

The Short Oxford History of Italy

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Italy since 1945

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The Short Oxford History of Italy

General Editor: John A. Davis

Italy in the Nineteenth Century

*edited by John A. Davis*

Italy since 1945

*edited by Patrick McCarthy*

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## General

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## Abbreviations

AC	Azione cattolica	Catholic Action
ACLI	Associazione cattolica dei lavoratori italiani	Association of Italian Catholic Workers
AN	Alleanza nazionale	National Alliance
BOT	Buoni ordinari del Tesoro	Treasury Bonds
BR	Brigate rosse	Red Brigades
Casmez	Cassa per il Mezzogiorno	Bank for Development of the South
CCD	Centro cristiano democratico	Christian Democratic Centre
CEI	Conferenze episcopale italiana	Italian Council of Bishops
CGIL	Confederazione generale italiana del lavoro	Italian General Confederation of Labour
CISL	Confederazione italiana dei sindacati dei lavoratori	Italian Confederation of Labour Unions
CLN	Comitato di liberazione nazionale	Committee of National Liberation
COBAS	<i>comitati di base</i>	autonomous unions
Comit	Banca commerciale italiana	Italian Bank of Commerce
CSM	Consiglio superiore della magistratura	Supreme Council of Magistrates
DC	Democrazia cristiana	Christian Democrat Party
DS	Democratici di sinistra	Democrats of the Left
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community	
EDC	European Defence Community	
EFIM	Ente di finanziamento industrie meccaniche	Fund to finance mechanical engineering
ENI	Ente nazionale idrocarburi	National Petroleum Company
ERP	European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan)	
FI	Forza Italia	Let's go Italy!

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# Italian environmental policies in the post-war period

Simonetta Tunesi

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Nature repairs her ravages—repairs them with her sunshine,  
and with human labour.

(G. Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*)

We are not living in a landscape but in a collective project.

(Sebastian Matta)

To trace the main elements in the history of the Italian environment two hypotheses are proposed. First, that the economic and political choices that shape the natural landscape and the urban environments after Second World War predate this era and testify to a deep divide, first of all intellectual and emotional, between the characteristics of environmental and historical resources and the way they were used. Secondly, that the implementation of environmental policies similar to those adopted by other western governments revealed extremely damaging effects in Italy, the land known as the *Bel paese*, home to more than 60 per cent of the world's architectural and cultural heritage.

Since the eighteenth century, Italy had been the destination of

artists and wealthy young people on study tours. They came to enjoy the natural beauty and climate, to learn the formal rules of aesthetics, and to admire a country in which 'limited and domestic scenarios acquire a universal meaning' (Benevolo 1998). But by the latter half of the nineteenth century, owing to the advancing industrialization and the social overturns produced by the Napoleonic and Austro-Hungarian administrations, the organic relationship between the local, rural, urban, and craft communities and the landscape, the very relationship that made Italy so sought after and well loved, was already shattered.

The fifty years that followed the Second World War were characterized by a general indifference of public administrators, either at local or at national level, to safeguarding natural resources and the threads of human activities intertwined with them. While throughout this period, citizens have shown an increasing awareness of the delicate environmental equilibria and the need to protect public health, from the forming of sound grass-roots organizations to the founding of Green political parties in the 1960s, environmentalists' proposals have not had much influence on the policies for economic and urban development in Italy.

The divide between civil society and the natural environment is deep-rooted. Following the unification of Italy (1861), national efforts concentrated on creating administrative structures and on providing support to the manufacturing industry of the North. They marked the detachment of Italian intellectuals from their natural environment. This trend was accentuated as a result of the idealist approach characteristic of Italian culture in the twentieth century and the eclipse of scientific culture. It had irreversible effects on land organization and native natural resources.

In describing the history of the Italian environment it is important to trace the changes wrought on the delicate natural environment which had been embroidered by human labour over centuries; to look at the relationship between the people and the artistic heritage surrounding them; to record the effects that the destruction of beauty has on the quality of life of Italians. The challenge facing the common weal administrators is even harder than that given by other national realities. The economic, cultural, and political choices necessary to sustain the industrialization and the development of the Italian economy should rise to the level of the cultural and artistic heritage

of a civilization so finely expressed by the harmony of Renaissance cities.

