

CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF CORSICA'S MOUNTAIN AREAS THROUGH A STUDY OF THE SMALL DISTRICT OF NIOLU

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RESUMEN

El pequeño distrito de Niolu (Fig. 1) ha sido elegido como objeto del presente estudio porque es particularmente representativo del tradicional contexto montañoso de Córcega y de las transformaciones culturales, sociales y económicas ocurridas durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX.

La combinación de factores históricos, físicos, culturales, sociales y económicos ha contribuido a la preservación de la antigua sociedad de Córcega, cuya economía se basa primariamente en el campo y en las granjas ovinas. Hay cinco municipios –Albertacce, Calacuccia, Casamaccioli, Corscia y Lozzi- que se localizan alrededor del lago artificial de Calacuccia, con una población media de unas 1.000 personas durante la estación de invierno. A partir de 1972, con el establecimiento de el Parque Natural Regional de Córcega, hasta que surgió el distrito de Niolu, ha contribuido al cambio socioeconómico de la zona.

La presente investigación hace hincapié en el estudio de estas áreas montañosas; uno de los más notables potenciales culturales y medioambientales, que ha administrado la promoción de estos territorios y propuesto un modelo viable para contextos montañosos similares.

Palabras Clave: Córcega, Niolu, áreas de montaña.

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ABSTRACT

The small district of Niolu (Fig. 1) has been chosen as the subject of the present study because it is peculiarly representative of the traditional mountain context of Corsica and of the cultural, social and economic transformations there occurred during the second half of the XX century.

The combination of historical, physical, cultural, social and economic factors has contributed to the preservation of Corsica's archaic society, whose economy is based primarily on land and sheep farming. Its five boroughs – Albertacce, Calacuccia, Casamaccioli, Corscia and Lozzi – are located around the artificial lake of Calacuccia, with an average population of 1,000 people during the winter season. Since 1972, the establishment of the Parc Naturel Régional de Corse, to which the Niolu district belongs, has contributed to the socio-economic change of the area. The present research aims to study this mountain area; one of remarkable cultural and environmental potential, which has managed to promote its territory and propose a viable model for similar mountain contexts.

Key words: *Corsica, Niolu, mountain area.*

THE AREA

The small district of Niolu, in the north of Corsica, covers an area of 241km². It is 10km long, from north to south, and 15km wide, from east to west. A high and irregular rock face with peaks and vertical slopes lies on its northern border, which includes the chain of Monte Cinto (2,706m AMSL). On the western border lies the Paglia Orba (2,525m AMSL), the southern border has gentle granite slopes of a glacial origin, such as, for instance Punta Artica (2,327m AMSL). On the eastern border lies Scala di Santa Regina, a spectacular canyon with a bare and dry rock face, where the Golo river flows. The river is the most important on the Island, and it has its source in the Niolu district. The average altitude of the district is 900m AMSL, the climate is of a Mediterranean altitude type between 600 and 1,200m, and typically alpine above that level. The Mediterranean altitude climate is the climate of Corsica's mountain areas, usually cultivated and inhabited up to a height of 900m, and occupied by forests and grazing land above that level. The alpine climate, on the contrary, is characterized by showers and persistent snow, with low wintry temperatures. A stark contrast between the high rocky mountain areas and the conifer forests of the lower hills is peculiar to this territory.

The forest covers the basin almost entirely, yet the practice of land and sheep farming has led to a gradual deforestation of a vast mountain area (Fig. 2). The territory bears testimony to its terrace cultivations and dry walls, though today the land is no longer tilled, and the forest is slowly growing back.

Following a new cantonal division in the years 1971-1973 – in 1954 the district was part of the canton of Calacuccia – Niolu has become part of the Niolu-Omessa administration – its double name being the name of a parish, Le Niolu, and of a borough, Omessa, the ancient capital city of the canton. Niolu-Omessa is a French administrative canton located in the Département de la Haute-Corse (*Department of Upper Corsica*), and it forms part of the Collectivité Territoriale de Corse and of the Arrondissement de Corte (a third order administrative division). The Niolo-Omessa canton stretches along the Niolu parish, the Ghjvellina parish and part of the Tàlcini parish. This small district includes the five boroughs of Albertacce (867m AMSL., 97 km²), Calacuccia (847m AMSL, 19 km²), Casamaccioli (868m AMSL, 36 km²), Corscia (837m AMSL, 59 km²) and Lozzi (1.044m AMSL, 31 km²), with a total population of 952 in 2007. With the exception of Casamaccioli, the other villages are situated on the sunny side of the Golo valley.

