

Raimondo Strassoldo  
University of Udine

Paper prepared for the meeting  
“Living space and intercultural relations in local and global context:  
Research in Slovene Istria and beyond”  
Koper-Capodistria, May 29, 2010

Proceedings not published

## Distal relations in Friuli V.G.: a typology

### Introduction: Friuli as a case study and a lab.

All social relations have spatial dimensions, that can be described in terms like “in/out”, “small/large”, “narrow/wide”, “intimate/public”, “short-range/long range”, “immediate/mediated”, and in many other ways; some more proper (literal) and others more metaphorical. In the last two or three decades in sociological discourse a prominent place has been gained by the “local/global” binomy, akin to particular/universal and to near/far. As a new addition, we can import from the medical science the proximal/distal couple, where it refers to the spatial relation between two biological structures. To my mind this pair has three advantages. One is that it is static, while its close cousin, “distant”, has a verbal (action) denotation. The second is that the two structures are embedded in the same system (organism); it is intrinsically relational. The third is that it clearly is a *continuum*, while the “local/global” are usually felt as polar opposites. It is difficult to define something as “more (or “less”) “global” than another. The great success of the term “glocal”, fusing the two terms, comes from such difficulties and their overcome.

In this paper I shall try to highlight some categories of distal socio-spatial relations, taking Friuli Venezia Giulia as a case study. I focus on the first part of this name, because I am more conversant with the historical region Friuli and because Trieste, - the bulk of Venezia Giulia - has a rather different history and social features. Weaving it with the former would make the argument less clear.

Socio-spatial relations are shaped by communication means, ranging from the biological endowment (non-verbal and verbal communication, organic locomotion) to the latest technology (ICT, airplanes). Owing to this latter and to other factors (resources, etc.), the tangle of socio-spatial relations has grown to impressive complexity. This obtains in Friuli as it does in other comparable regions of Italy, of Europe and of the world.

Friuli can be considered as an average specimen of advanced regions, concerning demography, income, schooling, occupation, life-style, communication, media-diet, and leisure activities. In political behavior it does not differ much from the rest of Northern Italy, and its outlook is no less “global” than in other regions, in the field of popular, modern, “young” subculture. Cinema, shows, music, apparel, crazes, fashions, etc. are no different in the rest of the advanced world.

Seen from the Center of Italy (Rome, the capital) Friuli has often been considered as a forlorn, isolated corner. In fact, this region has always been a cross-road of relations, both proximal and distal. Leaving aside the long history of demographic movements (invasions, settlements, etc.), it can be noted that during the last century or so Friuli has been the locus of many Italian state personnel, civilian and especially military, because this was the more sensitive frontier, first

against Austria, and later – for a few years – against Yugoslavia and, beyond that, against the Communist world. Friuli was widely known among Italian males, mainly because they had spent some time here during their military service. After the second World War also many young American spent time here, since Friuli hosted a large American air base, at Aviano.

Another remarkable source of movement and distal relations is tourism, overwhelmingly Austrian and German, and targeted to the sea-side resorts. Here the Mediterranean comes closest to Central Europe.

In the last twenty or thirty years, a veritable explosion of “cultural” activities – shows, concerts, festivals, meetings, art exhibitions, etc. has been observed. Certainly, this brings to Friuli a large number of persons – actors, singers, authors, dancers, etc. from distant, often world-wide places. Without reliable data in this realm, it is hard to assess whether this region is above, below or just average, in “cultural consumption”; but the impression is that it is rather high. These activities show both distal and proximal features: the performers come from the whole world, but they deliver experiences of proximity to the public. In the cases of really big events, like rock concerts (Madonna, Springsteen, etc.) , the public comes also from distal places, both from other Italian regions but also from neighboring foreign areas.

Not irrelevant is the case of sport. Friulian teams in soccer (“Udinese”) and basketball (“Snaidero”) mostly play in the national leagues, and thus many Friulians travel to accompany the team in games in all of Italy, and many Italians come to Udine to see the games with the host. Sometimes, Udinese plays in European championship, and so Friulians go to see it abroad, and viceversa. Thus, such sports are the source of both distal and proximal relations. Probably superficial and short-lived, but not without social and cultural meaning. It is widely held that sports are a channel for international knowledge, understanding and participation.

I have neither hard data nor personal experiences in these fields. In this paper I shall stay on more safe grounds, on which I feel more reasonably acquainted, and I limit myself to the distal half of the total relations accruing to this region. I focus on what I think are some Friulian peculiarities. In the following I outline five spheres: 1) relations based on old history, resulting in the sense of belonging to the “Mitteleuropean” area; 2) political relations developing in the last quarter of the XX century, in the effort to build a “transfrontier region” in the narrower space between the mountains and the sea, i. e. the “Alpe Adria” concept; 3) social relations stemming from the massive traditional outmigration flows of Friulians, which has amounted to a real “diaspora”, but keeping relations with the place of origin; 4) the international outlook of Friulian economy, generating new, higher-level, temporary outmigration (“modern nomadism”); 5) the spectacular growth, in the last twenty years, of immigration from the rest of the world, and the building in Friuli of many new linguistic and cultural communities. In turn, this generates other outer, distal relations, from Friuli to the rest of the world.

