

English translation of our article in the «Bündner Woche», December 24, 2019

Research in Graubünden

Italian is in the air

The educational offer is not the same for everyone

Fragments of Italian words are wafting through the air. Valeria Manna, a native of Ticino, welcomes work colleagues and visitors in her mother tongue. They also answer in Italian. However, we are neither in Ticino nor in one of the southern valleys of Graubünden. We are located in Chur, the cantonal capital of Graubünden, on the campus of the Pädagogische Hochschule Graubünden (PHGR). “The PHGR is an island in a German-speaking environment where I can speak Italian”, praises Manna, now in perfect German. Since 2017, she has been working there as a research assistant in various research projects to promote the Italian language and multilingualism. In the only trilingual canton, much is done to ensure that the minority languages Italian and Romansh are audible and visible.



Studying a foreign language is a great challenge. Picture: Pixabay

When she began her studies at PHGR to become a primary school teacher in 2007, she was one of a total of three Italian-speaking students in her year. Today, the PHGR's approximately 60 Italian-speaking students are able to complete most of their studies in their mother tongue. Nowhere else in Switzerland do Italian-speaking students from Graubünden and Ticino enjoy this privilege outside their home cantons. Manna became all the more aware of this special educational situation when, after graduating from PHGR, she enrolled in a Master's program in Educational Sciences at the University of Zurich: “Nobody there was interested in my mother tongue. That was sometimes exhausting. Nevertheless, I benefited from this challenge.”

Based on her personal experience, she wanted to do a doctoral thesis on how students from Italian-speaking Switzerland live their language and culture outside their canton of origin. Manna explains, “The university offer in Italian-speaking Switzerland is not complete. This leads to students moving across the Alps and attending a university in German or French-speaking Switzerland. They are important ambassadors of the Italian language and culture in the rest of Switzerland. However, due to their autonomy and their dependence on their own cantons, German-speaking universities do not give special consideration to Italian-speaking students.”

With her doctoral thesis, which is still in its infancy, Manna aims to answer the following questions: “Where can the cantons and the Confederation do more to promote equality between languages? Or rather, to what

extent are they obliged to do so? What strategies do universities have to attract Italian-speaking students? Which German-speaking universities offer the possibility of studying in Italian? What influence does language competence have on career prospects?” Her answers are intended to help ensure that the needs of students from Italian-speaking Switzerland are better perceived in other parts of the country.

The Expert



Valeria Manna

The pedagogical scientist Valeria Manna lives in Bellinzona/TI and commutes to Chur every week for her work at the Pädagogische Hochschule Graubünden. In addition to her research activities, she mentors prospective teachers. In her spare time she likes to travel. She also loves music and enjoys attending concerts. For many years she has been playing the piano and guitar. Please send your questions on the topic to the expert at info@graduateschool.ch by 31 December.

Find out more about research in Graubünden: www.academiarætica.ch, www.graduateschool.ch.

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