

## Two Democracies Work Better Together

French and Italian decision-making processes for the Turin-Lyon railway project.

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*The Pan-European Corridor V railway line connects Lisbon and Kiev and touches many European countries. The paper present focuses on the Turin-Lyon section where French and Italian authorities jointly work on this huge infrastructure project while applying different approaches. While there are provisions for a public debates on such issues in France, there is no similar institutional framework in Italy. Hence, the analysis allows to compare the dynamics of the public debate in two democratic systems with different public decision-making systems and political cultures. While the French case evidences that public institutions can activate participation by providing “invited spaces” for collective discussion, the Italian case shows that these space also can be claimed by the public. In essence, lessons learned from this comparison raise interesting questions about the use of participatory spaces to correct and improve representative democracy.*

### *1. Introduction*

The paper aims to describe how two European neighboring countries have tackled the problem of the same new, big infrastructure landing in both their own territories, starting from the 1990s until today. Its subject is the Pan-European Corridor V railway line from Lisbon to Kiev, in particular the Turin-Lyon section, and the two countries involved are France and Italy. The perspective of this analysis is focused on the dynamics of the public debate in these two democracies. On the French side of the Alps, the *Débat Public* has been low since 1983. On the Italian side, a similar institutional frame does not exist. So, the Italian public debate concerning a stretch of a highway near Genoa is a rare exception and an example of voluntarism by the promoters (Pomatto, 2011).

In Italy, during this last decade, fighting dynamics between the national top-down promoters of the Corridor V track section and the local bottom-up opposition movements to these works have been continuous. In France, on the other hand, there was no public protest and the project proceeded calmly. Recent interpretations of this gap in terms of government and governance were self-evident: France appeared to be well

prepared to handle projects of public interest while Italy seemed to lack any institutional provisions for handling the opposition expressed by its citizens.

This paper, however, aims to question this image. We basically argue that the Italian bottom-up movements add some value to the French public debate system and vice versa. In the title, the key finding of this paper is mentioned already: two democracies work better than just one. The authors provide an evolutionary interpretation of the case study analyzed: from a former unidirectional dynamic, according to which “Italy should learn from France how to manage conflicts and complexity through public debate on important infrastructures project,” to a bidirectional dynamic, like “and France is on her behalf learning from Italy that public debate has wide margins of improvement.” Starting from the same infrastructural subject, French top-down efforts and Italian bottom-up strivings seem to work in a complementary way, towards an incremental improvement of closely related democracies. The driving belt of this mechanism, as will be argued, could be identified in the argumentative movements, which lay in contact with and listen to each other, from one side of the Alps to another.

## 2. *The Turin-Lyon railway project: Conflicting issues*

The history of the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway is a story of uncertainty and ambiguity. A story that needs a double reading tier, that implies a reference to policy analysis in order to describe the intricate system of subjects that drove or variously affected decisions, but that also needs critical reflection on planning practice in complex and conflicting conditions. In the following pages, we will try to provide a synthetic reconstruction of Italian stakeholders' positions overall, the process, and critical insight on the political and technical nature of territorial planning in the infrastructural field.

Since the beginning of the entire decision-making process, the story has been told according to two substantially different perspectives: the institutional voice of national and European governments on one hand, and the informal voice of local communities living in the territories affected by this infrastructure on the other.<sup>1</sup> By going throughout the chronicle of the Turin-Lyon rail layout project, from 1988 when for the first time the idea to connect the French high-speed railway *Tgv-Méditerranée* with Italy through Susa Valley came out, until today, antagonist actors have been sustaining conflicting technical and political visions about its strategic role, never coming to end with a sufficiently legitimate and effective decision. The project, strongly desired by the French government, was certainly supported from the beginning by Italian local private agencies, such as Agnelli Foundation and the *Federazione delle Unioni Industriali del Piemonte* (Federation of the Employers' Association of Piedmont), which started the

