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# From Public Participation to Place-Based Resistance. Environmental Critique and Modes of Valuation in the Struggles against the Expansion of the Malpensa Airport

Laura Centemeri\*

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**Abstract:** »Von der öffentlichen Partizipation bis zum ortsgebundenen Widerstand: Umweltkritik und Bewertungsmodi in den Kämpfen gegen die Flughafen-erweiterung von Malpensa«. Through an analysis of the 40-year history of conflicts triggered by the repeated attempts to expand the Malpensa airport in northern Italy, this paper seeks to show the heuristic strength of using the concept of *modes of valuation of the environment* to discuss the transformations of environmental critique over time in their relation to social change. I argue that, beyond empirical specifics, the trajectory witnessed in this case – from public participation to place-based resistance – reflects more generalized dynamics that can be found in many other conflicts over large infrastructural projects in contemporary Europe. The article is organized as follows: in the first section I briefly introduce the concept of *modes of valuation of the environment*, which is inspired by recent work in pragmatic sociology. In particular, I distinguish between universal, local, and emplaced modes of valuation. In the second and third sections I provide an analysis of the struggles against the Malpensa airport expansion from 1970 to 2014. Here, I distinguish three phases of mobilization, which I discuss in terms of the transformations that can be observed in the arguments that actors develop to fight or support the airport expansion. I argue that these transformations are articulated not only with changing action repertoires but also with evolving social and sociotechnical imaginaries that convey specific understandings of the environment as a matter of political concern. This analysis shows that, far from being simply a case of citizens' resistance to change, the mobilization against the Malpensa airport has contributed to producing the cultural basis of an increased collective reflexivity about the many values that the environment takes on among community members in the airport region. In the final section I discuss some hypotheses concerning what modes of valuation of the environment reveal about the emergence of a new radicalism in environmental struggles.

**Keywords:** Environmentalism, valuation, pragmatic sociology, Italy, place attachment, critique, environmental conflicts.

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## 1. Introduction

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This article aims to contribute a reflection on the transformations of environmental critique since the 1970s. By environmental critique, I refer to a form of contestation of the socio-economic order oriented toward producing a specific change in society: a new understanding of the place of “nature” in the political community (Latour 1993, 2004a). I argue that a key issue for environmental critique is that of how experience, and in particular the experience of the environment, can contribute to the critical power of reason applied to environmental problems.

The relevance of this issue for environmental critique is made clear once we consider that this critique fundamentally asks for the political recognition of a plurality of “languages of valuation of the environment” (Martinez-Alier 2002, 2008) or “environmental values.” “Environmental values” are intended here as the plurality of ways in which environments and their constituents matter to people (O’Neill, Holland and Light 2008, 1). In this sense, different kinds of value might be attributed to the environment, since there are a large variety of declinations of what can be experienced as an environmental good. Such recognition of the variety of environmental values raises the question of how people reach an agreement on the kind of experience of the environment that should be valorized in the deliberation concerning a given course of action.

Through an analysis of the 40-year history of conflicts triggered by a series of proposals to expand the Malpensa airport in the territory of the Regional Natural Park of the Ticino River Valley in northern Italy, I seek to show the heuristic strength of using the concept of *modes of valuation of the environment* to discuss the transformations of environmental critique over time in their relation to social change. Beyond the empirical specificities of the Malpensa case, I argue that the trajectory of transformations witnessed in this context – from public participation to place-based resistance – is in fact indicative of a more generalized dynamic of environmental critique, which can be found in many other conflicts over large infrastructural projects in contemporary Europe.

The article unfolds as follows. In the first section I briefly introduce the concept of modes of valuation of the environment and its relevance for understanding critique and social change. I distinguish between universal, local, and emplaced modes of valuation. By the adjective “emplaced,” I refer here to a form of knowledge and appreciation that takes place primarily at the aesthetic level, understood as the level of perception and corporeal sensibility. The concept of modes of valuation and the typology I introduce are inspired by the sociology of “regimes of engagement” (ROE) developed by Laurent Thévenot, on the basis of the pragmatic sociology of critique he elaborated together with Luc Boltanski during the 1980s. In partial disagreement with an understanding of pragmatic sociology as limited in its capacity to explain long-term trends (cf. Delanty 2011), I argue that pragmatic tools can be usefully mobilized to sup-

port an analysis of the transformations of critique over time. In the second and third sections I provide an analysis of the mobilizations against the Malpensa airport expansion that have taken place over the course of more than 40 years. This struggle is a typical case of mobilization against infrastructure policy in Italy, and one of the oldest and most widely debated at the national level, for its political and economic implications. Events related to the Malpensa expansion led the Italian flag carrier Alitalia Airlines to financial turmoil, ultimately resulting in its going bankrupt in 2008 (Di Palma and Paviotti 2008). I distinguish three phases of mobilization corresponding to three different plans of airport expansion. I discuss these three phases in terms of the arguments that emerged to support or to criticize the airport expansion, observed from the perspective of the modes of valuation of the environment they combine. Arguments are connected not only with action repertoires but also with evolving social and sociotechnical imaginaries that convey specific understandings of the environment as a matter of political concern. According to Taylor (2004, 92) “social imaginary” can be defined as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” For Jasanoff and Kim (2015), the concept of “sociotechnical imaginaries” points more specifically to the ways in which visions of scientific and technological progress carry with them implicit ideas about public purposes, collective futures, and the common good.

This analysis shows that, far from being simply a case of citizens’ resistance to change, the mobilization against the Malpensa airport has contributed to producing the cultural basis of an increased collective reflexivity about the many values that the environment takes on among community members in the airport region. In the final section I discuss some hypotheses concerning the usefulness of the notion of modes of valuation of the environment for exploring the emergence of a new type of radicalism in environmental struggles.

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## 2. Critique, Valuation, and Argumentation

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My analysis of the transformations of environmental critique in the Malpensa case relies on an analytical frame based on French pragmatic sociology.<sup>1</sup> According to this approach, critique is related to the exercise of peoples’ ordinary capacities for evaluative judgments (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Diaz-Bone

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<sup>1</sup> A general discussion of French pragmatic sociology is beyond the scope of this article. Various contributions provide a detailed analysis of this sociological tradition, its origin and developments: see in particular Bénatouïl (1999), Dodier (1993), Wagner (1999), and the special issue of the *European Journal of Social Theory* edited by Blokker (2011).

