

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE CIMBRIAN LANGUAGE IN LUSERNA/LUSÈRN AND GIAZZA, ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Intangible Cultural Heritage – i.e. practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that a population recognizes as part of their cultural heritage – represents a distinctive factor for a tourism destination, as tourists are increasingly interested in unique experiences deeply connected with the authentic culture of the place. Intangible heritage is, therefore, part of the discourse on sustainability on tourism. Sustainable tourism activities, seen as activities that aim at not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and to access to natural and cultural resources, comprise intangible heritage that only survives and is available to future generations with continuous and daily practice by the population. One of the most important aspects of intangible heritage, according to The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, is the language since it stands for a unique worldview and is the vehicle of the collective memories and values. More than one-third of the languages spoken in the world today, however, are endangered. Previous studies proved that tourism strengthens the sense of cultural identity of minority groups and thus encourages the population to learn more, creating a virtuous circle of cultural revival. Nonetheless, current literature only partly considers the positive impacts of tourism on minority languages, while partially neglecting Italy, although it is home to 31 endangered languages. This study will fill in a gap by considering the case of Cimbrian people in Luserna/Lusèrn and Giazza, Italy, where a population with Bavarian origins still speak the dialect of their ancestors. Through qualitative interviews, this study aims to analyse whether and to what extent tourism in these two small Italian towns can be seen as sustainable, i.e. whether it contributes to the revitalization of this particular language.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, minority language, Cimbrian, intangible cultural heritage, cultural tourism, qualitative methodology.

1 INTRODUCTION

Extensive research in the tourism field has proven that tourists are increasingly interested in unique and educational experiences that showcase an authentic culture of the place they are visiting [1]–[3]. As a consequence, cultural tourism has experienced a significant change: not only has it grown considerably, becoming the primary motivation for tourists [4], but it has also moved away from a more traditional view of tangible heritage, to include also intangible cultural heritage [5]. Intangible heritage has been defined by the UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Convention as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects and cultural spaces associated therewith – the communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (p. 5), including traditional languages [6].

Local traditions and practices are particularly in danger of extinction because they need constant practice by the population to be transmitted from one generation to the next and, thus, survive [7]. For instance, more than one-third of the languages spoken in the world today are endangered [8]. Therefore, every activity that aims at preserving intangible heritage can be considered sustainable, as long as it pursues the availability of traditions and practices for future generations [9], [10]. One of these sustainable activities can be tourism [7].



On the one hand, languages have exactly that connection with the cultural identity of a population, as they are the main vehicle of the collective memories and values and therefore stand for a unique worldview and knowledge [11], [12]. As a consequence, traditional minority languages have a huge potential application in tourism and represent a distinctive value and an asset for the destination [13]–[15]. On the other hand, it has also proven that tourism helps revitalize those languages since it becomes a matter of pride for the local communities, who are encouraged to learn more about their heritage [1], [16], [17].

Although being home to 31 endangered minority languages [6], Italy is still partially neglected by the literature. This study attempts to fill in this gap in the literature by analyzing, through qualitative research [18], which role tourism in Luserna/Lusérn (Trento) and Giazza (Verona) has in the ongoing revitalization process of the Cimbrian language.

This paper will be structured as follows: first, the relevant literature regarding the mutual relationship between minority languages and tourism will be summarized. Then, two case studies will be presented and the methodology used to collect the data will be explained. The third paragraph will show the main results. Finally, the results will be discussed and conclusions will be drawn.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

By now it is common knowledge that the concept of sustainable development can be thought in terms of three spheres or dimensions, also called pillars: environment, economy and society [19]. The three pillars contain various important sub-aspects; for instance, some researchers argue that culture is an important aspect of the pillar of social sustainability, to the point that it should be considered a pillar on its own [20]. From the concept of sustainable development, many other concepts and definitions were inferred. Although there is still no official definition of sustainable tourism, an adapted definition of sustainable development from the Brundtland Report [19, p. 37], could read “(sustainable tourism is tourism) that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Not surprisingly, this is particularly true for intangible cultural heritage, as it will be available for future generations only with a continuous practice by the population. Therefore, sustainable tourism should also aim at preserving and revitalizing intangible heritage, including traditional minority languages, which if not spoken on an everyday basis, fall into oblivion [1]. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, in fact, characterize languages as one of the most important aspects of intangible heritage, both as cultural artefacts per se and as fundamental for cultural transmission from one generation to the next [6].

