was at times simplistic and even egotistical: ‘they will throw me out of my house, they will make me leave the valley, how much value will my house lose?’. Then as administrators and citizens, we understood that we needed less simple arguments that would support our initial opposition. So we found some experts, university professors, who confirmed to us what we feared. The damage from the noise of a high speed train, for example, or those following from years and years (20 those planned) of vans in our streets. And dust, traffic and pollution”. In fact, instrumental frames leave the way to ethical ones. An activist observes that “this is not a party question, nor only an environmental one, it has become an ethical and moral question, but we at first did not realize that” (Margaira 2005, 118).

During the campaign, “when we clearly understood that we would never have a voice in decisions taken elsewhere, then the contestation became really tough, our certainties strengthened, and we automatically realized that at risk was not only our territory…at risk was the credibility of the entire system, our future and those of our children. At risk is the death of a countryside and the founding system of collectivity: ethics, reciprocal respect” (ibidem, 123). In the interviews, the activists recognize the formation of an identity during the course of the action (“the traditions, the identity counted, but they were elements that were acquired, rather than starting points”, IVS1), but also a supra-territorial definition, oriented towards “the entire model of development” (IVS1).

3. Diagnostic and Prognostic: What Progress?

The definition of the ‘us’ is strictly linked with the heart of the conflict. Snow and Benford (1988) talked of diagnostic frames, oriented to develop a new image of what is wrong, and prognostic frames, that suggest solutions for the identified problems.
Traditionally, the opponents of LULUs have been said to privilege the value of their environment against “growth machines” that instead stress the importance of economic development. In this image, residents have an invested interest in defending their quality of life (health, cultural heritage), while economic investors (and often local politicians) push for their economic (and political) interests. The strength of the growth machines has been seen in their capacity to convince residents that economic development would have a positive spill-over on their life as well. As Gould et al. (1996, 5) stated, “environmental conflicts are fundamentally struggles over the different capacities of social groups to meet their needs by gaining access to natural resources. One of the dilemmas in managing ecological scarcity in a liberal industrial society is the need to satisfy both the demands of private capital and public agencies for economic growth and the demands of citizens for maintaining public health, as well as the recreational and aesthetic amenities of their natural habitat”. However, the definition of the interest of the citizen remains open to a symbolic struggle. The very conception of the public interest emerges in fact as central for the meaning work of Tav and Ponte oppositionists, as well as their supporters.

According to our two case studies, the opposition to large-scale public works is characterized by its supporters as maintaining “archaic prejudices and cultural backwardness or instrumentalisation and political bad faith”, already observed in similar conflicts (e.g. Borelli 1999, 39). One of the frames used against those who protest is in fact their assumed opposition to progress. With regard to the anti-Tav struggle, on the centre-right Confalonieri (Forza Italia) speaks of a “retrograde opposition to a work that is fundamental for the progress of the country” (R 30/11/05) and the national secretary of the Democratic Left (Piero Fassino), repeats that “it is not true that a work it by itself devastating and harmful, and often the objections are daughters of a regressive culture” (R 23/11/05); and still further, “there is a cultural problem: we must do battle with anti-scientific thinking, the irrationality which generates fear” (R 7/2/05). In the same way, with regard to the anti-bridge protests, Folco Quilici, a famous documentarist of marine fauna, always favourable to the Bridge and from April 2005 member of the governing board of SdM, wishes that the WWF environmentalist Anna Giordano “purify herself from retrograde ghosts” (G 29/7/05), characterising the struggle against the bridge as “obscurantist: we cannot imagine the world will progress without constructions of this type. Rome was a village of brigands before the Campidoglio was realized or the bridge on the Tiber” (GaS 23/1/06). In a similar manner, the SdA replies to the No Ponte dissident by suggesting that their “criticisms are based on slogans without foundations that are technical, environmental, socioeconomic or financial. These are in fact statements which contrast with the evidence of facts, with what is stipulated in the project, with the approval from the competent authorities, with the valuation of the Government, the Italian and European Parliament (GdS 22/1/06). In La Repubblica, Sebastiano Messina writes that “the people of Val di Susa have all the right to defend their health… another discussion must be made for… ‘the professionals of no’. Those who opposed the Bridge on the Straits because it interrupts the flight of the storks” (R 8/12/05).

