

MULTILINGUALISM POLICIES - A WAY TO THE PROFESSIONAL AND ECONOMIC SUCCESS OF COUNTRIES IN EUROPE

POLITICILE MULTILINGVISMULUI – O CALE CĂTRE SUCCESUL PROFESIONAL ȘI ECONOMIC AL ȚĂRILOR DIN EUROPA

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Abstract. *The current paper aims to present the EU policies promoting multilingualism and the concrete ways in which these are made operational in a number of EU projects. The projects presented as case studies are all being run in Iasi, having the EuroEd Foundation as a coordinator from the Romanian side and demonstrating the partnership abilities of important partners from the academic, educational and economic fields in Iasi.*

Key words: lifelong learning, intercultural communication skills, non-formal education, online learning

Rezumat. *Lucrarea de față prezintă politicile europene care promovează multilingvismul precum și modalitățile prin care acesta poate să se manifeste în cadrul unui număr de proiecte europene. Proiectele prezentate drept studii de caz se derulează toate în Iași, sub coordonarea Fundației EuroEd, responsabil pe partea română; ele demonstrează capacitatea de parteneriat a unui număr de instituții educaționale, universitare sau cu profil economic din Iași.*

Cuvinte cheie: învățare pe tot parcursul vieții, abilități de comunicare interculturală, educație non-formală, învățare online

INTRODUCTION

The European Commission has worked since 2002 with Member States towards the Barcelona objective of enabling citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue, in particular, by developing an indicator of language competence (1), by setting out strategic action and recommendations, and by including skills in foreign languages among the key competences for lifelong learning (2).

Building on the progress of earlier years, the latest communication on Multilingualism aims to achieve a qualitative shift, by presenting a policy that is widely shared and comprehensive, going beyond education to address languages in the wider context set by the EU Agenda for social cohesion and prosperity, the two central objectives of the Lisbon strategy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Today's European societies are facing rapid change due to globalisation, technological advances and ageing populations. The greater mobility of Europeans - currently 10 million Europeans work in other Member States - is an important sign of this change. Increasingly people interact with their counterparts from other countries while growing numbers live and work outside their home country. This process is further reinforced by the recent enlargements of the EU. The EU now has 500 million citizens, 27 Member States, 3 alphabets and 23 EU official languages, some of them with a worldwide coverage. Some 60 other languages are also part of the EU heritage and are spoken in specific regions or by specific groups. In addition, immigrants have brought a wide range of languages with them: it is estimated that at least 175 nationalities are now present within the EU's borders (3). Due to these and other factors, the life of Europeans has become more international and more multilingual.

Without adequate policies this increased linguistic diversity presents challenges. It can widen the communication gap between people of different cultures and increase social divisions. The current challenge is to minimise the obstacles that EU citizens and companies encounter and to show that languages can work as an asset for the benefit of the European society as a whole.

The idea of facilitating the communication and integration of ethnic minorities within a wider host community was at the basis of the Lingua project ***Learning by Moving***: Romanians travelling to Italy by coach for a job were given flyers with basic Italian vocabulary and useful phrases for a job interview and listening drill. In the same project in Hamburg, the local tube trains displayed basic Turkish phrases and vocabulary as the city has a big Turkish minority working there.

In projects such as ***Facelt! (Grundtvig)*** the international partnership educated international trainers to address families at risk either because they are a minority in a host country or, specifically in Romania, because many children are left behind with relatives or neighbours while their parents work abroad. These trainers are equipped with the skills, attitudes, and teaching materials and procedures adequate for communicating to these families' ways to better cope to become integrated citizens, active in the reception country.

The main objective is therefore **to raise awareness of the value and opportunities of the EU's linguistic diversity and encourage the removal of barriers to intercultural dialogue**. The projects ***Vivace (Lingua)***, ***Facelt! (Grundtvig)*** and ***NoChild Left Behind (Comenius)*** have found innovative ways to open ways to disadvantaged categories to non-formal education opportunities which include elements of foreign language training associated to practice of other skills.

A key instrument in this respect is the Barcelona objective - **communication in mother tongue plus two languages**. More effort is needed towards achieving this objective for all citizens. To start doing this at an early age has more chances of success than beginning later in life. Projects that sensitise young children about the diversity of languages in Europe, about comprehension abilities in related languages with one's mother tongue are very useful.

