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Author

Paini, Anna Maria

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It Was like Velvet: Cultural Nature in Vinigo (Dolomites)

Anna Paini, University of Verona, Italy

Introduction to the Fieldsite

Vinigo is a mountain village with an elevation of 1,025 m (3,200 feet) situated in the Belluno province of the Veneto Region, Italy (see Figure 1).¹ It is one of the oldest settlements in the Ladin area (Vinego Paes Laden) in the Dolomites, which have been included in the Unesco World Heritage List in 2009 (Seville, June 26th, 2009), when nine areas have been designated as a 'Serial Heritage Site.'² Although the Dolomites have been recognized as the heritage of humanity, the role of local inhabitants is neglected in the Declaration, as several authors have highlighted, stressing the underlining assumption of a rigid boundary between natural space and human space (Varotto and Castiglione 2012). The geographer Mauro Varotto remarks that such

little or no consideration of the role of the people and local communities appears all the more jarring, even in the face of the fact that the legal ownership of the Unesco heritage in some cases belongs to the people themselves, through the *regolieri* institutions and ASUC (Amministrazioni Separate Usi Civici). During the nomination process, the promoters stressed the difficulty to make understanding the positive role of the human presence in preserving the same environment, thanks to the management systems developed by a secular agro-pastoral civilization (Guichonnet 1986), of which one has become less and less aware, since the same local society has embraced new models of development and behavior (2012a: 288)". Varotto concludes by stressing that "the knowledge about and therefore the mediation role played by a discreet, rarefied and widespread human presence in preserving balance and synanthropic environments has disappeared. (2012a: 288-289).

Cesare Lasen of the Fondazione Dolomiti-Dolomiten-Dolomites-Dolomitis Unesco clarifies that the nine sites have been recognized on the basis of two criteria: aesthetic-landscape and geologic-geomorphologic components. The Italian dossier included two further criteria, the biological-naturalistic and ecological-succession components, however, "for these last two aspects, it was impossible to demonstrate their uniqueness, a fundamental requirement together with that of integrity" (Lasen 2012: 273).

Vinigo is included in the area called Cadore, an historical region which borders Austria. The nearest town is Vodo, in the Boite Valley, which is also home to the municipality (Vodo, Peaio, Vinigo) (Figure 2). The village is located between two creeks: the Rudan (to the West) and the Ruinian (to the East). In the past three windmills were located along the latter. Vinighesi (as local people are called) say that Rudan (*ru*=creek) means "*torrente/fa danno*" 'creek/makes damage,' while Ruinian means "*torrente/fa rumore, e non fa danno*" 'creek/makes noise, and not damage.' Even the most recent event of a *roa* 'landslide' in the area (August 2015) caused by heavy rain, has provided evidence that this seems to be the case. The Rudan is a tributary of the Boite, a right tributary of the Piave,³ a river that flows entirely in the Veneto Region and is one of the most artificial waterways in Europe (creeks and rivers harnessed, artificial lakes, dams). Both creeks originate in the Antelao (the second highest peak in the Dolomites, 3,234 m), which is located to the north of the village. The other imposing mountain (to the west) is the Pelmo, 3,168 m, locally named *el caregon del Padreterno* 'the throne of God.' Both mountains are very relevant to the

life of the people of Vinigo and in their daily talk they often make reference to them. To the south lies Mt. Rite (2,160 m). and to the east Col Maò (1,470 m).



Figure 1: The Fieldsite: Vinigo in the Veneto Dolomites

Vinigo is connected to the rest of Cadore by a paved road with a steep slope and sharp turns which joins the *strada statale* ‘state road’ 51 of Alemagna (SS51) at Peaio (Figure 2). One of our interviewers recalled when in the past people from Vinigo would be preparing to get off the bus in Peaio and the bus driver would announce in an ironic way: “For Vinigo. You change here: Eagle service.” In time of heavy snow the road is closed as was the case for the snow storm at the end of January/early February 2014. The village remained isolated, cut off from electricity for 48 hours, cell phones became useless, and the road from Peaio to Vinigo was closed.

The relationship between Vinigo and Vodo has not been an easy one. To stress this tension our interlocutors often made reference to the nicknames used to refer to the inhabitants of each village of the area. Vinighesi are called “*i cian de Vinigo*” ‘dogs from Vinigo.’ Local people explain that it refers to the high altitude of Vinigo and the role of guardians of the territory historically played by its inhabitants. Vodesi are instead called “cats” (De Ghetto 2009: 48).



Figure 2: Vodo (Municipality) and Peaio (route SS51) and the village of Vinigo

Analyzing the relevant issues concerning contemporary Alpine spaces, Varotto underlines the role of “intermediate spaces that act as buffers between protected areas and areas of strong touristic and agro-industrial development” (2012b: 325).⁴ Vinigo could be considered one of such intermediate spaces.

In the first half of the XX century Vinigo was entirely surrounded by cultivated fields: wheat, rye, corn, potatoes, barley, and hemp. Old pictures show a cultivated landscape. Then meadows took over in order to produce hay to feed the cattle. Nowadays no local family raises cows nor pigs and fields are fallow. “Everyone had animals: cows, goats and also pigs” recalls Riccarda. And Mario adds: few families, “the more wealthy ones,” also had one or two horses. As Dario says: “*Stalla e bosco*” ‘Stable and woods’, from these two sources came what you needed to survive. As the *bosco* ‘woodland’ is no longer maintained and used for woodcutting, it is expanding and encroaching the village. Alps are an “exceptional wealth of biodiversity compared to the entire European continent” (Lasen 2012: 273). The spread of the woodland involves a loss of such biodiversity (Varotto 2012a). Retreating glaciers are also participating in creating an unfamiliar landscape in the area.