The central theme of the supporters of large-scale public works is in fact development: locally, declining in terms of competitiveness, and more broadly (national, European), as requiring large strategic projects. Significantly, the Director of the committee promoting the Transpadana, argues against those who “prejudice the interests of the Turinese, Piemontese, Italian and European Communities” (R 22/3/05). At the local level, the
large-scale works are presented – in Piedmont, as in Calabria and Sicily- as necessary to break out of isolation. The president of the province of Turin (centre-left) appeals to “create a true and proper Turinese and Piemontese lobby which involves all social, political and economic forces, and can put pressure on the government in the competition with other Italian territories” (R 8/6/05). And the regional minister Borioli insists that “the will of the Region of making the Torino-Lyon is out of doubt”, given that “the infrastructure is indispensable per getting Piemonte out of the cul-de-sac in which it currently finds itself” (R 25/6/05). And the ex-minister of the Centre-Left Bersani affirms that “without a Turin-Lyon, the loss would be above all for the West of Italy”, given that the Tav “is a European choice which responds to a great design” (R 3/11/05). In a public appeal, Piemonte intellectuals and professionals define the Tav a strategic opportunity for improving the competitiveness of the region (R 9/7/05). Similar are the positions of the economic interest associations: the Confederazione Nazionale Artigianato-CNA (Handcraft National Confederation) affirms that “the infrastructure is necessary and must be realized to support the competitiveness of firms”, Confartigianato that “the Tav is necessary to avoid isolation because the economic centres are where the arteries of communication pass” (R 16/11/05), Assoespressi (transport associations) affirm that without the Tav they will lose 100,000 jobs (R 20/11/05). And the Piemonte secretary of the CGIL Union, in occasion of a strike in the valley against the Tav, underlines that “the strike is a weapon that must be used in a struggle with common objectives. The question of Val di Susa, unfortunately, has always less of these characteristics because it risks isolating that collectivity from the general context” (R 5/11/05). At the national level, in a bipartisan manner, a leader of the centre-left Rutelli affirms that “the Tav is a fundamental work for the country. The project must be improved, but the commitment to modernize the country must be maintained” R 2/12/05), and the President of the House of Deputies Casini (centre-right), observes that “the protests in the Val di Susa in effect cut us out of the large European infrastructure networks” (R 2/12/05). The President of the Republic, Ciampi, confirms that saving the mountain does not mean isolation “because we cannot permit ourselves to be cut out of the large European networks” (R 1/12/05).

Also those who support the project of the Bridge on the Messina Straits define it as being essential not only for the economic development of the interested area, but of all the Italian South. The whole centre-right national government strongly supports the bridge, the minister Lunardi defines it as “a fundamental project for our South and strategic for communication links with Northern Europe and the Mediterranean” (Me 13/3/04), “an epoch-making work. The largest of the 21st century…the Mezzogiorno must return to connect the two shores of our sea. The Bridge on the Straits is part of that design…thanks to which the South will return to the centre of the Mediterranean” (CdS 22/4/04). Of the same opinion is the leader of the Forza Italia group in the Senate, Schifani, who defines the bridge as a work which will favour “the development of the South” (Me 13/3/04). Even some local politicians underline the aspect of economic development. The centre-right mayor of Reggio Calabria, Giuseppe Scopelliti, affirms that “the Bridge on the Straits is necessary to the development of the South… the benefits produced by the Bridge will comfortably surpass the social costs tied to its realization… the externalities produced by a real shock from this infrastructure will provide lasting drive to improving the economically weak productive structure existing in the South” (Io 13/3/04). A former councillor in the Commune of Messina (with responsibility for the environment), Elvira
Amata (centre-right) sustains that “we must reason in terms of the development of the city: the project will bring well-being, tourists and employment” (A 6/10/03). Even the President of the Province of Catania, Raffaele Lombardo (leader of the centre-right ‘Movement for Autonomy’) declares that we need “to quickly build the bridge, which is the mother of all infrastructures, which will then make indispensable other infrastructural projects, and not the reverse” (CdS 8/12/05); and citing the political scientist Angelo Panebianco, the principal reason for supporting the bridge is that it represents “the possibility for victory of a Sicily and a South that exists and that would like to build a future of self-sustaining development” (CdS 5/12/05), that is “normal and European, archiving away the mafia and the anti-mafia” (CdS 8/12/05). The symbolic aspect of the Bridge is often underlined as a “redemption of the South” (R 2/10/03). And still further, the minister Lunardi retains that “the Bridge on the Straits is a work worthy of the roman empire..a symbol. The sign of a return of a spirit, that of the great builders” (CdS 22/4/04).

In relation to these appraisals of the project, those who protest against the Tav and the Bridge risk stigmatization. However, they affirm the necessity to privilege well-being above economic development. The defence of well-being is often referred to when citing the appeals of doctors from Val di Susa who highlight the risks of tumours tied to asbestos (mesothelioma) and uranium (lymphoma), both of which are materials found in the ground which is to be dug--in their appeal (DVS2), the doctors conclude that “there is the real possibility of severe damage to public health”.

The image of living in the past and opposing progress is however contested through the elaboration of an alternative model of economic development. First of all, the economic costs and risks of large-scale public works are underlined. While the pro-Tav promote petitions which express concern at the risk of “being cut out” (R 10/7/02), the No Tav respond by underlining the economic risks which the Tav will bring for local development – both tourism and agriculture. In July 2003, the slogans of the five days of picketing by the No Tav were: “It is possible to stop it”, “opposition to a useless and incredibly expensive project” (R 22/7/03). The Tav is in this image a work that is neither large-scale nor strategic--but simply pharaonic and useless: a rubbish bin, the “fraud of the century” (flyer of the Val di Susa circle of Legambiente). To those who define them as backward and isolationist, the No Tav respond with a definition of themselves as being aware of the future. The flyer calling for the march from Susa to Venaus on the 4th June 2005 (signed by the mountainous community, conference of mayors, committees of the valley, unions and environmental organizations) calls for “all of Susa to defend the future of our territory” (DVS3), and the flyer of the mountainous Community of lower Val di Susa, with committees, unions and environmental organizations, invites a demonstration on the 16th of November to “defend our future”, against the compromising of our well-being and the health of the population of Val di Susa (DVS4). In parallel, the No Ponte observe that “they say that we are ‘backward’ and ‘against the future’, as if a bridge of cement and steel were the future, given that they were being built 80 years ago, when people were still thinking about the society of automobiles” (IME4).

