

A Socio-demographic Profile of the Calabrian Linguistic Minorities

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In Italy it is possible to identify 11 linguistic groups of ancient settlement, divided as follows: border minorities, who speak a language of a neighboring state; minorities that occupy some internal areas as a consequence of emigrations and diasporas; the so-called residual groups of formerly majority populations. Three of these minority groups are present in Calabria: the Albanian minority, the Greek minority, and the Occitan minority. The Albanian community (Arbëreshë) is one of the most numerous. It is present in various areas of the South, but the most important colonies are found in Calabria. During the course of time these populations have undergone a strong assimilation process with the consequence that in many municipalities the spread of the Albanian language has been increasingly reduced or has completely disappeared. From 1951 onwards the Albanian-speaking communities of Calabria have shown the first signs of demographic malaise. The resident population gradually decreases and in many municipalities, especially the inland ones, there is a strong depopulation that still continues nowadays. In the Byzantine period the whole of Calabria was Hellenophone. Only the southern part of Calabria remained Hellenophone in the Norman age. Over time, the Grecanic area has been increasingly reduced and today it survives only in a limited area of the province of Reggio Calabria. Among the most remote causes of the decrease in Greek civilization we recall the abolition of the Greek rite in religious ceremonies, while after the Unity (Unità d'Italia), an important role played the fight against the Greek language by the Italian school. Today this area has 11,211 residents and the speakers should be just 2,724. The Occitan-Waldensians are the smallest linguistic minority of Calabria. They came to Calabria, from Piedmont, towards the end of the 14th century to escape religious persecution. Today the Occitan-Waldensian colonies survive only in Guardia Piemontese, San Sisto dei Valdesi, and San Vincenzo la Costa, but the language is present only in Guardia Piemontese. The population of Guardia Piemontese, like that of many other Calabrian areas, experienced an intense migratory exodus after the Unification of Italy as well as a strong demographic malaise. Of these three Calabrian minority populations, which are characterized by a valuable cultural heritage, we will analyze the socio-demographic traits with the objective to grasp those potentialities (e.g., cultural, touristic) in order to mitigate the phenomenon of depopulation which in these areas is more pronounced than in the remaining "Calabrese" territory.

Keywords: linguistic minorities, demography, Calabria

Introduction

Soon after the investigations of ethnic minorities in the last century conducted by Italian statistician Corrado Gini in the 1930s, the study of ethnic or linguistic minorities present in Italian territory has caught the attention of

Italian demographers since 1980, although this trend has been a long tradition in the United States and in Canada. In Canada, in particular, the French-speaking population of Québec has been the subject of sturdy demographic analysis and the term *demolinguistique* (demolinguistics) is due to Canadian demographers, i.e., the demographic approach to the study of linguistic minorities (De Vries, 1987), an approach that we have tried to follow in this research on Calabrian historical minorities with the aim of grasping both the degree of permanence of the language and the most significant current demographic and perspective traits. A geography of Italian ethnic and linguistic minorities is found in Pahor (1980), Chiassino and Papa (1988), Cortese (1988), Bellinello (1991; 1992). For Calabrian ethnic and linguistic minorities, see the studies by Piromalli (1981), Genre (1984), Stancati (1984), Spano (1965), Minuto (1976), Mosino (1988), Rother (1968), Micali (2016). For an analysis with a more demographic approach, see De Bartolo (1989; 1995).

The work is divided into three parts. The first part illustrates the problems and general characteristics of the ethnic and linguistic minorities present on the Italian territory; in the second part the demographic analysis of those who are present in Calabria is completed; in the third part the summary of the results is presented.

Traditional Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities

The ethnic geography of our country has become more and more distinct in recent decades since the 1970s of the last century, after Italy has been affected by increasingly intense immigrant flows from the Third World and Eastern European countries. Given this new reality, Italian ethnic minorities can be divided into recent and ancient settlements. The latter, also called historical or traditional minorities, have undergone intense assimilation processes over the centuries, decreasing in number but retaining, even if to an increasingly limited extent, the language.

