

## The Multilingual City: The Cases of Helsinki and Barcelona

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## THE MULTILINGUAL CITY

### *The cases of Helsinki and Barcelona*

#### Abstract

Helsinki and Barcelona are particularly interesting cases for the study of the challenges associated with present-day multilingualism, due to their combining a well-entrenched endogenous patrimony of linguistic diversity, together with the politics this patrimony has entailed, with new layers of exogenous linguistic differentiation introduced by recent waves of immigration. As a result, the linguistic cleavages of the past intermingle in intricate ways with the imprint of the new heterogeneity. The assessment of the politics of multilingualism in the two cities demonstrates, on the one hand, how the national is “transnationalized” due to the new cultural and communicative practices introduced by immigrant groups. On the other hand, the politics of multilingualism is a politics that nationalizes the transnational: although the “hybridization” that is often associated with the dynamics of immigration may well change the parameters of identity politics, it apparently does not entail the waning of all cultural identities in a cosmopolitan pastiche of sorts. The analysis presented leads to the normative conclusion that the recognition of linguistic identities plays a key role in linking the dynamics of complex diversity and citizenization. By just political standards, cities concerned with how to confront a diverse citizenry should open up to introduce varying combinations of a multilingual repertoire at the level of their institutions.

#### Keywords

Barcelona • citizenship • complex diversity • Helsinki • language politics • recognition • urban multilingualism

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## 1 Introduction: multilingualism and the city

When social scientists analyze cultural heterogeneity in the context of cities, they generally do not devote a great amount of space to dealing with the effects language diversity and multilingualism have specifically in urban areas. Richard Sennett (1991: 133–141), to mention one prominent example, presents a poignant critique of Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization of the urban public sphere, arguing that Arendt’s view of the role of the public is so emphatically abstract and impersonal that it fails to keep in touch with the proper realm of the social. In the end, Sennett observes, it is hard to see how different people – strangers – would be able to communicate at all in the philosopher’s ideal city. Taking this into account, it must be considered paradoxical that neither does Sennett make a proper attempt at grasping the challenges that are involved in managing linguistic diversity so that a characteristically urban “culture of

difference” can be institutionalized. Peter Marcuse (2002: 12), to give a second example, outlines a historical approach to the “partitioned city” which does include language in its account of cultural cleavages that may be relevant for studying urban politics. Yet, in this case too, language is only mentioned in passing, and there is no discussion of the possible connections between the linguistic and the functional or status-related divisions that are typical of partitioned cities.

In view of the tendency to abstract from the linguistic dimensions of an urban setting largely characterized by diversity, the great American sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman (1997: 347) has perspicuously compared language in New York City to an “overlooked elephant at the zoo”. In accordance with the perspective adopted by Fishman, the thesis advanced in this contribution is that linguistic diversity is becoming an increasingly salient issue on the agenda of urban politics and policies in Western societies, at least in the European context. Thus, both political and urban sociologists, as

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well as scholars working in the field of ethnic relations and migration studies, are well advised to study the phenomenon more extensively. At the same time, it seems obvious that a thorough normative assessment of the implications of identity politics, including the politics of linguistic identity, requires detailed analyses of the “micro” dimensions of political integration in contexts marked by deep cultural diversity. In most cases, these dimensions find their clearest expression at the level of cities. The approach to the analysis of language politics sketched out on the following pages is hence based on two main assumptions. First, the use of language in urban settings can be taken as a telling indicator of sweeping processes of social and political change. Second, in European cities, at present, linguistic differentiation is a topic that deserves specific research efforts on its own right, as it raises important empirical and normative questions.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 The multilingual city, European nation-states, and the new heterogeneity

European modernity was substantially defined by the emergence and consolidation of the political model of the nation-state, a model characterized, according to Charles Tilly (1994: 25), by “centralized organization, direct rule, uniform field administration, circumscription of resources within the territory, and expanded control over cultural practices.” Parallel to the unfolding of national forms of rule, the processes of population structuring that shaped Europe during the last five centuries involved a continuous push towards cultural homogenization. If we leave aside the presence of new immigrant minorities for a moment, many European states today apparently offer a rather homogeneous image in terms of their cultural profile. To a large extent, this homogeneity is a manufactured homogeneity, which is the result of institutional strategies designed and implemented by political authorities (Mann 2005). Almost everywhere in Europe, enforced assimilation and population transfers, not to mention more aggressive measures, played an important role in the process of state-making. Generally speaking, since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the long-term historical trend was to create uniformity *within* the different units composing the European state system, even if one of the main reasons for the establishment of the system was the necessity to come to grips with the new differentiation of Christianity after a protracted period of religious wars. This differentiation was therefore taken as a key criterion for delineating borders *between* states. Thus, the generalization of national forms of rule can be considered to be one of the most salient features of Europe’s path to modernity, and this generalization often became synonymous with cultural homogenization.