In a final section, I scale down the horizon, zooming on an even smaller laboratory: I shall offer very concrete details on the distal relations that can be found in a village – the one I live in – that I suppose is representative of any other place in Friuli.

This paper is not based on a single, specific, new, ad-hoc research; it is a synthesis of some former studies<sup>1</sup> and the result of a life-long immersion in the daily flow of information pertaining this region, and by some participation in its life.

## **1. Relations based on old history and Friuli’s new “mitteleuropean” identity**

Some distal relations stem from long and deep roots. They have been nurtured by oral tradition, and can be still heard and seen in the name of places (toponymy) and of families. To

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<sup>1</sup> My first overview of Friuli is R. Strassoldo, B. Cattarinussi (ed.) *Friuli. la prova del terremoto*, Angeli, Milano, 1978. Two collections of abridged research papers are R. Strassoldo, *Sviluppo, ricostruzione, ambiente e Ricerche in Friuli*, Ribis, Udine, 1998; and R. Strassoldo, *Euregioni, Alp e Adria, Mitteleuropa. Prospettive dal Friuli*, Forum, Udine 2005

some (small) extent it is formally taught in school (local/regional history, "storia patria"). More recently (last fifty years) it has entered political rhetoric. The history of Friuli has been studied by scholars as never before, emphasizing the wide diversity of ethnic threads intertwining in this area, in turn invaded, conquered and settled since prehistoric times (Illyrians, Venets, Celts, Latins, Byzantines, Goths, Lombards (Longobards), Slovenes), and raided by a host of passing armies, from Quads and Marcomanns to Huns, Magyars, Turks, French and so on. Against the dominant, nationalistic/Italian view, of Friuli being basically a stronghold of the Latin civilization, after the fall of Fascism a quite different, "revisionist" history of Friuli has been worked out and promoted. Friuli is seen as shaped by the encounter of the three main European cultural stocks – the Latin, the German and the Slavic. Such unique feature of this area has become one of the main source of pride and identity of friulians. It started with the study of the Friulian language: underneath the dominant Latin component, the Celtic "substratum" (underlayer) was emphasized, linking it with similar languages in other parts of the Alpine arc (the "Retho-Romands" of the Swiss Grisons). The later influence, in different waves, of the German language was also noted, and some German-speaking small communities in the valleys of Carnia and the Canal (Canal del Ferro) attracted much interest among linguists and ethnologists. The cultural and political importance of the Longobards – up to recent times seen as mere barbarians, destroyers of the Latin civilization – was acknowledged. Their success in early Middle Ages, when the Duke of Forum Iulii (later Cividale) seized the crown of the Italian Kingdom, and even – for a short time – the throne of the Empire, was celebrated. Another source of pride in the relations of Friuli with the outer spaces was the Patriarchate of Aquileia, which for some centuries was basically a German fief, immediately linked with the Empire. The Patriarchs and their ruling class came from the German world. More in general, the Patriarchate was celebrated (perhaps in epical and mythical terms) as an international, far-flung entity, straddling the Alps, from Como to Budapest, attracting people from many countries, and drawing attention from all European quarters.

This revision of old history of this region slowly gained respect with the birth of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia as a special autonomous region, in 1963. One of its first cultural event (1969) was a scholarly meeting aimed at the rehabilitation of the Longobard rule. Instead, the Celtic component became the main stock of the rhetoric of a new political current, the Movimento Friuli; a motive later taken up by another movement, the Lega Lombarda, which gained a remarkable success also in Friuli, since the 90s' (as Lega Nord-Friuli).

Another strand of the "historical revisionism" is the revival of the "Mitteleuropa". The whole affair was started with Claudio Magris' bachelor thesis at the University of Torino on "Mitteleuropean" literature (1963). This word and concept – *Mitteleuropa* – was unmistakably German, and with Pan-germanic connotations; but this very successful work made it legitimate in Italy. A couple of years later, a group of intellectuals in Gorizia founded – with the Region support – the Institute of Mitteleuropean Cultural Meetings. Since then it has worked on up to our days, organizing yearly a main international meeting and minor activities, drawing to Gorizia many hundreds of scholars from Austria and Germany, but also from the Communist Central-eastern Europa, Poland and Rumania included; and, of course, from Italy. In the seventies, the severe political and social troubles in this country revived a certain nostalgia for the "good, old times" of Austrian (Hapsburg) rule in Lombardy, Veneto and Tuscany. In Italy, *Mitteleuropa* took on a very positive connotations.

This mood caught on also at a more popular level. In 1974 a "Mitteleuropean Movement" started in the formerly "Austrian" or "Imperial" (south-eastern) part of Friuli. Since then it stages a yearly festival, celebrating initially Franz Josef's imperial anniversary, and later re-christened as "the festival of Mitteleuropean peoples"; where folkloric groups and bands and common people flock in tens of thousands, from all countries of central-eastern Europe; specially Austria, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary. After the first years, when the movement was surrounded by suspicion and contempt by officialdom and political forces, it gained wide recognition, respect, and eventually was officially endorsed by regional and even State authorities. The leaders of the

movement/association have developed a host of other “para -diplomatic” activities, bringing them all over in Central -Eastern countries, attending high -level meetings and ceremonies; and calling officials and scholars in cultural meetings in Friuli<sup>2</sup>.