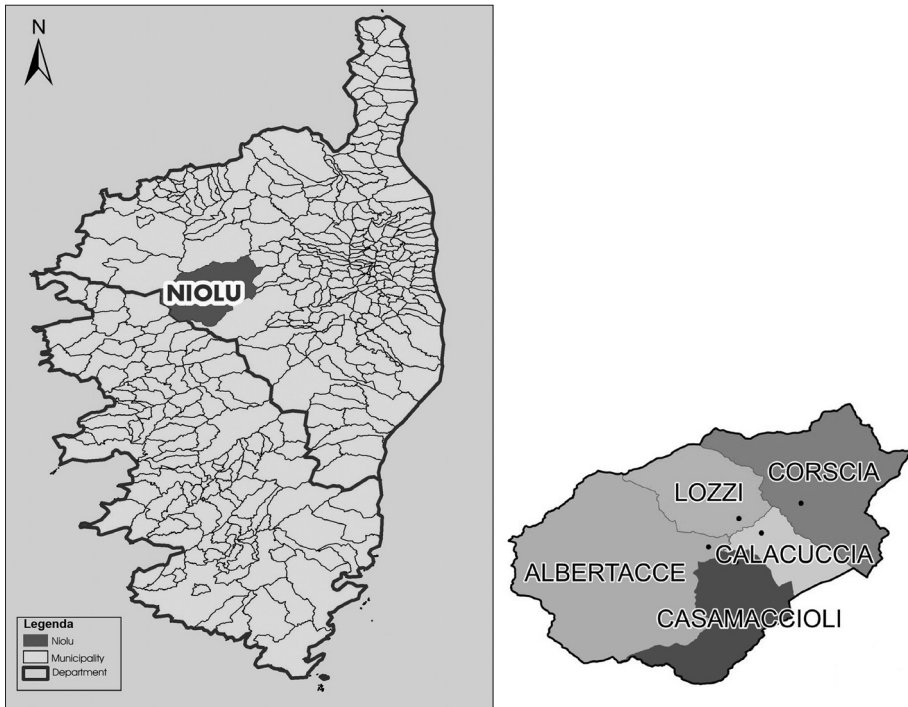


Fig. 1 – With its five boroughs, the small district of Niolu bears testimony to Corsica’s archaicism as well as to the significant transformations of the island’s socio-economic and cultural contexts. Source: www.insee.it, 2002 (revised).

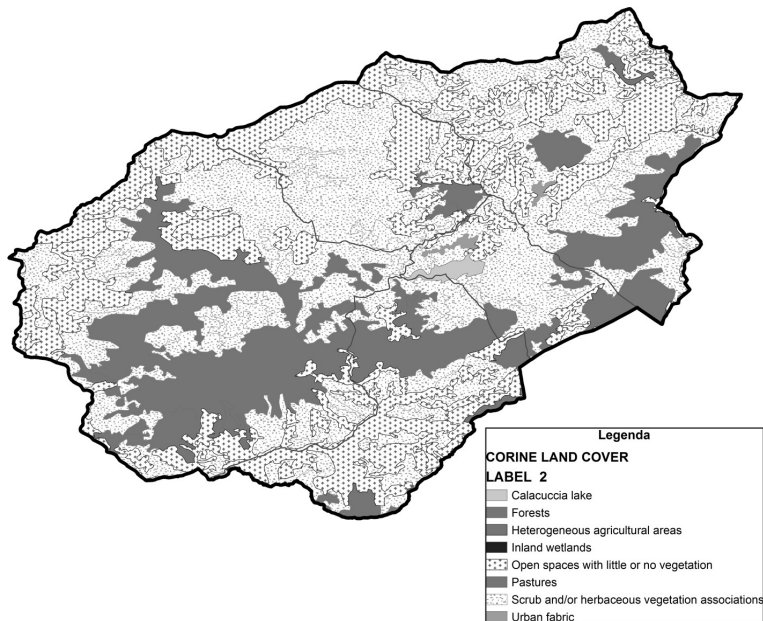


Fig. 2 – The forest and the partially natural landscape of the Niolu area.

The gentle hilly slopes have allowed for human settlements since prehistoric times. In 1913 R. Blanchard thus described the small district: *“Murée vers l’aval par de puissants contreforts dont la rivière ne vient à bout qu’en creusant des gorges redoutables, la vallée est isolée entre de hautes montagnes, et un système de communications permanente et faciles ne s’y est installé qu’à une date récente”* (SOCIETE CORSE D’ECONOMIE SYLVO-PASTORALE, 1961, p. 74). Its villages had been isolated at the foot of the mountain by deep gullies such as Scala di Santa Regina, where a road was built as late as 1892 (SIMI, 1981, p. 163). Between 1965 and 1968 the valley landscape was altered following the construction of the artificial lake of Calacuccia (RAVIS-GIORDANI, 1983), which has undoubtedly contributed to the development of the tourist industry in the area, as well as in the whole region. On the one hand, the presence of this hydroelectric barrier, in fact, has altered the landscape – literally it has submerged an area of 130ha; on the other, it has had an impact on the social landscape too. Both the altitude and the distance from the sea have affected the economy in a negative way, and slowed down the development of this territory; yet at the same time the effort to promote disadvantaged and fragile areas of outstanding beauty has

resulted in the establishment of Corsica's National Park. Overall, the Park has managed to improve and promote both the natural and the economic systems of the district, and consequently it has confirmed the importance of its work in the area (CARBONI, 2003).

GEOLOGICAL FEATURES

The geological history of Corsica is linked to the Atlantic Ocean, whose opening activated a complex mechanism of rotation and compression of the large African and Eurasian plates and resulted in the rising of the Alps.

For the western Mediterranean, in fact, Corsica represents a continental lithosphere block in between two basins of oceanic backarc – the Ligure-Provençal Basin and the Tyrrhenian Sea, both surrounded by orogenic collision chains. Corsica's peculiar location is the result of a complex alpine geodynamic evolution, which the island has undergone both through compression phases and through extension phases – the former occurred between the Cretaceous and the Upper Oligocene and due to the subduction of the old Ligure-Piedmontese basin, with the consequent continental collision between Adria and Europe; the latter occurred during the Oligocene-Miocene and linked to the alpine orogenic collapse and the opening of the Ligure-Provençal Basin and the Tyrrhenian Sea (Fig. 3).

The crust subduction of the two plates resulted in an active magmatic arc between 35 and 13 millions of years ago along the coastline that stretches from Catalonia to Liguria, whose components, now in the form of crystalline granite, surface especially in Provence, along the south-western Corsican coast and the north-western coast of Sardinia.

The few calcareous soils on the Island are located on the east of the St. Florant Bay, near Capo Corso, and the deep south, near Bonifacio, where they form spectacular white cliffs and the ria where Corsica's capital city sits.

The coastal plains, located along the western coast, are formed by recent sedimentary deposits, mostly of the debris flow type. These are due to the high energy level of the ridge and to climate change.