In post-war Italy the needs for reconstruction were pressing. The demand for industrial manual labour moved millions of Italians from the south to the north, from the mountains and the countryside to the cities. Urban development around historic centres was frenetic and unplanned. After the Second World War, urban planning regulations required the drawing up of detailed city plans. But in practice privileges were granted to private land owners and the way was left open to irrational building speculation, which failed to take into account the integration of the different urban functions. No control was put on the occupation of agricultural land on the outskirts of urban areas, not even historic areas. A glaring example is the degradation, since the 1950s, of the ancient Appian Way, where petrol stations, private villas and blocks of flats have been superimposed on ancient monuments. An urban park, planned for the last forty years, may never see the light of day.

Dormitory urban outskirts laid siege to artistic cities, invaded during the course of the time by bank counters and emptied of their old craft functions; monuments were degraded by air pollution; urban green areas were dismembered. By the seventies no Italian city could boast more than three square metres of green areas per inhabitant. European planning experiences, such as the British, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish, integrating the development of building areas with open spaces and green zones, were studied and applied, both in the construction of new peripheral neighbourhoods and in the preservation of historic cent. These efforts, undertaken during the seventies by left-wing public administrators in a few central north Italian towns, were a result of the transfer of several territorial control functions to the regions. They were just isolated examples that were not followed elsewhere.

Private and road freight transportation was encouraged in the name of the national car industries and supported by the construction of highways, viaducts, connecting roads, bridges, underpasses. During the fifties and the sixties more than 100 000 trees were cut down to allow for the enlargement of roads. This spread of concrete was more a result of favouring specific industrial, political, or local groups' interest than of meeting real needs. It has contributed to transforming Italy into the nation with the highest number of tons of

concrete per inhabitant. Because of these activities vulnerable Apennine mountains were pierced; springs were intercepted and polluted; natural areas and parks were not respected. It could even happen that, through design and execution mistakes, two highways branches would never link up. These stumps were left undisturbed and are a perennial warning of the damage caused by the unconditional support of private transportation. The railway system, constructed during the fascist period all over the territory, had great potential, but was never placed at the disposal of freight transportation. In the eighties, the flow of trucks coming from Italy was so intense as to generate conflicts with bordering alpine countries, which started protesting at the pollution. As for private car use, in the seventies Italy was refining three times the amount of oil necessary to internal consumption; refineries robbed hectares of coastal land of their primary vocation, for tourism or the enjoyment of nature, causing air, sea, and inland water pollution.

Industrial centres, created in the nineteenth century, were enlarged without effective controls of polluting emissions. From the end of the sixties, as awareness of the damage caused to workers' and citizens' health grew, a conflict developed between the need to alleviate the damage caused by industrial discharges and the requirements of maintaining high employment. In the post-war period, the national governments created other industrial centres in the South. Because of inadequate services and the absence of links with a wider production sector, these plants became 'cathedrals in the desert', a reminder of the failure of industrial policy in creating steady employment.

From the calm beaches at the mouth of the Po river, frequented by mass tourism from all over Europe, to the most exclusive shorelines and southern islands, coastal land has been covered in concrete. Rivers have been filled with concrete, with the aim of imposing order in the distribution of water resources, thus producing regular flooding in the cities and the countryside during autumnal rains. Mountains zones are invaded by ski-lifts, and the mountain agricultural and social framework is deconstructed by the requirements of winter tourism.

## Control over land, natural resources and cultural heritage

Some events can take on symbolic meaning if the causes that determine them are representative of a whole system. In describing the evolution of the natural environment in post-war Italy it is useful to refer to the events of 5 May 1998 in Quindici and Sarno, two townships in the Campania region clinging to the slopes of the Apennine mountains. After very heavy rainfall, these two townships were covered by a mud-flow almost four metres deep, originating from a landslide and advancing at the impressive speed of about 300 metres per minute. The mass of mud caused the destruction of an entire community and over 200 casualties. The inhabitants who had not left their homes, partly because they were not warned, were overwhelmed by the solid mass.

The explanation of this occurrence reveals the limitations of the environmental policies implemented across the national territory for decades. The soil of the mountain was bare following arson which caused complete deforestation the previous summer. This allowed infiltration of rainwater in a natural fault and caused the swelling and consequent detachment of surface layers. This area, like the rest of the Apennine chain, is particularly vulnerable hydro-geologically, and subject to floods and landslides. The first national hydro-geological ordinance on all land 'whose stability may be jeopardized by intervention on the forest coverage or by transformation involving perturbation of the water regime' dates back to 1923 (royal decree).