1 For a detailed chronicle of the two histories, see Ciaffi & Maroni (2006).

discussion with political players first at the local level, then at the national one (Maggiolini, 2009); Piedmont Region, the Province and the Municipality of Turin, which flew in to join the Supporting Committee, together with the most important local economic actors; the national rail agency, *Ferrovie dello Stato* (FS), that contributed in 1994 to establishing the French-Italian Alp tunnel (today's *LTF - Lyon Turin Ferroviaria*), albeit with some changes of opinion of the different chairmen in office over the years;<sup>2</sup> all national executives, who, since 1990, have been in favor of the project, even though each with a different position on how much local authorities had to be involved in the decision-making process. Looking at the opponents' side, it is possible to identify at least three main phases of strong contrast (Algotino, 2007; Sasso, 2006): the first lasting from the early nineties to 2000, the second, ending in 2005, culminating with the opening of the first construction site in Venaus, and the third coming up until present. Information campaigns – promoted by some environmental groups, scholars, local authorities, and ordinary citizens – are what mainly characterized the first phase (Maggiolini, 2009). However, already with the second phase, the movement crossed the borders of Susa Valley, reaching towns near Turin located alongside the planned railways, and involving not just environmental groups, but also political parties, trade unions, and social centers, thus assuming a more politicized character, questioning both legitimacy and efficacy of the project (Ciaffi & Mela, 2011). The 'No TAV'<sup>3</sup> movement, then, became a heterogeneous group, supported also by other radical dissent groups spread all over Italy, whose coalition and internal cohesion was facilitated by the absence of any possible contact with the counterpart. This is also the phase in which local administrators started playing a key role in opposing the infrastructure. Some of them (mostly from Low Valley) joined an Institutional Committee aimed at reinforcing the No TAV movement in further formal negotiation with national government.

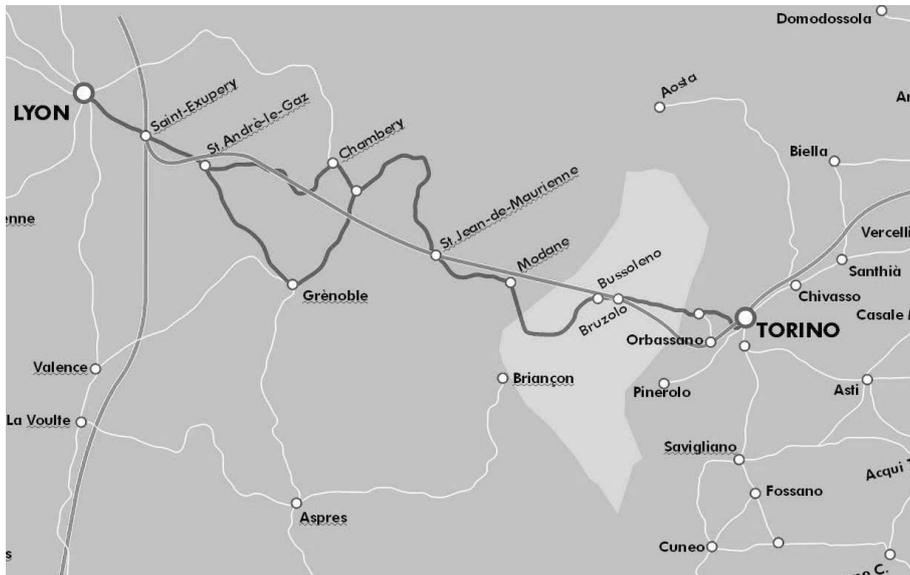
2 Caruso underlines how contradiction within FS are related to different organizational levels: “on the basis of the political level of the organization (at the managers level) or of the technical level, it is possible to recognize different positions regarding the feasibility of the work” Caruso (2007), p. 5.

3 TAV is the Italian acronym for high-speed train (Treno ad Alta Velocità). The No TAV movement was born initially as a clear protest group, which doesn't leave any room for mediation.

Figure 1: The layout of Corridor V



Figure 2: The Lyon-Turin section



The dark gray line shows the historical railway whereas the lighter gray line indicates the new high-speed train (TAV) rail layout. Susa Valley is in the Piedmont Region which is the lighter gray area at the center-right of this map. Source:

The role of European Union Policies for Regional Planning was certainly crucial. According to Maggiolini, Ciaffi, Celata, Fubini it seems that EC had the merit and the responsibility of including the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway project into the institutional framework of transnational policies for regional development, in particular into the Trans-European Networks (TEN), conceived according to the objectives stated in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP).<sup>4</sup> In fact, in 1994 during the Essen Council meeting,<sup>5</sup> the section of Turin-Lyon became a part of the Corridor V, a multi-modal transport axis crossing southern Europe from Lisbon to Kiev, which in the EC's intentions would have ensured competitiveness to a newly enlarged EU,<sup>6</sup> internal market functioning and improvement, economic strengthening, and social cohesion. Although the EC position regarding the Turin-Lyon rail layout has been somehow ambiguous, becoming in different moments critical about environmental issues and citizen involvement, as being one of the main backers, EC turns out to be used either as a kind of source of the unquestionable legitimacy of this public work by those in favor or, on the other side, as one of the spheres where lobbying can take place (Maggiolini, 2009).

