

Limits and potentialities of cadastre-based historical GIS in recovering place names in minority language.

An experience in Comelico Valley, Dolomites

VIVIANA FERRARIO, PIERGIORGIO CESCO FRARE, ANDRA TURATO¹⁷

This paper presents and discusses an experience of a cadastre-based historical GIS applied to place names, interpreted as immaterial cultural heritage in danger (Cassi, 1998; Aversano, 2007; Jordan et al., 2009; Kerfoot H., 2016). In the frame of the European cooperation project PRIMIS, financed by Interreg V A Italy-Slovenia 2014/2020, about linguistic minority as a resource for cultural tourism and local development, the research group is developing a digital toponymic Atlas in Comelico Valley, that will be exhibited in a local tourist information point and published online. According to the Faro Convention, digital technology can have a major role in enhancing access to Cultural Heritage, as well as maintaining diversity of languages and cultures in our information society (art. 14).

Comelico Valley, belonging to the historical region of Cadore, situated at the Italian border with Austria, and is inhabited by a Ladin speaking population, recognised as a minority in 1999.

Like other similar initiatives in the Alps and elsewhere (for example www.toponomasticafriulana.it; Lorenzi, 2012), the

¹⁷ Viviana Ferrario, Iuav University of Venice (Italy); Piergiorgio Cesco Frare, Andra Turato, Independent researchers (Italy).

Atlas is intended on the one side as a way to record and map local place names for scientific reasons, as well as to enhance local minority and provide a sort of payback for past linguistic expropriation; on the other side - in the spirit of PRIMIS project - it is proposed as a way to promote linguistic minority as a resource for cultural tourism, trying to revitalise the use of Ladin toponyms among local population and visitors.

The Atlas is grounded on previous geographic and linguistic researches that have been made in the valley in the last 20 years. After a first collections of geographical dialectal terms (Marinelli, 1901), the toponyms collected by Tagliavini during the linguistic investigations on the Ladin dialect of Comelico should be mentioned (Tagliavini, 1926; Id., 1944). A chapter of the series of the "Oronimi Bellunesi", promoted by the Angelini Foundation of Belluno, is dedicated to a part of the Comelico valley (Cesco Frare, 1993). In the same years, P. Cesco Frare collected a very large number of toponyms and microtoponyms relating to the highest parts of the valley, that are still unpublished. More recently, some first toponymic maps have been published by local associations (Comelico Superiore: GRCCS, 2002; San Nicolò: De Bolfo, Ferrario, Turato, 2005; Costalta: Cesco Frare, 2016; Valle: De Bernardin Gàina, Soravia, 2019). Two published maps have been recently unified by V. Ferrario and A. Turato and exhibited in the section dedicated to the Ladin language in a local museum. There are also several handwritten maps, coming from graduation theses and exercises by students of the local University of the Elderly, under the guidance of P. Cesco Frare. The aforementioned collections, and the maps in particular, are extremely valuable secondary sources, and yet their use has some serious limitations: they cover only some parts of the Comelico valley, while other parts remain uncovered; each of them was built at different times, with different criteria and methods and using different sources;

the collections are not comparable in terms of linguistic depth, or spatial information (Ferrario, 2018).

To fill this gap, the Atlas develops a methodology firstly adopted in the framework of a research project funded by IMONT in 2005 that produced the aforementioned toponymy map of the territory of San Nicolò and Costa and then of the village of Casamazzagno (Ferrario, 2019). The work started from toponyms collected in the nineteenth-century land registers, and specifically in the so-called "Napoleonic" cadastre. Modern land registers can be considered as a sort of ante litteram GIS, in which the spatial data (the parcels drawn in the cadastral maps) are uniquely linked to alphanumeric data contained in the corresponding registers. This feature has been widely exploited to reconstruct the historical use of land in various disciplines, such as historical ecology, forestry, landscape history and historical geography. The creation of "historical" GIS has been more rarely adopted in toponymy studies, but it has shown great potential especially for praedial microtoponymy (Ferrario, 2019).

