

## Place names as a conflicting cultural heritage in the Municipality of Resia in Friuli, Italy

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The Municipality of Resia (it. Resia, friul. Resie, sln. Rezija) is located in the Valley of Resia in Western Julian Alps in Friuli - Venezia Giulia, Italy. It is a remote hilly municipality on the border with Slovenia, with a surface of 120 km<sup>2</sup> and 1048 inhabitants (data from 2015). It has five villages – Ravanca (it. Prato di Resia), which also serves as the seat of the municipality, Bila (it. San Giorgio), Njiva (it. Gniva), Osojanë (it. Oseacco), Solbica (it. Stolvizza) – and several smaller hamlets. The inhabitants speak the characteristic Resian dialect (*res. rozajanskë* or *rozojanskë*, it. *resiano*, friul. *Rosean*, sln. *rezijansko*), part of the *Primorska* group of Slovene dialects. Even though it is spoken on a relatively small area, it is internally very diverse, featuring four distinct local varieties and a number of subvarieties. The valley was settled by Slavs during the 7<sup>th</sup> century from the direction of Carinthia following the routes of Val Canale and Val del Ferro. Owing to the Romanisation of Val del Ferro, linguistic contact with the speakers of what would later become the Carinthian dialect group of Slovenian (sln. *koroška narečna skupina*) was broken sometime after the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Younger linguistic features point towards a more intensive linguistic contact with the speakers of Slovenian of the modern Littoral dialect group of Slovenian (sln. *primorska*

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*narečna skupina*), specifically the *Tersko* dialect (located to the south of Resia, naturally delimited from it by the Musi mountain chain) and, in some aspects, the *Obsoško* dialect (to the east, delimited by Monte Canino). Today, the dialect is actively spoken mostly by the older generations, while linguistic competence generally decreases with youth. Due to its relative isolation, the dialect has developed several distinctive features on one hand and retained several archaic ones on the other. It was first extensively described by the later-to-be-famous Polish linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, most importantly in his works *Opyt fonetiki rez'anskih govorov* (1875) [An attempt at phonetics of Resian varieties] and *Materialy dlja južnoslavjanskoj dialektologii i ètnografii I: Rez'anske teksty* (1895) [Materials for South Slavic dialectology and ethnography I: Resian texts] based on years of fieldwork in the valley. The local variety of Solbica/Stolvizza is also included as research point number 1 in the Slavic Linguistic Atlas. This longitudinal project dedicated to the recording of dialectal varieties of all Slavic languages by national language institutes and academies under the supervision of a commission based at the Russian Academy of Sciences has cca. 850 research points, of which the first 22 are Slovenian.

It is generally accepted among linguists, that Resian genetically forms part of the Slovenian dialect continuum. However, as is well-documented with numerous other minorities with limited geographic and linguistic contact with speakers of other dialects of their corresponding languages and/or their standard varieties, the Resian-speaking community, too, is marked with conflicting attitudes on this topic among the speakers. Contentions often surpass linguistic issues and are usually tied to political and ideological differences as well. While a part of the speakers accepts the scientific interpretation, varying lay interpretations as to the origin of Resian (and, *ipso facto*, the origin of the Resian populace) have emerged through time. The

most popular ones among others variously characterize Resian either as: *i*) a dialect of Russian, *ii*) a mixed Slavic-Altaic language (using the adjective "Turanic", an archaic term for Turkic languages), or *iii*) an archaic Slavic language of ancient or unknown origin. The "Turanic hypothesis" was first proposed by Baudouin de Courtenay himself to explain the phenomenon of vowel harmony, at the time unknown in Slavic but a typical feature of Altaic languages – paradoxically, in his paper entitled *Particolarità linguistiche in contrasto con l'opinione che i resiani siano russi* [Linguistic features that defy the opinion that Resians are Russians]. Although the researcher later retracted this hypothesis, it has nevertheless stuck among the people until the present day. Whatever the origin hypothesis, though, it is frequently accompanied by a fervent denial of any connection between Resian and Slovenian.

The 1976 Friuli earthquakes with magnitudes of 6.4 (6 May) and 6.1 (15 September), or an intensity between IX and X and between VIII and IX on the European Macroseismic Scale (EMS-98), with an epicenter in the Venzone area in Italy claimed 990 lives, and 157,000 people lost their homes. In Resia, the earthquakes shook up not only the ground and the buildings, but also the sense of local identity. Slovenia, then a part of Yugoslavia, contributed to the renovation efforts in the region which helped to notably strengthen relations. In 1979, Yugoslavia funded and built five so-called *Slavic houses* (it. *case slave*) as well as, in 1981, a 200-seat culture centre, named *Rozajanska kultürska hiša* (it. *Centro culturale resiano*). The 1980s also saw an awakening of Resian literature with the works of local poets Silvana Paletti, Renato Quaglia and the singer-songwriter Rino Chinese. It is through these events and circumstances that efforts for the standardization of Resian as a means of its revitalization were born. To this end, the municipality organized two conferences in the 1980s. The work was entrusted to the Dutch linguist Han Steenwijk, at the time