According to the Council of Europe [21], minority languages are those languages spoken by a group of people that are not concentrated on a specific part of the State or by a group numerically smaller than the speakers of the official language. Traditional languages are “traditionally linked with an ethnoculture” [12] (p. 20). Since speakers are few, traditional minority languages are often threatened with extinction [22]. Language endangerment and language loss have been a matter of concern for linguists for decades due to reasons connected to a loss of cultural and intellectual diversity, linguistic interest, identity, history and human knowledge, i.e. information contained in a language [22], [23]. As each language stands for a unique worldview and is the vehicle for collective memories and values, losing it could then lead to terrible consequences for a people and its cultural identity, as “language shift generally and basically involves...quite devastating and profound cultural change” [12] (p. 16). Methods to work towards language preservation include language documentation, place names, education and mass-media. Not all linguists, however, agree on which method works best [23]. For instance, language commodification,



the use of languages as commodities in fields such as advertising and tourism, is discussed [13], [14].

The relationship between minority languages and tourism has already been highlighted by the literature. Some researchers point at some controversies regarding authenticity and commodification, since, when languages are used in tourism they acquire different meanings than those they have in the community as they become marketable products [13], [14]. Another reason for concern is the fact that tourism brings the need for people to learn a global language, like English, in order to be able to interact with international visitors, which, according to some, competes with the process of language preservation [24]. However, as tourists seek authentic cultural experiences, traditional languages represent an asset for the destination [25].

Various authors provide a more skeptical insight on the issue. Languages can be used as a sign for authenticity and, as such, represent an asset for the destination; however, they thus become a marketable commodity, causing problems of commodification. The Irish language, for instance, is often used in combination with other symbolic resources, making it more understandable for tourists but undermining the authenticity of the language [26]. Some perplexities are also expressed by Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen, who considered how cultural museums represent language as an artefact and its impact on the population. Museums represent the Sami language in a folkloristic way and thus contribute to maintaining the ideologies and hierarchies. However, valorizing the language and demonstrating its value leads to a revitalisation of the Sami language and culture [27]. Burden also analyzed the problem of the representation of intangible heritage in museums, with an emphasis on the Afrikaans Language Museum. The display and presentation of intangible heritage are of course challenging, but this has some positive and important impacts: firstly, languages have to be established as a written language, which has not occurred yet; furthermore, the museum provides education for local people as well [28].

On the other hand, however, the process of cultural revival caused by ethnic tourism has been a matter of growing interest among the academic community [29]. Nowadays, many minority populations and Indigenous people are striving to (re)invent new strategies in order to survive as a distinct cultural group and make a living out of it. This economic space has been, for many Indigenous groups, heritage tourism. The deployment of the local language is an ideal marker of authenticity, thus highlighting the distinctiveness and remote otherness of the experience, which has become added attributes of touristic places. The traditional culture and language of the Sàmi, Indigenous people living in Northern Scandinavia and West Russia, was, for instance, an asset for the development of tourism in the region [30], [31]. This is valid for other communities as well: the production of arts and crafts as souvenirs by the Pataxo Indians (Brazil) generated a sense of group identity and helped legitimize the presence of the Indians in the region. Tourism also generated a revival of Indigenous names and language, as Indigenous people realized it is more appealing to present oneself with traditional names and to use the traditional language to brand restaurants and hotels [29]. In Haida Gwaii (British Columbia, Canada), Haida people decided to incorporate their traditional language into the management and development of touristic products. The benefits extended to the community itself: thanks to tourists' genuine interests in their traditional culture, Indigenous people started feeling proud about their origins and wanted to learn more [17]. In Mexico, tourism also appears to be an important factor that motivates Indigenous people and mestizos in Puebla to preserve and revitalize their languages, traditions, and culture, by providing them financial assistance [16], [32].



