



Project Homepage



23-25/06 Conference

Return Migration as an Interdisciplinary Research Area Using the Example of the South Tyrolean "Return Option"

A two-year joint research project of the Department of Contemporary History of the University of Innsbruck and the Faculty of Education of the Free University of Bolzano, funded by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano – South Tyrol

THE PROJECT

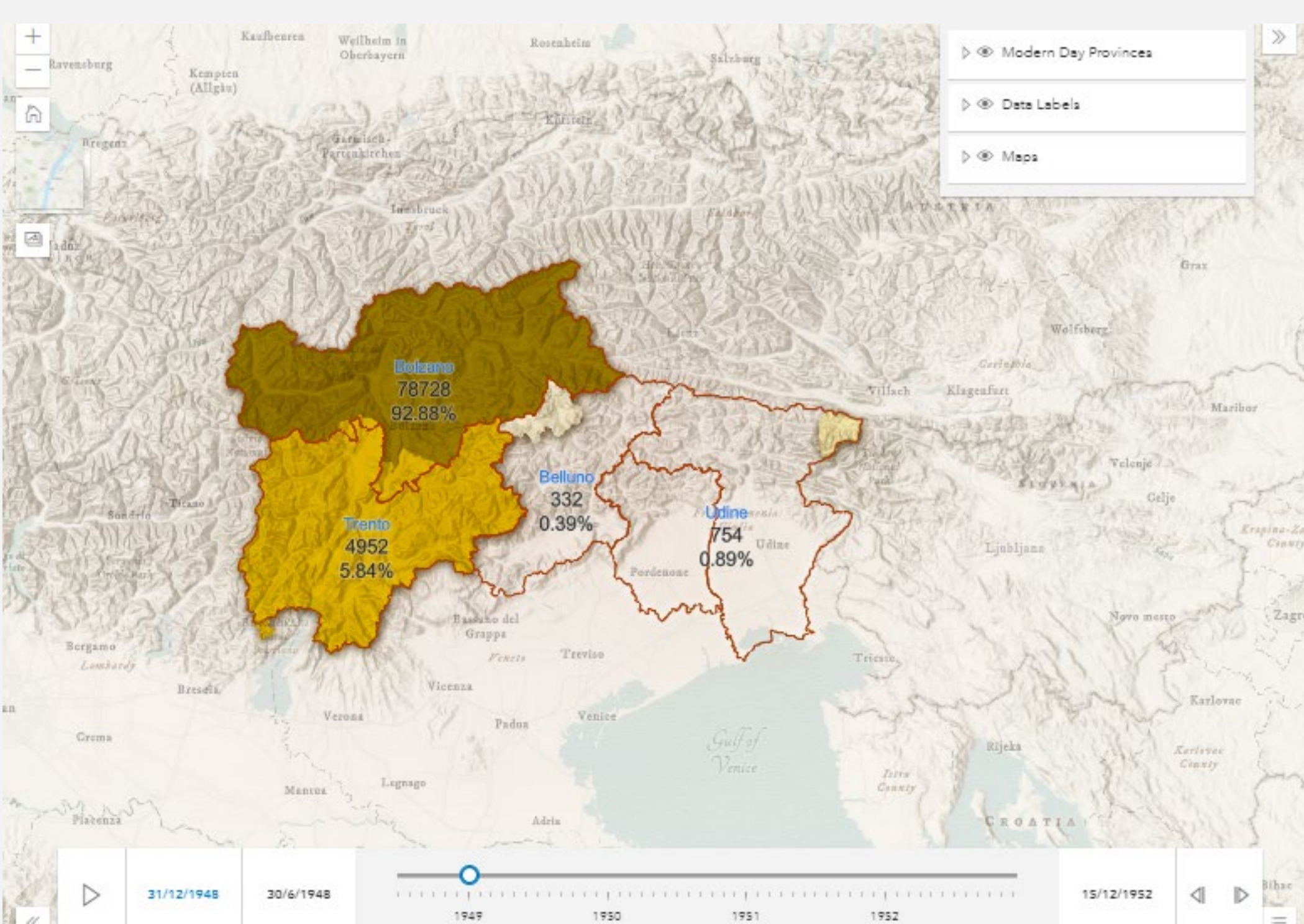
While the South Tyrolean "Option" has been widely researched this does not apply to the "Return Option". For this reason, the central research question of the project will address the reassessment of the latter history. To achieve this, our team aims firstly to get an overview of the complex archival situation concerning "Return Option" and to find out how archived files are interconnected.

