

*Onoma* 56

Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences

ISSN: 0078-463X; e-ISSN: 1783-1644

Journal homepage: <https://onomajournal.org/>

---

**Peter Jordan, Přemysl Mácha, Marika Balode, Luděk Krtička, Uršula Obrusník, Pavel Pilch, & Alexis Sancho Reinoso, *Place name politics in multilingual areas. A comparative study of Southern Carinthia (Austria) and the Těšín/Cieszyn area (Czechia)* (Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities), Cham: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2021, 615 pp. ISBN: 978-3-030-69487-6**

**Drago Kladnik\***

ZRC SAZU, Anton Melik Geographical Institute

To cite this article: Kladnik, Drago. 2021. Peter Jordan, Přemysl Mácha, Marika Balode, Luděk Krtička, Uršula Obrusník, Pavel Pilch, & Alexis Sancho Reinoso. *Place name politics in multilingual areas. A comparative study of Southern Carinthia (Austria) and the Těšín/Cieszyn area (Czechia)* (Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities), Cham: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2021, 615 pp., ISBN 978-3-030-69487-6. *Onoma* 56, 323–329. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.56/2021/20

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.56/2021/20>

© *Onoma* and the author.

#### **Article history**

Received on 12 November 2021.

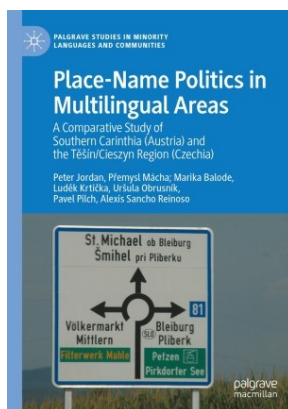
Final form accepted on 12 December 2021.

Published online on 13 December 2021.

\* Contact: Novi trg 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, [drago.kladnik@zrc-sazu.si](mailto:drago.kladnik@zrc-sazu.si)

**Peter Jordan, Přemysl Mácha, Marika Balode, Luděk Krtička, Uršula Obrusník, Pavel Pilch, & Alexis Sancho Reinoso, *Place name politics in multilingual areas. A comparative study of Southern Carinthia (Austria) and the Těšín/Cieszyn area (Czechia)* (Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities), Cham: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2021, 615 pp. ISBN: 978-3-030-69487-6**

DRAGO KLADNIK



<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-69488-3>

The survey presented in this volume is an important contribution to social geography, anthropology, and socio-onomastics – disciplines that all interconnect to examine this increasingly important international topic. The authors present and emphasize the role of place names in the formation and maintenance of individual and group identities in multilingual situations.

The book is unique because of its systematic interdisciplinary comparative approach and its complex, diverse, and exhaustive field research, carried out in the Austrian state of Carinthia and the Czech Republic's Silesia region. The authors also combine various research methods to achieve a complex understanding of the jointly studied issue. It therefore

offers a synthesis of current independent research work within different disciplines that are nonetheless still tightly connected in their methodological approach.

The historically different socioeconomic backgrounds of the two countries in the twentieth century, which have been brought back together again within the fold of the EU over the last two decades, is also an important factor in this comparison. The interdisciplinary comparative study of two quite different bilingual areas and linguistic landscapes is an important innovation in research and methodology. The authors have succeeded in preparing comparable studies and supplementing them with many illustrative appendices that can convey more than even the comprehensive text.

One of the important aspects of the composition of this publication's project team and its authors is its internationality and multiethnicity, which is especially evident in its Austrian section.

The research project was conducted by Peter Jordan on the Austrian side and Přemysl Mácha on the Czech side, with Mácha taking the initiative and

planning most of the research. Both of them formulated most of the texts in the volume, with Jordan performing the final editing. The members of the Austrian team were Marika Balode and Alexis Sancho Reinoso, and the members of the Czech team were Luděk Krtička, Uršula Obrusník, and Pavel Pilch.

Peter Jordan was born in Hermagor, Carinthia, Austria, close to the bilingual area. He studied geography, cartography, and ethnology at the University of Vienna, where he earned his doctorate, received a faculty rank at the University of Klagenfurt, worked from 1977 to 2006 at the Austrian Institute of East and Southeast European Studies in Vienna (serving as its director from 2002 to 2005), and has been at the Austrian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Urban and Regional Research, also in Vienna, since 2007. He has regularly taught cultural and tourism geography, cartography, and toponomastics at the universities of Vienna, Klagenfurt, and Cluj-Napoca (Romania). He has authored 388 research publications, eighty-four of them on toponomastics, the topic closest to the theme of this volume. From 2006 to 2017 he served as the convenor of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Working Group on Exonyms, and from 2007 to 2017 as the chair of Austrian Board on Geographical Names. Since 2017 he has been the chair on behalf of the International Cartographic Association (ICA) of the Joint ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy. Together with Paul Woodman, he edits the toponymic book series *Name & Place*.