Thus, the Lingua projects ***Chain stories, Eat-Eating Abroad Together and Dinocrocs Travelling to the Balkans*** show how to teach young learners about the EU linguistic and cultural diversity and about how interesting it is to communicate with representatives of other languages and cultures. Non-formal ways are being used to do so: in the first project young children whose mother tongues are Romanian, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan and Italian interact online, creating together a common story with chapters written in turn in their mother tongues. Inferencing and prediction are being encouraged to guess the meaning and the developments

proposed by each team. A multilingual dictionary with terms is gradually created while the children develop creative writing skills as well.

In **EAT** language and communication skills and new cultural information are all being passed over to 5-10 year olds from Bulgaria, Romania, UK, Holland and Germany through a variety of non-formal and informal activities all connected to the culture of healthy eating. The project benefits from a wide partnership aiming at educating young children and their families about healthy eating while teaching communication in a foreign language on a life scene. **Dinocrocs Travelling to the Balkans** creates a pool of well trained tutors and teachers able to use recent psycholinguistic findings about how a foreign language may be taught and learned efficiently using mime, drama, role play, videos and songs at a very early age.

In the project **Vivace** adults in difficult circumstances (criminals in prisons, adults with Down syndrome, women in shelters against abuse, school dropouts) benefitted from exposure to foreign languages in nonconventional settings and through informal practices. New learning solutions are called for to reach these specific groups. More work is necessary to facilitate language learning for adults and young people in vocational education and training (VET). Projects such as **Office InterActors** and **European Languages for Secretaries (Leonardo Transfer of Innovation)** and **LaProf (Key2-Languages)** deal with this issue.

These projects are dedicated to specific professional categories: assistant executives in the first two, and professionals in the field of agricultural sciences and computing sciences in the third project. Language online courses with innovative touches are being developed to meet the professional communication expectations in a foreign language.

A concerted effort is required to *ensure* that, within existing resources, multilingualism is 'mainstreamed' across a series of EU policy areas, including lifelong learning, employment, social inclusion, competitiveness, culture, youth and civil society, research and the media. The above mentioned projects outline key aspects of this **inclusive approach** aimed at widening the scope of multilingualism to social cohesion and prosperity. In this respect the Leonardo projects **ELSTI**, **LaProf**, **InterAct** intertwine goals relevant to SMEs, to professionals from the agricultural fields, to the hospitality industry and health care with a partnership that can contribute to the sustainable development of the respective industries in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Multilingualism for Intercultural Dialogue and Social Cohesion: Valuing all languages

In the current context of increased mobility and migration, mastering the national language(s) is fundamental to integrating successfully and playing an active role in society. Non-native speakers should therefore include the host-country language in their 'one-plus-two' combination. The **Learning by Moving** project and its follow ups are oriented towards this goal. The teaching of Turkish in Hamburg was directly linked to the idea of sensitising the host country to the linguistic context of the Turkish minority in Germany.

There are also untapped linguistic resources in our society: different mother tongues and other languages spoken at home and in local and neighbouring environments should be valued more highly. For instance, children with different mother tongues — whether from the EU or a third country — present schools

with the challenge of teaching the language of instruction as a second language (4), but they can also motivate their classmates to learn different languages and open up to other cultures. The projects *EAT* and *Chain stories* are applications of this desideratum into classroom life. To familiarise young kids to the idea of the richness of languages around them is an asset which will accompany them in adult life and develop skills which could later be expended or re-practised.

With a view to allowing closer links between communities, the Commission's advisory group on multilingualism and intercultural dialogue (5) developed the concept of a 'personal adoptive language', which could usefully benefit from a further reflection (6).

