

Structure of the House and Courtyard in Friuli Proposal for a Glossary

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Abstract. Houses (and courtyards, as houses in Friuli were rarely built in isolation, being usually part of a group of buildings used partly as dwellings and partly for rural purposes) have always been important in Friulian culture. In the building sector, a series of trades (bricklayers, carpenters, joiners, etc.) and a very precise and detailed terminology on structures, materials and so on, were established in Friuli.

The study presented in this contribution aims to give an initial answer to the question: do houses, courtyards and rural buildings in Friuli have their own ethnically specific identity and precise terminological Friulian language glossary, or are they affected by other factors unrelated to ethnic specificity and the Friulian language?

Key words. Friulian, rural constructions, linguistic minority, glossary, terminology.

1. Introduction. In Friuli, the house was rarely isolated; on the contrary, it was generally found within a nucleus of houses and other rural constructions. Houses and courtyards have always been important in Friulian culture, so much so that it was said that the Friulians had the *mâl dal modon* – the “brick obsession”¹ – alluding to their

desire to build houses. In the field of construction, a series of trades (bricklayers, carpenters, etc.) and a very precise and detailed vocabulary of structures, materials and so on became established in Friuli.

The question that prompted us to undertake the study, and which we are presenting in this paper, is therefore

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¹ The expressions *mâl dal modon* (brick obsession) more or less jokingly refers to a kind of illness/mania for house building.

the following: do houses, courtyards and rural buildings in Friuli have their own identity with a specific glossary linked to ethnicity or to the Friulian language, or are they affected by other factors unrelated to ethnic specificity or to the Friulian language?

In this regard, we must remember that Friuli has been a border region since Roman times, especially from a language point of view (it borders on both the Slavic and German languages), and has seen languages and peoples mix many times. This variety of languages still exists there today, with the neo-Latin languages (Friulian and Italian) lying alongside the Slavic language (Val Resia and Valli del Natisone) and Germanic language (Val Canale and the German-speaking language islands of Carnia, i.e. Sauris, Timau, Sappada). Within this context, local populations have been able to develop their own complex, articulate and original civilisation, even though they have found themselves in the midst of difficult historical situations, which have affected their social and cultural base.

The Friulian civilisation, born and developed over more than 2000 years, has clearly manifested its uniqueness in its use of the Friulian language. This language, although spoken by a small number of people, has always been in contact with other languages and although now, with globalisation, all languages tend to lose many of their characteristics, Friulian remains a living language.

In reality, it is not easy to establish the precise number of people who still speak Friulian, due to their being a

linguistic rather than ethnic minority. However, a reliable estimate puts this number at between 500-700,000 people (Leclerc 2011; Cisilino 2004) of the 1.2 million inhabitants of Friuli Venezia Giulia (ISTAT 2010).

The Friulian language was born as a continuation and evolution of the popular and peasant Latin of Aquileia, mixed with linguistic elements coming from the Celtic language spoken by those who already inhabited this geographical area. When we speak of Aquileian Latin, we refer to the Latin of the colony of Aquileia (founded in 181 BC), which was rapidly influenced by Celtic words and language in both vocabulary and phonetics, becoming a different Latin and later a Neo-Latin language. The evolution from the Latin of Aquileia to Friulian took place in the period from the 4th century to about the 10th century.

At that time, the Friulian language must already have had structure for it to have absorbed the Slavic populations, called to repopulate the areas of the *Vastata Hungarorum*, and subsequently resist the German language of the patriarchs (almost all German) and the many elements of German, Venetian and Italian that entered the Friulian language, without changing completely. Friulian, as it is known, obtained legal recognition as a minority language with the Italian Law 482/99, and has a standardised spelling regulated by the Regional Law 15/96 (for an analysis of the body of legislation, see Angerer and Favret 2011).