Přemysl Mácha was born in Frýdek-Místek, Silesia, Czechia, and he has lived most of his life in the Těšín/Cieszyn region. He obtained his doctorate from the Institute of Ethnology at Charles University in Prague. During the project, he was working as an assistant professor of anthropology and cultural geography at the Department of Human Geography at the University of Ostrava. He now works in the Department of Memory Studies at the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Brno. He is interested in identity politics, place names, landscapes, inclusive communities, and sustainability. He is the author, coauthor, and editor of over sixty publications, including several books and many articles on place names.

Marika Balode was born in Liepāja, Latvia, and she lives in Leppen/Lepena in the core area of the Slovenian minority in Carinthia. She is a Slavic specialist and geographer, currently pursuing a master's degree at the Institute of Geography and Regional Research at the University of Klagenfurt. She speaks five languages, including German and Slovenian, and she is interested in space-related identities, intercultural relations, and minority situations.

Alexis Sancho Reinoso was born in Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, and lives in Lower Austria. He received his doctorate in geography from the University of Barcelona and works at the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Vienna. His main areas of interest are intercultural relations, regional development, and rural space.

Luděk Krtička was born in Rapotín, Moravia, Czechia, where he also lives, and he works as an assistant professor at the Department of Human

Geography and Regional Development at the University of Ostrava. He received his doctorate in physical geography, geo-ecology, and geoinformatics at Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. His interests include landscape change assessment, urban sustainability, GIS analysis and data collection, cartography, and landscape toponymy.

Uršula Obrusník was born in Ostrava, Silesia, Czechia, and lives in Aberdeen, Scotland. She is currently pursuing a doctorate in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen. She is interested in issues of belonging, minority rights, politics of memory, and contemporary urban spaces. She is a member of the Polish minority in Czechia.

Pavel Pilch was born in Třinec, Silesia, Czechia, that is, right in the research area – and lives in Brno. He is a Bohemian specialist, Slavic specialist, and comics studies scholar, currently pursuing a doctorate and teaching at the Institute of Slavic Languages at Masaryk University in Brno. As a native of the research area, he speaks the local dialect.

The book is divided into eight chapters, forty-six subsections, and six appendices. The chapters are titled:

- 1) *Introduction* (pp. 1–12);
- 2) *The wider onomastic scope of the research topic* (pp. 13–43);
- 3) *The challenges of studying place-name politics in multilingual areas* (pp. 45–69);
- 4) *Linguistic minorities in Austria and Czechia: Historical, political and cultural contexts* (pp. 71–175);
- 5) *The two minority situations compared* (pp. 177–286);
- 6) *Research results* (pp. 187–516);
- 7) *Comparative interpretation of research results* (pp. 517–527); and
- 8) *Conclusions* (pp. 529–536).

The authors' principal research questions were the following:

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 and national boundaries, and what are the principal social forces structuring the contemporary toponymic landscape and everyday toponymic practice?

3) How are the multilingual and 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?

The research presented in the publication reveals very intimate links between names, place, and identity. The authors have observed these links

consistently in archival sources, media, linguistic landscapes, interviews, and questionnaires in both areas studied.

The interviews were carried out with sign creators, public officials, vandals, and local residents, supplemented by visual documentation and the reception of signs in the local press. The authors also looked for historical photographs and postcards capturing parts of the local linguistic landscape in different time periods.

Almost 3,000 signs were documented in southern Carinthia and approximately 1,500 in the Těšín/Cieszyn region. Due to the different size, configuration, and structure of the two areas studied, however, in southern Carinthia only two places were the target of an (almost) complete documentation (documentation of the totality of signs), and for the rest of the area only a selection of typical cases was documented, whereas in the Těšín/Cieszyn region four municipalities were completely documented.

The linguistic landscape in Carinthia has a long history. By the end of the Middle Ages, a distinct language boundary had developed within the region, closely coinciding with the ecclesiastical boundaries established between Salzburg and Aquileia in 811. The independent principality of Carantania flourished in the territory of Carinthia in the Middle Ages. Slovenian and German geographical names equally marked the linguistic landscape, although Slovenian names gradually gave way to German names. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, political events and forces had a strong impact. This included the rise of nationalism during the First World War and national homogenization after the war almost all across Europe and also in Austria: although some parts of Carinthia populated predominantly by Slovenians were awarded to the first Yugoslav state, the part of Carinthia that was awarded to Austria (but with a Slovenian minority) was regarded as “Austrian” and subjected to Germanization.

After the Second World War, the Austrian State Treaty, which reestablished Austria as a sovereign democratic state, was signed in 1955. Article 7 of this treaty details the obligations of the Austrian authorities regarding the rights of the Slovenian ethnic community in Austria. Even though the Slovenian ethnic community in Carinthia (and Styria) acquired special rights, they still have not been fully implemented. The largest gap between the obligations defined in the treaty and their fulfillment can still be seen in the unresolved problem of bilingual town signs in Carinthia.

