

# The Alps. The People

## Anthropology of small communities. Demographic movements.

### Women's condition. Development perspectives.

By Michela Zucca

#### ABSTRACT

*The project called "Sustainable development processes in the marginal alpine communities of Trentino (Italy)" took off in 2003. We have conducted anthropological fieldwork in five communities regarded as socio-economically marginal. The work has been complemented by demographic research concerning over 1.800 Italian Alpine municipalities, from 1951 to 2001. The data gathered have been used to draw depopulation maps, divided by gender, as well as maps of "critical status" based on different levels of social deterioration. The evidence shows that problems almost invariably associated with mountain communities are not merely of an economic nature. They have massive social and cultural implications.*

*As far as research method is concerned, we have opted for participatory action-research, which is based on the idea that collected data can and should be used to foster community development. This was done during the period of analysis and afterwards. Actions have been carried out not only on traditional rural activities but on innovative sectors such as tourism, culture and - mainly - on ICT and networking. It is worthy of note that four of the five villages that have come under our anthropological scrutiny have been subsequently selected as beneficiaries of EU territorial development programmes. This has permitted the creation of qualified work opportunities to halt the migration of young people and women.*

*During our work we have been able to analyse the process of migration within Trentino, mainly in those 10 municipalities where the gender divide in employment had been found to be larger. Evidence for the period between 1991 and 2004 shows that women are moving from their birthplace to the nearest place, usually a medium-large town, which can cater for their needs (healthcare, family support, culture and leisure).*

*Our fieldworkers have observed the local political, economic and social dynamics, with a particular emphasis on those inconveniences that are more likely to induce residents to leave. By and large, what is most conspicuous is the widespread distrust of the territory itself, and the unravelling of family networks. As a result, local pharmacies, schools, post offices, banks, etc. close down, and this increases the marginality of these areas, for it becomes increasingly difficult for both residents and local authorities to start new business enterprises. It is thus unsurprising that, in some places, development programmes could not take off precisely due to the relative indifference of the local population, a large proportion of which remains set on moving out.*

*Therefore, the originality of our contribution lies in its focus on the procedures to detect, analyze, and diagnose the experience of marginality in alpine communities. We propose that social change should be premised on a combination of various elements and conditions that are most likely to ensure a self-sustaining process of development, based on local values and opportunities.*

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#### PART I: The search for an identity.

#### "PATTERNS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE REMOTE MUNICIPALITIES OF TRENTO"

The "patterns of sustainable development in the remote municipalities of Trentino" project was initiated in 2003 and is sponsored by the Centro di Ecologia Alpina. It consists in extensive ethnographic research in five remote communities and in the analysis of the relevant demographic data provided by the National Statistical Institute for the 1951-2001 period. Results raise a series of questions that could be extended to the whole of the Italian Alps.

#### The Research

The Centro di Ecologia Alpina has been founded in 1993 to investigate human ecology. Current research draws on a great deal of published and unpublished studies.

The reasons behind the significant delay in the development of so many alpine municipalities are not only of an economic nature. We hold that the current situation can be imputed to cultural and social factors. Years of action/research specifically designed by a four-specialist team led by Michela Zucca to look into this issue in various alpine valleys have prompted CEALP to undertake a comprehensive ethnographic study to substantiate our initial hypothesis.

#### The team

Prior to embarking on the actual ethnographic fieldwork, the team members – Alessandro Gretter, Chiara Modenini, Nicoletta Tiziana Beltrame and Claudia Marchesoni – under the direction of Michela Zucca, have attended a course in

anthropology of development to learn the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of ethnographic research. The same course was offered again the next years, and this time enrolment was made open to the general public. We believe that it could be taught elsewhere in the Alps, and one of our primary goals is actually to ensure that this will be done soon, also by circulating more widely the papers and reports produced by the team.

### *The field*

Sagròn-Mis, Cimego, in Western Trentino, Terragnolo, in the vicinity of Rovereto, together with Ronzone, in the Non Valley, and Luserna (where an undergraduate has also been involved in the fieldwork). These are the municipalities in which our ongoing ethnographic study is taking place. Each one of them has a population of a few hundred inhabitants and suffers from the depopulation epidemics that affects so many alpine and rural communities.

This research has focused on areas where the social and economic fabric has been frayed but also on other, less marginal districts, with real potential for growth and where depopulation can be halted. During their residence, researchers have sought to understand the development of the communities not only from a historical perspective but, above all, the human element and the socio-cultural factors that have led to the present situation.

### *Participatory planning for sustainable development*

We have opted for the technique called participatory action-research: based on data collection, we have started, already in the fieldwork stage, new programmes for sustained development, which combine traditional rural activities with innovative and broad solutions in the area of tourism, culture, handicrafts and, above all, new technologies and web services. We expect that this initiative will facilitate the creation of qualified labour, so as to prevent young people and women from leaving their villages. Development programmes of this sort, especially concerned with the promotion of local cultural identities and the active participation of the local residents, have been tried before in Trentino, at Pejo, Primiero and in Val di Cembra, as part of the RECITE II "Learning Sustainability" and Interreg III C "European Network of Village Tourism" frames. The "European Network of Village Tourism" has involved four of the five municipalities under study, namely Cimego, Luserna, Terragnolo e Ronzone.

### *Fieldwork in areas where resettlement programmes are in place*

Fieldwork for the empirical verification of conditions abroad has been carried out in tandem with the one taking place in Trentino. We have selected regions with similar environmental and demographic circumstances, like the Science Park of Sophia Antipolis in the French Alpes Maritimes department, Eastern Ireland, and the Spanish Pyrenees. This has enabled the team to propose solutions that had already been successfully tested elsewhere.

### *Data gathering and quantitative analysis – data mapping*

We have compared qualitative and quantitative data through statistical analysis of census data relative to the 1951-2000 period, for every municipality of the Alps. Tabular summaries have been graphically displayed as depopulation maps, featuring total numbers and gender breakdown. In a similar way, we have produced "critical status" maps of municipalities on the brink of extinction, assuming that shrinking municipalities are those with a size of less than 500 inhabitants and at a distance of at least at a 20 minute drive from the nearest town (the convention being that in the Alps towns have at least 5,000 inhabitants). We have considered the ten municipalities in Trentino where the men/women of fertile age ratio was the most significant – incidentally, Trentino is the Italian region where the male/female ration is the most unbalanced - in order to figure out where, over the past 13 years, women have resettled.

Data from the interviews have been run through statistical processing, and we have arranged the most frequent statements thematically, so as to show relative frequency and significance.

## **The context**

The trend towards the abandonment of settlements and economic activities in the remotest regions of the Alps points to a state of deep social and cultural crisis and is entirely confirmed by the interviewees. Inhabitants of small alpine villages sense their marginality, their declining living standards and the perceived increase of their "distance" from towns. Throughout their fieldwork, researchers have examined the process of cultural change occurring during the transition from tradition to modernity, one that has exerted a considerable influence on the relationship between community and land and between the community members themselves.

In the space of a generation, the traditional economic, social and cultural signposts have changed dramatically and we suggest that it would be useful to learn, through an interdisciplinary approach, what the effects of this transformation are, and what the most likely future scenarios might be. From a broader perspective, the situation is even more serious. Demographic projections to 2025 of international organizations like FAO predict that 87 percent of the European population will be concentrated in urban districts. In the Alps, the depopulation rate ranges from 30 percent in Trentino to over 80 percent in Carnia. Accurate data are not available for the Apennines, but it is reasonable to postulate that data may be even more alarming.

People in the mountains live in an undeclared state of emergency that calls for complex and diversified solutions, sensitive to local identities and needs but also, where possible, ground-breaking. This is all the more important because,

even though 70 percent of Italy is mountainous, Italians, even in the Alps, regard themselves as city-dwellers. This has important repercussions at a political and administrative level, because local authorities are not prompted to see depopulation as an actual problem that needs to be tackled with determination. Consequences can be vastly many, from the shortage of people managing the land, to cultural and group identity loss and the erosion of economic and social structures.

### **Objectives: development plans**

The main objective of the project is the anthropological definition and assessment of a development plan increasing the quality of life in remote mountain communities and reducing the discomfort of their inhabitants. This will provide important indications concerning the way reforms and changes in the social, economic and environmental fields should be effected in order to allow these communities to survive. The four fieldwork researchers have illustrated a number of recurring themes that could be used to induce young people and women to continue to reside in their birthplaces. This study should uncover the factors that affect most dramatically the development of these communities, and prevent the use of local resources, both of an economic and cultural nature; it should also suggest a way in which this seemingly inexorable loss of "vital forces" can be halted.

We want to understand why young people and, according to the available demographic evidence, especially women, leave the places where they were born and raised and move to the cities. A better understanding of this phenomenon will encourage the formulation of adequate legislation and policies that, once locally implemented, will hopefully keep small communities alive and vibrant. Ultimately, we would like to provide evidence of the conditions of remote villages, of their levels of social cohesion and of the quality of their relationship with the environment, while assisting local authorities developing and advancing plans for the enhancement of the living standards of the inhabitants of small villages.

### **An innovative content**

The advantage of the approach that we propose lies in the method that we employ to ascertain the conditions of marginalization of alpine communities at the intersection of their social, environmental, anthropological, and geographic dimensions, with a view to the possible benefits that can be reaped from the added value of local opportunities and practices.

Central to our study is the notion of sustainable development, that is to say, an approach responsive to the needs of the present generation, including economic and profit growth and distribution, working opportunities, social and cultural services, better housing and education (viz. Brundtland Report).

The concept of sustainability and of quality of life that we set forth stresses the importance of the social and anthropological elements that make up a community and the strong but flexible bonds between a community and the surrounding region. The research method that we employ combines quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (ethnographic) data. Both provide benchmarks for each issue that we explore. The definition of the opportunities for sustainable growth will not only consider structural factors, but also the living conditions of the community, marked by cultural distinctiveness, by traditional ways of doing things, as well as by its vulnerability and deficiencies, vis-à-vis the ubiquitous market economy.

The development of targeted methods and strategies of implementation will involve a plurality of variables and will have a special regard for the fragility of the environmental, economic and social context in which they are deployed.

### **Methodology for sustainable development: action-research**

During our fieldwork, we have employed the action-research technique, consisting in data-collection aimed at the development of a given region, through the involvement of its population. ■ The goal is eminently practical: the actors involved in an action-research study are both the researchers and the informants. The definition of the problem comes at a later stage, when researchers and the community come together to discuss the relevant information and decide in concert what should be done next.

The observation of the social context is vital. "context" is an expression which comes from the Latin verb "con-tessere", meaning "to weave together" and, by extension, "fabric." Specifically, "context" includes all the elements that define the identity of a group, a set of complex economic, social, cultural, human, religious, mythical, and archetypal relations that constitute a social milieu. This is the key-scenario for every development plan. It must consider both economic and socio-cultural dimensions and must be empirically tested, by trial and error. This is what makes it flexible: it varies as the context changes, for there are no universally applicable, pre-packaged solutions. Needless to say, theory is important, since no intervention can be built on a foundation lacking an accurate theoretical framework and a reasonable amount of information.

Two methodological assumptions underpin this approach:

1. The gradual emancipation of the social sciences from positivism and the theoretical models of the hard sciences, with their irrefutable results and their scientific reliability based on universal laws. Diversity of human behaviour generates a variety of situations and solutions even when the context is ostensibly the same: it is this complexity that a positivistic approach cannot fully grasp;
2. Expertise must be applied. Expertise is only valuable when it is of some use.

### *Guidelines*

For our action-research we have followed the EU preferential guidelines for 2002-2005. The proposed criteria are as follows:

- Capacity of the project designers to make it suit the needs of the community;
- Bottom-up approach at every stage;
- Broad participation in planning and execution;
- Increased equal opportunities, especially for women, through mainstreaming and empowerment throughout the design and implementation of the project; involvement and economic, social and cultural growth of disadvantaged areas;
- Identification and involvement of end-users, by informal as well as direct contact
- Project sustainability.

### *What needs to be evaluated*

When it comes to economic development, including sustainable development, the first thing to do is to appraise the initial conditions. A project cannot take off without it and one needs to address the following issues:

- The number of inhabitants of a community;
- Their occupations;
- Their age;
- Their schooling and education;
- Their attitude towards entrepreneurship;
- The core values of the community;
- The community's expectations;
- The expectations of the most dynamic social actors;
- The role and expectations of women;
- The role and expectations of young people;
- Conflict and disagreement;
- Distribution of wealth;
- Family ties and patron-client relations;
- Formal and informal associative and aggregative patterns, within and without the community;
- Business activities;
- Entrepreneurial spirit;
- Relations and partnership between economic actors;
- Drive for innovations among the young generations;
- Type of local government and policy-making process;
- Degree of consensus about the initiatives of the local authorities;
- Measure of trust;
- Trust and consensus with respect to action-researchers and their project;

## **THEORETICAL PREMISES: NOTHING IS MORE PRACTICAL THAN GOOD THEORY**

### **Human ecology**

Human ecology is about the processes of transformation of the environment triggered by natural phenomena or human intervention. Human beings have always modified the environment, as one can easily deduce from the numerous signs of their presence, such as cropland and grassland pasture and grazed forest land.<sup>3</sup> Human beings determine the evolution or extinction of entire ecosystems. Ecosystems are specific, porous environments where population and nature co-exist and the impact of human action is usually significant.

But while in the past, at least until WWII, traditional economic systems prevailed and human intervention was visible in settlements and fields, without being exceedingly conspicuous, as there used to be a certain concern for keeping the balance between nature and society, resources and the population, now these practices are being phased out.

The study of demographic trends is at the core of human ecology. Historical-demographic research carried out by anthropologists<sup>4</sup> clearly shows that men in alpine communities migrated seasonally. Women did the same less frequently, in order to supplement their other occupations: farming and herding for men, mainly domestic chores for women. Families relied on a great deal of functional flexibility. Where temporary migration did not occur, there still were ways in which procreation was kept at bay, such as high celibacy and late weddings: a case in point is the Swiss village of Törbel, studied by Robert Nettino.<sup>5</sup>

Social organization is another key aspect of human ecology. It comprises the institutions, principles and rules established by the community to govern individual behaviour. We are talking about a process, whereby individual actions are

not determined by social organization but really are its outcome. In the Alps, wedding practices have shaped an institutionalized model of society that forestalls an excessive demographic growth.

Another branch of human ecology is cultural technology, introduced by Haudricourt and Leroi-Gourhan<sup>6</sup> in the Forties. It studies the relationship between human beings and their environment, with technology as the intermediary. The interdependence of science and society, which manifests itself through technological advance, is an important variable because, according to Haudricourt, technological innovations arise from a society undergoing a major process of social and cultural change. It is technology that generally adapts itself to society. On the other hand, no technological advance will occur so long as it is not socially and culturally acceptable, because the process of devising something technologically new is almost always related to a broader and diverse socio-cultural context.

### **Cultural ecology**

For the experts of cultural ecology<sup>7</sup> change comes from the process of adaptation to the environment.

This outlook focuses on the relationship between society and nature, on the embeddedness of a community in its environment, on resource management and on the harnessing technologies, on herding and domestication, on demography, food habits, biological and technical adjustment to extreme climates, on the "techniques of the body," on health and healthcare practices. It involves studies of primatology, prehistory, archaeology, ethnology, environmental sciences, linguistics, and biological anthropology.

In cultural ecology, the element of technology has a special importance. André Leroi-Gourham<sup>8</sup> and André Haudricourt have pointed out the close relatedness of science, technology, and society, breaking away from traditional divisions between hard sciences and social sciences, and demonstrating that tools, any sort of tools, from a plough to a spaceship, are inventions that can only exist in a specific social and economic context.

This implies that there will be a constant interplay between a technological environment, namely the technologies, techniques, actions and modes of work available in a certain historical period to a human group, and the surrounding ecological system. This substratum consist in the technological background of the culture under study, and in the technological background, which includes the technologies employed by those neighbouring peoples with which there is an ongoing exchange of products and ideas.<sup>9</sup> Innovation occurs when a society is ripe for it: then, it is either devised inside a community, or it is imported and reworked: the difference between the two scenarios is, for all intents and purposes, negligible.

### **Sustainable development**

The issue of socio-cultural change is crucial when it comes to sustainable development and to putting an upper limit to growth for environmental reasons. The most popular definition of sustainable development is the one used in the Brundtland Report, in 1987, which led to the official adoption of the same definition by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCDE), organized by the United Nations. The report, entitled "Our common future," reads as follows: "humanity has the ability to make development sustainable, to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits – not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities."

Such a definition can be contradictory, and this is precisely the opinion of Serge Latouche, the chief advocate of downscaling growth.<sup>10</sup> In point of fact, our culture is still heavily influenced by nineteenth century evolutionism, stressing the importance of the notion of "progress" as the engine of a more affluent and ultimately better society, thanks to a larger distribution of goods, and of a linear perspective on human history. Therefore, despite the results of many studies published over the past decades,<sup>11</sup> which demonstrate that further growth is impossible, coming to terms with the reality that the production of goods should be curtailed and that it is about time that we implement forms of sustainable development, remains awfully unpleasant.

Human beings can partly circumvent natural selection and intervene to alter the natural order in a way that does not compromise it. But they can also neutralize or destroy those processes that allow ecosystems to adjust to change, regain their balance and re-establish their self-sufficiency. The result is deterioration and loss of biodiversity.

Europe, and especially Northern Italy, from the river Po to the Riviera and to the Alps, has been densely populated since ancient times and its inhabitants had to learn how to functionally adapt to the environment. Over time, they have developed a lifestyle that was instrumental to the harnessing of natural resources without depleting them: this highly sophisticated "technological environment" has brought about important environmental changes across the Alps, barring glaciers and peaks.<sup>12</sup>

Human beings decide to what extent the modification of the environment should be pursued, which model of socio-economic development is the most advisable: a sustainable, long-term and harmonious approach, or something entirely different, since between wilderness and deterioration lies a gamut of options. We think it would be most desirable for the natural environment and human society that humanity attempted to strike a balance between the improvements of both. Protecting nature does not mean placing it in a crystal coffin. What we should rather do is to manage in a fair and effective way human progress and the evolution of the environment.

