

MINORITY LANGUAGES AS A RESOURCE FOR TOURISM PROMOTION ON THE WEB: THE CASE OF SOME MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN ITALY

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Abstract Minority languages have been the subject of a rich literature in the field of the sociolinguistics of tourism and a number of works have underlined that they have been increasingly used in tourism promotion in the last few decades as they convey overtones evoking authenticity. Travel websites do not only provide a first glance at a destination for potential guests, but they are also part of the tourist experience because they introduce visitors to relevant contents related to specific places. In view of this, in websites of a destination where a minority language is spoken the use of the local variety could be particularly relevant in order to promote a specific place as offering an immersion into a unique cultural experience. The present article addresses the question how ten minority communities in Italy mobilize their local languages for self-representation purposes within their tourism websites.

Keywords:

minority
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communication,
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commodification,
multilingualism

1 Introduction

1.1 Minority languages and tourism promotion

Minority languages have already been the subject of a rich literature in the field of the sociolinguistics of tourism. A number of works have underlined that minority languages have been increasingly used in tourism promotion as they convey overtones evoking authenticity (see Cohen, 1988; Zhu, 2012). Heller (2003) suggests that globalization in tourism has brought about “a shift from understanding language as being primarily a marker of ethnonational identity, to understanding language as being a marketable commodity on its own, distinct from identity” (Heller, 2003, p. 474). Heller, Pujolar and Duchêne (2014) have underlined that the processes of commodification of language involve “new ways of using and representing languages and language practices in the specific field of tourism” as well as the reassessment of minority languages as a “symbolic and economic capital” (Heller, Pujolar & Duchêne, 2014, p. 561). Hall-Lew and Lew (2014) also remark that a linguistic variety can frame the identity narrative and sense of place for a destination and that “international tourism settings turn multilingualism and cosmopolitanism into economic assets” (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014, p. 344; on the correlation between minority languages and the economy of minority communities, see also Grin, 1999; Grin & Vaillancourt, 1999; Strassoldo, 2014).

A consequence of this new role minority languages have taken in tourism is that new awareness among members of communities speaking a minority language emerged as to the value their language conveys as a carrier of a specific *weltanschauung*, thus improving a sense of identity, self-regard as part of a group having exclusive cultural features. This, in turn, initiated in some cases a virtuous circle of language preservation and revival (Cohen, 1988; de Azeredo Grunewald, 2002; Greathouse-Amador, 2005; Kelly-Holmes, Pietikäinen & Moriarty, 2011; Lonardi, Martini & Hull, 2020).

The new role minority languages have taken in tourism – or at least their potential – appears to be clearly perceived in some communities speaking minority languages in Italy (see Toso, 2009; Negro, 2014). Protto (2014), for instance, underlines that awareness of the value of the German dialect spoken in the village of Sauris (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy) as a resource for tourism promotion has emerged in the last

few years, as is testified by the fact that Sauris raises considerable interest in culturally and linguistically kindred nearby Austrian regions of Carinthia and Tirol (in addition to Italy); at the same time, she claims that tourism can provide “further incentive for learning and using a local language” (Proto, 2014, p. 66). Lonardi, Martini and Hull (2020) discuss the results of interviews to privileged observers in the Cimbrian-speaking village of Giazza (Italy), which clearly show awareness of the local language and culture as an asset in tourism marketing. One of the interviewees is reported as saying that “with globalization, people realized they needed to find something typical of the territory and started promoting local products and some aspects of the local culture too” (Lonardi, Martini & Hull, 2020, p. 2); moreover, the authors reported that several interviewees underline that “direct contact with tourists, genuinely interested in their culture and language, has rekindled their understanding of the value of their language” (ibid.), which in turn “has renewed their sense of pride in their culture and identity and encouraged many to learn more to preserve this valuable heritage and to deliver authentic experience” (ibid.).

