

## Short Term Scientific Mission Report

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**COST ACTION:** FP1201 – Forest Land Ownership Change in Europe: Significance for Management and Policy (FACESMAP)

**REFERENCE NUMBER:** COST-STSM-FP1201-25170

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**TITLE:** Tradition in a time of change: Community forest governance in the Dolomites of northern Italy

**TIME PERIOD:** 16.04.2015-10.05.2016

### 1. Overview

This STSM is concerned with traditional forms of common property regimes, known as “regole”, that exist in the Dolomites region of the Italian Alps. In some cases, these institutions have functioned for a thousand years or so, although since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century they have been challenged by successive regimes that have attempted to centralise state management of the forests and grazing pastures, where these have traditionally been the preserve of the regole. This entailed giving municipalities the power to govern at the local level, but under the control of the national government.

In more recent times, and particularly since the second half of the twentieth century, new legislation and policy initiatives have created a more receptive environment for the regole. A key part of this shift has been the recognition that regole have a right to exist and to manage their territorial assets. At the same time, emerging challenges and opportunities associated with modernity now confront the regole. Many of these are not specific to this area of Italy, but apply to the EU more generally, and so how the regole deal (or fail to deal) with them is of much interest from a research perspective. This assertion formed the basis of the research agenda, which is articulated further in the following section.

### 2. Purpose of visit

Despite its short timeframe, the research sought to achieve three distinct objectives. Firstly, the intention was to contribute to the goals of the Facesmap project, and in particular to some of the questions raised by Working Group 1 (forest ownership types and motives) and Working Group 2 (new forest management approaches). Here the objective has been to understand how regole in the Dolomites are innovating in order to manage land (forest, pastures, and meadows) in the face of

more recent challenges and opportunities, where these include issues surrounding how the regole integrate themselves within local, regional, national, and European policy visions and legal frameworks. At the same time, the traditional role of the regole to ensure the livelihoods of their members by regulating how forests and pastures are used and managed is being altered by new social and economic processes and paradigms. Not least among these is a burgeoning tourist market, immigration and population growth, and an increasingly connected and integrated rural landscape. Within this context, the research sought to understand the following in order to explore territorial innovation:

- Development decisions of the regole (around land use)
- Communication (with other regole, and actors involved in governance of the territory)
- Perceived similarities and differences (with other regole)
- Available and utilised assets/forms of capital/resources (limiting and enabling factors)

The second research objective was to take the knowledge and skills I developed during my recently completed PhD in water governance and to apply them to a different area of commons governance, namely community forestry governance in the Dolomites. Here the intention has been to employ the novel framework I utilised during my PhD – the politicised IAD Framework – in order to learn more about its application in a different setting. Whilst this Framework encompasses a potentially much wider array of considerations than I had time to address during the STSM, it nonetheless served as a useful means of structuring and guiding the research, as well as highlighting those areas that have not been included in the study but which must be acknowledged as such.

The third and final objective was to network with researchers and academics from my host institution, Padova University, and other relevant individuals or organisations I should meet or work with during my time in Italy.

### **3. Description of work carried out during visit**

I undertook a range of actions in carrying out my work plan during my time in Italy. Firstly, I conducted a rolling literature review, which started before I left England and continued throughout my time in Italy. Here the purpose was to provide a foundation for the work by highlighting areas of potential interest, and by informing the fieldwork in accordance with the points outlined in the previous section.

The fieldwork itself was carried out with a Canadian researcher, Dr Nathan Deutsch, who specialises in community-based natural resource management and now lives with his family in the town of Belluno in the Italian Alps. Dr Deutsch can speak Italian, and this proved invaluable for conducting interviews with members of the regole. In total we interviewed ten members from three different regole (The details of these case studies can be found here: <http://www.sharedassets.org.uk/inspiration/community-forest-governance-in-italy-part-2-context-and-settling-in/>). Primary and secondary documents have also been gathered and analysed.

During the trip I also wrote a research blog for my home institution, which can be found on their website (<http://www.sharedassets.org.uk/>). I also conducted a seminar at the University of Padova, where I spoke about the research I undertook for my PhD.

#### 4. Approach and preliminary observations

I am still waiting on transcripts for most of the interviews that were conducted, which Dr Deutsch will provide at some point in the near future (although he has other work commitments which have stopped him from properly translating the interviews sooner). However, the interviews were broadly/roughly translated during the course of the conversation and so some analysis has been undertaken. As will become clear below, Dr Deutsch and myself are also hoping (funding permitting) to collect more data in the form of a survey, interviews and workshops, either in person or via skype. In this section I therefore provide a short overview of the case studies, the theoretical approach, and the key preliminary findings.

Two separate qualitative (and critical) analyses are being undertaken in relation to the three case studies. In the first analysis, we are comparing one case study - the Regole d'Ampezzo - which for a number of reasons has been successful in affecting the direction of land use in their respective territory (where since the 1950s this development has centred predominantly on tourism) with another case study, the regole of Comelico, located in a neighbouring valley. Notable features of the Regole d'Ampezzo is that the eleven individual regole that constitute it have formally come together to form a confederation of regole (a "Comunanza") that governs through a general assembly with elected members occupying different positions, as well as the fact that since 1990 this confederation of regole have been in charge of managing a natural park – now with World Heritage Site status - that encompasses the entire northern aspect of their territory. In contrast, the regole of Comelico (where there are sixteen regole in total) have not been able to formally come together in the same way, or to affect decisions concerning land use in the territory.

