

Minorities and minority toponyms in multicultural areas of the border region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* in Italy

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Friuli Venezia Giulia is one of Europe's most typical "contact" regions because of the multicultural nature of its border areas and the political and geographical transformations it has undergone in its local, regional and even broader geographical contexts. These elements have deeply influenced the colonization processes and the resulting inter-ethnic relations, as well as the formation of the internal and cross-border social links of its population and, more specifically, the unique minority and linguistic situation that prevails today. The area of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* represented the historical meeting point of the three main European ethno-linguistic groups: Romance, Germanic and Slavic. Together with the neighbouring territory of Slovenia, it is the only European contact area where all three ethno-linguistic groups coexist as autochthonous populations. However, *Friuli Venezia Giulia* is the only region in Europe, where representatives of the Romance, Germanic and Slavic peoples are also represented in a minority situation, living together in a genuine, enduring multicultural environment. In fact, the situation has converted *Friuli Venezia Giulia* into a "region of minorities", a contact area of the regionally predominant Friulians, the Slovene national minority, and the Germanic ethno-linguistic communities. The article describes the historical background of these communities and provides a more detailed description of their current situation, with a particular emphasis on the provisions and practices related to minority toponyms and visual bi/multilingualism.

Key words: *Friuli Venezia Giulia*; Friulian, Slovene and German minorities; minority toponyms

Friül Venècia Júlia és una de les "regions de contacte" europees més típiques, a causa de les seves característiques multiculturals i de frontera, i de les transformacions culturals i geopolítiques que ha registrat dins un context local i regional més ampli. Tots aquests elements han influït profundament en el desenvolupament dels seus processos de colonització i en les relacions interètniques, com també en la creació de vincles socials (tant interns com externs) entre la seva població i, en particular, en la conformació d'una minoria i d'una situació lingüística úniques. Aquesta regió representa, a la pràctica, el punt de trobada històric dels tres principals grups etnolingüístics europeus: el romànic, el germànic i l'eslau. Juntament amb el veí territori d'Eslovènia és l'única regió

de contacte europea en què aquests tres grups etnolingüístics conviuen en qualitat de “poblacions autòctones”. No obstant això, estem parlant també de l’única regió d’Europa on els pobles romànics, germànics i eslaus es troben representats en una situació de minoria, convivint plegats dins un entorn multicultural de llarga durada. Aquesta situació està convertint Friül Venècia Júlia, de fet, en una mena de “regió de les minories”: una àrea de contacte entre els friülans (el grup prevalent), la minoria nacional eslovena, i els grups etnolingüístics germànics. L’article pretén oferir una informació bàsica sobre el desenvolupament recent de les comunitats esmentades i una descripció més detallada de la seva situació actual, amb una atenció particular envers les previsions adoptades i les pràctiques relacionades amb els topònims minoritaris i amb allò que podem anomenar bilingüisme i multilingüisme “visual”.

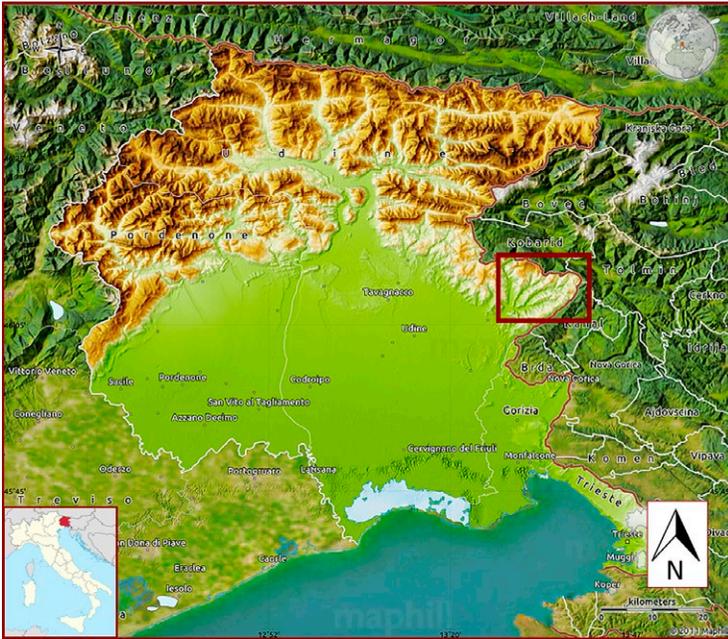
Paraules clau: Friül Venècia Júlia; minories friülana, eslovena i germànica; topònims minoritaris