Italy's natural conformation is extremely delicate. It is transected by two mountain chains, Alps and Apennines, which present an enormous variety of ecosystems. It has 8,000 kilometres of shores going from sand dunes to volcanic headlands. Rivers have a torrential character, and are exposed to autumn floods and summer droughts. Cultivated plains have been extracted from marshy environments through intense human labour. From the end of the war up until 1990, there were 3,488 casualties due to landslides; 4,600 municipalities are at hydro-geological risk, accounting for 65 per cent of the national land area.

During the sixties, Italian legislators' attention to water regimes

intensified. They eventually produced a 1989 soil protection law that affirmed the need to confront the serious problems of land disruption through a sound knowledge of the territory. It also aimed at ensuring coordination among water policy makers and established that land planning should be based on the watershed, a physical and natural element transcending administrative boundaries. This approach emphasized the protection of natural features, and integrated soil quality control with the rational distribution and use of all water resources. The responsibility for the planning of the hydro-geological rearrangement of local watersheds was handed over to the regions. But the implementation of this law has not been ubiquitous, in Campania the 'watershed plan', which would have defined landslide risk zones, has never been formulated.

In spite of their physical structure, the zones where the townships of Quindici and Sarno are found had for years been selected as the locations for large building contracts: restructuring of ancient canals, straightening of canals and rivers with concrete walls, construction of a mega power station, highway construction. In the absence of planning decisions, an avalanche of concrete was deposited on an area whose natural vocation was agriculture and sheep-rearing.

Another peculiar element of recent Italian life which has had effects on its physiography is the presence of covert and illegal organizations which have for decades exerted almost total control over the southern territory, and which for the last two decades have shown the ability to expand to the north. In Quindici (population 3,000) two powerful Camorra clans were at war for control of the wild urbanization and indiscriminate cementification of the area. In the early eighties, a mayor allied with the 'new Camorra' was elected. During this period, illegal houses and building yards kept popping up on the fringes of the town. This mayor was eventually removed by the intervention of the President of the Republic, Sandro Pertini. But in 1990 the town council was again dissolved owing to serious Camorra infiltration. Sarno (population 15,000) was home for years to illegal traffic of waste, to illegal excavation of quarries, and to use as dumps. Waste from other regions, most likely the more industrialized northern ones, was buried in these areas. The Naples prosecutor's office declared that what happened in those areas was an 'example of the extreme interest of organized crime to achieve control of large building contracts at the expense of land upkeep'.

The Sarno town council was also dissolved because of Camorra infiltration. While the town had never drawn up a design for an urban development plan, it listed 3,000 building legalization requests. In this atmosphere, a new business that could enrich the Camorra materialized: mud removal, landfill deposits, and building reconstruction. In Quindici, on 23 May 1998, only eighteen days after the disaster, a few gunshots were aimed at the trucks of a company engaged in mud transport.

For a few days it was difficult to estimate the number of casualties and missing people, because the landslide took place in an area subject to illegal urban development. Here local administrations had allowed for building of houses, often by future residents, that would never have taken place had there been any land planning. Since officially those houses did not exist, and neither the birth nor the electoral registry was up to date, it was not immediately possible to find out how many citizens had inhabited the area.

Illegal building was also the result of urban development and of the reconstruction efforts undertaken to repair war bomb damage. The building of houses and facilities was entrusted to private enterprises that freely established what and how much to build. Suburbs developed outside of any planning framework both in the authorized and in the unauthorized areas. These constructions often occupy zones of natural, historic, or architectural value, and permanently disrupt a landscape shaped by centuries of cultural and social superimposition.

Illegal building was not a phenomenon of the past. In the period 1994–7 alone, 207,000 illegal houses were erected, corresponding to 29 million square metres of illegal cement, 76.3 per cent of which was concentrated in the Southern regions. This is on top of those built during another illegal building boom in 1983 to 1984, when 230,000 illegal houses were built. These peaks were the result of announcing in advance administrative amnesties on illegal building (in 1993 and 1985 respectively). This resulted in many fines being paid into the treasury but at the same time it cancelled out illegal situations accumulated over the previous fifty years. These announcements of amnesties generated even more illegal building as private builders, relying on the state's lack of control on dating constructions, begun furiously building illegally in time to be granted a waiver. To these numbers should be added those relating to illegal construction dating

from the post-war period located on state property or in areas subject to landscape or historical limitations, that have never been pardoned and are still waiting to be demolished.