Quality of life is defended against works that are defined, in North as in South, pharaonic, anti-economic and useless, in addition to being damaging for the territory. In Val di Susa, is the protestors underlin--citing data on the current use of the railway network and
projections for future demand—the uselessness of building another line (the counter-proposal is therefore a much cheaper re-structuring of the existing line). Commenting on electoral results which saw the No Tav list gain around 10% in the valley (where anyway all the candidates of all the parties expressed opposition to the Tav), the meteorologist Mercalli underlines that “we are not talking about nine thousand small land-owners that fear expropriation, but nine thousand citizens that retain the project to be useless and damaging” (R 17/6/04). Even eleven regional councilors of PRC, PdCI and the Greens affirm that the Tav must be re-negotiated, given the excessive economic cost and the devastating environmental impact (R 23/5/05). Legambiente recalls that a Loetschenberg tunnel between Berne and Sempione is being opened, and in 2015 one in Gottardo will be opened; the two tunnels will absorb in large part the traffic of goods (R 4/6/05); and the WWF defines the Tav “a hazard from the economic and transportational point of view” (R 4/6/05).

Similarly, the No Ponte speak of a “useless work, anti-economic and devastating, from a wrong era and in the wrong place. It could have been a good idea 40, 30 or 20 years ago, because it was a work that for better or worse had a certain ‘image’, but currently there is a situation that pushes not only Europe, but the whole world to rely on transport via sea, reducing the consumption of petrol, of car traffic, privileging forms of transport much less damaging than cars, and they want to realize a road right in the middle of the only sea in Europe where there isn’t one! It seems to be pure folly. It is a work that has been imagined in a territory where, in the mean time, there has been a certain development, by which they pretend that the city should have to adapt to the Bridge rather than the Bridge to the city” (IME1).

The anti-economic aspect of the work is supported by underlining its incompatibility with regard to the characteristics of local development – from tourism tied to agriculture to fishing. In an appeal to a general strike in Val di Susa (DVS 5) we read “if the ecosystem is destroyed so will the economic structure of the area. The damage would be incalculable. The pollution caused by the asbestos powder would place in crisis the agricultural small and medium-sized industries of the area”. While Ds and Margherita repeat, with regard the Tav, the “strategic nature of the work” (supported also by the President of the Republic and the centre-left prime ministerial candidate Romano Prodi), PRC underline the need to listen to the local population, and the Greens re-launch the No Tav proposal of reinforcing existing lines, which would cost 1 billion euros (as opposed to the 12 billion euros projected for the Tav), and would be able to satisfy the needs of mobility until 2020 (R 12/11/05). Even in the area of the Straits, those opposed to the Bridge enounce the damage it would bring to local economic activity, without bringing lasting increases in employment, as sustained by those in favour of the project. Saro Visicaro, of the committee ‘La Nostra Città’, retains in fact that “faced with a hypothetical employment, which is that created by the Bridge, and faced with the destruction of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs which already exist where the Bridge will be situated – that is hotels, restaurants, cockle-picking – all these things would disappear from today to tomorrow. And all these people will not be employed in the Bridge, to dig holes, because in the beginning they will only have to dig holes. So we feel that this development will bring very terrible economic damage” (IME3). And still, Camillo Pigneri of the ‘CariddiSicilia’ coordination declares that “the people of Messina, of the Straits, have discovered that the bridge barely interests them and it goes against
their local interests, because it can only lose jobs, and is useless from the point of view of increasing employment” (IME2).

In denouncing the economic damage of large-scale public works to local development, the alternative use of the territory is underlined (more socially just and ecologically sustainable), for the funds allocated to the large-scale public works. In the pro-Tav discussions the project is considered to have ‘zero cost’ (financed externally) – investment in the Tav is never considered with possible alternatives: instead it is continually repeated that there is a risk of losing EU funding, destined for precisely that project – those who oppose the Tav instead denounce the waste of resources which could be better utilized in a different manner. The high investment in visible works becomes thus linked to the loss of essential services: “They cut services to invest in large-scale public works”, “They cut personnel in the stations and on trains” (R 3/12/03). In the flyer calling for a demonstration on the 17th December (DVS6), signed by numerous and heterogeneous groups (Cobas, Cub, Emergency, Ya Basta, Greenpace, Federazione Anarchica Italian, PRC, Manitese, Askatasuna) can be read “public money is necessary first of all to improve local transport, social and health services, for research and for all those important things which instead they are cutting”. In the general strike at the end of November 2005, the No Tav bring a banner which reads “15 billion for the Tav! And for work in Val di Susa?” (R 26/11/05).

The same discussion also applies to those who oppose the Bridge. Anna Giordano of WWF denounces the “insane costs to the state, even if they say these are private funds, up till now there haven’t been any. They are funds left by IRI which should have gone to the Treasury but instead are going to the SdM group, so it is public money. All of this despite other more impelling needs, the basic needs necessary to live in a dignified and civil way, for which they claim not to have a euro. It makes me laugh when they say that 200 trains a day will pass over the bridge, and I ask myself: to go where, given how the train system works in Sicily?” (IME1). No Ponte ask (in various appeals to demonstrate) that the sums allocated for the construction of the Bridge (6 billion euros) is instead invested in “adapting and strengthening existing infrastructure in Calabria and Sicily” (DME 9, DME 18), and in particular for “improving sustainable maritime mobility and reclaiming the coasts” (DME13).