1 THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MULTILINGUAL LANDSCAPE IN *FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA*

This article aims to illustrate the fundamental elements that make the Italian region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* one of Europe’s most typical “contact” regions. In so doing, it outlines the multicultural nature of its border areas and the political and geographical transformations it has undergone in its local, regional and even broader geographical contexts. These elements have deeply influenced the colonization processes and the resulting inter-ethnic relations, as well as the formation of the internal and cross-border social links of its population and, more specifically, the unique minority and linguistic situation that prevails today.

The relatively peripheral condition of the territory of the present-day region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* does not mean that it has been immune to all external influences. This is evident from the fact that the entire regional territory, at different times and to varying degrees, has been incorporated into neighbouring social and political entities. As the contact region between the Alps and the Adriatic, and the Pannonian basin and the Padanian lowland, the area of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* represented the historical meeting point of the three main European ethno-linguistic groups: Romance, Germanic and Slavic. Together with the neighbouring territory of Slovenia, it is the only European contact area where all three ethno-linguistic groups coexist as autochthonous populations. However, *Friuli Venezia Giulia* is the only region in Europe, where representatives of the Ro-

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-Maps 1 and 2: The study area, in the context of the region Friuli Venezia Giulia. [Basic source: Physical map of Maphill under open access license (system ODbL).]



mance, Germanic and Slavic peoples are also represented in a minority situation, living together in a genuine, enduring multicultural environment. In fact, the situation has converted *Friuli Venezia Giulia* into a “region of minorities”, a contact area of the regionally predominant Friulians, the Slovene national minority, and the Germanic ethno-linguistic communities. These three minority language groups also represent three different spatial types of minority settlement: the Friulians constitute a typical “regional” minority or a “nation without a state”, like the Catalans in Spain; the Slovenes, being a national minority, are typically located along the entire border belt with Slovenia; while the Germans, on a much smaller scale, make up various “language islands” in the Alpine part of the region.

The Friulians are descendants of a Romanized Celtic population who gave their name to the area they originally settled in, roughly corresponding to the present-day Italian autonomous region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia*. The Friulian language belongs to the Rhaeto-Romance family, sometimes called Eastern Ladin, since it shares the same roots as Ladin, but, over the centuries, it has diverged under the influence of surrounding languages. Documents in Friulian are attested from the 11th century and poetry and literature date as far back as 1300. Until 1700, Friulian was also spoken in Trieste, but was replaced by a more Venetian type of dialect. In the 20th century, there was a revival of interest in the language that has continued to this day, despite the fact that several Italian scholars consider the Friulian language to be merely an Italian dialect and not a separate language.

The Slovenes in today’s *Friuli Venezia Giulia* are, by origin, descendants of the Slavic population who colonized the hilly, easternmost part of the region in the 6th and 7th centuries. North of the Carnian Alps they followed the rivers Zilja/Gail and Drava/Drau up to the Pustertal in present-day South Tyrol and into what now forms part of the Italian region of Trentino-Alto Adige, where they were Germanized by the 11th Century. In Friuli, they were stopped by the Longobards, a Germanic people that would give their name to the Italian region of Lombardy, and who thus fixed the central section of the historical Romanic-Slavic ethnic “limes”. Interestingly, these ethno-linguistic “limes” have persisted, almost unchanged, to the present day, a quite unique situation, considering the complex political, geographical and ethno-linguistic changes in this part of Europe (Bufon, 2002). As far as Slavic toponyms are concerned, some