Thanks to these two movements – the first “high-brow” and intellectual, and the other initially “low-brow”, popular and practical – Friuli prides itself to be the cradle of a renewed Mitteleuropa spirit. Friuli sees itself no longer, as in old nationalistic rhetoric, as the “bulwark of Latin civilization against the German and Slav barbarians”, but a full member of the family of Central European peoples. It does not consider itself as a solid Italian (“Italianissimi”), but an amalgam of different cultures. The Region Friuli -Venezia Giulia bases its identity on its ethnic diversity. The presence of linguistic minorities is considered the basis of its “special -autonomy” status, different from other Italian regions. In 2007 it adopted the four languages historically spoken here – Italian, Slovenian, Friulian and German – as official. For some other reasons, to be mentioned in a following section, in its offices the public can see signs in some other languages – English, French and Spanish, to underline the international outlook of this region.

A final remark can be recalled, concerning the Friulians as a linguistic/ethnic minority. The matter is complex, and not to be sufficiently developed in this context. In a first phase, between 1945 and 1985, some “friulian nationalists” hoped to turn eventually Friuli into a solidly friulian-speaking Region, more autonomous from Rome and wholly separated from Trieste. This ambition was finally abandoned, and the extant political -administrative order (the unitary Friuli -Venezia) was accepted. The leaders concentrated on merely ethnic and linguistic matters. Even the historical-geographical Friuli, from the Livenza to Isonzo, was redefined as a multilingual community. The “Friulanist” leaders sought relations with other such minorities all over Europe; mainly other Ladins in the Dolomite area and in the Swiss Grisons, but also with Occitans and Bretons in France, the “Celts” in the British islands, and Basques, Catalans and Galicians in Spain. The Friulianists joined the European -wide movements for the survival and development of linguistic minorities, well sponsored by the European authorities in Bruxelles and Strasbourg. Friulian leaders travelled visiting their distal colleagues, and in turn the latter were called to bring their experiences and inspirations in Friuli. The building of a local identity became an aspect of globalization<sup>3</sup>.

## **2. Relations based on cross -border (trans-frontier, international) political interest: the lost utopia of “Alpe Adria” and new prospectives.**

The international outlook involved regional political leaders, since the birth of the Region (1963). The “twinning” of towns, the meeting between local authorities and citizens of different countries – a policy launched in the Fifties by the Council of Europe – was sponsored. The Region, as already mentioned, supported Mitteleuropean Meetings Institute, and founded other bodies in the same vein, like the Institute of International Sociology, again in Gorizia, and the ISDEE, Institute for Study and Documentation on Eastern Europe, in Trieste; both in 1968. Some 15 years later (1982) it funded the United World College, in Duino, drawing here every year two hundreds of youngsters from all over the world.

The contacts with immediate neighbours preceded the birth of the Region and were continued with more energy. It was still important to work for the healing of the history’s wounds caused by conflicts with Austria and Yugoslavia. For about ten years the contacts between the politicians of Friuli- V.G., Carinthia, Slovenia and Croatia were anecdotal and sparse, but they

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<sup>2</sup> On this movement see the detailed study by R. Strassoldo, *L’Associazione Culturale mitteleuropa, 1974 -2004*, in R. Strassoldo, *Euroregioni, Alpe Adria, Mitteleuropa*, cit., pp. 187 - 210. A related paper, on Mitteleuropa, has been published in Slovenia: R. Strassoldo, *Meje in sistemi. Sociološke misli o Srednji Evropi*, in *Srednja Evropa*, Založba Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 1991

<sup>3</sup> Earlier works on these matters are collected in R. Strassoldo, *Lingua, identità, autonomia. Ricerche e riflessioni sul Friuli*, Ribis, Udine 1996. Among the later papers see R. Strassoldo, *Lingua, Identità, Autonomia: l’evoluzione della “questione friulana” dal 1945 ad oggi*, in “Plurilinguismo. Contatti di lingue e culture”, n. 9, 2002

eventually coalesced into a formal organization, bringing together 7 regional governments, three Austrian (the Länder Carinthia, Styria, Upper Austria), two Yugoslav federal Republics (Slovenia and Croatia), two Italian Regions (Veneto and Friuli-V. G.); and two observer-status members, (the German Land Bavaria and the Austrian Land Salzburg). It was given the name of Working Community Alpe Adria, founded at Venice in 1978. The official goals were the cooperation in promoting common interests in various administrative fields (territorial planning, infrastructures, environment, tourism, social services, et c.). Informally, the aim was to further mutual knowledge, exchange information, building trust and familiarity among the involved persons (political leaders, high-officials); to make normal the relations among administrators across political/state/national borders. It was a very original and bold project, considering the many wide differences in political, legal, administrative, economic, cultural and linguistic spheres. For some years the ARGE AA enjoyed a remarkable impetus. At the beginning, it was an expression of rather proximal, not distal relations, because it relied on contiguity, on good neighbouring. It looked like a mere miniature version of Mitteleuropa. But the idea caught on, and many other regions asked to join: two from Italy (Lombardia and Emilia-Romagna) one from Austria (Burgenland) and 4 from Hungary (Baranya, Somogy, Vas and Zala). Some Czechoslovakia provinces also showed interest. In Friuli Alpe Adria became a common phrase; the name was given to important structures, like the motorway from Udine to Tarvis, a major commercial center, a bank, and a biking trail, from Tarvis down to Grado. All sort of socio-cultural initiatives (art, sport, youth, education, etc.) adopted the Alpe Adria name and logo.