It has already been highlighted in the literature on tourism studies that travel websites do not only provide a first glance at a destination for potential guests, but they are also part of the tourist experience because they introduce website visitors to relevant contents related to specific places (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2009). In view of this, in minority language destination websites the use of the local variety could be particularly relevant in order to promote a specific place as offering an immersion into a unique cultural experience. Building on a case study on websites related to two bilingual communities in Ireland and Finland, Kelly-Holmes, Pietikäinen and Moriarty (2011) show that minority languages are employed “extensively where the product or the provider are part of the minority language industry or infrastructure” “both for local legitimacy and to authenticate their product” (Holmes, Pietikäinen & Moriarty, 2011, p. 40). At the same time, however, the promotion of tourism needs to be ‘inclusive’ in order to address the audience of potential visitors and needs to resort to national (or global) languages (Kelly-Holmes & Pietikäinen, 2014).

1.2 Aims of the study

The present article addresses the question how these conflicting instances, involving local languages and communication on a national or global stage, are coped with in tourism promotion websites of some minority language communities in Italy, and in particular how these communities mobilize local languages for self-representation purposes within the tourism discourse. To do this, we will first provide a short depiction of the locations we focused on from a linguistic and tourism viewpoint (Section 2), we will then describe the research methods we adopted and we illustrate the results (Section 3); we will then try to discuss how to interpret the results (Section 4) and draw the conclusions (Section 5).

2 Context of the study

2.1 Multilingualism in Italy

Italy is characterized by a significant richness in terms of linguistic diversity. Beside standard Italian, which is nowadays the native language of most Italians, regional Romance vernacular varieties are also spoken as well as non-Romance local languages (Albanian, Germanic, Greek and Slavic). Twelve languages have been recognized as minority languages according to national legislation which was passed in the 1990s (law 482/1999). Specific regional legislation further determines the fields of application of the national law on minority languages with respect to school teaching, public services, use of minority languages in mass media, etc., and more in terms of general preservation. Revitalization and standardization of minority languages are promoted through initiatives organized by regional agencies or local cultural associations.

2.2 Scope of the study

Since an exhaustive mapping of the use of minority languages in tourism websites would be tantalizing (the legislation on minority languages is likely to be applied in many more than 1,000 municipalities), we have selected ten tourist locations, eight in Northern Italy and two in Sardinia. These locations have in common the fact that a minority language is spoken and that national or regional legislation sets the ground for language planning actions. They may vary significantly, however, as far as other

features are concerned; we considered here four factors as particularly relevant to potentially affect the appeal of the minority language in tourism marketing: the dimension of the community, the number of minority language active speakers, the type of tourist offer and the number of beds in accommodation facilities, as an indicator of ‘touristicity’, see Gismondi and Russo, 2004 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Destinations inquired in the present study with relevant sociolinguistic and economic variables.

Location	Inhabitants	Minority speakers	Type of tourist offer	Number of beds in accommodation facilities ¹
Gressoney	±1100	70-80%	alpine, ski	4058
Alagna Valsesia	±700	20%	alpine	1685
Rimella	±150	90%	alpine	74
Luserna	±260	60%	alpine	67
Palù del Fèrsina	±160	90%	alpine	212
Sappada	±1300	n.a. (±60%)	alpine, ski	1050
Sauris	±400	60%	alpine	903
Val Resia	±900	n.a.	alpine	93
Alghero	±40,000	50%	seaside	15027
Carloforte	±6,000	85%	seaside	n.a.

¹ Data from <dati.istat.it>, services > tourism > capacity of collective accommodation – municipality data > capacity of collective accommodation establishments by type of accommodation > hotels and similar accommodation, holiday and other short-stay accommodation, camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks.

In the following subsections we give some more details on these destinations.

2.2.1 Walser communities in Aosta Valley and Piedmont

The term Walser refers to Alemannic populations who emigrated in medieval times from Valais (Switzerland) and then settled in colonies throughout the Alps. Walser communities are located in Italy in various Alpine settlements in Aosta Valley and Piedmont, roughly around the Monte Rosa massif.

These settlements date back approximately to the 13th century (Dal Negro, 2011). We examine here three destinations, Gressoney (Aosta Valley), Alagna Valsesia (Piedmont), and Rimella (Piedmont).