of writing a tenured professor of Slavic linguistics at the University of Padova. Steenwijk laid the groundwork for the project in his 1994 *Ortografia resiana/Tö jošt rozajanskë pisanjë* and further developed it in subsequent publications. The cited orthography manual includes principles for writing the Resian dialect in two versions: a) one closer to the orthography of Slavic languages using the Latin script and b) one closer to the orthography of Italian (for the sake of its greater familiarity among the local population). Additionally, Steenwijk also developed standardisation principles for the establishment of »standard« Resian as an average of the four major local varieties.

Steenwijk's orthography was used in 1994 by the municipal administration of Luigi Paletti (1990–1999) when it systematically introduced bilingual local comonym signposts in Resian for the first time in history; to give a few examples: *Ravanca, Bila, Njiwa, Osojanë, Solbica*, etc. Already then, the move attracted opposition from a segment of population deeming the signposts »too Slovene« and a number of signposts were defaced. The major point of contention was the writing of the phoneme /ts/ using the letter ⟨c⟩ (as is usual in all (non-Cyrillic) Slavic orthographies). One of the first moves of the municipal administration of Sergio Chinese (2009–2019) was to replace all of the local comonym signposts with ones written in the mayor's own orthography based on Italian orthography different from that of Han Steenwijk, most notably replacing the letter ⟨c⟩ with the letter ⟨z⟩ among other changes. Also evident was shift away from the Standard Resian variety toward local varieties. The examples given above were thus written as: *Ravanzä, Bilä, Njiwa, Osoanë, Solbiza*, etc. As the old ones before, the new local comonym signposts faced defacement too, presumably from a different segment of population. Steenwijk himself criticized this new system of writing as well as its implementation as inconsistent and unsystematic. He lists

several problems, among others: *i*) the improper use of letters reserved for (phonologically different!) stressed vowels also in unstressed positions, e.g. *Martinjī Läs* or *Ravanzä*; *ii*) inconsistencies regarding word-final devoicing not only in the notation of toponyms (cfr. *Läs* instead of *Läs̄/Läs̆* following oblique forms such as [ˈlaza]) but already in the newly-adopted official orthography table: *dēt* [ˈdēt] ‘grandfather’ alongside *šob* [ˈzop] ‘tooth’ (as one would expect either *dēt* and *šop* or, sooner, *dēd* and *šob* – cfr. their respective oblique forms [ˈdēda] and [ˈzoba]); *iii*) improper notation of desinences, e.g. *Martinjī Läs: Rošajanskē kumün* ‘the Resian municipality’ (in both cases the desinence in question is actually *-i*), etc. But most importantly, the unsystematic use of the letter ⟨z⟩. Since this letter was allocated to the phoneme /ts/, the phoneme /z/ was found lacking a letter to write it with. To circumvent this now supposed to be written using a new letter ⟨ś⟩; *iiii*) this, however, was not in line with the usage of the acute (ˊ) sign, used to denote a palatal pronunciation (such as with Resian phonemes /c/ and /ʃ/ written as ⟨ć⟩ and ⟨ǰ⟩, respectively), as is customarily used in other Slavic orthographies (e.g. Croatian ć and Polish ć, ś, and ź). Beside official municipal announcements (not all of which are bilingual) the newly adopted orthography seems to be used predominantly for toponym signposts. Steenwijk’s, on the other hand, is well-established within the professional community and is widely used by various cultural institutions and societies, most notably perhaps *Rozajanski dum* and *Muzeo od tih rozajanskih judi* (it. *Museo della Gente della Val Resia*) in their publications – a biannual magazine, annual calendar and various books – and at events.

While literally all of the old toponym signposts have been replaced in 2009 with ones written in the then newly-adopted orthography, existing signposts containing historical and tourist information or information on various walking trails, etc. were largely preserved, although never renovated. Several new

signposts have been added in recent years, ranging from microtoponyms to common place names (e.g. domonyms *dum ša te parlitne* ‘retirement home’, *měšto za šport* ‘stadium’, *munizipě* ‘municipality’ etc.). Some of the translations in the latter group seem awkward, or rather, reveal a trend of avoiding the use of loanwords, opting instead for descriptive neologisms, such as e.g. *město ki so fabrike* ‘industrial area’ (literally ‘the place where factories are’), *miduha dum* ‘health centre’ (lit. ‘the doctor’s house’), or *hīša librinuw* ‘library’ (lit. ‘house of books’). Whatever the case may be, the increase of bilingual signposts in recent years, as well as the retention of some of the old ones, shows an awareness of place names as cultural heritage and, even more so, as means of promoting local identity. As highlighted by the contentiousness of writing systems, this heritage can also be conflicting, serving to divide an already scarce community.