However, Article 7 does not specify the percentage of the local Slovenian-speaking population needed for the implementation of this right. Originally, 205 places and localities in thirty-six municipalities were supposed to receive bilingual town signs. Previous unsuccessful attempts to put up bilingual signs with occasionally very dramatic and heavily politicized scenery were followed by a compromise as late as 2011 that seems to have satisfied all parties involved. The so-called “town sign compromise” (German *Ortstafelkompromiss*) was reached, which was ultimately accepted by all parties and essentially calmed what was at times a highly delicate political situation. The compromise ruled that

164 villages and towns in twenty-four municipalities in the southern parts of Carinthia were officially given bilingual names based on a share of a 17.5% Slovenian-speaking population in an individual settlement according to the 2001 census. Minor deviations from this benchmark were possible in cases where this was accepted locally, and it calmed what had been a delicate situation at times.

A specific challenge for the Těšín/Cieszyn region was the linguistic proximity of Polish, Czech, and the dialect referred to as *po naszymu* ('in our language'). Some names are written identically in all three, and in such cases there was no way to decide based on the name itself which language it was written in. Only the context of the entire map could help to resolve this issue – but not always because many maps contain a mixture of names in different languages. In addition, most pre-First World War maps use German orthography, which means that most names are rendered either in German or more commonly in a nonstandard hybrid form, making it impossible to judge the name's original language. This is further aggravated by the fact that Czech and Polish standard orthography took a long time to develop and even longer to enter daily use. As a consequence, the use of what today would be seen as Czech or Polish orthography may not necessarily indicate a Czech or Polish origin of a name, but simply an orthographic preference of the mapmaker. The Těšín/Cieszyn Poles differ from Poles in Poland not only in their spoken language, but also religiously because there is a strong Protestant presence.

There were also several important periods of renaming in the Těšín/Cieszyn region. The repeated toponymic overhauls of Czech geographical names have had several important consequences. First, minority names have been erased. Second, the state control of the naming process with a strong emphasis on name standardization has led to an almost complete erasure of dialect diversity in names. The contemporary toponymic landscape is thus relatively unified, presenting an inaccurate image of a linguistically and culturally homogenous nation. This is also a larger context that should be taken into account when interpreting the debates about bilingual signs in the Těšín/Cieszyn region today, the painful local history notwithstanding. And third, because of the aforementioned overhauls, multiple names for the same places originating in different periods are used, most commonly in cities but also in the countryside. As a consequence, all names of populated places exist in three forms – Czech, dialect, and Polish – which may or may not be identical in writing and pronunciation.

For the Těšín/Cieszyn region, a paradoxical situation is characteristic when standard Polish is promoted but is rarely used in everyday life. At the same time, the local dialect – the communication code actually used – is often practically invisible in the written linguistic landscape.

A special value of this book is the comparative interpretation of similarities and differences in both areas studied, which is a unique synthesis of a thoroughly conducted study. Unlike in Austria, where the bottom-up principle is well established, in Czechoslovakia and later Czechia the naming process has been controlled from above.

In addition to a long-shared history of both areas studied within the Habsburg empire, striking similarities such as place-name conflicts and historical burdens such as military occupations by the nation state corresponding to the minority were a major motivation for comparing the two minority situations. However, the longer the research proceeded, the more it became obvious that similarities are balanced out by differences, and that even similarities differ in detail in both regions. Over the past few decades significant conflicts have arisen regarding the use of bilingual signs (German and Slovenian in Austria, and Czech and Polish in Czechia), including in the last few years, when many public signs and place names have been vandalized.

It is especially commendable that the latest sources and international research have been considered, demonstrating the authors' familiarity with the latest findings in this field.

All the findings lead to the general conclusion – also applicable to minority situations in other countries – that strengthening regional identities (e.g., by seeking correspondence between historical-cultural and administrative regions with major responsibilities of self-government) can mitigate antagonistic situations in ethnic or national terms. It may also be read as recommendations for minority policies and legislation in other countries with good ethnic relations.

Of course, the book cannot be treated as a manual for such problematic areas because every situation is unique – if only because of the uniqueness of the people taking part in it. However, what this volume can do – and has attempted to do – is to offer experiences from two areas that have gone through years of painful conflict and have finally arrived at alternative solutions. Much can be learned from these results, and even more from the process itself. The authors also justifiably express hope that the book will serve as an inspiration for researchers and practitioners searching for solutions to similar conflicts in other countries and regions. Thus, politicians at the international and national levels can be viewed as an important audience for the book's message because appropriate treatment of ethnic minorities in the modern world, with its almost unlimited number of ethnically mixed areas, is gaining increasing attention.

Beyond such political importance, the main readership of this survey will be academics and students, especially in social geography (where studying geographical names is becoming an increasingly important field of research attracting an increasing number of scholars), socio-onomastics, and toponomastics.

To sum up, this remarkable work makes a valuable contribution to the discipline, investigating new areas through interdisciplinary comparison of similarities and contrasts between two ethnically and historically (especially socioeconomically and politically) different bilingual areas. It compares the German and Slovenian ethnic groups in Austrian Carinthia, as well as two Slavic ethnic groups (Czech and Polish) in Silesia, highlighting the important role of local dialects and their regional identities. Finally, it addresses totally new area of investigation that from a regional point of view are almost unlimited.