

Traces of German settlement in the modern-day cultural landscape of the Carpathians

Abstract

Although German settlement in the Carpathians and their forelands declined to a minimum after World War II and again with the fall of Communism, its traces in the cultural landscape are still visible. This article investigates this fact, regarding the built cultural landscape, the linguistic landscape, and the aspect of landscape or regional identity rooted in a German past. Considering the modern Carpathian countries (Slovakia, Czechia, Poland, Ukraine, Romania), it starts by casting a light on the historical background of German settlement, followed by a glance at the current situation of Germans in the entire country, before focusing on German traces in the cultural landscape. It reveals that such traces are significant in areas that were populated by a German majority, or a larger share of Germans, up to World War II or even later, while, elsewhere, only scattered areas with German traces can be found. They are mostly well maintained, and frequently presented proudly – not least due to their function as tourist attractions, and because German emigrants and their descendants like to remain in contact with their former homes and visit them.

Keywords

Cultural landscape • linguistic landscape • Germans • Carpathians

Introduction

The goal of this contribution is to highlight the impact of (former) German settlement on the cultural landscape of the Carpathians and their forelands up to the present day, although Germans remained only as a small residual population after World War II and the events around the fall of Communism compared to their presence before then. The contribution neither claims to present original research nor to reflect all existing research on this topic, but serves as a preface and first survey for a special issue on Germans in the Carpathians. It is, of course, based on existing literature; it is also partially the field work of the author and his disciples (Hofer 2012; Szabó 2008), and draws on the author's photographic documentation and acquaintance with the wider region.

The Carpathians are, in this context, understood in the usual topographical sense as the arc-shaped mountain range from the Danube at the Hainburg Gate [Hainburger Pforte] east of Vienna [Wien], near Bratislava, down to the Danube at the Iron Gate [Porțile de Fier/Đerdap] at the border between Romania and Serbia, although, in the geological sense, they also include the Hainburg Mountains [Hainburger Berge] in Austria, south of the Danube, as well as the Serbian Carpathians [Srpski Karpati], south of the Iron Gate and up to the Nišava valley.

Germans are, after the general “national awakening” in the 19th century, understood in the cultural–national sense, as human communities that speak variants of German and share other characteristics of a common culture, although it should always be taken into account that national identities are inventions of the Enlightenment in the late 18th century and subsequent developments, having replaced older identity formations. This is especially true for the Germans in the Carpathians and their

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forelands with whom also after the phase of nation-building other identity-shaping factors such as regional affiliation, denomination, or descent from different parts of the German-speaking area, remained or even prevailed, while a common German identity existed, if at all, only as a thin veil.

Before portraying still visible and traceable German impacts on the current cultural landscape, it is necessary to look at where, why, and in what numbers Germans (in the above-mentioned sense) settled throughout history, as well as where they arrived from, what they brought with them, how their political and socio-economic structures showed up in their Carpathian destination, and into which macro-political and macro-economic structures they were embedded. Only against this background will it be possible to comprehend and evaluate their lasting impact on the cultural landscape. This, as well as reflecting still visible and traceable German impacts on the current cultural landscape, will be done according to modern “Carpathian” countries in the sequence from west to south-east – namely, from Slovakia, through Czechia, Poland and Ukraine, to Romania.

A survey of the cultural landscapes in question is provided in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows (in blue) the compact German settlement areas before World War I, according to data of the 1910 census (compare Kamusella 2021). These start in the west with Bratislava (German *Pressburg*) and the towns along the south-eastern foothills of the Little Carpathians [Malé Karpaty]; they continue with the so-called Hauerland in the central part of modern Slovakia, and end in Slovakia with the two Zips [Spiš] regions – the Oberzips, with a small extension into modern Poland, and the Unterzips – although they also include the cities in the east of present-day Slovakia, namely Košice (German *Kaschau*), Prešov (German and Hungarian *Eperjes*), and



Figure 1. Local concentrations (in blue) of German speakers (by mother tongue in the Kingdom of Hungary and colloquial language in the Austrian Crownlands) in the eastern parts of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1910. Thick red lines indicate international borders in 1910. Broken thick red lines show the borders between the Austrian Crownlands and the Kingdom of Hungary and the Condominium of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the political entities of the dual monarchy below the level of the Empire. Broken thin black lines show, for comparison, the borders after 1918. Source: Jordan 2001

Bardejov (German *Bartfeld*), which had considerable shares of German inhabitants. The places where there was a German minority in and near the Carpathians in modern Czechia, Poland, and Ukrainian Transcarpathia [Zakarpat'tja] are too small to be represented due to the scale of this map. In the modern Ukrainian Bukovina [Bukovyna], the city of Chernivtsi [Černivci] (German *Czernowitz*) stands out as a German settlement centre. In the modern Romanian part of Bukovina [Bucovina], the upper valley of the river Bistrița with Vatra Dornei is marked as settled by Germans. In Romanian Transylvania proper [Ardeal, Transilvania], the Royal Lands (in German *Sachsenboden* or *Königsboden*¹) near Sibiu/Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt, the Burzenland [Țara Bârsei] around Braşov/Brassó/Kronstadt, and the Nösnerland [Țara Năsăudului] around Bistrița/Beszerce/Bistritz are three compact regions of German settlement. In the lowlands of the Romanian Banat around Arad and Timișoara/Temesvár/Temesvar, as well as in the Banat Mountains [Munții Banatului], German communities are represented; they can also be found in the Szatmar region near Satu Mare/Szatmárnémeti/Sathmar.

Figure 2 highlights, again according to the population census of 1910, shares of Germans in the overall population. In the areal section in question, the places with the relatively highest share of Germans (by colloquial language in Austria and mother tongue in Hungary) (50–80%), indicated by the darkest shade of red, are the towns of Místek (German *Friedberg*) and Bielsko (German *Bielitz*) in former Moravia [Morava] and Austrian Silesia [Slezsko, Śląsk], respectively. The next level, at 25–50%, indicated by a slightly paler shade of red, characterizes the Banat lowlands, including Timișoara/Temesvár/Temesvar, the main part of the

Royal Lands and Burzenland in Transylvania, south-western Bukovina, and the cities of Chernivtsi and Bratislava. They are followed (10–25% share of Germans, an even paler shade of red) by the Banat Mountains, the northern parts of the Royal Lands, the upper Bistrița valley and larger parts of Bukovina, the Marmaroș, which, today, corresponds to the Romanian county [judet] Maramureș plus the south-eastern parts of Ukrainian Transcarpathia, by the Zips, and northern parts of the Hauerland, as well as larger parts of former Austrian Silesia. A 5–10% share of Germans (paler red again) is documented for the Crișana (German *Kreischgebiet*) in modern western Romania, north of the river Mureș, north-western parts of modern Ukrainian Transcarpathia, the Šariš (in German *Scharosch*) region in modern eastern Slovakia, and south-western parts of modern Slovakia, down to the district surrounding Bratislava. The palest red on the map, indicating a 2–5% share of Germans in the overall population, fills most of the remaining gaps in the former Hungarian façade of the Carpathians, but also some Galician slopes in the areas of Stryj and Drohobič.

