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English

**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names
Second session**

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Item 12 of the provisional agenda *

**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity, including indigenous,
minority and regional languages and multilingual issues**

**Place name politics in multilingual areas: a comparative study of
southern Carinthia, Austria, and the Těšín/Cieszyn region, Czechia**

Submitted by Austria **

Summary

In the study, the politics of toponymy, identity and landscape in two multilingual areas is analysed: the Těšín/Cieszyn region in Czechia and southern Carinthia in Austria. In both areas, linguistic and ethnic composition is the result of population movements in Central Europe's vivid history and shares a lot of similar characteristics. For that reason, close cooperation between researchers from Austria and Czechia seemed highly desirable. Also, a comparative study allows for broader generalizations based on similarities and differences.

Both regions have gone through a series of conflicts over bilingual signs in recent decades. The authors of the study investigate what such conflicts reveal about the relationship between name, place and identity, what were the principal causes of those conflicts and what factors most influenced people's attitudes toward bilingual signs. They draw on anthropological and geographical approaches to place names to gain a complex understanding of the issues. In-depth presentations of the historical and political backgrounds supplement the toponymic analysis and make it a study in critical toponomastics.

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**The full report was prepared by Peter JORDAN (Austria), Honorary Chair, Austrian Board on Geographical Names

Place name politics in multilingual areas: a comparative study of southern Carinthia, Austria, and the Těšín/Cieszyn region, Czechia

Study areas

There is, up to this day, no systematic study of bilingual/multilingual toponymy of the Těšín/Cieszyn region (Fig.1) that would put place names in association with landscape, identity and minority rights. It is true that several historical texts have appeared that provide excellent information about the historical development of the region. Nevertheless, virtually no in-depth toponymical analysis exists save a recent brief study on the linguistic landscape of the area in a wider comparative perspective. This is rather surprising given the unique position of the area in Czechia. It is the only area with a high concentration of an ethnic minority (Polish) where according to Czech legislation the minority has the right to use their maternal language in official dealings with the government, in schools and newspapers and on public signs. Over the past few years significant conflicts have arisen regarding the use of bilingual (Czech-Polish) public signs and place names, the Polish names being vandalized. The situation is even more complicated, because the real maternal language of both Poles and Czechs is neither Polish nor Czech but a unique local dialect called *po naszymu* ('in our language'). Traditional toponymy exists in this dialect. The region therefore is trilingual while public signs are bilingual, written in languages which few people use in everyday life. The pronunciation of place names thus becomes a deeply public and political matter).

The Carinthian minority situation (Fig. 2) is up to the present day – albeit with declining intensity – marked by the fact that a Slavonic population present since the 6-7th centuries has later been socially overlaid by Bavarian settlers. The newcomers, supported by political powers, formed the upper strata of the society including traders and craftsmen while the Slavonic population remained the rural ground layer. Up to the end of the Middle Ages an ethnically/linguistically mixed situation persisted. Assimilation towards local majorities resulted in an ethnic/linguistic patchwork. This shapes Carinthian culture in many respects also today. It is also reflected by the namescape, which is a mixture of Slavonic and German names all over the province. In general, however, linguistic assimilation towards German-speakers, the upper strata of the society, proceeded. Social ascent was only possible by using the German language – very similar to the situation of Slovenes under Venetian rule in what is today Italy, where Venetian, later Italian were the languages of the dominant group. By the end of the Middle Ages a distinct language boundary within Carinthia had developed – very much coinciding with ecclesiastical boundaries between Salzburg and Aquileia established in 811. This boundary still exists, but also at the Slovenian side of the boundary the Slovenian population has decreased substantially. The strong decline is not only due to social stratification as mentioned before, but also to societal change in general (conversion of rural societies by industrialization and tertiarization) and the peripheric situation of the Slovenes in Austria in socio-economic terms.

Fig. 1: Location of the Těšín/Cieszyn region (Cartography: Luděk KRTOČKA)