If those who propose large-scale public works define their investments as leading to progress, those who oppose them propose instead a critique of consumption, which echoes on the proposal against growth, synthesized in the slogan to ‘consume less, consume better’. Luca Mercalli, activist and metereologist, affirms that “we cannot think of a world where economic growth continues. High-speed trains consume energy, in a world where energy is exhausting itself, destroying agricultural fields and historical panoramas” (R 4/6/05). Also Legambiente stigmatises the blind faith in progress and ignorance of its consequences, remembering that the first slogan “we love the train too much to accept the Tav” (R 12/8/05). And a representative of the Greens observes that “it is not only a confrontation between alternative models of transport, but between models of development: here we have to begin to ask what goods to produce, why transport them and where to” (IVS3).

To the criticism of being backward and anti-progress, the protesters promptly reply with a different definition of progress: a human progress, against inhuman economic progress.
In the Val di Susa diocesan journal can be read “The inhabitants of Val di Susa are not idiots. None of them wants to stop progress. They simply pose the following question to the whole country. What is the price that we must pay for this progress, for this development?” (R 6/11/05). Among the Tav supporters, the promise of jobs from the project becomes contrasted with an ‘evil’ occupation. While the secretary of the union of builders talks of the “folly of thinking that the Tav, a work of 15 years, will not bring development”, the petition of Val di Susa unions for an anti-Tav strike remembers past experience with large-scale public works with “precarious work, under oppressive conditions”, remembering possible alternative uses of the funds invested in the Tav (eg. international universities) (R 8/11/05). In the Cobas flyer (strike on the 16th November) we read that “in the jungle of the neo-liberal market, investment does not produce work, but profit. Unless by work we mean the exploitation of the precarious workers with the hours of a slave, without rights or defence” (DVS7). And the anarchists of FAI write that “a more livable environment for a civilization founded on people and not on profit, on the quality of life and not its speed” (FAI declaration, Turin 11/4/05; DVS8). The petition of workers in the Val di Susa, entitled “let us decide our own future”, denounces a “propaganda which tries to circulate the idea that the Tav can increase employment and will bring economic benefits to the inhabitants”, sustaining the importance of “having an idea of sustainable development that is compatible with environmental needs and the health of citizens”. The secretary of the critical union CUB, is critical of “the idea that any job, in any condition, is an objective for which everything else must be sacrificed” (IVS2).

The central stake here is the very definition of development. According to the metal workers union Fiom, “we are the victims of an only model of development. But these no longer convince us. No one has explained what goods the Turin-Lyon line will move, for what companies and for what reasons. They start from a dogmatic assumption, namely that this work is strategic and fundamental, but the reasons are not explained” (R 8/11/05). Again in an appeal of the Piedmont unionists for a demonstration on the 17th December, the No Tav issue is considered essential not only for the democratic deficit and the under-valuation of environmental damage, but because it “requires an immediate reflection by the entire union movement on this entire model of development, on the costs and benefits connected to it, that the interests of the populations and the workers not be subordinated to those of goods and the global market”. A priest in the picket affirms that “the Italian constitution guarantees the health of the citizen, this does project does not. For this reason I define it as inhumane” (R 3/11/05).

In the struggle against the Bridge on the Straits, the definition of development is likewise placed under scrutiny. In a document we read that “the idea of ‘development’ which is being continuously imposed implies waste, incinerators, thermolectric plans, large-scale public works and claims that these projects will be able to provide work for the poor unemployed in the South” (DME6). But as Massimo Camara (No Ponte activist) points out, the mobilization against the Bridge “was necessary to re-launch our perspective on how this territory should be managed. In fact, the opposition to the bridge is tied in with a revaluation of the countryside, environment, and even the resources of the area of the Straits” (IME4).
Together with the notion of progress, there is the conception of general or national interest that is here contested. The sociologist Luciano Gallino notes that “we need to ask ourselves if it is not precisely the inhabitants of Val di Susa who, with their opposition to the Tav project, are carrying out the national interest. That they pursue particularistic interests is not in doubt. But in doing so they have led to the emergence in Italy of a mass of studies, documents, and questions founded on the validity and priority of the project, to make us think that a minimal level of pre-caution should lead us to take them into serious consideration” (R 7/11/05). On the other side of the protest, Camarata declares again: “we are against those who accuse us of Nimbyism, for which our particularistic interest would be opposed to a general interest, to the common good. We need to define what is meant by common good, because here we are talking about old-fashioned speculative operations, in this case a classic show-piece construction project’ (IME4).

In this way, interest in large-scale public works is framed as the interests of a few – ‘money-makers’, ‘speculators’ or even ‘corrupt’ and ‘mafiosi’. Attac (DVS 9) defined these investments in large-scale public works as “suffering from gigantism”, oriented towards profit. The supporters of the Tav are defined as ‘businessmen (DVS@, Appello degli artisti, 4/11/05), or the ‘pro-Tav lobby’ as ‘gigantic speculators’ (DVS10, Cobas flyer calling for a popular strike on the 16th of November 2005). Don Ciotti (DVS11), of the Abele Group (active against organized crime) asks “why large-scale public works? For whom? Investments for the future. Whose future?”; and the environmental Forum of Piedmont invites a mobilization against a “mega work of waste and environmental destruction” (DVS12). According to a politician of the valley, “with the passing of time our parochial reasons have been transformed into political ones: because why for example do we not improve the old railway lines, which are today under-used for goods and badly used for passengers? And then the economic reasons. The businessmen who lobby for the Tav are private, but the money spent will be public” (R 12/8/05). The Tav becomes defined as a “a great idea for brick-layers or, as we call them, the lobby of the reinforcing rod, which have decided that this work will certainly bring a lot of money into their business and so they developed this project and sold it to the politicians…until we end up today with a transversal right-left lobby in favour” (IVS5). In parallel, and with a greater focus on the role of the mafia, the documents elaborated by some networks of activists (MSF, Coordinamento Calabrese control il Ponte, RSR) read that the threat of the Bridge is that “it is a speculative model of development in the guise of Berlusconi, which links the realization of large-scale public works to the sale of our natural, cultural and artistic heritage, to a diffused system of micro-speculation, which brings social cynicism and consociational consensus. In contrast with the liberalist enunciations on the centrality of the market, it is public money (subtracted from public services) which is used to realize these large-scale public works (Bridges, Highways, Tunnels, Dams, Power Plants..) which are then given, through privatization, to economic groups that are collateral to the political class, whose essential contribution is to store away the profits. So then we have a repeat of the traditional passage Public Money – Private Profit. On this level it is evident that the convergence of interests of powerful financiers, businessmen, politicians and Mafiosi, whose intertwining is now no longer a crime or even a scandal” (DME3).
4. Motivational Frames: the rights of the community, mobilization of the people