Germans by “Carpathian countries” Slovakia

Historical background

Germans, in the above-mentioned sense, settled (since the 6th century) in the predominantly Slavic northern parts of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, to which modern Slovakia belonged at that time; the settlement mainly occurred from the 12th to the 15th centuries, especially after the 1241 Mongol invasions that left a lot of damaged and depopulated areas. They arrived from various rather peripheric and poor parts of the German-speaking area, motivated by envoys of the Hungarian King who was interested in repopulating the devastated areas (Botik 2021;

¹In Hungarian, the region is called *Királyföld*.

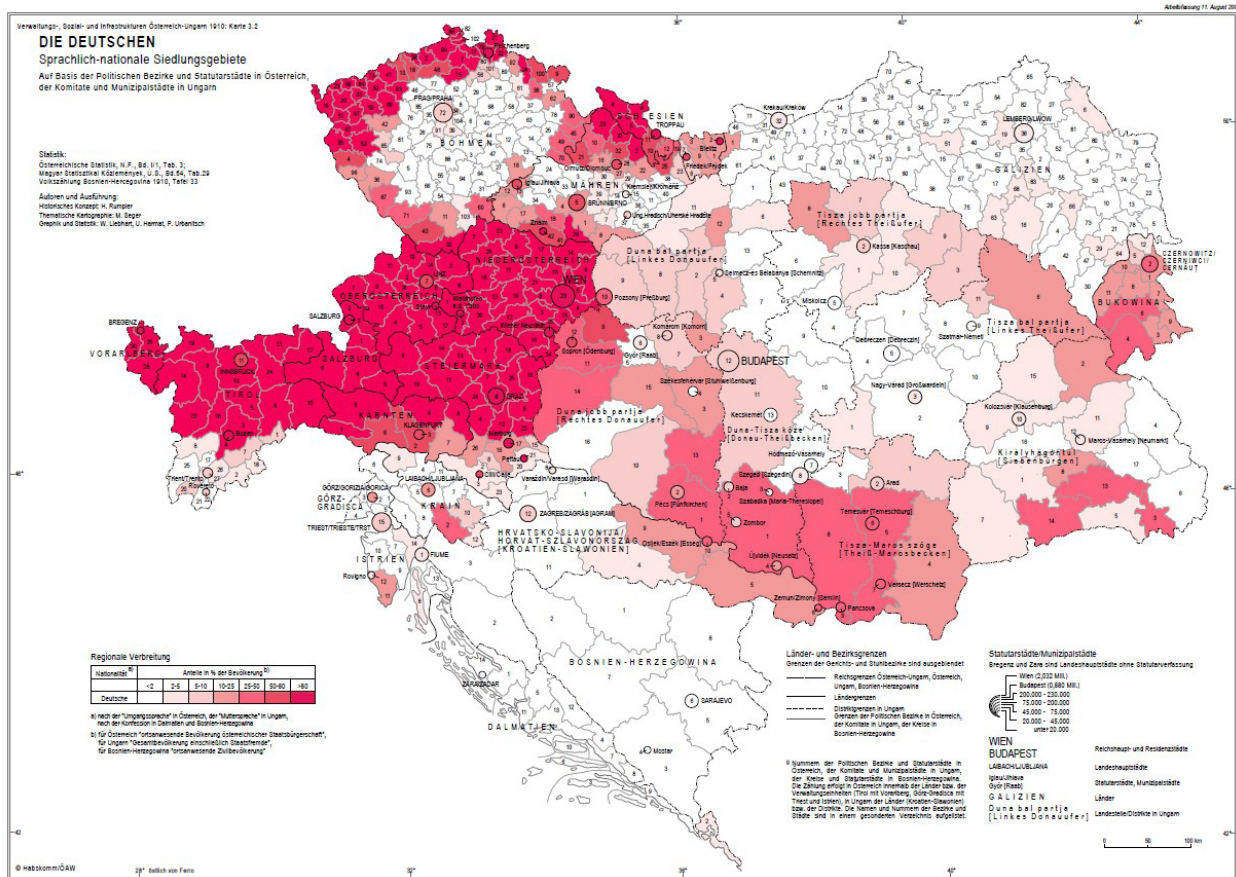


Figure 2. Share of German speakers (by colloquial language in Austria, by mother tongue in Hungary) in the overall population in the eastern parts of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1910. Darkest red >80%, paler shades of red 50–80%, 25–50%, 10–25%, 5–10%, 2–5%. Source: Rumpler & Seger 2010

Fausel 1927; Homýánský 1858; Mally 1942; Rudolf, Ulreich & Zimmermann 1982; ed. Švorc 1995). So, it can be assumed that their destinations on the territory of modern Slovakia were initially characterized by quite a mixture of dialects and customs, which, later, would vary in the various regions of compact German settlement.

Since World War I, only the Germans of Slovakia (the Slovak Germans or *Slowakeideutsche*), have commonly been called *Carpathian Germans* (German *Karpatendeutsche*). During the parliamentary democracy of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), Carpathian Germans participated in social and political life, and they had their own political party. Their close association with the fascist regime of the Slovak Republic during World War II affected their status after the war. In 1946 and 1947, about 33,000 of them were expelled from Slovakia under the Potsdam Agreement, while around 20,000 were allowed or forced to remain in Slovakia. Those who remained could not access German education or maintain any cultural institutions. Until 1989, they could not take part in any organized activities (Ira 2024).

The current situation of the Germans in Slovakia in general

According to the 2021 census, 1,034 people declared they were of German ethnicity. However, an additional 5,255 also checked off German as a second ethnic affiliation. In 2001, 5,405 people declared they were Germans in Slovakia; this figure was 5,414 in 1991, and 2,918 in 1980. In 2021, nearly 4,000

claimed to be German native speakers (Botik 2021). At present, the highest concentration of ethnic Germans is in Kunešov (German *Kuneschhau*) near Kremnica in the Hauerland, and in the localities of Medzev (German *Metzenseifen*) in the Unterzips, and Chmeľnica (German *Hopgarten*) in the Oberzips. Rudolf Schuster, the second President of independent Slovakia 1999–2004, was a German from Medzev. Among cities, Bratislava has the relatively largest number of Germans (Botik 2021; Ira 2024).