Until the 60s/70s Vinighesi derived their main source of livelihood from agriculture, breeding and timber. Itinerant activities such as *calderai* ‘coppersmiths’ and *vetrai* ‘glaziers’ were added as an essential source of income. The village has felt the dramatic impact of different waves of emigration in the 1900s. In some cases they were seasonal movements, in others (particularly between the two World Wars) migration was definitive and permanent (e.g. to USA, Argentina). People emigrated to Germany, Holland and the former Czechoslovakia to be ice cream makers. They always make a point in stressing that they left to be *gelatieri* ‘ice cream makers’ and not *gelatai* ‘ice cream sellers.’

Vinighesi of a certain age remember the *colonie di vacanza* ‘holiday camps’ that animated the village in the summer time during the fifties and early sixties. For example, la Locanda dal Gobbo, the inn which Emma Piviroto opened in 1957 and was in business for almost thirty years, rented rooms in different houses of Vinigo in order to host the guests. As Riccarda, Emma’s daughter, recalls: “Parents came to visit their children and then they used to come back bringing their friends.” People have very fond memories of the period of the *colonie*. The arrival of young people, often from the cities, animated the life of the village during the summer; it allowed to make new acquaintances, which sometimes turned into long-lasting friendships, to find out about things and practices of the city, and for families to get some revenues. People remember when during those summers their parents made them and their siblings give up their bedroom in order to use it to host guests. Ettore, in his mid-seventies, adds that for *ferragosto* ‘August 15’ even the barns were used to accommodate guests. Angelina, his wife, although ten years younger, has a vivid memory of those times, and explains that she moved to the *mansard* ‘attic.’

When *occhialerie* ‘lenses manufacturers’ opened in the area in the late 1960s, these factories attracted many people from Vinigo providing a major source of income for many families. To get a better understanding of the importance of this industry, one needs to be reminded that 80% of the glasses made in Italy are produced in Cadore. Yet the depopulation has continued; today the village has only 115 inhab-

itants (58 males and 57 females) compared to 359 in 1929; and during winter time they are down to less than 100 residents. Some houses are abandoned, some have become *seconde case* 'vacation homes.' The archival data kept in the town hall show that in the early 1900s Vinigo had 177 heads of families. Considering that the average family was made up of 4/5 people, one can get an idea of the strong impact of the current depopulation.

The last groceries store closed its doors in December 2013. In the past, there were 5 *osterie* 'family restaurant' and a restaurant. Today none survive. One element stressed by several interviewees as characterizing the Cadore, is that in the past both boys and girls went to primary school. 'The school in Cadore was ahead of the school of the plain' says Enrica, born in the early fifties. A consideration backed by historical studies (Piseri 2012: 55).⁵

Mapping the Village of Vinigo

The village has a circular shape. The central area of the village—locally called *pias*—is traditionally dedicated to privately owned allotments for the cultivation of *capuže* 'cabbage,' a variety of very fine cabbage which is considered the most prestigious produce of the village. Today also vegetables are grown in these allotments. No development project has been allowed in this area. A Vinighese told us that the presence of small plots and thus of many small owners (some of them living abroad) and the high quality of the land have helped to maintain the historical *destinazione d'uso* 'intended use' of this land in the center of the village.

Two streets encompass the central area forming a kind of oval. Locally one street (via Savilla) is considered *via par davante* 'the front' and one (via della Grotta) *via par daos* 'the back.' The more formal side of the village (the front) is where the Church of San Giovanni Battista (the oldest part goes back to 1506), and the former primary school (today home of the local group of the Associazione Nazionale Alpini) are located. The back—the more informal side—is where the Latteria Sociale 'Communal Dairy' used to be (the building still stands but the Dairy closed in the mid 70s (see Figure 3, 4 and 5).

These distinctions are locally drawn. As one of our interviewees in her 60s told us, in order to take the front side one should be properly dressed. Most people still adhere to this. A third street (*via pias*) cuts through the village and it is addressed as *via par mezzo* 'middle street.' At the northern edge of the village the path to Greanes starts, a close by locality used in the past by Vinighesi for pasture.

Space is an important and multifaceted dimension in Vinigo. If some interlocutors recognized a "front" and a "back" side, which follows a north/south axis, all the old inhabitants of Vinigo acknowledge another distinction, which follows a different criterion: the low half vs the high half of the village. People remember a strong sense of belonging to either Festin (low) or Savilla (high) as well as (in the past) the local rivalry. Today people still speak of *do Festin* 'going down to Festin' and *sun Savilla* 'going up to Savilla.' However, this distinction is less marked and people tend to recall more the sense of belonging than the sense of competitiveness. As one can see in Figure 6, this distinction is expressed through a dotted line which follows an east-west axis and which splits the village in two halves. The line divides Savilla

from Festin: The Church of Saint John is located in the Festin half, whereas the Chapel of Saint Lorenzo in the Savilla half. Another line indicates the road descending to Peaio.