An additional important function of the framing process is producing motivations to action—i.e., giving people a reason to join the protest by convincing them that collective action is not only possible but also potentially successful (Snow and Benford 1988). In this process, the stakes of the conflict expand to the meta-frames of democracy, as well as the right to protest (della Porta, 1999). As Luigi Bobbio (1999, 195) observes “it is difficult to pretend that a community takes upon itself the consequences of a decision that it considers unpleasant, if there is no possibility for it to question the reasons for such an undesired proposal”.

As in other territorial conflicts – including those against High Speed Trains in other parts of Italy (della Porta & Andretta, 2003) – in our two cases the discourse extends itself to procedure: “those opposing are able to transform the nature of the problem: there is no longer in question only the danger of the project, but also the correct procedure which led to the decision about the localisation of the project” (Bobbio 1999, 189). Typically in local conflicts the rights of the local population to decide on large-scale public works is one of the main areas of contention. Also in our cases it can be confirmed that, when there is an open discussion on LULU, normally the project “is already tied to a specific site. They can discuss how, but not ‘where’” (Bobbio, 1999, 193), and a discursive strategy of the promoters of large-scale public works is that of the ‘accomplished fact’ (judge, jury and executioner according to Susskind, 1985). The investment in both the Tav and the Bridge is not one with alternative possibilities: instead, it is repeatedly underlined that there is a risk of losing EU funding, destined specifically for that project. Those who oppose these works must therefore articulate in a credible manner a discourse that points towards the action, by accentuating a sense of injustice, and by diffusing the possibility that an alternative is possible.

If the involvement of the residents is in fact contested, then the very conception of democracy is put into question. In the case of Val di Susa, it is above all the Piedmont and national politicians of the Centre-Left (particular the Ds) who seek to limit the role of the mayors of Val di Susa, who are all against the Tav. The President of the Region Mercedes Bresso (DS) asserts that “the decision on whether the work will be undertaken is a decision for Europe, the two states involved, and the two regions involved. The choice on how to do it, with what guarantees for the population involved, with which characteristics for the building sites, is a choice that must involve the inhabitants and the local politicians of Val di Susa”. According to the Mayor of Turin, Chiamparino (Ds), “nobody can exercise the right to veto the project which has been democratically decided by national and international authorities”; the local populations and politicians must limit themselves to discussing “how the building sites will be organized, on the problems they may cause and the possible risks” (R 3/12/05). The secretary of the Piemontese federation of the Ds, Mercenaro, confirms that “it is not up to Val di Susa to decide if high-speed trains are useful for Italy”. Even if not yet in national government, “we must reason as if the Tav was a plan of our government” (R 12/11/05). According to the ex-minister Bersani (Ds), this work “has been discussed at European and national level, and strategic decisions have been taken (R 3/11/05).
In reaction to this, one of the first frames used in Val di Susa by those protesting underlined the rights of local politicians to represent their territory. In April 2002, in a demonstration by the coordination of associations and committees of Val di Susa and Turin opposed to the Tav, which took place while the institutions were examining the proposal, a frequent complaint is heard that everything was decided already (R 12/4/02). In the demonstration of the 30th of May 2002, the president of the Comunità montana Ferrentino affirms that “they cannot ignore the views of locally elected officials” (R 1/6/03). In autumn 2003, the No Tav committee announces a recourse against “a project imposed by Rome without the involvement of local officials”, in a territory that already has two highways, a motorway, a railway line that runs 3 metres from houses, two electroducts and one river, all within area of 1 km (R 12/11/03). And in the flyer distributed in occasion of the eruption of the protests by mayors, environmental organizations and social centres, at the conference on high-speed trains organized by the ‘Consulta dell’Arco alpino’ at the ‘Centro congresso della Regione’, we read that “the communities of the valley affected by the project have had no say. Once again the mountain people are there to be squeezed into servitude” (R 30/11/03). Re-united for the entire day in Piazza Castello (Turin), 37 local councilors asked for the involvement of local bodies, protesting at not having been minimally involved and citing independent studies critical of the project (R 20/3/05).