THE RETURN OPTION

In 1939 Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini signed the so called "option agreement". German-speaking inhabitants of the South Tyrol were forced to 'opt' for an emigration to the German Reich and thus become German citizens or they could opt to stay in Italy and consequently accept the Italian language and culture. Until 1943, around 75.000 people left their homeland to find an uncertain future in the German Reich. Only after 1948 could those who had moved abroad apply for the reacquisition or retention of Italian citizenship and legally return to their native country. It is assumed that about one third of those who had emigrated finally returned to South Tyrol.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Public Database of the digitized content
- Guide to the studied archival material
- Paper contributions based on the research results
- Conference on return migrations
- Web site and visualizations



An interactive map of the Return Option requests from Italy

THE TEAM

Innsbruck

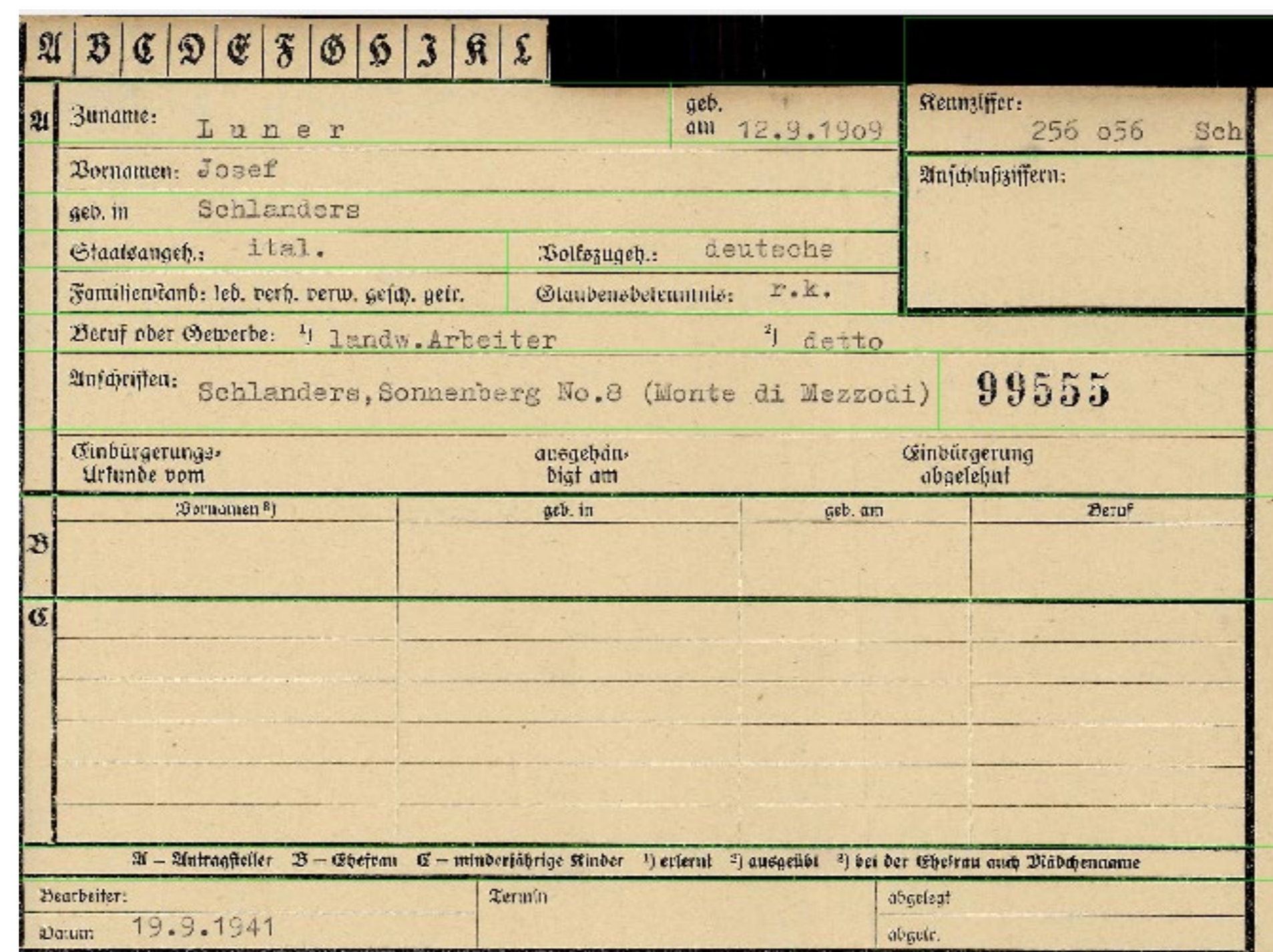
- Prof. Eva Pfanzelter
- Sarah Oberbichler, Ph.D.
- Verena Hechenblaikner, BA

Bolzano

- Prof. Andrea Di Michele
- Valerio Larcher, Ph.D.