40 to 70 Slavic/Slovene settlements were created by the Aquileia Patriarchs between the 11th and 14th centuries in central Friuli, above all in the belt between Pordenone and Palmanova, and the rivers Tagliamento and Torre, the latter as the new local rulers received territory in the second half of the 10th century, on the condition that they undertook its repopulation. By the end of the 15th century, all the names of these Slavonic villages had been Romanized (Kos, 1985), but their original names survived assimilation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of toponyms of Slavic origin west of the "limes" in central Friuli

Larger settlements and year of establishment:	
Villa Sclaborum/Santa Maria la Longa [probably also deriving from: Loka, see below], 1031)	
Midea Sclabonica/Medea, 1294)	
Versa Sclabonica/Versa, 1275)	
Sanctus Vitus de Sclabonicus/S. Vito al Torre, 1311)	
Paseano Sclauonesco/Basiliano, 1288)	
Other toponyms:	
Sclavons (near Cordenons)	Loka/Lonca (Codroipo)
Schiavoi (near Sacile)	Ljuvidrag/Liuvidrago (Rivignano)
Koprivno/Capriva del Friuli	Jezernik/Iesernicco (Rivignano)
Topljane/Topogliano	Novak/Novacco (Aiello del Friuli)
Višk/Visco	Močilo/Mazzilis (Aiello del Friuli)
Gradišče/Gradisca	Novak/Noax (Corno di Rosazzo)
Lastica/Lestizza	Robidišče/Rividischie (Codroipo)
Jalmič/Ialmicco	Smardenča/Sammardenchia (Pozzuolo del Friuli)
Kravji/Craui (S. Vito al Torre)	Selo/Sella (Rivignano)
Goričica/Goricizza (Codroipo)	Topolič/Topalico (Sacile)
Gorica/Guriz (Camino al Tagliamento)	Sklavnič/Sclaunico (Lestizza)

These, and other toponyms, were presented in greater detail by Di Prampero in his “Glossario Geografico Friulano” in 1882 (re-printed in 2001) and more recently by the Friulian researcher Franco Finco (2003). An almost continuous and quite intensive, “spontaneous” Slavic/Slovene colonization outside its “classic” ethno-linguistic area developed in the area between the Slovene-inhabited Karst plateau of Doberdò/Doberdob and the river Isonzo/Soča. In addition to these permanent flows, there was a period of more organized repopulation, supported by the Republic of Venice, especially after the wars at the beginning of both the 16th and 17th centuries. In this period, most of the newcomers arrived from the Republic and the nearby Slovene areas, providing the foundations for the development of a new variation of the Venetian dialect, known as “bisiaco”, connected also with a separate local “bisiaco” identity. According to Puntin’s reconstruction (2003), toponyms were changed considerably, as in the case of the road name *Podercia*, deriving from the Slavic *Podrtija* (ruin) and currently known as *Portanzie*. Other place names can be readily recognised, as is the case of the toponyms of Starigrado, Mlacca, Staravas, etc. Puntin provides a tentative list of 75 toponyms of Slovene origin in the present-day area of Monfalcone and a map illustrating their spatial distribution (Puntin, 2003). Table 2 shows a selection of these toponyms.