Minority communities in northern Italy were partially considered as well. In South Tyrol, the Ladin minority group offers the visitors an added value, with their traditions, customs, architecture and even languages [15]. Other projects considered the Cimbrian minorities in Giazza and Luserna/Lusérn and proved that the Cimbrian culture represents an added value for the tourists and an asset for the tourism industry [33] and, on the other hand, that tourism has a positive impact on the community [34].

The practical implications of this research are evident: aspects of minority culture, such as languages, represent a distinctive factor for the destination and therefore a competitive advantage [8], [15], [25]. Moreover, according to the studies presented here, tourism also has a sustainable impact on the local population, since it encourages language preservation [17], [25], [31].

3 CASE STUDIES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Case studies

The brief literature reported here shows that Italy has only been briefly touched upon, even though the UNESCO's Atlas of the World Languages in Danger identifies 31 endangered languages there [8]. This study will fill in a gap in the literature by considering the Cimbrian communities of Giazza and Luserna/Lusérn (Italy). Cimbrian people are descendants of Bavarian immigrants who, between the 11th and 16th centuries, were called to work woods and cultivate new terrains in the alpine mountains [35]. Due to the isolation of the mountain villages where they settled, they retained their language until the present day, an Upper Germanic variety called Cimbrian language [36].

This language was once spoken in three main territories of North-eastern Italy: the so-called *Thirteen Communities* (near Verona), *Seven Communities* (near Vicenza) and Luserna/Lusérn – Lavarone (near Trento). As the three areas were isolated from the city, they retained their traditional language, an Upper German variety derived from Southern Bavarian, called the Cimbrian language. Currently, this language is spoken only in three districts: Luserna/Lusérn in the Trentino region, just by some elders in Giazza near Verona and in Mezzaselva di Roana near Vicenza [37]. As a consequence, according to the UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, the Cimbrian language is definitely endangered, i.e. children do not learn it as their mother tongue anymore, even though parents may speak it to them [8]. Nonetheless, a clarification here is needed, as there is a significant difference between the three communities above mentioned. Nowadays, the community where the majority of the population still speaks the language is Luserna/Lusérn, where according to the latest census in 2011, 238 out of 279 people living there spoke the language, including the children [38]. The situation is a lot more serious in Giazza, where, in 2001, only 19 people out of a population of 131 could speak the Cimbrian language and another 24 could understand it. Young people could neither speak it nor understand it [37]. However, the situation is worst in Roana, where only about 10 elderly people speak the Cimbrian language [37]. This study will only consider Giazza and Luserna/Lusérn.

Giazza is located in the Lessinia area, the Alp region near Verona. The area is visited by hikers, people who practice mountain sports and, in a limited number, by winter lovers [33]. Giazza, for instance, is the starting point for many hikes: from there you can reach the Foresta Demaniale di Giazza, but also the Valle del Fraselle and, the more challenging Gruppo del Carega (2259 m.a.s.l.) [39]. This little town lacks a tourism offer specifically focused on the Cimbrian language, even though visitors can find some general cultural



tourism offerings. For instance, the Centro di Cultura Cimbra – Museo dei Cimbri Ljetzan – Giazza, is a museum that has a wide explanation about the history of the area and the peculiarities of the Cimbrian culture but is rarely open. There are also events connected to the Cimbrian culture, like the well-known Festa del Fuoco (*Waur Ljetzan* in the traditional language, which can be translated into ‘fire feast’), held every year on the summer solstice, 23 June [39]. Another event that is becoming increasingly popular is the starting of the *carbonara* – charcoal pile – a traditional method to produce charcoal, particularly widespread in the region. This tradition was slowly dying until about 40 years ago, when the owner of the Osteria Ljetzan – a restaurant in the main square – realized that it would be much more convenient to produce their own charcoal and therefore, decide to restore this ancient tradition. In the last few years, thanks to the commitment of the restaurant owner, who continually promotes on social media and has even placed a live-webcam near the *carbonara*, this event has become more and more famous and important among the local population, and has slowly attracted visitors from outside the community as well [40].