The similarities and differences between these two case studies make them interesting for conducting a comparative analysis. By identifying the mechanisms that have helped the Regole d'Ampezzo to innovate, and by evaluating the outcomes that have been achieved, we will then be able to explore the Comelico case study in order to understand how it differs and what this implies for territorial innovation with respect to land use. We are currently planning to draw up a survey that will explore our initial observations and insights gleaned from the interviews. We may also attempt to explore further the relationship between the regole of the two case studies and other relevant actors, such as the local municipalities and officials from the Region's offices. However, it is likely that in order to do this we will need to source additional funding.

We can nonetheless make some early observations about these two cases, where the focus is on understanding how the regole in question have innovated, or failed to innovate, in the context of territorial development. It is useful here to refer to the concept of "development through bricolage" (Cleaver 2012), which we have defined here as "making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities" (Baker and Nelson 2005: 333). This process of recombination through bricolage can be considered a useful framing for this study as it is a primary driver of innovation (Senyard et al 2014).

In specifying the analysis, we have decided to consider the Regole d'Ampezzo in terms of their ability to negotiate the development of the natural park discussed above, and to be named the legal manager of this park. This is therefore a recent historical example of territorial innovation for which there is existing literature; which has been explored further during our interviews. We can note that the development of the natural park was at least in part a strategic move by the Regole d'Ampezzo intended to curtail more recent developments in their territory which were imposing on their way of life.

In particular, the northern part of their territory was being used by the military for training exercises, and the construction of a new highway through their territory had also been proposed. In the face of these threats the regole in the area were able to draw upon their available assets in order to negotiate the designation of the park, which in turn meant that both military activity and the proposal for a new road were halted. The interviews and literature review have identified a range of factors pertinent to this case, including:

- Use of a stewardship discourse, which the regole drew upon to position themselves as the obvious (perhaps only) choice to manage the land given their historical relationship with it.
- Access to Government funds, which provided the regole with the financial power to manage the park.
- The capacity to network and negotiate, in particular with respect to the designation of the park and of the regole as its manager.
- Institutional and geographical fit, including the fact that there is only one municipality to deal with in the area and that all the regole's land constitutes a single, undivided territory.
- Members' relationship with the land, where until the 1950s most of the members of the regole were still farmers, which allowed for a smooth transition into tourism given that for many outsiders it is these farming practices (agri-tourism) and the landscape that is produced by them (scenic value) that makes Cortina such a desirable place to visit.

Although there is not space here to discuss these and other observations in more detail, it is possible to further abstract from the above points to say that in many ways the success of the Regole d'Ampezzo to propose and manage the natural park relates to their ability to embed themselves within a range of legal orders, from the local through to State and EU laws and regulations. Thus a key mechanism appears to be "fit and embeddedness", where this relates both to institutional and geographical/territorial dynamics. This in turn relates both to the internal capacity of the group and to their ability to influence proceedings through their external relations, where they have drawn upon available assets to position themselves in a way that corresponds with particular strategic objectives. This is consistent with our concept of development through bricolage, discussed above.

In contrast, the regole of Comelico appears far more fragmented (both institutionally and geographically), with territories that are not always contiguous and where there are a number of local municipalities to deal with. They also lack the internal capacity that characterises the Regole d'Ampezzo. As a result, these regole have failed to achieve appropriate levels of fit and embeddedness, which would allow them to better position themselves within the current system of governance and so have greater control over their territorial development. A deeper analysis will start to unearth more precise underlying causes for this situation.

The second study is concerned with the regole of San Vito. Here we are exploring a situation whereby the regole are attempting to manage an area of forest on their territory that has been divided up into private parcels of land, where the scale of these private holdings is not appropriate for effective forest management. This is an intensive study that will require further interviews to tease out the details of the case and to explore the issues from a range of perspectives.

At present we have examined some of the wider factors that are pertinent to this case study, and have sourced a number of new contacts who will be interviewed in due course. These wider issues includes how the regole of San Vito initially reformed in the year 2000 as a response to the way the municipality was affecting the course of development in the area, which the members of the regole felt threatened by. Having reformed, their newfound institutional capacity is being employed to reorient development along a pathway that is more desirable to them. As with the previous analysis

discussed above, this case is well framed by the concept of “development through bricolage”, where the regole continue to draw upon available assets in order to affect the direction of land use in their territory, towards particular strategic ends.

#### **5. Future collaboration with host institution**

It is my hope that I will be able to work further both with Dr Deutsch and with the University of Padova in order to complete the work described above. Whilst at present there is useful data and enough information to outline some interesting preliminary findings, further work in this area could prove very fruitful as the cases under consideration are of much interest to scholars and practitioners concerned with land use and territorial development in Europe.

#### **6. Projected publications/articles resulting or to result from STSM**

Should further work be conducted, I foresee a minimum of two journal articles stemming from the research.

#### **7. Confirmation by the host institute of the successful execution of the mission**

Please see the attached letter from Professor Paola Gatto at the University of Padova.

#### **8. Other comments**

I would like to thank everyone who made this STSM possible. In particular, the relevant individuals in the FACESMAP – COST action FP1201 project, all the kind people at my host institution, and especially Professor Paola Gatto, as well as my home institution, Shared Assets.