However, in terms of strategies and approaches to infrastructural planning, Corridor policies would have been conceived as a system of local interventions and investments aimed at overcoming the damage caused by a more or excessively sector-based approach, typical of infrastructural planning. In EU documents' intention, the Corridor would have promoted a more comprehensive planning approach with a special interest for local needs (Fubini, 2010), by coping with what is specifically defined as the *territorialization* process of a great work (Dematteis & Governa, 2001), which concerns localization policies within a specific territory.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, national governments and local authorities would have had the duty to develop integrated spatial policies through which to lever on the new infrastructural system and to produce new

4 The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is a document produced in 1999, which states principles for European sustainable territorial development. It is based on three general principles which were defined at Lipasi in 1994: 1- Economic and Social Cohesion 2- Sustainable development 3- A more balanced competitiveness of the European Territory. In particular among the objectives, the ESDP includes the creation of a balanced and polycentric urban system and new urban-rural relationship. For further insights see CEC (1999).

5 For further insights, see the presidency conclusions of the European Council (1994).

6 From 2004, Europe included new State Members from Est. regions and activated a new period of policies. New members were Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

7 Each "territorialization" process is determined by symbolic and material production/construction of a territory. This process necessarily implies a conflicting dimension, which concerns with representations, goals, strategies and actions of an actors' plurality, which act on different scales on the basis of different rationalities (Dematteis & Governa, 2001).

territorial and economical scenarios. By looking at the Italian situation, the actual *territorialization* process does not really show a clear correspondence between local planning and Corridor policies (Fubini, 2010). If this gap is evident in correspondence with Italian big cities, intended as Corridors' strategic nodes, this is even clearer for “in-between territories,” such as Susa Valley. The first and main argument used by local communities to cross the new railway project, in fact, was the infrastructural overload of the valley (especially the Low Valley), indeed, already straddled by a highway, two national roads, and a power line. Years of failing public planning policies in this area, aimed at reducing traffic congestion and at improving economic development of the region, have transformed this territory in a “service area,” exploited to generate benefits for other territories (Ciaffi & Mela, 2011), and consequently it has increased local communities' skepticism and disaffection towards public policies.

It is thus evident that infrastructure planning at the above local scale raises controversial issues in practice. In fact, it has to deal with its inter-scalar nature and taking into consideration outcomes-evaluation at different levels, at different scales, and in different, even competing, territories. Although the overall project might have a rationale if taken per se, when viewed at the local scale it may appear not linked to territorial approaches and often in conflict with local policies. This kind of complexity makes decision-making processes in spatial planning uncertain and intrinsically conflicting, strictly dependent on the way in which means and goals are formulated (Christensen, 1985). Therefore, the conflicting potential of an infrastructure project may concern not just with antagonist stakeholders' values or interests, but also to what extent works' costs and benefits are intended to be distributed along different geographic areas and scales, raising issues of social and territorial justice. According to this operative framework, to enlarge decisional arenas through open and participative processes seems to be a necessary step. From a spatial planning perspective, the aim is not just to reduce conflicts and to deal with NIMBY<sup>8</sup> syndrome, but to collect as much knowledge as needed to design the most suitable solution for each territorial setting. The emerging necessity for planners of involving a plurality of actors in planning processes, derives both from pragmatic and political reasons: from the consciousness that making effective public policies means merging expert and experiential knowledge (Balducci, 1991), drawing on the “intelligence of democracy” (Lindblom, 1975); but also it derives from the political need of designing new and more democratic forms of public decision-making processes by introducing participatory practice as a way to

8 The NIMBY Syndrome (*Not In My Back Yard*) is a label used to describe reactions of local communities towards common interest projects, which are perceived as threatening to local identity and territorial peculiarities or that could have negative externalities on their territory. Such projects could be, for example, incinerators, quarries, and industrial, mobility, or energy infrastructures. It is a kind of spiteful label, because it implies that opponents are moving because of selfish, and individualistic interests (Bobbio, 2004).

solve the existent gap between public institutions and civil society (Bobbio, 2002, 2004, 2007).

In light of a persistent conflicting and uncertain situation affecting the Turin-Lyon railway decision-making process, two main questions remain: how to conceive public decision makers' action in order to produce an effective and legitimate project? And which role is there for "conflicting participation" (Ciaffi & Mela, 2011)?