Corsica is divided into two different sections, each one of them featuring a distinctive geology and geomorphology. One, the north-western sector (Alpine Corsica), presents alpine layers, mostly of an oceanic origin; the other, the western sector (Hercynian Corsica or Ancient Corsica) consists of a basement with Permian volcanic rocks and a large granitoid of the

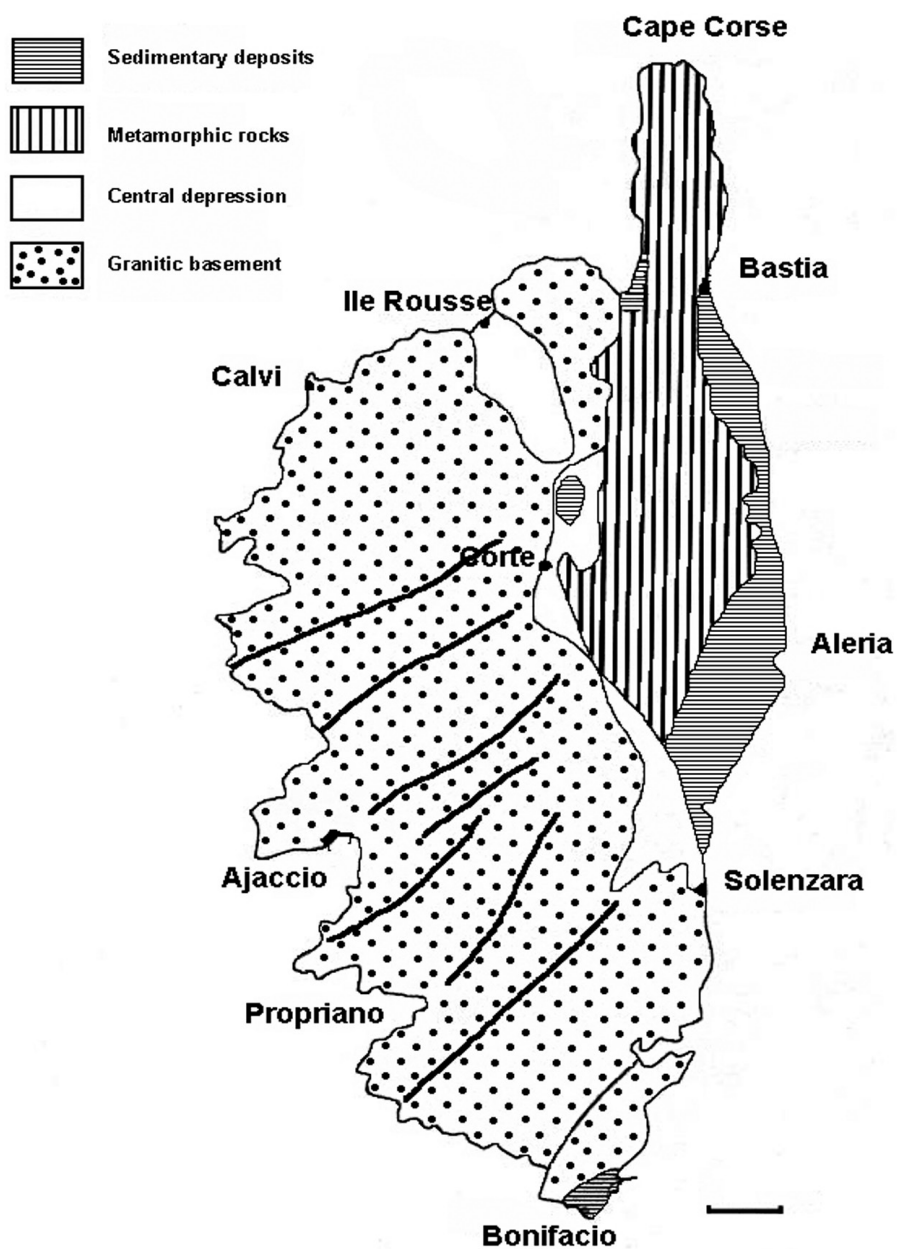


Fig. 3 – The geological scheme of Corsica.

Carboniferous-Permian period, in Palaeozoic and Pre-Cambrian rocks. Along the western border of Ancient Corsica deposits from the Upper Mesozoic-Eocene period are found, with a stratigraphic disconformity on the said basement. A tectonic line stretching NNW-SSE and 100 km long separates Ancient Corsica from Alpine Corsica. About 30 millions of years ago the Sardo-Corsican and Balearic micro-plate began to drift apart; the anti-clock wise rotation of the plate resulted in the emergence of both the Appennines and the Apuan Alps. This phenomenon, occurred about 6-7 millions years ago, determined both Sardinia's and Corsica's current location.

The north-western part of Corsica, including the Niolu district, presents crystalline rocks and granites risen from the African plate. The present work focuses on the Niolu district, that is the mountain area of the Golo Bay. The area belongs to Ancient Corsica, and it is characterised by Hercynian granites which form the southward extension of the batholith of the Sardo-Corsican block. The granites of this region belong to the "Autochthonous Unit", and they are defined by Permian ring structures. Numerous fractures perpendicular to the main divide stretch across the region, with the Island's highest mountains (eg. Monte Cinto) being located along such divide.

GEOMORPHOLOGIC FEATURES

As noted, the area of interest features primarily rocks of a magmatic-intrusive nature, which include mainly granitic rocks and gneiss, but also sedimentary layers of the Quaternary period formed as a result of the breaking down of the granites. The density of such recent layers may reach up to 10 metres, and this is a clear indication of the significant transformation of the Island, its midland and coastal areas. The orogenetic pressure from Alpine Corsica has determined the formation of the western coastline. Here, the recent sea raise has led to the formation of numerous *rias* along the main valleys as well as into the minor ones, and thus it has shaped this peculiar area of the west Mediterranean. In the near island of Sardinia such a coastal feature is found exclusively in the Gallura region and in some portions of the coast. However, in Corsica the same granitic landscape looks different: while the two islands may present a number of peculiar analogies and similar distribution, the morphology of Corsica's granitic rocks appears to be continuous while Sardinia's does not. The Sardinian granitic landscape is the result of a series of intrusive episodes which gradually broke the granitic crust and gave origin to its current parallel crests, converging

towards the most recent point of intrusion. The most representative instance of this morphologic-petrographic evolution is Monte Limbara, in the north-western region of Gallura of Sardinia. Corsica's reliefs, on the contrary, form a homogenous morphologic unit whose centre lies on the crest of granite reliefs stretching across the island and which divides it into two similar parts, from Bonifacio in the south to the small district of Balagne.