2017, in this volume). Consequently, political critique depends on individuals' ordinary capacities for evaluating situations and claims based on the plurality of evaluative criteria that can be used for this purpose. Therefore, my emphasis is on the different kinds of critical capacities people rely on and exercise in order to promote particular visions of social change, while at the same time taking into account the situational, historical, and material constraints that might inhibit the emergence and the expression of these capacities.

More precisely I am interested in the analysis of those modes of valuation that social actors mobilize in order to politicize an issue. In the work that I am currently developing with Gildas Renou (Centemeri and Renou 2015), we use the concept of *mode of valuation* to point to a variety of cultural forms that people can resort to in order to share a judgment concerning what matters, what is worthy or worthwhile, what is valuable, and what counts as important in a given situation, in order to be able to convene on a shared understanding about the proper way to "engage with" the situation at hand (Thévenot 2001, 2006, 2007). In particular, I distinguish between universal, local, and emplaced modes of valuation.

The term *valuation* points here to the process through which an agent comes to identify what should count as valuable, so as to orient action in a given situation; the term *evaluation* then points to the assessment of that situation according to this criterion, by means of convenient and appropriated "tests of reality."<sup>2</sup> In a similar way to how Annemarie Mol uses the concept of "logics" in her own work on care (Mol 2008, 10), the choice to speak of modes of valuation, and not simply of valuations, is explained by the interest in the comparison of distinguishable yet co-existing ways of valuing (and evaluating) that can account for the difficulties observable in actual processes of attribution of value, both at the individual and the collective level.

The concept of modes of valuation is inspired by the pragmatic sociology of Laurent Thévenot and his framework of "regimes of engagement" (ROE).<sup>3</sup> The ROE approach enlarges the original pragmatic focus on publicly justifiable definitions of value – the "orders of worth" that Boltanski and Thévenot elaborate in their collaborative work *De la justification*<sup>4</sup> – in order to account for a

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<sup>2</sup> On the sociology of valuation and evaluation see Lamont (2012). Tests of reality are performed by actors through specific objects, instruments, or procedures expressly conceived or formatted in order to assess a certain form of the valuable (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> I opted for the concept of "mode" in order to address valuation trying not to separate issues of language and representation and issues touching upon what we can define as an ontological dimension. See on this point Latour (2013) and his concept of mode of existence.

<sup>4</sup> Boltanski and Thévenot identify six different expressions of the common good in our society, from which they derive their six "orders of worth": market competition, industrial efficiency, fame, civic solidarity, domestic trust, and inspiration. As historically-defined conceptual constructions, "orders of worth" evolve over time with the emergence of new legitimate justifications. Examples are the network-based worth theorized by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) or the "green worth" discussed by Lafaye and Thévenot (1993). These legit-

wider variety of culturally shared definitions of the valuable that can orient people's judgments about what is worth doing in a given situation. In other words, according to Thévenot, there are other definitions of the valuable we should pay attention to beyond those public ones. These other definitions of the valuable are based on broad culturally shared understandings of the good – resting, for example, on the accomplishment of a plan of action (the “engagement in a plan” in Thévenot's terms), or on the familiarity with one's everyday surroundings, which contributes to basic material and affective sustenance (Breviglieri 2012). The communication of what counts as valuable can then be more or less dependent on propositional language, the same being true for evaluation.

Hansen (2016, 132) argues that Thévenot

arrives at an extremely generic definition of critique as doubt relating to some kind of sacrifice which can take numerous forms from the most public and explicit ones described in *On Justification* to more subtle and less explicit ones such as irony, gestures, indecisiveness and groping.

Reframing these remarks in terms of valuation, I would say that, according to Thévenot, critique potentially arises whenever the sacrifice of a mode of valuation – whether publicly justifiable or not – is judged as undue in a given situation. Political critique properly speaking takes roots in this more ordinary sense of critique, raising doubts about the appropriateness of the modes of valuation that underlie particular ways of governing and denouncing them as being unjust or, more broadly speaking, oppressive. But how do people succeed in making their critical voice publicly relevant?

The ROE approach, in continuity with the idea of justifiable action, rests on an understanding of *publicness* as a specific quality of action and of the modes of valuation that guide it. For Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) the public form of action in Western society has been socio-historically conceived and operationalized through a variety of cognitive artifacts, disciplining devices, and technologies to support the construction of both the public sphere and the individual. According to this construction, in order to be publicly justifiable, a mode of valuation must rest on a universally legitimate underlying good, meaning that this good must potentially benefit humanity as a whole: a truly “common good.” This beneficial link must be proven on the basis of a specific form of knowledge: modern scientific knowledge. The experience of value relevant for this public mode of valuation must be formalized in such a way that reason, as conceived since the Enlightenment, can critically reflect upon it. This implies that this experience of value must be independently valid beyond the unique context of its occurrence.

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imate definitions of worth are the result of the specific political, material, and intellectual history of Western European societies (Wagner 1994).

For the purpose of the present argument, I will limit myself to pointing out that, according to this understanding of publicness, a public mode of valuation is a universal mode of valuation that precludes a direct, sensorial, in-context experience of the good. The validity and indeed the value of such an experience must thus be proven in a way that can stand up to critical scrutiny, through a formalization in terms of *objective* experience. Moreover, the key operation that has to be performed in order to justify a publicly valid value judgment is that of establishing objective equivalence across different situations; this requires the devising of tools and techniques of commensuration. In this sense, commensuration can be considered as a social process (Espeland and Stevens 1998). Commensuration materializes in socio-technical “investments in forms” (Thévenot 1984) meant to ensure the formatting of things that are different (in the personal experience that one has of them) into things that can be represented as the same (in value).

The investments in forms needed to stabilize these universal modes of valuation require the highest degree of temporal and spatial validity in the formatting of knowledge (universal validity). They require substantial material transformations as well, accounting for the persistent material impact of these investments and their limited opportunities for reversibility (Thévenot 2009).

A mode of valuation based on *emplaced experience*, or emplaced mode of valuation, is diametrically opposed to this former public one.<sup>5</sup> By the adjective emplaced I refer here to a form of knowledge and appreciation that takes place primarily at the aesthetic level, understood as the level of perception and corporeal sensibility. Following Thibaud (2012, 4) the term “aesthetic” has to be intended here “in its original meaning of aesthesis, i.e., perception by the senses and not only as judgment of taste or philosophy of beauty.” This mode of valuation could be defined as “aesthetic” but two reasons justify the choice for “emplaced valuation”: the more explicit link to the material conditions of valuation and the more direct connection with the critical and political potential of this mode of valuation. The key evaluative operation here is not that of establishing objective equivalence, but rather of appreciating a personally (and bodily) felt proximity to a personally (and bodily) felt good (cf. Adloff and Pfaller 2017, in this volume). At work here is a form of appreciation that can be communicated to others but in forms less amenable to being generalized, in the sense that they can be neither depersonalized nor decontextualized: an emplaced good can only be experienced through the senses in a given situation.