A Carpathian–German Homeland Association was created in 1990 to maintain traditions. In 2005, the Museum of Carpathian German Culture in Bratislava was established. The museum has its headquarters in Bratislava, two branches in Handlová and Nitrianske Pravno, and permanent exhibitions in Martin and at the Červený Kameň Castle (Recktenwald & Pöss 2020). In municipalities with a larger number of members of the German minority (Bratislava, Nitrianske Pravno, Kežmarok, Chmeľnica, Gelnica, and Medzev), schools with extended teaching in the German language were established. All subjects are taught in German at the German School in Bratislava and the high school (Gymnasium) in Poprad. The Federal Republic of Germany purchased so-called Meeting Houses for the Carpathian Germans in Slovakia, where numerous gatherings of local groups and regions are organized. There are two German-language media outlets – the *Karpatenblatt* (monthly) and *IKEJA* news (Internet) – and minority broadcasting in German on Slovak radio (Ira 2024).

Traces of German settlement by landscapes/regions

Bratislava and the towns along the south-eastern foothills of the Little Carpathians

Up to World War II, locations where up to a quarter of the population was German (Kocsis 2000), and where they held usually elevated social positions, were found in Bratislava (German *Pressburg*) and its suburbs, villages in its eastern surroundings, and the winegrowing towns along the south-eastern foothills of the Little Carpathians [Malé Karpaty], namely Svätý Jur (German *Sankt Georgen*), Limbach, Pezinok (German *Bösing*), and Modra (German *Modern*). Today, tiny minorities remain (Kocsis 2000). Nevertheless, in the historical centres of all these places, there are remnants of an earlier linguistic landscape (Fig. 3); Limbach is the only village where the German name is still official – a reminder of the German presence.

Hauerland

In the Hauerland, settled from the 12th century, mainly by German miners, the gold mining town of Kremnica (German *Kremnitz*) and the uppermost Nitra valley, north of Prievidza, as well as Pila (German *Paulisch*) and Veľké Pole (German *Hochwies*), north-west of Žarnovica, had German majorities up to World War II, while Banská Bystrica (German *Neusohl*) had a German minority (Czoernig 1855). No German descendants are present today (Kocsis 2000), although the built cultural landscape, in the historical centres of both Banská Bystrica and Kremnica, as well as in the small villages of Pila and Veľké Pole, which are almost abandoned today, show many German traces.

Zips [Spiš]

Although almost no Germans remain in the region (Kocsis 2000), the historical German population, who called themselves *Zipser*, shaped the built cultural landscape up to the present day. Like the Transylvanian Saxons, they came from the Mosel-Rhine [Rhein] region, and populated the Zips from the 12th century up to World War II, constituting a majority in at least some parts of the region, where there were, at one time or another, 24 autonomous, self-governing towns, independent of Hungarian nobility and subordinated only to the Hungarian King. At their heyday, they lived mainly on the salt and wine trade between Poland and Hungary. Again like the Transylvanian Saxons, they converted to Lutheranism during the Reformation, thus emphasizing their identity compared to the Roman Catholic Slovaks and Poles. When the wine and salt trade across the Carpathians decreased in importance, partly due to the development of the railway network, some of them migrated further to the Marmaroş, Bukovina, and Transylvania in modern Romania. All the historical centres of towns and villages in the Zips have a German character and are major tourist attractions today (see Fig. 4).

What is most striking is the fact that the name of the region derived from its former German population, *Zips* (in Slovakian *Spiš* and in Hungarian *Szepes*) – admittedly also supported by the fact that it constituted a Hungarian county for centuries – remained the popular name of the landscape. It is reflected not only in the names of populated places (e.g. *Spišská Belá*, *Spišská Nová Ves*, *Spišská Stará Ves*, *Spišské Podhradie*, *Spišské Vlachs*, *Spišský Štvrtok*) but also in ecclesiastical-administrative affiliation (a Zips diocese comprising the historical Zips region), and even in a soccer league and the names of commercial enterprises (see Hofer 2012). The landscape identity remained, although since 1996, the territorial-administrative division of Slovakia cuts it into two halves at the first administrative level below the state, the level of regions [kraje], where the Zips is divided into the Prešov



Figure 3. An old pharmacy in Bratislava's historical centre bears inscriptions in Hungarian, Slovak, and German (*Salvator Apotheke*)

Source: photo by Jordan 2022



Figure 4. Basilica of Saint James [Bazilika sv. Jakuba] and the old town hall of Levoča (German *Leutschau*) in the Zips. Source: photo by Jordan 2005

[Prešovský kraj] and Košice [Košický kraj] regions.² Thus, as in the cases of Polish Silesia [Śląsk] and Slovenian Kočevje, a regional identity shaped by a historical German population is, after 1945 and in the absence of their creators, perpetuated by the new settlers of a different ethnic origin.

Czechia

Historical background

Germans settled in the Bohemian Lands (Bohemia [Čechy], Moravia [Morava], and Silesia [Slezsko, Śląsk]), that today form Czechia with the exception of larger parts of Silesia, in the 12th and 13th centuries during the Great German Migration towards the East and, there, met a Slavic population that was already present since the 6th century. They had been called there by the Bohemian kings to serve as border guards or miners, and to colonize still empty spaces. They came from various parts of the German sphere, but mainly from Franconia [Franken] and Saxony

²In 2002, these regions, representing deconcentrated state administration, were duplicated by a parallel system of Higher-level Territorial Administrative Units [Vyšší územní celky, VÚC], exerting regional self-government (see Jordan 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2010).