In Friuli, therefore, for centuries it was normal for all the workers

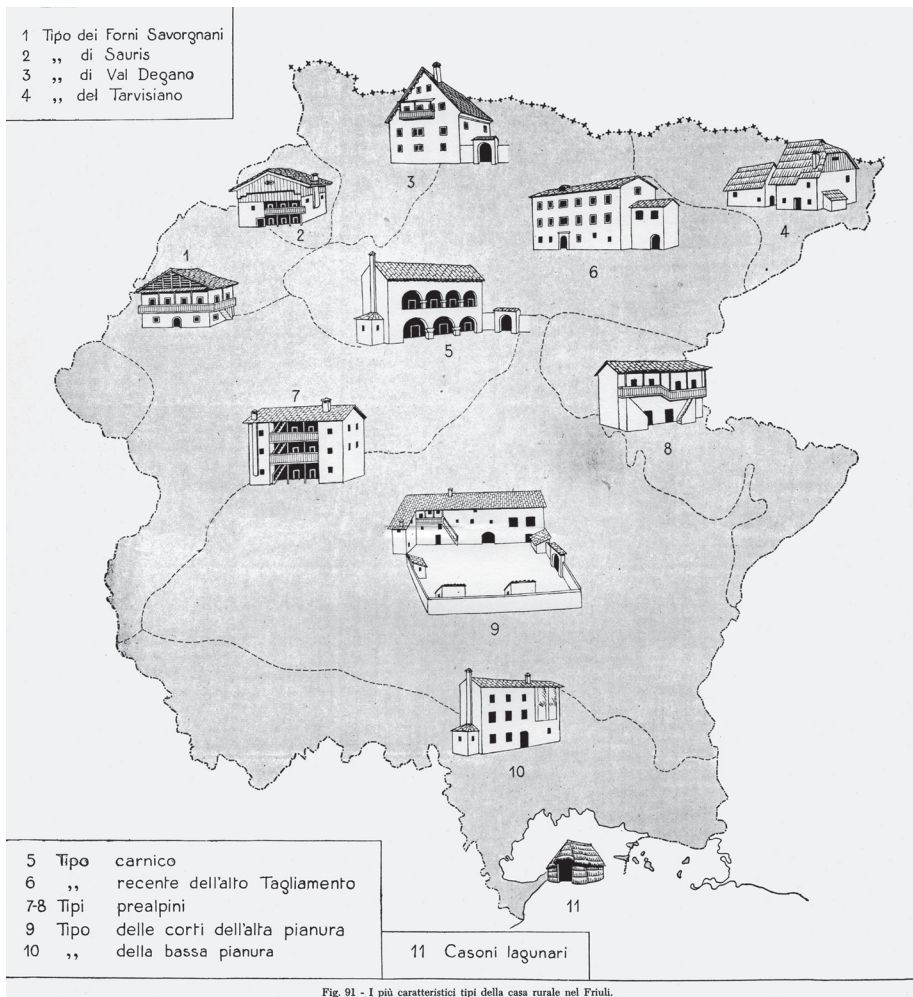


Figure 1. Scarin's classification of houses in Friuli (1943).

who built houses, palaces and towns to use the Friulian language, and this gave rise to a rich vocabulary of terms, used to denominate structures, materials and work tools. It should also be remembered that Friuli has always been a land of great builders and of workers and craftsmen skilled

in finishing work, skills which the Friulians of the past brought with them to the countries they emigrated to and to the places they went to work, albeit for a limited period of time. Construction work and other human activities are influenced by the living environment, the economic

conditions, the history of the territory and the culture of the people living in a given area (De Matteis 1989). Basically, the characteristics of buildings are conditioned on the one hand by the materials that can be found near the place where one lives, and on the other by the climate of the territory (Pavan 1992). The geographical characteristics of our regional territory, which include mountains, hills, plains and coasts, provide different materials (wood, stones, clays) in a climate that sees a lot of rain and heavy snowfalls, especially in the northern part of the region. All this leads to a great variability in buildings, particularly rural buildings, which must be better adapted to the characteristics of the climate.

One classification of these buildings was produced by Scarin (1943), who identified (Fig. 1) different types of houses: from the *casoni* of Marano with their roofs of reeds and straw, to the mountain constructions of Sauris, partially built with interlocking wooden beams (*blockhaus* in German).

Agricultural buildings were generally very simple and comprised a residential part attached to other parts where animals were kept (mainly the stable with the herds), places where tools were stored (perhaps a part of the porch) and, finally, a courtyard, which could be open or closed, in the latter case called a court.