### *3. Coping with complexity: Two normative approaches*

In order to explore possible answers to the research questions we are proposing, we will try to understand how France and Italy, two neighboring countries sharing the same infrastructure and of course similar planning problems, have tackled and are still coping with Corridor V projects. In particular, we will critically analyze normative and institutional approaches to civic participation as a methodological way to untie a complex and conflicting planning topic.

#### *3.1. One deliberative instrument for several projects: French Débat Public*

French public management of large-scale projects in territorial development boasts a decennial experience in involving civil society in decision-making processes. During his presidency, Mitterrand started a legislative path to regulate public inquiries, which led to the establishment of the 'public debate' form (*Débat Public*) as a mandatory procedure to be followed in the face of big urban and territorial transformation projects.

Going back to the origins of the current French Débat Public, the first set of rules to involve civic society in spatial planning processes became law in 1976. During the following fifteen years, national legislators' perspective shifted from a generic goal of "taking into consideration environmental protection" into a growing attention towards specific large infrastructural projects regulation. In the early nineties, the Bouchardeau's law gave a very convincing meaning to the concept of transparency: in a modern democracy all actors involved in any big spatial transformation have to participate in public presentations of projects and to debate according to specific procedures designed by the law. Public debate was definitively introduced with Barnier's law in 1995, which defined procedures of actors' consultation and responsibilities. With the Chart de la Concertation (Consultation Chart) in 1996, the assumption of a participatory culture was clear: "consultation aimed at agreement achievement represents an enrichment for representative democracy towards a more participated democracy, and it generates minds- and behaviors- changing." Decision-making responsibility for territorial public policies was thus shared by the *collectivité locale*

(local collectivity): in fact, members of government, third sector, and civil society are brought to work together in the public debate form. From a methodological point of view, this instrument is a deliberative device<sup>9</sup> aimed at facilitating a transparent and dialogical communication among participants – not just the stakeholders, but everybody who has an interest in the topic discussed. Furthermore, it has to take place at the beginning of the decision-making process and it is not compulsory to reach a final agreement: the *Débat Public* is merely conceived to be an argumentative time for learning more about intentions, objectives, and meanings of an intervention, rather than designing solutions (Romano, 2012).

According to contemporary procedures, the key role in a public debate is played by the national commission, which has the responsibility of managing discussion between participants. Its members are chosen at top government levels, together with three other representatives: national association for environment protection, users, and experts. As several French authors underline, the experiences of public debate are widely innovative but still characterized by a number of imperfections (Revel et al., 2007). On one hand, one of the most problematic issues concerns selecting national commission members, particularly with the choice of the president. On the other, the extremely open nature of the method, grounded on participants' self-selection (Bobbio, 2004), could be critical. In fact, it would create a sort of imbalance during the discussion, favoring one-sided argumentations.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the need for public debates: the law decrees that they have to be launched if the infrastructure exceeds defined costs of the works (i.e. in 2002 the law fixed the cost of 300 million Euros for highways, railways, shipways as the threshold for public debate). The French culture of spatial planning is fully aware that any physical transformation is the result of a complex game among institutional, economic, social, and environmental actors (Melin & Choay, 1988). Any interpretation about urban and territorial changes in France pays big attention to the dynamics among the different players. This is an important cultural precondition in order to understand two core reasons of public debate on infrastructure: a successful public debate is a process that is legitimated from the different involved parties and, at the same time, it is the unique tool able to make different actors interact reflectively

9 In the Italian cultural framework, it has been necessary to underline the distinction between the Anglo-Saxon meaning of deliberation and Italian meaning of "*deliberazione*." While the Italian "*deliberazione*" would mean to reach a final decision, to vote a position, the English meaning is rather "to consider and examine the reasons for and against a measure." In this frame, "to deliberate" would imply a dialogical and discursive process, where participants' preferences can evolve and transform through a discursive confrontation. All Habermasian communicative theory is strictly linked to the deliberative nature of a communicative action (Habermas, 1986). Theories of Communicative and Deliberative Planning (Forester, 1989, 1999; Healey, 1997) draw on Habermasian philosophy and provide sophisticated methodological devices to facilitate collective discursive interaction in planning decision-making processes. A wide range of methods used to facilitate deliberation in planning is available on-line at [www.communityplanning.net](http://www.communityplanning.net).

(Pomatto, 2011). This goal is variously achieved through “democracy matches” depending on the contexts and on the personalities involved, but what is interesting to underline is that there are just three general principles regulating the public debate: equality of participants, transparency, and arguing.