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<sup>5</sup> As discussed by Sarah Pink (2009, 27), the emergent “paradigm of emplacement” points to “the revision of the notion of embodiment to account for the situatedness of the knowing body as in biological progress as part of a total environment.” The origins of this approach lie in the “phenomenology of place and space” developed by authors such as the philosopher Edward Casey, the geographer Doreen Massey, and the anthropologist Tim Ingold. I argue that through the ROE framework, it is possible to articulate this phenomenological account of the experience of the environment with a sociological theory of action.

The ROE literature emphasizes the variety of emplaced modes of valuation people routinely deploy, which are however generally glossed over within the social sciences. Examples of “emplaced goods” guiding valuations include: the “ease” of the “familiar engagement” with the environment (Breviglieri 2012); the “excitement for the newness” of the exploratory engagement (Auray and Vétel 2013); the resonance felt while engaging with the environment through attuning to an “ambiance” (Thibaud 2011). When they haven’t been seen as the source of various dangers or impediments to the expression of “modern values,” these modes of emplaced valuation have been considered as “tacit” or “practical” and are automatically disregarded as a potential source of critique.

Emplaced and universal modes of valuation often confront one another in a public setting. Where each mode is put forth as the most appropriate way to assess the value of an environment, we can speak of situations of “radical incommensurability” (Centemeri 2015). It is important to note, however, that actors can resort to a wide variety of *local modes of valuation*, neither properly public nor emplaced. In this latter case, the relevant value experience is not meant to be universally valid – as is the case with the public mode – but neither does it depend entirely on the sensuous, personally experienced body-environment nexus, as in the more phenomenological rendering of emplaced modes. Rather, *local modes of valuation* can rest on the creation of a (more or less extended) local space of equivalence or on references for valuing that emerge from a (more or less extended) community of experience. A form of bounded generalization is at work here, tied to some contextual conditions that have no ambition to be universally sharable, but nevertheless call for an evaluation of actors’ experiences from the standpoint of a form of local common good.

When approaching situations of conflict and disagreement from the analytical perspective of the plurality of modes of valuation, it is not sufficient to pay attention to how actors refer to justifiable orders of worth in order to denounce injustice (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). It is necessary to take into account the variety of ways in which actors produce “arguments” concerning the legitimacy of what should be considered as valuable in a given situation and how they succeed, or fail, in gaining wider support for their positions. In these argumentations, modes of valuation – be they universal or otherwise – come to be combined in novel ways. In order to grasp the contours of the debates at the frontier between the legitimate and the illegitimate, it thus becomes necessary to further unpack these emergent articulations of arguments.

In the following section, I analyze the transformations of the arguments deployed both by supporters and opponents of the Malpensa airport expansion programs, paying attention to the ways in which they combine universal, local, and emplaced modes of valuation of the environment. This qualitative analysis is based on several sources of data: ten semi-structured interviews I conducted with activists, political actors, and experts involved in the Malpensa case, as

well as supplementary data in the form of official documents (including technical reports), material produced directly by the mobilized groups (including web contents), press articles (300 articles published in the main Italian national newspapers from 1998 to 2012) and web articles (from web journals and activist blogs).<sup>6</sup> Previous academic and non-academic works of synthesis on the Malpensa case (Balducci 1988; Pizzi 2000; Di Palma and Paviotti 2008) have been particularly helpful, especially for reconstructing the earliest phases of the conflict. The methodology I have applied is in line with the “pragmatics of protest” approach developed by Francis Chateauraynaud (2011, 2015). The pragmatics of protest is defined by the author as “an attempt to bring together argumentative analysis of public issues and sociology of practice in different arenas or ‘interacting milieux’” (Chateauraynaud 2015, 2). Consequently, I observe how actors combine different modes of valuation of the environment in their “arguments,” while at the same time paying attention to the ways in which actors interact in the contexts of action and conflict. According to this approach, the strength of an argumentation is not simply based on intellectual coherence: it has to do with the success in creating a disposition to act, through a connection with an experiential “substrate.” In this sense, an argument always relies on a plurality of modes of valuation. As I will show, arguments evolved alongside specific action repertoires and social and sociotechnical imaginaries, including social understandings of the environment as a matter of political concern.

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### 3. The Struggles against the Malpensa Airport Expansion and the Transformations of Environmental Critique

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The Malpensa airport is situated approximately 50 km northwest of the city of Milan, the regional capital of Lombardy. Managed by SEA (*Società Esercizi Aeroportuali*), a joint stock company controlled by the Municipality of Milan, the airport occupies a surface area of 1.220 hectares at the border between the regions of Lombardy and Piedmont. With two terminals, two runways, and a dedicated cargo terminal, in 2015 Malpensa handled the second largest volume of airport passenger traffic in Italy (more than 18 million passengers) and was ranked first in the country in terms of freight transport volume.<sup>7</sup>

The airport site stretches over the territory of the Lombardy Regional Park of the Ticino River Valley, created in 1974 as the first Regional Park in Italy. In fact, regions in Italy exist as politico-administrative entities since 1970,

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<sup>6</sup> This research was conducted from 2010 to 2012 as part of the larger research program “Choice beyond incommensurability” I coordinated with José Maria Castro Caldas.

<sup>7</sup> Official data from ENAC: <[http://www.enac.gov.it/repository/ContentManagement/informazione/N1171036406/Dati\\_di\\_traffico\\_2015\\_160711.pdf](http://www.enac.gov.it/repository/ContentManagement/informazione/N1171036406/Dati_di_traffico_2015_160711.pdf)> (Accessed March 2, 2017).

when the first regional elections were held (cf. Jansen 2017). The municipalities of the Ticino Valley, together with an environmental NGO called *Italia Nostra* (Our Italy), had supported the development of the park since 1967. However, around this same time, in 1970, SEA submitted its first master plan for the expansion of the Malpensa airport to be considered by national authorities. The plan – known as the “Big Malpensa” – proposed the creation of a third runway in addition to the already existing two. Its subsequent approval in 1972 triggered what would come to be a decades-long battle over airport expansion; this legacy of conflict and controversy continues even into the present day.