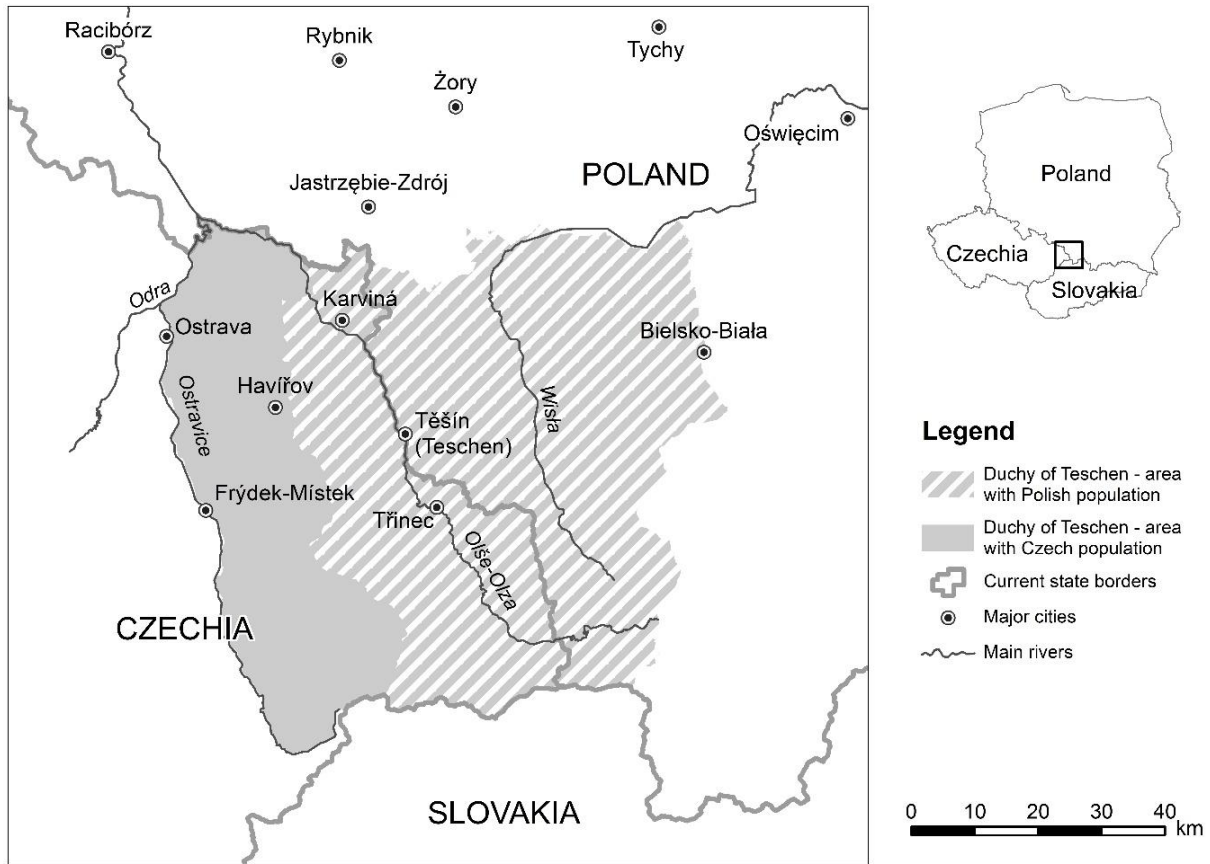


Fig. 2: Slovene-speakers in 2001 (Source: population census 2001, STATISTIK AUSTRIA 2020)

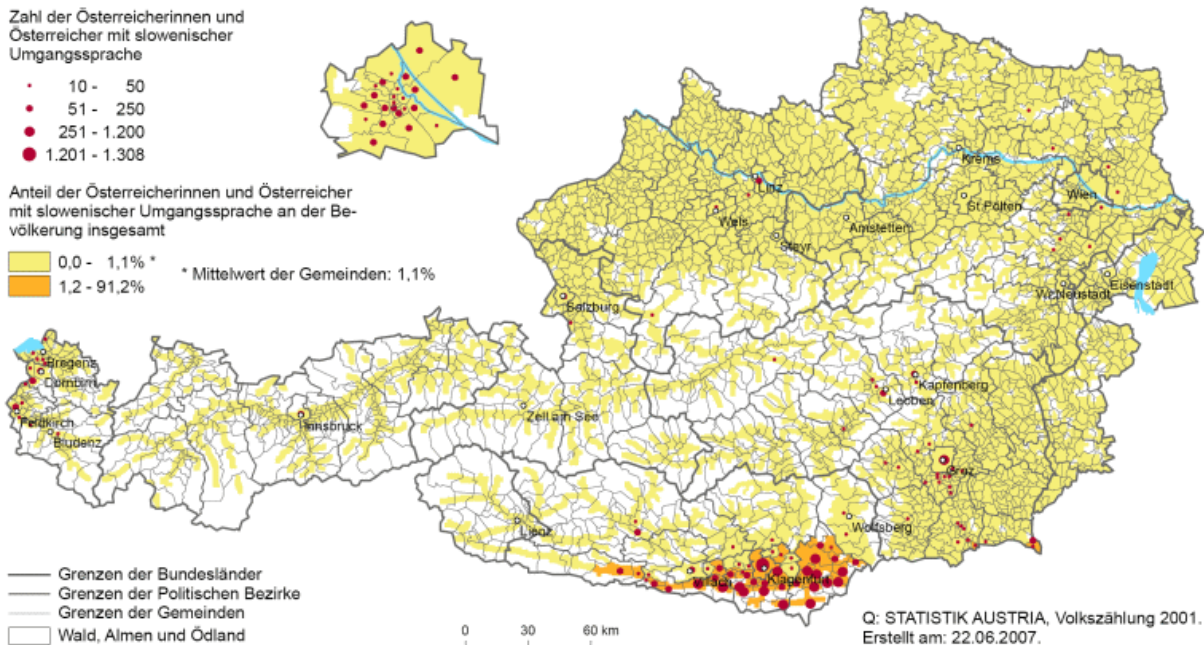
Österreicherinnen und Österreicher mit slowenischer Umgangssprache 2001 nach Gemeinden