Unfortunately, the geographical enlargement was not matched by the growth of its effectiveness. One reason was the legal, administrative and organizational difficulties in operating such an affair, involving so many different bodies; the second was the lack of concrete support from the respective central governments. In the tenth anniversary of Alpe Adria, meeting in 1988 at Millstatt, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all the concerned States acknowledged the positive goals and the good work done by the Regions and pledged support (The Millstatt Declaration), but with no substantial results.

A paramount factor, in the decline of Alpe Adria, has been the radical changes in the geopolitical situation: the collapse a year later (1989) of communism, the disintegration of Yugoslavia (1991-2), the membership of Austria into the European Union (1995), following some years later (2004 and 2007) by most other Eastern countries, from the Baltic to the Balkans.

In the meanwhile, in 1992 the Italian government had tried to enter as a major player in the new political game of Central Europe, launching the Central European Initiative (CEI, or InCE). It certainly was a distal affair, ranging from Poland to Ucraina and to Rumania but it concerned only the central government(s), despite its headquarters in Trieste. It seems that the CEI has followed the fate of Alpe-Adria: Italy's ambitious attempt to become a leading force – political and economic – in Central Europe has foundered, for reasons lying outside the scope of this paper.

Since the Nineties, Alpe-Adria essentially fell into slumber. Paradoxically, this ghost in 2006 ballooned with a new name, “Alpe-Adria-Pannonia”, stressing its further enlargement into the East. But the fascination of the idea has waned. Some other projects were devised, to supersede Alpe Adria; a more compact model, with only two Italian regions (Veneto and Friuli-V.G.), one Austrian (Carinthia), two Croatian counties (Istria), and parts of Slovenia. This idea was very dear to the heart of the then Governor of Friuli V.G., Riccardo Illy, and generated much political discussions and activities. Some remarkable scholarly studies were worked out; but so far in vain. The only unquestionable point was that Trieste should be the headquarters of the new body. Even a new proper name is still lacking: it is still talked about as simply as “Euroregione”, or the “Euroregione of Villa Manin” (the place a protocol has been signed in 2006). The latest name minted is “Euroregione senza confini” (“Euroregion without borders”), which is logically contradiction (evoking some classic, philosophical definitions of Mitteleuropa). Others have suggested the name “Euroadria”, throwing outboard the reference to the Alps. So far, the idea is wrecked by the refusal of Slovenia to join, for different reasons, and the covert opposition of

Carinthia to let in Styria. In the latest days (May 2001), the regional leader of the powerful Lega Nord-Friuli, speaking also for his colleague, the Governor of Veneto, has suggested to forget the Eastern possible partners – Slovenia and Croatia – and drastically change the orientation the other way, to the West (Trentino and Lombardy), and specially to the North, to Bavaria. So, in Friuli, the ideas in these affairs - in which direction to strengthen relations and ties - seem to be billowing in the thinnest air.

The hard fact is that since the joining of Austria, in 1995, into the European Union, and later of all the other Central-Eastern countries, most of the reasons originally promoting the ideas of Alpe-Adria and of Mitteleuropa have faded away. All these spaces have become parts of the same social, economic and political system, the European Union. There is no much reason to establish, in a general and durable fashion, networks of relations with public administrators and political leaders in this area, and even less to build “planometric” bodies, with a defined territories, new borders and new centers. Any local administrator who has some interest with a counterpart in any other country of EU can just go over and deal bilaterally, informally with him; and if insuperable difficulties arise, the national and European instances can be called in. Borders are less and less an important factor, in a Europe that strives to ever more perfect Union. Transfrontier Euroregions have never been a darling in Bruxelles and Strasbourg offices; they seem to be fallen into final disgrace. Nowadays, the perspective (or fashion) looks at two spatial extremes: the Macroregions, made up by whole countries (such as the Baltic, the Danubian and the Mediterranean macroregions); and the GECT, smaller and temporary Groups of Transfrontier Economic Cooperation, which is basically conceived as association of public bodies (not necessarily Regions) to develop specific projects and administer funds from the Union; something like the “temporary associations of enterprises” to win and implement contracts.

Waiting for some concrete effects of all this, the Regional Government of Friuli -V.G. is entertaining some new ideas, like establishing more official, public relations (informal regional foreign politics) with the rest of the Balkan Peninsula, beyond the neighbouring Croatia. All these countries - Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia (FIROM), Albania and Bulgaria - are areas sorely needing assistance and cooperation, and Friulian entrepreneurs, and even public bodies, are already operating there. Some feel that the Region Friuli-V.G. can play a useful role in this direction.

Another, novel idea, is the “Adriatic Euroregion”, initiated in 2004 by the Region Molise and launched in 2006 by the Marche; both placed in the middle of the Adriatic coast of Italy. The aim is to twine together all the regions and local authorities not only along the Adriatic shores, but also down the Jonian sea. This organization would then be a part of a future Mediterranean macro-region. It is too early to say whether this project has some chance. At any rate, Friuli -V.G. has joined this one too.