The characterising formations of the crystalline basement in Niolu are mostly scattered blocks: these are taphonomic remains and other formations due to the superficial flow of wild waters. Such scattered blocks form a tor, inselbergs or domes landscapes, but these are not as beautiful as the Sardinian landscapes, whose reliefs are less high than Corsica's. In addition, the climate – a secondary factor – determines a lower humidity level on the mountains as opposed to Sardinia, where the reliefs are not as high as in Corsica. The temperature is much higher in Sardinia, so that the combination of humidity and heat in the scattered granite blocks produces a much more evident and effective process of alteration on the surface where the taphonomic remains lie. However, pipes, grids, karren and domes are largely present on the surface of these rocks in the Niolu district. Some of them have spectacular forms and are located on the mountains.

The altitude, the recent tectonic movement and the geomorphologic evolution have contributed to shape and differentiate Corsica from the nearby island of Sardinia. The higher portions of Corsica's territory, including the Niolu district, are distinctive of this island as they feature numerous glacial lakes, none of which is found in Sardinia. These morphologies clearly testify to the impact of climate change on Corsica's reliefs, where it has produced formations and deposits of a glacial origin. In the Niolu district, at the source of the Erco and Rudda rivers, Golo's left tributaries, important lakes such as Lago di Cinto, near Capo Falo, and Lago Maggiore, near Capo Berdato, are found. Not far from the Lago Maggiore are the Lancone lakes, named Soprano, Mezzano and Sottano because of their altimetric location. Though belonging to sub-basins, these lakes are slightly more than 4km distant from one another, yet they are all located at a similar altitude. Within the same basin other minor lakes are also found, including Paglia Orba, Pedru and the Lago di Lavignolu, all of which are of a glacial origin.

The presence of horizons and of white sandy-muddy deposits, found in the vicinity of the coastal plains, are the result of a gradual frosting occurred on these mountain areas during the last glacial period, about 10,000 years ago.

Analogous morphologies can be found in the deposits of great rocky blocks located in the crystalline substratum as well as in the calcareous rocks of

Alpine Corsica where they form vast and significant deposits of a blockstream type. Near the district of St. Florent some fossiliferous karst caves are found within calcareous sedimentary deposits of a periglacial origin. The same deposits of the blockstream type are typical of the granite mountain areas, at less than 400 metres, whereas in Sardinia and at the foot of the Spanish Pyrenees they are usually found at higher levels. This demonstrates that in this part of the west Mediterranean area there exists a specific weather band which affects the local climate. The border derived from the said deposits marks the mountain-like features of a vast majority of Corsica's territory, which was severely affected by glaciations during the Pleistocene.

THE NIOLIN SOCIETY: TRAITS, SPECIFICITY AND TRADITION

Up to the 1950s, the traditional society of the Niolu district relied primarily on an agro-pastoral type of economy based on animal farming (sheep, goats, swine and cows) and land farming (cereals, rye, wheat, and family-run cultivated lands, olive trees and vineyards, chestnut trees and linen). This type of economy could be found also in other areas across the Island, such as, for instance, the '*piaghja*' territories along the west coast, and in winter pastures, where the Niolu people built small towns and villages such as Galeria, and there they settled, though they kept a strong link with their homelands (LENCLUD, RAVIS-GIORDANI, 1973, p. 200).

The Niolu district, therefore, cannot be separated from its marine identity.

In the autumn, the shepherds reached the lower or 'foreign' lands of the district (locally this transhumance bears the name of '*impiaghjera*'), and at the start of the summer, in May, they went back to their villages. While there, the community gathered to celebrate local festivities such as '*la tundera*' (the shearing). Early in June, the day after St. Anthony, the shepherds walked up the mountain (*muntagnera*) to reach their *bergeries*, the folds, located at a height between 1,500 and 1,700m.

The place where a *bergerie* (also called 'stazzu' and 'piazzile') was built depended upon its proximity to water – a spring or a river – since water was needed for cooking and to wash utensils used to make cheese. The proximity to the woods was also important, so that shepherds may easily find wood and have fire for heating and to make cheese. Finally, *bergeries* were preferably built near a rocky area, in cold and humid places where cheese could be stored in the '*casgile*', and where the view allowed shepherds to control the herds and keep safe from avalanches and rockfalls (RAVIS-GIORDANI, 1983).

The care of gardens, the house and the elderly people as well as the education of children was traditionally in the hands of women, whose tasks also included looking after the '*manighjia*' (cheese maturing) in storage rooms (GLEIZAL, 1981), and weaving wool and linen, used to make a renowned and popular linen called '*pannu corsu*'. Women also prepared trousseaus, work outfits and the so-called *peloni*, leather outfits used by the shepherds in cold winter weather (DUMAZET, 1982).

A peculiarity of the Niolin society was its strong sense of community and the central role of the family unit. In 1865, as he travelled across the district, Léonard de Saint-Germain observed: 'Each family unit is like a small state which can produce everything it needs to live' (DE SAINT-GERMAIN, 1869, cf. RAVIS-GIORNDANI, 1983, p. 291).

Crucial to the family unit was the house, *a casa*. The house was built exclusively with local materials, and like the houses of today it had a cubic, minimal and solid structure. Its windows are narrow and rare, and the walls are the same colour as the bare stone, glossed over the years (SIMI, 1981).