Gressoney/Greschòney (Aosta Valley) includes two municipalities, Gressoney-Saint-Jean (about 800 people) and Gressoney-La-Trinité (about 300 people). The latest statistical survey on the Walser-speaking population dates back to the 1990s, when about 50% of the inhabitants of the two communities were still active speakers. Estimates in the early 2000s suggested that about 35% of the population are active speakers of Walser (Prezzi, 2004); passive knowledge of Walser may involve a much more significant number of residents in Gressoney (between 70% and 80%, see Angster, Dal Negro, 2015). Winter ski tourism is highly developed as well as summer tourism, when due to the cool climate, Gressoney is a destination for hikers and holidaymakers.

Alagna Valsesia (Im Land in Walser) is a town of about 700 inhabitants located at the foot of the southern slope of the Monte Rosa massif. According to estimates only about 20% of the residents in Alagna Valsesia have some Walser competence (Angster & Dal Negro, 2015). The village is one of the most important Piedmont ski resorts. In recent years, it has increasingly established itself as the main ski resort in North-East Piedmont in terms of the number of visitors.

Rimella/Remmalju is a small village (about 150 inhabitants) located in a side valley of Valsesia in the province of Vercelli (Piedmont). Tittschu, the local variety of Walser, is still part of the repertoire of about 90% of the residents according to a recent estimate (Angster & Dal Negro, 2015). As in Alagna, Rimella is set in an remote area and mainly attracts hikers and visitors who value the beautiful landscapes and the quiet and fascinating flavour of the location.

2.2.2 Minority communities in Trentino

Luserna/Lusérn is set on the southern side of the Alps in the autonomous province of Trento. About 260 people live in the village. The Cimbrian language, a German dialect brought into the area during the 12th century by Bavarian peasants and woodcutters, is spoken in Luserna by about 60% of the villagers (Schöntag, 2013; Ciccolone, 2014). Consciousness of being part of a minority and the identification of the inhabitants as Cimbrian is, however, pervasive in the community and seems to overcome real proficiency in the language. Tourist flows to Luserna/Lusérn are characterized by the presence of daily hikers or skiers attracted by the breathtaking

Alpine environment. Most of the visitors come from Italy; German and Austrian tourists also visit the place because of their interest in the local language and culture. Palù del Fèrsina/Palai en Bersntol is a village in the Fèrsina Valley (Province of Trento). A Tyrolese German variety named Mòcheno is spoken by more than 90% of the 164 residents. Tourism flows only marginally touched Palù/Palai: daily hikers mostly from the nearby towns or from Trento visit the village mainly in the summer season. A few foreign guests also come from Südtirol and Austria, attracted by the local language and culture.

2.2.3 Minority communities in Friuli Venezia Giulia

Sappada/Plodn is a 1300-people municipality in Friuli Venezia Giulia, on the southern slopes of the Carnic Alps range. The area was inhabited by German-speaking settlers from nearby Pustertal (East Tirol) as early as the 13th century. Sappada/Plodn is a German island: the local language, Plodarisch, is a variety of Pustertal Tyrolean. To the best of our knowledge surveys have never been undertaken to determine how many people are active Podarisch speakers, but numbers may not differ significantly from those in other language islands in nearby Sauris/Zahre. Thanks to the beautiful natural setting and its well-developed ski infrastructure Sappada is a very popular destination both in summer and in winter.

Sauris/Zahre is a municipality of about 400 people located in Friuli Venezia Giulia. It was probably founded in the 13th century by people coming from nearby Carinthia and East Tirol. Because of its geographic isolation Sauris/Zahre has been a German island for centuries. Nowadays a southern Bavarian variety of German dialect ('Saurian', *de zahrar sproche* in the local language) is spoken by about 60% of the villagers (Costantini in press). The beautiful Alpine landscape as well as local food products and handicrafts make this village a destination for domestic and international tourism (mainly from nearby Austria). Since the 1980s an increasing number of tourists from neighboring German-speaking areas has been coming to Sauris/Zahre because of their interest in the local language (Protto, 2014).