Courts and courtyards in Friuli developed in many different forms, from very small examples in the mountains, to larger examples in the high plains and down to the lowlands

where they often had several farm buildings and substantial land around them. The courtyard could be enlarged to allow the number of families to increase, either by division or by inheritance, and this meant that adaptations occurred without necessarily leading to an increase in the number of buildings. Urban structures were often simple, especially if the court was part of a noble's palace (as one finds, for example, in Gemona with the palaces and courts of Gropplero, Prampero and Voraio), but they could acquire more complex structures with multiple entrances as the number of properties around them increased.

In fairly large courts there were also communal spaces, centrally located and containing items of common use, such as a well, drinking troughs, a wine press, or places to rest and converse (under the pergola), or common pathways. This favoured the development of social ties, also thanks to the work that was carried out with the collaboration of the whole community of the court (harvesting, pressing, pig butchering, and so on).

Nowadays, the courts are often divided by various walls, metal fencing and railings into small gardens or courtyards, connected only by the road for car access; this has led to both a change in the social mixing within the courts, and in their use. Of course, it is not a question of going back to the days of "the past", but rather of not losing all the important relationships which developed between those who lived



Figure 2. A Friulian court with current divisions.

in the courtyard, and of not losing the words that denominate the communal spaces and which protect against a complete abandonment of the local and Friulian culture (Fig. 2).

Around the courtyards, there were, and still are, plots of land which can be used in different ways and which make the complex a kind of multifunctional living structure. These plots of land take different names according to their use and the origin of the word. For example: the kitchen garden (*ort*) is a plot of land, enclosed by hedges or walls, cultivated to produce plants and vegetables for home use; the *braide* is a plot of land close to the house; while more distant plots of land are named according to the type of use or cultivation, such as meadow (*prât*),

arable land (*aratif*), woodland (*bosc*), or uncultivated land (*pustot*) (Fig. 3).

2. Methodology and materials.

The present study was conducted to analyse the organisation of house structures and the structures around them through the use of a series of maps of houses and clusters of houses and structures, and through the collection of a vocabulary relating to the different modes of construction, structures and arrangement of places within the buildings. The methodology involved collecting a glossary elaborated in a multidisciplinary, technical and linguistic way, and using a checklist to find structural components, the aim being to focus on the ethnocultural component of building and nomenclature.

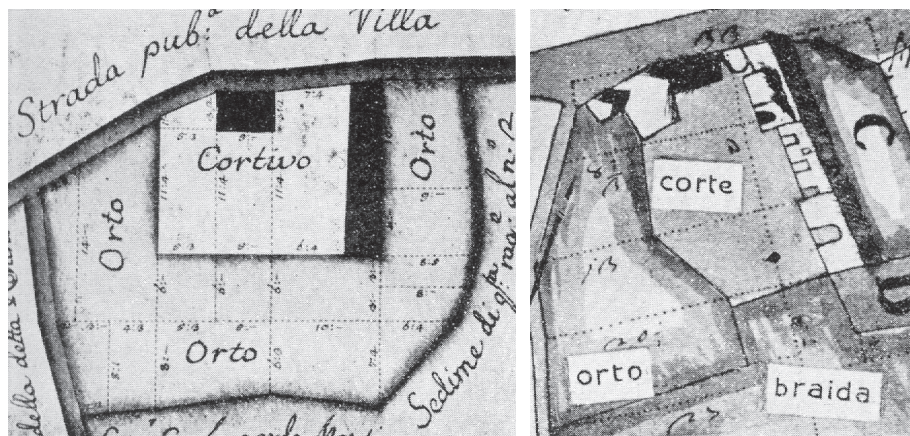


Figure 3. Example of images from an ancient map (Scarlin, 1943).



Figure 4. The surveyed area.

Complementary work was also carried out on the courtyards of the central Friulian plain, examining the area around the municipalities of Palmanova, Santa Maria la Longa, Basiliano, Campoformido, Codroipo,

Mereto di Tomba, Flaibano, Pozzuolo del Friuli, Bicinicco, Sedegliano, Pavia di Udine, Mortegliano, Trivignano, Lestizza and Coseano (Fig. 4).