Overcoming language barriers in the local environment

A basic feature of citizenship is that people living in a local community can benefit from the services available and are able to contribute to the life of their neighbourhood. Tourists, foreign workers or students, and immigrants often come to local communities with limited proficiency in the national language. To ease access to services and ensure a smooth integration, some communities make basic necessary information available in different languages. In particular, metropolitan areas and tourist resorts in Europe have gained considerable experience in coping with the needs of foreigners who do not speak the local language. The Commission attaches great importance to this and will support the dissemination of good practices in this area - "a language which should be learned intensively, spoken and written fluently (...) learning that language would go hand in hand with familiarity with the country/countries in which that language is used, along with the literature, culture, society and history linked with that language and its speakers." The Lingua projects *ALL –Autonomous Language Learning* –and *TOOL –Online and Offline Language Learning* address this concrete objective by creating an online platform with 9 LWULT language courses accompanied by face-to-face materials for blended learning contexts. People travelling abroad for leisure or work have the possibility to get acquainted with the host languages of Romania, Holland, Estonia, Lithuania, Malta, Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia and practise everyday communication phrases online, try their usefulness in the immersion situations and ask for clarifications in their tutor-based meetings.

The Commission will make strategic use of relevant EU programmes and initiatives (7) to bring multilingualism closer to the citizen:

run awareness-raising campaigns on the benefits of linguistic diversity and language learning for intercultural dialogue.

An interesting project meant to do this was the Lingua project called *Learning by Moving*, hosted in Romania by the EuroEd Foundation where the Romanians travelling by coach to Italy for work were given free Italian/English input on the way to Italy in the format of flyers with useful vocabulary and listening exercises.

The Member States are invited to: *facilitate access to targeted courses of the host country's language(s) for non native speakers.*

In this respect the projects *TOOL (Tool for Online and Offline Language Learning)* and *ALL (Autonomous Language Learning)* offer a portfolio consisting of 9 less widely used languages in an accessible format for both learners and tutors. Web2.0 applications (social sites, learning and reflective forums, wikis, blogs, learners-centred learning goals) are approaches developed by these courses.

Multilingualism for Prosperity

Languages can be a competitive advantage for EU business. Multilingual companies prove how linguistic diversity and investing in language and intercultural skills can be turned into a real asset for prosperity and a benefit for all. Some European languages are widely spoken around the world and can be a valuable communication tool for business.

The Business Forum for Multilingualism made recommendations to boost competitiveness and improve employability through better management of linguistic diversity. The Forum pointed out that emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia, India and China are increasingly important for EU companies and adequate language skills are needed to compete there. The challenge, therefore, is to root multilingualism in all strategies aimed at developing human capital (8).

Languages and competitiveness

A Commission study on the impact on the EU economy of shortages of foreign language skills in enterprise estimated that 11% of exporting EU SMEs may be losing business because of language barriers. Although English has a leading role as the business language of the world, it is other languages that will provide EU companies with a competitive edge and allow them to conquer new markets. When you want to buy something English is enough but when you want to sell something the orientation in the language of the buyer makes the difference among the sellers. Better language skills are an asset across all activities, not only for sales and marketing. However, in many cases, businesses — SMEs in particular — lack the know-how and the resources to incorporate languages into their business plans. *All* and *TOOL* projects fill in a gap of resources in this direction for 9 languages.

Multicultural workforces need adequate training in the language of their company, but companies need to go further, and find creative ways of using the language resources that exist, but are often hidden, in their multicultural workforces. The project *Office InterActors* meets this need by offering minority languages to the native speakers of the majority language in countries such as Lithuania, Romania and Spain.

Languages and employability

Linguistic and intercultural skills increase the chances of obtaining a better job. Those mastering more languages can choose among a wider range of job offers, including jobs abroad: lack of language skills is reported as the primary barrier to working abroad (9). There is empirical evidence that skill in several languages fosters creativity and innovation: multilingual people are aware that

problems can be tackled in different ways according to different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and can use this ability to find new solutions.

Mobility schemes should be made widely available to EU citizens (10). Studying or working abroad is one of the most effective ways of learning other languages and making contact with other cultures. Erasmus students ranked the improvement of language skills as the foremost benefit of their period abroad. Education and training curricula should make the most of exchanges, partnerships and E-twinning with schools in other countries.

The project *LaProf* is an interesting example of the way in which professional mobility linguistic needs are being met: the project develops online language courses with addressees in the field of agricultural and computing science who travel for professional/academic reasons to Greece and Nordic countries, respectively.

CONCLUSIONS

The current paper has aimed to encourage the active involvement of various partners from all the walks of life to identify ways in which their agendas could be better served by the policies of multilingualism for the sake of increased chances for each and every citizen. Approached in this spirit, linguistic diversity can become a precious asset, increasingly so in today's globalised world.

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