Resia/Resije is a municipality located in a valley in the Julian Alps (Udine). It has a population of just over 900 people living in six villages along the valley, which has been inhabited by Slavic people since the 7th century. The local Slavic language, Resian (*rošajanski langač*), is attested in four varieties and is considered a transitional

variety between Carinthian and Litoralean dialects of Slovenian (Steenwijk, 1992). Reliable data on the active use of Resian are missing, but we can assume comparable numbers to the ones of the other language islands in Friuli Venezia Giulia. As for tourism, Resia Valley is situated within the Julian Pre-Alps Natural Park, which is known for its beautiful landscapes. According to Quaglia (2014), in recent years Resia has become a favorite destination for Slovenian tourists interested in its linguistic distinctiveness.

2.2.4 Minority communities in Sardinia

Alghero/P'Alguer is a city of more than 40,000 inhabitants on the northwest coast of Sardinia. Also known as *Barceloneta sarda* ('small Sardinian Barcelona'), it is a Catalan-language island: in the 14th century Catalan settlers populated the town after driving out the indigenous populations. Algherese (Alguerés in the local language) is a conservative variety of Catalan. Nowadays it is spoken by about 50% of citizens (Oppo, 2007, pp. 65-74). Alghero is a very famous tourist seaside destination; it is also well known as an archaeological and naturalistic site. Many tourists from Catalonia visit the location attracted by its linguistic peculiarity (Toso, 2009).

Carloforte/U Pàize is a town of 6,000 inhabitants located on the island of San Pietro in the archipelago of Sulcis, in Southwest Sardinia. A local variety of Ligurian dialect called *Tabarchino* (*tabarchin* in the local language) has been spoken there since the 18th century, when Ligurian people who had moved to Tabarca (Tunisia) in the 16th century resettled in the archipelago of Sulcis in Carloforte and the nearby town of Calasetta/Câdasédda. In recent years a lot of initiatives have been undertaken in order to standardize and promote this language, even though it is protected by law only at a regional level (Tabarchino is considered as a dialectal minority, and because of this it is not protected by the national law on minority languages). Nowadays Tabarchino is spoken by more than 85% of Carloforte inhabitants (Oppo, 2007, pp. 65-74). Carloforte is a very famous tourist seaside destination. It is also well known for its traditional cuisine. Over the last few years, many tourists from Liguria have been visiting the town with the specific purpose of speaking or hearing Ligurian overseas (Toso, 2009).

3 Research methodology and results

3.1 Methodology

The materials to analyze have been chosen following the research methodology already adopted in Kelly-Holmes, Pietikäinen and Moriarty (2011), who attempt to replicate how a tourist would find the sites of the location under inquiry, in line with a virtual ethnographic approach (Hine, 2000). As the destinations we have focused on are mainly touched by tourism flows originating in Italy, we queried Google using as keywords the name of the locations and the Italian word *turismo* 'tourism'. The sites resulting on the first page of the search were examined and we selected the sites of regional and local tourist boards and associations excluding booking services or other service websites as more representative of the way an organization which represents a community on the whole resorts to a minority language in tourism promotion. Some 20 webpages were analyzed at first; we then considered other pages within the same websites as well, as a visitor potentially interested in knowing more about a destination may easily do. Table 2 shows lists the websites considered for our investigation.

We focused our inquiry on two aspects related to the use of minority languages on travel websites highlighted in Kelly-Holmes, Pietikäinen and Moriarty (2011): the presence in travel websites of a discussion on the existence of a minority language spoken in a location and the use of the minority code on a tourism website – single words or complete sentences, with particular scope on specific domains of activity, e.g. arts and crafts, food, traditions and traditional festivals, etc. A third feature in the use of minority languages in tourism websites emphasized by Kelly-Holmes, Pietikäinen and Moriarty (2011), that is, the interaction between minority languages and the visuals/images used, was deemed as irrelevant to immediate scrutiny. Finally, we also considered the relevance of a web page where the mention or use of the minority language is made – whether it was the homepage or a secondary page of a website. Almost 70 webpages overall were visited.

Table 2: Websites visited for the present study (March 2021).