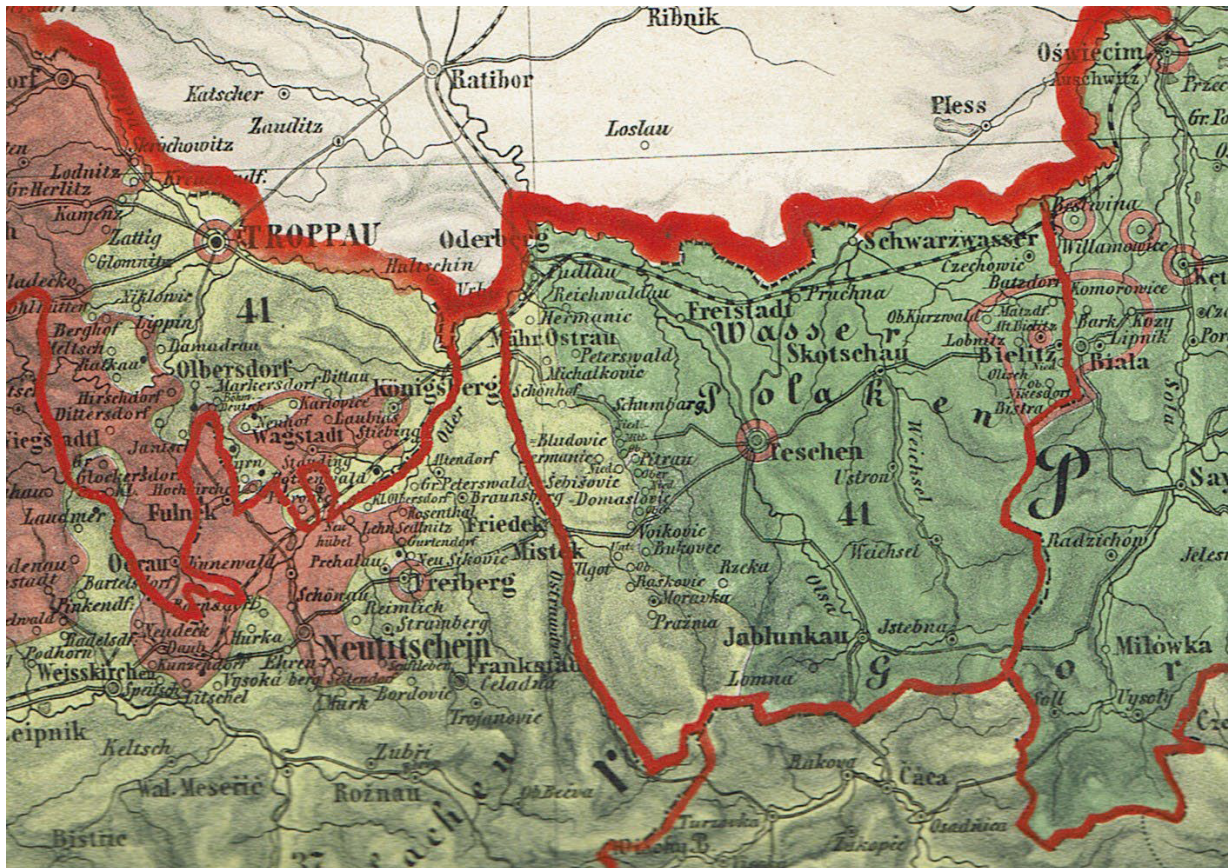


Figure 5. Eastern parts of Austrian Silesia and the Duchy of Cieszyn on the ethnographic map of the Austrian Empire by Czoernig (1855). Germans are, according to census data of 1851, indicated by a reddish colour, Czechs by pale green, and Poles by dark green; majorities appear in areal colour, minorities by coloured contour lines; red bands indicate the border of the Austrian Empire (thick line) and the borders of duchies (thin lines). Source: Czoernig 1855, private archive of Peter Jordan

[Sachsen]. They founded independent towns and cities all over the country, according to German law, and lived there on trade and craftsmanship. Farmers cleared the woods in the mountain ranges surrounding the Bohemian Lands and established a compact German settlement area there. But they also infiltrated the old Slavic settlement area, transferring German law and economic practices, such as the three-field system, to the Slavic population (Krallet 1958; Sperling 1981, 2008).

The German settlers were, however, heterogenous by origin and by German dialect. Figure 5 shows, in the reddish areal colour, the German majority areas and, in red circles, the German minority areas in the middle of the 19th century in the vicinity of the Carpathians (Czoernig 1855). A German majority area extended from Nový Jičín (German *Neutitschein*) to the north-west, while the Duchy of Cieszyn (German *Teschen*) or Cieszyn Silesia at the foothills of the Carpathians and since 1920 (with an interruption from 1938 to 1945) divided between Czechia and Poland, had only German minorities in the cities of Cieszyn, Český Těšín (German *Teschen*), and Bielsko (German *Bielitz*), and the latter's surroundings. According to the Austrian population census of 1900 (under the criterion of language), the Duchy of Cieszyn had 51,200 German inhabitants, or 14.2% of the total population (Eberhardt 2003).

The Hussite Wars of the 15th century questioned, for the first time, the social and political dominance of the German inhabitants. The Thirty Years War (1618–1648) was another proof of rivalry between Slavs (now *Czechs*) and Germans, but ended with a victory for the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire,

saving the political and economic dominance of the Germans up to World War I, although, during the 19th century and up to World War I, in an era of rising nationalism, the Austrian lands of what would become (from 1867 onward) the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, including Bohemia, Moravia, and Austrian Silesia, practised a rather conciliatory nationality policy (compared, for example, with the Hungarian Kingdom).

The First Czechoslovakian Republic of the interwar period counted 10.7 million inhabitants, of which 3.2 million were Germans; 3.0 million of them, with a share of 28.8% in the overall population (as of 1 May 1945), resided in present-day Czech territory (Eberhardt 2003). They still inhabited a compact territory along the borders with Germany and Austria (in the interwar period and during World War II, this was colloquially called *Sudetenland*). After World War II, in 1946 and before the seizure of power by the Communists, most of the Czech Germans were forcibly resettled to Germany and Austria by the decision of the Potsdam Conference of 2 August 1945. Only 180,000 remained (Eberhardt 2003; Siwek 2024). They were replaced by a new population from the Czech interior, and partly from Slovakia, including many Roma. The few remaining Germans – like all other minorities – did not enjoy any minority rights under Communist rule. After the fall of Communism around 1990, and especially after the division of Czechia and Slovakia in 1993, Czech minority legislation gradually adopted European standards, but there was, by then, an already tiny and dispersed German community, hardly able to take advantage of these opportunities (Siwek 2024).

The current situation of the Germans in Czechia in general

According to the most recent population censuses, the number of people in Czechia declaring to be Germans amounted to 39,106 (0.4% of the Czech population) in 2001, 18,658 (0.2% of the Czech population) in 2011, and 9,128 (0.1% of the Czech population) in 2021 (Czech Statistical Office 2024). Thus, the figure halved from census to census; the Germans have practically been assimilated. The share of Germans is relatively highest in some of their traditional settlement areas, namely in northern Bohemia, in the Sudetes [Sudety], and in Czech Silesia, but not near the Carpathians.