### **3. Relations with the “Friulian diaspora in the world”**

In history, Friuli has always generated emigration flows, in all directions. In earlier centuries, Friulians – specially from the Carnia mountains - moved seasonally to work, both towards the North (Central Europe) and South (Venice). After 1870, due to a combination of factors, like Malthusian unbalance, agricultural crises, the availability of safer and cheaper long-distance travelling (steamships and trains) and the opening of overseas lands, the migratory flows swelled enormously. Friuli ranked at the top among the Italian regions, in the amount of emigration, at the turn of the previous two centuries. Right before the Great War, more than 80.000 Friulians, about 15% of the total, 1 person in every family, were making a life in Central European countries. Other destinations for migrants were the North-Western European, more developed countries (Switzerland, France and Belgium), and Latin America. Between the wars the flows resumed; new directions were toward the Italian industrial regions (Lombardy and Piedmont). After the second World War, Friulian flocked again abroad, within Europe, in North America

(specially Canada), but also to South Africa and Australia. It is reckoned that in a century, 1870-1970, 400.000 Friulians left their home and settled permanently in the rest of the world; and it is estimated that there are 4 million people of Friulian descent; four times than the present population of Friuli. Of course, the large majority of migrants assimilated in the host societies, but a meaningful minority still retains some elements of ancestral culture and identity: speechways, songs, customs, tastes, ways of life, memories. In many places, where the friulian migrants live close by, ethnic communities were formed and survive the passing of generations (usually the ethnic heritage is shunned by the children of first-comers, and may attract some interest in the second or third generation). Whenever possible, the migrants come back home during vacations, to visit relatives, friends and homeplaces; and every village and town in Friuli has members that live faraway. Some of them manage to come back definitively, and it has been observed that such people have the strongest attachment for their homeland. Most of the leaders of the Movimento Friuli come from long experiences abroad.

The diaspora communities often invite some representatives of Friulian culture (singers, dancer groups, poets etc.) to perform in their clubs. In the early Fifties such requests grew so strong as to inspire some intellectuals to set up an agency to respond. In 1953 the Ente Friuli nel Mondo (Agency for Friuli in the World) was instituted, to help the survival of Friulian culture in the rest of the world.

It is difficult to assess the number of “real”, solid Friulians living far from their homeland. More precise is the number of their formal associations, “the Fogolars” (fireplaces), because the Ente keeps regular contacts with them. They amount to more than 200. A monthly journal is circulated worldwide, with about 4000 subscribers; it is estimated that as many families are strongly interested in the life of the “Friuli in the world”. In this last year, projects to link electronically (via the Web) the Fogolar and individual participants has been launched. The Ente organizes a yearly “comeback” festival for migrants; the participation ranges from 1500 to 2000. In the last weeks (May 2010) a prestigious villa in the countryside near Udine was outfitted as the “headquarters of Friulian migrants”; a gift by a group of older successful migrants.

It is worthwhile to note that in Friuli-V.G. there are a few smaller other organizations, besides the Ente here described. The second one in dimension accrues to migrants from the Western part of Friuli (the province of Pordenone). A third one deals with migrants from Venezia Giulia (“Giuliani nel mondo”), and a fourth beckons to the migrants from the Slovene-speaking areas.

Most Friulian migrants started out as manual workers (farmers, brickmakers and bricklayers, stone cutters, carpenters, miners and such); but many worked their way up the socio-economic ladder. Some reached top positions in their new countries; entrepreneurs, high officials, politicians. Friuli is happy to congratulate these eminent sons, and they are happy to come back to receive prizes and celebrations. Some Friulian Fogolars have large and posh headquarters, such as in Toronto and Vancouver and some in Argentina and Brazil. The contract for the construction of the new skyscraper on the Ground Zero to replace the Twin Towers has been won by a Friulian builder, who came to the US sixty years ago as a humble bricklayer. Professional success has not smothered his pride in his ancestral identity.

In the last years a new generation of Fogolars have sprouted, in such places like Barcellona, Miami, Prague, Novosibirsk and Hong Kong. They are not founded and funded by poor manual workers, but by young urban professionals, highly schooled and successful. Such Fogolars are less interested in old songs, tales and ballets than in the promotion of interests of Friulian economy. The new policy of the Ente is to turn the Fogolars and the “Friulians in the world” as ambassadors and representatives of modern industrial Friuli.

It is not possible for me to assess whether the distal relations between Friuli and its offspring living all over the world is more, less or just average, in comparison of the countless other diasporas that exists everywhere. An indicator of the peculiar strength of those ties in the case of Friuli appeared right after the 1976 earthquake. At that time, many countries around the

world responded with exceptional speed and generosity. A statistical analysis of the phenomenon showed that the amount of help donated correlates with the presence of Friulian communities<sup>4</sup>.

Diaspora is a normal condition, rather than an exception. Most countries, old and new, have sent a sizeable quota of their sons living in many other countries. World society is very different from what it looks like in geographical charts. The percentage of people living far from their original country may be relatively low, but their social, economic and political meaning is high.