In the rest of this section, I trace the evolution of this lengthy conflict, identifying three distinct phases corresponding to as many proposed expansion plans. With each new plan came (1) a correspondingly unique formatting of arguments deployed by actors supporting and opposing the plan and (2) specific action repertoires rooted in the evolution of underlying imaginaries, which were connected to major socio-political changes occurring in each respective period.

### 3.1 From the “Big Malpensa” Plan to the “Reasonable” Expansion: Mobilizing for the Right to Participate (1972–1987)

In the arguments supporting the first plan to expand the airport, SEA positioned itself as a major contributor to the modernization of the national infrastructural system – so as to support economic development – while affirming its own leading position in the national civic aviation industry. By way of the massive economic investments it required, a central ambition of the expansion project was to secure SEA’s national and international renown in the civic aviation industry. Universal modes of valuation are articulated with local “objective” needs (an expected increase in air traffic) in tandem with the local business interests of SEA. It is important to notice that SEA has progressively developed a business expansion strategy based not only on airport business, but also on real estate investments (Beria and Scholz 2010, 72). These arguments point to an imaginary of a modernized Italy, run by a modern technocratic elite and integrated into international networks of exchange.

However, the promoters of the expansion were confronted with opposition by the municipalities whose inhabitants stood to be directly impacted by the plan, and who were backed up by a large coalition of civil society actors, including trade unions, social movements, environmental NGOs, and grassroots movements. This composite coalition organized demonstrations and public assemblies, publicized their critiques through press campaigns, produced counter-expertise on the potential health damages of the expansion, and succeeded in creating a diffuse mobilization.

Different social demands were combined together into “chains of equivalentially related elements,” what Ernesto Laclau defines a “populist form of poli-

tics” (Griggs and Howarth 2008, 128). In the Malpensa case, this populist logic entails a twofold argument. On the one hand, there is the denunciation of the generalized lack of public participation in all kinds of decision-making processes. As with other similar cases of protest in Europe and North America during this period, critique in the Malpensa case was based on the “right to participate” (Feldman 1977). On the other hand, there is an argument based around the refusal of a capitalist driven type of local development. Equivalence is *argumentatively* (not objectively) built between two forms of *exploitation*: the capitalist exploitation of workers, and the exploitation of the environment. Equivalence is also built between two experiences of the *environment*: the experience of workers in their working environments, and the experience of inhabitants in their everyday living environments. Here, the environment is conceived of as the place where local communities had been organizing their daily activities in such a way as to produce a certain quality of life, to which basic rights were attached; this included the right to health, something that many social movements active during this period emphasized in their struggles for the right to healthy working conditions (Barca 2012).

The citizens’ claims to maintain and defend a certain quality of the everyday living environment was partially built on the importance attributed to *emplaced modes of valuation* of the environment, considered as a basic requirement for health. The idea was that of rehabilitating individuals and their experience as fundamental arbiters of the relevant knowledge required for public decision-making. For this purpose, politically engaged experts who were closely allied with leftist parties in the region were collaborating directly with workers and citizens in order to co-produce a form of counter-expertise emanating from the embodied and emplaced experience of health. These arguments against the Malpensa expansion plan were linked with an imaginary of a more just and democratic society and a common struggle of citizens and workers united against capitalist exploitation.

Faced with the energy crisis of 1974 and the delay of the central government in making funds available for the airport expansion, SEA decided to revise the “Big Malpensa” project, dropping the idea to build a third runway. It is at this point that the newly elected regional government decided to intervene.

The intervention of the regional government contributed to the emergence of what Laclau defines as an “institutional form of politics,” according to which social demands “are registered and processed by an existing political authority in a singular and punctual fashion” (Griggs and Howarth 2008, 128). In 1979, the regional government created the *Comitato inter-assessorile allargato per i problemi di Malpensa* (Inter-council Enlarged Committee for the Malpensa Problems), an oversight body which saw Regional Council members, the president of the Ticino Park, and mayors from the municipalities that were to be affected by the expansion coordinate with each other in the work of verifying and evaluating the consequences of the alternative plans of expansion.

Although the committee resulted in a series of meetings, there was no collective ambition for it to become a permanent structure for monitoring and evaluation. Rather than basing agreement on a formalized comparison of alternative options (including the no-airport option that was never considered), there was instead a convergence toward a consensual yet still relatively vague idea of “reasonable and controlled expansion” of Malpensa. The result resembled less a “public compromise” between multiple actors’ competing visions of the “good” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991) but was rather more akin to a “private arrangement” where actors’ local needs were sufficiently addressed for their immediate purposes (cf. Stark 2009).

This culminated in a new, second expansion plan put forth by SEA, called “Malpensa 2000.” The Lombardy region approved the plan in 1986 and stipulated a number of constraints. In particular, the volume of air traffic expansion was to be limited to 12 million passengers per year.

Meanwhile, the expected economic benefits from airport activities progressively became a central part of proponents’ arguments justifying the need for expansion. This was largely driven by the economic turmoil that the Malpensa region was facing as a result of a deindustrialization process that had begun in the 1980s. The territory between Malpensa and Milan (the so-called “*Alto Milanese*”) was eventually included in the list of beneficiaries of the Objective 2 European structural funds, to support industrial and structural change (Tosi and Vitale 2011, 7).

Europe was meant to become an important actor in the Malpensa case, especially by way of the directives and treaties through which European environmental policy had been progressively shaped. In particular, in 1985 the European Directive 85/337/EEC introduced the legal obligation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure for all projects deemed to have significant impacts on the environment – including airports. In a more general European context, European Directives<sup>8</sup> can be seen as an important tool for institutionalizing a “green worth” (Lafaye and Thévenot 1993), contributing to the stabilization of public qualifications (of objects and entities) and tests of reality meant to operationalize an ecological understanding of the value of the environment. The efforts to create this publicly legitimate sphere of “green value” is linked to the emergence of the *sustainable society* as a new imaginary that was gaining ground during this second phase of Malpensa expansion plan.

