

LANGUAGES IN URBAN COMMUNITIES – INTEGRATION AND DIVERSITY FOR EUROPE: Multilingualism in the educative sphere. ■

Project title, funding body and reference code ■

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Research Group: ■

Grupo de Investigación Complutense INDUCT “*Inclusión, Diseño Universal, Cooperación y Tecnología*” (Ref. 930448). Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Project members

1- Coordinator

- Nick Byrne. London School of Economics (LSE)

2- Spanish team members

- Carmen Alba Pastor. Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Coord.)
- Carmen López Escribano. Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- Jesús Casado. Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- Ainara Zubillaga. Universidad Camilo José Cela
- Montserrat Blanco. Universidad de Castilla- La Mancha
- Enrique Menéndez. Asociación para la Integración Lingüística del Inmigrante en Madrid

3- Participant Institutions

- London School of Economics
- The Languages Company
- Sofia Development Association
- Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”
- Municipality of Agioi Anargyroi – Kamatero, ATHENS
- Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- Universität Hamburg
- Trinity College Dublin
- Università di Roma ‘Foro Italico’
- Cyprus University of Technology
- Utrecht University
- Telemarkforskning-Notodden (Telemark Educational Research)
- Université de Strasbourg - Groupe d’études sur le Plurilinguisme Européen
- University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer

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- Institut des langues officielles et du bilinguisme (ILOB) / Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)
- University of Melbourne

Project overview

The European project Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe (LUCIDE) is a three years project, at this moment at the midway point, aiming to develop policy ideas about how to manage the new and more complex citizen communities and to gather a comprehensive picture of how communication occurs in multilingual/multicultural settings across the EU and beyond. With this information it is expected to be able to support institutions (councils, schools, hospitals) and national economies to make better use of diversity as a value for better communication and mutual understanding. This deeper knowledge will allow a better understanding of the cultural richness of the cities. The project will contribute with the development of practical policy proposals.

The LUCIDE network is composed of university and civic partners from thirteen European cities (London, Osijek, Athens, Sofia, Dublin, Madrid, Hamburg, Utrecht, Rome, Limassol, Strasbourg, Oslo, Varna), along with research teams from Ottawa and Melbourne.

Contributions and Results

The LUCIDE network (*Languages in Urban Communities: Integration and Diversity for Europe*) has as concrete objectives: 1) to analyze the realities of the multilingual city – in education, in the economy, in civil society and in cultural life; 2) to propose policy directions which can support the diverse realities of the multilingual city; 3) to examine the links between cities – the common communication and cultural space being established including cross border communication and the promotion of neighbouring languages; and 4) to propose a vision for the city of the future.

The project focuses in 5 major issues:

- 1) “Good practice” in language learning for immigrants – how do they learn the language of the host country and what kind of provision is there for them to maintain their own languages? What happens in schools and also in adult education?;
- 2) How do cities support social inclusion through linguistic support in social services, health etc and what kind of training is desirable in these areas?
- 3) How do cities provide for communication and cultural exchange with “neighbouring languages”?
- 4) How do cities promote intercultural dialogue and understanding by celebrating community cultures in common spaces?
- 5) Are there particular challenges for cities which have traditionally been in countries of emigration but which are now receiving many immigrants? How do they respond to this changed perspective and what is the impact on civil society?

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The aims of the network are to depict how communication occurs in multilingual cities and to develop ideas about how to manage multilingual citizen communities. In LUCIDE's research activities, the interest is focus in the real-life complexities faced by individuals in various spheres and aspects of city life.

To understand 'multilingualism', LUCIDE network takes the distinction drawn by the work of the Council of Europe (Beacco, 2007) for the terms 'multilingualism' and 'plurilingualism' to distinguish between societal and individual multilingualism. As it is described in the project documents, multilingualism refers to *societal* multilingualism: the co-existence of many languages, for the purposes of this study, within a city. Plurilingualism refers to an individual's repertoire of languages, or "the capacity of individuals to use more than one language in social communication whatever their command of those languages" (Beacco, 2007, p. 19).