A schema for classifying the buildings on the central Friulian plain




| ISCHEDE 24 | Scheda 24 | Survey schema 24 | |
|---|---|---|--|
| Païs <i>Paese</i> <i>Village</i> | Baraçêť <i>Barazzetto</i> |  | |
| Borc <i>Borgo</i> <i>Hamlet</i> | Baracêť <i>Barazzetto</i> | | |
| Centri <i>Centro</i> <i>Village centre</i> | | | |
| Cort <i>Corte</i> <i>Courtyard</i> | --- | | |
| Direzion <i>Recapit</i> <i>Address</i> | Via Maggiore n. (...) | | |
| Jentrade <i>Ingresso</i> <i>Entrance</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Sul cortîl <i>Sul cortile</i> <i>To the courtyard</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Cuntun puarton <i>Con portone</i> <i>With a door/gate</i> |  |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intun sotpuarti <i>In un androne</i> <i>Portico entrance</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cence puarton <i>Senza portone</i> <i>Without a door/gate</i> | |
| Materiâi de jentrade <i>Materiali dell'entrata</i> <i>Entrance materials</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Piere <i>Sasso</i> <i>Stone</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Beton <i>Cemento</i> <i>Concrete</i> | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Modon <i>Mattone</i> <i>Brick</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Messet <i>Misto</i> <i>Mixed</i> | |
| Lûs da jentrade <i>Luce dell'entrata</i> <i>Gateway span</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sierade <i>Chiusa</i> <i>Closed</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architrâf <i>Architrave/Piattabanda</i> <i>Architrave/Header</i> |  |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Vierte <i>Aperta</i> <i>Open</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Arc <i>Arco</i> <i>Arch</i> | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Passaç <i>Passaggio</i> <i>Passageway</i> | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Puarton <i>Portone</i> <i>Door/Gate</i> | |
| Ûs <i>Uso</i> <i>Use</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Plen <i>Completo</i> <i>Complete</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Bandonât <i>Abbandonato</i> <i>Abandoned</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Residenziâl <i>Residenziale</i> <i>Residential</i> |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parziâl <i>Parziale</i> <i>Partial</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Agricul <i>Agricolo</i> <i>Agricultural</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Messet <i>Misto</i> <i>Hybrid</i> |

Figure 5. Classification schema used for the survey.



| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Tipologjie <i>Tipologia</i> <i>Typology</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sierade <i>Chiusa</i> <i>Closed</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Des cjasis <i>Dalle case</i> <i>By houses</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Di un mûr <i>Da un muro</i> <i>By a wall</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Messet <i>Mista</i> <i>Mixed</i> |  | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vierte <i>Aperta</i> <i>Open</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Bande ort <i>Dal lato dell'orto</i> <i>On the vegetable garden side</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Bande strade <i>Dal lato della strada</i> <i>On the road side</i> | | | |
| Cambiaments <i>Cambiamenti</i> <i>Changes</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cundizion originâl <i>Condizione originale</i> <i>Original condition</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Pôcs cambiaments <i>Pochi cambiamenti</i> <i>Minor changes</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Une vore di cambiaments <i>Molti cambiamenti</i> <i>Major changes</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Alterazions des struturis <i>Alterazioni delle strutture</i> <i>Alterations to the structures</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Alterazions de cort/curtil <i>Alterazioni della corte/cortile</i> <i>Alterations of the court/courtyard</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Alterazions di dut <i>Alterazioni di tutto</i> <i>Alterations of everything</i> | | |
| Cjase principâl <i>Edificio principale</i> <i>Main building</i> | Numar di plans <i>Numero di piani</i> <i>Number of floors</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> >2 |  | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Terace <i>Terrazza</i> <i>Terrace</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Loze <i>Loggia</i> <i>Loggia</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Puiûl <i>Poggiolo</i> <i>Balcony</i> | | |
| Volums diferents <i>Altri edifici</i> <i>Other buildings</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Tieze <i>Tettoia</i> <i>Canopy</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Deposits <i>Depositi</i> <i>Depositories</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Altris <i>Altri</i> <i>Others</i> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nissun <i>Nessuno</i> <i>None</i> |
| Notis <i>Note</i> <i>Notes</i> | Brute fature dal portal di ingrès, vuastade in ocasion de sostituzion dal solâr di len cuntun di ciment | <i>Manomissione con danno estetico del portale di ingresso all'atto della sostituzione del solaio in legno con uno in laterocemento</i> | <i>Serious tampering and aesthetic damage to the entrance portal, which probably occurred in connection with the replacement of the wooden slab with a concrete one.</i> | |

Figure 6. Classification schema used for the survey.