### 3.2. Muddling Through:<sup>10</sup> Italian approach to public participation

In Italy, institutionalization of participatory processes for urban and territorial planning practices takes place mainly at the regional level, because of each region’s autonomy in legislating on town planning matters. As Italy has sustained a decentralized planning system since the 1970s, innovative practices in terms of civic participation in urban and territorial projects are also mostly local achievements. For this reason, regions such as Emilia Romagna or Tuscany have both reformed their main town planning instruments (Piani Strutturali Comunali) in order to include participation as a requirement for plan approval. Moreover, Tuscany has recently in 2007 enacted a Regional Law on Participation (L.R.69) for the first time in Italy (Regione Toscana, 2008). Taking into consideration that for public decision makers, participation would have broad meaning,<sup>11</sup> a minimum level of participation is already guaranteed in our most traditional town-planning instrument, Piano Regolatore Generale Comunale (Local Master Plan), whose revisionary process provides for consultation windows with local community. Of course, infrastructural planning, especially when conceived at an over-local and strategic scale, refers to more articulated and integrated planning instruments. This is the case of the so-called Conferenza dei Servizi<sup>12</sup> (Conference of Services), an institution where local authorities, together with regional and national ones, can sit at the decision table and discuss and question the advisability of an infrastructure. Moreover,

10 The concept of “muddling through” is gathered from Lindblom. Drawing on Simon’s “bounded rationality,” Lindblom developed his theory of “disjointed incrementalism,” based on “partisan mutual adjustment” (Lindblom, 1959), thanks to which the decision-making process was seen as a “plural” and “bargaining” process. Lindblom’s theory is based on a pragmatic approach to planning practice, generated through the direct observation of the public sector’s job.

11 In the urban and territorial planning field, “to participate” can acquire different meanings. It would mean “to engage” or “to communicate, to inform,” which means on the one hand to line up, to express a personal opinion becoming an active subject of the process, or, on the other hand, to share information and opinions (Ecosfera, 2001). To define what we mean with “participation” would imply different levels of power within a public policy practice. The most famous taxonomy for participation levels is Arnstein’s participation ladder (Arnstein, 1969), which has already been criticized and overcome by deliberative authors, as Forester, and in Italy by Ecosfera (2001); Mela & Ciaffi (2004); Bobbio (2004); see Saporito (2008).

12 The Conference of Services, established by the law of 7 August 1990 n. 241, *Nuove norme in materia di procedimento amministrativo e di diritto di accesso ai documenti amministrativi*, subsequently modified by the law of 11 February 2005, n. 15, dal Decreto legge 14 March 2005, n. 35 and by the law of 2 April 2007, n. 40, is created to simplify processes and speed up the decision-making process.

thanks to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and later to Strategic Environmental Assessment,<sup>13</sup> it became possible to strengthen and improve procedures in the perspective of increasing environmental protection and sustainable development, always empowering citizens and NGO's in the decision-making process.

In spite of all those normative instruments aimed to activate participatory spaces within infrastructure planning processes, things went differently for the Turin-Lyon railway. In 2001, Berlusconi's government introduced the Legge Obiettivo (Aim Law) as the new normative instrument to regulate and finance infrastructure planning in Italy. As soon as the new law was enacted, the Turin-Lyon project was included in the list of "strategic infrastructures" conceived by the law. In contrast with all European instructions, this new legislative measure basically centralized decision making at the national government level, excluding any form of local authority and community participation during the overall process, and basically denaturing the functioning of EIA and SEA.

Just after dramatic events of 2005, things partially changed. In December 2005, around 50,000 inhabitants of Susa Valley occupied the excavation site and set up permanent pickets, paralyzing the Venaus work site until the demonstration was repressed by police forces. When in 2006 Italian government changed,<sup>14</sup> the new executive body finally decided to establish two ad hoc institutional bodies to cope with this permanent conflicting situation: the Tavolo Politico di Palazzo Chigi (The Political Table) and the Osservatorio per il collegamento ferroviario Torino Lione (Observatory on the Turin-Lyon Railway). Those two bodies were interrelated. The Observatory was conceived to work as a technical consulting instrument, on which the Political Table would have relied in order to make political choices and to facilitate negotiations among different levels of government authorities – national, regional, and local. The institutionalization of a Political Table is unique in Italy (Podestà, 2008) and it is indicative of the fragility and significance the Turin-Lyon issue reached after 2005. The Observatory's goal was to "find technical answers to political questions, by trying to tie again the threads of an interrupted dialogue and to re-establish the mutual acknowledgment between subjects variously interested in the topic" (Observatory Turin-Lyon railway, 2007, p. 9). The Observatory in fact allowed a technical debate among experts named by each of the institutional stakeholders (from Susa Valley mayors to regional and European representatives), but it didn't directly involve citizens or local NGOs.