The approach used for researching multilingualism and plurilingualism in the participant cities considers language in its communicative processes and practice rather than from a more static perspective (e.g. counting people/languages). These communicative processes and practices may be understood within a typology of language use (LUCIDE City reports):

- Symbolic/representational use of language (bottom-up, realities of everyday life – how we use language to send messages)
- Transactional/communicative (e.g. pragmatic use/unofficial acceptance of ML/PL by authorities on the ground, for communicative efficiency)
- Authoritative/directive (official, uni-directional, tends towards monolingualism)

LUCIDE network is involved in secondary data collection and primary data collection in two phases of data collection. With these information activities such as seminars, workshops and city reports are developed.

Contributions / recommendations for education

Although the project is still at an intermediate stage, the study of multilingualism in the city of Madrid provides some clues regarding the presence of languages in schools. Following are some of the results obtained so far, extracted from Madrid City Report of LUCIDE project:

- The city of Madrid hosts people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This cultural and linguistic diversity has a clear reflection on the schools. In addition, this diversity includes cultural, religious and educational plurality. The multiple dimensions of plurality interact in complex and sometimes conflicting ways. Multicultural societies have either the alternative to succumb or to promote this plurality (Coste & Simon, 2009).
- Although multicultural experiences are encouraged in Madrid schools through curricular and extracurricular activities, the linguistic capital is rarely supported or used in learning

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experiences. Normally, teachers support the culture of their students but often ignore their native languages which could be a source of knowledge and contribution to academic learning.

- Multilingualism has not been addressed by the local educational authorities and the only positive experience they mention is the bilingual classrooms. Schools and teachers are not prepared to promote multilingualism. Teachers have not received specific training on how to manage multilingualism in their classrooms. Nevertheless, they manifest ambivalent feelings towards this experience and were not able to mention any other positive experience that they can implement in their classrooms to promote the learning or the interest towards other languages.
- Participant teachers agree on the implementation of the bilingual program but they are concerned that some students may be unable to grasp complex concepts in a different language. On the other hand, they worry about the simplification of learning concepts that teachers need to adopt for students to understand them in a foreign language. They think that the simplification does not benefit students. They also comment that the increased classroom time to learn a foreign language is detrimental to the study of other equally important subjects in the curriculum such as artistic education.
- Multilingualism is considered as a “touchy” subject. One respondent explains that giving priority to regional languages at the expense of the state language is a sensitive issue. All the respondents agreed that the most visible languages are Spanish and English and the less visible Romanian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Arabic. Autonomic languages are almost ignored.
- When asked which languages should be further enhanced, some interest was showed in learning Portuguese, French, English, and some Spanish autonomic languages. Also Arabic and Chinese was mentioned.
- The best ways to overcome language barriers, for all of them, are using translation, interpretation, Internet, dictionaries, foreign language courses, and specific material prepared to learn Spanish.
- In general, we can affirm that schools as institutions are not trained to promote multilingualism. Teachers tend to overlook languages that their students increasingly bring to the classrooms: such as varieties of the national, regional and foreign languages. Schools are reluctant to include and extend the scope and choices of languages in the curriculum. The reasons are not a secret. Among these are administrative, organizational, and pedagogical, arguments (Coste and Simon, 2009).

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Dissemination of results

Main dissemination strategies used for presenting the project and describing its results are:

- Project website, regularly updated displaying information about project activities and results. <http://www.urbanlanguages.eu/>
- Conferences, seminars and workshops organized in most participant countries, inviting members of the local target groups to share the results, disseminate the activities and discuss the progress of the project.
- Papers presented at conferences and seminars.
- News on local media.
- A quarterly basis newsletter with updated information of the project, which is available on-line and is also distributed by subscription.

Comments

According to our experience in European projects, we found it very motivating and rewarding to work in international teams. However, this kind of activity is quite complex and require a big effort given the organization of universities, administrative complexity, lack of institutional support and recognition of this activity. We understand that is a mistake and more European project involvement should be promoted, but that is how things stand at the end of the day.