It is plainly evident that this is the ideal challenge for anthropologists, because their expertise enables them to explain what has already been done and to make an important contribution to the decision-making process concerning the steps

that should be taken to redirect attitudes and practices toward the environment in the light of the local culture, its values and its history.

### **Peasant culture and environmental protection**

In Europe, wilderness is long gone. Even seemingly untouched landscapes are the outcome of human action, like grazing and timber cropping. Prior to the advent of mass tourism and industrialization, that is, until the second post-war period, the most common land management model in rural Europe was still subsistence farming in small holdings. It was parsimonious and provident because the unrestrained exploitation of the land could force people to migration. Peasants possessed a distinct sense of history: changes in the ecosystems were made with an eye to their immediate and lasting consequences and bearing in mind the experience of the predecessors.<sup>13</sup>

Interventions were tailored to address specific needs and attempts were made to anticipate future needs on the basis of the historical record and to coordinate present and future activities. Until a century ago, the European rural civilisation would manage the ecosystem regardless of demographic fluctuations. Human interventions shaped the land over and over again with a different intensity depending on the community and its needs.

The Alps are a case in point. Until the early seventeenth century, the Alps were one of the most densely populated region of Europe;<sup>14</sup> so much so, that most mercenaries for the European wars came from there. In spite of this human concentration - which was greater than, for instance, that of the fertile Pianura Padana, and even at higher altitudes, where the ecological equilibrium is more precarious -, the Alps were less seriously affected by the effects of the cycles of bad harvest, famine, and pandemics, which were normally devastating in a world where resources were limited. The main reason for this greater adaptability, which was shared in common with the Pyrenees, the Apennines and the Massif Central, was the broader distribution of settlements, which were located at different altitudes and in different ecological settings, which encouraged synergies and a more rational management of resources. In this "environmental mosaic," the economic base ranged from sub-Mediterranean cultivation (lemon and olive trees), near the lakes, to high-mountain grazing near the glaciers. This allowed the full and differentiated harnessing of resources, so that a large amount of them would be obtained directly from nature (viz. timber, fish, game and herbs), from farming (cereals, potatoes, fruit and vegetables), and from herding. Seldom was there shortage of them all at the same time. The Alps were an area of intensive farming, as opposed to the plain, where, as a rule, only one crop was harvested each year (monoculture) and if the harvest failed, many would starve and social and economic dislocation would ensue (unattended irrigation systems and river embankments, murrains, etc.).

In fact, crop production in the plains was comparatively remunerative in a market economy, but this did not prevent most peasants from living through recurring periods of hunger. A small-scale, family-oriented economy was less likely to produce a marketable surplus, but could sustain the entire population in disadvantaged areas.

It is of signal importance that the capitalist system is a fairly recent development in Southern Europe and one of the consequences of the diffusion of the market economy in rural area has been economic, social, demographic and ecological imbalance. A vicious circle took shape, in which economic growth was concentrated in regions with high production standards. Rising living standards in those same regions led to demographic growth and intensive cropping. Simultaneously, less favoured areas experienced recession or stagnation, emigration, and abandonment and turn into sources of cheap, unqualified labour for the fastest-growing industrial districts of the United States, France and Germany. Today large cities near the Alps are the favourite destination of these migrant workers. The capitalist economy has caused the demise of small-scale rural economy and the objective of production is no longer survival for the family and the community, but market profitability. In agriculture, the imperative was to cut down on costs and design economies of scale; farming was mechanized and, where necessary, the whole enterprise would be relocated in the Third World. As a consequence of this transformation, more land is needed to support a family, farmers are encouraged to expand and incorporate smaller farms and more and more large land holdings are devoted to monoculture, more efficient in terms of profitability but considerably detrimental in terms of biodiversity and traditional habits and customs.

### **The ecology of abandonment and the identity crisis**

The ecology of abandonment is one branch of human ecology that focuses on how human beings decide to move out of an occupation and of a given ecosystem and the disappearance of traditional ways to graze and to manage forests. It documents the short- and long-term consequences of these phenomena, such as the interrelation between depopulation<sup>15</sup> and ecological transformation, and their social, economic and cultural causes. Needless to say, "abandonment" has anthropocentric connotations, for the same phenomenon could also be described as nature' final vindication.

This discipline is concerned with those regions that have been transformed by stable human presence and, all of a sudden, within the space of a few decades, have been deserted. They have experienced the deterioration of their biodiversity, hydrogeological characteristics and landscape. Take the terracing of the Ligurian slopes, for instance. Massive urbanization along the coast meant that only retired old people, deeply attached to the land, would continue to manage terrace-cultivation. After their death, things will get certainly worse for the stability of the ecosystem.

The disappearance of cultivations and the return of the forest on the pastures cause the extinction of various valuable and fragile vegetable species, especially herbs, and the impoverishment of the soil. One of the results of this process is that essences and products that were once derived from agriculture and plants are now chemically mass produced, without

attaining the quality standards of the natural ones, viz. lavender essential oils.

A vegetative analysis carried out by the Centro di Ecologia Alpina<sup>16</sup> on some crop patches in Monte Bondone (Trento) shows that, compared to mowing patches, low density larch forests and beech forests, open meadows and swards that have not been used for cattle-grazing and mowing for 30 years exhibit a greater biodiversity. Analysis of the variety of species in these different habitats shows restrictions in the range of species, from 97 species in the sward, to 70 in the meadow, 48 in the larches' undergrowth and 46 in the beech forest.

The management of pastures affects the ecological dynamics of vast stretches of land. Alexander Cernusca and Ulriche Tappeiner<sup>17</sup> in the Hohe Tauern national park, Austria, point out that after only one year of abandonment, pastures display quantitative and structural changes of vegetation as well as microclimatic variations. These alterations may influence the run-off of rainwater, and therefore erosion patterns and streamflows, in mountain ecosystems. The two researchers argue that this research provides some important criteria to assess the environmental impact of mountain farming. This, in turn, will affect the amount of subsidies that will be allotted to mountain farmers. Such criteria should also include the positive effects of alpine agriculture for the entire population, like recreational benefits, the protection from avalanches and landslides, the preservation of a vital source of potable water and hydropower. Data analysis has revealed that because of the management of high pastures in the Hohe Tauern national park, the owner of the hydro-electric power stations within the limits of the park should contribute 90 Euros per hectare to local farmers to compensate them for the additional 3 percent of water run-off that reaches its stations due to their activities. Such estimates should be extended to other areas. The beneficial effects of the work of mountain farmers and of their culture have been far too often neglected. So much so that today mountain ecosystems are threatened by the dramatic identity crisis of this category of workers and mountain dwellers. The young generations and some middle-aged people often come to the conclusion that rural economy and agricultural work are doomed. At first, they are kept going by women and the elderly, then, when women manage to find another job, they leave the land behind and, with it, their native culture and traditions, now deemed worthless and passé. The young mountain-dweller easily forswears his identity, he is ashamed of himself and feels isolated, with no public support.

Older generations normally don't think in terms of profit alone and are more willing to stay and cultivate the land and perpetuate their ways of life. So long as they can support themselves and are physically capable, older people continue to live in their households and, if they are forced to leave, they lose their zest for life. Otherwise, they retain a sense of stewardship (and ownership) towards the place where they were born and raised.

For a farmer "home" includes the whole region where he lives: "his" mountain, "his" valley, etc. He feels guilty when a dry stone wall falls apart, when terraces are eroded, when a pasture reverts to scrub, as though he were personally responsible for the survival of the cultural landscape: traditional agriculture has become a second nature for him! Mass tourism has revolutionised the traditional socio-economic model, premised on an all-sufficient and decentralised mode of harnessing natural resources. The new, centralized model of total exploitation of one resource over the others, is entirely removed from the control and management of ordinary people, in that it depends on large investments of capital. The ecological balance of the farmed land can only be ensured by a sufficient amount of human labour devoted to its restoration. This process stalls when human beings no longer feel such a vocation. In the Alps, shared toil perpetuates the culture and gives meaning to the notion of nature and landscape stewardship. Nevertheless, over the last thirty years, national policies have produced enormous structural changes in both agriculture and apiculture causing a dramatic reduction of cropland and grazing land. Vegetation has reverted to typologies that existed before the establishment of human settlements.

Such a process may take decades and entails several successive stages, each defined by specific and unstable combinations of flora and fauna. Mountain communities knew full well that there are thresholds that should not be crossed when it comes to balance social needs and concerns about natural resources. They were aware that what is taken away from nature must be given back, at some point (e.g. manure), and in the same proportion. To the extent that these communities remained independent and free, they retained their environmental conscience and a degree of functional interdependence with nature. Then, pressures from the outside (nationalism, wars, housing speculation, capitalism, mass tourism, and so forth) tipped the balance against nature. FOOTNOTE? For further information on the subject of commons, public domains, and the management of mountain resources in the Alps, see the research conducted by the Centro studi per le proprietà collettive e demani civici, at the University of Trento ([http://www.jus.unitn.it/usi\\_civici/](http://www.jus.unitn.it/usi_civici/))

## Anthropology and Economy

Even today, the common perception of economics – among ordinary people as in the ivory tower – is that it is an exact science,<sup>18</sup> based on mathematical models that can be applied to clearly definable situations: underdeveloped countries, countries of the Northern hemisphere, agriculture, industry, new economy... Save for the Anglo-Saxon countries, anthropology is seen as too subjective a discipline to make reliable predictions about what will happen in the future in a given community, especially with regard to the economic sphere. However, the most receptive economic analysts have known for a long time that barter, much in the same way as the exchange in the global market, must obey to cultural, not only functional, rules. The way in which production is planned, a commodity is assigned a material and symbolic value, and is marketed, is the result of cultural dynamics specific to each civilization. The ability to propose and the willingness to accept a new, manufactured need (of goods, services, living standards, etc.) are contingent on the effectiveness of a message. A cultural model can be imported, exported, removed more quickly than a commodity. Economy and anthropology are

interrelated and the science of economics cannot be dissociated from the study of the society where cultural and consumer practices take shape. From this perspective, marketing strategies can greatly benefit from a methodical ethnographic analysis. The hi-tech boom has produced an enormous quantity of data to examine. But such is the amount of information that even the most sophisticated computers could not handle it. One has to pick out the most valuable information, and anthropological criteria can help considerably in making this choice, by showing the navigation through variables and functions, figures and reports to meet the expectations of the client, together with one's own.

Anthropology cannot certainly replace economics, but it can scrutinize the same evidence and offer a constructive critique, bringing out the implicit and hidden relations between production, distribution and consumption on the one hand, and society and culture on the other hand, because individuals and groups with their biases, beliefs and undisclosed assumptions, are the only true agents in these relations. The practical implications of this analysis, which are of considerable interest, are however all too often ignored by those who manage the economic growth of a country or a region.

Economics as we see it is how people's decisions on how to produce commercialize and consume are informed by their background and habits of thought and action, which are in turn culturally, socially, and historically determined variables.

Recently, then, the debate on some crucial economic questions has moved from universities, public offices and corporations to the public arena, and across the world. The destruction of non-renewable energy sources, the increasing economic rift between the rich and the poor, globalization, the influence of advertising, and the commodification of individual identities, the changing nature of work, are matters of consequences for the public.

In pre-industrial communities, even in small rural communities, the dominant economic model was autarchy: people tried to produce what was necessary to support themselves and resorted very little to market exchange. Family ties defined production relations. Production seldom exceeded the needs of a family. This system collapsed with the advent of market economy in both colonial societies and rural communities in Europe.

Today we cannot possibly define that system as backward, because it did manage to accomplish what contemporary economists can only dream of: a closed cycle of production-consumption-recycling-environmental care. The collapse of this age-old system led to environmental degradation. This is why we cannot think of it as a simple economic model. On the contrary, it is a complex model that minimizes the ecological impact and may offer some valid solution in these times of environmental crisis. In this sense, the work of anthropologists fills the gap left by other academicians, providing the expertise necessary to develop a new economic paradigm more attuned to the demands of the public, more respectful of nature, more responsive to the disparities between developed and developing countries, and between mountains and plains, cities and countryside.

## **History, anthropology, advocacy and the struggle for identity**

Looking into the possibility for small alpine communities to develop by their own efforts means writing the history of how a human group pursue the identity struggle, that is, how its history has been manipulated and neutered.<sup>19</sup> Without a strong identity economic growth will not be as robust as one would hope for, and nurturing a group identity without investing in collective memories, that is, in a common and unique history, is futile. Yet, rural populations in the Alps have been labelled "peoples without history" for centuries.<sup>20</sup>

Until the 1960s Italy was essentially a rural country; those who lived in the cities were a minority. Even today, we only study the history of a 10 percent of the population that lived in the cities; or, better said, of a 10 percent of that 10 percent, that is the members of the ruling classes. Still more precisely, we are talking about half of the latter, i.e. the men. In other words, our history is the monopoly of 0.5% of the entire population. This may well be of historical significance, but it is statistically irrelevant. A major shift towards social history in historiography occurred in the 1930s and 1940s, when Marc Bloch and Lucien Fèvre founded the "École des Annales"<sup>21</sup> and began to focus their attention on the history of the people who lived at the bottom of society. This school made history and anthropology come together to counterbalance the earlier overwhelming focus on events and historical figures.

Through the study of ordinary people and their concerns, the historian detects the fundamental mechanisms of a society.<sup>22</sup> This theory has yet to make headway in mainstream historiography: today the history taught at school is still the same as it has always been.

Furthermore, we tend to "forget" that most of the cultural, social and economic thinking in the Middle Age was going on in cloisters and castles: illuminated manuscripts were drawn in places that could be called "eagle's nests." Epoch-making technological and scientific discoveries such as watermills, oil mills, the forge hammer, the sawmill, and the wine barrel have not been made in universities but in egalitarian, autonomous, mostly self-sufficient rural communities, that did not shy away from innovation and creativity.

The question of which history and which identity suit a community is not an easy one to answer because, for all intents and purposes, the past is what historiography defines as such, and the rules of historiography are determined to no small degree by historical and ideological contingencies. History is culturally and anthropologically mediated. Proof of that: the transition from the history of the great figures and great events to social history, where ethnographic data and information on the mentality of ordinary people proves decisive. The masses become protagonist of their history, even though the rationale and the forces of change sometimes are blurred, or even overlap. This is really difficult to grasp, let alone accept, from within a linear, cause-effect perspective on historical trends, one in which the centrepiece is the individual, within a timeframe close to zero, made of quick, uneven and short oscillations, that is, what we call "events." These events form the baseline of history, seen as an historical account of the way things really happened, as though human life were entirely prey



to the whims of exceptional men whose actions and discoveries determine the fate of the common people. This is a kind of history that is seen from above and not in the *long-durée*. Yet, major social transformations do not originate from the decisions of charismatic figures: the thoughts and actions of historical figures themselves are the result of streams of events and processes unfolding over extended time-periods and these are non-linear, non teleological; they are the ideal subject for an anthropological study.

An anthropological outlook takes into account the inventions born out of collective wisdom that are generally neglected by the official historiography. Take the Middle Age, for instance. It was a period of major technological advance, viz. watermills. But those accomplishments were the outcome of the practical skills and reasoning of nameless people; it took hundreds of years to develop and perfect them. But while less arresting innovations are studied by heart, watermills are confined to textbooks dealing with the history of agriculture. It is not a coincidence that most of the techniques that sensibly improved our life, starting from the Middle Age, were introduced in the Alps, and have been developed and tested by those people that for centuries have been regarded as uncivilized. Among them, watermills, sophisticated irrigation techniques, sawmills, forges, oil mills, grindstones, furnaces, presses, felt cloth, etc. Social history, like anthropology and psychoanalysis study not only the conscious and clearly identifiable activities of human beings but also, and with a special emphasis, what is left unsaid, what is taken for granted and tacitly assumed, the collective subconscious, psychological and mental framework of a particular society at a given time. Anthropological historiography describes the culture of a community, its aspirations, its change, standstill, or even regression, its adaptation to the environment and to changing economic, political, religious and social conditions. Its focus is on collective history, where groups, communities and the masses play the central role and where the experts attempts to figure out the whys and wherefores of the life of anonymous people at the same time influencing and influenced by the socio-cultural milieu.

### **Teaching people to appreciate popular wisdom: identity economy and the role of tradition**

Fieldwork research, mostly in Africa, enabled Balandier<sup>23</sup> and other exponents of dynamic anthropology, a branch of anthropology that is concerned with changes in the communities under study, to question the commonly held view that there existed a dualism between tradition and modernity. This, he found too simplistic and reductionist. Today, globalization is bringing these issues back into the limelight. Dynamic anthropology identifies and explicates multifarious influences and cultural changes affecting not only traditional cultures but society as a whole.

Modernity and globalization are often perceived by the public as leading to deconstruction, fragmentation, if not to the extinction of age-old systems of values. In reality, while some disappear, other cultures are revitalized, sometimes restored, when symbols and rituals of collective identification are once again in fashion. Hobsbawm<sup>24</sup> submits that a tradition is not a cultural fact, it is not something that is already present in a society: it is a use that changes over time and can be made from nothing; and its adoption is made more convenient by material and immaterial needs.