Figure 7. Outline of the sequence in which to take photographs.



Figure 8. Outline of the sequence in which to take photographs.

was drawn up and a classification of the courtyards made using a schema in Friulian and Italian (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6).

Once the schema was completed, a series of photographs were taken

of each courtyard in order to classify it. The photographs also had to be taken following a pattern, as can be seen in Figures 7, 8, and 9. Finally, the most interesting details were also photographed.



Figure 9. Detail of a gateway's arch (Flaibano).

3. Results. The scientific bibliography on houses and courtyards in Friuli, from the first work of Emilio Scarin (1943), to the original ideas of Luciano di Sopra (1989), up to the contributions of Giuseppe Bergamini

(1985) and Valentina Piccinno and Enzo Pascolo (2006), would lead one to think that there is an overall picture of houses and courtyards in Friuli. In reality, in the last twenty to thirty years, as already mentioned,

there has been a great spatial change in the appearance of houses and courtyards: many are abandoned, many have undergone usage changes, and agricultural use has been reduced or has completely disappeared, with a subsequent loss of the very meaning of the place.

This work, therefore, seeks to recover the names, form and use of courts and courtyards before their memory is lost. We will thus examine a glossary of the house, agricultural buildings and the layout of courtyards.

In most cases the Friulian house is built in stone or pebbles, both because of the morainic and fluvial origin of the upper and lower Friulian plain, which guarantees a great availability of these materials, and because the rivers, such as the Tagliamento, transport a great quantity of them downstream.

The roofs of the houses were in most cases made of pantiles (roof tiles and channelled tiles) on flat tiles and planks. Flat tiles and pantiles were produced in the many kilns in Friuli, located in places where good quality clay was available. At one time, roofs could also be made of straw or reeds, but by now this type of roofing can only be found in the few *casoni* of Marano, largely only for tourists and historical purposes. The roofs may be arranged in various forms: gabled (two-pitch) or pavilion (four-pitch). The framework of the structure, if gabled, comprises beams called *lindarûi* in Friulian, which descend from the ridge to rest on a ledge and emerge from the main wall, so giving rise to the eaves (*linde*). The Friulian word *linde* comes from the popular

Latin *limita*, in the sense of a hem. The tiles, on the other hand, rest on a second framework of small beams (rafters), called *diurincs*.

In mountain houses, the tiles may be replaced by shingles (*scjandulis*), which are small wooden boards (usually of larch) that overlap by about a third, like the tiles, but give rise to a flat roof, without channels. Roofs rarely had a gutter and rainwater from the roof fell directly to the ground from the pantiles, which acted as a channel, while the fall line is called *strinceis*, a word derived from the common Latin *extraciliaria*, meaning out of bounds (Fig. 10).

The house could have two or three floors. On the ground floor, one entered through the door, which could have a frame made of tufa (a conglomerate of limestone), wood or just mortar and bricks, with the threshold (*suee* or *liminâr*) on which one's feet rested, and the jamb (*antîl*) that supported the architrave, which could be made of the same material or of wood. The floor was made of beaten earth or mortar, called *saligjo*: tiles only arrived in more recent times. Another solution was cobblestones (*cogolâr*), but these were more frequently used for stables. The inside space was organised into a large kitchen, which could have in one corner a small separate type of kitchenette (called *cusine sporcje*) in which various things were stored and in which there was a large sink (*seglâr*) for washing dishes, the water being stored in tin-plated copper pots. On a brick or stone elevation one found the *fogolâr*, a fireplace