Table 2. *Examples of historical Slovene toponyms in the Monfalcone area (“Bisiacheria”)*

Cenosechie	Gumilizze
Coschievizza	Presecha
Sagrado	Pojane
Moriscoviza	Ruppa
Starigrado	Grubia
Turriaco	Nograda
Vinograd	Staravas
Zapnanao	Cramarizze
Basovizza	Mlacha

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Agrada	Losiz
Brechi	Lonca
Calicci	Mucille
Clapece	Selz
Dolina	Clanich
Grude	Grapa

Finally, the German “language islands” in *Friuli Venezia Giulia* are the result of different immigration flows. Between the 12th and 14th centuries, people from Carinthia and Pustertal settled in the area of *Timau* and *Sauris* in the western Carnian Alps, as well as nearby *Sappada* in Cadore (located in the present-day Italian region of Veneto). At roughly the same time, iron works in *Val Canale* attracted German migrants to the region of Carinthia. The case of Val Canale is particularly interesting and unique in terms of its multilingual structure, even for such a multicultural region as that of *Friuli Venezia Giulia*. Colonized by Slovenes in the 6th century, who arrived from Carinthia, it remained almost ethnically unchanged until the end of the Middle Ages. In this period, iron-works in Malborghetto and Tarvisio offered opportunities for Friulian migrants, who were soon absorbed into the increasingly dominant German community. This grew from the 15th century onwards in Tarvisio and later also in Pontebba, at that time the centre of the border between the Austrian territories and the Republic of Venice. As a result, the ethnic structure of Val Canale began to change significantly: until the mid-19th century, around 52% of the population in the valley was German and 48% was Slovene. Following the Carinthian Germanization, the official Slovene population figure, according to the “usually used language”, fell markedly after 1846. Thus, it stood at 35% in 1880 but was down to 20% in 1910, whilst unofficial Slovene estimates suggested that the percentage of ethnic Slovene population remained almost the same (49%; see: Grafenauer, 1974).

When, after World War I, Val Canale became part of Italy, the process of ethno-linguistic transformation continued but now not only the Slovene population but also the German speakers became the subject of state assimilation policies. In fact, according to the Hitler-Mussolini agreement of 1939, Germans from South Tyrol (now the Italian Alto Adige) and Val

Canale had to be “removed” and relocated in Germany, where a similar “programme” was applied to non-German minorities, including, for example, the Slovenes in Carinthia. In practice, only a part of the “planned” migrations were ever implemented: some authors estimate that fewer than a thousand people actually moved from Val Canale before the end of World War II (Grafenauer, 1974), others (Steinicke, 1984) put the figure much higher (5,700 individuals, of these only 100 were Slovenes). Official Italian statistics are notoriously unreliable: the 1921 census, the last one in Italy designed to identify the ethno-linguistic structure of the population, reported that Val Canale was made up of 51% Germans, 15% Italians and 13% Slovenes, but as many as 21% “foreigners”. According to estimates at the end of the last century, Italians and Friulians represent about 75–85%, Germans 6–13% and Slovenes 9–12% of the population (Bufon, 1992). More interestingly, it is the only part of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* where all four recognized regional languages (official Italian plus the Friulian, Slovene and German minority languages) coexist and are used in a genuine multilingual environment. Table 3 provides an illustration of Val Canale’s multilingual structure by looking at its main toponyms.

Table 3. *Val Canale: one valley, four languages*

Italian	Friulian	Slovene	German
<i>Val Canale</i>	<i>Val Cjanal</i>	<i>Kanalska dolina</i>	<i>Kanaltal</i>
Bagni di Lusnizza	Lusniz	Lužnica	Lusnitz
Camporosso	Cjamparos	Žabnice	Saifnitz
Cucco	Cuc	Kuk	Kuk
Malborghetto	Malborghet	Naborjet	Malburghet
Valbruna	Valbrune	Ovčja vas	Wolfsbach
Pontebba	Ponteibe	Tablja	Pontafel
Santa Caterina	Sante Caterine	Šenkatrija	Sankt Kathrein
San Leopoldo	La Glesie	Lipalja vas	Leopoldskirchen
Tarvisio	Tarvis	Trbiž	Tarvis
Ugovizza	Ugovize	Ukve	Uggowitz
Cave del Predil	Gjavis	Rabelj	Raibl