This is why we should not think of tradition as something that belongs to the past; to the contrary, it plays an important part in the definition of the present, by affecting the perception of events and of the need and direction of change. For all the conservatives' efforts to argue the contrary, the interplay of tradition and modernity is not antagonistic but dialectic. It follows that categories such as false and authentic have little meaning in the debate revolving around the concepts of modernity and tradition. The French anthropologist Gérard Lenclud, pondering on the meaning of tradition, maintains that it does not correspond to "a product of the past, a work from a different time that contemporaries should receive passively;" something traditional is "not what has always been, but what we want it to be."<sup>25</sup> This approach, according to Lenclud, "helps us dispose of a false problem, namely the question (...) of change and preservation, of rates of relative transformation and conservation."<sup>26</sup>

But then again, what is the function of tradition? Why is it so badly needed in the timeframe, space, mentality, sensibility of the community under scrutiny or in which positive actions are being undertaken?

Sometimes anthropologists may be asked to revise, modernize and reinvent rituals and archaic folklore to make them more plausible. This can be done for several reasons, like rebuilding cohesion around shared symbolisms to prevent social break-ups, or to promote tourism and the identity economy, and so forth. In the light of the above, refusing to do this in the name of academic purism and the cult of authenticity may be counterproductive: the degree of acceptance of the revised tradition is really the only indication that such effort was worth it.

One of the most interesting and stimulating outcomes of the combination of ecological and anthropological research concerns traditional skills and knowledge in the use of environmental resources. One can easily see it as hyper-specialization and balanced adjustment to every single local condition, in accordance with the requirements of a specific culture and its dominant values.

There is a general tendency to cut down on waste and function as a closed cycle, one in which garbage is re-utilised as an energy source (e.g. manure), both ecologically and economically. Indeed, the two terms come from the same Greek root, *oikos*, which stands for home, indicating both the domestic and the natural environment as a shelter and a production unit. They are not opposed but complementary, and this the most important lesson we have to learn from rural civilizations.

One of the ways in which we can recover this traditional wisdom is by means of the identity economy, which is at once technology-oriented and rooted in the history of a community as well as based on innovative forms of advertising. It combines high margins of profit, respect for and appreciation of local identities, and social growth. It is along this line that several communities with a strong identity are working to brand their products as traditional.

Since the report of the Club of Rome and MIT<sup>27</sup> was published, which explained that growth is not unlimited, that the

current conception of economy, environment and their relationship might lead to catastrophic consequences, traditional systems of farming and forestry, herding and land-management have been resumed. Archaic economies that had been of interest only to anthropologists are now studied by other specialists who hope to find out the key to sustainable development, one more respectful of the environment, cultures and local identities, and of the Third World; and one centred on the use of local renewable energies, on setting of limits, on the reduction of pollutants, and on a commitment to implement Rio de Janeiro's Agenda 21.

### **Development anthropology and tourism**

In the Alps, in peripheral communities, people feel the need to initiate processes of development compatible with the revitalization and appreciation of their cultural heritage. The latter is clearly an important element in the establishment of new forms of local entrepreneurship. The promotion of culture tourism, where culture is "translated" so as to become intelligible to outsiders, who should feel involved and relish the opportunity to encounter authenticity and spontaneity – as there is nothing more artificial than tourism promotion built around immaterial goods – may well be the best solution for those areas that have no other resources. To do this, it is indispensable that specialists should carry out a preliminary survey. There is nothing worse than a tourist who feels that he has been deceived. It is also better to avoid criticisms from the local cultural institutions and associations set on defending the integrity of their culture and prevent its commodification. Specialists can wed the historical-anthropological research with handicraft, gastronomy, hospitality, tours, and entertainment in general, as well as to the objectives of public and private investors. It takes hard work, clear goals, diplomatic skills, and the ability to involve the local population.

Constant, specialized training is needed for all the people involved in this kind of project: authorities, entrepreneurs, new employees, teachers, etc. More generally, the whole population should be kept informed about the progress and outcome of this programme; while researchers have to realise that these tasks are not irrelevant to their career goals. Widespread participation of ordinary citizens will allow them to take matters in their own hands. This approach may well cause disagreement and conflict, but the solution to these problems lies in the role of negotiators and coordinators between the various sides performed by researchers and in viewing tourists not only as a necessary hassle, but as a source of potential beneficial change.

In order to reverse the current demographic and social trends we need a cultural renaissance of peasant civilization, especially among the youth, who must understand that the things that they are most ashamed of might well turn out to be worthy of transmission to posterity and a great opportunity for employment and for the enhancement of the quality of life in the mountain valleys.

### **THE ALPS: MOUNTAINS OF PROBLEMS – A GENERAL OVERVIEW**

The 3 May 2004 law "Gasparri" recommends that, by 2007, 60 percent of the Italian population should be enabled to benefit from the digital switchover of the TV broadcasting network. Yet 80 percent of the Peninsula will be virtually cut off; mountain regions will be especially affected by the digital divide,<sup>28</sup> and this is particularly unfortunate, given that their inhabitants are those who, due to their peripheral position, would most benefit from this switchover and who had been told that hi-tech innovation would improve their lives by allowing them to work without commuting.<sup>30</sup> Today, access to broadband is mainly available to those who need it the least.<sup>31</sup>

The EU expansion to the East will most likely harm the most subsidized sector of the economy, namely agriculture. But while larger producers will increase the prices and hire more immigrant workforce, thousands of family-led businesses in the mountains will be hard hit with serious consequences for the environmental integrity of the land. These are two examples of how "global" plans treat the European and national territories as homogeneous and flat. Worse still, European policies to support agriculture neglect mountain peasants who are not included in development programmes.

The consequence is a slow, quiet ethnocide, suppressing work opportunities and the local symbolic and cultural identity markers: words like "mountaineer", "peasant", and "farmer" still possess negative and disparaging connotations.

While the focus of our research is on the Alps,<sup>32</sup> we should also like to point out that things might be even worse in the rest of Italy. After all, municipalities not in the mountains are only 4.2% in Central Italy, 17.7% in the South, 15.6%, in the islands. By contrast, in the North-West and in the North-East they are 33.6% and 41.9%, respectively.<sup>33</sup> While it is certainly true that the Apennines reach lower altitudes and the climate is warmer, infrastructures and emergency services are less effective and damages are often greater in scale.

The fact remains that, in spite of the relative ignorance of the Italian public, the 13,000,000 inhabitants of the mountains, scattered across 190,919 square kilometres, share a common heritage and identity.<sup>34</sup> What's more, about 100 million visitors, mostly from the plains and the coast, annually choose the Alps as their holiday destination, making it the most popular international tourist destination in the world.<sup>35</sup> Many of them, especially retired citizens, spend several weeks a year in the Alps, and can be considered part-time residents.

The Italian Alps extend for a thousand-odd kilometres from east to west, over an area that is 42 percent of the total mountain area of the Peninsula. In 2001, 4.5 million people lived in the Alps. 1,851 municipalities, 22.8% of the total number of Italian municipalities and 44% of the Northern municipalities, are located in the Alps.

The alpine habitat is highly heterogeneous and outsiders looking at the Alps feel a sense of inaccessibility and environmental fragility; or they look at them as the garden and playground of Europe; or else they may be altogether indifferent to them. Lack of knowledge is an important component of the various perceptions: when students are asked

how many people they think live in the Alps, the usual answer ranges from 300,000 to a couple million inhabitants.

On the other hand, the Alps are far from homogenous: it is fair to say that the western portion does not seem to be able to overcome modernity and its demographic trend is negative. The eastern part seems to be able to better cope with it. Still, even within the same district there large social and income disparities are likely.

In the course of our study we have gathered census data for all the alpine municipalities for the 1951 to 2001 period, to generate depopulation maps sorted by total number and by gender. We have followed up on earlier work by Werner Bätzing, a well respected alpine geographer who, in the Eighties, was the first to produce demographic maps for the entire alpine region.

These are the results for Italy. The first map shows trends of demographic increase and reduction over the past 50 years. If we consider that, over the past fifty years, the world population has grown by 250% and the Italian population by 20.86%, yellow zones should also be considered at risk of depopulation. The second map documents in greater detail where people are leaving out and where they are not.

Maps show even more clearly that the Western Alps and some parts of Friuli and Veneto are confronted with a severe crisis. South Tyrol has a positive trend and Trentino is somewhere in between. However, if we compare the historical record, we can see that things are slowly improving, even though the remotest valleys are at a critical junction and some villages have by now passed the demographic point of no return.

A more detailed treatment of these statistical data can be found in the appendix.

## The abandoned mountain

To understand the nature of this depopulation process, one has to introduce the concept of "demographic equal opportunities," that is to say, to acknowledge that the alpine area is entitled to growth patterns that should be comparable to those of other Italian areas. In order to do this, we compare the average rates of demographic growth in the Alps and in the rest of the Peninsula, and show which districts have managed to keep up the pace over the previous half a century (fig. 3, highlighted in green). With barely 27% of the total, these municipalities represent a distinct minority. Many of them are located in South Tyrol and Trentino, where we can use the expression "local growth" – development fostered by the locals. There are other exceptions in the most economically developed Lombard valleys, with a good concentration of metallurgical and handicraft industry. In the provinces of Varese and Verona, growth has generally come from the outside and residents must commute on a daily basis and become less attached to their birthplace. The same is just as true in Bormio and in the Susa Valley, whose economy is heavily dependent on Switzerland and in other municipalities that are virtual satellites of the industrial districts of Turin and Genoa.

Further data corroborate this impression: Werner Bätzing and the Geographic Institute of Zurich have argued that the settlements most affected by the demographic crisis are:

- 1) those located higher on the mountains;
- 2) those more distant from larger settlements which provide those services that are regarded as essential, such as associative opportunities, shops, schools, basic sources of entertainment. At the time of the study in question, these settlements normally exceed 5,000 inhabitants and were within the distance of 20-30 km.
- 3) The smaller ones, with up to 300 inhabitants.<sup>36</sup>

Our study draws on these data, which demonstrate that most mountainous districts in Italy are directly threatened by globalization. Even the attempts by provincial and regional authorities to undertake expensive developmental policies for their peasant communities in the mountains have been frustrated by the unwillingness of residents to continue to live there. The same occurred in Switzerland as well.

In Italy, a study commissioned by Lega Ambiente and Confcommercio indicates that most small settlements are located in mountain areas.<sup>37</sup> The 2001 national census showed that 79.7% of municipalities in the region of Aosta Valley had less than 2000 inhabitants. This proportion diminishes only slightly in Piedmont (73%), Trentino (67.8%), Liguria (59.6%), Lombardy (45.5%), Friuli (42.5%), Veneto (22.1%). Of these, more than half are considered, for various reasons, "at risk".<sup>38</sup> 40.9% of municipalities in Liguria fall in the same category. Ditto for 15.1% in Friuli, 13.5% in Aosta Valley, 10.9% in Trentino, 9.4% in Lombardy, 3.4% in Veneto. But then again, over 97% of alpine settlements have less than 10,000 inhabitants. Grenoble, with over 160,000 inhabitants, is the largest city of the Alps.

According to the 2001 Italian census, the average alpine municipality has 2,436 inhabitants, but this figure belies the fact that the census surveys also consider urban districts located in the Alps. In reality, 864, that is, 46.7% of alpine municipalities – twice as many than in the rest of Italy – have less than 1000 inhabitants.<sup>39</sup>

There are 206 municipalities at greater risk, with less than 300 inhabitants, that is, slightly more than 14% of those located in the Alps. The majority of alpine settlements are shrinking, with alarming rates like 85% in Friuli, approximately 77% in Piedmont, and 60% in Veneto and Liguria. In Lombardy, Aosta Valley and Trentino half of them are getting smaller. Among the provinces that have been granted an autonomy statute, only in South Tyrol the depopulation rate remains below 16%. The fact of the matter is that financial aid does not seem to be responsible for the differential demographic patterns of South Tyrol as opposed to other Italian regions. This is a clear indication that South Tyrolean policies targeting the strengthening of local identities have been most successful. It is not just a matter of financial resources. The Aosta Valley has received an even greater amount of subsidies, but this has not reversed the downward-spiralling trend.

## Where do people go?

People in the Alps gradually move to the nearest cities, which are becoming densely populated, polluted, stuck in traffic jams, and are losing their identity. Unlike cities in the plains, which have developed homogeneously, cities in the mountains are physically constrained and had to grow longitudinally, absorbing several rural settlements along the way. As a result, the farthest neighbourhoods find themselves too distant from downtown and, because of their low-income housing estates, they witness the emergence of latent or actual interethnic rows between the original residents, who feel they should be in charge, and the newcomers, who end up even more alienated.

### **Mountains near, mountains far**

With the economic growth and the increasing European integration, national boundaries are less and less a barrier and, since the Nineties, new forms of EU-sponsored interaction and interdependence between alpine regions are taking shape. Yet this has also led to a growing divide between advantaged and disadvantaged districts and the intensification of traffic movements. Gradually, the economic heart of Germany has shifted towards the subalpine regions of Bavaria and Baden. Hi-tech research institutes in beautiful locations are reminiscent of the Silicon Valley,<sup>40</sup> and the major axes of economic growth and trade between Baden-Württemberg and Lombardy run through Switzerland. Additionally, this entire area lies at the crossroads of East-West and North-South trade. Similarly, the most developed economic districts of France, after Paris, are Lyon and Marseille, and then Alsace and Strasbourg, Nice, Cannes and the Côte d'Azur. They are all near the Alps. Grenoble and Sophia Antipolis, with its environmentally friendly and culturally sustainable Science Park, are emerging as foremost hi-tech players.

Even so, economic disparities between alpine villages and urban centres are still remarkable: in real terms, the gross product of the alpine area is about 30-40% lower than the metropolitan gross product (e.g. if the figure for Milan is 130, the one for Sondrio is 75).<sup>41</sup> The southern slope of the Alps has been confronted with harsher competition and more severe climatic changes.

That there is a great potential for innovation in this area is past doubt. One only has to think about the highly competitive industrial districts of the prealpine valleys north of Brescia, and about Valle Strona, Valsesia, Biella, and Belluno. We could also mention the numerous universities and related research centres in the Alps and pre-Alps.<sup>42</sup>

One of the less desirable effects of this state of affairs is the growing and seemingly intractable problem of traffic travelling. Statistics are startling. Whilst in 1965, 87% of the transit freight through the alpine core area was transported by rail and only 13% by truck, by 1988 the proportion had changed considerably, and 55% of goods were transported by truck. In 1994, road transport amounted to about 60% of the total which itself has increased substantially and is forecast to grow further, by 3%, annually with respect to goods, and 1,7% with respect to people.<sup>43</sup>

For a long time, traffic was seen as the engine of prosperity in the Alps. Up until recently, the position of a town along one of the main traffic routes between north and south was regarded as an advantage. However, nowadays, transport has become faster, and stops between Munich and Verona are mostly unnecessary.

Recent protests against the re-opening of the Mont Blanc tunnel and against high speed railways in Val di Susa and elsewhere,<sup>44</sup> the blockades of the Brennero highway, the Swiss referenda promoted by the local population, are a testimony to the fact that people are by now perfectly aware that traffic can only be advantageous when it stops somewhere along the way between departure and destination, whereas it is only harmful, economically, environmentally and socially, when it passes through. This is unfortunately true also with respect to secondary roads, in the Alps as in the Pyrenees. People have asked the local authorities to build them, regardless of the economic and environmental costs, but once in place, they have not been used to improve the quality of life of villagers, but to facilitate their moving out. Only the first generation commuted to go to work. The following generations have left and their parents' houses are now holiday homes for the grandchildren, who would never leave in a place where there is "nothing to do"...

Our fieldwork analysis and statistical data, which indicate that many of the remotest municipalities are on the brink of disappearance is confirmed by further statistical analysis. Fig. 4 lists the alpine towns with a population greater than 5,000 inhabitants, even though some of them, like Livigno and Cortina, exceed that value by virtue of the fact that many people reside there only nominally, but really live someplace else. This notwithstanding, such tourist towns attract workforce from the surrounding region.

5,000 inhabitants marks the lowest limit for a settlement to be considered a town, with all the services generally associated with that status. In Trentino, only 12 settlements in 223 can be classified as towns or cities.

Next, we have estimated the duration of commuting to and fro these towns by private and public transportation in wintertime. The distinction between public and private means of transportation is extremely important because reaching a bus stop may turn into quite an adventure when seasonal conditions are harsh. Owning a car is therefore a necessity and a privilege. People who are too old or too young to drive find themselves at a distinct disadvantage.

We have then examined the contention that more distant settlements are more likely to lose inhabitants, compared to those closer to a town. The resulting cartographic evidence substantiates this hypothesis, with a few exceptions: the border areas with Switzerland, the Fiemme and Fassa valleys, and the Giudicarie. Although most towns with at least 5000 inhabitants see their population increase, there are some sporadic cases of towns that are shrinking inexorably. The following towns, region by region, are on a descending trend:

*Friuli Venezia Giulia:* Gorizia and Cormons (Gorizia); Cividale del Friuli, Tarcento, Gemona del Friuli and Tarvisio (Udine); Caneva (Pordenone).

*Veneto*: Valdobbiadene (Treviso), Mel and Feltre (Belluno); Asiago, Recoaro Terme and Torrebelvicino (Vicenza).

*Lombardia*: Cernobbio (Como), Lovere (Bergamo), Vobarno (Brescia)

*Piemonte*: Varallo Sesia (Vercelli), Trivero (Biella), Barghe and Peveragno (Cn).

*Liguria*: Vado Ligure (Savona).

These towns are usually in areas hit by serious economic downturns, such as Friuli or Carnia. Take for instance Tarvisio, a town whose fortune was built on the customs barrier – which has been since removed – and on the weekly market, or Gorizia, Cividale, Tarcento, and Gemona, one-time thriving towns that could not compete with the emerging markets.

In Veneto, Asiago and Recoaro Terme remind us that even celebrated tourist resorts may at some point become unfashionable, when appropriate countermeasures have not been taken. Alternatively, when something is done to buck the trend, it is already too late: this is the case of Feltre, where a university has been established, but to little avail.