Figure 3: Stamp of the Communal Dairy (from letterhead)



Figure 4: Communal Dairy, February 2014 (Photo © A. Paini)



Figure 5: Communal Dairy after being cleaned and reopened for a communal evening occasion by a small group of Vinighesi, November 2014 (Photo © A. Paini).

A social institution that cuts across this distinction is *coscritti* ‘an age class;’ young people, men and women, born in the same year or in nearby years. On the façade of a wooden building in via della Grotta, a prominent white graffiti “1950 51 52” written in the 1970s by the *coscritti* of the year 1951 has not been removed. It stands as a ‘traditional’ graffiti (see Figure 7). Seven people (men and women) of this age group still live in Vinigo (one of them only part of the year) and often emphasize this sense of belonging: they still engage in communal activities. It was their idea to clean the inside of the Communal Dairy in the spring/summer of 2014 as a part of a project for a new cultural association.

Most of the houses have at least a small fenced garden (locally called *orto* or *al brolo*), where carrots, celery, beetroot, garlic, onion, and lettuce are grown. Sometimes there are also fruit trees. The allotments in the *pias* are instead called *cianpo*. This central area, which comprises allotments dedicated to the cultivation of *capuže* ‘cabbage’ for which Vinigo is well known, has remained unchanged for generations. The cultivation of this cabbage is unusual in that the gardens, located at the center of the village, form a single large field divided into many small sections each one owned by a different local family. All Vinighesi stress that “it was a piece of land suitable for that kind of work.” We have questioned them in order to understand what it

means “being suitable.” Some of them speak of the soil which has good nutrients and the right amount of water and it is at the right altitude; others refer to the fact that wild animals love cabbage, so in the past it was a way to protect the produce from being eaten by animals, as one among them puts it: *l'é l'altitudine, l'é la terra e l'é la conca, se vede che l'é protetta*. ‘it is the altitude, it is the soil, it is the gully, one can see that it is protected’ (Gianna).

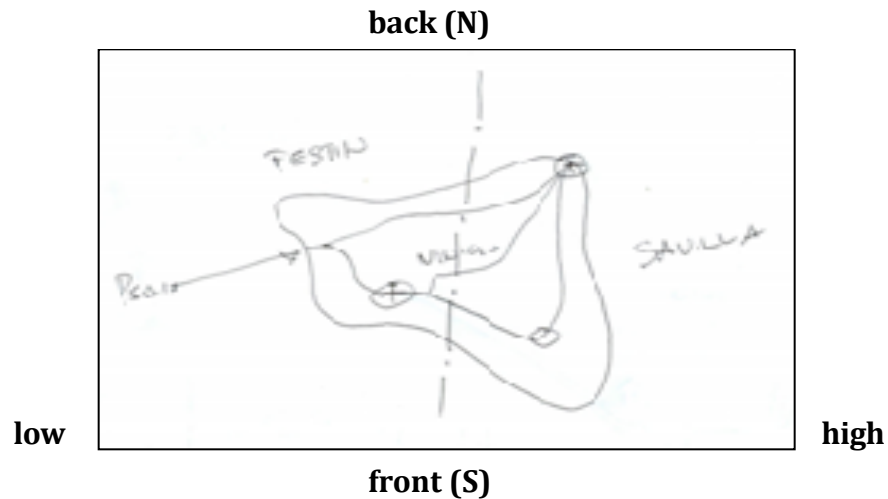


Figure 6: Drawing of the lower/upper area of the village, made by an interlocutor.



Figure 7: Via alla Grotta, Graffiti, January 2014 (Photo © A. Paini)

In the past, Vinighesi kept *capuze* they cultivated in the *pias* for consuming at home and exchanged some of them with people from other communities. Today,

some sell *capuze*, others donate them to friends. As one of our female interlocutor told us, they are *troppo preziosi* 'too precious' to be sold. In more recent time, due to different climatic conditions, a variety of new cultivations have been introduced. From the interviews both elements of continuity and discontinuity emerge. In fact some of the women interviewed, when asked how they choose what and where to plant in the *cianpo*, speak of a continuity with the choices made by the women who planted crops in the *cianpo* before them (usually mothers, grand-mothers) in terms of a form of *rispetto* 'respect' towards those women.

Land Use Management

"If there were no *Regole*, the environment in Cadore would have been devastated" (MDB).

A very important local institution in the Dolomites region is *La Regola* 'The Rule'. It is a traditional communal way of ruling the community life and managing land, woodland, and resources which goes back to the XIII and XIV centuries. The 'communal properties' through the centuries have become a residual phenomenon (Lorenzi and Borrini-Feyerabend 2009), all of which makes the land use management in the Dolomites even more unique. As *terre civiche* 'civic lands' they are characterized by being *inalienabile*, indivisible, *inusucapibile* 'non-usucaption,' *inespropriabile* 'cannot be confiscated' and by the immutability of their agro-forestry destination.