Eleven traditional ethnic-linguistic groups can be identified on the Italian territory, divided into: border minorities, that is, who speak a language of a neighboring state (the Germans of South Tyrol, the Slovenians of Friuli, the French of the Valle d'Aosta); minorities occupying some internal areas following emigrations and diasporas, such as the Albanians of the Mezzogiorno (a region in Italy roughly coextensive with the former Kingdom of Naples), the Serbo-Croats, the Occitans, the Catalans of Sardinia; residual minorities of once majority populations (Greek, Ladin, Friulian, and Sardinian). Amid these minorities, three are present in Calabria: the Albanian, the Occitan, and the Greek.

After the Unification, the ethnic-linguistic minorities have made a whole series of social and economic claims, aimed at the rediscovery and revaluation of their diversity. These claims, after the Second World War, became a real cultural movement with the aim of giving political and juridical body to their reality and their ideals, in an attempt to slow down the process of assimilation which, as in the case of the Greek, is now in a very advanced stage.

The protection of minorities is enshrined in Art. 6 of the Constitution, but has found application only in some regions with special enactment which, due to their frontier position, have considerable political importance. In the year of 1992 when finally Article 1 of Law 482 was passed, the Italian state finally became aware of the existence of other historical linguistic minorities so that it recognized a total of 12 (Albanian, German, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, Francophone, French Provencal, Friulian, Ladin dolomitic, Occitan, Sardinian) minority groups whose population in 1995 was estimated as 3,261,600 people by the Interior Ministry.

In Italy, the preservation of minority groups is unfortunately a process that experiences serious delays. In fact, there are no updated official data concerning them; data are not available even for linguistic minorities

who are undoubtedly the most interesting from a cultural point of view. In truth, in the past, numerous efforts have been made to register the spoken languages. We recall that on the occasion of the census of 1981 the attempt to include in the questionnaire some questions concerning the spoken language failed, as had happened during the censuses that went from 1861 to 1921, a practice that the fascist regime had then interrupted, suppressing the question about the spoken language or dialect.

The Albanian Minority (Arbëreshë)

The Albanians probably descended from the Illyrians, who in the 6th century BC, were definitively a part of the Roman Empire. From the 6th century they were called Arbëreshë. Their emigration to Italy occurred several times between the second half of the 15th and the middle of the 17th century (Piromalli, 1981). They spread to several points in the South, but the most important colonies were formed in Calabria and the largest was formed in a hilly area located in the northern part of the Province of Cosenza (Piromalli, 1981).

The Arbëreshë have preserved a certain territorial unity and limited the communion with the Italian-speaking populations over time. This was favored by the Greek rite which was the only language used in religious ceremonies. Over time these populations have undergone a strong assimilation process. Consequently in many municipalities the diffusion of the Albanian language has decreased more and more or completely disappeared, which resulted the dropped off use of the language, that it is now present only in 19 municipalities of the Province of Cosenza and in three in Catanzaro and Crotone. As of 1/1/2018 the population of the entire Arbëreshë area aggregated to 38,832 residents (Table 1).

Table 1

Population Residing in the Albanian Municipalities of Calabria on 1/1/2018

Provincial municipalities of Cosenza	Resident population	Provincial municipalities of Catanzaro	Resident population
Acquaformosa	1,108	Andali	723
Castroregio	276	Caraffa	1,814
Cerzeto	1,359	Marcedusa	436
Civita	912	Total	2,973
Falconara Albanese	1,456		
Firmo	2,044	Provincial municipalities of Crotone	Resident population
Frascineto	2,074	Carfizzi	638
Lungro	2,504	Pallagorio	1,164
Plataci	733	S. Nicola dell'Alto	786
S. Basile	1,034	Total	2,588
S. Benedetto Ullano	1,511	Total of Calabria	38,832
S. Cosmo Albanese	582		
S. Demetrio Corone	3,442		
S. Giorgio Albanese	1,406		
S. Martino di Finita	1,036		
S. Caterina Albanese	1,207		
S. Sofia d'Epiro	2,528		
Spezzano Albanese	6,977		
Vaccarizzo Albanese	1,082		
Total	33,271		

Source: Istat.

After the Second World War, the only information on the percentage of Albanians in the Municipalities of the Arbëreshë Area, dates back to 1966, thanks to the research made by the German scholar Rother (1968). From his research it was possible to obtain an estimation of the percentage of speakers both for the Albanian area and for the Province of Cosenza (83.7% for 1921 and 82.6% for 1966) and for that of Catanzaro and Crotona (80.6% for 1921 and 90.5% for 1966) (De Bartolo, 1989).