Traces of German settlement

In the region in question, namely the Czech section of the Carpathians and their forelands, the current traces of German presence correspond to the share of Germans up to 1945. They are in the built cultural landscape obvious in and to the north-west of Nový Jičín, while, in the Duchy of Cieszyn, other traces prevail. While German was, for the first generation after World War II, still a widely used trade language in this region and elsewhere in Czechia, it has been replaced by English today (see Jordan & Mácha et al. 2021).

Poland

Historical background

The share of present-day Poland in the Carpathians and their forelands, namely the share of the Duchy of Cieszyn that was, in 1920, awarded to Poland, western Galicia [Galicja], and six counties of eastern Galicia, as well as the north-eastern part of the Orava region and the north-western part of the Zips, acquired by Poland from the Hungarian Kingdom, which had altogether an overall population of about 3.3 million in 1900 (Eberhardt 2003), was sparsely populated by Germans up to World War I. According to the population census of 1900, only 38,800 were, according to the criterion of language, Germans, namely 1.2% of the total population (Eberhardt 2003, quoting Kryżanowski & Kumaniecki 1915, and Wakar 1918). German rural colonization started there in the 14th century, albeit in a much lower density than further to the west. Later (from the 17th century onward), at least some of these colonizers, with a focus on the Krosno-Jasło-Strzyżów triangle, were called *Forest Germans* (German *Walddeutsche*) because they cleared woods and settled in a wooded area. Independent towns and cities, according to German (Neumarkt and Magdeburg) law, in which, at least in their initial phase, Germans were engaged but did not necessarily (and in this case not at all) prevail, were founded further towards the West of Galicia in the 13th century and further towards the East in the 14th century (Krallert 1958).

From 1772 onwards, under Austrian rule, another wave of German settlers arrived, mainly from south-western Germany (Krallert 1958). "Many lived in towns and cities, where they were rapidly Polishized, both in language and national consciousness. Those who settled in the countryside generally congregated in separate villages where their co-ethnics predominated. [...] The rural German population lived largely in isolation from the neighbouring Slavic population and did not undergo rapid assimilation. The German colonies were generally distinguishable from surrounding villages by higher economic status and educational level as well as by greater advancement toward modernization" (Eberhardt 2003: 97).

The current situation of the Germans in Poland in general

In the 2002 census, German nationality was declared by 152,897 Polish citizens, or 0.4% of the Polish population (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2008). Thus, it was by far the largest ethnic minority in Poland. When asked for the language used at home, 204,573

declared they used German, or 0.5% of the Polish population. In the 2011 census, the number of people declaring German nationality decreased slightly to 147,814, despite the fact that dual national-ethnic affiliation could be declared in the census (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2015). The census of 2021 documented 144,236 Germans by nationality – still 0.4% of the Polish population (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji 2022). Most of the Germans, or more than 90%, are concentrated in Silesia, while the Carpathian section of Poland under investigation here is almost void of Germans.

The majority of Germans are Roman Catholic. Numerous associations exist for the German minority, which mainly deal with socio-cultural issues. The German minority also has its list in parliamentary elections, and usually has one seat in the Sejm, the lower house of parliament. (As a national minority, the Germans are exempt from the requirement to obtain 5% of countrywide votes required for political parties.) The German minority publishes its magazines (monthlies and weeklies) and has its own radio and TV broadcasts. German is taught in many schools of the regions where Germans are numerous, as an additional minority language; some of them have introduced bilingual education (Zych 2024). Additionally, place names in German, exposed on town signs, were the first names of this type introduced in Poland and amount to 359 (Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names Outside the Republic of Poland 2022).

Traces of German settlement

Since German settlement in the Polish section of the Carpathians and their forelands was never significant, German cultural traces do not exceed the general German impact on Polish material and immaterial culture, such as independent, self-governing towns and cities or rural juridical and economic practices, such as the three-field system or hoof classification (Krallert 1958).

Ukraine

Historical background

Historical and current German settlement in the Carpathians and their forelands on the territory of present-day Ukraine affected and affects, in general and through German settlement history, two very different regions: Transcarpathia [Zakarpats'ka oblast]³ that had, for centuries, been part of the Hungarian Kingdom; and (Ukrainian) Bukovina, which was, from the Middle Ages, and under Ottoman suzerainty, integrated into the Principality of Moldova and, from 1775 to 1918, was an Austrian land.

In the 18th century, German colonists moved as peasants, winegrowers, and artisans into the uninhabited or destroyed Hungarian areas of present-day Transcarpathia. After the Hungarian uprising and war of independence (1703–1711), led by Prince F. Rákóczi II, some of his vast estates were granted to L.F. Schönborn (archbishop of Mainz, Germany), who encouraged the massive immigration of Germans from the vicinity of Bamberg and Würzburg. As a result of this colonization several German villages appeared in the environs of Mukačeve (German *Munkatsch*) – for example, Verhnyi Koropec', Šenborn (German *Schönborn*), Pavšino, Kučava, Lalovo, Berezinka – between 1730 and 1750. In the 1770s and 1780s, the Imperial Treasury in Vienna initiated the resettlement of lumbermen from the Upper-Austrian Salzkammergut (Gmunden, Bad Ischl) to the valley of the Teresva river (German *Theresental*); they founded the settlements of Ust'-Čorna (German *Königsfeld*) and Nimec'ka Mokra (German *Deutsch Mokra*). At that time, German workers were settled in Kobylec'ka Polyana (iron works), Solotvino, and Okrugla (salt mines). At the time of the first census in Hungary

³The section on Transcarpathia is essentially based on Karoly Kocsis's chapter "Ethnic Structure" in (eds) Jordan & Klemenčić 2004.

(1784–87), there were 490 settlements, as opposed to 317 three hundred years before in present-day Transcarpathia. Out of these, five had German ethnic majorities (eds Jordan & Klemenčič 2004; Kocsis 2001).

During the 19th century, in the period before 1867, German forestry and industrial workers from Upper Hungary, Bohemia, and Austria migrated to the vast estate of Mukačeve-Činadiyovo of Count Schönborn. As a result, several German ethnic islands were formed in the woodland around Mukačeve and Svalyava. In the later 19th century, however, they underwent rapid Magyarization.

Following the first Vienna Award of 2 November 1938, Czechoslovakia ceded 1,636 km² of the territory of Transcarpathia to Hungary with 192,116 inhabitants, out of whom 2% were German native speakers (Magyar Királyi Központi Statisztikai Hivatal 1939; Rónai 1939). The remaining area of present-day Transcarpathia had 552,124 inhabitants, with a share of 1.5% Germans (Thirring 1939).