Location	Website
Gressoney	www.lovevda.it/it/banca-dati/3/localita/valle-d-aosta/gressoney-saint-jean/392
Alagna Valsesia	www.alagna.it/ www.monterosavalsesia.com/alta_valsesia_paesi/it/it-alagna-valsesia.html www.invalsesia.it/alagna-valsesia/
Rimella	www.monterosavalsesia.com/alta_valsesia_paesi/it/it-rimella.html www.alagna.it/estate/gite-fuori-porta/rimella/
Luserna	www.visittrentino.info/it/trentino/destinazioni/luserna_md_239 www.alpecimbria.it/it/scopri-l-alpe-cimbria/localit%C3%A0/lus%C3%A9rn/68-0.html
Palù del Fèrsina	www.visittrentino.info/it/trentino/destinazioni/palu-del-fersina_md_226 www.valledeimocheni.it
Sappada	www.turismoavg.it/sappada www.sappada.info/ www.sappadadolomiti.com/
Sauris	www.turismoavg.it/sauris www.sauris.org/
Val Resia	www.turismoavg.it/resia www.resianet.org/
Alghero	www.algheroturismo.eu/ www.sardegnaturismo.it/it/luoghi/nord-ovest/alghero
Carloforte	www.carloforteturismo.it www.sardegnaturismo.it/it/luoghi/sud/carloforte

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Mention of minority languages

The first remarkable aspect that comes to the fore is that regional tourism board website pages of minority communities generally mention their linguistic specificity as one of the most defining features. The page of Gressoney-Saint-Jean in the official tourism website for the Aosta Valley region, underlines that the town is rooted in the Walser culture and language as the second piece of information overall. Similar mentions of the minority language can be found on the Luserna and Palù del Fèrsina page in the official tourism website of Trentino:

- (1) Luserna è il più piccolo dei comuni dei grandi altipiani trentini, ma è anche uno dei più ricchi di storia e tradizioni, infatti qui si parla ancora il cimbro un'antica lingua tedesca.

[Luserna is the smallest municipality in Trentino uplands, but it is one of the richest in history and traditions, as Cimbrian, an ancient German language, is still spoken here].

(www.visittrentino.info/it/trentino/destinazioni/luserna_md_239)

Palù del Fèrsina is described as the village that “boasts the most interesting and authentic folk traditions” (it. *vanta le più interessanti e autentiche tradizioni popolari*³⁹) linked to the Mòcheni people and their language. Similarly, the Friuli Venezia Giulia official tourism website provides as one of the earliest pieces of information the linguistic specificity of Sappada, Sauris and Val Resia (see the following excerpts from the Sappada and Val Resia webpages respectively).

- (2) Circondata dalle Dolomiti, Sappada (Plodn nel dialetto locale) è una famosa meta di turismo invernale ed estivo. La sua origine è altomedievale ed è attribuita al Patriarca di Aquileia che avrebbe chiamato in questa zona allora disabitata un gruppo di famiglie dalla Baviera. Ancora oggi, a Sappada si parla infatti un antico dialetto tedesco.

[Surrounded by the Dolomites, Sappada (Plodn in the local dialect) is a famous destination for winter and summer tourism. Its origin is early medieval and is attributed to the Patriarch of Aquileia who would have called a group of families from Bavaria to this then uninhabited area. In fact, an ancient German dialect is still spoken in Sappada today.]

(www.turismofvg.it/sappada)

- (3) Resia si trova in una valle magica e appartata, dove vive una comunità di ceppo slavo che conserva tradizioni e una lingua antica, unica nel contesto delle comunità slavofone.

[Resia is located in a magical and secluded valley, where a community of Slavic lineage lives which preserves traditions and an ancient language, unique in the context of the Slavic communities.]

(www.turismofvg.it/resia)

³⁹ See <www.visittrentino.info/it/trentino/destinazioni/palu-del-fersina_md_226>.

Sardinia's tourist board official website does not explicitly mention minority languages on the pages of Alghero, although linguistic alterity is clearly perceived through the presence of place names (which may however have Catalan or Sardinian origin as far as the visitor may be concerned). Carloforte is instead strongly identified from the very beginning as a Ligurian-speaking community (see excerpt (4), where the local name for the town is not even translated).