In Piedmont, Varallo Sesia, Rimella, Rassa suffered from the dismantling of the textile industrial base of Val Sesia, without ever fully recovering. Barghe and Peveragno lost most of their inhabitants during the past century. In Liguria, Vado Ligure has been affected by industrial restructuring, which has caused large unemployment and emigration. In Lombardy, Lovere and Vestone have been hit hard by the crisis of the iron industry. Finally, the main cause of Cernobbio's decline has been the trend to relocate or outsource silk production in China and Eastern Europe

### **Exceptions that warrant further study: from the Insubric model to the Giudicarie**

One exception to the thesis that remote municipalities are demographically declining is the so-called "Insubric model". Insubria is the region between Lake Garda and Lake Maggiore which lies on the slopes of the Alps and includes the valleys north of Bergamo and Brescia. Milan is where a large share of the workforce of the area commutes to. Workers, often employed in the building industry, may have to travel 100 km or more every day. Some drive the so-called "death buses" for 300 km, taking driving-shifts, which is a most hazardous practice, due to sleep deprivation which may cause car accidents and serious or even fatal work injuries. Lombardy is the region where safety procedures are followed most scrupulously, but it is also the region with highest percentage of work injuries, precisely because construction workers are too tired from commuting.<sup>45</sup> In Insubria small firms employ mostly women, underqualified male workers and immigrants, who are quick to leave when the opportunity presents itself: viz. the family of Albanian refugees who refused to live in Sondrio. The same applies to Trentino. Our study reveals that many immigrant families who happened to settle, temporarily, in small villages, cannot wait to move out. Many local residents, by contrast, are willing to commute for a well-paid job if this allows them to continue to live where they grew up. Switzerland is a favourite destination, since Swiss employers are well disposed towards Italian workers, and particularly towards those coming from the mountains. As a result, many of them manage to go on to a brilliant career in healthcare and education. If the Italian alpine towns and cities offered the same opportunities, many young professionals would most likely choose to stay and services for local residents would not deteriorate as they are currently doing.

The valleys of Fiemme and Fassa are another example of a place where the local population is not declining. This is easily explained: mass tourism, combined with the enormous advantages accrued through the adoption of the autonomy statute, has benefited family-run small enterprises with a well-defined local identity and producing traditional stoves and furniture, but suited to the modern taste, "Tyrolean" apparel, high quality local cheeses, like "Puzzone di Moena." Giudicarie is an altogether different case. It was and partly still is mostly cut off from the rest of the country and the local entrepreneurs, with the support of the local authorities, have succeeded in marketing across Northern Italy a local product like Storo's flour, which is produced elsewhere, because the valley is too narrow for a factory of the required capacity. In this area, specialized training has been offered to local students and young professionals to guide them through the application process for EU funding. Such spirit of initiative is particularly welcome, given that raising standards of expertise and best practice certainly pays off in the long term, for instance through the creation of a network of small but enterprising service and production companies and cooperatives established by young graduates who could live elsewhere but decide to stay and improve the living standards of their communities.

## **PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS: FIELDWORK FINDINGS**

### **Research methodology: long residence, sharing, and participant observation**

We did the ethnographic fieldwork in the municipalities of Cimego, Ronzone, Sagron-Mis, Terragnolo, and Luserna, through comparative, participatory action-research on a micro-community, so as to learn about the beliefs and motivations of residents of small, remote alpine villages. We maintain that the results can be extended to other realities of a similar kind, in the Alps as in the Apennines, and in other rural regions of Europe as well.

At the heart of anthropology is the study of humankind. On this count, anthropology has much in common with history, sociology, psychology, medicine, etc. What sets this discipline apart is the methodological approach: the fieldwork, its long duration and the close interaction and considerable familiarity with the people under study. The one thing that all anthropologists, regardless of their theoretical orientation and political sympathies, agree upon is that armchair speculation is sterile. Participant observation is indispensable if one wants to understand human interactions and relations. Therefore,

the anthropological fieldwork consists in spending at least a few months in place, interviewing the locals, most of all those that are at the centre of the investigation – in our case: the local authorities, the entrepreneurs, the youth and the women in general. Participant observation involves the willingness to become part of people's everyday activities, through negotiation and exchange. Talking with and listening to people raised in a different culture is what anthropology is all about. Sometimes anthropologists must pay special attention to what cannot or must not be said and to what is so taken for granted that people assume that everyone knows that.

There is no such thing as a society that is completely transparent to itself: much of a culture is hidden in each person, subconsciously, after the internalization of precepts and values. Responses become automatic, "natural." On the other hand, it is often precisely the unsaid that reveals the most about a community: its actual needs, unresolved questions, latent contradictions and conflicts ready to explode. Human beings tend to rationally justify their actions: but large shares of the rationale behind human behaviour is culturally shaped in many, complex ways, so that the motives of human actions are not always clear to the outsider and cannot be lucidly spelled out by local actors. Anthropologists are expected to interpret the local model of thinking and doing things and to explain it to those who do not belong in there. They do so by means of participant observation.

During the years prior to the drafting of the present report, researchers have done fieldwork in different locations and have kept in touch constantly, also by visiting their colleagues. Not only that: such locations have been included in EU-sponsored development programmes run by Cealp, so that it has been possible to test the reliability of the collected data and of the relevant conclusions and their usefulness in promoting the local business. As part of this programme, local residents have enrolled in skills training courses in entrepreneurship and tourism marketing and promotion, before, during and after the fieldwork. There is an ongoing partnership with Cimego, which began several years ago. Sagron Mis is the only municipality where the partnership has been discontinued.

In the light of these achievements, we can confidently say that our observations can be used in other alpine villages where local authorities are planning to embark on a programme of sustainable and participatory development

### **Here people are equal...more or less**

"You see, here people are pretty much on the same footing": this is the self-perception of our informants. This is blatantly untrue, but it is held as self-evident, and it persists in opposition to a system of values that has taken shape over the past two centuries, beginning with the French Revolution, in urban milieus. In other words, even though these communities are immersed in a liberal-democratic environment, the dominant rules are of a different order, and arise from a segmentary society, which is collectivist rather than democratic, and nominally egalitarian but hostile to diversity and distinction.

The classification of political systems in segmentary and complex, was first set forth by Emile Durkheim<sup>46</sup> and further elaborated by E. E. Evans Pritchard and M. Fortes,<sup>47</sup> as part of an analysis of the factors involved in maintaining cohesion and internal stability in a clan, tribe, or larger society. In state societies, legitimate political, administrative-bureaucratic, juridical, military and repressive structures provide the necessary cohesion. Instead, in segmentary societies mechanisms of internal adjustment that are not always visible serve the same purpose: only expert analysis can tease out specific determinants and dynamics. This type of social structure is composed of segments and sub-segments (clans, sub-clans, and dominant families) that form alliances or merge, held together by ties of kinship and loyalty; or else, they contest each other, according to consensual rules and, in democratic contexts, also in an entirely peaceful manner, as in the democratic competition for local elections. A system such as this leaves room for informal agreements on codes of conduct that maintain the social order. As a result, statistical analysis of voting generally reveals that people cast their ballots uniformly, by family membership; that is, there exists a general consensus on certain principles and criteria regarding how things should be done that are seldom contested or transgressed, to prevent the dissolution of the community.

Social systems like these demand structural homogeneity and voluntary adherence to the group rules and values on the part of their members. The other side of the coin is that formal equality exacts a high price: the exclusion of any kind of personal distinction and ambition which may threaten the solidity and stability of the community. This is because when a person stands out, this is regarded as a violation of a collective property right. What is more, gender and age differences do exist and are of considerable importance. The ostensible egalitarianism conceals a strictly hierarchical and exclusionary organization, where some hegemonic families and clans monopolize political representation and are granted liberties and entitlements that the rest of the community can only dream of. So, for instance, during a mayor and council election campaign, one of the candidates claimed that he was entitled to be the designated mayor, for he was the grandson of a former mayor, even though he had spent most of his adult life working elsewhere, in large cities. His interlocutors did not seem to take exception to this line of argument. Open confrontation in a democratic fashion is not without problems, and it is generally shunned. Taking sides is likewise avoided as much as possible and a conflict on rival election candidacies is apt to provoke lasting rifts. From an early age, children are taught to conceal their views and the pursuit of one's self-interest, not to express dissent publicly, never to believe that one is superior to the others, and to make oneself as inconspicuous as possible. It follows that material comfort cannot be displayed: large investments and purchases are often made elsewhere to dodge resentful criticism.

Envy is a major obstacle to social solidarity and, from a socio-anthropological point of view, an effective mechanism of social control and equalization, for income disparities remain hidden for fear of gossip and slanders and do not cause too much discomfort. Its levelling function is even more obvious when it comes to property transmission: sons and daughters inherit in equal measure and the estate fragmentation proceeds unchecked, from one generation to the next, because siblings are more willing to sell to outsiders and leave rather than sell to their relatives and enrich them. Another more practical

reason is that relatives and villagers are presumed to sell at a fair price, that is, low, while transactions with outsiders do not raise the same concerns. The opposite is true: a successful sale benefits the whole community, directly or indirectly.

Having said that, envy is not the exclusive domain of alpine cultures. The same mentality does typify all closed systems: viz. condo meetings and emotional abuse at work. The official policy promoting egalitarianism is at odds with the other universally acknowledged value, that is, "roba", a term which refers to the economic, symbolic, psychological connotations of personal properties, especially the house and the estate. Influential families are those who own the largest estates, who can help their heirs to buy a house when they form their own families, and who have several cars and purchase new ones every few years. At the same time, they cannot boast about it: everyone should know about their prosperity, but it is considered bad form to display it too loudly. A common faith, culture and the exchange of favours concur to maintain a functional balance between these countervailing forces.

Authority is conferred upon the head of the family and of the clan and he, for he is generally a man, has the duty to see that bonds of loyalty are respected and that all members of the clan give a hand when the clan needs it (e.g. house restoration, rebuilding, or building). Those who refuse to help are branded as reckless failures and the community may well cast the blame on the entire clan. As a result the clan's members cannot help but feel partly responsible for the breaking of rules and ashamed about the whole thing. Sanctions for those who disobey are of a moral nature, but they are no less dreadful and effective: "what people say" is a constant source of distress and a deterrent factor, and forces those people who are too proud, too vulnerable or too outstanding to comply with the dominant rules to leave. In practice, this mentality neutralizes most attempts at social change and development based on self-employment and entrepreneurship. Only the strong-minded and strong-willed can overcome the powerful means of social control like envy, collective sanction, gossip and the suppression of debate and controversy for the sake of harmony.

### **A fragmented society**

One of the hallmarks of segmentary societies is social fragmentation: clans, tribes, hamlets that do not share common interests even though commonalities are self-evident to outsiders. Rival groups that do not seem to understand that their often unreasonable internecine conflicts are self-defeating. In order to shed some light on these phenomena, one has to cast a glance at the past, when alpine settlements were scattered, so as to enable the community to best harness the local resources. The alpine landscape, far from being "wild", was tamed and systematically exploited and inhabited. In areas with a prevalence of romance culture, people grouped together in hamlets connected to a larger settlement, as in a galactic polity. When the climate was harsh, this community became self-sufficient, with their priest, their small grocery store, their school, tavern, and dairy and, of course, their own peculiar identities. Weddings were celebrated between members of families who lived next to each other in order to strengthen their ties of loyalty. As a further demonstration of their autarchic bent, in some cases, like Samolaco in Val Chiavenna, the local council was periodically relocated from a hamlet to the next. Distinction was hardly tolerated, as in the saying "the nail that sticks up will be hammered down". There also was need for particularism and localism, as villagers were reluctant to surrender any room for self-determination to a modern, centralized administration.

My personal experience may give some indications of the kind of difficulties that one might encounter in alpine villages. A few years back, between 1994 and 1998, Cealp had organized an international festival called "an evening around the fire: seven days of alpine culture." This festival was held in Garniga Terme, which comprised half a dozen scattered hamlets, and initially we thought it would be best to "spread" it over the entire area, in order to involve everyone. Then, because there were only 400 residents, we decided that the square before the town hall of the main hamlet was the most suitable location for the event. Little did we know that such a change would cause most residents not to attend the festival. Administrative centralization does not seem to be in accordance with the stated desire of local inhabitants to govern themselves.

One of the major obstacles to the development of alpine communities is indeed the difficulty that people encounter in overcoming localisms and parochialisms in order to build up a proactive approach to the solution of problems which, after all, affect everyone. This kind of close-mindedness is closely reminiscent of siege-syndrome: "we against them", "we are not clear about what they want from us, but what they propose is never really explicit", "they always have an ulterior motive", "what they do, they do it to serve their own interests, not ours". Their agenda is therefore suspicious and "we must be careful not to be tricked by them". It seems as though their subconscious is haunted by the inextinguishable fear that someone is out to steal their hard-won properties and rob them of their traditional entitlements.

Then, to make things worse, there are the endless and seemingly unsolvable feuds between families and clans, whose origin is lost in the mists of time. Such rivalries reach their boiling point when, because of depopulation, schools, which truly represent the spirit, the essence of the community, probably more than the council house and the church, are forced to close.

There countless examples of this unwillingness to cooperate in small villages. In Valle del Chiese there are two networks for the promotion and advertising of tourism and leisure that seldom work together. In the village of Sagron Mis everything is duplicated, including women's volunteering associations. The inhabitants of Cimego (slightly more than 400) are loath to work with those of Castel Condino (about 150), which is only 5 km away. Nobody really knows why. Thankfully, though, it appears that parochialism is not as endemic among the younger generations.

### **Associations and volunteering: obstacle or engine of change?**

Despite the received view that cities are brimful of intense social activities, the evidence points to a greater participation to community life in alpine villages. However tiny, every village features its own clubs and associations, from the "Alpini" (mountain troops) to the parish council, from the firemen association to the local tourist board, from sport clubs to the municipal band, involving the vast majority of the population. Indeed, one could well argue that life in a village is always associated and nobody can stand a chance to be admitted to the higher echelons of the local civil service, banks and cooperatives, unless one has first "voluntarily" taken part in one of these associations. People are accustomed to sharing and self-government and the "do it ourselves" philosophy is pervasive in the life of the community, which is founded on a high degree of mutual trust. It is precisely this trust that could make the attempt to set up local business enterprises for a sustainable development a feasible undertaking. Unfortunately, this is hardly ever the case: fear of conflict and responsibilities, and of a meritocratic and quantitative assessment of individual efforts, leads to the outright rejection, sometimes exhibited with pride, of earnings and of the possibility that someone might actually profit from it. When voluntary associations are ready to take a step forward and become small companies, psychological and socially induced inhibitions are so strong that people prefer to renounce rather than become entrepreneurs. This equally applies to all our fieldwork settings: in Cimego, Sagron Mis, and Luserna, earnings from work done for the associations are given to the association itself or to charity, instead of reinvesting it.

For this reason, tourist shops that could have enticed visitors to come have not been opened and sales of typical products, which would be a valid means to retain a strong local identity, have never taken off. Paradoxically, then, the volunteering mentality is apt to retard the economic growth of the community and to perpetuate the precariousness and vulnerability of certain categories of residents, especially young people and women.

The question of generation gaps and the incommunicability of aspirations and values between the young and the aged is probably the root cause of this socio-economic inactivity. Even when a company is created, it is the elder associates or full-time employees that run the enterprise, and they are moved by the belief that their ethos must be one of service, and often a thankless one, and are not willing to adopt a genuinely entrepreneurial attitude. They do not need to earn money, because their incomes are already secure, and so they put a major emphasis on dedication and vocation, and feel entitled to run the business according to their principles.

When a cooperative enterprise or a small company is formed, which involves younger professionals, more inclined to seek a steady profit, inner contradictions come to surface: "they have done nothing so far, and now look how demanding they are. We used to do things for free." Because business management entails responsibilities and older partners don't feel like running into too much trouble to increase their incomes, which generally are supplied by the state or regional governments in the form of retirement benefits or subsidies, entrepreneurial spirit can hardly establish itself. It thus so happens that those actors that seemed so indispensable before, are now perceived as an awful burden.

A further source of conflict, one on which we shall expand more later, is gender: oftentimes women are the best candidates to run a local business, but their male partners have a hard time getting adjusted to the idea that "their women" are entrepreneurs and must spend a relatively large amount of time, energy and passion to keep the business going, rather than taking care of the family. The difference between an office clerk with fixed working hours and a self-employed woman need not be stressed. It can be the cause of violent rows between spouses, especially when the elderly must be entrusted to nursing home or assisted-living facilities because women cannot be there to tend gratuitously to their needs.

As a consequence, numerous families fall apart and new disputes arise within the community, which is little accustomed to open confrontations, to challenges to culturally ingrained practices and power-relations, and to the "natural selection" of the fittest and more deserving that lies at the core of market economy. Eventually, at times, the old customs and generations give way to the new ones. Or else they don't, and the process or replacement does not come to fruition, because the more dynamic forces of society dare not openly challenge the status quo and fear the social costs of such a confrontation. But the price to pay for this timidity is that most alpine settlements are bound to disappear within a generation or two, or to become holiday homes for city-dwellers who will only live there for a few weeks in summertime.

### **Needing someone from the outside: patterns of inclusion and exclusion**

People living in small villages on the slopes of the Alps are aware that envy and fragmentation fray the fabric of the society in which they live and believe that these problems can only be solved by the intervention of a strong leader supported by outsiders who, by definition, are thought to be objective. In these small communities the role of town halls and local civil servants is crucial, because they are looked to for help and leadership, regardless of their political orientation. Political disagreements can be set aside in a milieu in which nearly everyone can become an active participant in the decision-making process – as opposed to the neat separation of private life and politics in the cities –, and competent majors enjoy a greater measure of legitimacy. Even when they do commit mistakes, that is easily forgiven, provided that their blunders are not too serious and that they display a sincere commitment to work for the benefit of all and to further their own agenda. Therefore, if gossip, hearsays and slanders don't force them to take a step back and refuse to run for re-election, they are reconfirmed several times and may profit from this political continuity.