When, in 1775, Bukovina became part of the Austrian Empire, the Imperial Court in Vienna started to conduct a policy of populating the devastated and depopulated region with the aim of developing it economically and strengthening its ties with Vienna. This state-organized colonization lasted until 1826 (Schar 2010). In the first phase, besides migrants from Moldova, an overspill of Germans, mainly from south-west Germany who could not be settled in Galicia, moved further to Bukovina and settled there. The 1790–1826 phase is characterized by the settling of German miners and lumbermen from western German lands, Bohemia, and the Zips in the mountainous part of Bukovina.

The foundation of the University of Chernivtsi in 1875 as a German-speaking university, and existing as such until 1920, was an important step towards spreading German as the language of the educated and the regional trade language, in addition to the status of German as the official language (since 1860, alongside Romanian and Ukrainian). German-speaking Jews and Germans, who cooperated closely at that time, constituted the political, cultural, and economic elite. In 1910, by the criterion of language, towns and cities had a larger share of Germans, while, in the countryside, Romanians and Ukrainians prevailed by far. In the entire Bukovina, 21.2% of the 796,106 inhabitants (Schar 2010), or 168,774, mentioned German as their primary language; more than half of them, however, were Jews, and the share of ethnic Germans in the overall population was not more than 9.3%, or 74,038 inhabitants (Livezeanu 1995). Chernivtsi, the capital of Bukovina, that had, in 1786, been merged administratively with Galicia, but achieved the status of an Austrian crownland in 1860/61 – in 1910, had a total population of 103,563, of which almost 50% were German speakers (Schar 2010).

According to the Romanian census of 1930, the share of Germans in the overall population of Bukovina was still remarkable (75,533, or 8.9%, according to Livezeanu 1995), but Romanian rule, and the introduction of Romanian as the only official language and language of tuition, meant a blow to Germans (and Jews) as the former educational and economic elites (Hausleitner 2020). As a result of the Hitler–Stalin Pact of 1939, the Soviet Union occupied the region militarily. The Germans, plus family members of other ethnicities – in total around 96,000 people – almost completely joined the resettlement campaign “Home to the Reich” at the end of 1940.

The current situation of Germans in Transcarpathia and Bukovina

On the territory of modern Transcarpathia, compared to 1941, the number of German native speakers has reduced to one quarter (1999: ca. 3,500 persons) owing to losses during the war, deportations, and out-migration. Following the end of World

War II, Germans were ethnically cleansed from Transcarpathia, like from many other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Some of them fled the Red Army, some were killed in camps, such as the one at Svalyava, and some were forcibly taken to Siberia [Sibir], including 700 people from the Teresva valley alone. By the late 1940s, overt violence against Germans ended, but they were discriminated against in the period that followed, too. A few thousand survived repression following the end of the war, including those who returned after being released from Siberia.

According to census figures, the remaining German community numbered 3,504 persons in 1959; 4,230 in 1970; 3,746 in 1979; and 3,478 in 1989. Those who left Transcarpathia formed the association called *Karpatendeutsche Landsmannschaft*, with branches in Germany, Austria, and the United States. Descendants of those resettled from Germany and Austria to Transcarpathia in the 18–19th centuries, namely a community of a couple of hundred people, live in Mukačeve (mainly in the Palanok and Podhorod quarters), and in the surrounding villages, probably forming an ethnic majority in Šenborn, Pavšino, Kučava, and Sofija. A sizeable German population can also be found in the Nimec'ka Mokra and Ust'-Čorna in Tjačiv areas. According to the Ukrainian Census of 2021, Transcarpathia has 1,250,129 inhabitants, of whom about 3,500 are Germans (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2024).

In the Ukrainian part of Bukovina, namely the Chernivtsi Region [Černivecka oblast], of the 896,566 inhabitants counted by the 2021 population census, 0.02%, or 179, were German (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2024). In almost the absence of declared Germans, however, there are still some German cultural associations and activities that exist, such as the “Deutsches Volkshaus in Czernowitz” or the Austrian–German Cultural Association Chernivtsi [Österreichisch- Deutscher Kulturverein Czernowitz].

Traces of German settlement

Due to the fact that Chernivtsi emerged in the Austrian period to become the political, cultural, and economic centre of Bukovina – succeeding in this role the older capital Suceava in the Romanian part – its historical centre very much resembles the character of an Austrian city, with the Herrengasse (today named after Olha Kobyljans'ka) as its main business street, a theatre, a university, and residential quarters from the 19th century and up to World War I. Besides this impact on the cultural landscape, which is certainly by far the strongest Austrian–German influence, other traces remain sporadic and faint. One of them is the Schönborn Palace near Mukačeve in Transcarpathia (Fig. 6). In the linguistic landscape, German is almost absent.

Romania

Historical background

The Germans in Romania are of different origin, and settled in present-day Romania in different periods. They were, and still are, therefore, also different communities with individual identities; a German identity exists, if at all, just as a thin veil. What is common to them is that they speak variants of German (see, among others, Buza 1999).

The first to come were the Teutonic Knights, called by the Hungarian King as border guards against invasions from the East, who settled, in the 12th century, in the south-eastern corner of the Transylvanian Basin [Podișul Transilvaniei] in what later became the Burzenland [Țara Bârsei]; in 1225, they departed from there to the Baltic region after a conflict with the Hungarian King.

From the 12th century onwards, the Transylvanian Saxons (German *Siebenbürger Sachsen*) arrived. They were called



Figure 6. The former Schönborn Palace near Mukačevo in Transcarpathia, now part of the Sanatorium “Karpaty”. Source: photo by Jordan 2003

Saxons because this was the contemporary ethnonym for all kinds of Germans in south-eastern Europe, although they did not descend from Saxony [Sachsen], but mainly from the Mosel-Rhine region in what is today Rheinland-Pfalz and Luxembourg, and they spoke a Mosel-Franconian dialect (see Buza 1999; Nägler 1981). They settled wider parts of the Transylvanian Basin, with concentrations in the Burzenland, the Nösnerland [Țara Năsăudului], and, most significantly, the Royal Lands (German *Sachsenboden* or *Königsboden*), where they were later (1224) granted autonomy and exclusive settlement (Jordan 1998; Kocsis 1990, 1992; Limonta 2008; Săgeată, Buza & Crăcea 2017).⁴ The Transylvanian Saxons were traders, craftsmen, and free farmers, and founded towns and cities and became, in the Principality of Transylvania (from 1437 up to 1876), one of the three pillars of its autonomy (besides the Hungarian nobility and the Szeklers). During the Protestant Reformation, they almost all converted to Lutheranism, guided by their own reformer Johannes Honterus from Brașov/Brăso/Kronstadt, and this confession remained a major marker of their identity, and included founding confessional schools with tuition in German that persisted throughout the Romanian nationalist interwar period and even the Communist era.