13 European Commission introduced SEA (in Italian VAS) in 2001. In the introduction to the European regulation 2001/42/EC it is written "In order to contribute to more transparent decision making and with them of ensuring that the information supplied for the assessment is comprehensive and reliable, it is necessary to provide that authorities with relevant environmental responsibilities and the public are to be consulted during the assessment of plans and programs, and that appropriate time frames reset, allowing sufficient time for consultations, including the expression of opinion."

14 In 2006 a new left-oriented government was elected and the Prime Minister was Romano Prodi.

Chaired by architect Mario Virano, named extraordinary commissioner by national government, Observatory's merit was to open up a debate that for the first time questioned the opportunity of the Turin-Lyon layout by taking into consideration other possible solutions, even those grounded on the hypothesis of enhancing existing historical lines (Ciaffi & Mela, 2011). The way in which works were managed by the president, Mario Virano, was crucial. Meetings took place every week for almost 3 years. Communication with civil society occurred through monthly reports, Quaderni, containing all meeting records, as well as questions, issues, and contrasts. At the end of this experience, two critical issues might be identified within this approach. The first concerns excluding civil society from the process, that have been able, over the years, to organize groups and associations and formulate structured and valid positions and documents (Maggiolini, 2009). Secondly, bringing the political debate just on technical issues and practical solutions would have depoliticized conflicts (Padovan, Alietti, Arrobbio, 2011). Indeed, it displaces contrasts on technical arguments, as much that, at the end of all mediation processes, we have two robustly documented and fully feasible solutions, following opposite, incompatible paths: the construction of a new line and the enhancing of the historical line, the so-called Low Cost project.

#### *4. Which results? The role of opposing groups*

After a stalemate phase however, intercalated by some fight episodes, open conflicts exacerbated again in summer 2011, when police forces removed No TAV's garrison in the area assigned for construction of the exploratory tunnel. Together with the Italian government crisis in winter of the same year, further protests spread all over Susa Valley and culminated in February 2012 with the dramatic death of a young demonstrator.<sup>15</sup> In spite of the latter mediation attempts, No TAV resistance to central government choices didn't really make a step backward: the amount of technical studies and economic evaluation produced by No TAV supporters is impressive and all of them are addressed to delegitimize the economical and functional Turin-Lyon project's ratio.

In an interview in March 2012, conducted by Marianella Sclavi, Italian expert of creative conflicts resolution, Mario Virano reflects upon limits of the Italian way of managing conflicting public policies. He raises two main points: The first is the attitude of the Italian government to act with a sort of pre-Lutheran indulgences' market approach in order to make the local population and its political representatives consent to the new big infrastructure. The traditional top-down behavior is paying the stake-

<sup>15</sup> At the end of February 2012, Luca Abbà, 37-years old, fell from an electricity tower where he perched to escape from police. This tragic news upset Italian public opinion and contributed to the positions' radicalization (see Schiavazzi, 2012).

holders one by one, while the bottom-up perspective reveals an ordinary acceptance of this mechanism, as much individualistic as completely complementary to the top-down attitude. The interviewed speaks ironically by defining the Italian left party as “state-controlled in a different way.” As regarding the Observatory experience he states: “It is completely unreasonable to think that it can be possible to open a debate with local communities and stakeholders in general at the end of a decision-making process. First thing to do should be to modify the law [Aim Law] in order to introduce an organized debate phase, codified by determined procedures, certain duration, and a guaranteed external management system, as the preliminary phase of each infrastructure planning process. What has to be discussed should be motivations, goals, and features of a new operation.” Virano is clearly referring to French *Débat Public*, as a virtuous model for managing conflictive planning issues by enlarging the public arena. Today, it is common opinion in Italy that “we should learn from France,” as the Minister for Development, Corrado Passera, stated a few weeks ago.

But what is really happening on the other side of the Alps today? Indeed, echoes from Susa Valley's protests are crossing the regional borders to resound in France. Savoie, the French region crossed by the Turin-Lyon line, has been historically in favor of the project, which would have represented a good alternative to heavy-goods vehicles invasion, crossing the valley everyday, increasing pollution and creating safety risks. Now something seems to change. Although at first the trans-alpine rail road Lyon-Turin was conceived of to privilege just high-speed train travellers, already in 1995, with the Green party elected in the Regional Council, freight transportation issues were also taken into consideration and brought into the Lyon-Turin discussion. The Mont Blanc tunnel accident in 1999 was another turning point in the decision process for sustaining the new railway project: people were convinced that starting a process of modal shifting in the Valley was the best way of also reducing dramatic risks.