THE SOURCES

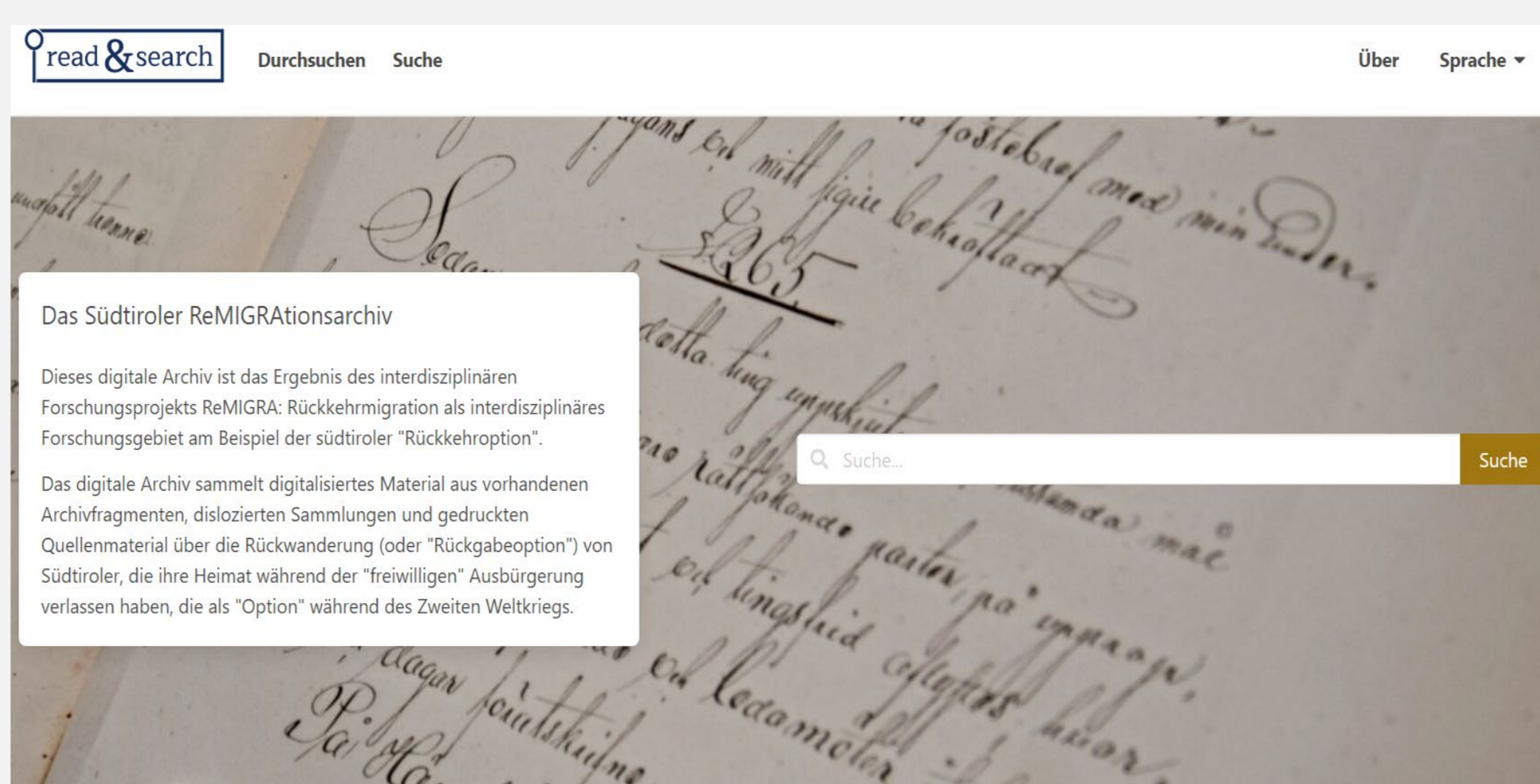
Our team has worked in various archives throughout Italy and Austria in order to be able to locate and digitalize approximately 285.000 documents about the return-migration of the South Tyrolean people.