The historical GIS created for the Comelico valley by the Napoleonic Cadastre, is synchronic and extended to the whole area, thus being an ideal common basis to connect all the local different sources previously mentioned. This source has obviously its limits too (Ferrario, 2019) and yet it has the advantage of being placed in a favorable temporal position to act as an intermediary with the historical toponymy, recorded in the archival documentation of the modern age. In fact, the nineteenth-century land register records some toponyms that are no longer in use and whose oral memory has been lost, thus offering a valid help in the case of toponyms present in the archival documentation, but of difficult geographical location. Finally, the experience conducted in 2005 shows that Napoleonic toponymy can be an excellent tool to bring back to

the minds of informants those toponyms that are now little used or disappearing.

This procedure opens up a number of interesting issues in terms of density, placement, scale, hierarchy of place names. Nevertheless the main issue when using this source in a minority language area, is that in XIX century local place names have been Venetised or Italianised to be recorded in the cadastre register (Ferrario, 2019). A sort of reverse process has been then put in place, “Ladinising” back Venetised and Italianised toponyms, with the help of previous studies (Cesco Frare 2001; Barbierato, Vigolo 2008), of the aforementioned local toponymy collections and of local informants.

Although the pandemic has greatly slowed down the process of building the Atlas, in fact, it has been possible to carry out two first tests that will be proposed for discussion.

Reflecting upon the methodological steps adopted in the Comelico Toponymy Atlas, and evaluating the first results obtained, this paper questions the limits and potentialities of the sources implied to recover minority language place names and to maintain them in use.

References

Ascoli, I.G. (1873). Saggi ladini. *Archivio Glottologico Italiano*, 1, Ermanno Loescher, Roma, Torino, Firenze.

Barbierato, P., Vigolo, M.T. (2008). Riflessi lessicali e toponomastici degli istituti giuridici comunitari di età medieval. *Studi Mediolatini e Volgari*, LIV, 5-36.

Cassi, L., Marcaccini, P. (1998). Toponomastica e beni culturali e ambientali. Gli indicatori geografici per un loro censimento. *Memorie della società Geografica Italiana*, LVI.

Cesco Frare, P., Comelico. In Angelini A., Cason E. (1993), *Oronimi bellunesi. Ricerca in itinere sotto la guida del prof. G.B. Pellegrini*. Ampezzo – Auronzo – Comelico, Fondazione G. Angelini, Belluno.

Cesco Frare, P. (2001). Gli insediamenti del Comelico nella toponomastica. In *Studi linguistici alpini in onore di Giovan Battista Pellegrini*, Fondazione Giovanni Angelini/ Istituto di studi per l'Alto Adige, 217-228.

De Bolfo, V., Ferrario, V., Turato, A. (2005). *Raccolta toponomastica. Carta topografica del territorio*. Regole di San Nicolò e di Costa, San Nicolò di Comelico.

De Bernardin Gàina, A., Soravia, S. (2019). *Val. Il paese di Valle nel Comelico tra storia e storie. Memorie di un villaggio nelle Dolomiti*. Press UP, Roma.

Ferrario, V. (2018). Per un atlante toponomastico in una valle a minoranza linguistica ladina. Alcune questioni metodologiche. In *Atti della Conferenza della Federazione italiana delle Associazioni Scientifiche per le Informazioni Territoriali e Ambientali (ASITA 2018)* 27-29 Novembre, Bolzano.

Ferrario, V. (2019). 19th Century cadastres as a source for the toponymy of the Venetian region. In Cantile A., Kerfoot H. (eds.), *Toponymy and Cartography between History and Geography*. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names Romano-Hellenic Division, IGM, Firenze.

GCCS - Gruppo di Ricerche Culturali di Comelico Superiore (2002). *Carta topografica 1:20.000 con toponimi in ladino del Comelico Superiore*, edited by Zandonella Sarinuto G. e D., Tabacco, Udine.

Lorenzi, S. (2012). *Atlante toponomastico d'Ampezzo*, Regole d'Ampezzo - Istitut Cultural Ladin Cesa de Jan, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Colle Santa Lucia.

Jordan P., Bergmann H., Cheetham C., Hausner I. (Eds.) (2009). *Geographical Names as Part of the Cultural Heritage*, Institut für Geographie und Regionalforschung der Universität Wien, Wien.

Tagliavini, C. (1944). Nuovi contributi alla conoscenza del dialetto del Comelico, Premiate Officine Grafiche Carlo Ferrari, Venezia.

Tagliavini, C. (1926), *Il dialetto del Comelico*, Olschki, Firenze.

www.toponomasticafriulana.it