From this point of view, the situation in the Messina Straits is different, where local politicians are divided in their attitude with regard to the Bridge. On the one hand, as cited previously, there are those in favour of the bridge, such as a majority in the former (though not the current) commune of Messina, and the current commune of Reggio Calabria, in addition to the powerful President of the Sicilian Region, Toto Cuffaro (all centre-right). On the other hand, there are significant politicians opposed to the Bridge, such as Rocco Cassone, centre-left mayor of Villa S.Giovanni (in the area where one of the pylons is to be built), who was the victim of mafia threats in September 2004 (R 2/9/04). The opposition to the Bridge is also visible in the communal council of Messina, which in 2003 established a Commission of control to evaluate the environmental and economic impact of the project, whose final text is defined by a No Ponte activist as “very complete and rich with reflections that oppose the building of the Bridge” (IME4).

The new mayor of Messina, Francantonio Genovese (elected in 2005 and belonging to the Centre-Left), is also vehemently opposed to the Bridge; whilst participating in the procession of the 22nd January 2006, affirmed that “this type of structure is neither in the interests of Messina nor of the South, it is time that policies were developed that gave real occasions for development” (R 23/1/06), and that “every decision will be evaluated with the citizens, without adopting proposals which betray their expectations” (Si 23/1/06). The alliance No Tav-No Ponte also involves local officials. Taking part in the No-Tav No-Ponte demonstration on the 22nd of January 2006, Cassone declares that “from today there is a virtual bridge between the South and Val di Susa, against the realization of works that are far from fulfilling the real needs of the territory” (R 23/1/06).

The development of a meta-discourse on democracy goes beyond the statements of local politicians, however. The lack of democratic procedure in the allocation of large-scale public works is denounced by both No Tav and No Ponte. At the picketing against ground testing for the Tav in Val di Susa, the activists affirm that: “In play here is not the Turin-Lyon but democracy itself” (R 2/11/05). Of the same opinion, but with regard to
the Bridge, is Anna Giordano of WWF, who believes that “it violates all the norms on democracy. The Legge Obiettivo [a law that was passed by the centre-right government to accelerate public works, with fewer controls and regulations, and into which the Bridge project has been inserted] is everything but democratic: they passed it to realize more quickly their public works, but they thus excluded local communities from the decision-making process; which is a folly, because you victimize people, set up building sites there for decades, and don’t even ask them if they agree to it” (IME1).

The demand for democracy is the demand for another type of democracy – more participative and coming ‘from below’. In the No Tav protest, the rights of the community to decide their own fate is claimed in the name of the people – it is no coincidence that the organizers choose names such as ‘Committee for the popular struggle against high-speed trains’ or ‘Spinta dal Bass’ – born in 2001 and which an activist explains “means starting from below and giving a push” (IVS4), and which is “principally involved as a committee in motivating and creating new ones” (ibidem). The ‘Gruppo Pace di Condovè’ organized in June 2001 a fast against the Tav which “ignores us as people and crushes our rights as citizens”, declaring itself to oppose “in a non-violent way the violence of the provincial, regional and national institutions” (R 10/6/01). With regard to the No Ponte protest, an activist declares that “the problem is to change the criteria by which choices become imposed in the territory, as if they were colonies, whereas we are firmly convinced that territories must be subject to the judgement of the people who inhabit them, and that they should decide their own programmes and their own future” (IME4). In a document of the ‘Rete Meridionale Nuovo Municipio’, among whose promoters is the new mayor of Villa San Giovanni Cassone, it reads “that which is defined as a particularistic interest – whether it be of the community of Val Susa or the area of the Straits- is instead the expression of the sovereignty of the people who live within that territory, reclaiming their legitimacy to decide their future and those of their children” (DME16).

The theme of democracy re-emerges also in terms of the rights of participation. The frame of violence is utilized in particular by the Pro Tav in autumn 2005, with the growth of forms of direct action. According to the Minister of the Interior, Pisanu, subversive groups are infiltrating the protest (R 13/11/05). Infiltration by the black bloc justifies, according to the minister, the tough intervention of the police to break the picket because “the risk of infiltration was known to everyone and we had to do things in a hurry” (R 8/12/05). Successively, while apologizing to the inhabitants of Val di Susa that were victims of the assault, he affirms that “those who use violence must either be suffered or confronted”, warning that “the subversive nature of the social centres. Of the antagonists. Of the anarcho-insurrectionalists and the anarchist squatters”. Even the theme of danger to public security echoes” on both Right and Left. The Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, alleges that “antagonistic extreme left groups and anarcho-insurrectionalists are trying to extend the disorder from Val di Susa to Turin, Milan, Rome, and various other cities”, while the “government is firmly opposed to these intentions, which have nothing to do with the peaceful protests in the valley” (R 8/12/05). On the left, the national secretary of the Ds, Piero Fassino, condemns the “violent methods of the anti-Tav protesters”, which are attacking “a well-considered project that will guarantee development, growth, work and well-being” (R 7/11/05).
A symbolic conflict on the right to participate in a democracy emerges around the conception of legality. For the pro-Tav politicians in Piedmont, the protest becomes illegitimate if opposed to the decisions of the majority. The President of the Piedmont Region, Bresso (Ds) affirms that “democracy works like this. You discuss issues and then, without abandoning your initial views, you must accept the decision of the majority. If someone does not want to do that, and instead decides to lay bombs, they thus exclude themselves thus from civil society” (R 11/5/05). A similar position is taken by the Mayor of Turin, Chiamparino, who states that “we have arrived at a point where… we must allow the rule of majority to prevail” (R 1/11/05).