In the 18th century, in the era of the Roman Catholic Counterreformation, they were joined by the so-called Landlers (German *Ländler*) from three regions of present-day Austria (the Landl in Upper Austria [Oberösterreich], the Ausseerland in Styria [Steiermark], and central Carinthia [Kärnten]). They had resisted re-catholicization and were, for this reason, exiled to the “Protestant fortress” of Transylvania, where they remained taxpayers of the Austrian Empire, “but could do no more harm”. Although much smaller in numbers, speaking (almost) the same language and residing side by side with the Saxons, they did not merge with them and maintained their identity and variants of German. Pronounced Roman Catholic Austrian rule after the Ottoman retreat from Transylvania neither pleased the Lutheran Saxons nor the Lutheran Landlers (see eds Bottesch, Grieshofer & Schabus 2002; Buza 1999; Girtler 1992; Schabus 1996).

The Ottoman defeat by the Austrian armies in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was followed by systematic recolonization of the devastated and depopulated areas in the Pannonian Basin and its south-eastern margins under the auspices of the imperial authorities in Vienna. As well as other ethnic groups, German colonizers settled the Banat plain near the Carpathians, the Banat Mountains [Munții Banatului], the Crișana, and the Szatmar [Satu Mare] region, in, for example, Carei/Nagykároly/

Großkarol. The German colonizers in the Banat lowlands, called *Danube Swabians* (German *Donauschwaben*),⁵ came from various parts of the German sphere, but mainly from Swabian lands, or present-day Baden-Württemberg. The Banat Mountains received miners mainly from Bohemia [Čechy], Moravia [Morava], and Styria [Steiermark], the latter commemorated by the still official place name *Steierdorf-Anina*. They were, in general, Roman Catholics. As Roman Catholics were better supported than Lutherans by the Viennese Court, they, like the Saxons in Transylvania, and alongside the Hungarians, achieved the status of the politically and economically dominant group in their region. In the 19th century, the influx of Germans continued (see Buza 1999; Wolf 2004).

In the same period, under Austrian rule, German immigration also affected, to a smaller extent, the Maramureș region in the north of present-day Romania and Bukovina [Bucovina, Bukovyna]; in 1775, it was acquired by the Austrian Empire; today, it is divided between Romania and Ukraine (see also subchapter 2.4). These Germans were partly resettlers from the Zips, which suffered from economic decline at that time.

In 1918, the extension of Romania to the areas inside the Carpathian arc (the “Great Union”) was already a first blow to the Germans as a politically and economically dominant group. Evacuation, flight or their accompanying the withdrawal of German troops at the end of World War II essentially reduced their numbers, and Communism after World War II affected them by depriving them of their properties. Thus, German emigration, mainly to Germany, started as soon as it became possible under Communist rule (1978) but culminated around and after the fall of Communism and up to 1993 in a kind of exodus (see Buza 1999; Jordan 1998; Jordan & Kahl 2006; Kocsis 1990; Livezeanu 1995).

The current situation of Germans in Romania in general

The number of Germans on the present-day territory of Romania decreased from 633,488 (4.4% of the total population) in 1930 to 384,708 (2.2%) in 1956; the figure was 382,595 (2.0%) in 1966, 359,109 (1.7%) in 1977, 119,462 (0.5%) in 1992, 59,764 (0.3%) in 2002, 36,042 (0.2%) in 2011, and 22,907 (0.1%) in 2021 (Institutul Național de Statistică 2024; see also Buza 1999; Săgeată, Buza & Crăcea 2017). Almost half of those remaining live in the Banat (Timiș, Caraș-Severin, and Arad counties), a third in southern Transylvania (Sibiu, Brașov, and Mureș counties), a few in the Satu Mare County, and another few in the Suceava County (Romanian Bukovina), where they amounted to 0.3% of the population in 2021 (see also subchapter 2.4). The majority of them are Roman Catholic (the Swabians), and the minority Lutheran (the Saxons, Landlers, and Zipsers) (Buza 1999; Gabanyi 1994; Gündisch 2019; Kiss & Veress 2018; ed. Köpeczi 1990; Săgeată, Buza & Crăcea 2017).

In spite of their small numbers, they retain remarkable educational, cultural, and political structures; for example, they have 10 high schools (lycees) with German tuition, a German-speaking branch at the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár/Klausenburg, German theatres, and cultural associations. Some of the latter also act as political parties like in Sibiu/Nagyszében/Hermannstadt, where the German Democratic Forum is also voted in by many non-Germans and, thus, has already provided a mayor for several terms, and the former German mayor, Klaus Johannis, has been elected as President of Romania. The relatively strong societal position of the few Germans is due to being regarded as “neutral” in the rather delicate relationship between Romanians and the (still sizeable) Hungarian community in Romania inside the Carpathian arc, as well as being bridgeheads for investment, tourism, and other interests of German-speaking countries in Romania. The latter is

⁴These privileges were, in 1486, extended to all Saxon settlements (Jordan 1998: 185).

⁵These privileges were, in 1486, extended to all Saxon settlements (Jordan 1998, p. 185).

based on the command of German, among other ethnic groups also, in places with a still existing or former German presence. It is also based on the assumption (and perhaps experience) that “German labour ethics” have also affected non-German groups in these places (Szabó 2008).

Traces of German settlement by landscapes/regions *Transylvania [Ardeal, Transilvania]*

In this intra-Carpathian basin, surrounded by the Carpathian arc to the north, east and south, and the Apuseni Mountains [Munții Apuseni] to the west, which, as a principality, has enjoyed remarkable autonomy throughout longer phases of history, not least under Ottoman suzerainty and up to 1876, the Germans (Saxons and Landlerers), as a major societal force, although always with a numerical minority, have had a significant impact on the cultural landscape up to the present day.

In the built cultural landscape, the historical centres of towns and cities, to a large extent founded and inhabited by Germans, stand out, as do the fortified churches of rural villages for which Transylvania is famous, and which represent major tourism attractions, and the typical Saxon and Landlerers villages.

Characteristic examples of Saxon towns and cities are Brașov/Brassó/Kronstadt, with its triangular main square (Fig.7), and Sibiu/Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt or Sighișoara/Szegesvár/Schässburg, both situated on a hill in an elevated position easy to defend. Fortified churches of villages exist in various forms but are always characterized by the church surrounded by a wall, which contains, on its interior side, flats and stores for the inhabitants of the village, and foodstuff should the village be threatened (Fig. 8, see Fabini & Orban 2004).