Another aspect of Italian social and economic development that strongly affected environmental conditions has been the abandonment of mountain areas. This reached its height in the beginning of the twentieth century and during the 1950s and 1960s, and was matched by the depopulation of the countryside when marginal agriculture practices were not enough to sustain farming families. This process led to the disintegration of the hydraulic structures built by human patience and labour over the centuries, that guaranteed a well diffused water control and channelled rain in river beds, mitigating its impact. In turn this facilitated arson and lack of reforestation.

The occupation of land by buildings, roads, bridges, and tunnels in Italy is indicative of the more general world ruling classes' unawareness of the relationships existing between the human occupation of land and the degradation of natural resources, between the restriction of enjoyment of the countryside and the lowering in quality of life suffered by populations detached from natural beauty. Given the concentration of valuable historic buildings and artworks in urban centres and the countryside, damage to the natural environment extends to the historical heritage.

Floods in Italy have been innumerable and constant, but in November 1966 Florence was submerged and Agrigento suffered a landslide. In Florence the loss of artworks was irreplaceable and the significance of this event was demonstrated by the huge assistance provided by young volunteers coming from all over the world. In Agrigento, the Italian public discovered that the landslide in the Valley of Temples, where splendid evidence of Greek civilization remains, was caused by the weight of illegal building which occupied vulnerable areas provoking their collapse. It emerged that 8,500 rooms had been built in defiance of all existing norms. In 1997 in Agrigento, the demolition of several buildings was proposed by environmental organizations and government offices, but at the end of a long legal battle they were not touched.

One positive trend in policy is the national government's increasing attention (and thus the mass media's) to safeguarding the artistic and natural heritage of the country and implementing

the demolition of illegal constructions. In 1998 the Council of State agreed to the demolition of the 'Monster of Vietri', a hotel built by pulverizing an ilex wood and the shoreline on the Amalfi coast. This area represents 'eighty prodigious kilometres that put these shores among the most splendid and famous in the world, where impressive nature and human toil have created through the centuries an admirable landscape equilibrium, from the historical centres to citrus grove terraces' (Cederna 1995). The demolition finally took place at the end of 1999. Meanwhile, to the satisfaction of locals, several illegal second homes of people with ties to the local Camorra have been demolished in Eboli, where Christ had stopped.

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## Ecomafia

The cement sector is one in which big illegal interests are aligned with legal activities. According to a report by Legambiente (1998), the number of Mafia clans that have a direct interest in the 'concrete cycle' and in waste management is growing and the connection between these activities and usury, extortion, and recycling of illegal capital is becoming apparent. In 1994 the neologism Ecomafia was coined. This term refers to a convergence of three criminal sectors: organized, economic, and environmental.

It is estimated that in 1998 the income flow from illegal building, illegal dumping of hazardous waste, and animals racket was 11,850 billion lire (6.12 million Euro). These illegal activities translated into a tax evasion equal to 2,342 billion lire (1.2 million Euro). Investments subject to Ecomafia involvement, that is, huge public projects which Mafia companies may infiltrate, amounted to 18,868 billion lire. The link between the environmental and social aspects of these phenomena is evident: as a huge amount of public wealth was taken from the open market and the treasury, permanent and widespread destruction of natural collective riches was perpetrated.

Legislators and environmental grass-roots organizations which have constantly denounced and fought against illegal waste traffic have been calling attention to this problem. A 1997 law has reorganized waste management and, in accordance with European Union

directives, calls for the reduction of waste production, recycling, and energy recovery. Further support is found in the citizens of the different cities where recycling experiments are undertaken.

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## The great industrial centres

Just as the landslide in Sarno can be considered the symbol of the degeneration of national and local land control policies, so the history of a few industrial installations is sufficient to describe the economic development of post-war Italy and its impact on natural environment and on the quality of life of workers and citizens.

Post-war industrial development policies endorsed those adopted since the beginning of the industrialization process. Existing northern industrial centres were strengthened and enlarged. The development by big industrial centres, the localization of which ran counter to any planning consistency and economical use of the territory, was encouraged in the South. Aggravating the environmental impacts of these processes is the fact that all over Italy, as economic activities spread, artisan installations and small and medium-size industries proliferate in highly visible positions all along main communication routes. This growth has failed to take into consideration the integration of urban functions with the safeguarding of environmental quality and has produced ribbon-like barriers which obscure the surrounding landscape for kilometres at a time.