In the Niolu basin block houses, '*maison bloc*' are popular: these are structures with a rectangular plan, usually on three stories; they may have a sloping roof, with protruding hollow tiles, and made with rough granite, slightly smoothed, or a flat roof – more widely used and cheaper (ROTHER AND ROTHER, 1990). These houses usually line up along a town's main road, as can be seen in Calacuccia and in Albertacce.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS

The history of the population of the five towns in Niolu may be divided into three main periods, starting from the XIX century. The first period, from 1801 to 1884, sees an average demographic increase. It should be recalled that at the time the majority of Corsica's population lived in the mountain areas, as opposed to the hills and the plains. The inhabitants included transhumant shepherds who worked the land for their subsistence, farmed dairies, or produced meat for sale; farmers, who worked the land and bred the cattle; and woodcutters, who supplied wood for domestic use, for coal and for the building industry (wood was also traded abroad). They lived primarily in large villages at a height between 600 and 1,000 metres, and used temporary lodgings at times of seasonal transhumance to the mountain and coastal pastures. In this archaic world, where a system of shared land property was necessarily in place, due to the local economy,

life was relatively secure, despite the often presumed too harsh and isolated context. In the mid- and high mountain areas, whose economy had been based on animal and cereal farming for centuries, the potential for a stable livelihood was higher, at least up to the last decades of the century. Signs of overpopulation were already evident as farmed lands expanded as much as the climate and the local morphology allowed for; the chestnut culture reached its peak when the demographic growth reached its highest rate, and the shepherds began to settle along the coast and in the winter pasture areas (ROTA 1998; RENUCCI, 1974).

During the second period, from 1885 to 1955, the population of the entire island, including the Niolu district, decreased. Between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries overpopulation and the overall unstable economy forced hundreds of people to migrate. The majority of them were country and townspeople, while the shepherds, who were financially more secure, were reluctant to leave. Most migrant countrymen were farmers from the hills who cultivated cereals; yet the number of migrant cereal farmers from the mid-mountain areas was also considerable, given that they could implement their income with animal farming. As regards the mountain areas, where the population was represented mainly by shepherds, who owned animals and farmed the land (especially chestnuts and cereals), migration was a lot more contained. It ought to be recalled that in these areas especially the shared property system was largely still intact – property could be shared among the different villages, or else it could be divided among the people so that everyone, including the poor, may have access to both land and animal farming resources. In this way, the shared property system contributed to the island's economic stability at times of demographic growth. However, though change was not evident in communities across the mountain areas as it was in the hills, the state of things would not last long. The division of shared property, which remained a minor phenomenon, ought to be considered in the light of another important event, which took place during the XIX century, that is the gradual emigration of groups of local people who left their boroughs of origin and settled permanently in areas of winter pasture along the coast or nearby. The once seasonal refuges slowly began to turn into proper settlements; their economy went from being essentially pastoral-based to being based primarily on agriculture. Naturally, the next step would have been a strong demand for administrative autonomy from other boroughs miles away and hard to reach. A problem with the question of shared property of the land thus emerged. Who would be the owner now? Would it be the new settlers along the coast or the original communities? In addition, would the new

settlers have a right to use the mountain pastures? Let us consider a rather emblematic case: the Niolu shepherds, who had long been coming down from the mountains with their flocks and spent their winters in Filosorma and in the Galeria plain, in response to demographic growth and therefore in need of farming land, settled in areas of shared pasture, and later on, they gained administrative autonomy with the foundation of the boroughs Manso and Galeria. However, while the new communities lost their rights in the Niolu basin, they retained their lands in the *piaghja*. In the case of Filosorma, this was solved relatively soon and with no major problem because the new settlers no longer needed to rely on a transhumant system of animal farming. Today, however, given the development of the tourist industry in the Galeria Bay, the boroughs of Manso and Galeria are largely subject to the decisions of people who no longer belong to those communities, and have not for over a century now, that is the Niolu people, the owners of the ancient winter pastures (GEOFFRAY, 1982).

Up to 1910, the population decreased, yet demographic depression increased significantly later on between 1911 and 1945, and even more so between 1946 and 1955. Among the causes, youth migration is undoubtedly the most important: a significant number of Niolins, mostly young people, left their hometowns and moved to Bastia, Ajaccio, the mainland or the south Mediterranean area in search of occupation. These migrants have largely kept in touch with their original community and are listed in the local electoral register. About a half of second-generation Niolins living in countries across the continent and in the colonies never left their homeland completely, and towards the end of the 1960s they retired back in their native land.

During the third period, from 1956 to 1968, the population increased. This demographic change was caused primarily by a significant wave of immigration, with retired Niolins going back home, and with the arrival of craftsmen, public officers, and tradesmen, for whom life in the area was convenient. After 1968 and up to the 1980s the demographic rate gradually slowed down (Fig. 4) (INSEE, 1991; CARBONI, 2003).

Up to 1990, the depopulation of the midlands opposes to the dynamism of the suburban areas, the cities and the coastal areas. The growth of both the island and of the Niolu district began again in 1991, and on to 1999, when the population was largely the same; this trend continued up to 2007.

Today Niolu has a population of 4 people per km²; its five boroughs have a relatively low demographic rate: three out of five have less than 200 inhabitants, one of them has more than 300, with a total population of 948 people.