Aside from an acknowledged leader, people also suggest that they would favour initiatives to bring detached professionals from the outside. It is openly conceded that rivalries and fragmentation squelch all attempts to promote an entrepreneurial spirit. This is why alpine communities have proven far more open to external advice than urban districts. Most interestingly, patterns of inclusion and integration have worked far better and faster than in the plains. Needless to say, this does not mean that everything proceeds smoothly. It is not infrequent that experts from the outside hold on to a



romantic view of rural communities<sup>2</sup> which partially blinds them to the realities of life and work in the mountains and does not help them understand the actual potential of the region under scrutiny.

The degree of personal involvement, a disposition to impose one's own ideas, the intensity of criticism necessary to effectively interact with people with whom one must live side by side most of the time, and cannot avoid, (as it would be certainly possible in a city), may lead to escape from the reality of conflicts that are both within and without the observer.

When these issues are duly confronted, experts enjoy a degree of latitude that they could only dream of in an allegedly more open urban milieu. Differences of gender, race, political and religious affiliation, lifestyle, etc. are pragmatically set aside when it comes to enhance local standards of life.

What's more, local authorities regard it as an honour to be chosen for experiments of social development engineers by competent outsiders and do their best to be helpful.

Four of our researchers had a direct experience of this and three of them, including one who was quite familiar with the local milieu, experienced what anthropologists call "burn-out," that is, suffering from a culture-shock of such magnitude – often induced by their involvement in local disputes and the consequent alienation and loss of mutual trust – that they refused to deal any longer with their informants. One developed a nearly pathological hatred for anything in any way related to the mountains and mountain life, to the point that she would not go back to Cealp, which is located at 1500 m, on Mount Bondone. Two researchers declined a formal invitation to continue to work for Cealp and another one took up the offer on condition that she would never do fieldwork again.

There is a further instance of alienation among urban-dwellers being asked to spend some time in a village. During a training course local development sponsored by the Ministry of the Environment and FORMEZ and run by Cealp, most classes were held in Cimego, which seemed to be a suitable location for twenty-odd students examining development process at the sharp end; and indeed, the experience turned out negative from the start. They spent most of the time in the hotel because they felt they were being constantly watched. They did not feel like hanging out with the local teenagers, so that they failed to build a sense of trust and reciprocity vis-à-vis the locals, which is the indispensable ingredient of good ethnography. Coming from the cities, they had a false, somewhat romantic conception of what life in the mountains would be like,<sup>48</sup> and believed that they would enjoy the same kind of entertainment that one can find in fashionable tourist destinations. When they realised that things were different, and that the pace of life in a village is much slower, they decided that they would rather remain in the hotel and play cards. They did not come to terms with the fact that in a village one must live side by side with people who may be unpleasant and even hostile, and that there is no alternative to that. The degree of personal involvement in the everyday life of the community means that one is forced to examine one's own assumptions and to deal with conflict-resolution and anger-management on a daily basis, something that can be easily avoided in a city. On the other hand, when professionals get their hand in, they are rewarded with leeway and with a considerable measure of understanding when they don't seem to figure out how to go about something that they are unfamiliar with, and even when their lifestyle and political ideas put them at odds with the prevalent habits and persuasions. Furthermore, local authorities are generally genuinely interested in contributing to the success of the development programme; they sometimes provide office space and accommodation for fieldworkers, and see that they are given what they need to carry out the project successfully. Some even come from other villages that have not been included in the research to ask whether it would be possible to get involved. Therefore, it would be seriously wrong to presume that mountain villages can only be described as closed communities. When it comes to talk about themselves and their community, and offer help whenever they see that it would make a difference for the ethnographer, they are more generous than the people of the cities.

Some measure of openness persists even in the face of blunders. Outsiders are expected to commit mistakes. If they have earned the respect of the villagers, they may be sanctioned but, after a while, they are re-integrated into the community, which is characterized by high internal control and social coercion as well as by defence mechanisms against external aggressions, which simultaneously facilitate group cohesion. This is hardly the case in the cities, where human relations are more loose and malleable, and the exclusion of a member of the group does not normally threaten the stability of the group. What the outsider is expected to demonstrate is the willingness to settle within the community.

Otherwise, marriage and stable companionship bring in new members of the family, who are automatically incorporated into the community. In practice, new members do not enjoy the same status and privileges of the others, but if they accommodate themselves to the new situation, they can climb the ladder and even become mayor. Another scenario is when the outsider's ancestors came from the community in which their descendants currently reside. In this case, former bonds of loyalty and mutual obligations are resumed. The third scenario is when outsiders buy a house in the village, and settle in the village, showing that they are willing to take part in the life of the community.

In my own experience, being the owner of a house in Trentino has certainly helped to make things easier for me in dealing with local authorities and politicians. Appreciation is also extended to those who demonstrate that they are self-sufficient, as when they restore an old house to its original glory by themselves, or when they clean up a garden or when they gather firewood with the other villagers. Conventional wisdom has it that, for all the snobbery of urban-dwellers, manual labour is unavoidable and ennobling – lazing around is, as it were, sinful –, and those who do not shrink from it are worthy of respect and aid. Therefore, to go gather firewood with other men is praiseworthy, even if one does not need firewood. The ethos of service is what truly matters, for it involves all-important rituals of socialization and the joint use of communal forests, called "*part*." Then there are folklore festivals and other events during which everyone is expected to give a hand, and volunteer associations of firemen, rescuers, churchgoers, culture and nature conservationists, chorus singers, and so forth.

Naturally, an adequate knowledge of the region and of its sometimes partly forgotten cultural traditions and

customs is an additional advantage when research and development projects are examined for approval. In a great many communities people are painfully conscious of the risk of losing the recollection of various attributes of the local peasant civilisation and of the traces of human activities. The expert is often invited precisely for the purpose of recovering vanishing records: this was the case of Cimego, Ronzone and Lucerna, that devote a large share of the local budget to cultural activities.

“She knows more about our things than we do”: this is the kind of comments that express the acceptance of the outsider inside the community. Furthermore, expertise accompanied by genuine curiosity about local practices, by a sincere affection for the region, and by a clear readiness to accept other people’s idiosyncrasies, is likely to remove most of the obstacles.

### **Patterns of inclusion: immigrants**

All in all, despite possible preconceived notions, those alpine communities that we have researched have demonstrated to be more open and welcoming towards foreigners than city-dwellers. We have measured the degree of integration of foreigners along the following axes:

- Proportion of immigrants to the total population;
- Work and residential stability;
- Decent and legal housing;
- Prospects for family reunification;
- Participation in the village’s social life and activities;

The foreigners that we have interviewed have a stable and legal job; more often than not they work as manual labourers, because across Northern Italy there is a serious labour shortage in this sector, and employers in mountain villages prefer to legalize their employees, to avoid unnecessary worries. Working and housing conditions appeared to be better than in metropolitan areas and the exploitation of immigrants that is so frequent there was nowhere to be found. Most of all, many had managed to have their families join them, also with the help and the generosity of their neighbours, who had donated pieces of furniture and wood, an act that, besides its practical value, has a considerable symbolic value as well. Some of them, after a few years, have bought a house and their presence in the community has been seen favourably. Instead, when some of them chose to move somewhere else, their neighbours regretted their departure.

Alongside of this - and this is something even more significant and so rare in large urban areas where immigrants are far more numerous but tend to group together along ethnic lines and seldom mix with members of the ethnic majority – is the active participation of immigrants to the life of the village. Opportunity for socialization in rural settings abound: working together on something that benefits the whole community, like road paving, collecting firewood, and organizing festivals, including celebrations of multiculturalism. If someone is not work-shy, his or her ethnic identity is a matter of no concern for the other residents. In Terragnolo, immigrant families from Maghreb were granted the right to gather firewood, invited to throw ethnic parties, cook their own food for the other villagers. The children of these immigrants can easily fit in, attend the same schools, play in the same sport teams and become members of the same associations as the children of the original inhabitants. They are even allowed to play and study in the church’s premises, even though some of them are Muslim or Christian orthodox. Only those immigrants who do not appear to be interested in doing their own part within the community, are denigrated. This is further proof that open-minded local authorities could achieve so much more if they realized the immense potential for integration and enrichment of these intercultural encounters in rural and mountain communities.

### **There is nothing in here: commuting and alienation**

Traffic congestion is a serious problem in the alpine valleys. Most cars do not come from the outside, though. The owners of those cars are residents who refuse to employ means of public transportation - too inefficient, or simply inexistent, they say - but are attracted by the many recreational opportunities of alpine towns and cities.

Cimego best exemplifies this trend. 20 years of efforts to halt the depopulation process, efforts that have recently met with success, could not prevent a rising trend of commuting, especially among youth: everyday, half of the young workers who reside in Cimego drive 5 to 70 km to go to work. In Trentino, a 30 minute drive is seen as long-distance commuting, and is reason enough to decide to find housing closer to one’s workplace. Those who stay and work in Cimego have to make do with what the local job market can offer, which is not much. Women who stay normally become housewives and look for seasonal and summer jobs. As a rule, these young men and women are not very keen on studying, which they see as irrelevant in terms of the potential impact on their lives. For many adjusting to the life of the city where they could pursue higher education is simply not worth the candle. They are not helped to fit in nor do they believe that fitting in is necessary. They experience discrimination and exclusion, are teased and called names, and therefore tend to stay on their own. On the other hand, those who work and study in a city are perceived as different, neither fish nor flesh, and find it hard to hang out with those who do not. Villages are increasingly turning into functional extensions of the cities and, even when the population is numerically stable or on the increase, many complain that “there is nothing in here, no one, everyone is gone, everyone”.

### **The housing problem**

"There's no way we can find a place to live": this is the common complaint of people who decide to leave. But the evidence contradicts this statement: in many villages there are plenty of abandoned houses, sometimes even blocks that are left to fall apart for lack of renovation. Why is that so? There are a number of reasons.

First off, partible inheritance practices may lead to estate and property fragmentation. Some of the owners no longer live in the village, and yet they refuse to sell or to rent the house, for fear of usucaption lawsuits. Sheer selfishness and ignorance of the artistic, historical and cultural value of certain buildings is also an important factor at play: owners expect local authorities or the State to intervene and finance renovations, or seek to elude the law's strict provision for the preservation of cultural heritage. Civic spirit in Italy leaves much to be desired, so that the binding force of the law is dramatically weakened before the personal and family interests. Instead of renovating, some prefer to build a new house where they are not supposed to, and in so doing they spoil the landscape. Finally, young people prefer to buy an apartment or a house rather than rent them. Some wait until their parents can provide one, but at the same time parents are happier when they can give the apartment to married children. This of course means that apartments and houses may well stay unoccupied for years. If children come back from the city, it is often because they got married and their parents have ensured that they will be given a furnished apartment.

### **Psychological relinquishment and escapism**

The choice between leaving and staying, which is also one between changing and keeping things the way they are, is of an anthropological nature, and involves people's mentality. Since the end of the Fifties, massive waves of emigration took place, which took away with them much of the vitality and resourcefulness of alpine communities, causing an epidemic of alienation and uprootedness. The impact of industrial and metropolitan culture is also destabilizing. Alpine villages have been physically and culturally colonized so rapidly that changes of conventions, values, and practices have not been metabolized, also due to a growing sense of inadequacy vis-à-vis city-dwellers, who oftentimes display little understanding and tolerance of the local culture and ways of speaking and knowing.

Elderly people are especially affected by these transformations, because they are the least willing and capable to adapt to new frames of reference and symbolic repertoires that displace the reassuring benchmarks of their ancestors.<sup>3</sup>

The new cultural models, imported from the outside, popularized by schools and mass media is often incompatible with a social fabric that has no strong identity and resilience, nor means to defend itself.

Of course we are not here to gainsay the evidence of greater prosperity, literacy, and health that typify today's Alps. However, the social costs of this development are high in terms of marginality, dignity, and self-esteem. Herding and farming are regarded as undignified and unclean and the number of farms and amount of farmland in Italy is shrinking more rapidly than anywhere else in the Alps.<sup>4</sup>

Young people are anything but enthusiastic about finding employment in the cattle-breeding sector and labour is almost always imported. But then again, the older generations are also partially responsible for this because, in a bout of self-hatred, they do not want to see their children follow their footsteps. Social isolation, periodical disconnection with those peers who spend the summertime elsewhere, and lack of entertainment are among the reasons why young people choose not to take that kind of job. This phenomenon is less dramatic where communities have organized ways to contrast the sense of solitude: in France government policies and trade unions have helped seasonal workers to get involved in cultural initiatives. Elsewhere, mountain pastures are the destination of holiday-makers, some of whom reside in villages for the rest of the year and own log-houses and cabins on the mountains. This helps alleviate the loneliness.

The root of the problem is not economic. Those who accept to work in a shepherd's hut earn far more money than those who work in hotels and restaurants and some may well find out that this job is also physically less demanding. Also, from the point of view of psychological well-being, working exceedingly long hours without interruption, with little spare time to interact with colleagues and guests, is definitely less pleasant than having time to think and read and write, when the daily chores are over and done. But these advantages are sometimes hard to see, especially when this employment is not viewed as temporary and is unrelated to other, more "fulfilling" occupations.<sup>5</sup>

The question of identity loss is tied to the process of cultural marginalization, occasioned by a certain path of historical evolution that has devalued the status of manual workers, especially if they have to deal with foul-smelling organic matter. These days, the highest aspiration for workers is to find a stable and well-paid job, congruent with the level of education and specialization they have attained, with regular working hours, well-defined goals and little need for further training and refreshing, in a healthy and clean environment, and with a reasonable amount of spare time. Those who fail to achieve these standards are pitied.

At the same time, most people maintain that that ultimate goal is almost unattainable unless one is prepared to leave. Thus the actual abandonment of a place is preceded by the psychological habituation to abandonment. Those social categories that are more vulnerable to this kind of pessimistic discourse, namely women, youth, and the more literate, who often feel discriminated in a traditional society, end up despising their own culture and identity by comparing it with the more free, open, sociable and entertaining urban culture, more attentive to individual needs and therefore more likely to meet great expectations about oneself and the future.

Having said that, the time of mass-emigration is over and things have changed. Several alpine areas have become the preferred destination for a tiny stream of immigration which, however, has yet to compensate for emigration losses and for the flight of educated people. Likewise, it cannot yet counter the process of deterioration of the local communities, marked by the closure of schools for lack of pupils, of pharmacies and post offices for lack of customers, of health services

for lack of patients, of sport facilities for lack of children, of factories for lack of workers, of associations for lack of members. The degradation of cultural life produces a vicious circle that makes these places increasingly less interesting and attractive, both for the residents and the tourists, but the local authorities do not seem to perceive it as the calamity that it actually is, in terms of the sustainable development of these regions.<sup>6</sup>

This situation can only intensify those attributes of alpine life like social fragmentation, parochialism, and rivalries between hamlets and groups, between families and individuals that prevent a significant measure of cooperation on common endeavours. Distrust towards the outsiders may actually increase and compromise the possibility of receiving aid, advice and feedback from external consultants, thus involuntarily reinforcing the vicious circle that we have referred to above.

### **What people say: social control**

A retarding factor in the social and economic development of alpine communities is social control, comprising all the measures necessary to keep the social order intact. If so many communities crumble down, that is because they have not been able to respond and adjust to changed circumstances and are still dominated by a mechanism of mutual surveillance monitoring and evaluating the actions of every member. This mechanism originally derived from the need to maintain internal cohesion and neutralize most sources of conflict, but it gradually crystallised codes of conduct and the underpinning system of values, which are now hardly consistent with modern expectations about freedom and self-determination, the result of the emancipation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

Even today the set of rules that parents and acquaintances instil in children is meant to provide a safe pathway, from schooling to work, to marriage, and to parenthood. The infringement of rules is punished by merciless gossip but is almost inevitable, insofar as the mass media convey an idea of how life should look like, a portrayal that, especially for women, is completely at variance with traditional values and habits of the mind. Those who are not ready to bow must leave, for young women are not presumed to live by themselves in an alpine village; the others will have to reside in their parents' home and conceal their true feelings and frustration as much as they can.

Fear of judgment has another terrible consequence: it stifles frank interaction between individuals and clans. Behind the façade of a dense social life, one can discern the unpleasant reality of people who keep other people at a distance, for those who are not clan-members are apt to misjudge or misrepresent a family's lifestyle, and thus destroy their respectability: "the less we see each other, the less we have something bad to say about one another", as one informant remarked.

Inevitably, then, children do not really know each other, because their parents are not accustomed to hang out together and because, when they go to school, they are assigned to different classes, in the expectation that, in this way, they will be able to familiarize with other peers. However, when they go back home from school, they spend the rest of the time with their family, not with their new acquaintances. These relationships are shallow, with little emotional engagement, and go on like this, on and off, for years, seriously restricted by the need not to arouse suspicion, not to look too different from the others, not to express too straightforwardly one's own views, for fear of being cut off as too extroverted, and therefore unreliable.

Lest festivities should lead to feuds between clans and families, people meet and celebrate on neutral grounds: the garden, the log-house on the mountain, or the tavern. The household is forbidden territory for outsiders, even for the children's and husband's friends. They have to make do with the "stube", that is, a separate room, often behind, underneath or adjoining the kitchen fireplace.

Not surprisingly, most informants revealed that nearly all of their friends do not live in the village and tend to be co-workers, with whom you don't have to share your private sphere. But still, relationships outside the family circle are thin and a generalized distrust has the upper hand. Disclosure of intimate, personal information is carefully avoided and this may cause people to feel lonely, alienated and depressed.

