

## The example of Montafia d'Asti, turning point for raising collective awareness

### L'exemple de Montafia d'Asti, point tournant dans la prise de conscience collective

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The chainsaws began to take the trees out of a memorial avenue connecting the suburb of Zolfo di Montafia to the center of the village in the afternoon of November 20, 2013, but the inhabitants of the village and neighboring areas put an end to it, for the first time in the history of Asti province.

We need to examine some aspects of current Italian law in order to understand the reason for cutting down trees and reason for inhabitants to stand against it.

Memorial avenues in Italy often stand on public roads, so issues related to road laws amount to the standard problems connected with maintaining trees in good health and shape. Knowledge of road laws helps avoid tree felling, as in the Montafia d'Asti example.

There is no mention about tree-lined roads in the road laws, even when searching as far back as 1865 - just after Italian reunification - whilst there are many rules about private trees along roads. This is still valid in the current Italian road law revision (1992): the distance between any road and private trees outside villages and towns must be greater than maximum possible tree height. In 2008, a woman died crashing into a tree in central Italy, and in 2010 the Italian Supreme Court (Cassazione) condemned the road worker to prison because he did not eliminate the danger from this very old public tree along the road. The interpretation of the Ministry of Transport was "what is valid for private trees should be valid for public trees too". Consequently, as of 2010, it is not possible to plant a tree along any road outside villages and towns in Italy. Old trees could stay, but public administrators fear the possibility of similar judgements, so often they try to cut down every tree. In 2012 Asti province started a dissimulated project for felling all the remaining trees along all roads; this explains why, on November 20, 2013, they started cutting down the trees along "strada provinciale 2" in Montafia d'Asti.

Montafia is a small village in the Alto Monferrato, a microcosm of nature, history and stories. The scattered houses look out over the green of rugged hills, crowned by the enchantment of the mountains. Even today, a long avenue of lime trees that runs along the provincial road 2 connects the center of the village to a sulphurous spring at its feet. The absence of the many young people who died in the Great War was still a gaping scar across the country and its green hills when, in 1925, Mayor Giovanni Molino decided to transform the sunny road from the historical Fonte Solforosa spring to the village into a long memorial avenue. The Provincial Deputation of Alessandria authorized the planting of the trees in April 1926, and some years later the youngest war widow, Giuseppina Viarengo, former wife of Giuseppe Rosso, was the godmother at the solemn opening ... with an unforgettable ride in a buggy.

Time washes over people and memories. The linden memorial avenue stood there, silent witness to a tremendous new kind of war. Solemn old linden trees with a long history and an inebriating scent gave a deep breath of green to everyone climbing to or descending from the village. The fatigue of reconstruction, the economic boom, and the charm of the big city depopulated our hills, commuting and the myth of what is "new" disfigured the face and life of the country. Many things were lost, others were neglected; as in everything we were too sure of ourselves. The linden trees remained, majestic and immovable .... until November 20, 2013. The slaughterers sent by Asti Province administration started taking them out, even though they were adorned with the Italian tricolor ribbon, for every year the eighteen-year-olds of the village still start their celebration from the memorial avenue!



We can imagine that everyone - except for the people of Montafia - had forgotten this was (and still is) a memorial avenue. Therefore, many people immediately started to complain about the felling operation, and on the morning of November 21 they loudly asked and succeeded in convincing Montafia's Mayor Marina Conti to sign an official stop order against Asti Province.

Only when part of the memorial avenue was on the ground did everyone appreciate the silent magic of this presence, too beautiful to destroy, too rich in the history of fragrances of memories to forget as one would forget an old kerbstone on the roadside.

The shame of the trees' loss became an awareness of the profanation of identity and a search for deeper roots. The village rediscovered itself and its pride in its existence. Environment, culture and social life intertwine with new ferments and rich promises. A new chapter of the story of the tree has begun.