The Demographic Malaise of the Arbëreshë Minority

From 1951 onwards the Albanian communities of Calabria show the first signs of demographic unease. Over time, the resident population decreased in many municipalities; especially in the internal parts, there was an intense depopulation caused by emigration. In 2018, it was observed that in all Arbëreshë municipalities, negative natural growth rates were higher than the average value of Calabria.

These trends have strongly marked the population structure. In fact, the age pyramid (not shown here) has the typical shape of those populations with a high level of demographic ageing. I would like to mention that today the aging index in Italy is 168.9% (population over 65 years old divided by population 0-14 years old); in Calabria it is 158.4%, while in the Arbëreshë community it is 254%, with municipalities that register old age indices above 300% (Table 2).

Table 2

Ranking of Old Age Indices in Albanian Municipalities: Comparison With Calabria and Italy (Year 2018)

Municipalities	Old age indices %	Municipalities	Old age indices %
Calabria	158.4	Frascineto	261.5
Spezzano Albanese	161.4	Cerzeto	262.8
Italia	168.9	Acquaformosa	270.5
S. Benedetto Ullano	180.3	S. Giorgio Albanese	289.4
Caraffa	194.2	S. Martino di Finita	322.9
Falconara Albanese	208.8	Lungro	340.3
S. Caterina Albanese	222.2	Plataci	347.8
Marcedusa	226.3	Andali	381.0
S. Cosmo Albanese	236.8	Civita	423.5
Firmo	246.7	S. Basile	432.5
S. Demetrio Corone	246.9	Pallagorio	448.4
Vaccarizzo Albanese	248.3	S. Nicola dell'Alto	610.2
S. Sofia d'Epiro	248.6	Carfizzi	651.3
Total Albanian municipalities	254.1	Castroregio	720.0

Source: Istat.

The demographic projection developed by us, although with fairly optimistic hypotheses of fertility and mortality (1.29 children per fertile woman, survival values similar to the 2015 regional mortality table, absence of migratory movement), shows that the population Arbëreshë in half a century will not reach 21 thousand units (Table 3) and will be characterized by a high demographic malaise (reaching an aging index of 378.8% in the year 2068).

Table 3

Evolution of the Arbëreshë Population From 1861 to 2018 and Forecast to 2068

Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population
1861	45,958	1951	63,360	2023	37,316	2048	28,192
1871	50,092	1961	59,820	2028	35,669	2053	26,212
1881	51,338	1971	53,499	2033	33,931	2058	24,283
1901	52,833	1981	51,637	2038	32,097	2063	22,446
1911	51,652	1991	51,351	2043	30,171	2068	20,727
1921	50,111	2001	46,139				
1931	53,430	2011	42,004				
1936	56,443	2018	38,832				

Source: Our elaborations on Istat data.

The Hellenophone Minority of Calabria

Among the Italian ethnolinguistic minorities, the Greek language is perhaps the most threatened one. Once present in a large area of southern Italy, today it is reduced to only two linguistic islands: the first in the extreme southern part of Calabria, the second in Salento area of Apulia.

In the Byzantine age, all of Calabria was Hellenophone. In Norman times only Southern Calabria remained Hellenophone. In the second half of the 16th century, the territorial units that made up the Greek island were 30. In 1921 the Calabrian Grecìa was limited to the Municipalities of Roghudi, Roccaforte del Greco, Condofuri, Bova, Bova Marina, and Palizzi, all in the Province of Reggio Calabria (Piromalli, 1981). From 1963 onwards the area has shrunk again, since the Greek language has completely disappeared among the inhabitants of Palizzi. The data in Table 4 describe the implosion process of this linguistic area.

Table 4

Reduction Over Time of the Grecìa Calabria

Era	N. municipalities	Population	Greek-speakers	Surface kmq
XVI sec.	30	30,590	=	1060.5
1669	25	19,398	=	959.9
1780	16	25,488	=	661.2
1828	15	19,561	=	614.5
1861	11	17,835	10,536	412.8
1911	7	17,999	8,535	291.4
1921	6	14,728	3,639	223.2
1964	5	14,871	3,900	227.5
1990	5	13,460	3,278	227.5
2011	5	11,399	2,770	227.5
2018	5	11,211	2,724*	227.5

Source: Cortese, 1988; Spano, 1965; Bellinello, 1991; * our estimate.