Zahl der Österreicherinnen und Österreicher mit slowenischer Umgangssprache

- 10 - 50
- 51 - 250
- 251 - 1.200
- 1.201 - 1.308

Anteil der Österreicherinnen und Österreicher mit slowenischer Umgangssprache an der Bevölkerung insgesamt

- 0,0 - 1,1% * * Mittelwert der Gemeinden: 1,1%
- 1,2 - 91,2%



In addition, political events and forces had their strong impact: the rise of national ideas during the 19th century and national homogenization after World War I almost all over Europe and also in Austria; the fact that Austria had to cede some parts of Carinthia populated predominantly by Slovenes to the first Yugoslavian state (with the effect that the rest of the area populated by Slovenes was regarded as ‘ours’ and subjected to Germanization); repeated attempts of the Yugoslavian states (after World War I and II) to occupy at least larger parts of Carinthia; the atrocities of the National-Socialist regime between 1938 and 1945 and of Yugoslavian partisans at the end of World War II. Efforts to establish and improve minority rights after World War II met already a very small and further declining Slovenian group. As regards minority toponymy, the Austrian State Treaty as of 1955 included a principal statement, which needed to be specified by additional federal legislation. Unsuccessful attempts in 1972 and 1976/1977 were only in 2011 followed by a compromise that seems to have satisfied all parties and calmed down the at times delicate situation.

The Carinthian minority situation resembles the situation in the Těšín/Cieszyn region as regards place names in actual use frequently deviate from standardized names or names in the standard languages and as regards political conflict on place names in recent times. In contrast to the Těšín/Cieszyn region toponymy is linguistically well-investigated in Carinthia. Not too much has been done, however, also in Carinthia on highlighting the roles of place names from a cultural-geographical perspective, i.e., as mediators between human community and space including aspects such as space-related identity building by place names, place names as supporters of emotional ties between human beings and place, and the ambivalent attitudes also of some minority members towards minority place names in public space.

In view of this, the principal research questions are as follows:

(1) What do place names mean for the identity of human communities in general and more specifically for linguistic minorities? What is the relationship between language, place and identity, and how do we make ourselves at home through place names?

(2) What toponymic strategies have been employed by different actors in establishing, maintaining and subverting ethnic/national boundaries, and what are the principal social forces structuring the contemporary toponymic landscape and everyday toponymic practice?

(3) How are the multilingual/multiethnic city-text and linguistic landscape produced, performed, interpreted and contested?

(4) When we speak of minority rights and cultural preservation, what role do place names play in this discussion? Why, how, by what means and procedures, by whom and for whom should place names be protected?

Structure of the book

After an introduction, the second chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the study. It draws on several disciplines (namely anthropology, geography, history and linguistics) as well as on different topics associated with names (etymology, socio-toponomastics, politics of place naming, emotional geography of names, cultural heritage value of names, linguistic landscape studies, etc.). The discussion is therefore necessarily superficial, and only selects those themes which are most directly relevant for this research.

The third chapter summarizes the methods chosen for this study describing how data were collected and analyzed. It also reports on the practical challenges encountered in the field. It tries to be maximally transparent, so that the reader can competently judge the relevance of results and future researchers can learn from experiences and mistakes.

The fourth and fifth chapters provide a comprehensive survey on linguistic minorities and their political, legal and societal embedding in our two countries (Chapter 4) as well as a detailed description of the research areas, including their historical, cultural, political, legal, socio-economic and geographical background and situation (Chapter 5), since it is the authors' conviction that a study in critical toponomastics is to make all these backgrounds and conditions transparent to the reader. The two regions share a part of their history, as both belonged to the Habsburg dominions for hundreds of years. After World War I they departed on their own ways, and for this reason a comparative analysis seems to be very valuable since it can be studied how the changing context impacted ethnic minorities and minority names. After the common framework therefore the changes in the national contexts during the 20th century up to the present are presented.

Chapter 6 presents the results of the research in the two situations in an identical structure, so that it is easy to compare them. The structure of this chapter follows that of the methodological chapter – place-name use on maps, linguistic landscape, media analysis, interviews, questionnaires.

The final two chapters 7 and 8 compare the results from both situations (Chapter 7) and offer interpretations and conclusions (Chapter 8) critically reflecting this work and suggesting possibilities for further research.

The text is accompanied by a comprehensive bibliography and by lists of figures and tables as well as appendices containing basic materials and documents.

Bibliographical quotation:

Peter JORDAN & Přemysl MÁCHA; Marika BALODE, Luděk KRTIČKA, Uršula OBRUSNÍK, Pavel PILCH & Alexis SANCHO REINOSO (2021), *Place-Name Politics in Multilingual Areas. A comparative study of southern Carinthia (Austria) and the Těšín/Cieszyn region (Czechia)*. Cham, Palgrave Macmillan. 544 pages.

The Group of Experts is requested to:

- (1) Take note of the effort made to investigate into the use of minority place names and their standardization.
- (2) Consider and compare different practices of minority place-name standardization with their strengths and weaknesses.
- (3) Consider best practices of minority place-name standardization on the background of varying political and societal structures.