The "Our linden trees - Montafia" Association is born, with the aim of replacing the felled trees and protecting the landscape. Many associations and concerned people support it, newspapers follow it. The road affected is outside the village, so we cannot replant trees but, according to one suggestion, it is sufficient to change the boundary of the village a few tens of meters. A long and exhausting negotiation with the Public Administration has begun. The Association is organized into skills-based working groups. After some weeks at the Asti State Archives, we found the approval for a memorial avenue from the Provincial Deputation of Alessandria in 1926.

Our research continued. We found the surveyor's survey, the receipts of the subscription for the war memorial, the land purchase contract... Gradually we rebuilt the whole story of the Memorial Avenue and its oblivion. Moreover, we built new friendships, reinforced old affections, we learnt to dream of a more vibrant and more beautiful country. Months and months of work, contacts and expectations... then finally, at the end of October 2014, the resolution concerning the Municipal Road Law made it possible to replace the felled linden trees. It was party time! The Association "Our linden trees" immediately activated initiatives aimed at raising the necessary funds for the purchase of the trees and began preparations in collaboration with the Municipal Technical Office. Associations, organizations, many mayors, the bishop, citizens of the area, and many more besides, together, began replanting in November 29, 2014. The asymmetry of the avenue will be the sign of a new memory, how beauty has managed to do what no one else had managed to do, i.e. unite many people with a sense of community, users, jointly responsible for a shared gift. The Declaration of Interest from Regione Piemonte was officialized in May 2016, so Italian law now protects the memorial avenue.

The story does not stop here. The association continued its work and in 2018 wrote a book gathering the stories of all the soldiers from Montafia and neighbouring villages who died in WW1. Other projects are ready to start in 2019 and beyond.



### FESTA PER IL RICONOSCIMENTO DI NOTEVOLE INTERESSE PUBBLICO DEL VIALE DEI TIGLI DI MONTAFIA

Programma della giornata:

9.45 Accoglienza e caffè del mattino  
10.00 Convegno di studio: riflessioni su storia e tutela delle alberate, con la partecipazione degli relatori di storici, giuristi, biologi e dei ragazzi della Scuola Media di Montafia  
12.15 Visita guidata alle chiese romaniche di Montafia  
13.30 La Capannina: aperitivo e buffet a cura della Pro Loco  
15.00 Esibizione del coro A.N.A. di Moncalieri con i bimbi delle scuole materne ed elementari e con la tromba di F. Adriano  
16.00 Arrivo del carrettino dei gelati artigianali e...gelato per tutti i presenti!  
16.30 Per bimbi e ragazzi: "laboratorio verde" di Luca e animazioni con la chitarra di Luciano

Tutti invitati sabato  
**28 maggio**  
dalle ore **9.45**  
presso la Capannina  
a **Montafia**  
Frazione Zolfo



La partecipazione alla giornata è aperta a tutti ed è totalmente gratuita. In caso di pioggia tutte le attività si svolgeranno al coperto, all'interno del calendario. Per maggiori informazioni: 347-2020812

### FESTA PER IL RICONOSCIMENTO DI NOTEVOLE INTERESSE PUBBLICO DEL VIALE DEI TIGLI DI MONTAFIA

Convegno: **Storia e tutela delle alberate stradali**  
Montafia, 28 maggio 2016 ore 10

Moderatore: Avv. Emilio Lombardi

Introduzione: Prof. Maria Vittoria Gatti  
Presidente dell'Associazione "I nostri tigli"

La dichiarazione di notevole interesse pubblico a tutela del paesaggio  
Prof. Marco Devecchi - Università di Torino

I parchi e i viali della rimembranza  
Dott. Guido Gentile - Sopr. Archivi Piemonte e Valle d'Aosta

Perché si tagliano gli alberi lungo le strade?  
I ragazzi e le ragazze della Scuola Media di Montafia con Legambiente

La tutela giuridica delle alberature stradali  
Prof. Massimo Occhiena - Università di Sassari

Quando il danno è già avvenuto: il ruolo della Corte dei Conti  
Dott. Claudio Chiarenza - Magistrato della Corte dei Conti

Conclusione: Un mondo migliore è possibile  
Dott. Franco Correggia - Biologo e naturalista