For French ecologists, in fact, it has been somehow hard to understand how Susa Valley inhabitants would prefer trucks crossing valley landscapes and be against goods-rail transports. Nevertheless, today Italian opponents' argumentations are introducing new elements for evaluating Turin-Lyon benefits so convincing that “it is necessary to revise our critical support to the project, since those are profoundly changing the game,” Gérard Blanc, National Leader of EELV (Europe Ecologists the Green) Savoie, recently affirmed.<sup>16</sup>

In the light of a renewed consciousness, French ecologists are again opening up the debate. Michèle Rivasi, a member of European Parliament for Europe Écologies, Greenpeace France ex-manager, and vice-mayor in Valence, has recently explained very well how their positions on Lyon-Turin are evolving:

16 For further insights, watch interviews at the following link <http://www.lavoixdesallobroges.org/environnement/396-les-ecolos-savoyards-divises-sur-le-lyon-turin>.

“At first, we were more convinced that goods transportation would provide the big opportunity of crossing Alps to develop trades with Italy. Now, instead, because of the problematic situation in Susa Valley and people protests against the high speed line, we wouldn't certainly oppose the majority,” and she adds “this is the reason why I asked for a new report about valley situation. After all the effort aimed at promoting rail transport against heavy-goods vehicles, we wouldn't change opinion easily. But, if Italians are still opposing, we have to face with these new problems.”

A public enquiry conducted by the National Agency for French Environment (AE) about the ‘Turin Lyon’ project, published in December 2011 in France, raised a number of evidences, according to which environmental organizations such as FRAPNA (Rhône-Alpes Federation for Nature's Protection) and FNE (France Nature and Environment) historically in support of the project are changing opinion and asking to open a public discussion on the infrastructure. According to this report, in fact, former evaluations on the Turin-Lyon line traffic system and economic returns would have been carried out from no more valid data (Sansa, 2012). Apparently the first traffic foresights were too optimistic, enough so as to weaken cost-benefit analysis results made today: by using actual traffic data and taking into consideration work site delay foresights, expected profitability would reduce dramatically. The ‘Lyon-Turin’ project is already costing 24 billion euros. Its completion date and use however remain unclear: the number of long-distance journeys by train is stagnating and goods traffic between Italy and France is falling. The modernization of the line, according to experts, would be sufficient to transport up to 19 million tons of goods by rail, while the current figure is less than five million. Beside that, the report tackles environmental impact issues by recommending RFF to produce more detailed studies on air pollution and flooding risks.<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly, these argumentations coincide exactly with those sustained by the Italian No TAV movement.<sup>18</sup>

While regional representatives from EELV are espousing this thesis (Emmanuel Coux, 2011) at the national tier, former President Sarkozy and current President Hollande, both are still strongly in favor of the project. This gap between central government conviction and local positions is evident also within ecologist groups themselves. If at the local level representatives from EELV are criticizing the entire project's ratio, also enlarging the debate to the entire economic system this infrastructure would represent (Gérard Blanc, 2011), their delegates at the national level seem still convinced.

It is certainly hard to affirm if a new French front is going to appear in the battle against the Turin-Lyon high-speed train. For sure, French central government has made crucial work in the last 10 years, preparing public opinion to accept and welcome the infrastructure. The law of 2002, in fact, contributed to defining compensations for local

17 For more detailed information see <http://www.cipra.org/en/alpmedia/news-en/4556>; <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/03/05/ricavi-traffico-dubbi-parigi-sulla/195633/>.

18 Full documentation at <http://areeweb.polito.it/eventi/TAVSalute/ANALISI%20DOCUMENTO%20GOVERNO%2028.03.12.pdf>.

communities by imposing the rate for local enterprises at 86% by favoring economic returns for hotels and residences and tax facilitations. However, the rising of new opposing movements on the French side of the infrastructure project is the demonstration that conflicting dynamics within civil society have a generative and transformative power also in a very democratic and sophisticated governance system.