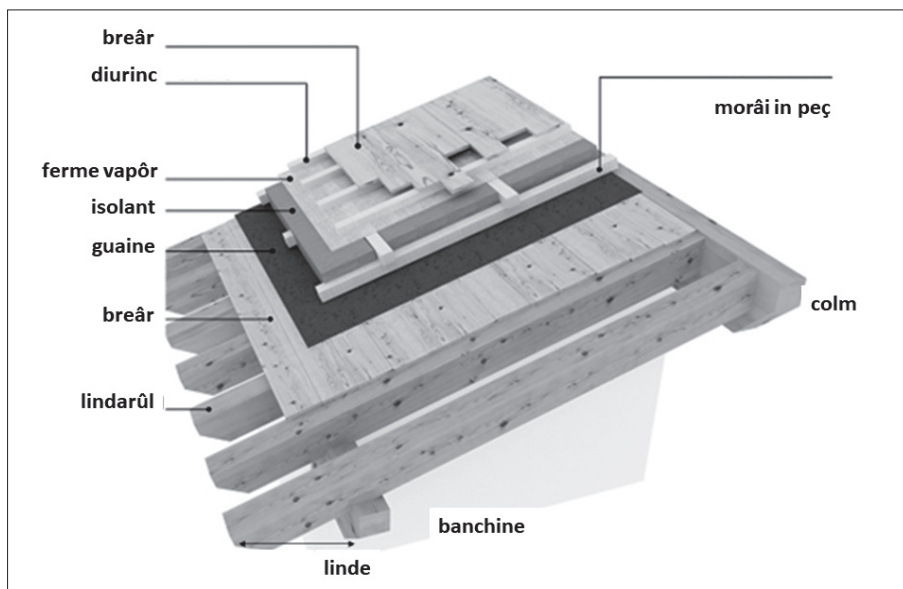


Figure 10. Example of a roof structure glossary.

above which rose a round chimney with a strip of cloth around it, which served to prevent the spread of too much smoke (Fig. 11).

The intimacy of family life lived in this kitchen-fireplace space has made the *fogolâr* a symbol of Friulianness in the world.

In the twentieth century, as life began to become a little easier with more time to rest, one began to see the emergence of the dining room, a space in which to converse with people who came to visit the family.

On the other side of the kitchen, there was the larder (*camarin*), in which foodstuffs such as cheese and cooked butter (*ont*) or pork products such as lard, sausage made from pork offal (*palmon*), salami and sausages were stored. On the same level as the kitchen

there was also the cellar, where the vineyard produce was kept, together with barrels and casks (*caratei*) and the tools for making wine: vats, *bigoncioli*, funnels, treaders and so on.

The instruments for producing wine were placed up a floor, on a wooden structure raised 30 to 40 cm above the floor; in this way, the barrels could be in the same room as the cellar or in another room, separated by a partition called a *celâr*.

On the first floor one went up a staircase, that could be inside or outside, which led to the rooms; these could also look out onto a balcony resting on wooden or stone modillions. The rooms were divided from one another by partitions made of brick, but often of grids of reeds and mortar, called *grisiolo* or *grisole*.



Figure 11. *Fogolâr furlan* (Cjase Cocel, Fagagna).