An Option Index Card

DISSEMINATION

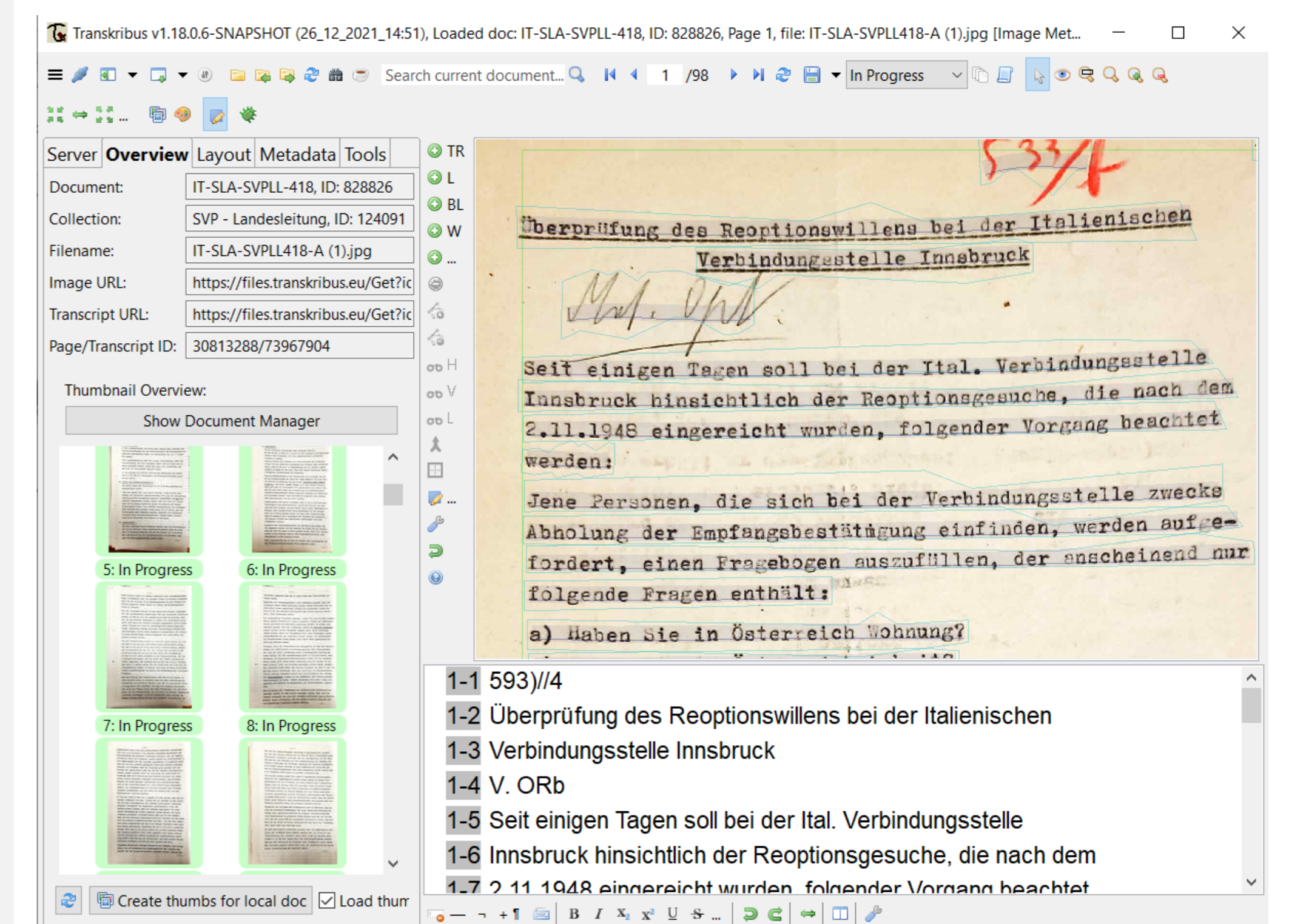
The team aims also to provide both other scholars and the public with our results via more accessible and interactive tools such as digital archives and interactive maps. We are also planning to implement a workflow which will provide a network between documents, as well as between documents and identified people via searchable links.