As a matter of fact, social control has been blamed for the high rates of depopulation in smaller villages by C.I.P.R.A, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps. One of our main tasks will be to remedy this situation if we want to achieve a reasonably sustainable development. As long as this vicious circle of harsh criticisms will endure, change and the emergence of an entrepreneurial mentality will not be possible. This is all the more intolerable, given that large amounts of money are left in banking accounts or spent somewhere else, where nobody knows who the investor is and no one can complain. Therefore, ironically, one can see houses in need of renovation that are left untouched, because the owners prefer to buy properties in the city, or abroad, in order to prevent invidious comparisons with other villagers.

### **Young people and the fear of change**

Social control is more oppressive when it comes to more vulnerable citizens, such as the younger generations and women, because older people hold the reins of power and establish what is culturally and socially viable and acceptable, and what is not. Those who do not abide by the rules are progressively excluded from participation in the social life of the community.

Since childhood, they are taught not to pursue self-determination and, because most of rural schools have been closed down to balance the budget, children do not get exposed to socialization with their peers as often as it used to be. Most of the time, they stay home and watch TV or play videogames. When they meet at the local pub, they do not really talk about

themselves, for fear of being misjudged. In a car, that is where youth discuss issues of intimacy and have their first sexual experiences. This is because in the countryside and in the valleys young people leave their parents' home at an older age than those living in the cities. Instead, festivals and events are organized and run by adults who also take care of the surveillance of teenagers, who are openly suspected to be prone to misconduct.

There are notable exceptions to this "iron cages" model, however. In Terragnolo, the parish priest and the local authorities gave permission to the local teenagers to set up their own association, called "el būs", i.e. "the hole" where they would throw parties, keep the place clean and tidy and prevent unruly behaviour and discuss the very meaning of "unruly" and "acceptable" behaviour. Most significantly, many of the voluntary participants in our project in Terragnolo had cut their teeth in "el būs." Something similar took place in Cimego, where the pub has been reopened with a view to supplying youth with a place where they could meet. Unsurprisingly, both municipalities are governed by young men AND women.

Elsewhere, drug and alcohol abuse or car races are a common "break" from boredom. When crimes are committed by young people, failure to raise respectable villagers is sometimes imputed to the malign influence of satanic sects, instead of seeking the root-causes in the malaise of the community itself. It is as though adults could not quite bring themselves to trust the young generations: So, for instance, I was once refused the authorization to host a festival of Celtic music because adults were afraid that teens would get stoned. One transgression, or the mere suspicion of it, is enough to take back what had been granted earlier. Instead, alcohol abuse is accepted as a socially inclusive activity, despite the inherent risks; and when car accidents happen, with young victims, it is fate or the winding roads that are blamed, not the circumstances that made them possible. Paradoxically, many sincerely believe that drinking and driving is a problem mainly affecting people living in the cities, when the opposite seems to be far more likely. By the same token, understanding the causes of teenage suicides does not lead to some form of self-examination: collective responsibility for an event of such gravity is out of the question, and researchers who attempt to shed light on this phenomenon may end up being ostracized.

Social pressure to conform exerts a different influence depending on whether the target is a boy or a girl. Boys, because of their dominant role, are the most likely to cave in and trade in their future happiness for some freedom; they are then instructed on the kind of partner they should look for, while many girls are prepared to leave as soon as they can. Consequences can be serious. The gender gap causes many men to remain bachelors, while women, who really have few alternatives, escape from their native village, and from priests, parents, brothers and husbands. So many of them have moved out or have decided not to get married or not to have children that today valleys are far less populated than they used to and the local economy drags along, while the social and cultural life has waned.

## **THE GENDER QUESTION: AS WOMEN LEAVE, MOUNTAINS DIE**

Women are essential for the existence of alpine communities. Decisions on whether to have children and raise a family, and therefore to settle in a place, all depend on women's willingness to do so. It is mostly women who devise new ways to do things, seek better standards of living, and strive to revive older traditions. Without them, no development would be possible. This is why they are at the heart of an ongoing research project that has been undertaken by a team of anthropologists at the Centro di Ecologia Alpina (Centre for Alpine Ecology) and that has already produced six international congresses and five major publications.<sup>7</sup>

### **When women say no: traditional women's roles and their rejection**

What is the social status of women in the Alps and why is it that people are loath to talk about it and do something about it?<sup>8</sup>

For centuries, women have managed to survive in limit-situations by keeping in touch with nature, using natural resources without depleting them, while protecting the environment, and cultivating a magic and poetic quality to life, while carrying out the task of recording the memory of past event. The Alps, that for centuries have been removed from the main communication routes and development processes, have witnessed the emergence of a feminine culture and society, mostly due to the men's absence.

It is becoming increasingly evident that when women leave, because for instance they refuse to marry a farmer, mountains die. When men cannot find a spouse from Latin America or Eastern Europe, they have to resign themselves to celibacy or resettle, as they grow old.

Women have been the first to leave, carrying through a feminist protest that, even though it has not reached international recognition, has not been less effective. It was a spontaneous reaction against a culture that regarded them as little more than servants and procreating machines, unworthy of any kind of personal gratification. Their diaspora started in the Fifties and has since reached alarming proportions. Today it is a fact of life.

This migration has ancient roots and it is to these roots that we should go back to if we want to figure out how to reduce the likelihood that this phenomenon will persist or, at least, if we are determined to contain it and reduce its severity. In peasant societies, women were the first to wake and the last to go to sleep. Girls, like boys, would start working at an early age, for there was always something to do. Childhood in general would end very quickly, carefully overseen by parents and priests, who acted as the custodians of morality.

Even though, compared to bourgeois women, peasant women enjoyed a certain measure of latitude, and could be promiscuous, conventional morality denied them the right to enjoy life's pleasures. From an early age, they were constrained by religious prescription. Sexophobic priests inculcated into their minds and souls the concept of sinful behaviour and a sense of unbending duty. Nearly everything was reprehensible: as late as thirty to forty years ago, girls would be publicly

reproached for wearing stockings or for dancing on Sunday afternoon, when youngsters used to meet to play, sing and dance.

Transgressions existed, of course, but every action that broke the prescribed rules produced a deep feeling of guilt and resentment: social control was especially strong. Awareness and fear of sin were deep-seated and sexual transgressions were vigorously chastised. Similarly, talking about sex was regarded as most inappropriate.

Predictably, women's clothes would be chaste and austere, in both shape and colours, mostly dark, and fashion would not change appreciably.<sup>9</sup>

Once married, women's private feelings and aspirations were crushed. Their very existence was devoted to taking care of their husbands, relatives, children and of the household, till they died. They never really celebrated festivities. On Easter or Christmas, on Sunday, or on family celebrations, they were expected to work hard during the night to prepare special meals, and to clean, wash, mend, iron, etc. Everything would look impeccable. They were forbidden from entering taverns, unless they were forced to take home their drunken husbands. In wintertime, when their husbands rested, they kept working and giving birth to babies. Virtually no money was left for anything other than the essentials, and there was no real source of entertainment: women aged without having the opportunity to do something only for themselves, and they seldom experienced love or sexual bliss.

Still, for all their socially disadvantaged status, the economy of the family and of the community revolved around them. Women kept the accounts of the family-farm but, because incomes were small, they were forced to do odd jobs in order to deal with unforeseen expenditures. For instance, drawing on the knowledge and skills of previous generations, which could be traced back to the societies of hunters and gatherers, they would look for berries, medical herbs, and mushrooms that they could sell at the market. They would also use the hand loom to make clothes, linen and other textiles with which they would decorate the household. Some rooms could be rented to tourists and, in summertime, if they lived near a tourist resort, many women would also work as chambermaids.

After all, because agriculture alone cannot support a family, one of the typical attributes of alpine people is versatility. In the Alps, perhaps more than in the plains and in the cities, there seem to have existed two distinct, discrete societies, with little intercommunication: a male and a female society. This separation became dramatic during the nineteenth century, when men began to spend several months elsewhere, to earn more money, and their spouses stayed at home, alone, running the farm and handling the side jobs by themselves, with no prospect of seeing their dreams come true.

The problem with all that was that, traditionally, before getting married, girls would work as housemaids in the cities and would get to know a different world and develop different needs, and perspectives on life and what to expect from it. When they went back to their villages they would unfailingly realize that they would have to relinquish the dreams they had previously cherished and the pleasures they had enjoyed. Yet these aspirations could not possibly disappear into thin air, and were often transmitted to their daughters. This caused women to metaphorically leave the mountains well ahead of their actual diaspora, which began about forty years ago.

The crisis of the extended family, that has dramatically improved the life of women living in the cities, has worsened the life of women living in the countryside and in the mountains. Now that longevity is increasing and solidarity networks are breaking down, women are supposed to nurse elderly parents, parents-in-law, and relatives as well. Public services are often insufficient and, on top of that, women feel a sense of moral obligation to do what others expect them to, and sometimes they conceal their hiring of foreign carers to dodge the neighbours' judgment. Seeing all this, it is perfectly understandable that daughters will do anything they can to avoid that kind of existence.

These days, they have moved out or have decided not to get married or not to have children. As a result, valleys are far less populated than they used to and the local economy drags along, while the social and cultural life is waning.

## **A quantitative assessment of the diaspora**

On processing the results of the inquiry and drawing the depopulation maps accordingly, we have realised that we should take a different tack, and analyse data in gender-based sorted lists to detect possible discrepancies in male and female depopulation patterns between 1950 and 2001, decade by decade. While it is true that the two trends seem to run parallel to each other, we ought not to discount other factors:

- Women live longer than men, and therefore one would expect them to be more numerous, in the long term;
- Studies of demographic changes must take into account the 20 to 45 age-set, that is to say, the age at which women can still procreate and are more likely to, and the 20 to 49 age-set, namely the age at which women are more likely to marry in mountain communities.

When these variables are factored in together, we can fully realise the seriousness of the women's plight. Maps show that clearly. Pink-coloured areas are those where women aged between 20 and 49 are in equal number or more than men. As anyone can see, they are a tiny minority of municipalities. Across the Italian Alps, women in that age-set are almost invariably fewer than men. Some cases are more alarming than others, but the overall picture is by no means encouraging. Nationwide, women exceed men by 1.60%, but those between 20 and 49 years of age are about 49.88% of the age-set, 49.07% in Trentino. In more than 80% of alpine municipalities, for every hundred residents there are between 51 and 55 men and, in Trentino, there are various districts in which the ratio drops to 60 to 40, or even to 65 to 35. Paradoxically, Trentino, which is one of the most virtuous alpine regions with respect to depopulation, is the one where the ratio is most lop-sided. Indeed, the part of the map occupied by Trentino is almost uniformly dark. In nearly 8 percent of municipalities

women in this age-set are less than 45 percent. Only in larger towns like Trento, Rovereto, Arco, and Borgo Valsugana is the ratio more favourable to women. In 10 municipalities, for a total of 4,772 residents, the mean ratio is 0.72 women – 41.91 percent altogether – for every man included in the 20-49 set.

Our analysis proves that, in the 1990-2004 period, many of the “missing” women have remained in the same valleys: 52.6% of them have simply moved to larger settlements. With changes of lifestyle in the settlements of origin, it is possible that these women would not have left. However, it is undoubtedly difficult to promote changes that are, first of all, of a cultural nature.

It is undeniable that there is a social and cultural problem affecting women living in mountain communities that we have detected throughout the fieldwork and that cannot be by-passed.

It looks like, especially in Trentino, changes in customs, morals, lifestyles, and in the women’s status have not been completely digested by the male population. The weakening of the mechanisms of social and family control on women and a different conception of marriage and love-life are sometimes ostracised and those women who stubbornly resist this opposition are often forced to leave.

### **Hidden discomfort: the right to a denied pleasure, traditional expectations and current needs**

We have detected a patent discrepancy between social expectations and women’s claims and demands. Married or aged women are still required to be the primary caregivers, even though they may have their own job, and an exacting one at that. People believe that their incomes should be devoted to family and homecare; their patience is drained by sometimes abusive if not violent relatives. In a word: they constantly sacrifice themselves.

Here is an example of what could happen anywhere in the Alps. In Switzerland, a 40-year-old single woman, the director of an institute employing 70 researchers, decides to move back to the village where she grew up, to live with her brother, who is alone. Because she retains her job as head of the research centre, she hires a maid to help her with the domestic chores while she is at work. Unfortunately, the traditional view of things goes like this: a middle-aged woman with an unmarried brother should behave like someone who is half a wife and half a mother, that is, like some sort of a servant. She should stay at home and pamper him. Because she is not like that, gossiping becomes unbearable: why does she pay a housemaid? Can’t she do those things by herself? Why does she spend so much time away? What does she do while she is not here? Does not she feel guilty and embarrassed when she leaves her brother alone? Eventually, her brother could not withstand such an enormous pressure: every time he walked into the pub he felt like everyone was gossiping about them. She eventually had to leave and go back to the city.

Rumours sometimes turn into outright harassment. In one of the villages where we did fieldwork, one of the few young mothers with a university degree turned down an offer to work as a high-rank civil servant, which would have allowed her to combine a professional career with motherhood, because of her fear of what her neighbours would have thought of her daily commuting.

As a consequence, girls are most eager to look for friendly relationships outside of their close circles, which can be used as a pretext for spending as much time as possible away from their constraining daily routine. Problems worsen when girls get married, that is to say, marry into the husband’s family and move in with her parents-in-law, that she is expected to care for, especially when they are no longer self-sufficient, given that paying a professional carer is regarded as socially and morally unjustifiable. While money spent on luxurious cars is an investment, money spent for carers, nursing homes, and baby-sitters is wasted. Women must see about that by themselves.

Men are usually free to pursue their passions and hobbies (playing cards, fishing, hunting, going to pubs, etc.), do sport and volunteering activities, see their buddies (but not at home, which is unsuitable for this kind of get-together). When a young mother died in a car accident she was blamed for taking a day off to go skiing. Married women who dared to go to the local tavern would be labelled as irresponsible, if not worse. The kind of behaviour that must be tolerated with men (e.g. coming home drunk at night) is not forgiven when it comes to women. Even today, women cannot dawdle: they are not supposed to have spare time and when they spend time together, they must account for the time they have been away from housework.

### **When pressure reaches the point of no return**

A suffocating social climate, if unacknowledged, may provoke major discomfort and harsh disputes: over the past years several cases of “murderous mothers” have been reported, motivated by seemingly unexplainable depression syndromes.

We have analysed the socio-economic and cultural context of these tragic events, in connection with the Centre for Mental Health in Cavalese, an institution specialised in treating and researching this kind of pathologies, especially when they affect women. The results are astounding. I have examined infanticides perpetrated by young mothers with no economic or family problems in Cogne and Montjovet, both in Aosta Valley, Santa Caterina Valfurva and Casatenovo, in Lombardy, and Meran, in South Tyrol.

We are talking about “normal” couples, at their first marriage, financially well-equipped, with no sign of an imminent separation. They live in beautiful houses with garden and splendid surroundings. Mothers were young and reportedly still in love with their spouses. By and large, their husbands are described as “nice blokes, working hard, family men”.

All but one are housewives, and even this one exception works part-time, while another, a would-be TV starlet, declared that what she was doing was a past-time, rather than a job. According to a widely held belief, they have the time and opportunity to devote themselves completely to their children, with the only help of their mothers, if they are still alive;

if they are not or live too far, these young mothers are left to their own devices, no matter the number of children.

The common denominator of these dramas is the loneliness of women and the inability of men to detect signs of the impending tragedy, even though they are aware that their wives have not been able to sleep for months.

Half of the women had been under psychiatric care (Merano, Casatenovo, Santa Caterina, Valmanera.) Their husbands did not think they needed help at home, even though they did not lack the money to hire a helper. They simply relied on the traditional presumption that their wives would know what to do and would toe the line. These women lived secluded and felt terribly lonely, but their husbands and the whole community made light of the women's psychological and physical predicament. One, who used to spend her holidays in the valley where her husband was born, remained a virtual stranger to the inhabitants of the village where she stayed.

We should also mention the high consumption of psychotropic drugs among women in the rural Alps. This might indicate that there is a larger problem that people have hitherto chosen to ignore.

### **Matrilocal self-sufficiency**

In alpine villages, women are agents of change, also because they have managed to use clans' traditional mutual assistance rules to their advantage, during early motherhood. In Switzerland, a survey has been conducted to assess differences in behaviour among Swiss nationals and second generation Italian women living in Switzerland with respect to the problem of managing career and motherhood. Surveyors expected that Italian women, coming from a culture in which they are supposed to stay at home after marriage and therefore to quit their job would be comparatively worse off. Instead, the opposite is true. The ostensibly "backward" Italian customs actually allow young mothers to retain their jobs because their mothers are prepared to take care of their grandchildren, to the point that some even move to live near them. Conversely, Swiss mothers could not expect that kind of help from their mothers and were more likely to quit their job.

This type of clan-networking is exceedingly effective in rural communities in the Alps and more than compensate for the lack of public services for children. While on the one hand living close to one's parents also means being controlled, on the other hand, if family members are on good terms, this also implies that much of the burden of having children to look after for most of the day fall upon the grandparents. This is probably the main reason why matrilocality – i.e. the young couple settling near the house of the young wife's mother – is so widespread, and should be seen as an important development priority. In this sense, it is even more imperative that basic facilities like gyms or libraries, as well as cultural opportunities should be provided to those municipalities in which this sort of mutual help networking comes almost natural. There are highly promising instances where self-management of public facilities has been successfully experimented, such as in Terragnolo, where the kindergarten is run by young mothers

### **IDENTITY CULTURE AS A DETERMINANT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH**

In the Alps, culture is one of the few antidotes to depression, estrangement, and alienation.