2 THE CURRENT SITUATION

According to research conducted primarily at the University of Udine (see, in particular, materials available at the webpage of ARLeF – L'Agenzie regional pe lenghe furlane), today the largest minority group in *Friuli Venezia Giulia*, the Friulians, numbers around 600,000 speakers (i.e., 60% of the total population of the provinces of Udine, Pordenone and Gorizia), of which about 420,000 are regular speakers and a further 180,000 use Friulian on a periodic basis. Some 900,000 people in *Friuli Venezia Giulia* understand Friulian. Friulians live in a total of 177 communes (that is, throughout almost the entire area of the provinces of Udine and Pordenone, and in 15 communes in the province of Gorizia) and they speak four major variations of the language: Udine, Pordenone, Carnian and Gorizia type. A standard Friulian language, close to the Udine type, was selected as recently as 2014, to be used in written form and in education, but in practice, local usage still prevails.

A first regional law for the Friulian language was passed in 1996, followed by a general state law for all Italian minority languages in 1999 and a more detailed regional law in 2007. The aforementioned Regional Agency for the Friulian Language (ARLeF) was established in 2005. Friulian is used in teaching: in about 130 primary schools in the school year 2012/13, attended by about 30,000 pupils. Roughly 40% of toponyms and road signs in Friulian-inhabited communes have been bilingual since 2004.

The German language group in *Friuli Venezia Giulia* is present and recognised in the commune of Sauris/Zahre (about 400 inhabitants) and Paluzza (in the village Timau/Tischlbong, about 500 inhabitants). In addition to these two small “language islands”, Germans form an autochthonous community (as discussed above) in Val Canale, numbering some 1,500 members. Various protections measures were provided by the Italian “umbrella-law” passed in 1999, whilst the region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* adopted a special law for the German linguistic minority in 2009.

Finally, the Slovenes are an autochthonous community in 36 eastern border communes, stretching from Val Canale to the province of Trieste. During the 20th century, due to the process of de-agrarianization and urbanization, members of the Slovene community started to move from the rural and more peripheral areas into the urban and industrial areas. In

the province of Gorizia, after World War I, the number of Slovenes started to increase in the urbanized communes of Ronchi, Monfalcone and Staranzano within the *Bisiacheria* micro-region, where they now represent between 3 and 6% of the population. In the province of Udine, they abandoned the mountainous areas of the so-called *Benecia* (The Venetian Slovenia), above all after the major earthquake in 1976, and settled in about 15 Friulian communes in the area between Udine and Cividale, where they represent, according to official Italian estimates, around 10% or more of the total population (Bufon, 1992). As a result of these processes, a population of Slovene ethnic origin is now present in 56 communes of the provinces of Udine (35), Gorizia (15) and Trieste (all 6), but they are only officially recognized in 32 communes.

In fact, estimating the size of the ethnic Slovene minority population in *Friuli Venezia Giulia* is complex. The 1910 Austrian (for the areas of Val Canale and the present-day provinces of Gorizia and Trieste) and Italian (for the so-called Venetian Slovenia) censuses for the original 36 communes reported a figure of almost 130,000 people (some 40,000 in the present-day province of Udine, 20,000 in the province of Gorizia and about 70,000 in the province of Trieste). The predominantly urban structure of the Slovene community is particularly evident in the areas of Trieste and Gorizia: in the town of Trieste/Trst at that time there resided roughly 40,000 Slovenes (that is, about 20% of the total population), and another 10,000 in the town of Gorizia/Gorica (about a third of the total population). This means that in these two major border towns alone, in 1910, was concentrated almost 40% of the entire Slovene population of today's minority inhabited territory in *Friuli Venezia Giulia*.