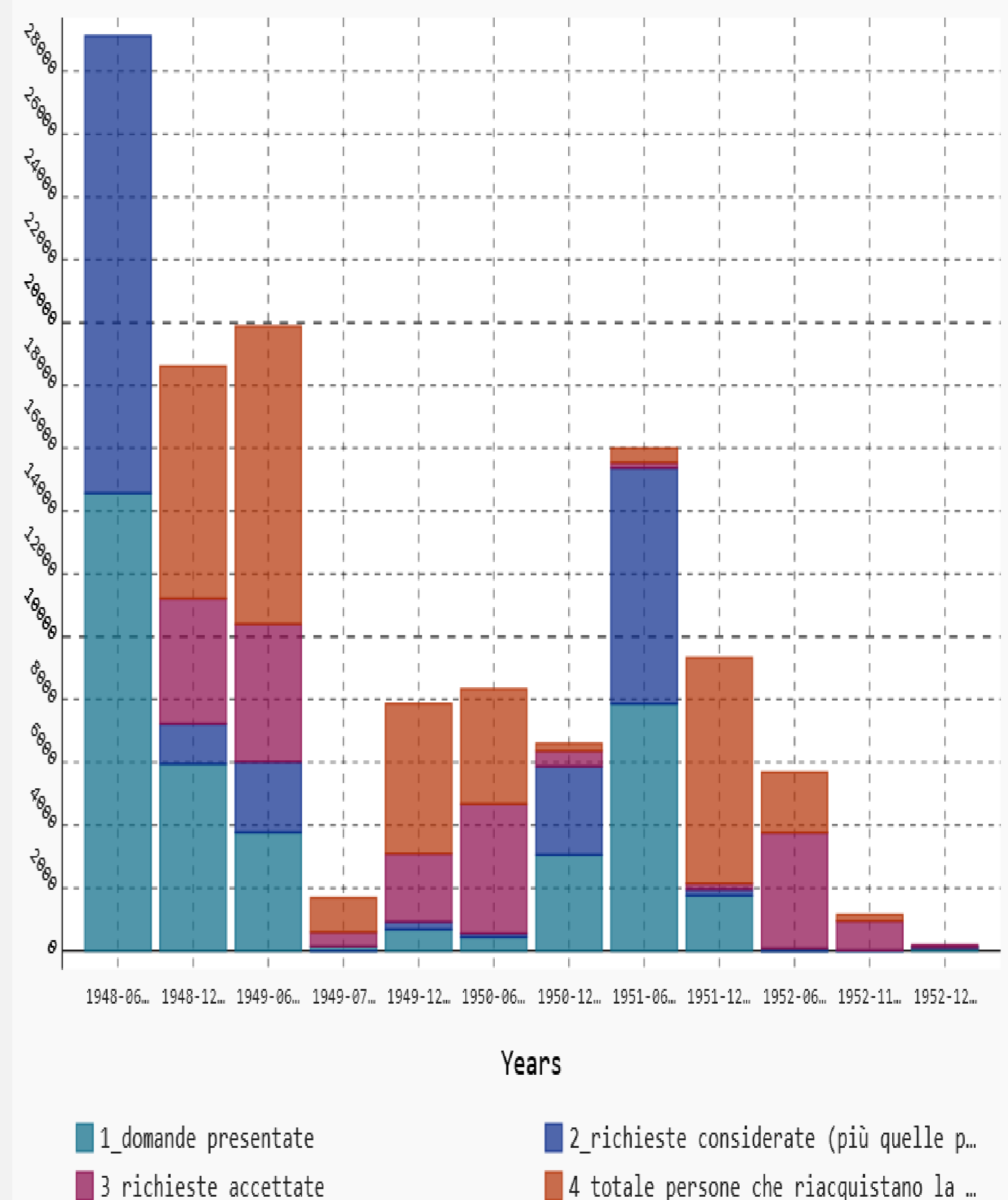
The, not yet public, open access archive of the Return Options documents. English and Italian versions are going to be implemented

DIGITAL APPROACH

An approach with digital methods and technologies is currently used to analyze the digitalized archival material. The team works primarily with Transkribus, a comprehensive platform for digitization, AI-powered text recognition, transcription, and searching of historical documents. Due to the combination of traditional and digital take, this project has the benefit of opening up the research area for further studies in the field.



Naturalizzati emigrati (art.11)



An interactive graph showing the stage of re-option requests of South Tyroleans that emigrated to the German Reich (1939 to 1943)