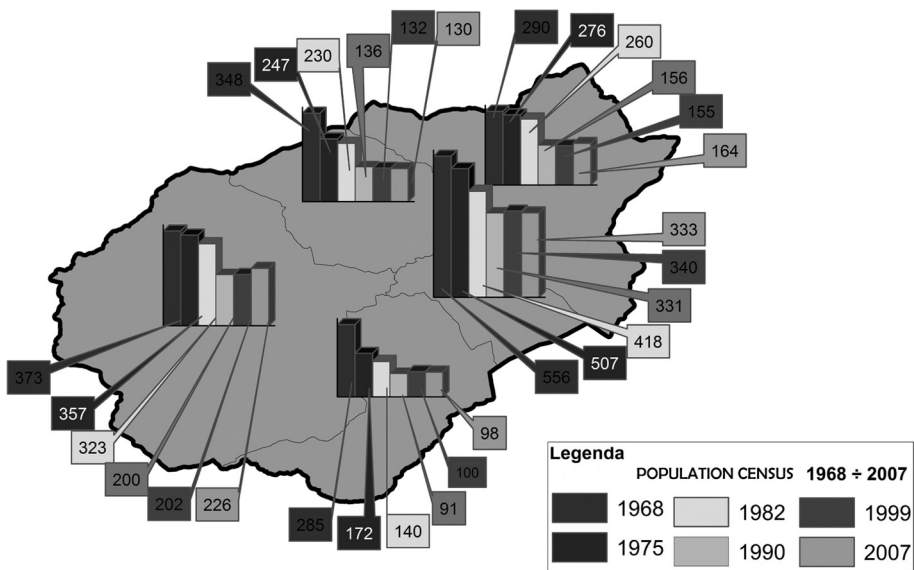


Fig. 4 – The Niolu population from 1968 to 2007. Source: www.insee.it

The active population is on the increase (295 in 2007 as opposed to 266 in 1999). The non-active population, however, has a significant impact on the demographic structure of the five boroughs (234 in 2007 as opposed to 250 in 1999) despite its decreased rate over the years.

The population is aged between 45 and 74 (65%) with a low birth rate the 0-14 age group represents a mere 9% of the total population while the 15-44 age group currently represents the 26% of the population.

The gap between the elderly and the younger generations in 2007 was the same as in 1999, though a small increase in the number of youths has been registered in the boroughs of Albertacce, Locci and Casamaccioli. The low percentage of youngsters, and especially of children under the age of 5, is a consequence of a low birth rate, due, as it is known, to a low fertility rate.

In Niolu, the overall balance between births and deaths is negative: births do not compensate for the number of deaths given the high percentage of elderly people and in spite of a high mortality rate. However, the total population of Niolu increased from 929 in 1999 to 949 in 2007, thanks to immigrants outnumbering migrants. The presence of immigrants affects the balance with the elderly people. Since 1999, in fact, the total population of Albertacce and Corscia has increased respectively by 9 and 24 people.

THE ECONOMY OF THE NIOLU DISTRICT

The years between 1945 and 1950 saw the end of a longstanding economy in the Niolu district, based on a moderate self-sustaining agro-pastoral structure. Such a structure could be seen in areas beyond the district, including the much better off lands along the coast –the '*piaghja*'– in the Marsolino-Filosorma district where wheat, olive trees and vineyards were cultivated. Despite the cold winters, each house, and its family unit, stored wheat and chestnut flour, pork meat produce, cheese, pulses and oil. With the exception of coffee and sugar, each family was able to produce everything they needed. In October, the paterfamilias could leave for the *piaghja* and spend up to five or six months there, certain that the family back home would not want.

Between October and May, in la *piaghja*, the fields were sowed with cereals, the vineyards were pruned, olives were harvested, and gardens attended. At the start of summer, on the mountains, the rye was harvested, and part of the family reached the *piaghja* to help with the harvest. In September the grapes were gathered which would give wine for the year ahead, and in October and November the chestnuts –the staple of the local diet– were also gathered. These tasks took a man's whole day; meanwhile, at home, women also worked strenuously attending the house, looking after the elderly and the children as well as making cheese, weaving wool and linen to make work outfits and trousseaus for their daughters.

In 1865 Léonard de Saint Germain noticed how the family unit could be compared to a small self-sustaining State. A century later the situation was essentially the same: the family unit still in charge of the production, consumption and the inheritance system (DE SAINT-GERMAIN, 1869, cf. RAVIS-GIORNANI, 1983, p. 291).

Unlike other rural contexts where a family from another community may become landowner, in Niolu it is not possible to perform any agricultural tasks nor become a shepherd unless wedded to a local woman. Property, in fact, is shared today as it was in the past, and it can only be accessed by the local people only, whose future it shapes significantly.

Before WWII Niolu opened to the tourist industry. The *Hotel des Touristes* in Calacuccia was built at the start of the XX century, and large numbers of tourists visited, attracted by the landscape and its mountains. The first visitors were mainly French, German and English. Since then, Calacuccia and Albertacce, both located on the way between Bastia and Porto, have developed a lot faster than the midland boroughs of Corscia, Lozzi and Casamaccioli.

As opposed to the other boroughs, Calacuccia and Albertacce have played a crucial role in the development of the local tourist industry most facilities including shops, hotels and bars, pharmacy, a GP, the Post Office and a garage, in fact, are located there.

What do the people of Niolu live on today?

Fig 5. below shows details of different business activities up to 2009. As evidenced, according to the current welfare division by sector, agriculture is the base of the economy of the Niolu district.

In the mountain areas a traditional type of agriculture is still practiced. This is based on intensive farming and chestnut culture. The primary forms