Thanks to its peculiar characteristics, Luserna/Lusèrn is a perfect tourism destination for sport and mountain lovers, but also for those interested in history and culture. Not only is it nestled in the Alps, but is also a living witness of World War One, with remains of forts, trenches and the Cimbrian culture. The Provincia Autonoma di Trento is trying to promote the Cimbrian minority through education, social activities but also through tourism. Luserna/Lusèrn is part of the DMO “Alpe Cimbra” (Cimbrian valley) that also includes the neighboring Folgaria and Lavarone. The name “Alpe Cimbra” is quite new, which proves the increasing interest in this minority culture. The Museum Centro di Documentazione Luserna and the Haus von Prökk have a goal to bring awareness about the Cimbrian minority and of preserving its culture and language [41]. The town also offers festivals, cultural events and hikes, all related to the Cimbrian culture [34]. A project carried out by Eurac specifically focuses on the Cimbrian culture of Luserna/Lusèrn, though only marginally considering the language. Results revealed that this minority culture represents an attractive distinctive factor for the destination and therefore encourages the population to make every effort to maintain and revitalize it [34].

The fact that the two minority communities in Giazza and Luserna/Lusèrn have the same origin and used to speak the same language but are now so different, will allow for a fruitful comparison and analysis of the role of tourism in the maintenance and revitalization of the Cimbrian language. Table 1 provides a summary of the two case studies. This research will mainly examine to what extent tourism in Giazza and Luserna/Lusèrn can be considered sustainable, in the sense that it guarantees that the Cimbrian language and culture will continue to be available for future generations.

3.2 Methodology

Since this research deals with cultural and anthropological aspects of the population, it will use a qualitative methodology [18]. Qualitative methodologies consider few cases but have the considerable advantage to provide a holistic, in-depth and authentic understanding of the phenomenon being studied [42].

Until now, eleven in-depth interviews [18], [43] of Cimbrian speaking people working in tourism, as well as key players in both tourism and governance of the two towns, have been conducted. Participants were selected through snowball sampling. The interviews took place between summer 2018 and February 2019. Other interviews were planned, but the restrictions imposed by the Corona-crisis forced to an interruption of the research.



Therefore, in order to improve the generalizability of the study, ten to fifteen subjects will be contacted in the future. The framework for the interviewees will be narrative, i.e. will have few questions (max. three) and will be more akin to an open conversation, where the participants will decide what they think is important and needs particular attention [42], [43]. This will allow for a collection of personal feelings and opinions about tourism and the use of particular aspects of the Cimbrian culture, like the language, in tourism activities. Interviews were face-to-face: participants were interviewed in a context familiar to them, i.e. either Giazza or Luserna/Lusérn and in their houses or in the workplace (museum or restaurant).

Questions were carefully selected from the literature review [43]. With written consent from the interviewees, interviews were recorded, and then transcribed by the author. Interview transcripts were then translated into English by the author and analyzed, coded and compared with the help of a computer software, MaxQDA [44].

Table 1: Case studies.

	Giazza	Luserna/Lusérn
Location	Verona	Trento
Speakers of the Cimbrian language left	19/131	238/279
Tourism	Mountain tourism destination	Mountain tourism destination, people interested in history
	Mainly summer	Summer and winter
	Museo dei Cimbri Ljetzan – Giazza	Museum Centro di Documentazione Luserna and Haus von Prökk
Traditions retained until today	<i>Waur Ljetzan</i> and <i>carbonara</i>	Bobbin lace and <i>vorprennan in martz</i>

4 RESULTS

This study represents a steppingstone in the analysis of the positive impacts of tourism on minority languages, especially in a partially neglected context like Italy. The analysis of two Cimbrian communities will contribute to fill in a gap in the literature in that it considers minority languages as sustainable tourism resources. This paragraph will present the main and more significant results of this study.

All interviewees were aware that their traditional language is seriously threatened and therefore, the process of language preservation is urgent and of the utmost importance. However, aligned with the literature, a significant difference was found between Luserna/Lusérn and Giazza. Participants in Giazza were almost resigned that the language is disappearing, whereas in Luserna/Lusérn the interviewees were much more positive.

