



# On mountain peasantry, public policies, and hope: development shaping the Alps

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# On mountain peasantry, public policies, and hope: development shaping the Alps?

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## spatialising Stateness...

- ♦ (place-blind) promises of equality of treatment and opportunities sustain the discourses of modern bureaucratic nation-States
- ♦ Countryside as marginal/peripheral: submission, resistance, or negotiation?
- ♦ Rural development policies as sites of articulation between locality and abstraction
- ♦ Moving from Gramsci's theory, how development policies contribute in (re)produce and shape State as an historical experience, whilst producing heterogeneous trajectories at the “ground” level?



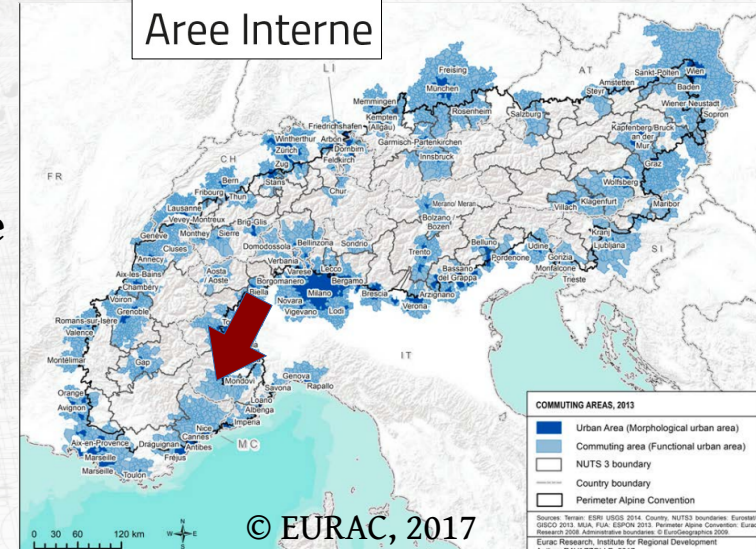
## ...from “below”

- ♦ Public policies as forms of planned social change:
  - How social engineering is designed and implemented?
  - How ordinary people cope with these forces?
  - How the articulation with the centre reconfigures positions in the local social space?
  - How public policies contribute in shaping the perception people have of their place within “the larger society”?



## The Grana valley

- ♦ multiple micro-ecologies
- ♦ *remote and traditional*, but...
- ♦ Quality food production (organic agriculture and PDO cheese) and outdoor tourism
- ♦ A National Plan for fragile areas not having matter so far? → schooling facilities, public transports, and infrastructure



*“place-based policies and multilevel local governance (...) to counteract massive demographic exodus” (Agenzia Coesione, 2021)*



## A two-century-long history of improvements

- ♦ The « mountain question » in Italy dates back to the end of 19th century, related to the crisis of mountain farming and Alpine households and was framed as an agricultural issue (« mountains are different »)
- ♦ In Grana valley, bureaucrats and technicians, looking at the mountain peasantry as isolated and backward, aimed to increase dairy and fodder production, by acting on local knowledge and attitudes
- ♦ Technical (fertilisers) , economic (cooperatives) and ecological (crops) transfers





## Public institutions organising mountain economy



(1928)



(1975)



(1993)



(2001)

- ◆ Issue: involving mountain peasantry into more modern forms of production
- ◆ Recurrent non-achievements... but what about the big picture?



## How economic events enter the collective memory?

- ♦ Epistemological, political, economic, and socio-technical arrangements produce regimes of judgement, converting implementation gaps in failures (Appadurai & Alexander 2019)
- ♦ Eclipsing the material conditions, people speak of:
  - Tiredness of social fabric
  - Inability to implement a real collective project for a qualitative leap
  - Lack of culture of collective work
- ♦ ... thus assimilating the vision of policy-makers and technicians



## Public policies and local perceptions



- ♦ Demographic trends as measures of quality
- ♦ EU schemes, relying on tourism and territorial branding are stressing on the mountainous, traditional character of the area
  - « *right not to emigrate* » Vs « *out of the ghetto* »
- ♦ supra-local (e.g. European) institutions assess the value of endogenous action and social resources
- ♦ Whilst displaying mistrust toward public action and assessing the value of community (endogenous) action as “authentic”, people also point the many conflicts, disputes and competitions preventing a “successful development”



## Unexpected outcomes...

- ♦ « something has to be done »
- ♦ State authority is contested on the basis that « mountains are different »
- ♦ Compelling to participate?
- ♦ From imperfect participation to non-institutional collective action






## In conclusion

- ♦ The idea of “mountain uniqueness” is rooted in the Italian public debate as well as in the local history of policy-making
- ♦ Development policies contribute to reshape the local imagery of the social world, especially with regard to the population-institutions relationship
- ♦ Even unstable and failed public policies have important social effects, especially when re-signified in the collective memory, producing patterns of social action and regimes of meaning that affect how future forms of social engineering are designed and implemented





**Thank you for your attention !**

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