A frame that is frequently used by the Pro Tav is distinguishing between good and bad protestors. The interior minister Pisanu, distinguishes between “peaceful protestors and those seeking to do everything to provoke violence”, then affirming that “in Val di Susa there is a worrying mix of legitimate popular protest, political speculation and subversive intrusions, which risks exploding from one day to another” (he then cites al-qaeda cells, anarchists and autonomist groups) (R 3/12/05). In a similar manner, the centre-left Mayor of Torino, Chiamparino, retains that a part of the picketers “are thugs, and I pretend the the protesters coalition isolate them before the demonstrations”, defining them “in favour of pluralism, as long as you do not consider modernizing the city” (R 9/12/05).

Although less utilized than in Val di Susa, the frame of violence and illegality has been used also by the supporters of the Bridge. Some No Ponte activists remember that since the daily “La Gazzetta del Sud” is one of the main supporters and sponsors of the Bridge, it has accused the ‘eco-pacifists’ opposed to the bridge of attempting to carry out a series of explosions, realized without damage to people or buildings, on the coast of north Messina in February 2004. Saro Visicaro recalls that “a morning two years ago on the coast of Messina, 7 bottles that were loaded with explosives suddenly ignited, making it seems as if there had been a design. And then something very serious happened, the Gazzetta del Sud filled its pages with accusations that these were carried out by ‘eco-pacifists’ opposed to the Bridge. This was launching a very precise message. Then the issue was over because they discovered it was four idiots who had exploded the devices to steal some government maritime property. But I am not convinced by this, because I think that behind this there was an attempt to end the protests against the Bridge” (IME3). Anna Giordano remembers that “they threw mud at us, saying that it was the movement against the Bridge, which had nothing to do with it; and then they found those responsible, who had nothing to do with us, but in the process they sought to portray us as terrorists” (IME1). The reply comes via a tough press release entitled “No to the Bridge on the Straits – No to the journalistic assault on the Movement” (DME7). The spectre of violence was also raised by the ex-councillor of Messina (Centre-Right), who as Massimo Camarata remembers: “Two years ago the commune, thanks to an intervention by local police, recommended all the shop-owners to close during the procession because they feared acts of violence, the ‘assault of the barbarians’, the black bloc! We obviously derided this, and made a highly communicative procession and most of the shop-owners who did not close then benefited enormously” (IME4).

The theme of public security is instead defined by those who oppose large-scale public works as being instrumentalised to discredit an opposition which has persistently chosen peaceful means. An anti-Tav protestor complains of having voted in Bresso, who spoke
of bombs (“the worst of the Right never amounted to so much”), after “fifteen years of light of the sun, fifteen years of opposition made by scrutinizing the plans of the project. Fifteen years of informational evenings, debates, conferences, fifteen years where not a single stone has been thrown by anyone in the movement. The experience of the No Tav in Val di Susa has been defined as a great building site for participatory democracy, we have grown, aged, inevitably personal relations have inter-twined in the movement. Stories of struggle, because it is a struggle dealing with public life, for free and after having worked all day, it is tiring to participate, to make politics from below. Val di Susa did not deserve this vulgarity… Lady, without false modesty, we can teach people what active citizenship means. Twenty thousand people in a procession, 35 communal councils in Turin, to do something never seen before, decide in Piazza Castello” (Chiara Sasso, R 22/5/05).

The right to protest is here only not only defended as legitimate right, but as ethically central—“Our force is the anger of the meek” (3/12/03). The petition of the Turin Committee expressing support for Val di Susa (signed by many associations, from Rete Lilliput to the Social Forum of Turin, Pro Natura to CUB, Area Cambiare Rotta of CGIL to the Greens; from Coldiretti to PRC) invites us to find “the famous grain of sand capable of stalling the powerful motor”, praising the “great lesson of participatory democracy” in Val di Susa. As an activist writes, “We do not have hope, we do have certainties; we are only grains of sand but we are many, we have no secondary aims, we are not against progress and in this campaign we have made very few mistakes” (Margaira, 2005, 132). During the torch of 15,000 against the ‘militarisation’ of Val di Susa, a participant declared on the megaphone: “It is immoral to keep all these men here to guard a peaceful valley. This is not an emergency, this is participatory democracy” (R 6/11/05).

In discussion here is the possibility then to intervene in politics as citizens. In La Repubblica, the force of interest groups in favour of the Tav is seen as decisive: “High-speed, the prerogative or the damnation of our times, will not stop in front of a barricade of stones and trees placed by the people of Val di Susa: for the simple reason that whether they like it or not, the weight of interests – and here we are discussing legitimate interest, that is the need to connect Italy more rapidly to France and to Europe, to modernize our rail infrastructure; to reach the next station of technological progress–probably prevail against all doubts and reserves against any local resistance” (R 2/11/05). To this the committees respond that: “When the ants agree, they can move elephants” (R 16/11/05). Defending their right to protest in Turin (whose mayor had sought to revoke the procession on the 17th of December, stating that there were not “the conditions for a peaceful protest”), a mayor of the valley repeats that “it was precisely the large demonstrations that allowed the possibility of mediation” (R 9/12/05). A flyer of the ‘Comitato spontaneo Alesino control il Tav/Tac’ (DVS13) asks for participation because “we must make ourselves visible because blocking the Tav/Tac, together is possible”. At the end of the mobilization, the efficacy of the protest is in fact recognized in La Repubblica: “It was necessary that an entire valley went into the streets, armed with banners and placards, to finally open a table of negotiation, which in reality should have been open from the start”; “now around the table will ideally be suited all the interested Italian citizens, in order to ascertain whether the railway line Turin-Lyon corresponds to the national interest, if it is proportional to the predicted increase in traffic, if it is
practical, how many economic resources does it require, and what advantages does it offer” (R 12/12/05).