“From what I can see, the language is slowly dying. The accent has changed...the children are not learning it” (restaurant owner in Giazza).

“I’d say 80% of the population here can understand the language” (staff member at the Centro Documentazione Luserna).



A more similar view between the two locations was found in the awareness that the Cimbrian culture and language represents an asset for the destination:

“The community now is proud of the language [...]. There is a growing interest from outside, as well. When I’m attending the conferences in Verona, people are very keen to ask for clarifications [...]. The same when I take visitors on the hikes around Giazza” (Cimbrian speaker, expert and writer).
 “Some restaurant owners translated their menus in Cimbrian, because it is an added value. People who come here and discover that there is a minority culture and language, appreciate it and want to know more” (staff member at the Centro Documentazione Luserna).

As a consequence, the Cimbrian language is part of the tourism experience offered to visitors. In Giazza, the language is part of the landscape since all signs and plaques are also translated in Cimbrian. For instance, along the little hike leading to the *carbonara* visitors can find signs describing this tradition, which are translated into German, English and Cimbrian. Moreover, in the museum, various panels explain the history and origin of the language together with the meaning of some words. The Cimbrian language is integrated into both the Centro Documentazione di Luserna and the museum Haus von Prück: panels in both museums are in four languages (Italian, German, English and Cimbrian), greetings from the staff is often in Cimbrian and a specific section of the Centro Documentazione di Luserna is dedicated to the origin and evolution of the language, as in Giazza.

Other aspects of the culture contribute to differentiate the destination. In Luserna/Lusérn one of the hikes visitors can find is thematic and evolves around traditional Cimbrian legends and creatures of the local folklore. This, according to the interviewees, represents an added value:

“We offer a hike that can be found only here in Luserna; it’s called *nå* in tritt von Sambinélo, which means ‘on the trail of the Slavanello’. It presents the Cimbrian legends, which adds value to the hike...It the most popular hike here, visited by thousands of people every year” (staff member at the Centro Documentazione Luserna).

As already mentioned in the presentation of the case studies, the tradition of the *carbonara* has become increasingly well-known in the Lessinia area around Giazza: the event is attended by dozens of people and provides the Osteria Ljetzan with a “story to tell” since the restaurant now uses the coal produced with this method to cook the local trout. As an appreciation for its local cuisine and restoration of this tradition, the Osteria Ljetzan is an official Lessinia Park branded trader.

“It’s an added value. No one cooks with the coal he produces by himself. You bet I’m so proud of that!” (owner of Osteria Ljetzan in Giazza).

Other traditional practices have been revitalized in Luserna/Lusérn as well, thanks to the growing interests by people from outside the community. For instance, “*bruciar el martzovorprennan in martz*” (burning March), a traditional event in the Cimbrian tradition in Luserna/Lusérn, which consists in lightening a bonfire to welcome spring, was slowly disappearing but is now attended by hundreds of families from North-eastern Italy. Another example in Luserna/Lusérn is the tradition of the bobbin lace (*tombolo*), widespread in the Cimbrian town for centuries, has been growing despite the modernization and has made the town renowned among the enthusiasts around Italy and even abroad.



The integration of particular aspects of this minority culture in various tourism experiences led to satisfaction and loyalty since many interviewees felt that many visitors in both Giazza and Luserna/Lusérn are or will become returning visitors. They felt this loyalty to the destination could be ascribed to Cimbrian words and traditions, rather than the natural landscape, especially in Luserna/Lusérn.

A significant part of the conversations was dedicated to the topic of sustainability, which is of primary importance when dealing with delicate aspects of minority cultures. In this case, the concept of sustainability evolves around culture preservation, especially as regarding the endangered Cimbrian language. In Giazza, courses of Cimbrian for adults take place almost every year, but, unfortunately, rarely the schools in the area include the Cimbrian language as an optional class. Moreover, more and more experts are visiting the town and documenting the language. However, all interviewees were skeptical that this could lead to a real language preservation in the long term, i.e. language will be transmitted to future generations, even though visitors show interest and want to know more. On the contrary, participants in Luserna/Lusérn were certain that the tourism field in the town contributes to the process of language preservation. Since it is a small and isolated town, it does not offer many job opportunities to its inhabitants. Thanks to this economic activity, many people can remain in the town and work there in companies that are somehow related to the tourism field. All interviewees highlighted that besides the museums and the Kultinstitut Lusérn, nine restaurants operate in Luserna/Lusérn, which is a huge number for such a small town:

“So, if there’s the opportunity to keep these companies here in Luserna, even the language will benefit from that. All these families stay here and will keep speaking the language and pass it on to their children” (staff member at the Centro Documentazione Luserna).

