



International Conference - Toponyms of historical linguistic minorities in Italy, Trento, 2 - 4 July 2025

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From 2 to 4 July 2025, the Autonomous Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol hosted the International Conference *Toponyms of historical linguistic minorities in Italy*, promoted by the Romano-Hellenic Division (RHD) of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEKN), and the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy, and organized by the Department of Humanities at the University of Trento and by the Autonomous Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol. The conference adopted a multidisciplinary approach, engaging experts from various fields in reflecting on how place names are inherently linked to identity, historical memory, and the safeguarding of local cultures.

The introductory session was conducted by Elena Dai Prà (University of Trento), Chair of the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy, and Luca Guglielmi, Councillor for Linguistic Minorities of the Autonomous Region of Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol.

Gianluca Casagrande (European University of Rome), Chair of the Romano-Hellenic Division of UNGEKN, presented the status quaestionis of national toponymic developments; Elena dell'Agnesè (University of Milano-Bicocca), representing SoGeI, underlined how historical toponymy could serve as a bridge towards peace and mutual understanding.

Introductory speeches were given by Andrea Cantile (IGMI and University of Florence), Honorary Chair of the Romano-Hellenic Division of UNGEKN, and Valeria Piergigli (University of Siena). Both scholars discussed the issue of standardising minority toponymy - a crucial matter for ensuring consistency, recognisability, and the protection of place names, preventing linguistic fragmentation and fostering accurate representation of identities in official documentation. As Cantile pointed out, the matter of

standardisation remains far from being fully regulated and resolved, due to a fragmented legislation and its uneven application. Councillor Guglielmi called for renewed dialogue between central institutions and local and regional bodies.

The session on Thursday 2 July, entitled *La toponomastica minoritaria dell'Italia meridionale*, was chaired by Cosimo Palagiano (Sapienza University of Rome) and offered an overview of the dynamics of toponymy and identity across Southern Italy. Patrizia Miggiano (Pegaso Telematic University) analysed the "toponymic threads" of Apulia. Leonardo Mercatanti (University of Palermo) explored the Arbëreshë and Gallo-Italic communities in Sicily. Valentina Campesi (Museum Ladin, Südtiroler Landesmuseen) presented a comparative study of toponymic policies implemented in Calabria for the Arbëreshë, Occitan, and Grecoan communities. Silvia Siniscalchi (University of Salerno) focused on Basilicata, where Arbëreshë toponyms narrate a fascinating interweaving of documented history, legends and landscape. Domenico Proietti (University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli) offered a diachronic perspective on minority toponymy in Southern Italy, analysing the geographical distribution and future prospects for safeguarding these linguistic communities. Annalisa D'Ascenzo (Roma Tre University) extended the discussion to the northern part of the former Kingdom of Naples, where minority toponymy continues to reflect traditions despite social and linguistic changes. Giuseppe Scanu (University of Sassari), addressing the case of Sardinia, illustrated the role of toponymy with particular attention to bilingualism and policies aimed at recovering traditional place names.

In the afternoon, a first Round Table, entitled *Le minoranze linguistiche storiche viste dall'esterno*, was chaired by Gianluca Casagrande. Participants in the debate included Silvia Dal Negro (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano), Christiane Dunoyer (Centre d'Études Francoprovençales



René Willien), Vittorio Dell'Aquila (University of Milan), Franco Finco (University of Klagenfurt), Matjaž Geršič (Anton Melik Geographical Institute), Joan Tort Donada (University of Barcelona), Genc Lefe (University of Salento), and Francesco Giannachi (University of Salento). During this discussion, scholars offered an external perspective on Italy's historical linguistic minorities, analysing their representation, protection policies, and identity significance from geographical, linguistic, and cultural viewpoints.

Wednesday, 3 July opened with the second session, *La toponomastica minoritaria dell'Italia settentrionale*, chaired by Federica Ricci Garotti (University of Trento). On this occasion, focus was placed on the historical linguistic minorities of Northern Italy, in particular Patois, Franco-Provençal, Occitan, Ladin, Mòcheno, Cimbrian, Slovene, and Friulian. Numerous academics and experts in the field contributed to the discussions. Guido Lucarno (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore) delved into the toponymy of linguistic minorities in north-western Italy, concentrating on the complex cases of the Aosta Valley, Piedmont, and Liguria. David Colmano (Autonomous Province of Bolzano) and Johannes Ortner (independent researcher) presented a survey of place names in South Tyrol, from which a database was created, aimed at the production of toponymic maps. Lydia Flöss (Superintendence for Cultural Heritage and Activities - APT) explored the role of the *Dizionario Toponomastico Trentino* (Trentino Toponymic Dictionary) in collecting and systematising Cimbrian and Mòcheno toponymy within the rich geodatabase developed by the Autonomous Province of Trento. Viviana Ferrario (IUAV University of Venice) addressed the toponymy of linguistic minorities in north-eastern Italy, with particular attention to the Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Federico Vicario (University of Udine - Friulian Philological Society) continued tracing the steps of the evolution of Friulian toponymy over time. Guglielmo Cevolun (University of

Udine) examined place names in the same region, focusing on the legal aspects of "linguistic rights".

A second Round Table, entitled *La toponomastica delle lingue minoritarie dell'arco alpino*, chaired by Elena Dai Prà. Participants of this discussion were representatives of associations, cultural institutes, and research centres focused on the minorities of Northern Italy: Michele Musso (Walser Cultural Association Augusta of Issime, Aosta Valley), Teresa Geninatti Chiolero (Regional Council of Piedmont for Historical Linguistic Minorities), Fiorenzo Nicolussi Castellan (Cimbrian Cultural Institute of Luserna / Kulturinstitut Lusérn), Claudia Marchesoni (Mòcheno Cultural Institute / Bersntoler Kulturinstitut), Sabrina Rasom (Ladin Cultural Institute Majon di Fascegn), Werner Pescosta (Ladin Institute Micurá de Rù), Denni Dorigo (Ladin Cultural Institute Cesa de Jan), Nicola Cassisi (Federation Ladina of Veneto), Andreja Kalc (Slovenian Research Institute of Trieste), and Laura Sgubin (Service for Minority and Regional Languages Abroad, Autonomous Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia). The Round Table provided an engaging exchange among the various experts, aiming to foster the sharing of suggestions and opinions, based on the speakers' experiences of research and intercultural exchange, regarding the need to standardise the issue of toponymy in diverse Italian and European minority linguistic contexts. As Elena Dai Prà recalled, scientific research in this field can serve as a bridge between society and institutions.