Among the causes that contributed most to further regress of the Hellenophone area, in addition to the suppression of the Greek rite (Spano, 1965; Piromalli, 1981), it is the emigration, more intense in the Calabrian Hellenophone area compared to the Salento one. In recent times, the negative role of mass media must not be overlooked either.

An estimate, even if outdated, of the degree of persistence of the Grecanico in Calabria is due to Spano (1965) and Bellinello (1991). The first estimated that in 1964 the speakers of Grecanico were 3,900 out of 14,871 total residents (26.2%), while the second in 1990 estimated the speakers to be Grecanico in 3,278 out of 13,460 residents (24.3%). At the end of the 1980s, other sources indicated the Greek language to five thousand speakers, including also the Greek speakers living in the San Giorgio-Extra—a district of Reggio Calabria—and the emigrants of Switzerland (Verduci, 1988).

As of 1/1/2018 this area had 11,211 residents and, assuming that the percentage of those who still speak Greek has remained unchanged at 24.3%, as estimated by Bellinello (1991), it can be deduced that today speakers would not exceed 2,724 units (Table 4).

Demographic Aspects of the Grecìa of Calabria

The demographic analysis concerned the Municipalities of Roghudi, Roccaforte del Greco, Condofuri, Bova, and Bova Marina all in the Province of Reggio Calabria, where clear traces of Greek speech still persist.

Table 5 allows us to grasp the essential features of the demographic evolution of these populations from the unification of Italy until today. As can be seen, from 1861 to 1951 they experienced a period of considerable growth; subsequently the reference territories are depopulated due to an intense emigration (within the same province, towards Northern Italy and Switzerland) not absorbed by the natural balance (Nobile, 1977; Izzo, 1965). These trends have left traces deep in age structure: In fact, at 1/1/2018 these populations had a high aging index, equal to 196.3%, a value higher than both the regional average (158.4%) and to that of Italy (168.9%).

Table 5

Resident Population at the Censuses in the Hellenophonic Municipalities on 1/1/2018

Years	Condofuri	Roccaforte del Greco	Roghudi	Bova	Bova Marina	Total population	Total population index Base 1951 = 100
1861	2,718	1,524	1,082	1,813	854	7,991	51
1871	2,442	1,217	1,067	2,356	1,109	8,191	52
1881	2,586	1,392	1,118	2,208	1,040	8,344	53
1901	3,636	1,392	1,276	2,448	2,140	10,892	69
1911	4,171	1,556	1,457	2,293	2,639	12,116	77
1921	4,384	2,048	1,592	2,476	3,258	13,758	87
1931	4,825	1,940	1,571	2,375	3,491	14,202	90
1936	5,168	1,933	1,623	2,512	3,801	15,037	95
1951	5,865	1,778	1,782	2,155	4,192	15,772	100
1961	5,777	1,740	1,691	1,893	4,068	15,169	96
1971	5,447	1,377	1,650	1,401	4,008	13,883	88
1981	5,316	1,186	1,868	1,175	3,786	13,331	85
1991	5,461	1,213	1,530	602	4,371	13,177	84
2001	5,055	802	1,365	474	3,967	11,663	74
2011	5,074	550	1,172	461	4,142	11,399	72
2018	5,053	445	1,036	457	4,220	11,211	71

Source: Our elaborations on Istat data.

A demographic projection was also carried out for the Hellenophone Area, building a scenario with the same assumptions adopted for the forecast of the Albanian minority. Keeping it in our minds, it is possible to

hypothesize that in a span of 50 years this population would be reduced by half compared to the value of the beginning of this century. That is, there would be a lack of inhabitants equal to the total number of Bova and Roccaforte del Greco (Table 6) and there would be a worsening of the aging process already underway: From 2018 to 2068 the old-age index would increase from 196% to 369%.

Table 6

Past Evolution and Forecast to 2068 of the Hellenophone Population of Calabria

Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population
1861	7,991	1951	15,772	2023	10,908	2048	8,684
1871	8,191	1961	15,169	2028	10,555	2053	8,146
1881	8,344	1971	13,883	2033	10,152	2058	7,600
1901	10,892	1981	13,331	2038	9,700	2063	7,053
1911	12,116	1991	13,177	2043	9,206	2068	6,518
1921	13,758	2001	11,663				
1931	14,202	2011	11,399				
1936	15,037	2018	11,211				

Source: Our elaborations on Istat data.