#### **4. The globalization of Friuli's economy and relations with the modern nomads**

In the last fifty years, Friuli has grown out of its traditional, peasant backwardness and taken off into the industrial sector; its economy has become export-lead and international-oriented, in the line of the rest of North-Eastern Italy. In the last few years, Friuli is ranking at the very top of the classification of Italian regions according to their export ratio (between export and import in international trade); of course not in absolute quantities, since Friuli-V. is one of the tiniest regions in Italy (2% of Italy). The picture is as follows (in the pre-crisis year 2007): Friuli-V.G 200 (exports are twice than imports), Abruzzo 175, Marche 171, Emilia-Romagna 158, Toscana 130, Veneto 128, Piemonte 123. The sectors more involved in export are machinery, with a ratio of 412, electric apparatus 312, plastics 250, transport machinery (200) and beverages (200). The more important markets for exports are the Americas (300: mostly central-southern), the Far East (200) and Europe (180). The internationalization of the Friulian economy also involves agribusiness (specially wine and hams) and the coastal tourism (Lignano), and is eased by the contiguity of Friuli-V.G to two states (Austria and Slovenia) and proximity to many other states in central-eastern Europe.

International-oriented enterprises like Zanussi-Eletrolux (home appliances) Snaidero (kitchens), Rizzani-De Eccher (building), Danieli (steel plants) and many others routinely send their personnel all over the world. These people fly out from the regional airport at Ronchi dei Legionari, and the neighborhoods of Venice and of Treviso; it can be guessed-estimated that every year 200-300.000 flights are for business or work (no data broken down in this fashion are available). Some businessmen, specially in the early stage of their career, are constantly on the move: career (curriculum) is linked etimologically to run (lat. curro) and to cart (currus), and social mobility is correlated to physical mobility. In modern societies a new breed of nomads has arisen; pulled rather by achievement than pushed by tradition or poverty. A number of businessmen and workers dwell for some length of time in distant places, and bring home a variety of experiences from their stay abroad: knowledge and appreciation of foreign, distant cultures, and sometimes also spouses. I am impressed by the number of persons with international background that speaks up in social circumstances, in this region. In an older study (1987-1992) it was found that almost everyone in Friuli has been abroad, for work but even more for other reasons (mostly tourism); almost a third has been only in 1 other country, 20% in two, 14% in three, but almost half (48.3%) has been in four or more countries. In the average, in Friuli people has spent almost two years abroad, mostly for reasons other than work. Similar results obtain in other North-eastern Italian regions<sup>5</sup>.

The "modern nomads" and "high-class migrants", with important jobs who stay for long period abroad but keep strong roots in Friuli and build "fogolar" are mentioned also in the previous paragraph.

#### **5. Interior globalization: the 70 new ethnic communities in Friuli**

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<sup>4</sup> G. Delli Zotti, *La solidarietà internazionale*, in R. Strassoldo, B. Cattarinussi, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-212

<sup>5</sup> R. Strassoldo, N. Tessarin, *Le radici del localismo. Indagine sociologica sull'appartenenza territoriale* in Friuli, Reverdito, Trento, 1992, pp. 94-99



In the last thirty years, Friuli has turned into a place of immigration. Like emigration, some waves or trickles of immigration has occurred in all former times; mostly in higher echelons: skilled manual trades, artisans, (handicraft), administrators, businessmen, not to speak of rulers and invaders from the German world, Slovene new settlers in the central plains following the Hungarian raids that had wasted this strip, and the gipsies coming from the Balkans (since the XV century). In XX century the more relevant immigration was from Southern Italy, due to the growing role of the Italian state (civil and especially military personnel).

Since the 80s picture reversed completely, with the stop of the emigration flows, the demographic decline (natality dropped suddenly to 1.3, the worst rate in Italy after Liguria, and one of the worst in the world) and the need to fill jobs opened by economic development; jobs mostly of menial level, shunned by the weaker and ever-more educated younger cohorts. Today, Friuli-V.G. hosts almost 100.000 recent immigrants, amounting to about 8% of the total population; which is the percentage that can be found in most advanced European countries. The immigrants come from dozens of countries, and the languages spoken has been estimated in about 70. By far the strongest groups come from Rumania and Albania and the other countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe (Poland, Russia, Ucraina, Moldova, and the whole Balcan peninsula). The guest-workers from Africa, Asia and Latin America, being much fewer but much more visible, endow Friuli with a quite new cosmopolitan and multicultural atmosphere.

So far, no serious social problems in this field have surfaced. No complaints of the immigrant minorities have been aired; their representatives are slowly finding places in institutions (parties, trade unions, local administrations, etc.). There is a meeting place (not really a Mosque) for Muslims in Udine, but it is estimated that about only 4% of the Muslim population of Friuli attend it; and the Rumanian Orthodoxes are hosted in a small church in the center of Udine. The large majority of political forces support positive, inclusive policies toward them; no spontaneous popular demonstrations against them have been reported. Overt "racist and xenophobic" groups do exist, but are very small, and so far no violence against the immigrants has occurred. However the remarkable growth of the Lega Nord is a cue of some deeper unease and worries, specially in the lower social layers and concerning specifically the Muslim minority. The potential challenge to the age-old Christian roots and dominance raises some alarm in Friuli, as in all rest of Western Europe, and even among groups who in the past would not care much about Christianity. It is more a matter of cultural tradition and identity, than of religion.