As for the current situation, figures vary considerably depending on the criteria used in making the estimates. At the low end, a figure of around 40,000 is obtained based on the criterion of self-identification; while at the high end a total of around 90–100,000 is obtained based on the criterion of inter-generational minority language transmission. These figures represent population counts of between 3,000 and 13,000, respectively, in the province of Udine, between 10,000 and 24,000 in the province of Gorizia, and between 29,000 and 63,000 in the province of Trieste. Self-identification is high in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia (former Austrian territories), but markedly lower in the province of Udine (former Vene-

tian territories). In these first two areas, Slovene medium schools were already established in the 18th and 19th centuries, whilst in the entire province of Udine the first and only (private) bilingual primary school was established in San Pietro/Špeter as late as 1984.

After World War II, a number of protection measures for the Slovene minority in *Friuli Venezia Giulia* were introduced by the 1954 London memorandum, following the partition of the Free Territory of Trieste between Italy and the former Yugoslavia (for a comparative presentation of the Slovene and Friulian minorities in Italy, and the Italian minority in Slovenia, see: SLORI, 2013). These provisions (the re-opening of the Slovene medium schools abolished by the fascist regime, official recognition of the Slovene language in communes where ethnic Slovenes represent at least 25% of the population) were *via facti* extended to the Gorizia province too. In practice, official and visual bilingualism was, however, introduced only in those communes, where, at the local level, Slovenes represented the majority of the population (three in the province of Gorizia—San Floriano del Collio/Števerjan, Savogna d’Isonzo/Sovodnje and Doberdò/Doberdob—, and four in the province of Trieste — Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina, Sgonico/Zgonik, Monrupino/Repentabor and San Dorligo della Valle/Dolina). Outside these areas, bilingual signs were subject to changeable political decisions at the local level and mostly located outside urban centres.

This situation improved only after 2001, when the central government eventually adopted a special law for the Slovene national minority. Thanks to this law, in 2007 a special commission, established specifically for its implementation, fixed the territory within which bilingualism should be adopted (comprising 32 communes, but still excluding the urban areas of Trieste and Gorizia). In reaction to this decision, several local governments in the communes of Resia and Benecia claimed their communities spoke a peculiar, non-Slovene local language structure, which in their opinion should be recognized alongside the standard Slovenian language. The result of this situation was — in common with certain Friulian areas, where different variations of the Friulian language are used for local signs — that within the Slovenian inhabited areas of the province of Udine, visual bilingualism became quite chaotic, and, rather than using standard Slovene, follows local dialect toponyms and expressions, as illustrated in the photographs.

In 2007/08 SLORI, the Slovene Research Institute in Trieste, and the Societat Filologjiche Furlane, published a study commissioned by the regional government of *Friuli Venezia Giulia*, aiming to discover the degree of “satisfaction” with the minority protection measures as expressed by the population living in minority areas (Regione, 2010). It reported that Friulian, Slovenian and German are, in general, considered highly or sufficiently present in local public life by 49%, 54% and 31% of respondents, respectively, living in the corresponding minority areas. Similarly, local administrations are deemed to be highly or sufficiently committed to using Friulian, Slovenian and German by 35%, 40% and 16% of the people, respectively. In the case of other public institutions, they are reported to be at least making sufficient use of Friulian, Slovenian and German by 19%, 13% and 13% of the respondents, respectively. Over the last five years, an increasing public use of the corresponding minority language was noticed by 19% of respondents in the Friulian areas, by 32% of respondents in the Slovene areas, and by 20% of respondents in the German areas. For the same period, an increasing use of minority languages on road signs was noticed by 44% of respondents in the Friulian areas, by 35% of respondents in the Slovene areas, and by 14% of respondents in the German areas.

In a recent study of bilingual (Italian/Friulian) public signs in Friuli, Finco (2014) reported them to be present in 60% of the Friulian inhabited communes of the province of Gorizia, in 46% of the Friulian inhabited communes of the province of Pordenone and in 83% of the Friulian inhabited communes of the province of Udine. Interestingly, Friulian overlaps with Slovene inhabited territories (the case of 11 communes in the provinces of Udine and Gorizia) and with all five communes where the German-speaking population is present. As such, in most of these instances, trilingual signs could also be used; sometimes, as in the case of Val Canale, even four language signs can be justified, though here the situation is potentially confusing, as Italian regulations do not permit the use of more than two languages on road signs.

