



Montagne in Movimento (“Mountains on the Move”), is an anthropological action-research project driven by an Italian informal research group of young scholars and professionals in the fields of anthropology, social research, education, art and design who recognise the capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004) as a fundamental element in nurturing democratic processes, especially within small communities in rural or inner areas or marginalised populations. Their names are Mattia Branca, Amalia Campagna, Michele Cancellara, Anna Giulia Della Puppa, Giulia Ferrante, Manuela Izzo, Giulia Mascadri, Consuelo Nocentini, Gabriele Orlandi, Virginia Patrussi, Valentina Porcellana, Raffaele Spadano, Matteo Volta, and Roberta Clara Zanini. The Montagne in Movimento group is concerned in activating and accompanying participatory processes, as well as in supporting organisations and local actors in interpreting and evaluating their own activities.

At the present time, a framework agreement has been signed between Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences of University of Valle d’Aosta - Vallée d’Aoste (Italy), the Dept. of Philosophy and Education, and, the Dept of Public Health of University of Turin, both from the University of Turin (Italy), the Italian municipalities of Gagliano Aterno (AQ), Valdilana (BI), Val di Chy (TO), Rueglio (TO), Brozzo (TO), and the Regional Coordination of Workers' Mutual Aid Societies (*società operaie di mutuo soccorso*) of Piedmont in order to strengthen their collaboration in carrying out scientific research, training, applied research and/or experimental development activities within the “Montagne in Movimento” action-research method.

The “Montagne in Movimento” method was developed in November 2019 in the Italian region of Abruzzo when several students in anthropology engaged in their MA thesis research come together in developing a more public and community-oriented research design. Even if their encounter could appear as random, it constitutes the product of an historical moment in which social scientists are the first to be asked to rethink society and stimulate capacity of social imagination. Mountain areas in Italy regroup the majority of inner areas, far from common facilities (schools, hospitals, rail stations etc.). In many cases, this worrying situation results in processes of isolation and depopulation. The “Montagne in Movimento” method involves classic fieldwork (e.g living in a mountain village for a relatively long time) and more intense and collective moments. A researcher works with the local networks and the material and immaterial heritage, and then organises events that open up and recount the transformations underway within the target community, often with the help of a more extended research group, hosted for a few days in the field. One of the main objectives is to accompany the territories towards a cultural opening capable of welcoming new inhabitants and devising innovative, sustainable and participatory forms of local development.

Italian marginalized communities (both among rural and urban areas) often experience the incapacity of asserting a positive self-identity as well as imagining a positive future. If in the Renaissance Italian *comuni* constituted an important framework for citizen involvement, the current polity and institutional structure tends to obliterate direct democracy in the making of everyday policies. Even at the municipality level, people voice on public issues and discussion is not taken into account outside the election moments. People can not discuss public issues and spaces where their opinions can be heard by public administrators are not sufficient. For that, many experience a lack of control on their collective futures and lives and tend to isolate, thus depriving the community “as such” of its advantages in terms of belonging, mutual aid, and cooperation. However, collective ethnography allows people to engage in cooperative and reflexive processes, and collect the variety of experiences and points of view. By stressing the importance of local heritages and working on the culture features of future, the “Montagne in Movimento” action-research method represents an important tool for engaging people in participatory processes and self-perception as a group at a small scale in rural and urban areas.

The “Montagne in Movimento” method combines several tools of social research in order to grasp citizen point of view on locally sensitive issues and stimulate their involvement in these latter. Anthropology allows a community to develop a self-consciousness of their history and

features. At the beginning, one researcher does field work in order to develop a deep understanding of local dynamics and social configurations. Secondly, a group (12-15 persons) of people with a traineeship in anthropology and qualitative research arrives on the field for a short-term ethnography. The number and variety of ethnographers allow the group as a whole to take into account class, age, race differences and grasp the plurality of strategies and opinions concerning the issues identified by the first fieldworker. Results and insights are repeatedly discussed within the research group as well as with the target population in order to make them more and more consistent. Once the research process is at the end, the collective image of the local community is performed by events and/or artistic performances, thus involving a more interdisciplinary group (photographers, artists, musicians, designers). All along the research period, a particular attention is given to creative processes and innovators. The demographic recomposition underway in Italy's rural communities raises the question of cultural openness and closure, as well as the clashes and encounters that these generate. The method aims to encourage inclusiveness and the expression of all points of view, as well as participation in the elaboration of shared perspectives.

Collective ethnography, collaborative research, and action-research are more and more common within anthropologists' research practices. For this reason, the more innovative feature of “Montagne in Movimento” action-research method is the mixing of individual and collective fieldwork, with their own temporalities, not only in order to achieve a more complete anthropological knowledge, but also in stimulating local empowerment and agency within marginalized communities.

The “Montagne in Movimento” method has its main transformative efficacy in producing empowerment and reflexivity in local marginalised communities, in order to stimulate citizen involvement and develop a common vision toward a sustainable future. More democratic and inclusive societies are an important pillar of transition towards a more ecological and equal civilization. In this sense, focus-groups and reflexive moments realised during the implementation of the research design result in a more equilibrated distribution of capabilities and capacity of voice. The presence of the research group on the field strengthens the extralocal networks, making citizens and institutions capable of attracting resources, ideas and people from the outside. At the same time, the performance of collective events bring people together and improve the social cohesion within the community. This latter enjoys also the fact that after the ethnography, the products of the research (e.g. tangible and intangible heritage) are made

available to the community herself, that can thus use for their own goals. In addition to this, the method has an important educational impact, in particular for students and young scholars in ethnography and qualitative research, since learning-by-doing is at the core of the method. During the collective fieldwork researchers constitute a community of practices and they can exchange on their findings, insights, hypothesis, and experiences as cooperative fieldworkers. In this way, after the research, they can replicate the same approach in territories which need citizen involvement in sustainable and local development processes.

Visual materials.

Le Parole della Majella: <https://youtu.be/BvaPXuhHT7s> , a short doc depicting the first collective ethnography and participatory research of the Montagne in Movimento group, within the Majella national park.



(a focus-group in Valdilana municipality)



(collaborative artistic performance in Cammarata municipality)



(artistic performance in Valdilana municipality)