

ITALY

# The twists and turns of the Brenta River

by Andrea Signori





A warehouse shed immersed in vegetation. Veneto built its wealth on a myriad of small craft areas spread across the region. In the 70s, 80s and 90s the expansion of these small enterprises in some way compromised the surrounding natural environment.







## **A JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF THE VENETO REGION, FROM TRADITION TO INNOVATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND RELIGION**

**In the 1950s the hardworking Veneto region in the northeast of Italy, best known for its capital Venice, was a poor, agricultural area. Nobody would have bet on the success that was to arrive with such force and resounding impact.**

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In just a few years farmhands became factory workers, unemployment disappeared and the economic boom powered the growth of the region's economy at breakneck speed. Veneto became one of the richest regions in Europe. For twenty or so years, beginning from the end of the 1970s, each year saw double-digit growth, spreading wellbeing and driving the expansion of the region's businesses, which for the most part were family run firms. Today, after almost two years of the Covid crisis, once more Veneto is driving the recovery of the Italian economy, registering the highest growth in the country.

One of the symbols of this "economic fairy tale" was and is the important waterway, the Brenta, which runs through the heart of the region and spans almost 200 kilometres. Along this river Veneto's inhabitants came of age, reaping the fruits of this golden period and today they reflect on a period of change, poised between the risks of globalization, the damage caused by the pandemic and the energy of the new generations that are increasingly contaminated by foreign cultures.

The Brenta provides a privileged view of the heart of Mediterranean Europe: following its course one embarks on a journey through religion, taking in aspirations of regional independence, sumptuous villas as well as small warehouses and shed workshops, not to mention pollution, the determination of the region's inhabitants and the silence of a region that is traditionally reserved in character but has always been dedicated to hard work.



Ginevra Finamoni, aged 22, is a student from Carmignano di Brenta (Province of Padua) who is passionate about her horse. Each week she spends her free time riding him and taking care of him.



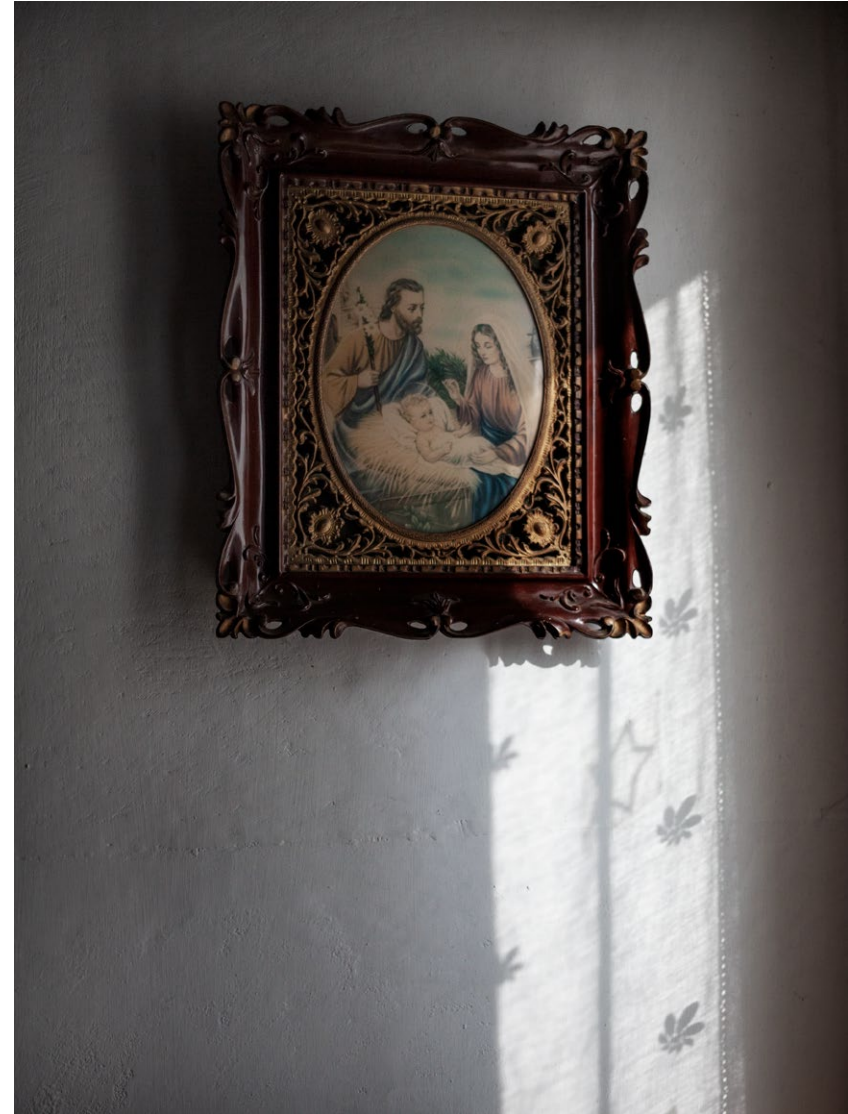
The mouth of the Brenta is in Sottomarina (near Venice), prior to which the river is joined by the Bacchiglione River. Spanning 174 km in length, the Brenta's source is in the lakes of Caldonazzo.