For those who associate Venice with the ability of man to produce objects which at the same time give the pleasure of real beauty and evoke a dream dimension, the installations of Porto Marghera are an example of how industrial policies in Italy produce more intense and far-ranging effects than in other countries. By their behaviour, policy makers exhibited their schizophrenia with respect to the physical and cultural environment on which they acted, modifying it irreversibly.

In March 1997 a suit for offences ranging from fraudulent omission of precautions against accidents to first degree murder, including the hypothesis of massacre, was brought against two companies operating in the chemical sector. These investigations were based on statistical data regarding the high death and disease rate for workers assigned to the production and treatment of vinyl chloride. As prosecutors

confirmed a series of environmental legislation violations, the inquiry widened.

The shift of productive activities by Venetian entrepreneurs from the mainland to the lagoon shore had occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. By 1910 the shore housed almost seventy firms with about 5,000 workers; the location of Porto Marghera dates to 1917. At present, the industrial centre occupies 6 kilometres of the shore, with an average width of four kilometres, thus covering almost 2,000 hectares, compared to the 200 of historic Venice. The list of industrial activities concentrated in Porto Marghera is impressive: chemical, aluminium production, shipyard, oil refinery, metalworks, electrical energy production, and oil products sale. There are 2,000 chimney stacks in the industrial zone, which emitted 240,000 tons of various chemical substances per year, some of which are well-known carcinogens. Since 1917, 80 million tons of waste have been dumped in the Adriatic Sea; liquid discharges in the surface waters at present amount to 20 000 tons per year. In the sixties, the construction of the 'oils channel' in the middle of the lagoon helped to increase the competitiveness of local industries. At that time the petrochemical installations employed about 60,000 workers and the average income of Venetians was among the highest of the region. Meanwhile, the density of high-risk industries in this area was among the highest of Italy, not counting the number of plants which handled industrial and toxic waste.

The Venice Urban Development Plan of 1962, which was in force until 1990, contained this paragraph: 'Those plants diffusing in the atmosphere smoke, dust, or exhalation hazardous to human health, discharging poisonous substances in the water, producing vibration and noise will be located primarily in the industrial zone.' Toxic vapours and dust emitted in the atmosphere formed a yellowish pall which robbed locals of their health; the management of industrial plants was carried out without due attention to working conditions. By the end of the sixties, it could be proved that children dwelling in the zones surrounding the plants had a high incidence of respiratory diseases; from 1971 to 1973, fifty-one accidents took place and more than 1,200 workers were poisoned, scalded, or subjected to toxic exhalations. Workers assigned to a peculiar step of vinyl chloride production died of liver cancer with a frequency 600 times higher than the national average. This information was provided as a result

of a private investigation conducted for years by a single worker. Meanwhile, official studies, performed without isolating the statistically most exposed workers, were showing only a slight increase in cancer occurrence.

The depth of the 'oil channel' entails that it must be regularly dredged. In the single year of 1996, 20 billion lire (10.3 million Euro) were earmarked to dredge the channel. Beginning in the sixties, an island was created from the sediment and it was illegally enlarged during the seventies. For decades the development of this area was supported, without concern for environmental degradation, or damage to monuments, because of the employment it guaranteed. But due to the constant streamlining of chemical production in Italy, in 1997 the workers in Porto Marghera were reduced to about 12,000.

In the spring of 1998 the magistrates ordered the closure of plants because the law on industrial discharges had not been observed. Tons of soil and sediments had been polluted. In all, including wastes, there were 5 million tons of material to clean up. These events highlight the tension between the well-developed Italian legislation on water and air pollution, and the actual capacity to ensure institutional controls on its implementation. Industrial waste-water containing hazardous substances in concentrations higher than that allowed by the 1976 law have been discharged in the lagoon waters for years, but employment concerns had led citizens and trade unions to neglect the failure of industrialists to apply environmental laws.

In the seventies, adopting the same development scheme, the construction of industrial centres began in the South of Italy. The pattern adopted in the North was reproduced as a result of national policy makers' inability to comply with the propensity of Italian territory to agriculture, and to natural and cultural tourism. Moreover the capital flow supporting these enterprises remained external to these areas. A self-supporting development, respecting environmental resources, could have been based on the development of small and medium-size industries which would have benefited from local knowledge, natural resources, and historical heritage, thus allowing for the diffuse growth of sustained income and permanent employment for local residents.

