



Workshop Briefing Report 4

Language revitalisation and the transformation of governance

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Executive summary

- This paper reports on the deliberations of the fourth Revitalise project workshop held in Cardiff on 14-15 February 2019. The workshop was **entitled 'Language Revitalisation and the Transformation of Governance'** and its aim was to provide an opportunity to critically assess some of the main trends in how contemporary efforts to revitalise the prospects of minority languages are governed. Key conclusions arising from the workshop are listed below.
- **The increasing role of governments in language revitalisation (pp. 4-6).** Over recent decades, governments – usually sub-state governments – have emerged as increasingly influential actors in many European language revitalisation efforts. This has meant that in several European locations language revitalisation has moved away from being an activity that is based primarily on the language community itself working through different civil society organisations.
- **The relationship between government and civil society in language revitalisation (pp. 6-8).** Tensions may arise between governments and civil society organisations when the former emerge as increasingly influential actors in language revitalisation efforts. Consequently, there is a need to reflect critically on which types of activities associated with language revitalisation that governmental institutions are in the best position to administer, and the ones where activity by civil society is more appropriate and effective.
- **The role of legislation and the courts in language revitalisation (pp. 8-9).** The effects of legislation on language vitality go beyond simply offering symbolic affirmation. Legislation can contribute to status planning, by creating opportunities to use the language in a variety of domains; it can also facilitate acquisition planning efforts by guaranteeing access to minority language education. The courts system can also contribute to language revitalisation efforts in important ways, but the significance of the courts will often depend on the nature of a state's legal and political cultures.
- **Language commissioners as new actors in language revitalisation efforts (p. 10).** Language commissioners have the potential to act as important drivers of a broader language revitalisation effort, for example by providing independent oversight of language policy implementation. Yet the effectiveness of these posts will depend a great deal on the nature of their founding legislation. Once established, managing the political relationship with government can also be extremely challenging for the language commissioner.
- **Language revitalisation as a multi-level activity (pp. 10-12).** Sub-state level actors have overseen most of the recent activity across Western Europe in support of regional or minority languages. Yet, state-level structures and continental or global level structures are also potentially significant. As a result, greater attention needs to be given to the move towards multi-level patterns of governance when seeking to understand the political dynamics that underpin the development of policy interventions relating to regional or minority languages.
- **The significance of the supra-state level for language revitalisation efforts (pp. 12-13).** There is evidence that indicates that language revitalisation activity being undertaken at the European level can impact in important ways on work being undertaken by actors at lower levels. This can involve practical benefits resulting from the sharing of best practice through different types of minority language networks. Potential benefits can also be conceptual in nature as members of a minority language community may be offered an opportunity to rise above long-established discursive norms associated with their particular state context, and to be exposed to new ideas, terms or concepts that can be used to articulate their position and aims in a novel manner