During the past 15 years, our fieldwork has taught us that communities would thrive where the sense of identity and rootedness was stronger. This is even more true when it comes to Trentino, where tourism is the largest industry, and it is closely bound up with the revival of traditional culture. Commendable examples are Cimego with the House of the Peasant Culture of Kramsach. Elsewhere, it may be, likewise, a permanent exhibition of the art, tools, and memories of the peasant civilization or an eco-museum celebrating the beauty of the local landscape and nature. The one thing that is for certain is that the human factor is increasingly central to the tourism industry,<sup>56</sup> and that first-hand anthropological expertise is in a position to make the difference and bridge the gap between rural and urban society. Tourists generally come to the mountains with one well defined expectation: experiencing authenticity, which has become an important customer value. This authenticity should not be overtly fabricated, though. It is by all means necessary to strike a middle-ground between traditional and appealing, without compromising the delicate balance between stratified memories and customs on the one hand and leisure on the other hand, by imposing a patently arbitrary invention of local identity.<sup>57</sup>

Tourism development plans that ignore the sheer complexity of the task in question, and prefer to reapply models that can only be successful in a specific context (e.g. seaside tourism), are most likely doomed to fail, in the long run. Instead, local authorities could take advantage of the sincere and profound emotional ties that bind emigrants to the land of their ancestors, which is testified by their willingness to undertake long and expensive journeys simply to attend a funeral or a wedding.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, many emigrants, if they come back to the place where they grew up, are among the most eager to plan cultural events in their native village and bring fresh ideas and proposals. It is also worthy of note that many municipalities are prepared to spend relatively large sums of money to promote cultural activities: viz. Cimego's ethnographic trail, Luserna's Istituto Cimbro and Centro Documentazione, Ronzone's museums, Terragnolo's Maso San Giuseppe and the museum that is being built nearby. In all these instances, cultural heritage professionals have helped to develop marketing strategies to promote tourism and at the same time preserve the most valued aspects of the local culture. All in all, we should not believe that mountain villagers are overly conservative: they have time and again demonstrated that they are perfectly capable of re-interpreting and reinventing their traditions when it is done for the benefit of the community or for the sake of personal growth. A case in point is the corps de ballet of Cimego, whereby young women have re-appropriated local gender history and translated it so that it could be made accessible to everyone, tourists included. When a cultural activity is designed with local residents in mind, these will rarely let down the organizers. They can discriminate between something that it is worthwhile and something that is done just for its own sake. Here is an example. Many education institutes in Trentino



complained that there were far too many IT courses, compared to the number of students, and because of that some would never get started. But in Cimego things turned out differently. Local authorities purchased twelve state-of-the-art computers and set up their own IT course. The attendance was overwhelming and it lasted for months. When asked, attendees pointed out that this time they were not given second-hand, outmoded technology. Likewise, when experts were brought there to lecture on various topics, the turnout was also remarkable. It all goes to demonstrate that, when people are treated with respect, they respond with equal respect and enthusiasm.

### **Dialects as markers of identity**

In the Alps, dialect is the most common identity marker.<sup>59</sup> It defines the boundary between “us” and “them.” People are almost automatically accepted as insiders when they can speak the local dialect and the process of inclusion begins when people start speaking dialect to an outsider. What is a dialect? Technically, nothing sets it apart from an official language. There are dialects, like the Occitan, that have been used for centuries as a lingua franca and now are only spoken in the border area between France and Italy. It is the number of speakers, its usefulness, and its status that determine how a standard form of a language evolves out of a dialect. Linguistically, the phonetic, lexical and idiomatic attributes of a dialect, together with its plasticity, practicality and realism, and its sometimes curt immediacy, reflect the identity of a community. But a dialect is not confined to the realm of everyday life: there are certain professions, techniques and literatures that can only be expressed in dialect. When norms are designed to define which food is typical of a region, legislators must use terms of the local dialect, because national languages cannot provide an equivalent translation. In sum, dialect is the expression of the cultural heritage and worldview of a people. One can measure the degree of acceptance of a minority by looking at the measure of respect in which the minority’s dialect is held by the majority. Even today, people living in the plains regard dialects as backward, ignorant, and vulgar. Even TV programmes contribute to the disparagement of certain dialects by portraying their speakers as characteristically close-minded, if not altogether dim-witted. This creates the mechanical and involuntary association of a host of negative feelings and impressions with what is related to that dialect. It is not uncommon to hear professionals commenting with annoyance on the behaviour of colleagues, teachers, or students who spoke in their own vernacular, as tough this was a sign of disrespect.

This may cause distrust and embarrassment and may also inhibit spontaneous conversation. A teacher from Tessin, the ethnic Italian Swiss canton, told me that local students hesitated to speak to Italian teachers for fear of being ridiculed because of their strong accent.

Still, the revitalization of a collective identity, which is the foregrounding of a development programme, can only be based on respect and care for the language, as in the case of South Tyrol, Valle d’Aosta, Friuli, Occitania, and Ladinia. In Valle di Fassa, tourists have positively responded to the free courses of Ladin offered by the local authorities. We do not need to remind the readers of the accomplishments of Dario Fo, who was awarded the Nobel prize for his hybrid vernacular epic clowning. Something along similar lines is being currently done by musicians and playwrights who fuse exotic sounds or rock with dialect. Dialects should be preserved and special education programmes should be established, to teach the use of dialect, even to recent immigrants, who will be able to better integrate into the local community.

### **There is no one-fit-all solution: the myth of the local produce**

The socio-economic development of the alpine region can only ride on the back of a comprehensive strategy comprising flexible measures that must be tailored for specific sites and conditions. It is not uncommon to find out that cultural variables matter more than botanic and agronomic characteristics. One first has to persuade local people that selling their cattle would be unsound, then one can train the younger generation to become good farmers. It would be equally unreasonable to gear production and marketing towards the local market, because networks of distribution are by now globalized and several goods can be purchased for less, while local populations are not heading towards higher levels of consumption of the local produce, which is generally rather expensive, especially butter and cheese, which are inseparably associated with the mountains in the popular imagery. The only consumers who can afford it in large quantities come from the outside. Having said that, being able to produce goods that are in great demand can be a major boost for the residents’ self-esteem, and it is likely to be much more helpful than converting hold farms into boarding houses or resorts, something that calls for a great deal of money and for a deep knowledge of tourism provision and management, which are not always available. Sustainable and participatory development schemes will encompass new and old vocations, such as mountain pasture that, with the help of state-of-the-art technology and adequate training, will be made much more profitable and less alienating. Aside from production, it is important that we all understand that the profit margins for local entrepreneurs will remain rather thin; unless residents get involved into the marketing and distribution of dairies, herbs, meat, honey, flax, etc., and learn how to successfully apply for regional, national and EU subsidies. Products should be sold where they are produced, and where they can be accompanied by other services such as hospitality, the mildness and salubriousness of the climate, and the wholesomeness of the food, in a pleasant environment.

This goal can only be achieved if petty politics and internecine strife are left aside, once and for all, and if local authorities finally realise that investing in the local culture, local resources and local people is really the only available option.

### **Women and the identity economy**

Recently, a counter-movement striving for change and for the establishment of economic measures that could prevent emigration has taken shape. This is what is conventionally called "identity economy".<sup>10</sup> It is not a matter of "total innovation": some of the proposed practices are age-old, but are recast in a more modern fashion, using advanced technologies and different attitudes. Besides creating new income sources, these initiatives preserve and regenerate traditional cultures. The local cultural heritage is re-appropriated and improved, also through insights and contributions from the outside, and conservative traditionalism is cast aside in favour of a more diverse and creative future. This is the task that women, the traditional custodians of the memory of a culture, have made their own, on behalf of their communities and land.<sup>11</sup> This dynamism certainly accounts for the fact that some of the most promising entrepreneurial undertakings in the Alps have been undertaken by women.

Let's make no mistake: the most lucrative business – i.e. hotels, ski-lifts and chair-lifts, factories, public procurements, etc. – is still in the hands of men, as it is political power. But family-scale economy is controlled by women. Most of the micro-economy and identity economy is run by women, who generally manage to combine environmental and business concerns, tradition, innovation and rights claims. This specific sensibility is the asset on which a new, more socially and culturally concerned entrepreneurial style should be built: women are the key to change, and to a sustainable, equitable, and ultimately desirable development.

Tourism, for instance, an activity that has almost replaced agriculture and zootechnics in the Alps, is mostly managed by women, especially insofar as medium and small size enterprises in the private sector are concerned. Women are in charge of virtually everything, from internal design to reception and tourist information.

Beside the environment, family habits also inevitably change in response to tourism. For instance, before, households were relatively small, and families were forced to share almost the same premises with their guests, so that even the intimacy of Christmas celebrations was lost.<sup>12</sup> In Trentino, the relative shortage of boarding houses and hotels is due to the disinclination of families to make apartments and houses available to tourists.

Today, women seem to be more open-minded than men, more willing to experiment, to learn new things and new practices, even at an older age. They enthusiastically participate in cultural initiatives where they help, cook, entertain, etc., grit their teeth, and invest on the future, while men appear more content with immediate gratifications. If, besides basic services like a post office, an elementary school, and a grocery store, women were ensured access to gender-based essential services, for instance those concerning the care of children and of the elderly, and non-material sources of fulfilment, that is to say, if women's needs were not overlooked, mountain communities would blossom again. This could be accomplished by addressing the issue of culture and culture identity as a remedy against the desertification of alpine villages produced by TV-sets.

### **A growing number of peasant women...**

Increasingly, women are proving their worth and resolve in professional agriculture and in agro-tourism. In Italy, women comprised 19 percent of agricultural labour in 1931, 24 percent in 1951, 29 percent in 1971, and approximately 36 percent in 1981 and 1991.

Some argue that, formerly, couples used to form an economic unit: men were more likely to find employment in a factory, while women continued to work in the farm. However, statistic estimates are deceptive: the women's diaspora was massive and in some valleys they were the first to leave. Whereas in 1951 there were 2,033,000 peasant women, in 1991 only 589,000 worked in the agricultural sector. That said, a remarkable change has occurred, as more and more women started to take an active role in farm management, and with very encouraging results.

In 1970, 18.9% of rural businesses were controlled by women distributed as follows: 26.9% of the small ones, 7.2% of the medium-sized, and 8% of the large ones. If we contrast these data with those of two decades later, we can appreciate the considerable progress. While the total number of agro-businesses decreased from 3,607,000 to 3,023,000, those run by women increased from 680,000 to 780,000, that is, from 18.9% to 25.9%. This expansion mostly consisted of medium- and large-sized farms, unlike in the past, when the involvement of women in the management of the farm was inversely related to its economic importance.

Prior to this crucial shift, in rural areas, allowing one's wife to be a housewife, instead of working the field or milking cows, was the privilege of relatively wealthy land-owners, and a status-symbol. In the Alps, this occurred very rarely. Nowadays, things are slowly changing, and women are attempting to reverse this trend. This is the real challenge of the "new rurality".

The 2000 national Agricultural Census described a changed scenario, where the presence of women in leadership positions was becoming more salient. While the number of mountain farms had decreased by 23%, and there were about two and a half million farms nationwide, nearly 800,000 of these were managed by women, that is, almost one third of the total. However, while there has been a sharp increase with respect to farms located in the hills and in the plains, mountain farms run by women have actually declined by 14%. Still, statistical evidence shows that when women control an agro-business, this is less likely to go bankrupt. Women managing farms in the mountains appear to be better organized and more determined than men, and this is especially true in the case of medium-sized (10 hectares) and large-sized farms (over 100 hectares).

The Census report tellingly points out that women promote a "new concept of rurality", by investing in the land and protecting the environment.

## Sustainable development does not come cheap

Despite a common misconception, sustainable growth exacts a steep price in terms of human and financial resources; it needs the most favourable conditions to deliver, requires a high level of professional expertise, and takes a long time to really get going. And yet this is what it takes to successfully coordinate a variety of services and activities in the area of tourism, the stewardship of natural and cultural heritage, sport, marketing of local produce and handicrafts.<sup>63</sup> For instance, in order to obtain EU funds, one must be conversant with the rules of the game in Bruxelles, and must be able to communicate in several foreign languages; and this may still not be enough, if the local population is not actively involved in this process and prepared to put time and money into this enterprise, for development training programmes are neither easy nor inexpensive, and results can be disappointing; this is especially true if they are undertaken in regions where education levels are comparatively low. Education is expensive and may not yield tangible results for years, but it is really the only way to go. Training programmes should be managed by a staff of professionals with extensive experience in this specialized field but should also be complemented with long-term strategies involving the consultation and participation of the public. Now, because, at least initially, it would be irrational to expect large private investors to become interested in this area of business, the best bet would be to encourage startup entrepreneurship. This policy is normally hampered by the desire to find an easy 9-5 job with minimum hassle and fuss, but then again, as they say, "no pain, no gain."

## Glocalization and the land

The effects of globalization can be upsetting where cultural specificities are depreciated: metropolitan suburbs and wealthy enclaves share in common the scant attention to the universal need for cultural entertainment and social networking places. What in the mountains used to be farming land, is now a symbol of underdevelopment and marginalization where young people survive rather than live and few seem to be ready to face what is going on "out there," in the plains. As a result, for some, the globalization process is not something desirable but an unwelcome imposition of standardizing criteria, tastes, styles and languages. The response can be as extreme as outright rejection and self-exclusion, fear of what is new and alien and obsessive attachment to what is traditional. Normally this is the typical reaction of groups that feel threatened, that is, those whose identity is more vulnerable and feel cast aside. Interestingly, increasingly more people are growing sceptical about globalization, and consequences can be as serious as the silent marginalization of thousands, possibly millions, of people who cannot rapidly adjust to the new realities because they lack sufficient mental flexibility, or are simply happier the way they are.

Alpine communities were less self-enclosed than many people believe. But the globalization of the market economy and the levelling of regional socio-cultural idiosyncrasies meant that the peasant civilization of the mountains became outmoded. Now, the risk is that a culture that has survived for thousands of years could die out. This would be an irremediable loss and, by all means, an unnecessary one. Because globalization also means that more outsiders get to know local cultures, who are likely to appreciate those traits that locals tend to disparage, out of an unjustified embarrassment. This, aside from being a remarkable business opportunity, could also help local residents to gain self-esteem and to protect their unique heritage, without suspending it in a timeless vacuum.

## PART II: "our" municipalities

### MUNICIPALITIES UNDER STUDY

#### An overview

Overall, the five municipalities in which we did the fieldwork comprise 2,066 inhabitants, which should be considered a statistically significant sample. Following a general outline of the region and of the relevant statistics, we report some of the conclusions that we have reached,

The depopulation trend in Luserna, Sagron Mis and Terragnolo has not been reversed, whereas things are improving in Cimego and Ronzone. Aging is also a problem: Luserna has the unenviable distinction of having three times as many residents over 65 years of age than teenagers aged less than 14 years. Cimego and Ronzone are also doing well as regards level of education and number of enterprises per 100 inhabitants. Among people aged 20 to 49, women only comprise 48% of the total number of residents, Cimego and Ronzone prove to be more attractive to young women than Sagron Mis, Luserna and Terragnolo. Those women who leave, - and they are a majority, except in Terragnolo, and with a peak of 62.9% in Sagron Mis -, normally move to somewhere outside of Trentino (23.3%), to a nearby village (24%), to a nearby town (26.2%), or to a city in Trentino (20.2%). More than half of these women choose to live close to their native village, and it seems safe to assume that many of them would rather stay were they used to live, if they were given the opportunity.

Together with the statistical analysis, this section provides a qualitative and comparative perspective on social life in the municipalities in question. We also sketch out recent development plans and those that are in the pipeline. The case of Cimego, so far a veritable success story, will be described in detail, from the inception of the programme, in the early 1990s. Luserna's case will serve to illustrate what has been accomplished in the area to promote the Cimbri's culture. Terragnolo is important for its strong stand on and active recognition of issues related to the welfare of children and youngsters; Ronzone

for its Museums Association. Sagron-Mis instead exemplifies the difficulty of embarking on the task of creating sustainable growth, locally. These sections are complemented with bullet points and factboxes.

A majority of our informants – 300, 15 percent of the total population – are relatively young, are women and hold a position of responsibility or manage a company. Among the non-structured, free-flowing, open-ended, in-depth interviews, we have picked out only the most informative with respect to inclusion/exclusion practices and development programmes (114). Statistical matching has defined commonalities and differences between informants and municipalities. The one piece of evidence that we think is the most significant is that where, as in Cimego and Ronzone, local authorities have undertaken programmes for the cultural and economic development of their municipalities, people's conceptions of place and identity have undergone a significant change: they are more inclined to describe their village as protective and peaceful, even though, as in all the other villages, parochialism and sectarianism are still pervasive.

Many young people are not eager to journey to destinations outside Trentino. Change is perceived as hazardous; opportunities, including professional opportunities, are seldom seized; people doubt that they could change the fabric of the local society and are prone to passively follow the mainstream. Cimego is an exception: twice as many respondents would go for a change, there. Apart from Cimego and Terragnolo, depopulation, seclusion, lack of entertainment and infrastructures and despondency are recurring themes (in almost half of the interviews in Luserna and Sagron Mis). Most of the people who declare that they are ready to leave are women, and this is further confirmed by 1990 to 2004 census data. 63% of those who left Sagron Mis are women. By contrast, in Terragnolo young people are coming back to live in the houses vacated by their parents. Everywhere, even in Cimego, there is a widespread tendency to frequent social networking places that are as far removed as possible from everyday life and the people that one sees on a daily basis, because many seek to escape from social control. This may in part explain why several mostly young men are described as uncommunicative and is probably a symptom of endemic social malaise, especially among youth and women.

## DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS IN THE ITALIAN ALPS. 1951-2001 CENSUS DATA OVERVIEW. REGION BY REGION

### *Liguria*

This region suffers from a serious demographic downturn, and its population has decreased by 5 percent. The number of men is declining twice as fast as that of women. In small municipalities (with less than 400 inhabitants), the population has dropped by one quarter in 50 years. Municipalities with between 600 and 1,100 inhabitants are stable and those with a population ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 inhabitants tend to grow (this is an exception in Liguria). This is incidentally also where the male-female gap is greater, with 4% fewer men than women.

### *Piedmont*

In Piedmont only those municipalities with a population larger than 1,500 inhabitants report an increase in the local population, while in smaller municipalities – particularly in the 192 with less than 400 inhabitants – the decline is equivalent to that occurring in Liguria. There are fewer men, also because women's life expectancy is greater than men's. Women tend to move to municipalities with more than 3,000 inhabitants (that is, 66 municipalities). Piedmont and Friuli are the only northern regions where an across-the-board demographic decline has been reported (400,000 fewer residents in Piedmont).

### *Valle d'Aosta*

Here the population is growing by 6%, and women are contributing twice as much as men to this growth. In municipalities with a lower density, men are more likely to leave than women. Women normally tend to live in larger municipalities. The population of Aosta, the only city in the region, is declining, and men are the most likely to move out.

### *Lombardy*

*216 out of a total of 524 alpine municipalities (40 percent) are growing smaller. This phenomenon is more marked (15 percent) in clusters of municipalities with a smaller population. Instead, those with 1,500 to 5,000 inhabitants attract new residents (an increase of 10%), especially if they are near the suburbs of cities like Varese, Como, Lecco e Sondrio, where housing is too expensive and has caused the heaviest loss of resident population in Lombardy. In these suburban areas, increases may hit peaks of 100 percent. There does not seem to be a demographic imbalance between men and women.*

### *Venetia*

This is the region where the redistribution of resident population exhibits the greatest tendency to fuel urban growth. In 49 municipalities with less than 1,500 inhabitants, the average population drop ranges from 7 to 20 percent, and it increases as the number of residents is lower. As a result, there are currently over 60 municipalities with more than 3,000 residents. These are more likely to attract men.

### *Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen*

A significant increase of the female population, i.e. 11 percent, is reported for South Tyrol. This is more marked in municipalities with a resident population of over 5,000 inhabitants, which have absorbed 40 percent of the local population growth. The increase in the number of women exceeds that of men, but in smaller municipalities women are still fewer than men. This imbalance has persisted for over 50 years.

### *Autonomous Province of Trento*

Resident population is growing, as in the neighbour province of South Tyrol. There are instances where the resident population has declined, but they are less frequent than elsewhere. They generally occur in the 33 municipalities with less than 400 inhabitants, where men exceed women by 3 percent. Women seem to prefer to live in municipalities with 3,000 to 5,000 inhabitants

### *Friuli Venezia Giulia*

This region is one of the most severely affected by depopulation. All municipalities experience a decline, and women are leaving in larger numbers than men (minus 9%). This is especially dramatic in the 18 municipalities with less than 600 inhabitants, where resident population has dropped by over one third since 1951. The 25 municipalities with 600 to 1,100 residents lost one fourth of their initial population. Even the 15 municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants have lost 10,000 residents; 60 percent of them were women.

## Notes on the text

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- <sup>1</sup> On this subject, see the work of Michela Zucca, the project manager.
- <sup>2</sup> Zucca, Michela, *Antropologia pratica e applicata. La punizione di Dio: lo scandalo delle differenze*, Esse Libri, Napoli, 2002, pp. 71-2.
- <sup>3</sup> Bätzing, Werner, *L'ambiente alpino. Trasformazione-Distruzione-Conservazione*, Melograno Edizioni, Milano, 1987 (*Die Alpen. Naturbearbeitung und Umweltzerstörung*, 1984).
- <sup>4</sup> Among the most important historical-demographic in anthropology: Viazzo, Pier Paolo, *Comunità Alpine. Ambiente, popolazione, struttura sociale nelle Alpi dal XVI sec. a oggi*, Il Mulino, Bari, 1990, (*Upland Communities*, Cambridge University Press, 1989); Sibilla, Paolo, *La Thuile in Valle d'Aosta: una comunità alpina fra tradizione e modernità*, Leo S. Olschki, Firenze, 2004; Sibilla, Paolo, *Una comunità Walser delle alpi. Strutture tradizionali e processi culturali*, Leo S. Olschki, Firenze, 1980.
- <sup>5</sup> Netting, McC. Robert, In equilibrio sopra un'Alpe. Continuità e mutamento nell'ecologia di una comunità alpina nel vallese, La Nuova Italia Scientifica/MUCGT, Roma/San Michele all'Adige, 1996 (*Balancing on an Alp: Ecological Change and Continuity in a Swiss Mountain Community*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, 1981).
- <sup>6</sup> Haudricourt A.G., *La technologie, science humaine. Recherches d'histoire et d'ethnologie des techniques*, Editions de la Maison de Sciences de l'Homme, 1987; Leroi-Gourhan, A., *L'uomo e la materia*, Milano, Jaka Book, 1993 (1943).
- <sup>7</sup> For an extensive analysis of cultural ecology, determinism and possibilism: Poppi, Cesare, "Frontiere culturali e metodo antropologico nell'opera di John Cole ed Eric Wolf", in *La frontiera nascosta. Ecologia e etnicità fra Trentino e Sudtirolo*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 1993, pp. XV-XXIII, (*The Hidden Frontier. Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*, New York & London: Academic Press, 1974).
- <sup>8</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, A., *L'uomo e la materia*, Milano, Jaka Book, 1993 (ed. or. 1943).
- <sup>9</sup> Zucca, Michela, *Antropologia pratica e applicata. La punizione di Dio: lo scandalo delle differenze*, Esse Libri, Napoli, 2002, p. 250.
- <sup>10</sup> Latouche, Serge, *L'occidentalizzazione del mondo. Saggio sul significato, la portata e i limiti dell'uniformazione planetaria*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 1992, (*L'occidentalisation du monde. Essai sur la signification, la portée et les limites de l'uniformisation planétaire*, Editions La Découverte, Paris, 1989).
- <sup>11</sup> Meadows, D.L., *I limiti dello sviluppo*, Mondadori; Milano, 1972; Meadows, Donella, Meadows, Tennis, Randers, Jorgen, *Oltre i limiti dello sviluppo*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1993.
- <sup>12</sup> Bätzing, Werner, *L'ambiente alpino. Trasformazione-Distruzione-Conservazione*, Melograno Edizioni, Milano, 1987 (*Die Alpen. Naturbearbeitung und Umweltzerstörung*, 1984), p. 36.
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.
- <sup>14</sup> Guichonnet, Paul (a cura di), *Storia e civiltà delle Alpi. Destino storico*, Jaka Book, Milano, 1986 (*Histoire et Civilisations des Alpes*, Edition Privat Toulouse et Payot, Lousanne, 1980).
- <sup>15</sup> The notion of "place" in depopulated areas has been investigated by the Italian anthropologist Vito Teti, who has sought to elucidate how places, even when deserted, affect emigrants' thought and behaviour. See Teti, Vito, *Il senso dei luoghi. Memoria e storia dei paesi abbandonati*, Donzelli, Roma, 2004.
- <sup>16</sup> Talamucci, Paolo (et al.), Utilizzo razionale dei prati di montagna a fini terapeutici mediante i "bagni di fieno", *Report n°1*, Centro di Ecologia Alpina, 1995.
- <sup>17</sup> Tappeiner, Ulrike, Cernusca Alexander, „Auswirkungen des Auflassens einer Almweide auf die Bestandsstruktur und das Lichtklima, in *Belastung und Belastbarkeit alpiner Ökosysteme*. Universitätsverlag Wagner, Innsbruck, 1989, pp. 531-548.
- <sup>18</sup> Zucca, Michela, *Antropologia pratica e applicata*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2001, p. 401.
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 367-9.
- <sup>20</sup> Zucca, Michela, *Donne delinquenti*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2004, pp. 11-20.
- <sup>21</sup> On the Annales: Fevre, Luciene, *Il problema dell'incredulità nel secolo 16°. La religione di Rabelais*, Einaudi, Torino, 1978 (*Le problème dell'incroyance au 16° siècle*, Paris, 1968 (1942); Bloch, Marc, *La società feudale*, Einaudi, Torino, 1987 (ed or. *La société féodale*, Paris, 1968 (1939).
- <sup>22</sup> Kilani, Mondher, *Antropologia. Una introduzione*. Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 1994, p. 102, (*Introduction a l'anthropologie*, Editins Payot Lausanne, Switzerland, 1992).
- <sup>23</sup> Balandier, Georges, *Il disordine. Elogio del movimento*, Dedalo, Bari, 1991 (*Le désordre: éloge du mouvement*, Paris, Fayard, 1988). This French ethnologist focused on the changes occurring in African societies from the viewpoint of the semiotics of development, and cast light on the relations between alternative representations of modernity.
- <sup>24</sup> Hobsbawm, J. Eric, Ranger, Terence (a cura di), *L'invenzione della tradizione*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino, 1987. (*The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- <sup>25</sup> Lenclud, Gérard, "La tradizione non è più quella di un tempo", p. 131, in *Oltre il folklore*, a cura di Clemente, Pietro e Mugnaini, Fabio, Carocci, Roma, 2001.
- <sup>26</sup> *Cit.* p. 131.
- <sup>27</sup> Meadows, D.L., *I limiti dello sviluppo*, Mondadori; Milano, 1972.
- <sup>28</sup> The expression *digital-divide* indicates the technological gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. In June 2000 the EU approved the "eEurope 2002" plan, which was aimed at the reduction of the digital divide across the continent. As for Italy, the Landolfi government decree of the same year adopts a similar approach.
- <sup>29</sup> Gianni Nicolini, Franco Viola, Michela Zucca, Claudio Chemini, "The Italian Mountains", in *Unasylva* 208, vol. 53, 2002, Fao, Roma, p. 68.
- <sup>30</sup> Telework and telecommuting are often regarded as the solution to the problem of commuting in mountain areas. However, their implementation has proved more complicated than expected.

- <sup>31</sup> One of the early applications of new technologies in remote areas has been the Docup-sponsored programme in Trentino. It involved the provision of broadband wireless access in the Leno valley for the municipalities of Terragnolo, Trambileno and Vallarsa. 740 km of fibre-optic communication systems are being simultaneously installed across Trentino.
- <sup>32</sup> As already mentioned, this chapter presents only part of the ethnographic and statistical data and information that we have collected. A more detailed and extensive treatment, updated to 2005, will be made available at a later date.
- <sup>33</sup> Italian National Census 1951-2001.
- <sup>34</sup> see the reports at [www.cipra.org](http://www.cipra.org).
- <sup>35</sup> EU Report, *Alpine Space Programme – Interreg III B Community Initiative*, Bruxelles, November 2001.
- <sup>36</sup> Guglielmo Scaramellini (a cura di), *Montagne a confronto: Alpi e Appennini nella transizione attuale*, Giannichelli, Torino, 1998; Werner Bätzing e Manfred Perlik, *Le Alpi tra urbanizzazione e spopolamento*, p. 119-154.
- <sup>37</sup> Serico – Gruppo Cesme, *Piccola Grande Italia: la disomogenea vitalità dei piccoli comuni con meno di 2.000 abitanti*, Legambiente – Confcommercio, Roma, 2001
- <sup>38</sup> These are the indicators of social malaise according to Lega Ambiente and Confcommercio: cultural impoverishment, low birth-rate and education, lack of services, aging and isolation.
- <sup>39</sup> According to the 2001 Census, by then in Italy 1,974 municipalities (24.4% of the total, and 37% in the North-West) had less than a thousands inhabitants.
- <sup>40</sup> Institutes like Fraunhofer, Max Planck, and so forth.
- <sup>41</sup> EU Report, *Alpine Space Programme – Interreg III B Community Initiative*, Bruxelles November 2001, p. 26.
- <sup>42</sup> Cealp, for instance, which was established in 1993, is concerned with both ecosystems and sustainable development of the alpine area.
- <sup>43</sup> EU Report, *Study of the Development of Transalpine Traffic (Goods and Passengers)*, Horizon 2010, in *Alpine Space Programme – Interreg III B Community Initiative*, p. 33.
- <sup>44</sup> Preliminary proposals for high-speed railways (“Treni ad Alta Velocità”) date back to 1988 and were modelled on the highly successful French railway development programme T.G.V. (*Train à Grand Vitesse*). The Lyon-Turin railway line, part of the Pan-European Transport Corridor V, and passing through Val di Susa, is currently at the centre of a dispute. For some independent researchers, an increased railway line capacity (AC), instead of faster trains, would be better suited to the local environmental and geological setting
- <sup>45</sup> *INAIL reports that in 2004 the highest number of work-related accidents occurred in Lombardy (158,328 out of 938,613).*
- <sup>46</sup> Durkheim, Emile, *La divisione del lavoro sociale*, Newton Compton, Roma, 1972 (1893).
- <sup>47</sup> Fortes M. e Evans-Prichard E.E., *African Political System*, Oxford University Press, London, 1940.
- <sup>48</sup> See the insightful criticism of romantic archaism of nature and mountains in Kilani, Mondher, *Antropologia. Una introduzione. Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 1994, (Introduction à l’anthropologie, Éditions Payot Lausanne, Swiss, 1992).*
- <sup>49</sup> Annibale Salsa, “La molteplice unità delle Alpi”. In: Commissione Internazionale per la Protezione della Alpi, *Secondo rapporto sullo stato delle Alpi*, Edizioni Centro documentazione Alpina, Torino, 2002, p. 29
- <sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p. 29.
- <sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p. 29.
- <sup>52</sup> Birgit Reutz-Hornmeister, “Essere giovani ed invecchiare nel territorio alpino”. In: Commissione Internazionale per la Protezione della Alpi, *Secondo rapporto sullo stato delle Alpi*, p. 43.
- <sup>53</sup> Michela Zucca (a cura di), *Matriarcato e montagna I, II, III, IV, V*, Centro di ecologia alpina, Trento, 1995, 1998 e 2000, 2003, 2005.
- <sup>54</sup> Michela Zucca, *Antropologia pratica e applicata*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2001, p. 359.
- <sup>55</sup> In Campo, Val Tartano (So), in 1948 the priest refused to administer Holy Communion to a young woman who wore the black veil typical of the neighbouring villages instead of the local, traditional square scarf. See: Donata Bellotti, *Religiosità popolare in Val Tartano*, Quaderni valtellinesi n°7, Sondrio, p. 45 e 46.
- <sup>56</sup> For a more comprehensive treatment of the social and cultural problems related to mountain pastures, see Associazione per la valorizzazione degli alpeggi, *Presente e futuro dei pascoli alpini in Europa*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 1999, and Michela Zucca, *Attività rurali tradizionali come beni culturali. La figura del malghese nell’immaginario collettivo: stereotipi e realtà*, p. 193-206.
- <sup>57</sup> Critics of the notion of authenticity often objects to the professionally designed and implemented construction of group identity and of a symbolic framework. But nobody disputed the right of Jewish survivors to create their own identity. I believe these operations are important for the survival of a community and altogether legitimate.
- <sup>58</sup> We could mention religious commemorations at Christmas, Easter, All Saints and All Souls, or for the Patron Saint. Then there are local festivities like the Carnival of Bagolino (Brescia), Termeno (Bolzano) and Sauris (Udine), the *Bodrum at Lusèrn*, in Luserna (Trento) that, like the Easter parade of Erto and Casso (Pordenone), are attended by people from the outside as well.
- <sup>59</sup> Zucca, Michela, *Antropologia pratica e applicata*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2001, p. 194.
- <sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256.
- <sup>61</sup> Zucca, Michela, *Donne delinquenti*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2004, p. 336.
- <sup>62</sup> Richard Fliri, tourism operator, Valle Lunga (BZ).
- <sup>63</sup> Cahiers Espace, *Tourisme rural, la voie du tourisme durable*, n° 42, juin 1995, Editions touristiques européennes, Paris, Nathalie Vicq-Thépot, *Formation-développement et tourisme rural*, p. 146-151.
- <sup>64</sup> The aging index is the ratio between people aged over 65 to people aged under 14
- <sup>65</sup> Each subsection is accompanied by statistics provided by the Statistics Service of Trento Province, the registry office and

the municipal historical archives.



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For a more thorough treatment of the romanticization of nature and landscape, see Kilani, Mondher, *Introduction a l'anthropologie*, Editins Payot Lausanne, Switzerland, 1992).

3

Annibale Salsa, **La molteplice unità delle Alpi**; in Commissione Internazionale per la Protezione della Alpi, **Secondo rapporto sullo stato delle Alpi**, Torino: Edizioni Centro documentazione Alpina, 2002, p. 29

4 See p. 29.

5 Ibid. p. 29.

6

Birgit Reutz-Hornmeister, **Essere giovani ed invecchiare nel territorio alpino**, in Commissione Internazionale per la Protezione della Alpi, **Secondo rapporto sullo stato delle Alpi cit.**, p. 43

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Zucca, Michela, (ed.), **Matriarcato e montagna I, II, III, IV, V**, Centro di ecologia alpina, Trento, 1995, 1998 e 2000, 2003, 2005

8

Zucca, Michela, *Antropologia pratica e applicata*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2001, p.359

9

In Campo, Val Tartano (Sondrio), in 1948, the priest refused to administer Holy Communion to a young woman who wore a black veil of the neighbouring villages instead of the local, traditional square scarf. See: Donata Bellotti, **Religiosità popolare in Val Tartano**, Quaderni valtelinesi n°7, Sondrio, p. 45 e 46.

10

Zucca, Michela, *Antropologia pratica e applicata*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2001, p.256.

11

Zucca, Michela, *Donne delinquenti*, Esselibri, Napoli, 2004, p. 336.

12

South Tyrolean informant from Valle Lunga (Bz).