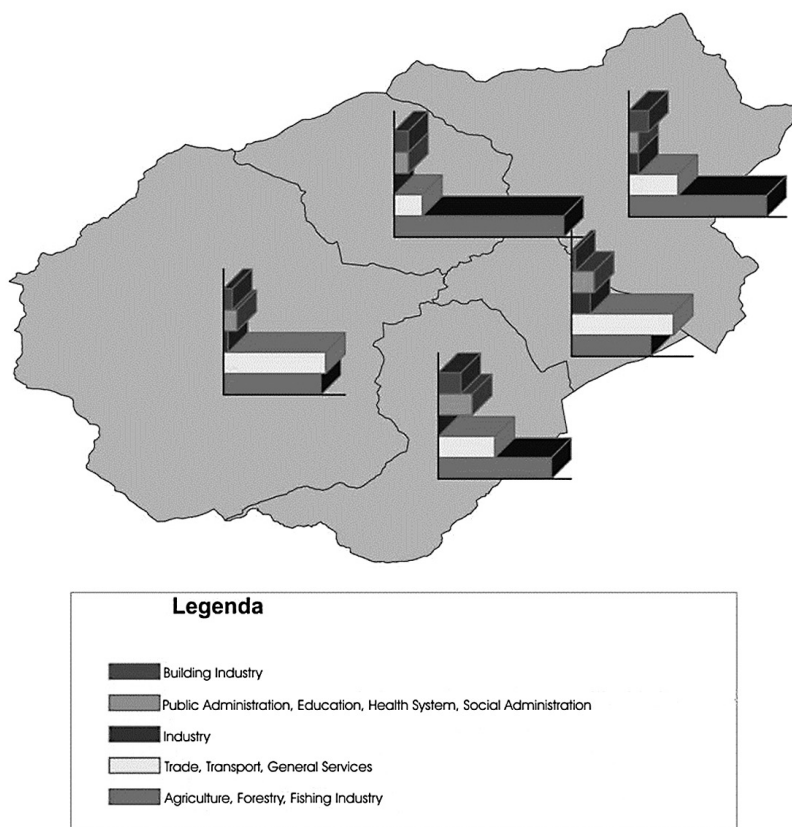


Fig. 5 – Number of active businesses in Niolu, divided by sector (period: up to 31 December 2008).
Source: www.insee.it

of animal farming are cow-farming (the locals are expert meat producers), sheep and goat farming (with the production of milk, partly used to make cheese) and swine farming. Less than half of animal farming today is of a traditional type; the rest relies on extensive cow and swine farming which use and occupy lands once cultivated and now abandoned. Many farmers combine their work with other non-agricultural types of activities.

Butchery for the production of cured meat is practiced in rural homes by a large number of farmers, yet this practice is badly organised and rather expensive, often with food health concerns. The local farmers have also concentrated their efforts in the production of local goods such as the '*brocciu*' and a local honey called '*mele de Corsica*', both of which have obtained the DOC Certification in 1998. The swine farmers have been trying to certify the '*charcutere corse*', and similarly have local producers tried to obtain the DOC Certification for their chestnut flour.

The tertiary sector follows, with tourism being the leading service industry. Path tracking in particular is a major resource – the G.R.20 is one of the longest and most difficult trek paths in Europe: it takes 15 days to cross it, at a steady pace of a 7-hour walk each day. Various shelters are located along this 200-km long path, at a height between 250 and 2,500 metres above sea level. Camping is forbidden and in winter time it is also possible to ski along the G.R.20. In summer time large numbers of people walk this track on their way to Niolu which attracts individual as well as group and family tourism in the warm season, but also third-age tourism in the low season, and throughout the year sports tourism, horse riding and walking along the G.R.20 and the shepherds tracks. The birth of the Parc Naturel Regional de Corse has helped revive the midland boroughs as well as launching an alternative form of sport tourism, the *randonnée pedestre*, that is trekking in search of forgotten places. One of these is the Sea-to-North Trek, which is offered to tourists visiting Niolu. It is a relatively easy trek, it can be done all year round and it allows for the discovery of this island's colours and contrasts. Along paths such as these, in small villages across the Niolu district, tourists can find half-board hostels (*gîte d'étape*) which boost the economy of minor tourist destinations. The Regional Park has also organised daily walks of 2-5 hours in 8 small districts (*Pays*), and Niolu is one of them. The routes are circular so as to take tourists across different villages along the way.

The development of tourism, radically different from the elite tourism of the pre-war years, has had a significant impact on the economy of the Niolu district, enhancing trade activities as well as the hospitality industry especially

between May and October each year. For some shepherd this has also meant the possibility of selling dairy produce at good prices. The Niolu district hosts one of the oldest skiing resorts on the Island, Vergio, situated in northern Niolu in the Valdoniello forest, at 1,400m. Opened in 1958-1960, this skiing resort is 100km from Bastia and 85km from Ajaccio. According to INSEE, on January 1, 2010, there were no hotels in Albertacce, Casamaccioli, Corscia and Lozzi. There are three 2-star hotels in Calacuccia, with a total of 48 room available. The same INSEE also affirms that there are no camping facilities in the Niolu district, yet according to internet sources there is one camping site in Acquaviva and one in Calacuccia.

The structure and the number of houses in Niolu has changed since 1982, when holiday homes and other vacant lodgings were built.

Holiday homes are usually owned by local people and by Corsican people living in the continent who regularly visit their native towns. In 1975, in Niolu, 86% of the local homes were main homes, 3% were holiday homes, and 11% were vacant properties. In 1982 the situation was radically different, with 58% of holiday homes, 41% of main homes and three vacant properties only (0.2% of the total). In 2007, 35% were main homes (452 units); 56% were holiday homes (720 units), and there were 108 vacant properties (9% of the total). Considering both, holiday homes and vacant properties could then accommodate for up to 4,140 people³.

In 2010 there was a total of 718 between holiday homes and occasional lodgings scattered across the five Niolu boroughs, that is only two less than 1999. Respectively, there were 173 in Albertacce, 164 in Calacuccia, 136 in Casamaccioli, 122 in Corscia and 123 in Lozzi. In 2010, holiday homes could accommodate up to 3,590 people.

Generally speaking, the natural and the cultural heritage of the Niolu district make it a top holiday destination for the contemporary tourist. As regards commerce, the tourist industry largely benefits from it, yet the production of consumer and intermediary goods remains weak.