As an answer to the social uproar (which would eventually become urban warfare) in the face of high unemployment rates, it was decided to build an iron metallurgy centre on Gioia Tauro. The plant was to be located in what had been a splendid olive and citrus area in

Calabria that produced high incomes for the landowners and seasonal work for olive pickers. To help industry a harbour was built by destroying a pine wood that protected citrus from sea-salt spray. In the end, the industrial plant was never built, but the land had been expropriated and trees uprooted. The shore, once green and scented, had become a wasteland. Ten years later it was proposed to transform the undeveloped centre into a coal power plant. Even in this case the industrial zone never saw the dawn, and not a single industrial job was created, while many jobs in the agricultural sector and food production were lost. Unexpectedly, the harbour started functioning in 1995 thanks to a private initiative. A thousand jobs were created and it has since become the most important port in the Mediterranean Sea for the transportation of containers, thus redressing a strategic error which had lasted for two decades.

For the Sicilian industrial centre of Priolo, Syracuse, the list of disasters will suffice. From 1949, an area which at the beginning of the twentieth century had seen the building of a harbour, added to that three refineries, plants for the production of cement, chemical plants, and a power station which were lined up along a coastal line of almost 20 kilometres. This area was archaeologically invaluable because of a long and complex human history. The following remains were engulfed among installations: coastal caves serving as homes to Palaeolithic populations; a Neolithic village; a vast dwelling and a necropolis from the Bronze Age (fifteenth to twelfth centuries BC); the Greek colony of Megara Hyblea founded in the eighth century BC; a palaeochristian basilica; and Roman and Norman dwellings. There were repeated accidents that caused toxic emissions in the atmosphere and polluted rainfall; oil product fires and sea water pollution. Industrial accidents caused casualties and intoxication. One thousand people from a fishing village were forced to move to give room to a refinery plant which was never built. Among the archaeological remains even an industrial wastes landfill found its place. Water consumption was so heavy as to cause the infiltration of sea water into the groundwater.

## An Italian case

A peculiar example of the intertwining of Italian cultural and social characteristics and the perception of environmental damage is offered by the Seveso accident. On 10 July 1976 a ICMESA chemical reactor exploded producing dioxin and the emission into the atmosphere of a toxic chemical mix. The multinational owner kept silent about the presence of dioxin in the vapour, and even today it is not possible to know either the exact amount emitted from the stack or the fate of the forty-one barrels filled with contaminated materials. Spurred by animal deaths, on 20 July the mayor issued a first ordinance forbidding the use of garden produce. Beginning on the 15th, children were being admitted to the hospital for skin lesions. On the basis of contamination estimates, on the 25th the forced evacuation from houses began. News on chronic effects and foetal damage begun to spread. At the end of August, the first episodes of chloracne were recorded. The accident was so serious that it generated the European law 'Major accident hazard of certain industrial activities', the so-called Seveso directive (82/501/EEC).

In the weeks following the accident, a debate raged in the local community and at the national level on the question of whether to allow women exposed to the toxic cloud to undergo therapeutic abortion. The disagreement of clerical voices with the declaration of the local, Catholic, councillor, who gave freedom of choice and free public medical examinations to pregnant women, was strong and aimed at throwing a social stigma on the abortion choice. In Seveso, private and painful decisions were made more confusing by the uncertainty concerning the toxic effects of chemicals, by the lack of knowledge on the contaminant dispersion phenomena, and by the suffering caused to inhabitants by the relocation prudently imposed by local administrators, on the basis of scanty scientific information, to reduce the accident damage.

The strength of the values expressed by the local Catholic community was woven into the difficulties pertaining to the communication of environmental and health risk. This was a community of craftsmen who were industrious and strongly bound to their land and work. Had there been an examination confirming women's

exposure to dioxin, they would have been inclined to accept the results, in order to take a step towards finding a solution. On top of all this was added the intervention of Catholic local authorities and fundamentalist national organizations, with the intention of minimizing and denying danger. Minimization of the problem found fertile ground, owing to the great inconvenience of a relocation/evacuation that had interrupted work and fragmented the community. To local people the denial of the hazard meant obtaining permission to return to their homes and the life they knew. On the other hand, a push in favour of clean-up and recognition of health damage was charged with a symbolic value that would have implied criticism of the economic and social model that had shaped that community. The locals preferred not to push for industrial liability in the accident and to silence those who expressed their awareness of the damage and who were in favour of the disrupting interventions.

The most polluted area was cleaned up and currently there is an innocent oak wood, one form of economic compensation that citizens accepted for the environmental and health damage caused. The local community preferred to remove the memory of the accident 'because we must progress and not let ourselves get depressed by misfortunes' (Conti 1979).

# The post

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