Yet due to the specific conditions under which the EIA directive was implemented in the Italian setting, the Malpensa 2000 plan was not ultimately submitted to a formal procedure, creating a space for contesting the plan on

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<sup>8</sup> See in particular the “Habitats Directive” (Directive 92/43/EEC) that, along with the “Birds Directive” (Directive 79/409/EEC modified by Directive 2009/147/EC), led to the creation of the European Network of protected sites “Natura 2000.”

legal grounds. Together with the inclusion of Malpensa 2000 in the list of “priority projects” of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), this would trigger a new phase of social mobilizations.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 The Increasing Relevance of Expertise in the Opposition to “Malpensa 2000”: Denouncing the Expansion as Illegal (1993-2008)

In 1994, the Italian government of the newly elected Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, supported by a coalition of right-wing parties, requested that the Malpensa 2000 project be included on the list of priority projects of the European TEN-T. The Milanese airport was promoted as a potential international aviation “hub” for Southern Europe,<sup>10</sup> even if its expansion under the Malpensa 2000 plan was limited to the “reasonable” maximum volume of 12 million passengers annually, far below the threshold that would qualify it as an efficient hub. In addition, considering that Italy already had a hub in the airport of Roma-Fiumicino, the government’s demand to include Malpensa in the TEN-T was seen by many as a controversial move.

The arguments supporting the expansion of Malpensa as a hub were propelled by its being framed as a strategic infrastructure for Italy – especially for northern Italy – and the promise it held for facilitating economic competition at the European and global levels. Moreover, the investments related to the airport, and the airport itself, were purported to bring economic growth to the Malpensa region. Potential ecological damages were acknowledged, but were considered as compensable, not simply with the usual economic means but in ecological terms as well (e.g. through the creation of green corridors and reforestation efforts).

There was, however, no formal evaluation concerning the feasibility and the effectiveness of such ecological compensations; nor was the expansion project subjected to any serious comparative scrutiny, either in terms of the socio-environmental impacts or the economic potential of alternative project proposals.

Among the new supporters of the Malpensa expansion during this phase was the very Lombardy Region that was initially supposed to guarantee a reasonable and controlled expansion plan. Moreover, the rivalry with the main airport hub in Rome fit perfectly with the “Northern question” narrative of the right

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<sup>9</sup> The Trans-European Networks (Transport, Energy, Telecommunication) are the strategic infrastructures whose realization is considered as crucial for improving market circulation and socio-economic cohesion in the European Union.

<sup>10</sup> A “hub” is, for an airline, the airport that functions as operational basis and where all flights are routed through to get people transferred to their final destinations according to a hub and spoke model, which is alternative to the point-to-point model.

wing separatist political party *Lega Nord* that was now included in the regional government coalition.

The left-wing government of the Prime Minister Romano Prodi, who succeeded Berlusconi in the elections of May 1996, guaranteed the same level of support for the hub project as it had enjoyed from the previous administration. This reflects the strength gained in the last twenty years by an “ideology of big infrastructures,” that is, the bi-partisan support to a sociotechnical imaginary according to which large-scale infrastructure projects in Italy are the main drive for economic growth (Berta and Manghi 2006; Caruso 2015).

Meanwhile, local opposition was growing stronger, with various actors, institutional and otherwise, becoming involved: the Ticino Park, the municipalities of the Piedmont side of the river (excluded by the negotiations with SEA up to this point), national environmental NGOs, the Green Party, as well as numerous grassroots movements (federated as UNICOMAL in Lombardy and COVEST in Piedmont).

The main arguments against the expansion during this phase of struggle were its illegality (e.g. the lack of EIA procedures) and the risks of health and environmental damages. The production and diffusion of expertise to support these public modes of valuation was considered as the more appropriate action repertoire, together with public demonstrations and protests. It is important to note that activists conceived their production of expertise as a way to contribute to a better decision-making process. Their motivation was thus to increase the quality of the public debate and to fight against what was perceived as being the capture of public institutions by private interests. Their imaginary was not that of a radical shift away from the hegemonic logic of the capitalist system, but rather that of a participatory democracy that would provide for greater transparency and a more (environmentally) sustainable society.

The mobilization expressed an “institutional-bound type of politics” (Griggs and Howarth 2008), in which the reasons to mobilize against the airport were not related to broader social and economic struggles but to localized controversies concerning specific aspects of the project.

Moreover, the aforementioned lack of formalized procedures of evaluation implies that instruments for decision-making were indeed supported by activists as means for turning a very opaque process into a testable procedure, open to critique. Yet they also required the activists to delve into highly technical matters, resulting in a progressive “technical alphabetization”<sup>11</sup> of activists, raising the threshold of access to participation, and leaving public demonstrations as the only other alternative format of involvement in the struggle against expansion.

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<sup>11</sup> This process of technical alphabetization has been observed in other cases of conflicts against big infrastructures: see in particular Maggiolini (2013), Caruso (2010), and Pellizzoni (2011).

In fact, the opposition organized a series of demonstrations and sit-ins that blocked access to the airport as well. These demonstrations were mainly the expression of individual citizens' exasperation. In fact, to give an idea of the impact of the airport expansion and traffic load, in 1998 Malpensa was still registering 5.5 million passengers annually (more than 73 thousand flight movements) while only a year later, in 1999, the passenger volume reached the threshold of 17 million (more than 220 thousand flight movements).

In June 1998, the mobilization succeeded in convincing the Minister of the Environment to submit the Malpensa 2000 plan to a formal EIA. A series of local public assemblies were organized at the behest of environmental NGOs and grassroots movements. Experts in the EIA procedure were invited to participate and to share relevant knowledge with local inhabitants so that they could better understand the procedure and thus to be able to meaningfully participate in the evaluation process. The relationship between experts and the public during this phase of opposition appears to accord more with the paradigm of the "deficit model" (Irwin 1994) than the practice of co-production of knowledge promoted during the first phase in the 1970s. The emphasis on the everyday personal experiences of the environment as a source of knowledge and emplaced value was partially put aside, and they were brought in only if they could be related to a provable health problem or instance of environmental damage.

In November 1999 the Environment Minister closed the EIA procedure with a negative evaluation, requesting a suspension of any further expansion of air traffic at the Malpensa airport. At once defying this evaluation and request, and reaffirming the strategic role of this infrastructure, Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema issued a special decree (DPCM 13 December 1999) allowing further expansion.

Another eight thousand people demonstrated against the "illegality and abuse" of the airport in May 2000, but by November of the same year, when a new demonstration was organized, citizens' participation began to wane significantly, revealing a growing resignation and distrust.