The State administration is strongly present in the Niolu district in the form of different activities including education, health, social action and public administration. In addition, the demand for new housing is kept under control; construction works usually has to do with public buildings or else it means the refurbishment of existing homes. Likewise, industrial activities are

³ Conventionally, the reception capacity is calculated on the basis of the number of beds available or the number of people, where one person equals one bed. Holiday homes can accommodate 5 people (Source: INSEE, 2001).

of small importance. To confirm the low activity of the building industry, it may be noted that by 2007, about 50% of the extant main homes had been built before 1949 (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1 – Transformation of main homes in the five boroughs of Niolu, with reference to year of construction. Source: www.insee.it

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION	ALBERTACCE	CALACUCCIA	CASAMACCIOLI	CORSCIA	LOZZI
Before 2005	108	151	48	79	64
Before 1949	48	73	30	51	45
From 1949 to 1974	12	29	4	6	2
From 1975 to 1989	32	28	8	15	8
From 1990 to 2004	16	21	6	8	9
2007	109	151	50	79	64

In 2007 the active resident population in the district reached 295 people; between 1999 and 2007 it increased by 13 people while people with a full-time job went from 220 to 256. The number of unemployed people decreased significantly from 46 to 39 people (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 – Active and non-active population aged 15÷64 in 1999 and 2007. Source: www.insee.it

	ALBERTACCE		CALACUCCIA		CASAMACCIOLI		CORSCIA		LOZZI	
	1999	2007	1999	2007	1999	2007	1999	2007	1999	2007
N. of Employed People	115	135	57	61	57	61	72	77	74	59
Active (%)	49,6	54,1	47,4	55,9	47,4	55,9	34,7	48,7	50	67,8
-employed (%)	38,3	46,7	40,4	52,9	40,4	52,5	31,9	38,5	44,6	57,6
-unemployed (%)	11,3	7,4	5,3	3,4	5,3	3,4	2,8	10,3	5,4	10,2
Non-active (%)	50,4	45,9	52,6	44,1	52,6	44,1	65,3	51,3	50	32,2

The increase is due primarily to the increased number of residents working outside the Niolu territory: 36 people in total (Tab. 3).

Tab. 3 – Workplace of the active population aged 15÷64 working and living in Upper Corsica. Source: www.insee.it

2007	ALBERTACCE	CALACUCCIA	CASAMACCIOLI	CORSCIA	LOZZI
Total	65	99	32	31	34
People working in place of residence	48	76	14	15	13
People working away from home	17	23	18	16	21
<i>-in Upper Corsica</i>	16	21	18	16	16
<i>-In Lower Corsica</i>	0	1	0	0	3
<i>-In France, urban context</i>	1	1	0	0	2
1999	ALBERTACCE	CALACUCCIA	CASAMACCIOLI	CORSCIA	LOZZI
Total	45	98	23	24	34
People working in place of residence	36	77	17	15	20
People working away from home	9	21	6	9	14
<i>-in Upper Corsica</i>	8	20	5	9	12
<i>-In Lower Corsica</i>	0	0	1	0	0
<i>-In France, urban context</i>	1	1	0	0	2

Between 1999 and 2007 the number of unemployed people aged 15÷64 decreased from 45 to 39, though for the boroughs of Lozzi and Corscia the opposite is true. The increase in female employment rate has contributed to the current numbers.

In 2007, 166 of the active and employed people living in the Niolu district worked in the Upper Corsica – this data has remained the same since 1990. 95 of the 256 active and employed people with a full time occupation and resident in the district commuted on a daily basis to reach their workplaces; in 1990 they were 59. At the same time, it should be pointed out that active people tend to travel to the district for work whilst living somewhere else (Tab. 3).

In the Niolu district employment in the public sector is as high as it is in other rural areas across Corsica. The private sector is equally present across the territory, though less relevant if compared to the public sector. It is represented by 170 private businesses, of various kinds, with agriculture and the tertiary sector being the leading activities. The building trade is also a significant economic force, while commerce is still a minor presence in the district.

CONCLUSIONS

During the first half of the XX century especially, Corsica's midlands, including the Niolu district, have witnessed a significant phase of territorial uncertainty due to a radical change of the lifestyle and to the socio-economic transformations which have contributed to youth emigration towards the largely more receptive coastal areas, or to foreign lands. A strong demographic decrease is to be highlighted in this respect. This is due primarily to a low birth rate, a poor network of public transport and communication in the area, low incomes and the higher demands of the local population. The foundation of the Regional Park of Corsica aimed to halt depopulation in the area and put in place an action plan that would enhance the local economy and the employment prospects in full respect of the environment. Today, the demographic balance is positive, thanks to the Parc, which has contributed to control the depopulation process. The demographic structure, however, shows that the majority of the local population belongs to the upper class, and this is due to prolonged life expectations; yet at the same time this has had a negative impact on the socio-economic resources of the territory given that the economy relies on the active population.

An economically weak yet culturally and environmentally strong district such as Niolu could only concentrate its efforts on the tourist industry, which now represents its main source of income and social growth. The Niolin community, however, has not accepted external stimuli passively, but rather it has welcomed all that would contribute to the local culture and promote the local tourist resources, thus rejecting the imposition of stronger models from the outside. In this rural and mountain context, tourism has focused primarily on the discovery, the promotion and preservation of the local natural, environmental and cultural resources, and thus it has become, over the years, a driving force for the local economy, together with the traditional sectors of animal and land farming. The role of the Regional Park needs to be stressed in this respect, since here, as much as in other districts across the Island, it has failed to exploit the local infrastructures rather relying on holiday homes. As numbers clearly show, in fact, holiday homes and vacant properties in the five Niolu boroughs are numerous, and they contribute to a form of tourism of a migratory origin, which is well organised, and which is likely to give a positive outcome thanks to the currently growing demand for environmentally-friendly and traditional holiday destinations.

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The present work has been realised by the authors here named. More specifically, D. Carboni has focused on the paragraphs 'The demographic dynamics', 'The economy of the Niolu district'; S. Ginesu has compiled the paragraphs on 'Geological features' and 'Geomorphologic features'; M. Sechi Nuvole has concentrated on the following paragraphs: 'The area' and 'The Niolin society: traits, specificity and tradition'. The synopsis, conclusions and the bibliography are joint effort of the three authors.