- (4) U pàize è un enclave ligure in Sardegna: conserva lingua e cultura dei fondatori, le famiglie di pescatori originarie di Pegli, e provenienti dall'isola tunisina di Tabarka (dove risiedevano dal XVI secolo).

[U pàize is a Ligurian enclave in Sardinia: it preserves the language and culture of its founders, the fishing families originally from Pegli, and from the Tunisian island of Tabarka (where they lived since the 16th century).]

(<https://www.sardegnaturismo.it/it/luoghi/sud/carloforte>)

Quite paradoxically homepages of local tourist boards often make no mention of the linguistic specificity of a community. Neither on the Alagna tourist board website nor on the Sauris or Alghero or Carloforte websites is the existence of a minority language spoken in the village apparent from the homepage. Rather, secondary pages dedicated to the history and traditions of the community include references to the local language: they are in fact very rich in portraying the language and mentioning single words to refer to traditions (see next paragraph). However, a superficial visit to websites of local tourist boards may even leave the guest unaware of the linguistic specificity of the place. One of the two Sappada local websites (www.sappada.info) is exceptional in that the linguistic peculiarity of the town is stated, though only in an “info” box.

3.2.2 Occurrence of single minority language words

The sample of webpages considered here also shows some differences with respect to the use of tokens in a minority language depending on the type of website. The number of minority language words in regional tourist board website pages is generally scanty. The only Walser words in the Gressoney-Saint-Jean page in the Aosta Valley official tourism website are ‘stadel’ – the word for the typical Walser building, ‘titsch’ – the Walser word for the German dialect spoken in Gressoney – and ‘Bierfest’ ‘Beer festival’ (which may, however, be a German loanword). The Palù

del Fèrsina page in the Trentino official tourism website includes only one Mòcheno expression – ‘Graub va Hardimbl’ – ‘Hardimbl mine’, the name of a local mine museum. ‘Plodn’ – the local dialect name for Sappada – and ‘Plodar Vosenòcht’ – ‘Sappada carnival’ – are the only expressions in the presentation page of Sappada in the Friuli Venezia Giulia official tourism website, as ‘Zahre’ – the local dialect name for Sappada –, ‘Rölar’ and ‘Kheirar’ – names of two characters in the traditional carnival celebrations in Sauris – are the only Saurian words in the Sauris page. A handful of expressions occur in the Alghero page of the Sardinia official tourism websites – mainly names of places: ‘Escala del Cabirol’ (Catalan), ‘domus de Janas’ (Sardinian), etc. The Carloforte page in the same website also have few Tabarchino words in it, starting with ‘U pàize’ – the local name for Carloforte.

The homepages of local tourist boards are also rather poor in using the local minority language. Except for very few words there are no traces of the local languages in Alagna, Sappada, Sauris, Alghero (an “info” box advertises the events in the ‘Setmana Santa’ – ‘Holy week’) and the Carloforte (an “info” box advertises a music festival called ‘Creuza de mä’ – ‘path to the sea’) website homepage. The site www.sappada.info also includes very few words in Plodarisch – an “info” box mentions a typical figure of the Sappada carnival, ‘rollate’, and the word ‘rolln’ – ‘cowbells’.

Much more abundant are the words in local varieties in secondary pages dedicated to the history, traditions, arts and crafts, traditional costumes, typical products and cuisine, descriptions of traditional buildings and building techniques, folklore tales of some of the localities, as the following excerpts from the local tourist board website of Sauris and Resia show:

- (5) Le maschere, suddivise in belle (scheana schembln) e brutte (schentana schembln), indossano, a seconda della tipologia, vecchi indumenti e cappellini con fiori di carta e nastri colorati e hanno sul volto maschere di legno, velette o semplicemente fuliggine (ruess). Altre figure del carnevale saurano sono il Rölar ed il Kheirar. [...]
[Depending on the type, the masks, divided into beautiful (scheana schembln) and ugly (schentana schembln), wear old garments and hats with paper flowers and coloured ribbons and have wooden masks, veils or simply soot

(rues) on their faces. Other figures of the Sauran carnival are the Rölar and the Kheirar. [...]]