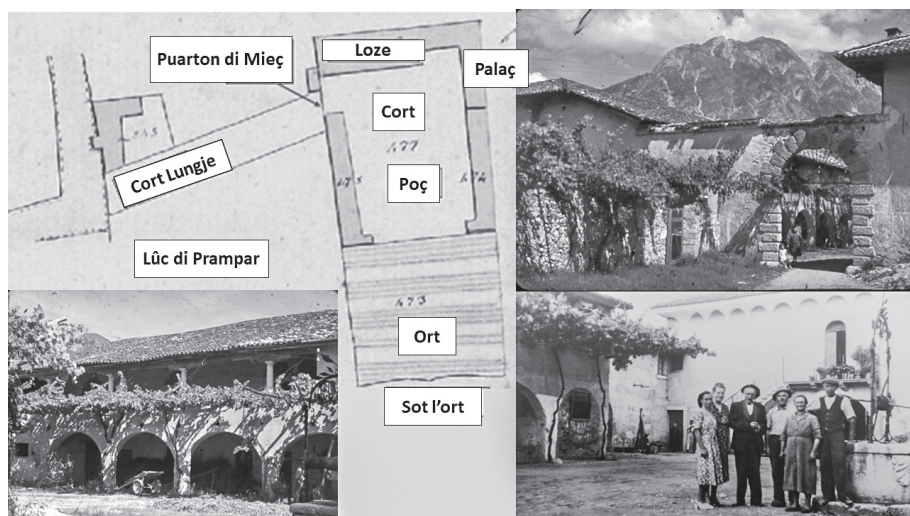


Figure 12. Example of a glossary referring to a Friulian court

This material was also used to make the ceilings. On the second floor, in the attic, there was a room, often completely open, which was used as a grain store (i.e. cobs and wheat, etc.) called *cjast* (or also *kaste* or *supe* in the Natisone Valleys where they speak a Slavic variety); this word derives from the German *kasto*.

Between the house and the buildings around it, there could also be a room used as a laundry, called a *lissiarie*, where water was heated in a large boiler to wash sheets and other linen or clothes. The word *lissiarie* derives from the French, like other Friulian words (for example artichoke, which in Friulian becomes *articjoc*).

Next to the house, often in the same building, was the stable where

the cows, heifers and steers were kept. The stable was usually small and low, with the animals arranged either in a single row with the manger in front of them, or in two rows tail to tail. The floor of the cowshed could be paved or cobbled using unsquared stones collected from the rivers or fields, given the alluvial origin of the Friulian plain.

Above the cowshed there was usually a hayloft, where the hay was piled up and once or twice a day pushed down into the cowshed through the *golâr*².

Other buildings located near the house included the pigsty (in Friulian, *cjôt*, a word of pre-Latin origin meaning enclosed space). In the same building as the pigsty

² The *golâr* is a vertical conduit with an opening on the upper floor and an opening on the lower floor.

there could be a henhouse (*gjalinâr* or *pulinâr*, another name of Latin origin) and above the henhouse there was a dovecote.

Around the house or other buildings was land used for a vegetable garden, vineyard or crops for family use (maize or potatoes). This land was called *bearç*, a word of Gothic origin meaning both courtyard and vegetable garden, and also found in the English *yard*. Wealthier families could have a *broili* around the house, a word derived from the Celtic for an enclosed space with a vegetable garden, attached to rural buildings. A little further away from the houses and the vegetable gardens was the *braide*, which included land close to the house; this is an old German word which entered the Friulian language a long time ago.

The kitchen garden was found in every house; it could be closed or open and was often located near the manure store (*mussulin*).

Around the wall of the kitchen garden or the plot of owned land, vines were also grown and the wall served to support part of the vineyard. In the courtyard there could be a pergola, which was at least four metres high, but provided shade during the summer season. If the whole plot of land was enclosed by a wall, it was called a *lûc*, like the large plots of land belonging to lords of noble origin who also had stores for corn, wheat, etc. The palaces of these lords could have a loggia (*loze*

or *lobie*) and, on the ground floor, a portico (*puarti*) (Fig. 12).

In examining the courtyards of central Friuli, we have seen that most of them still have a portico entrance (*puarti* or *androne*) and that half of these entrances have a door (made of wood or iron or other multi-material compositions).

If the entrance was a gateway, this was arched and of different shapes, but generally a low arch. These courtyards are almost all still in use, although not in all units, and while they were once all used for agricultural activities, nowadays either the uses are mixed (partly residential and partly agricultural) or the use is exclusively residential (Fig. 13).

Even today, most of the courtyards are enclosed by a wall or buildings (*cort*) and although these courtyards are now hundreds of years old, a good half of them have not changed much from their original layout, except for recent subdivisions into smaller courtyards (Fig. 14).

In these courtyards there are still terraces, balconies and other buildings, such as porches and carports.

4. Conclusions. With regard to the question we asked ourselves at the beginning, namely, whether the house, court and rural buildings in Friuli have their own glossary linked to the Friulian ethnicity, we can conclude as follows. Those who speak the Friulian language have their own identity

or, used for dropping hay from the barn to the stables; sometimes the conduit can be shorter and only on the lower floor, corresponding to a trapdoor opening in the floor of the upper floor.