“We have the chance to preserve and give value to the language, we can use it in the official documents, it is taught in schools, the news is in Cimbrian. The problem is the economic development. [...] Only 200 people actually stay in Luserna during the week, we are at the threshold of survival for a community” (former mayor of Luserna/Lusérn).

As a consequence, people in Luserna/Lusérn stressed the importance of the tourism field for the town and the survival of the minority culture. They also highlighted that is consequently extremely important to continue giving value to the Cimbrian culture and language, in order for the destination to maintain this uniqueness, that is a source for the attractiveness of the destination.

The concept of sustainability is also related to a genuine and authentic display of the local culture. The local population in Luserna/Lusérn, in fact, is committed to present the tourist a culture, as authentic as possible:

“I think in the Alpe Cimbra the community is committed to a genuine preservation and promotion of the culture and that is fine [...]. It is ok to re-interpret some traditions, even in Lavarone and Folgaria, but we should not distort them” (director of the Centro di Documentazione Luserna and cultural liaison of the Kultinstitut Lusérn).

The same concern about an authentic presentation of the Cimbrian culture was also expressed by the interviewees in Giazza, with two different approaches. On the one hand, tourists are genuinely interested in the Cimbrian culture and language. On the other



hand, those who are not familiar with the language do not feel comfortable in using and promoting it.

“Overall, this growing interest in the Cimbrian culture is genuine. More people in the region are getting to know this culture and appreciate it” (Cimbrian speaker, expert and writer).

“I can’t promote the Cimbrian culture and language if I don’t speak it myself” (restaurant owner of the osteria in Giazza).

Obviously, some tensions have arisen from the commodification of the Cimbrian culture. For instance, in Giazza, visitors of the Lessinia Park can find various “Cimbrian” products, like Cimbrian cheese, Cimbrian pizza and bread, Cimbrian strudel etc. Even though it is true that Cimbrian people had a centuries-long tradition in cheese production, all the other products did not previously exist.

Another example is the “Cimbrian ring”, sold in Folgaria, the ski-destination near Luserna/Lusérn. The guide of the museum explained that she did not know anything about such a piece of jewelry in her traditional culture and she also did not know what was meant with this souvenir. Even though at the beginning she was surprised and rather disappointed that such a souvenir was sold without consulting a committee of experts on the Cimbrian culture and language, she also argued that this commodification is ok until it generates curiosity in the visitor and becomes an opportunity to visit Luserna and learn more about the Cimbrian culture. She, as well as the director of the Centro Documentazione Luserna, present another example of commodification: “*bruciar el martzò/vorprennan in martz*”, which, in the last decades, has taken place on the last Saturday afternoon of February rather than the last day of the month as it used to be because in this way more people can participate and contribute to keeping this tradition alive.

To conclude, all interviewees believed more has still to be done in order to give value to this minority community through tourism activities. Not surprisingly, one of the most iconic examples mentioned was the possibility to expand the use of the language, especially in the signs of public spaces: streets, plaques, but also restaurants and bars:

“I think tourism contributes to language preservation, but we could definitely do more... The bar next to the town hall for us is not the bar ristorante Rossi’, it’s the platzbirt (bar in the square). Further on, there’s the old Andreashofer, we don’t call it bar Ferdi as the sign says. We should restore those traditional names. I firmly believe we should give more visibility to the language”

(director of the Centro di Documentazione Luserna and cultural liaison of the Kulturinstitut Lusérn).