La "*Regola Grande*" 'The Big Rule' includes Vinigo, Peaio, Vodo e Cancia; its first *laudo* 'common written charter' goes back to 1289. At the time Vinigo was part of the Centenaro of Venas, one of the ten constituencies that made up the *Magnifica Comunità* 'Magnificent Community' of Cadore. The story of the *Regole* is very complicated, especially in the nineteenth century. The new Napoleonic municipalities were generally grafted on to these old constituencies. Although there was not a total affirmation of private property in the 1800s and then a rebirth of the *Regole* system in the 1900s, but rather a continuing tension between the two systems of land tenure and management, the *Regole* have been revived as well as the Magnificent Community in the XX century, and today Vinigo with Vodo and Peaio form the *Regola Grande*. They were able to get back 95% of their land (5% remains with the municipality). In the past also a *Regola Piccola* 'Small Rule', which included Vinigo and Peaio, was functioning, but later it dissolved (Belli 2007: 21). Woodland around the village became private property and none of the inhabitants is able to remember when this reorganization of land management took place.⁶

For centuries people of this Alpine area have operated in strict compliance with both private and collective property rules. Relying on the work of Giuseppe Richebuono, Giandomenico Zanderigo Rosolo (2012) reports that on October 30, 1226 the Vinigo di Cadore's residents (*regolieri* 'members of the Regole'), who at the time owned the Cimabanche pasture land (which today belongs to the *regolieri* of Ampezzo), donated a parcel of this land for building a small church dedicated to wayfarers. On the occasion of the church consecration, the *regolieri* made clear to the authorities who had come for the ceremony that they should stay within and not cross the well-defined boundaries of the given pasture. In a document of 1289,⁷ the

regolieri made a list of the people who had the right to access the mountain specifying that: 'Only these, and not others, can access the mountain' "*isti sunt consortes montis et alii non*" (2012: 34).⁸

Regolieri used to be only males. Nowadays, in the case of no male descents also a woman descending from a *regolieri* family and if married to a *regoliere* can become a member according to the *Regole Ampezzane* 'Rules of Ampezzo.' Another proposal under discussion at the *Magnifica Regola Grande dei Monti di Vodo* 'Magnificent Great Rule of Vodo Mountains' is that a woman can become/maintain her role as *regoliere* even if married, and if she undertakes to transmit to her son her family name (Mario Della Bona [MDB] 29 January 2014). In any case, a *regoliere* must descend from one of the ancient families or one that has been living in the area for at least 100 years.

An example of the importance of the *Regole* and of what the *regolieri* can achieve can be seen in the Pelmo having no ski slopes. They opposed any development projects of this type on the mountain. While the Vinighesi speak with respect of the *Regole* they also stress that they have no confidence in the State. Thus, confidence in local traditional *Regole* is counter posed to mistrust in wider forms of government.

Family Names

Four historical family names are found among Vinigo inhabitants: De Lorenzo, Della Bona, Marchioni, and Pivirotto. These are matched by nicknames: an individual named De Lorenzo "Tomea" belongs to a different family subgroup from an individual named De Lorenzo "Frates" or De Lorenzo "Nanete" or "Fortunes." Local people often name other Vinighesi by their family nickname: for example, *ie de chi dei Vece* 'they are from the Vece subgroup,' referring to a family among those carrying the Pivirotto last name. These differences are often found in the *foglio di famiglia* 'family sheet' of the *Registro di Popolazione 1896-1902* 'Register of Population 1896-1902' concerning the village of Vinigo. I consulted this document in the Registry Office at the Town Hall of Vodo; e.g. Maria Marchioni (1857-1904) widow of De Lorenzo Flaminio "Medego" (sheet 30) or Giuseppe de Lorenzo "Tomea", unmarried (sheet 51).

Climate and Environmental Changes.

Phenomena related to climate and environmental changes affect the Dolomites in general. The perception of global warming is an experience shared by the inhabitants of these areas. For all of them the memory of past very cold and snowy winters is quite vivid. Their family memories highlight the changes taking place. They remember that during early years of the last century some *frazioni* 'hamlets' experienced true isolation, that is, they were often blocked by layers of snow several meters high, sometimes even for weeks. The local highest mountain, the Antelao, used to have three glaciers. The upper and the lower are in regression, while the third one has disappeared. The other 3,000 m high mountain, the Pelmo, had a *nevaio* 'permanent snow field', which is no longer there.

At this altitude (over 1000 m.), the increased temperature has had paradoxically also 'positive' effects on agriculture: new cultivations (definitely not alpine) like to-

matoes are now possible in the most sunny areas. On the other hand, the increasing wild woodland (no longer cultivated) is changing the micro-climate and raising the level of humidity. This is making wild animals (mainly deer) come closer to the village (in Vinigo also getting into the central *pias* at night searching for food). Fencing individual parcels of the *pias* is a very recent practice to which the Vinighesi resort hoping to protect their crops from deer.

Methodology.

Focusing on the relationship between local knowledge and climate change, the data were collected by Elisa Bellato and myself during our fieldwork in Vinigo between October 2013 and July 2015 for a total of 7 weeks.⁹ Our visits were planned on “the cabbage calendar,” that is, on the main activities connected to the *cavolo cappuccio* ‘cabbage,’ bearing in mind that the seed for the cabbage is prepared in autumn, sown in spring (April-May) close to home, planted in the *pias* around St. John’s Day (June 24)—the patron saint of the village—and collected and stored in early November (see Figures 8). We also spent a couple of weeks in Vinigo during winter time (January-February 2014) in order to get a better understanding of daily life in the village. Because of the snow storm that struck Vinigo at that time, we were isolated from other communities for a couple of days and this allowed us to acquire a more in-depth perception of what local people mean when they speak of feeling/being isolated while at the same time it allowed local inhabitants to become more familiar with us (Bennardo & De Munck 2014: 60-61).