It is difficult to assess the real dimensions of this phenomenon, due to its novelty and its speed. One problem is the drastic slowing down of the integration and assimilation processes. In former times, long-distance migration usually entailed the merging of the immigrants in the host society, the loss of the ethnic traits and conformity to the local culture; the assimilation of the minority into the dominant majority. Today, communication and transport technologies favor the upkeep of ties with the country (nation, ethnic group, community etc.) of origin. The immigrant can talk over the phone and PC daily with relatives and friends at home, they exchange pictures and videos, and can go back home frequently, thanks to the ease and relative cheapness of travelling by car, bus or airplane. The perspective is of a post-modern society where several dozens ethnic/national communities, different in language, customs, rites, religion, values and such traits, live side by side; keeping their roots, identities, loyalties and point of reference outside, and faraway, from the physical space they share.

This condition is not unknown in history: regions, cities, states, empires were made up by many different cultural communities. But this was depended essentially on relative isolation and self-sufficiency of the communities, and a strong central power, able to control the conflicts and keep peace. In our society, ubiquitous communication media, total interdependence and claim for recognition and equal status for all groups set new conditions, which makes it difficult to guess the future. The cultural realm has been "disembedded" from the physical space, the "place" has been displaced by the communication flows, and this must be coped with by man in this new millennium. Basically, what is required is a high level tolerance for diversity and complexity; but

some core social values (such as those promulgated by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights) must be shared by each and all groups, lest tolerance decays down into relativism, indifference and moral nihilism, and Hobbesian conditions obtain.

## 6. Some homely illustrations and conclusion

The call for paper for this seminar stressed the development of conceptual and theoretical models on socio-spatial relations. I must confess that for almost twenty years I have not systematically updated my competence in this field, going back sometimes only when I was asked to contribute a paper to meetings on similar theme<sup>6</sup>. So let me conclude with a note quite different from the call; not abstractions but “thick descriptions”. I offer an empirical sample of distal relations in a small place.

I live in a village of 800 people, 50 minutes by car from here (Koper). Skipping my own home, I shall start from the one in front of mine. When I was a kid, the man living there was a handyman coming from the Bassano area, about 140 km from here. Many peasant families from Veneto were moved into my village, after the Great War, when this area was detached from Austria and annexed to Italy. They quickly assimilated, and became the backbone of this community and parish. Having qualified as a skilled worker in a large nearby chemical plant, Torviscosa, in the Fifties this man was sent by his company for a couple of years to work in a similar plant in Kampsas, South Africa. He had four sons, my closest playmates. Then the first one, Luciano, when he came to age he migrated permanently to Vancouver, Canada, where he became a skilled worker in a chemical industry, and married there a girl, Adrienne, of recent Scot descent (a MacCormick). After growing two children, he divorced and married Irene, a lady from Switzerland, who runs a small but international fleet of camper for rent. He must have been rather successful, because he also travels extensively, literally all over the world (he seems to have seen everything), and comes back at least once every year to visit his old friends and especially his widowed mother, in the home in front of mine. He has not joined the large Friulian community in Vancouver and not reared his children in this culture, but when he comes here he speaks a fluent Friulian.

The second son, Pino, moved to Caracas, Venezuela, where he started a car-repairing shop. He married a girl from England, had two children, then divorced. The daughter lives close to her mother in England, the son Stefano lived with his father, but since a few years Stefano has migrated-back to his grandmother's family home, and is now re-assimilated into the local community. Pino seldom comes from Venezuela to see his mother, but at least he bequeathed his son to live with her.

The third son, Mauro, enrolled in the Italian air force, in the maintenance and repair of aircraft sector. For a number of years he has been stationed in a Nato air base in Aachen, where he brought up his family (three children). Since a few years he has been stationed again in a base in Friuli, he resumed as a prominent role in the community life (specially in the costume festival/parade staged here, and he looks gorgeous dressed up as a burly Medieval patrician). He has invested much (also in manual work, as the Friulians usually do) in the restoration of an old farmhouse nearby.

The fourth son, Sandro, graduated and works in Udine as an architect. Is the only one who did not leave Friuli.

In the next house on my right, in 1947 a young lady, Lilli, married “Tiny” Williams, a Scottish officer in the Allied corps camped here to keep peace in the border divergences of Italy with Yugoslavia. They had two daughters, Cookie/Cuki (Christine) and Lella, who were reared in Great Britain and in Bruxelles. Then they divorced; Cookie stayed with his father in Scotland, and married an Arab gentleman (“sheik”); Lella came back with her mother in Friuli. After a failed local

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. R. Strassoldo, *The meaning of localism in the global world*, in K. Nyri (ed.), *A sense of place. The global and the local in mobile communication*, Passage, Wien, 2005, pp. 43-59

marriage, she married Paul, a Belgian engineer working in the IAEA, the ONU organization for atomic affairs, in Vienna. They reside there, but almost every weekend and on every longer holiday they drive down (five hours) to see her mother and tend her large home and garden.

A cousin of Lella, Alexander, who spent most of his life in Bonn and who deals professionally in pre-modern paintings, having recently moved to Vienna to work at the Dorotheum, was inspired to buy an old farmhouse in this village. It has restructured it as a second- and week-end home, but outfitted it also as a B&B, with a dozen accommodations.