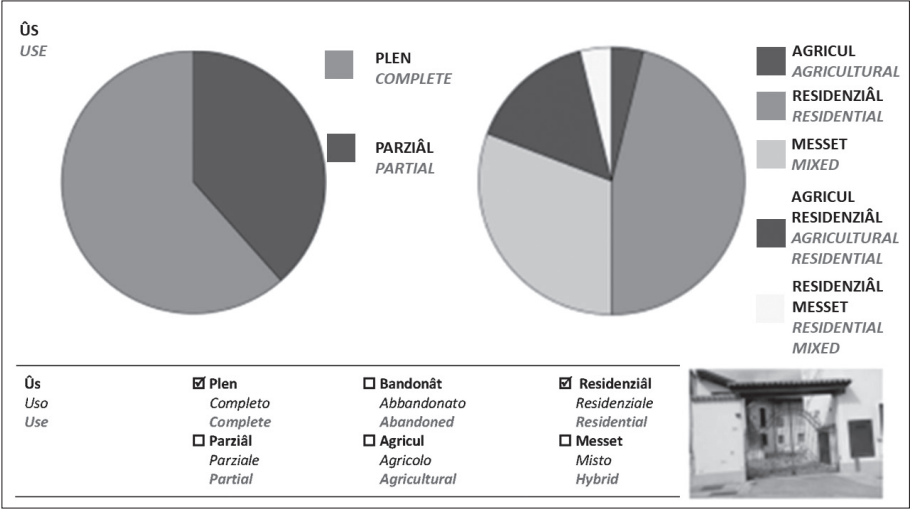


Figure 13. Use of courtyards and courts

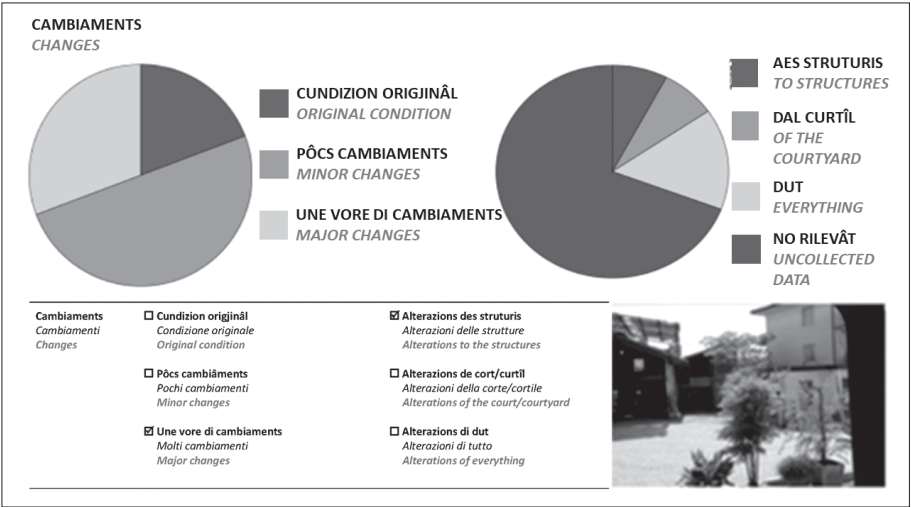


Figure 14. Changes within the courts and courtyards.

linked to the house. However, this is expressed more in the names of the building elements, the rooms of the house or other farm buildings, or the cultivated land around the house

than in the building methods or types of construction, which are similar to other parts of Italy and depend more on the climate and materials available.

The study presented in this contribution is intended as an incentive to formulate a complete glossary on the buildings and the places around them, so that the linguistic richness developed over hundreds of years, and describing the Friulian ways of building and living, is preserved for posterity.

Another element that emerged from the study is the need to support local administrations in renovating courtyard structures, as they encapsulate the values of a society that is more supportive and inclusive

than the current one and also safer against crime.

In conclusion, we can say that the survival of a language and the identity of a people and culture do not depend on the language alone, but also a little on the architecture of the places they live within. This has certainly influenced the birth and development of this culture and, therefore, we need to study in more detail how to regain the use and value of structures such as courts and courtyards and everything inside and around them.

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