During the various visits we used the following methods: Participant observation, informal conversations, nature walks, free listing tasks, space tasks and open and semi-structured interviews. As Bennardo and De Munch have argued (2014: 57-58), the qualitative versus quantitative typology does not correspond to the complexity of this type of research: data are “hybrid”.

The interviews were structured around a series of questions (in Italian, see Appendix) that we considered culturally appropriate/relevant, developed around six main areas, taking as a starting point the list of questions agreed upon with the other research units. The free listing tasks (30) and the semi-structured interviews (14) were recorded and later transcribed by Iolanda Da Deppo, a local research assistant from Domegge di Cadore, as we asked people to speak/respond as much as possible in their *Laden* dialect.



Figure 8: Cabbages ready to harvest and to be stored, November 2, 2013, (Photos © A. Paini).

Results of Analyses on Some of the Data Collected.

Free-Listing Task

The free-listing task based on six categories—*piante* ‘plants,’ *animali* ‘animals,’ *territorio* ‘physical environment,’ *tempo atmosferico* ‘weather,’ *persone* ‘people,’ *esseri fantastici* ‘supernatural’—was administered to 30 subjects. The last category proved to be the most difficult to elicit. The two longer set/list of terms elicited were those concerning plants and animals. These data is currently under analysis.¹⁰

Under “animals” our participants inserted wild animals, domestic animals, quadrupeds and bipeds, birds, reptiles, and one respondent a fish. Under “plants” they included wild plants, domestic plants, edible plants, fruit trees, and flowers. During our first visit we used the category *supernaturale* ‘supernatural’ but we soon realized it did not generate any result. We tried with *esseri fantastici* ‘supernatural beings’ and, although we were not completely satisfied with it, we realized it proved a more conducive way to put the question. In general, women seemed more patient than men in listing the different items. The men would mention a few items and then start to narrate event connected to one or more of those items.

The results of the free-listing task allows to make the point that women have maintained a deeper local knowledge than men. Gianna (f) in her late sixties recalled 46 names of plants and 51 of animals; Fanny (75 years old f) mentioned 22 plants and 25 animals; Lino (m) instead 17 plants and 19 animals, Dario (m) 10 plants and 19 animals, although Artelio (m), born as Gianna in the 1940s, was able to name 26 plants and 42 animals.

This difference may be due to the fact that in the presence of migratory (seasonal or definitive) movements involving mainly men, women had more interaction and experience with the local environment. They had to carry out all the work.

Interviews: “It Was like Velvet.”

We conducted and recorded 14 semi-structured interviews (7 men and 7 women); we also had many other informal conversations while in Vinigo. During the interview our interlocutors often switched back and forth from Ladin to Italian. The interviews were transcribed after each period of fieldwork so that we could rely on them for the next research period.

I consider different interaction and relationship of our interlocutors with their environment. I first examine ideas about climate and environmental changes through a choice of relevant passages of the collected transcribed material. How do the people of Vinigo perceive them? Then, I look at how they understand/interpret the perceived changes. Further, I present a number of relationships that can be inferred from these passages.

In presenting their idea of ‘nature,’ our interlocutors foreground the changes that have taken place in the environment close to themselves. They first state that snow, ice, and glaciers are not part of the yearly landscape as it was in the past. They also point out that fields around the villages are no longer cultivated. Then, they affirm that woodland, although it has always been part of the landscape, is today taking a more prominent position. So their first responses point to some components of

their environment which withdraw or disappear and then to others which are now taking a more front-stage place.

Lino, a man in his 60s who has spent most of his life living in Vinigo, expresses his concern for the changes affecting the local environment in these terms: “Certainly the temperature has increased. The glaciers that I used to know are there no more. And ... not even the year-round snow fields. For example, the lower glacier on the Antelao now is all gravel; there is no longer a permanent snow field on the Pelmo.”

Most of our interlocutors refer to the time when fields around the villages were cultivated and those further away were used for feeding the animals. And, when asked, they refer to these different parts of land outside the village using different specific local names (*pràs, vares, bosche*). Most of these elements of the environment have disappeared. When Vinighesi recall the different names used for the land, they also recall stories associated with those places. Some of them appear to be more detailed than others because of richer memories. The environment has changed and along with this all the stories associated with hard working sharing and sociality. Marilena, a woman in her fifties, with a university degree, who has chosen to live in the village, points to that difference when she says that “The hays has a memory for me that the lawn does not.” She explains that it was her mother who carried the hay “because for my mom going back and forth from the barn to the lawn with the sled was something she took in her stride.”

While they notice elements lacking in their environment, at the same time they highlight new ones that have appeared. Marilena adds: “Compared with the past, the woodland has been allowed to encroach into the field. It would have been better if this had not been allowed to happen, unfortunately, however, it has an air of abandonment about it.” The idea of an environment which has not been taken care of, which has been “abandoned,” “neglected” emerges in other interviews, and I will return to it. The presence of deer is another notable new feature of the local environment, which many refer to (see Figure 9). To mention but one: “Deer have hunted roes because deer also inhabit the dense forest, while roes need clearings to live. And there are few clearings today, because the woods have become so thick” (Riccarda, a woman in her sixties).