It is precisely on the meta-frame of the right to protest that the statements of solidarity for the inhabitants of the valley multiply beyond the valley. Numerous national associations (from Arci to Legambiente to Fiom) promote a petition to “block the unacceptable violence against the protestors”, defending “their democratic right to protest in a peaceful manner”, against a “project that is wrong and to which the overwhelming majority of the local population is opposed”. In the words of a provincial councilor of the Greens, “the truncheon blows we took have finally brought into evident light the problem. The problem emerged in the valley, but it does not belong to the valley” (IVS3). And on the issue of democracy, these protests also show the alliance between Val di Susa and the area of the Messina Straits.

6. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this paper has compared two recent campaigns on Locally Unwanted Land Use (LULU) in Italy: the campaign against the Tav in Val di Susa, and that against the Bridge on the Messina Straits. These two cases have been compared by means of a “most different research design”: despite significant differences in the social and political context of the Val di Susa (industrial north, with a high level of associationalism) and the area of the Messina Straits (representing a southern Italy that is less dynamic than the North in economic and social terms), in our research we shed light on a number of common themes between these two campaigns.

Our attention focused on framing processes, which we conceived not only as being important strategic instruments for mobilization, but also as mechanisms of fundamental importance in the construction of the identity of those who protest. We have in fact suggested that the opposing portrayals of LULU conflicts either as egotistical NIMBY protests, or as expressive mobilisations of a social conflict on the relative value of use or exchange of territory, both consider the values/interest/preferences of actors as being exogenous, concentrating instead on the capacity of these interest representatives to mobilize organizational resources and allies. In our analysis, we have instead focused on the emergence of these values/interests/preferences through a symbolic conflict which itself defines identity, stakes and motivations. Using certain categorizations on symbolic construction from the literature on social movements, we have in fact analysed the tensions around three important levels of definition of the actor and the action. First of all, in the definition of the identity of the actor we can observe on the one hand an elaboration of the positive identity of the community (strongest above all in Val di Susa, around the idea of a valley which currently resists a ‘useless and damaging’ public work, as it had in the past resisted fascism), and on the other hand there is also a search for universal values, finally arriving at a global definition of the conflict.

Against their opponents who accuse them of manifesting the NIMBY syndrome, the actors of the protest tend to respond through a symbolic construction which values the community, but without making it an objective of exclusive identification. In search of a definition of the public good, their framing of the dispute tends to supersede the dichotomy between defence of nature and defence of economic development, by
constructing an alternative model of progress. While the themes of the health of citizens and the value of the natural environment are both present (as in many other local conflicts), significant attention is focused on defining the struggle as being one oriented to the future rather than to the past. To those who accuse them of wanting to block ‘large-scale public works’, which are ‘strategic’ for local and global economic development, those who protest in Val di Susa and the Messina Straits respond by presenting these works not only as damaging from the point of view of health and nature, from also from the point of view of economic progress. By opposing a single model of economic development focused on large-scale investments, they underline the value of local economies, and even propose models of ‘de-development’ in order to defend not only the environment, but also levels of employment and quality of life. With regard to projects that are frequently defined as being ‘cost-free’, because they are presented as externally financed, those who oppose these two ‘large-scale public works’ underline instead the waste of public money, and crucially suggest alternative uses for these resources. It is thus the conception of general interest which is at the centre of these symbolic conflicts, where activists reject the accusations of egotism (typical of the NIMBY syndrome). In the discourse of the protestors, the strategic interests defended by the promoters of these ‘large-scale public works’ are presented as being the interests of speculators (corrupt in Val di Susa, mafia in the Messina Straits), while the protesters propose themselves as the true interpreters of the general interest.

Last but not least, the motivational frames underline the possibility of changing decisions, which are often presented as being ‘already taken’, through the collective mobilization of citizens. Together with the assertion of a political decentralization which takes into account the rights of local communities to take decisions which will affect their own destiny, there is the increasingly explicit affirmation of a different conception of democracy, based on participation rather than delegation. This ‘good’ politics is presented as coming from below, made by citizens rather than professionals, and based on local knowledge rather than the ‘bureaucratic expertise’ of representative institutions. Even if our data has not been systematized in a quantitative, cross-time manner (which we will seek to do in the next version of this paper), a hypothesis which appears confirmed from a qualitative reading of the material is that the evolution from a local to a global definition of the conflict; the elaboration of images that show an alternative future and a different conception of the general interest; the presentation of these actions of protests as the laboratory for an alternative conception of politics and a more appropriate definition of democracy, all seem to take place in the course of these campaigns. This in fact seems to emerge through the adhesion of different actors to the protest. Committees and local politicians, social centres and trade unions, environmental associations and social fora, local doctors and local priests all tend to meet, network and bridge their more specific frames in the course of the protest. In the words of an observer, one of the elements of the success of the campaign in Val di Susa is “the capacity to involve others in the protest, by putting aside initial mistrusts and being able to identify a common objective. This has created a political laboratory in the process, an experiment of a different form of participation, for which we require the consensus and approval of everyone. There is a search for unanimity: if there is no consensus then things are not done. It is interesting to observe this capacity of inter-action between subjects that at first did not even look at each other” (IVS6). Above all, changes in the symbolic construction
of identity, the stakes and the motivations for action, appear to link the protest campaigns in Val di Susa and the Messina Straits with the mobilization of the movement for globalization from below.

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GdS– «il Giornale di Sicilia»
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