The Occitan Minority From Calabria

The Occitan-Waldensians of Piedmont arrived in the South by land and sea towards the end of the 14th century to escape religious persecution, taking two directions: Naples and Paola. The Occitans-Waldensians landed in Naples reached Irpinia, Daunia, and Capitanata. The others, who arrived in Paola, went inland, founding the settlements of San Sisto, La Guardia, Vaccarizzo, Rose, Argentina, San Vincenzo, Borgo degli Ultramontani and Montalto (Montalto Uffugo). They were called “Ultramontani” because they came from beyond the mountains that are from the Alps. Over the centuries these populations have lost the religious trait while the linguistic one has gradually reduced.

Today the Occitan-Waldensian colonies in Calabria are represented by Guardia Piemontese, S. Sisto dei Valdesi, and San Vincenzo la Costa, but the language “guardiolo” is present only in Guardia Piemontese and S. Sisto dei Valdesi, fraction of San Vincenzo la Costa.

Let’s remember that the guardiolo, in addition to contaminations of the Calabrian dialect, has much in common with the idioms of the Val Pellice, which is the southernmost of the Waldensian Valleys (Kunert, 1999; Genre, 1984). Bellinello (1992) estimates that in 1988 there were 1,501 speakers of the mother tongue, of which 1,263 were in Guardia Piemontese and 238 were in S. Sisto dei Valdesi.

Over the past few decades, the process of “contamination” with the surrounding population and the disappearance of the older generations who had kept the use of the language alive, has meant that the speakers of the “guardiolo” have been reduced significantly to no more of 200-300 units (Femia, 2018).

Demographic Aspects of the Occitan-Waldensians

The population of Guardia Piemontese after the Unification and until 1921 experienced a strong emigrant exodus that resumed in the Second Post-War period with renewed intensity. These events limited their population growth so much so that in 1971 population census it was documented as 15% lower than that of 1861.

Since the 1970s of the last century the whole region has been affected by an intense phenomenon of urbanization: The small internal centers are depopulated; the cities and the municipalities of the coastal area have grown considerably; there is an uncontrolled and speculative building growth. Guardia Piemontese, like other towns on the Tyrrhenian coast, experiences this phase of population growth, also favored by the presence on its territory of an important thermal center.

As a result, its population has increased since 1981 until it reached the peak of almost two thousand residents at the beginning of 2018 (Table 7). This trend manages to hide the incipient demographic malaise that can be grasped both by the high aging index observed in 2018 of 220%, and by the negative rates of natural increase recorded in the last 10 years.

Table 7

Past Evolution and Forecast Till 2068 of the Occitan Population of Calabria

Years	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population	Year	Population
1861	1,336	1951	1,326	2023	1,867	2048	1,463
1871	1,338	1961	1,145	2028	1,811	2053	1,358
1881	1,248	1971	1,154	2033	1,742	2058	1,253
1901	1,344	1981	1,467	2038	1,661	2063	1,152
1911	1,228	1991	1,630	2043	1,566	2068	1,058
1921	1,431	2001	1,525				
1931	1,320	2011	1,895				
1936	1,238	2018	1,913				

Source: Our elaborations on Istat data.

The demographic malaise is likely to grow even more in the near future, when the positive impact of the social balance is exhausted and the negative fundamentals of the natural components of the population will emerge fully. More specifically, based on the results of the demographic forecasts developed by us, built with the same assumptions that were used for the projections of the other two minorities, in 2068 Guardia Piemontese would reduce to just over a thousand inhabitants (almost 45% less than in 2018) (Table 7), showing an increasingly growing aging that from 220% in 2018 would pass to 362.7% in 2068.

Conclusions

The historical ethnic-linguistic populations of Calabria (Arbëreshë, Greek-speaking, and Occitan), as highlighted in the present work, as a consequence of the assimilation process to which they have been subjected over time, have experienced an intense, continuous reduction of the trait in linguistic, especially after Unity. Furthermore, these areas, especially the internal ones, have experienced a strong depopulation and an intense demographic malaise since 1951. As shown by the results of the demographic projections made by us, these populations more than others have walked along a path that leads to their doom, with the risk of losing remarkable original cultural heritage, if effective social and economic policies do not intervene soon.

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