### 3.3 Against the Third Runway: Building a Place-Based Resistance through Practices of Care (2008-2014)

In 2008 SEA announced plans for a new 330 hectares expansion of the airport, including the construction of a third runway, a new terminal, and the expansion of the "Cargo City," the area equipped for storing goods and hosting commercial facilities. One argument supporting the third runway was the need to find a solution to reduce the noise impact – ironically brought about by the expanded passenger traffic allowed for in the previous phase of expansion – through a better distribution of take-off and landing patterns. At the same time, an additional reason for supporting the expansion was the approaching mega-event of EXPO 2015 in Milan, which was sure to increase the number of individuals

flying to the area in the not too distant future. The expansion is thus presented here simply as an efficient answer to objective local needs.

In 2010 the SEA master plan was approved by the Italian regulation agency for air transport (ENAC) and submitted for EIA. A large variety of actors – including the Ticino Park, environmental NGOs, grassroots groups, individual citizens, municipalities, and the Piedmont and Lombardy Regions – sent more than 2,000 negative remarks on the SEA document to the Ministry of the Environment during the course of the EIA procedure.<sup>12</sup> It was a resounding success for the opposition in terms of participation and amassing additional evidence of the process of “technical alphabetization” of local movements that occurred during these years of struggle. Behind this successful mobilization, however, there was the coordination effort deployed by a new grassroots movement: *Viva via Gaggio* (“Hurrah for Gaggio Road,” or VVG).

The group is named for a small country road, called the Gaggio Road, that passes through a green area, known locally as the Gaggio Heath. Heaths are specific ecosystems – especially rare in Mediterranean climates – which are included in European Habitats Directive, a list of valuable ecosystems and species that European Union member states are directed to protect. The Gaggio Heath, however, holds no special status as an officially protected area.

The Gaggio Road has been known locally as a place for walking, jogging, biking, enjoying nature, and relaxing. The VVG group has progressively transformed it not simply into a symbol of struggle but into a vibrant place where the resistance against the expansion takes a new shape: that of practices of *environmental care*. In the 40-year history of attempts to expand the Malpensa airport, this most recent phase is the first time that the environment under threat is clearly identified with a specific place whose value is expressed through an argument revolving around local attachments to that place and the everyday practices of care that valorize it.

The Internet, and especially social networks, are key instruments of the VVG’s communication strategy. Through the sharing of photos and videos, of poems and songs, the personally experienced and emplaced value of the Gaggio Road is communicated to a larger community. Various “proto-instruments” (Callon and Rabeharisoa 2003) enable VVG to share this particular way of attributing value to the environment of the Gaggio Road with others.

The VVG group is not active exclusively on the Web; they organize strolls and promenades in the Gaggio Road, which is presented as if it were a person. The road has feelings, an identity, a past: it is “one of the family,” “a relative that we need to protect.” A reference to indigenous cultures is included to prove the universality of this experience of attachment to a place.

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<sup>12</sup> In 2014 SEA decided to withdraw the plan of expansion, mainly for budgetary reasons.

According to the VVG group, the previous struggles against the airport tended to overshadow the reality of the environment as a *place of attachments*, and to turn it into a passive victim, the lifeless scene where damage occurs. The group considers this perspective as a victory for the planners of the airport expansion project. For this reason, VVG does not organize any demonstrations at the airport site; instead, it organizes its activities just outside the airport fence in order to show evidence of a lived-in and loved environment that perseveres against all odds. The emplaced experience of the environment is put forward as a largely shareable experience, one in fact shared by the “Gaggio people.” People are invited to “come and meet the Gaggio Road” and to “stay close as much as possible to our loved one (*il nostro caro*)” – where the “loved one” is the road and its environment – “who is threatened.” As is the case with a close friend or a “loved one,” the “true” value of the Gaggio Road is considered as deriving from the establishment of an intimate bond or connection with the road as a specific place.

Emplaced modes of valuation are considered as fundamental to judge the “true” value of the Gaggio Heath. Still, this value experience potentially introduces a condition of radical incommensurability, meaning by this the impossibility of judging the value of the Gaggio Heath through the establishment of equivalences with other valuable places (Centemeri 2015). For the VVG activists, however, it is important to work on both fronts of valuation: proving the value of the heath according to justifiable definitions of worth in a public setting and nurturing local, familiar attachments and other modes of emplaced valuation as a specific way to value and valorize.

Elements of both populist and institutionalist politics are thus detectable in VVG’s novel brand of activism, together with the limited capacity (and a partial unwillingness) of the group for connecting the Malpensa local struggle with other similar and more politicized struggles. There is a certain reticence to put forward arguments pointing to the need for a radical change in society, as when airport activities are denounced most typically for their impact on climate change issues (Griggs and Howarth 2013). At the same time, this discursive elision is supplanted by those very practices that encourage individuals to forge a personal connection to the place, connections that are themselves conceived as a material instantiation of radical change. Yet when inviting people to grow a special connection with the Gaggio Road, the VVG activists are promoting an idea of attachment to a place that has little to do with the links established between place and identity such as those proffered by the *Lega Nord* party and in line with the reactionary proposals of many other contemporary right wing movements. The VVG denounces *Lega Nord* – which promotes itself as being “close to the territory” while supporting the Malpensa expansion plan – for espousing a vision of *territory* as a *resource* to be exploited and of *community* as an abstract entity with no grounding in *common practices* of taking care of the environment.

The “Gaggio community” is, to the contrary, conceived of as a community in constant evolution. The VVG group organizes a variety of activities to bring new people to “meet” the Gaggio Road. These activities are conceived primarily as sites of conviviality, propitious to a certain personal and collective experience of the place. People are invited to be not simply users or visitors of the Gaggio Road; rather, they are encouraged to create a personal and affective bond to this place. Prior to the demand of mobilizing against the airport, people are offered the opportunity to develop a specific “place awareness” (Magnaghi 2010), through the *emplaced experience* of the value of the environment. These activities can thus be conceived as a form of what Noortje Marres (2012, X) has called “material participation,” that is a mode of engagement in which “everyday material actions are put forward as useful and valuable operations upon matters of public concern.”

These activities run in parallel with other initiatives, commonly undertaken by grassroots movements when contesting big infrastructures, which are meant to publicly display the value of an environment. The category of “local heritage” is frequently mobilized for this purpose alongside an understanding of value in terms of biodiversity. In both cases, the general categories of “heritage” and “biodiversity” are declined according to local modes of valuation, in which the reference to a legitimate order of worth (domestic, green) is combined with the recognized importance of more contextual sources of value.