Also another family – this one coming about one century ago from Trieste – has converted some parts of their estate as a guesthouse, aimed at German customers. This family has extensive relations in Germany, because it has been running, for generations, a firm exporting Italian wine to that country (trading Italian and Mediterranean stuff to Mitteleuropa has been a traditional activity in Trieste). They also run a wine-producing farm in this village.

Speaking of wine, it is worthwhile to mention that also a much bigger operator in this business is virtually present in this village, Gianni Zonin. The headquarters of his firm (rather an empire) and family are in Gambellara, Vicenza. In addition to his older family properties, he has created three large wine-growing estates in Friuli, the one in my village being, with 450 hectares, the smallest one. He also runs estates in the Chianti (Tuscany) and in Sicily. He even runs one in Virginia, USA; and has sent his son and heir to be educated in California to refine his competence in the international wine business. It seems that he is playing with the idea opening operations also in China.

Dwelling a bit more on the village economy, two cases of distal orientation can be mentioned. Gigi, coming from a peasant family, soon opened a shop for agricultural equipment. He represents the Swedish multinational Alfa-Laval, and had the opportunity to participate some meetings at the headquarters. But he also repairs machinery and trades in both new and old ones. Since the Sixties, he developed business with Yugoslav farmers: first those right across the border, in the Nova Gorica area, and then in Istria, and in Slavonia and then in Serbia. Since the flaring of the war of the Nineties, those contacts have declined sharply; but in his yard I still usually find customers from nearby Slovenia and especially Istria.

The other major businessman in the village is Ermes. He runs a yard of construction materials. He is strong and ambitious enough to keep stands in trade fairs as far as Milan. But more interesting is his line of operation with Turkey, which he sometimes tours and from he imports all sort of stuff; from old worked stones to clay vases and even to antique, folkloric furnishings. Lately he has diversified into agriculture; he has endowed his daughter, Simona, with a small farm where she grows lavender, olive-trees and peaches. The sight and scent of this plot is absolutely Provençal.

But there are many other evidences of globality in my village. Since about 15 years ago a Chinese family settled in this village; the ladies run a good Chinese restaurant and the men work in nearby “chair district” of Manzano. Another eating joint offers Mexican-type food, mixed with local specialties. A young mason, Valeriano, has met and married Constance, a pitch-black African of stunning beauty and grace. They have borne three brown children which have become the darlings of the parish (the family tends in their spare time the village church, and Constance is a very devout Catholic). A member of another religious family became a priest and soon chose to be a missionary in Bolivia. The former village postmaster, an unmarried lady, spent most of her income in two ways: travelling wide (in inclusive tour packages) and supporting charities. She supported financially an African boy through education in seminars, who sometimes came to visit her. Another citizen of this village, the heir of a militant Communist family, has married a girl from Russia, of statuesque proportions and with almost white hair and skin. In the village lives since a long time an American lady, and at least four Hungarian girls; two are married, and two work in bars. Often in these joints one can see and hear young and adult workers who clearly come from the Balkans. When I need some repairs in my property, I usually deal with young men from Albania or Rumania. Once I was serviced by a truckdriver from Congo, who in his country had just graduated in international relations. He found more promising to drive a truck in Friuli than seek a

job in Kinshasa. He did not say, but he probably also had problems with the incumbent government there. Some ladies that care for elder local people come from Poland and other Eastern European countries; they go back every few weeks, because there they also have their own families to care for. Another one is a old-time refugee from the Novi Sad area. Two girls and their fiancées, displaced there (the Banat) from their Serbian Krajina homeland during the Yugoslavian wars of the 90's, now work in the my village gasoline pump. A lady comes from Bosnia, married and work in his husband's flower nursery ; she is affectionately nicknamed "Ms. Medjugorje", because she has been converted to Catholicism by the "apparitions" in that village. Most of my first-grade classmates have worked in the building sector, with Italian global firms engaged in big projects in Africa and in the Middle East (Iran and Saudi Arabia ). One of them has a daughter that studied languages at the university of Venice, majoring in Hebrew. Most of the time she does academic work in Jerusalem. Gigi, the man I mentioned above, has a nephew who became an engineer with Danieli and Mans an office of his firm in Hong Kong; he is one of the founders of the local Fogolar. He often flies back, to see his relatives. His wife is an unusually tall Chinese lady, very elegant, perfectly bred in English culture.

I suspect there are other such cases in my immediate life-world, because I am not updated with the goings-on in the village, specially in younger cohorts. I suppose that this is only a cross-section of what one can find in any other village of my region, and probably any other region of advanced countries. I am not sure how this can be translated into theoretical models about localism and globalism, beyond the platitude that any place in advanced, mobile and communicative society is a crossroads of far-flung relations, a node of a global flows. Nevertheless, it still continues to be also a distinctive place, a community in which locals keeps pride and identity, as testified by the number of associations (one being called "Pro Loco") and the many communal activities ("festas") they stage. Proximal and distal, local and global are truly the Cusano's *coincidentia oppositorum*, two extremes that coincide, two faces of the same coin, the very zest of our postmodern society.