So the woodland is encroaching while at the same time it is becoming more dense, two important changes due to the fact that the land is no longer cultivated. However, Lino remarks that among the conifers, the *larice* ‘larch’ is disappearing. Lino is stressing that although the woodland is expanding and becoming more dense, some traditional salient species such as the larch are disappearing, and he is convinced that the *Forestaie* ‘Forest Rangers,’ the Authority in charge of giving permission to cut down trees, is not taking this change seriously.

Besides the encroaching of the woods, people mention other changes connected to the loss of agricultural land. Ettore, for example, refers to part of the woods that he inherited from his father, but its location has been lost. He explains: “When you were cutting the grass you also knew where the boundaries were, now we no longer know where the boundaries are.” Marilena, although younger than Ettore, makes a

similar remark: 'In the past the boundaries between fields, you could see them, really you could see them.' So the change in the environment has brought along also a change in the ability to recall, the knowledge of boundaries is lost.



Figure 9: Vinigo after the snow storm: Footprints, animal tracks, and tire tracks, February 10, 2014 (Photo © A. Paini)

Weather is another component to which Vinighesi refer to in talking about changes in the environment. For some of them, in the past it snowed more often whereas today it rains more often. Weather is considered more unpredictable compared to the past (*le stravaganze del tempo* 'the strangeness of the weather,' Gianpietro). However, some of the elderly men recalling the Christmas' Eve of 1940 when a fire destroyed a section of Vinigo burning to the ground many timber houses, underline that it was a snowless Christmas, which made it more difficult to contain the fire. To them the weather has always been unpredictable.

Local Interpretation of Climate/Environmental Change.

I will now discuss how people explain these changes. For some, the weather is the king. Whereas for others it is human activity which is all important. A human intervention which does not speak the language of domination but that of care, taking care of the woodland. Still for others these two rationales combine (see Strauss, 1999) as Rino's comments suggest: "Everything depends on the weather." *Il tempo è quello che comanda tutto* 'The weather is what rules everything.' "In the past there was sun, a lot more than today. Now in the same day, the weather changes one thousand times... because the weather has changed."

He then goes on to remark: "The bark or the cones, the dry ones, were burned, and some branches as well, if we were allowed to collect some wood, because in the past the woodland was treated like a kitchen. It was really clean, now one cannot even walk because now it is a disaster, but at one time it was taken care of with respect, those who were cutting firewood were cleaning up after themselves." Rino, a Vinighese in his sixties, which has worked most of his life outside the village, but has always kept his home in the village, points out the concerns that emerge from many of the interviews, that is, the 'neglect' in which the woodlands are left today.

I am struck by the passage “In the past the woodland was treated like a kitchen,” as Rino connects the woodland, an open space, with a kitchen, a domestic space. My interpretation of this image, given the context in which it is advanced, is that the kitchen refers both to a place kept clean and where nothing went to waste. A place which required to be looked after. In the past in many homes it was the only room kept warm during the cold season, thus a place inhabited/lived in by people. As Lino explains: “If you had little food in the kitchen you could survive, but if you could not heat the kitchen you would die.” The image can also refer to the fact that in the past the woods were less thick and one could find clearings in the woodland.

The sense of a place well-kept looms large. Gianna for example is quite explicit about it: “The fields were spectacular. Flowers everywhere. The flowers disappeared when they stopped cutting the grass. In some places where they started cutting again, the flowers came back.” If some components are not present anymore in the environment, nevertheless their disappearance is considered reversible; it is not an absence without the possibility of a coming back. And in both cases, it is human intervention (“when **they** stopped cutting the grass” and “when **they** started cutting again”) which is responsible for it. The sense of a place well-kept, clean, is associated with the idea of ‘spectacular’ fields.

Questions that have been central to this research are how do Vinighesi perceive the features of their environment? Do they attribute them intentionality? Some as Marilena (her comment came from a telephone call after a landslide affected a lower nearby village in the summer 2015), seem to attribute the quality of agent to elements of the close environment: “That is how things are, this year the Antelao [the mountain] wanted to move around.” Others prefer to stress interactions with the environment. Lino: “When I go for a walk..., I come and go, and a year later I pass the same place I was before. If I go to Milan, no ... a street, a house does nothing for me, but in the woods I remember, a plant, a stone, the root of a tree.”

As Tim Ingold underscores: “Ways of acting in the environment are also ways of perceiving it” (2000: 9). Two perspectives connected to humans and their relationship with the woodland emerge: 1) one should read the woodland, and 2) one should act on it appropriately. Our interviewees associated two different types of needs/skills: one needs to have knowledge about the woodland, but one must also have the capacity to listen to it. Lino emphasized that: “A woodland is like a book, is a book ... it says it all. The important thing is to read it. But clearly before reading it, you need to know how to read it. And take the time to read it.” And explains that you need to have ‘passion’ for this.

Some of our interlocutors seem to stress an “earpoint” more than a “viewpoint” (Feld, 1996: 95). Lino underscores that: *Se io sono in mezzo al bosco sento l'aria, il profumo delle cose, sento ... mi sento a casa.* ‘If I am in the middle of the woods, I sense the air, the smell of things, I feel ... I feel at home.’ And again: *Dute i camina de corsa, dute i core. Nel bosco si cammina piano, ci si ferma, si annusa l'aria, si sente ...* ‘Everyone rushes. Everyone hurries. In the woods you walk slowly, you stop, you sniff the air, and you take it in...’ The earpoint slides into the smell of things in bringing back memories. As anthropologist Daniela Perco points out “what is crys-

tallized in the memory is the smell of berries, herbs [...] that is largely similar to the flavor (the scent of strawberries is also the flavor of the strawberries)” (2013: 241).