(www.sauris.org/tradizioni/)

- (6) Il Carnevale inizia, generalmente, negli ultimi giorni, il giovedì grasso (Jojba Grasa) il sabato sera, la domenica (Püstawa nadēja), il lunedì, il martedì (TeVliki Püst) e il mercoledì delle ceneri (Te din na pëpël). In passato la festività dell'Epifania (Pernahti) dava inizio ai festeggiamenti carnevaleschi. [Carnival generally begins in the last days on Maundy Thursday (Jojba Grasa) on Saturday evening, Sunday (Püstawa nadēja), Monday, Shrove Tuesday (TeVliki Püst) and Ash Wednesday (Te din na pëpël). In the past, the feast of the Epiphany (Pernahti) started the carnival celebrations.]
- (<http://www.resianet.org/site/carnevale/>)

4 Discussion

The websites we analyzed appear to display tendencies that seem to depend on the type and function of the websites themselves. Pages within a regional tourism board portal generally feature discussions on the existence of a minority language spoken in a location more than the homepages of community tourism board websites, which host secondary pages to information about the history of the location, its tradition and its language. A search on Google may lead to both these types of pages as first results, but the display – and the perceived significance – of a minority language is uneven in the two types of pages. One may expect that a minority language will be treasured as a tourism promotion asset in websites of the tourist board of a community where the language is spoken; however, quite paradoxically, the samples we have examined show that regional websites expose the existence of a minority language more than local websites do. This may be understood as a response to the conflicting needs we mentioned at the beginning between reaching a national or global audience and authenticating a location. Regional tourism boards, which do not need to place themselves within the national tourism landscape (and perhaps have as their main target informing rather than attracting), can indulge in depicting the specificities of a (small) community, including the language spoken. Small communities need to find their own place in the tourism marketing landscape and attract potential visitors; because of this they may not perceive the local language as a primary ingredient, especially if their tourist offer includes other types of material

assets; thus, the authentication function of a minority language may be completely sacrificed if it is not strictly essential to the representation of the tourist destination.

These pressures may also explain the limited use of minority language words we found in the web pages we examined (on the risks of resorting to ‘linguaging’ strategies see Dann, 1996). We underline that in no web pages we analyzed an ‘emblematic’ usage (Kelly-Holmes, Pietikäinen & Moriarty, 2011) of a minority language was made: no welcome or greeting formulas were detected, no minority language tokens were used in connection with the visuals of the website. Minority language words were mostly used in secondary pages on the traditional (material and immaterial) culture of a community in websites of local communities. This also suggests that the local organizations that own the website may not perceive the local culture as a primary asset in promoting the location. At the same time the presence of words in the local minority language in some pages may be interpreted as a way a community legitimates its distinctive cultural identity; thus, although a minority language does not seem to be discerned as a resource for tourism marketing in itself, it may nonetheless be employed as a way to project a community and its cultural and linguistic specificity into the global stage of the web.

5 Conclusion

In the present paper we have tried to investigate the role of minority languages in websites promoting some destinations in Italy where such languages are spoken. Recent sociolinguistic literature has pointed out that minority languages have increasingly been mobilized as a resource of tourism promotion, as they are perceived to be capable of evoking authenticity overtones. We have tried to investigate whether destinations in Italy where minority languages are spoken appeal to them in their websites to promote themselves. The inquiry on about 70 webpages has shown that regional tourism board webpages of minority communities generally mention their linguistic specificity as one of their most defining features, but that homepages of local tourist boards often make no mention of the existence of a minority language spoken in place; rather, secondary pages dedicated to the history and traditions of the community include references to the local language. Our inquiry has also shown that the presence of minority language tokens is rather poor in the main pages of the considered destinations; secondary pages are instead much richer in minority language words, especially when history, material and immaterial

traditions, arts and crafts are described. We have proposed that this peculiar way of hiring minority languages in tourism promotion is motivated by conflicting pressures involving the need of reaffirming the cultural identity symbolized by a minority language and the need of placing a destination on a national or global stage.

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