Saxon and Landlerers villages are characterized by their Angerdorf configuration, where the central square (German *Anger*) is covered by grass, serves as a pasture, and usually has the shape of a lens or an eye, but may also take other forms, such as that of a rectangle, triangle, circle, or semi-circle. The farmsteads are oriented with their eaves facing the central square (Fig. 9). The Landlerers villages Großsau [Cristian] and Großpold [Apoldu de Jos] still present their traditional appearance, while Neppendorf [Turnișor] has been integrated into the city of Sibiu, although with a culturally very active Landlerers community.

In the linguistic landscape, German traces are also widely visible. This is first evident in official town signs that, since 2001, can be bi- or multilingual (Jordan 2005; Bartos-Elekes 2024). Representing the minority name on a town sign is obligatory – from a minority share of 20% in the total population upwards – but communal councils may decide to go below this threshold. This has been done much more frequently with German than with Hungarian names for the reasons mentioned previously. Thus, inhabited places with a German population of much less than 20%, such as Sibiu/Nagyszeben/Hermannstadt with around 1%, also present the German name on their town sign.

It is also a frequent practice to keep a reminder of the former German street name on street nameplates (Fig. 10). These names are frequently duplicated in names of restaurants and cafés. Besides official and touristic place naming, many historical sites, such as churches, cemeteries, older public buildings, or burgher houses bear old German inscriptions. They have not been erased or hidden away like in some other parts of East-Central Europe.

Banat and the eastern fringe of the Pannonian Basin

The historic centres of cities of the Romanian Banat and the eastern fringe of the Pannonian Basin are shaped by Hungarian rather than German culture – many, however, by both. One of these is the old main square of Timișoara/Temesvár/Temesvar, dominated by the Roman Catholic cathedral of the local



Figure 7. The former town hall on the triangular main square in Brașov's historical centre

Source: photo by Jordan 2016



Figure 8. The wall of the fortified church of Prejmer (German Tartlau), with flats and stores

Source: photo by Jordan 2016

Hungarian and German communities (Fig. 11). (The city also has a new main square, established after the Great Union of 1918, with markers of Romanian national identity, namely Romanitas and Orthodoxy.)

The villages in the plain, with their chessboard-like ground plan, however, are witnesses of the planned recolonization of land devastated during the Ottoman wars and organized by the Imperial Court in Vienna. Abandoned by their German population only quite recently, they are also full of remnants of German presence such as monuments and inscriptions, which is also due to the fact that many houses are still owned by their former German inhabitants or their descendants, and fairly well kept. Some of these villages (Gottlob, Liebling, Tirol in the Banat plain, and Eibenthal in the Banat Mountains) even bear their German name as the only official name on the town sign (Fig. 12).

Herkulesbad [Băile Herculane], in the narrow valley of the southernmost extension of the Romanian Carpathians near the Iron Gate, was one of the most prominent spas in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and presents a pre-Communist, traditional part, that retains the typical ambience of



Figure 9. Viscri (German Deutsch-Weißkirch), a typical Saxon “Angerdorf” in south-eastern Transylvania, today mainly inhabited by Roma
Source: photo by Jordan 2014



Figure 11. The Roman Catholic cathedral of the Hungarians and Germans at the old main square of Timișoara
Source: photo by Jordan 2016



Figure 10. Street sign in Sighișoara (German Schässburg), a reminder of the old German street name Umweg
Source: photo by Jordan 2016



Figure 12. The Swabian village Gottlob in the Banat plain has its German name on the official town sign
Source: photo Jordan 2007

spas of that time; however, it is deplorably maintained (Fig. 13).

Maramureș and Bukovina

German settlement in the mountainous parts of these regions was confined to some remote places and has, thus, left just island-like traces in the current cultural landscape. In the Romanian Bukovina (for the Ukrainian part, see subchapter 2.4), they are most obvious in Vatra Dornei (German *Dorna Watra*), that first started to develop as a health resort in the late 19th century under Austrian rule, and shows all the markers of a spa of that time, including a proud hall for taking waters and a casino (Fig. 13). In the upper valley of the river Bistrița, between Vatra Dornei and the Prislop mountain pass, the iron mine Iacoberni (German *Jakoberni*) and the village Cârlibaba (German *Kirlibaba*), a settlement of Lutheran Germans from the Zips in the later 18th and 19th centuries, retain remarkable traces. Cârlibaba is still inhabited by some Germans, and runs an elementary school that also offers tuition in German. At the Maramureș side of the same mountain pass, Borșa (German *Borscha*), Vișeu de Sus (German *Oberwischau*), and Vișeu de Jos (German *Untewischau*), like



Figure 13. Abandoned 19th century spa facilities in Băile Herculane
Source: photo by Jordan 2011



Figure 14. The former casino in Vatra Dornei; under reconstruction at the time of the photo
Source: photo by Jordan 2008.

Cârlibaba, were settled by migrants from the Zips (Offner 1995) and still host a small German community, although they have a lesser impact on the cultural landscape.

Conclusion

The survey shows that the impact of German settlement on the cultural landscape is most significant, where Germans were up to World War II not only an economically and politically strong, if not dominant, group but also in the numerical majority or they had a least a larger share in the regional population. This is true for the Zips in present-day Slovakia (with a small share in Poland also), and for Transylvania and the Banat in Romania. In addition, the cityscape of Chernivtsi, in the present-day Ukrainian Bukovina, was essentially shaped under Austrian rule by the Austrian administration and the German and German-

speaking Jewish population. In regions with a less significant historical German presence, such as in modern Transcarpathia or Romanian Bukovina, the imprint of Germans remains in scattered areas.

In the built cultural landscape, German traces can mainly be found in the historical centres of cities and towns, due to the fact that Germans were usually traders and craftsmen who founded and inhabited urban settlements. Where they were also farmers, like in Transylvania and the Banat, village structures and religious monuments, like the fortified churches in Transylvania, are also a reminder of the historical German presence.

In the linguistic landscape of the Carpathians and their forelands, German place names and inscriptions are, up to the present day, most visible in the former German settlement areas of Romania with its (since 2001) liberal toponymic legislation and practice, which benefit German even more than other minority languages.

The impact of regional identities shaped by historical German presence and political and economic domination is most obvious in the Slovakian Zips.

Thus, although Germans in the ethnic and linguistic sense are in the entire area under investigation today numerically only tiny remains of the past, they have influenced more than a small share of the current cultural landscape. Maintaining German traces is due not only to German emigrant organizations and the lasting ties of German emigrants and their descendants with their former homes but also to efforts of the countries and regions of the Carpathians to preserve relations in the economic (tourism, investment), cultural, and political spheres with German-speaking countries.

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