However, the purpose of the VVG group is not limited to protecting the Gaggio Road as heritage properly speaking. What the VVG group conceives as the “real” challenge is to bring local people to believe in the possibility of an alternative socio-economic model of development for the territory, based on activities that are not just respectful of the *environment* but that are connected to the specific history and ecology of the *place*. A new emerging social imaginary is detectable here, that of a local community that reintegrates its choices of development in a web of socio-ecological interdependencies.

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#### 4. Critique and Social Change: a Discussion of the Malpensa Case

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In this section of the paper, I rejoin the discussion introduced earlier regarding the interplay of critique, modes of valuation, and social change in the Malpensa case. More precisely, I zoom in on the role that emplaced modes of valuation play in this dynamic.

In the first phase of the conflict, the mobilization against the expansion expresses an understanding of the environment both as a “matter of concern” (Latour 2004b) according to public justifications, but also as an everyday place of living whose quality is assumed as a general precondition for the full enjoyment of social rights, the right to health foremost among them. Even if valua-

tions of the environment based on social justice and democracy are put forward as the central critical arguments to create equivalences between various struggles, modes of emplaced valuation are recognized as the source of specific knowledge and value experiences endowed with critical potential. In particular, the importance attributed to the co-production of knowledge through the collaboration of citizens and engaged experts, points to the relevance attributed to emplaced modes of valuation in the production of critical knowledge. The capitalist organization of economy and society is denounced as threatening not simply environmental values but also the more general possibility of a meaningful experience of living and working in one's own place. The defense of this place is part of a larger struggle to promote a change in the politico-economic system and this specific composition of modes of valuation takes "expressive power" (Chateauraynaud 2015) thanks to a social imaginary of radical change in society. During the 1970s, this imaginary was indeed quite widespread, and was made manifest in the Malpensa case by the leftist political parties and social movements that mobilized in the struggle against expansion.

The Malpensa case shows that when confronted with this critique, public actors answered through "internalizing externality" or "framing overflowing" (Callon 1998): the "environment" is progressively structured as a specific sphere of institutional action, equipped with qualifications, categories, tools, and instruments. If we define environmental critique in terms of a form of contestation of the hegemonic socio-economic order aimed at producing a change in the role that nature plays in the political community, this change appears, in the externality frame, as an incremental or reformist change, through the institution of an environmental sphere of public action as complementary to the economic and social spheres. The idea of overlapping spheres inspires the new imaginary of the "three pillars" model of sustainable development, relying on participatory democracy, epitomized in the Malpensa case by the fragile arrangement known as "reasonable expansion."

The second phase of the mobilization is triggered by the institutional betrayal of the promises made under the reasonable expansion scheme. Compared with other cases of struggles against big infrastructures, this betrayal takes a quite patent form in the Malpensa case. The lack of formalized procedures of evaluation of the Malpensa 2000 master plan – whether environmental impact analysis or cost-benefit analysis – is an easy target for a reformist critique that conceives of conflict as a way to increase the quality of public decision-making in order to turn sustainable development into the reality of actual public choices.

Where elsewhere critique is confronted with the hard task to show the inner biases of such procedures as EIA and CBA in underestimating environmental values (Costa et al. 2016), in the Malpensa case activists actively promote the adoption of these formal procedures of evaluation as a way to create the conditions for an open public debate on the issue of expansion. However, the denunciation of the second phase of proposed expansion on the grounds of its illegality

ultimately comes up unsuccessful when confronted with the cohesion existing within political and entrepreneurial elites in promoting economic growth as an overarching, undisputable common good. In this frame, the considerations of the actual relations between economic growth and social and environmental justice are subtracted from open political debate and public scrutiny. The objective of economic growth implies the subordination of issues of social and environmental justice to a specific form of objectivity that implicitly assumes that all modes of valuation can be, and indeed should be, expressed in monetized terms. This introduces a significant restriction on the conditions under which a mode of valuation is deemed legitimate in public debate, and it has major consequences for the social visibility of the existing plurality of other (non-economic/non-quantitative) modes of valuing the environment.

The magnitude and direct experience of the effects of the economic crisis equips the argument of growth with expressive power, especially at the level of national debate. In fact, this second phase of the struggle is marked by a national and European echo that nevertheless fails to bring the Malpensa movement to connect with other similar national or international struggles against large infrastructure projects. The mobilization in fact privileges a logic of difference (even exceptionality) over investing in creating equivalences with other struggles. The capacity to produce legitimate expertise on health and environmental damages is considered of paramount importance. In this phase of the conflict the mobilization relies primarily on universal modes of valuation of the environment, especially green and civic valuations. This explains the importance afforded to expertise and to experts transmitting – rather than co-producing – relevant knowledge to citizens.

This critique is not successful in challenging the pro-expansion arguments and imaginaries of growth and global competition, which show a significant stability over time and impermeability to wider social demands. This undeniably induces discouragement and even fatigue amongst many of the actors who had mobilized against expansion, and yet the mobilization does meet some success: in producing technical alphabetization amongst activists, and also in reinforcing the local networks of the various actors opposed to the expansion. Even if the mobilization does not achieve its objective of preventing the expansion from happening, this phase of critique acts as a means for nurturing resilience by way of keeping afloat a commonly held sense of injustice and illegality and fostering a basic sense of political community.

In the last phase of the conflict, the action of the VVG grassroots movement is primarily oriented towards restoring a “popular” (and positive) dimension of participation to a common endeavor, as a way of relaunching critique albeit in a rather novel form. Recovering this popular and positive dimension of participation, as complementary to the commonly held feelings of injustice within the local community, requires innovations in modes of valuation and action repertoires. In particular, emplaced modes of valuing the environment are put forth

