

## The friulian identity

The language is certainly one of the foundations of the Friulian identity, but it should also be reiterated that the sense of belonging to Friuli was more of a political and territorial nature than of a linguistic one. The collective identity is a complex and somehow multidimensional phenomenon. Beside the language, the territory, the political organization, also more broadly cultural factors play a role: customs, rites, traditions, sense of history and common destiny, awareness and willpower. What are the elements of the Friulian cultural identity? An ideal type” of Friulian devised in the 19th century is still alive and prevailing in certain environments, and was codified according to the “ideology” of the Friulian Philological Society: the Friulian type (or stereoptype), defined as «salt, onest, lavoradôr» (steadfast, honest and hard-working), basically moulded on the archetypal figure of the felix agricola or “good farmer”, also with emphasis on the role played by this land as stronghold of the Roman civilization against the German and Slavic world that pusher at the borders.

The rich literary, ideological and non-fiction production on the character of Friulians, flourished in this last century, by Friulians and external observers, we can infer a five-dimensional model. Therefore, the Friulian population would ha the following characteristics:

a people of farmers, therefore attached to the land and close to nature; organised in strong family structures and small village communities; hard-working with also good entrepreneurial skills; traditionalist and true to its word;

A people of Christians, thus of believers, set within the great catholic tradition, gifted with the virtues of simplicity, humbleness, austerity, ability to withstand the rigors of life with patience and determination.

a Nordic population: and therefore strong, serious, slow, taciturn, disciplined, with good organizational skills and sense of community, but with a background of existential sadness that is soothed by hard work but also by wine and expressed by choral singing;

a border people: situated in a location exposed to risks, toughened up by a very long history of invasions, plunders and battles; but also with the possibility of opening up and having positive relationships with the neighbouring peoples and other cultures, to mix with them, to welcome them and be welcomed by them;

a migrant people: since time immemorial, the imbalance between the population and the resources of the region has forced a number of people to leave their homeland, to seek employment and survival in other countries. Love strengthens in the pain of departure, and an idealised image of one's own country consolidates in the discomfort of being away from home. Fogolârs are recreated in the arrival communities and the language and traditions are preserved.

However, it is worth underlining that this model mostly reflects a historical and social reality that is rather circumscribed: the reality of Friuli between 1870 and 1970. However,

there is little we can say about the more ancient reality, because the historical and archaeological documents on the life of the populace is very scarce, almost non-existent. Peasant masses are people 'without history'. On the contrary, the image of Friulians conveyed by the historical documents of the Modern Age (15th-19th centuries) is quite different from the late 19th century one: the Friulian people (i.e. to a very large extent the peasants) is often described as rebellious, violent, indolent and undisciplined. This is surely the image prevailing in the mind of proprietors and law enforcers, who tend to emphasise the negative aspects (the stereotype of the villain, i.e. the bad guy) rather than the positive ones. But there is also a wealth of irrefutable evidence of this aspect of the Friulian character that dates back a couple of centuries: stories of disputes, banditry, crimes, riots and insurrections. Among all, here it is worth mentioning the «crudel zobia grassa» of 1511, the most violent, prolonged and widespread peasant revolt in Renaissance Italy. Obviously, the identity model, that we can define as traditional, barely reflects also the Friuli region of the last few decades: a highly developed, rich, secularized and publicised Friuli. A Friuli where peasants have disappeared and have been replaced by a good 5% of modern farmer-entrepreneurs; where the countryside is scattered with manufacturing plants, and where most of the employed works in the tertiary sector, whether advanced or not; and where emigration is only a distant memory, replaced by the immigration of people of any colour of skin coming from about seventy countries worldwide.