Thus, there is a way of acting in the environment that requires a specific posture. Yet to act rightly also implies the possibility to act wrongly. Flavio during the first nature walk clearly stated that: “A woodland must be cleaned up; otherwise the following year there will be no firewood.” This comment seems to point to a kind of reciprocity between elements of the environment and humans. Everyone agrees that in the past the woods had a very rich *sottobosco* ‘undergrowth,’ e.g., a high production of blueberries, which today is gone. Whatever is left is considered of a lesser quality. Mushrooms, for example, are less tasty than what they used to be.

We should remember that as Sara points out “to collect firewood everyone has his/her own places, because everyone has their own property, and you can’t go into other people’s property.” As I have already mentioned, Vinigo woodland, which used to belong to the Regola Piccola—thus, common property—has been transformed into private properties. Humans must tend to the woodland to keep it healthy, and a healthy woodland benefits humans. Otherwise, as Maria states: “The woodland will take over” *Il bosco si ‘mangia’ tutto* ‘the woodland ‘eats’ everything,’ a concern which reveals also some kind of anxieties about the future.

I want to leave the last word to Gianna; speaking in Labout about what she considers a dramatic alteration that has affected the close environment, she brings out memories of when she was young and the fields were well groomed: *Era duto bel neto, era i bosche nete . nos autre riedes deane co i scarpete fate in cèsa e basta* “Everything was well-kept, the woodlands were well-kept. We, the children, went around in our home-made soft-soled shoes.’ And she adds: *I pra i era come al veludo* ‘The grasslands were like velvet.’

Another strong image, that points to a tactile sensation in perceiving the environment by associating the land to the feel of a fine textile. The environment of the past brings back memories of long hours of hard work for the women and for the men though mitigated by images of softness, care, good tastes, closeness, and solidarity among people. The memories of a strong interaction with the environment loom large.

Hypothesized Cultural Model of Nature.

From the examples presented a number of relationships can be inferred that are parts of a Cultural Model of Nature:

- a **reciprocal** relationship between humans and woodlands;
- a **reciprocal** relationship between woodlands and wild animals (e.g., increasing woodland leads to increasing presence of deer);
- an **asymmetrical** relationship between weather and human activities (e.g., the weather influence agricultural produce such as cabbage’s growth, whereas humans do not influence weather);
- supernatural entities can master physical environment (e.g., it [God?] stopped a landslide).

It appears that this Cultural Model includes ‘Causal Model of Nature 2’ (see Figure 10). It is difficult to locate the place that animals have in this causal model. Subjects didn’t talk much about animals; places were more salient. Not only today families no longer have active stables but our interlocutors, when asked about the activities connected to taking the animals to the higher fields in the past, focused more around moments of sociality with the elderly or with peers or around the heavy work required by collecting hay (to feed the animals once they were taken back in the village) than about narratives centered on the animals. Further investigation will look more into this issue.

When one focuses on giving and receiving, would the notion of reciprocity fit the way Vinighesi think about these interactions? What does it mean “to take care of the land”? What do they mean when they say that “humans and land are connected”? It is possible that they mean that when humans are in a closer relation with soil and plants, then the woodland and the plants give back.

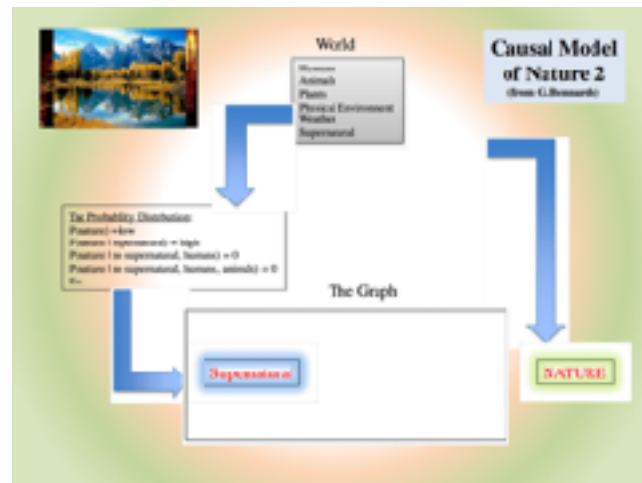


Figure 10: Causal Model of Nature 2 (from Bennardo 2014)

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) LAVORO AGROSILVOPASTORALE

- 1) Fai qualche lavoro legato alla terra o al bosco?
- 2) Ci racconti queste attività
- 3) Quando sei impegnato con queste attività? (stagionali, annuali, continuative, saltuarie ecc.)
- 4) Ci racconti cosa hai fatto ieri (questa settimana)?
- 5) Ci sono delle attività che si fanno solo in un certo momento della giornata o della notte? (ad es. nel passato si falciava l'erba al mattino presto per via della rugiada che la rendeva più tenera; oppure certe attività legate all'orto)
- 6) Ci sono modalità di lavoro e tempi che sono specifici di questo paese? (es. cavolo)

* lavoro legato alla terra (attività principale-secondaria-saltuaria)

2) COMPETENZE NEL LAVORO

- 1) Quali ritieni siano conoscenze essenziali per ottenere dei risultati positivi/buoni nel tuo lavoro? (es. nell'orto seguire ciò che fanno gli altri)
- 2) Cosa consideri "attività produttive" legate alla terra? (es. raccolta mirtilli o prodotti del sottobosco; rispetto all'orto)
- 3) Quali sono le aree/terreni produttivi?
- 4) Cosa influisce sulla produttività/crescita? Quali forze (umane, naturali, soprannaturali) influenzano il successo di una produzione? (es. orto: concimazione, acqua)
- 5) In che modo si capisce che una pianta/albero cresce bene? Cosa contribuisce alla crescita della pianta?