in the shape of “material participation.” I argue that this focus on *practices* as a form of participation is meant to promote the legitimacy of emplaced modes of valuing the environment in public debate, and also as the source of a radical critique of those definitions of environmental values that facilitate simple commensurations and render risks and damages inherently compensable. Through this form of material critique, a different kind of resilience is thus nurtured, one that accompanies the emergence of an *emplaced resistance*. With this term, I point to a certain material transformation of the environment, especially through practices of environmental care that generate progressively, through its own material characteristics, a material incompatibility with the project of the airport expansion. More generally, through emplaced resistance, activists support an understanding of the local community as part and parcel of a web of socio-ecological interdependencies. This ecological imaginary of the local community dovetails with an understanding of the local condition as part of a larger system of interdependencies, thereby potentially helping actors to construct argumentative equivalence between social demands. In this sense, in what I call emplaced resistance, localism and the populist logic of mobilization (in Laclau’s sense) are not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather work to reinforce one another.<sup>13</sup> The mobilization of emplaced modes of valuation is not seen to be an inherent obstacle to the construction of argumentative equivalence between dispersed social demands, since these modes point to a common form of experience of the value of the environment based on sensorial appreciation. However, they do introduce a form of radicalism, in that they fundamentally defy a certain modern understanding of legitimacy as regards modes of valuation. In this sense their mobilization in critical arguments aims to challenge the traditional contours of legitimacy, concerning what should count as valuable in public decision-making, and thus bringing to the fore the request of some radical social change. In the Malpensa case, this radicalism is somewhat tempered by the more institutionalist logics of action that the mobilized coalition promotes, and to which the VVG group contributes as well. At the same time, the VVG group actively works to increase the reflexivity of the local community concerning the many values of the environment, thus laying the groundwork for the emergence of a common will that seeks to challenge the acceptability of a generalized compensatory logic when dealing with environmental issues.

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## 5. Concluding Remarks

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The Malpensa case has many similarities with other cases of contested big infrastructure projects in Europe, even if the struggle against the Milanese

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<sup>13</sup> See for a similar argumentation Griggs and Howarth (2008).

airport expansion has remained somewhat isolated and, especially in its most recent phase, preeminently local, mostly for the unwillingness of the mobilized actors to openly join forces with other networks of local struggles that are perceived as politically too radicalized.

Since 2010, a European movement against “unnecessary imposed mega projects” has in fact begun to unfold. The struggles against the airport of Notre-Dame-des-Landes in France (Kempf 2014), a mining project in Roșia Montană, Romania (Velicu and Kaika 2015), and the high-speed rail project Turin-Lyon in Italy (Caruso 2010; Della Porta and Piazza 2008) have all become iconic cases of this emerging radical environmental critique.

While the Malpensa case is not one of these paradigmatic examples of environmental struggle, I argue that it nevertheless shares with them the importance progressively attributed to material participation as the expression of an emplaced resistance emanating from a “politics of place perspective” (Harcourt and Escobar 2005; Harcourt 2014). Here, “experiences in place” – and, I would add, especially *emplaced experiences of the value of the environment* – are of fundamental importance in thinking and practicing a truly sustainable ecological organization of social life.

In my discussion of the VVG group’s actions, I have stressed the importance of its collective attribution of the source of modes of valuing that are considered paramount to understanding its “true” value, to the “emplaced experience” of the environment. The importance attributed to the emplaced experience of the environment in the definition of the environmental values that should count in the decision-making processes is common to many of the emblematic struggles against big infrastructures I mentioned above. The physical occupation of the spaces under threat, the importance of conviviality, of sharing everyday activities (from cooking to growing vegetables) are all ways to prove that these spaces are, in fact, lived-in and loved places.

To stress the importance of the emplaced experience of the environment is not just a strategy these groups mobilize in order to reanimate public participation through appealing to “affective loyalties.”<sup>14</sup> Rather, emplaced modes of valuing are shared in communities of practice, and they are conceived as a powerful, inexhaustible source of critique against the restricted and oppressive definitions of what should count as legitimately valuable in the current capitalist order. The generalized commensurability of values sought after through the

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<sup>14</sup> On the concept of “affective loyalties” and, more in general, on the role of emotions in mobilization processes see Jaspers (2011). It is possible to connect modes of valuation to emotions, in the sense that emotions reveal underlying modes of valuation at work in the course of action. According to Nussbaum (as quoted in Jaspers 2011, 289), “emotions always involve thought of an object combined with thought of the object’s salience or importance; in that sense, they always involve appraisal or evaluation.” In particular, public modes of valuation are connected with the emergence of “moral emotions” where emplaced modes of valuation are instead connected with “affective commitments.”

spreading of economic valuation to all realms of life stands in stark contrast to enplaced value experiences, which are a primary resource for arguing for radical incommensurability.

As we have seen in the Malpensa case, beginning in the 1990s, what characterizes the newly emerging modes of governing in Italy is the predominance attributed to the convergence of economic utility together with market competition as the most (and perhaps sole) legitimate arbiters of value in all aspects of social life. The progressive impoverishment of the public understanding of the common good and the exhausting, never-ending debate over data and expertise to which politics is progressively reduced have led to a rediscovery of everyday life practices and the places in which they occur. These are fundamental political *loci* for exploring and “prefiguring” (Yates 2015) alternative socio-ecological organizations.

From a question of value pluralism, environmental critique thus exhibits a progressive shift towards questions of ontological “multiplicity,” to signal the coexistence of modes of valuation of the environment that rest on not quite fully equivalent languages and materialities (Blok 2013). Besides protest, the issue at stake here is to materialize an alternative and to materially produce a “crack” in the socio-ecological order (Bresnihan and Byrne 2014).

However, as I pointed out in the case of the VVG group, it is important to distinguish the community of practice as envisioned by these activists – a vision based on taking care of a specific environment – from the community in which a stated identity, disconnected from such practices, gives title to claims for a special connection to a given place, as in the case of the *Lega Nord* activists. The form of commonality at stake in groups such as the VVG is thus neither that of a “community” identified in terms of territorial, social, or ethnic characteristics, nor that of an abstract “public.” Indeed, my analysis – as a detailed accounting of the modes of valuation that actors mobilize in collective action – makes such a difference visible, while also calling attention to the analytic importance and utility of drawing out this distinction.

To conclude, I would like to stress the contribution that pragmatic approaches can provide to the understanding of critique and of its transformations over time and space. In particular, I argue that pragmatic tools can be usefully mobilized to support socio-historical analyses of the transformations of modernity and critique that pays attention to the spatial-temporal contexts in which human life unfolds.

As pointed out by Wagner (2001, 24), such an approach can support an understanding of capitalism and its dynamics that is “neither naturalized nor conflated with modernity.” Analytical tools such as regimes of engagement, orders of worth, modes of valuation, and evaluative repertoires surface as especially useful tools in this respect. For it is through this attentiveness to the variety of human capacities to judge, evaluate, and coordinate – and to the contextual conditions in which these capacities emerge and proliferate – that

we become better equipped in unravelling the intricate nexus between modernity and capitalism. Rethinking the relationship between these two hegemonic social configurations is in fact one of the main challenges that critique, and especially environmental critique, now faces. The approach I have offered in this article is but a small step towards addressing this much larger task.

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