Comitato d'onore  
Arch. Francesca Cavagnino, Dott. Giorgio Ferrero, Dott.ssa Rosanna Maggio Serra,  
Dott. Aldo Maria Marchisio, Dott. Giorgio Musso, Arch. Paolo Pejrone, Dott. Pasquale  
Perruchetti, Ing. Angelo Porta, Dott.ssa Angela Quaglia,  
Prof.ssa Luciana Quagliotti Auxilia, Prof. Dario Rei



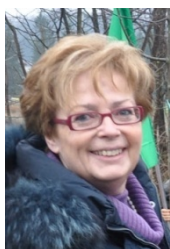


## Angelo PORTA

Consultant to Legambiente, Italy  
Conseiller auprès de Legambiente, Italie

Angelo Porta is a counsellor of Legambiente, the leading Italian association for environmental protection with more than 100,000 members. His main area of environmental interest is trees and tree-lined roads in Italy. Angelo's action started as a result of unmotivated tree felling along roads in Asti province where he lives, fighting local public administrations by writing in newspapers, organizing events, developing presentations, gathering much info about Italian laws and actions performed in a 200+ page e-book freely available at <http://bit.ly/2Dd1weZ>. Angelo is also the author of "Roatto nella Grande Guerra", a book about the soldiers from a small village in the Lower Monferrato who lost their lives in the First World War. He has a degree in electronic engineering and works as a computer engineer for large ITC projects in Italy and around the world.

Angelo Porta est conseiller auprès de Legambiente, la plus grande association italienne de protection de l'environnement, avec plus de 100 000 membres. Il s'y occupe principalement des arbres et des routes bordées d'arbres en Italie. Son action a démarré avec des abattages d'arbres injustifiés le long des routes de la province d'Asti où il vit. Il s'est opposé aux administrations publiques locales en écrivant dans la presse, en organisant des événements, en faisant des conférences, en rassemblant des informations sur la législation italienne et les actions réalisées, rassemblées dans un e-book de plus de 200 pages disponible en ligne <http://bit.ly/2Dd1weZ>. Angelo est aussi l'auteur de "Roatto nella Grande Guerra", un livre sur les soldats d'un petit village du Bas Monferrato morts pendant la Première Guerre mondiale. Il est ingénieur en électronique et travaille comme informaticien sur de très gros projets TIC en Italie et dans le monde.



### Maria Vittoria GATTI

Chair of “I nostril tigli. Montafia”, Italy

Présidente de l’association « I nostri tigli. Montafia », Italie

Maria Vittoria Gatti is a retired secondary school teacher. She is from Montafia d’Asti, a small Lower Montferrat village at the edge of an area declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016. Having always shown the keenest interest in her territorial birthright, she became Chair of the association “I nostril tigli” in November 2013, after the attempt to fell all the trees along the village’s Viale della Rimembranza (Memorial Road). Through her tenacity and ability to bring people together, and with the support of a range of associations and other organizations, she succeeded in stopping the operation once and for all and in having substitutes planted, for which she was awarded the Legambiente prize for Best Protection of a Tree Avenue in 2017. Maria Vittoria is also editing the book “Presente!” that recounts the stories of soldiers from Montafia who fell in the First World War, and of their families

Maria Vittoria Gatti est professeur retraitée de l’enseignement secondaire supérieur. Originaire de Montafia d’Asti, un petit village du Bas Monferrato aux confins d’un territoire inscrit au Patrimoine mondial de l’Humanité en 2016. Intéressée depuis toujours par son territoire, elle est devenue présidente de l’association “I nostri tigli” en novembre 2013, après la tentative d’abattage de l’ensemble des arbres de l’ancienne Viale della Rimembranza (route du souvenir) du village. Grâce à sa ténacité et à sa capacité à rassembler, aidée de divers organismes et associations, elle est parvenue à bloquer définitivement l’abattage et à faire replanter les arbres abattus. Primée par Legambiente en 2017 pour la meilleure action de protection d’une allée, Maria Vittoria coordonne également l’ouvrage “Presente!”, écrit pour raconter les histoires des soldats de Montafia tombés lors de la Première Guerre mondiale ainsi que de leurs familles.