In a more recent research project, SLORI (Mezgec, 2015) reported that only 15% of all signs and visual inscriptions in the Slovene inhabited areas are bi- or multi-lingual, and only 9% include Slovenian. This is primarily the result of the fact that only 2% of signs and visual inscrip-



Figures 1 a 5: Some examples of bilingual signposts in the region Friuli Venezia Julia. (Photos: Author)

tions in the town of Trieste and 7% in Gorizia include Slovenian. The situation is similar in Benecia (only 5% of the signs include Slovenian) and Val Canale, where only 3% of signs and visual inscriptions include Slovenian, whilst 18% of all signs include other languages, mainly German and English. Visual bilingualism is greater only in the outskirts of both major towns (about 23% of all signs in the outskirts of Trieste and Gorizia include Slovenian). Slovenian is only more widely used in visual signs (private and public) in the predominant Slovenian communes: in the communes of Doberdob and Nabrežina, they represent about 60% of all signs. As mentioned, in Resia and Benecia local Slovene language variations prevail over standard Slovenian; both represent together about 30–40% of all signs and inscriptions in the area. Bilingual inscriptions are more frequent in local administration (44%), road names (41%), tourist signs (40%) and road signs (25%). In total, 93% of visual bilingualism is produced by public institutions, and only 7% by private actors, showing how the “bilingual landscape” is the result of a prevailing “top-down” institutional process, even in areas where ethnic Slovenes prevail.

3 CONCLUSIONS

This article has outlined the ethno-linguistic structure of the Italian border region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia*, where representatives of the three main European language groups, Romance, Germanic and Slavic, have not only coexisted for centuries, but continue to be present as minority languages. From this point of view, the area studied can be deemed as being quite unique, representing as it does a good model of multicultural coexistence. Moreover, the area's multicultural and multilingual structure has not changed significantly as a result of processes of social modernization and political-geographical transformation.

The article has sought to present the historical antecedents of this situation, describing how, within the current territory of this region, the Romanized Friulians became the close neighbours of the Slavic people and, subsequently, of the dispersed German communities too. Past developments also contributed to the formation of three distinctive types of minority societies and spaces: (1) a "nation without a state" in the case of the Friulian regional minority; (2) a "border national minority" in the case of the Slovene community in Italy; and (3) "minority islands" in the case of the various small German groups living in the Alpine northern belt. The three minority groups also differ markedly in terms of their respective population figures: the largest is the Friulian minority with about 600,000 speakers, followed by the Slovenes, who number up to 100,000 speakers, whilst the German minority islands constitute fewer than 2,500 inhabitants. Nevertheless, in the post-war period, when the region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* was created within the Italian state, all three communities were closely linked by a process of assimilation and demographic erosion.

Only at the end of the last century and during the first decade of the new Millennium did the attitudes of the Italian national and local regional governments towards these minority groups start to change, and the first laws and provisions for the three autochthonous minority ethno-linguistic groups were adopted. As a result, minority toponyms regained their official status and visual bilingualism and multilingualism became more common within communes and localities included in the officially recognized minority areas. As there is a degree of overlap between these

areas — as exemplified by the case of the historical multicultural area of Val Canale — the situation can give rise to some linguistic confusion, given that in some places we can find as many as four officially recognized languages and toponyms for a single area or place. However, recent studies report that visual bi/multilingualism is primarily a top-down process, upheld by legislation, and that it should be better supported by a broader dissemination of minority languages through education, thus fulfilling the numerous bottom-up initiatives promoted at the local level by the minorities. As a result of these initiatives, the region of *Friuli Venezia Giulia* should establish itself as a truly special “European region”, providing a model for the “unity in diversity” paradigm, which is so often heralded in the EU, but so seldom manifest as a concrete social and cultural policy.

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