

Chestnut trees and newcomers

L'Arbu, the craft of the mountain: training opportunities for migrants for building up a mountain farm

Report on the pilot region Valle Stura

The project is located in Piedmont, in the northwest of Italy and is called l'Arbu, a word that means "plant" in the local dialect. The word l'Arbu is mainly used to describe the chestnut tree. In this area, the chestnut forests mean environment, landscape, organic food such as honey, labour and heating. The valley is called Valle Stura and that it is characterized by an ageing population and a greater generational difference. For many small local companies it is very difficult to find employees. The "dream" of the majority of the population is to find work elsewhere.



The exodus of the population is a major problem in many Alpine valleys. For these valleys, the arrival of people can constitute a great opportunity, for the social community, but also for the economy and for the development of the landscape. For this reason, CIPRA International Lab supports projects such as l'Arbu.

L'Arbu is the result of an initiative launched in 2015. At that time, the Germinale Association was founded with the aim of creating a community agriculture in Valle Stura. The founders were 5 locals and 4 migrants from Central Africa. At the very beginning Giulia was already involved. Giulia is the first protagonist of this story. She was born in Torino, grew up in Milan and lived in Argentina for many years. She came back in 2012 because the big city of Buenos Aires was too chaotic for her, her

husband and their daughter. One can say that Giulia landed in Valle Stura by chance. And above all, she arrived there without any knowledge of agriculture. But Giulia had many other resources and was able to integrate quickly in the valley.

When some PlurAlps partners spread the Alpine Pluralism Award call in 2017, the Germinale association took part with its project. A total of 40 measures and initiatives on migration and integration in the Alpine region were submitted. Germinale won in the category land use and environment because they had tried to give a chance to people who were excluded and agriculture which was considered marginal. In September 2017, thanks to the Alpine Pluralism Award, the cooperation between Germinale and CIPRA started around the project l'Arbu.

When we informed Giulia that we wanted to support the further development of her project, she told us about the second protagonist of our history. His name is Mohammed Alpha Diallo, he is 20 years old and comes from Guinea Conakry. He did not see a political and economic future in Guinea Conakry and left his homeland to find a better future. He travelled through Senegal, Mali, Algeria and stayed in Libya for a while. When the political context there was no longer stable, he took a boat and came to Sicily and then on to Piedmont. One say said that Alpha landed in Valle Stura by chance. He lived there in a reception centre where no activities or language courses were offered. He had a lot of energy and desire to do something, but unfortunately no possibility to get involved. Fortunately, he met Giulia and was started to work in the project l'Arbu.

The two protagonists of this migration story come finally together. They understand each other and work well together.

Since the beginning of the project Alpha has attended various courses: he participated in a one-day bread course and in a Sambucano lamb cooking experience. He begun to approach the world of beekeeping and learned how the world of bees works. His training also included sheep farming, the cultivation of vegetables, potatoes and medicinal plants.





Giulia, her colleagues and a large part of the population like Alpha and appreciate his work. Alpha had the opportunity to get familiar with various aspects of mountain farming and to decide which area he would like to work in. We visited the project in June and we can say that the project was working well.

But there are also difficulties: the cooperation in the valley is sometimes hard, it is difficult for Alpha to find an apartment, and above all he does not yet know whether he can stay in Italy. Giulia and Germinale imagine a future where Alpha stays in Piedmont and where he works in a mountain farm. Who knows. Alpha himself doesn't know what his future will look like. At the moment he wants to learn as much as possible about agriculture and is thinking about the possibilities of using new technologies in Guinea. Later he would like to work independently. He has many ideas and is very motivated. When we asked him a few questions in June, he told us that Africa has many resources, but that many things are still missing.

In the last months we have been in contact with Giulia very often. We asked her to give us a message about the project l'Arbu and she said that her team had become more aware of sustainable solutions and that the project had created new appreciation for the cultural landscape in Valle Stura. What she particularly likes in this project is that l'Arbu deals with an agriculture that cares for both people and nature.

We liked a lot to work on this project. While working on l'Arbu we asked ourselves some questions: what makes a project successful? Is it a large budget? Is it a good network? Is it enough time? All these are certainly important points, but even more important are the people who believe in a project and show their commitment.



People like Giulia and her team who are doing a fantastic project. We hope that they will never lack the motivation, flexibility and the capacity to be innovative.

The PlurAlps Team of CIPRA International Lab

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