5 DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results also showed that tourism indirectly contributes to the preservation of minority languages, especially in Luserna/Lusérn. Differently from the literature, however, this process of preservation was activated not so much because of an enhanced sense of pride among the population [16], [17], [25] – the interviews in Luserna/Lusérn showed that this sense of pride was already present among Cimbrian people – but because tourism created various job opportunities and, therefore, allowed for many families to stay in the town and maintain the relations with other inhabitants and Cimbrian speakers, fundamental for the maintenance of the language [12]. This confirms what was theorized in the Brundtland Report, i.e. the fact that the three pillars economy, society and environment of the sustainable development are inherently related to one other



[19]. Social, and particularly in this case, cultural sustainability is inevitably linked with the pillar of economic sustainability. Only with a sustainable economic development, that guarantees that people in Luserna/Lusérn can find a job in the town or in neighboring destinations and are not obliged to move, the language will survive [19], [29]. The Cimbrian culture, and especially the traditional language, is fundamental for this process of sustainable economic development, since it becomes an asset to differentiate the destination and, thus, a pull factor for visitors [15], [25], [27], [33], [34].

The study also confirmed that there are significant differences between the two communities analyzed. On one hand, in Luserna/Lusérn the Cimbrian language is still spoken by the majority of the population and transgenerational transmission is somehow guaranteed, also thanks to childcare programs in Cimbrian and Cimbrian classes taught at schools in the neighborhood. On the other hand, in Giazza there is no solid and official program that aims at maintaining the language: this relies just upon the (voluntary) work of single persons and researchers, who document the language and offer courses for a group of 25/30 adults per year [36], [37]. As a consequence, the use of the language in tourism is more frequent in Luserna/Lusérn than in Giazza, which leads to the conclusion that tourism cannot be seen as the only tool to achieve a proper language preservation. Tourism only contributes to a complete and effective language preservation if the language is only vulnerable or definitely endangered. The results showed the hesitation of participants in Giazza to talk about a language transmission to future generations, which is at the basis of a proper language preservation [12].

However, even though this study proves that the tourism field does not always lead to a complete and durable preservation of minority languages, it proved that it certainly contributes to the revitalization and preservation of other aspects of the intangible cultural heritage of a minority population, like traditional practices as the *carbonara* in Giazza, as well as the *vorprennan in martz* and the bobbin lace in Luserna/Lusérn [7].

Though the more frequent use of the language and traditional practices was definitely somehow related to tourism, we cannot talk about a process of pure commodification. This was not exclusively aimed at tourists' satisfaction and did not modify the socio-cultural balance of the Cimbrian population. People were sincerely driven by a sense of pride and genuinely wanted to present and show their language and their culture to the visitors.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This explorative study brings awareness not only on the value of minority languages for the tourism field but especially on the value of tourism for intangible cultural heritage, and especially minority languages. Aligned with the literature, the results presented in the previous paragraph confirmed that minority cultural group, with their traditional languages, represent a differentiating factor for the destination and, thus, contribute to attracting visitors [15], [25], [27], [33], [34].

Results also showed how important this is for an isolated minority community, since it allows for an economic sustainability of the town, i.e. creation of job opportunities that contributes to avoiding the depopulation of the town. Economic sustainability is intrinsically related to social/cultural sustainability because it guarantees language transmission and, therefore, language preservation [19]. As explained earlier, however, the tourism field seems to contribute to language maintenance only in those communities where the language is still widespread among its inhabitants, even though interviewees said that more could be done to integrate the language in the tourism activities and differentiate the destination. Nonetheless, tourism definitely contributes to the revitalization and preservation of other intangible traditional practices, as no significant differences were



found between Giazza and Luserna/Lusérn. Therefore, the tourism industry can definitely be considered a sustainable activity [19].

This study hopes to represent a stepping-stone in the analysis of sustainable tourism and minority language revitalization, especially in an Italian context. Further research is needed, in order to analyse more in-deep the case study presented here, but also include other minority communities in the discourse. Finally, considering the situation the world is living right now, with the global pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the consequent lockdown of most countries worldwide, more research should be dedicated to domestic and proximity tourism. Further research should be dedicated to understand how much tourists are now interested in (re)discover the “hidden gems” in their neighbourhood, like the Cimbrian communities of Giazza and Luserna/Lusérn.

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