## 5. Conclusion

The Turin-Lyon railway project is an emblematic case of when such a cross-border infrastructure becomes the occasion for two democracies to confront relative public decision-making systems and political cultures. French case evidences that public institutions can activate participatory devices aimed at improving public policies, as in the infrastructural planning field, by providing “invited spaces” for collective discussion, like public debate sessions. On the contrary, Italian government shows how such a top-down approach, imposed in an emergency regime without any margins for public debate, can produce weak public policies and exacerbate conflicts. Although many Italians are looking to France as a virtuous example, asking for the introduction of public debate forms also in its governmental system, the emerging protests in France as well as recent technocratic experiments in Italy are raising interesting questions about the use of participatory spaces to correct and improve representative democracy.

A first reflection concerns with the consensual perspective proper of those participatory practices aimed to anticipate and reduce conflicts. Even though deliberative approaches do not promote negotiation (Elster, 1991), but rather transactional learning through free speech and creative dialogue, those practices are addressed to facilitate “mutual understanding” and “preferences transformation” (Habermas, 1986). Such a culturalist perspective indeed reduces pluralistic potential of participatory practices according to which “passions and interests are incommensurable”<sup>19</sup> (Pasqui, 2005, p. 31). In this sense, some authors are talking about “the tyranny of participation” (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Pasqui, 2005; Massey, 2011), whose systemic tyrannical potential do not conceive “claimed spaces” for participation and consequently systematically exclude less powerful social groups. In a recent interview given to Markus Miessen in 2010 for his work *The Nightmare of Participation*, Chantal Mouffe clearly explains the conflicting relationship between the seeking of pluralism in participatory practice and the consensus-building approach. Her point of view is certainly extreme, but it

19 An Italian policy analyst, Gabriele Pasqui, clearly explains how “on one side *planning theory* adopts the centrality of deliberative dimension as an universalized process, without being sufficiently prudent and by underestimating the fact that planning processes are mainly social constructs, produced within a plurality of multi-actor cooperative and conflictive interaction's forms, which involve interests and lives' meanings, not necessarily associate,” p. 31 in Pasqui G. (2005). *Progetto, governo, società. Ripensare le politiche territoriali*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

gives some interesting cues of reasoning about the deliberative model, both in its practical and political dimension. In particular, Mouffe criticizes the consensus-building perspective, by sustaining instead that interaction and collaboration, as a way for producing new knowledge, should be pursued in conflicting contexts, where relationality of powers could be broken: "Because today's networking culture is based on consensus rather than conflict, it merely produces multiplications, but rarely new knowledge." (Mouffe quoted in Miessen, 2010) Indeed, looking at the relationship described in the last paragraph of this paper between Italian opposing movements and French ecologist groups, Mouffe's observation finds a practical relevance. If the core of public debate is deliberation, the role of those opposing movements, working outside of "invited spaces" of participation, provided by the public institutions, and producing additional reasoning, is crucial for improving deliberation by incrementing collective knowledge and public consciousness on the specific topic discussed. A conflicting conception of participation, in fact, acknowledges opposing groups as beneficial for democracy, aimed at stimulating deliberative devices and governance systems in the direction of a more pluralistic and heterogeneous social organization.

In Mouffe's words "One should therefore argue that, instead of breeding the next generation of facilitators and mediators, we should encourage the 'uninterested outsider,' the uncalled participator, who is unaware of prerequisites and existing protocols, but instead who has to enter the arena with nothing but creative intellect and the will to provoke change."

The Italian experience of the Observatory, on the other side, opens an interesting reflection about the relationship between technique and politics. Virano's technocratic approach, in fact, fails when it doesn't take into consideration the communicative and discursive nature of public decision-making practices, by, on the contrary, emphasizing, in a sort of neo-Positivist manner, the power of technicalities and scientific knowledge. In doing this, he seems to be not aware of the "tricky" and "malignant" nature of public issues (Rittel & Webber, 1973), by relegating problem-setting process to a technical debate. At the same time, the incrementalist approach to decision-making practices in the Observatory seems a step forward for deliberative conception of participatory planning: looking for little agreements on practical tasks seems a more pragmatic and effective approach to pluri-logical decision contexts, rather than looking for "mutual understandings." However, the choice to reduce the public arena by excluding civil society from the debate has certainly affected the legitimacy perceived by public opinion about the entire Observatory's experience.

Confrontation matters, and is useful. Decades of experimentation by French democracy on more participative forms of territorial governance are proof that "it is possible" to change the way of governing and it is time for Italian technicians and politicians to ask themselves "why not here?" At the same time, French public managers have to face the weaknesses of a rigid consulting system. Certainly, French participatory mo-

dels need some revision towards more flexible, transformative structures for participation, in the light of an urgent society that is showing an increased consciousness of sharing information through ICT, and producing new knowledge itself.

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