Rosi, aged 69 and a mother of two, has been a housewife for most of her life. She regrets not having studied because of the economic hardship her family experienced. Her family, however, remains very closely knit and, thanks to her sacrifices, her children have been able to obtain degrees in Engineering and Political Science.



A religious painting in an old house in the countryside. The Christian Democrat party governed the Veneto region almost uninterrupted from the Second World War until the advent of the Tangentopoli scandal. Indie rock band Estra's song *Nordest Cowboy* aptly described the prevailing culture in Veneto.



A welder works in a workshop on the banks of the Brenta. These businesses were largely set up as family run enterprises. With few employees, a lot of hard work and a lifestyle that over time became middle class.





A shed workshop in Piazzola sul Brenta (Province of Padua).





Limena native Filippo Tognazzo is an actor, director and playwright. Filippo founded “Zelda”, a theatre company through which he managed to bring new working standards to the theatre environment, ranging from management to event organization. Now one of the most important theatre companies in Veneto, Zelda too took advantage of the POR FESR grants, the Regional operative Plan that is a mix of European, state and regional grants that offered investment in activities concerning the environment, the digital realm and industrial development.





An abandoned fairground attraction in Isola Verde, near the Brenta estuary.





Villa Trieste-De Benedetti in Vaccarino,  
on the banks of the Brenta.





Construction impresario Cesare Cardin pictured in the tunnel in the world's deepest swimming pool – the Y-40 in Montegrotto Terme (near Padua) – that his firm built.





A modern bridge over the Brenta along the ancient military railway between Treviso and Ostiglia.





A Porsche parked in the open air.



Rino Zin is a pensioner who enjoys hunting in his free time. Having hunted since he was young, Rino has witnessed how bird numbers and migration routes have changed. He believes this is a result of climate change and the industrialization of the countryside.





The banks of the Brenta, near Grantorto (Province of Padua). Long stretches of the river still remain untouched by man's influence; the resulting vegetation is both gloomy and fascinating at the same time.





Since they were young the Morandi brothers have been interested in sheep rearing and shearing. Many young companies, between 2014 and 2020, took advantage of the POR FESR, the Regional operative Plan that is a mix of European, state and regional grants that offered investment in activities concerning the environment, the digital realm and industrial development.





Nicola Meneghello is a businessperson from Piazzola Sul Brenta (Province of Padua). When he was very young he founded Thron, an ultra innovative company involved in managing companies' digital content. The firm is now a reference point for some of the world's largest brands. Nicola chose to keep his company in the town where he lives, refusing numerous requests to transfer his expertise abroad.





One of the many companies located near a town centre, a legacy of the 1980s when annual growth reached almost 10%. For some years local administrations have been trying to move production areas outside of town centres.





The office of the owner of a carpentry workshop. Often the administrative activities were conducted alongside production. "*Fasso tutto mi*" is one of the phrases most often uttered by small businesspeople in Veneto. It translates as "I do everything myself".





The bridge in Limena, in the metropolitan area of Padua, where the Brenta flows through one of the city's most important industrial areas.





A young fisherman. There are numerous small boats along the Brenta, where many young people have rediscovered the joys of fishing.



The walls of a small paint factory in Piazzola sul Brenta (near Padua).





Mirko Artuso, an actor from the Veneto region, during the filming of a documentary in the WWF nature reserve in Valle Averte (near Venice), just a few kilometres from the mouth of the Brenta. The numerous films he has acted in include *I piccoli maestri* (*Little Teachers*) by Daniele Lucchetti and *La giusta distanza* (*The Right Distance*) by the late Carlo Mazzacurati.





A Wels catfish. Originally from Eastern Europe, the species was introduced into rivers in Northern Italy around half a century ago. It is now one of the main freshwater predators and can grow to up to 1.5 metres in length.





A surfer on the beach in Sottomarina,  
near the mouth of the Brenta.



