

## UPF Reggio Calabria, Italy Celebrates International Mother Language Day

Carlo Zonato  
February 20, 2023



Reggio Calabria, Italy -- UPF co-sponsored a commemoration of International Mother Language Day.

"Rediscovering a Lost Heritage" was the title of the conference held on February 20, 2023, at Palazzo San Giorgio, the administrative center of the southern Italian city of Reggio Calabria.



International Mother Language Day was established by UNESCO in 1999 to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education. The conference in Reggio Calabria was part of the Pame Ambrò project, which promotes the speaking of Calabrian Greek.

Organized by the Municipality of Reggio Calabria, Department of Linguistic Minorities and Territorial Identities, with the collaboration of the Anassilaos and Fidapa associations and UPF, the conference aimed to promote the rediscovery of an ancient and precious linguistic heritage.

The moderator of the conference was **Lucia Anita Nucera**, councilor of the Municipality of Reggio Calabria.

"For me, it is valuable to belong to this culture of the Greeks of Calabria. We are talking about a language dating back to the seventh century B.C., a unicum at the international level because it is written in Latin letters and has been present without interruption for 2,700 years in our territory," Councilor Nucera said.

She spoke about the Pame Ambrò ("Let's Get On with It") project, which started in 2017, and the success achieved by the first course held in Reggio on the language, culture and traditions of the Greeks of Calabria.

"Now the goal is to have Law 482/99, which provides for bilingualism in all schools where there is a linguistic minority and which has not yet been implemented in Calabria," she said.

To have a law implemented that has been in the drawer for 23 years, she explained, the help of the whole city is needed. She added that she will take responsibility for this project because "one day I will not be able to forgive myself [before] my children and grandchildren for not having done anything to maintain this language." She ended by stating, "No one can take away our historical memory, and each of us must become a witness to our culture."



**Stefano Iorfrida**, the president of the Anassilaos Association, emphasized the importance of the event "because it is not only the Grecanic language that is at risk, but in the world of globalization our Italian language is also at risk."

"Dialects and our mother tongue are our culture, our origin, and we must cultivate them," **Cinzia Iadicola**, the president of Fidapa Morgana RC, said. "We must ensure that our young people do not see dialects as a subculture, something to be forgotten. Our task is to instill in them a love for the culture and history of our land."

This was followed by the screening of **Mimma Scibilia's** documentary *Al sonno di cicale querce e pietre* ("To the Sleep of Cicadas, Oaks and Stones"), taken from the book of poems of the same name, which was also the title of the poetess' subsequent speech.

"However many journeys each of us may make in the course of our lives," she began, "unconscious and inexplicable will always remain the motivations we have for our land, for that great mother that saw us born, for all those places of memory that we have loved, sometimes from afar. Perhaps because in this great mother that welcomes us all lives a deep sense of belonging and identity, together with an awareness of what we are. Becoming aware of all this can make us less fragile and vulnerable."

As she wandered through the land of Calabria, she observed "the traces of those peoples, such as the Greeks, who arrived here and left us the testimony of their passage also in language. A heritage to be preserved and protected."

**Daniela Scuncia**, head of the Anassilaos Association's Centre for the Study of Narratology, spoke about "Writing and Orality." She began by noting that "what changes in space and time are the different languages used. Today we are faced with terminologies that use the language of the digital. Think how the language of photography and its dissemination has changed that of music and literature."

"From a historical point of view," she said, "we take it for granted that the history of human civilizations coincides with the birth of writing. For too long, historians have taken it for granted that the development of writing went hand in hand with social growth and the acquisition of scientific skills."

She explained that writing has been identified as the dividing line between a primitive civilization and a more evolved one, leading to a series of gross errors in the evaluation of oral cultures such as those of the Native Americans, whom she called "a civilization rich in astronomical, medical and herbal knowledge,



highly evolved in its internal hierarchical structure, with an ethical vision of the human being within the context of the environment in which [they live] in perfect harmony."

She highlighted the problem of the deterioration of sources such as recordings on reels and cassettes of Grecanic speech, songs, folklore and popular traditions; and the need for the collection of existing material in the area to create an archive and preserve it in special conditions of humidity and temperature so that it is not lost.

**Maria Gabriella Mieli**, public relations director of UPF-Italy, speaking via videoconference from the northern Italian city of Turin, addressed the topic "Cultural Diversity: The Common Heritage of Humanity." Referring to the various conferences and declarations presented by both the United Nations and UNESCO, she took stock of the international and national state of affairs on the subject.



"Almost 50 percent of the 6,000 languages spoken in the world are at risk of disappearing," Mrs. Mieli said. "Preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage passes through the most powerful tool, that of language. When a language disappears, we lose the traditions, the memory, the ways of thinking and expressing related to that language.

"Multilingualism is linked to multiculturalism, and both lead to inclusion, solidarity, understanding, tolerance and dialogue with those who speak another language and live a different tradition. Cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity. Human rights are guaranteed by cultural diversity."

Over the centuries the people of Calabria have maintained and transferred to later generations the very important Greek culture that flourished in the Mediterranean. Mrs. Mieli recalled that according to UNESCO's intangible heritage in Italy, five languages are currently recognized: Sardinian, Friulian, Ladin, Neapolitan and Sicilian.

Officially, according to the legislation recalled by Councilor Nucera, there are 12 protected historical linguistic minorities, including the Greek language, and Mrs. Mieli encouraged the participants to support the councilor's work, both in having the Grecanic language recognized at UNESCO and in applying the aforementioned law on Calabrian territory.

The conference in Palazzo San Giorgio was followed on February 22 by a press conference presenting the Pame Ambrò project for teaching the Greek language of Calabria in schools.

"The course on the history, language, culture and tradition of the Greeks of Calabria will be of interest to schools, and I will follow it personally and free of charge," Councilor Nucera explained. "All these years have favored the inexorable death of our recognized minority languages, in addition to the Greek of Calabria, Albanian and Occitan: a heritage of inestimable value that we have a duty to transmit and protect."