3) CONOSCENZE NECESSARIE

- 1) Quali informazioni/conoscenze sono stati utili per prendere delle decisioni (tramandate, apprese a scuola, in corsi di formazione, dai media, da conoscenti, autoformazione ecc.) (I tempi di semina, date di una volta)
- 2) Ci fai un esempio?
- 3) Quali decisioni hai preso tu (tua famiglia) per ottenere risultati positivi?
- 4) Come scegli le colture da coltivare (anche nell'orto), ciò che cacci, ciò di cui vai alla ricerca (es. prodotti del sottobosco)? (scambio di semi)
- 5) Quali problemi incontri e quali limiti/vincoli devi tenere in considerazione in queste attività? (es. periodi in cui piantare, questioni economiche, Regole; dopo san Marco non potevi passare sui terreni degli altri perché l'erba stava crescendo)

4) EFFETTI SULL'AMBIENTE

- 1) Chi produce effetti maggiori sul tuo ambiente (campi, bosco)?
- 2) Cosa e/o chi fa succedere le cose? (forze naturali o soprannaturali; umani, animali, piante, santi, spiriti ecc.)
- 3) Il ruolo del governo e dei vari enti amministrativi (Comune, Comunità montana, Regione, Regole)?
- 4) Qual è la cosa migliore/peggiore che gli umani possono fare nel cacciare, coltivare (orto o campi), raccogliere prodotti del sottobosco (es. solidarietà/litigare; incuria, abbandono del territorio)

5) SODDISFAZIONE RISPETTO ALL'ATTIVITA' LAVORATIVA SVOLTATA

- 1) Che cosa ti piace/non ti piace di ciò che stai facendo (soddisfazione)?
- 2) Ci sono cose che devi fare che sono distruttive ma che non vorresti fare? (es. uso prodotti chimici nella coltivazione)
- 3) Le conseguenze del tempo/clima, governo, guerre, gente sulle attività legate alla terra/ambiente
- 4) Quali sono le forme alternative a questa per guadagnarsi da vivere. (Tu come ti guadagni da vivere? Vivi dei prodotti dell'orto?)

6) CAMBIAMENTI CLIMATICI

- 1) Hai riscontrato cambiamenti nell'ambiente e nella tua attività legata al lavoro agrosilvopastorale?
(ad es. modifica nelle aree destinate a pascolo)
- 2) Che tipo di cambiamenti?
- 3) Ci sono dei cambiamenti climatici? Quali? In che modo si sono verificati?
- 4) A cosa ritieni siano dovuti le variazioni (ad es. stagioni più brevi) e i cambiamenti (assenza di stagioni intermedie)?
- 5) Che cosa gli umani possono fare al riguardo?
- 6) Ritieni che gli umani, come collettività o anche singolarmente, possono produrre effetti sulla natura e sul clima?
- 7) Hai notato cambiamenti nella presenza o nel comportamento di una specie dovuti alla presenza di un cambiamento nell'ambiente o climatico (ad es. dovuti al bosco che sopravanza o alla presenza di una specie animale o di un cambiamento climatico)?

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Notes

- 1 In Italy, the Region is the main administrative subdivision followed by provinces, which have been emptied of powers in the recent administrative reform (Delrio law, 7 April 2014).
- 2 Among them the Pelmo - Croda da Lago System. "The nine components of The Dolomites World Heritage property protect a series of highly distinctive mountain landscapes that are of exceptional natural beauty." (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1237>).
- 3 It must also be mentioned the very important role played by the river during World War I.
- 4 For an overview of the most relevant issues facing the Alpine mountains, see Varotto and Castiglione 2012.
- 5 See Pier Paolo Viazzo (2012) and the socio-cultural and demographic paradoxes which have emerged from researches conducted in the Alps in the last two decades of the twentieth century, bringing forward a rethinking of the relationship between the mountains and the plains.
- 6 There is also the Regola Staccata 'The Detached Rule', to which belong the families from Vodo.
- 7 Both documents are transcribed by Richebuono (1962).
- 8 The term *consortes* (literally *cum-participants*) refers to the people who had rights to access the mountain to be distinguished from mere residents (personal communication, Gian Maria Varanini, 23 August 2016).
- 9 Periods of fieldwork: 30 October-4 November 2013; 28 January-11 February 2014; 19 May- 22 May; 27 June- 5 July; 28 October-3 November; 30 June – 5 July 2015.
- 10 Miro Marchi, who has recently joined our team, has been working in cleaning the list from noises, that is, double entries or terms that are different but refer to the same animal or plant.