Cities played a crucial role in this process. In Stein Rokkan’s well-known model of the territorial structuring of Europe, the initial sequences of nation-state making, which led to the political control and cultural standardization of a given territory by the ruler, widely overlap with the dynamics of center formation (Rokkan 1999). In the

paradigmatic cases, the rise of the European nation-state presupposed the existence of an urban center acting as the driving force of dynastic expansion and concentrating economic and coercive resources. At the same time, the standards to be adopted in the territories controlled by the center reflected the cultural patterns that had become hegemonic at the center itself, including a linguistic standard. As the symbolism of their historical architecture still reveals today, European capitals such as Paris, London, or Stockholm for a long period literally embodied the cultural identities of the nations they claimed to represent, and constituted the unchallenged focal points of linguistically integrated spaces of public communication. In virtually all larger territorial states in Western Europe, the history of the metropolis was inextricably linked to the history of *one* national community, whose members shared a particular set of cultural attributes and spoke the same language.

The tempestuous expansion of national forms of rule towards the East, where the political scene until World War I was characterized by the continuity of imperial powers such as Habsburg or tsarist Russia, made the homogenizing impact of the modern structuring of Europe’s populations and territories more dramatically visible than in the *longue durée* of nation-state formation in the West. The cultural and linguistic map of Central and Eastern Europe was traditionally more mixed and patchwork-like than in the Western half of the continent. Thus, the main urban centers of the multinational empires also remained permeated by a strong pluralism of languages and ethnicities well into modern times. In his portrait of late 18th century Vienna, the Bavarian traveler Johann Pezzl expresses his amazement by the “mixture of so many nations” and the resulting “linguistic confusion (*Sprachenverwirrung*)” that in his view were distinctive features of the imperial capital, when compared to other places in Europe. Pezzl’s account includes the following “national” and “linguistic” groups: “Hungarians, Moravians, Transylvanians, Styrians, Tyrolians, Dutch, Italians, Frenchmen, Bavarians, Swabians, Silesians, Rhinelanders, Swiss, Westphalians, Lothringians etc. etc.” (quoted after Therborn 1995: 53).

The homogenizing force involved in the breakdown of old multinational empires and in the making of new nation-states can be grasped through the figures collected by Göran Therborn (see Table 1). Therborn refers to ethnic identities, yet in most cases these identities also include a particular linguistic dimension. Some of the evidence listed in the table may be questionable. For instance, in the case of Helsinki, a city still under tsarist rule in 1890, the use of the “national ethnicity” label cannot ultimately exclude the bulk of Swedish speakers, who were as loyal to the Finnish nation as the their Finnish speaking fellow citizens captured by the figure. Vilnius was in 1926 a city clearly marked by two larger communities: Polish speakers and Jews. Yet it is hard to believe that at that moment no Lithuanians at all were living in what today is the capital of Lithuania. In other cases, such as Bucharest, Prague, and Sofia, the reliability of the statistical evidence we have at hand for the 19th century may be rather limited. Nonetheless, the table does give an excellent first

Table 1. Early modern share of current titular nation of the population of East European capitals

City	Year	% Total population
Bratislava	1910	38
Bucharest	1850	c. 40
Budapest	1870	46
Chisinau	1926	40
Helsinki	1890	46 (?)
Istanbul	1878	62
Kiev	1926	42
Ljubljana	1880	75
Minsk	1926	42
Prague	1846	< 36
Riga	1913	42
St. Petersburg	1910	89
Sofia	1866	c. 33
Tallinn	1871	52
Vienna	1910	85
Vilnius	1926	0 (?)
Warsaw	1897	62
Zagreb	1910	75

Source: Therborn (1995: 44).

approximation to a cultural map that would be radically altered during the first five decades of the 20th century.

When looking at the figures, one should keep in mind that they do not only depict the situation at the aggregate level. Often enough, the multilingualism of Eastern Europe's administrative and commercial centers found its reflection in individual biographies as well. We may think of writers such as Edith Södergran, a Swedish speaking Finn brought up in St. Petersburg, who wrote her first verses in German, before she produced her highly praised poetry in Swedish. Another famous case in point is Elias Canetti, an author with a Spanish – Sephardic family background, raised in a Bulgarian border town where he received his main instruction in German, the language he kept on using in his prose after escaping from the Nazis and moving from Vienna to London.

As Therborn (1995: 47) has put it, the long-running process of ethnic and cultural homogenization in Europe reached its peak around 1950. The price paid in Central and Eastern Europe for approaching a standard thought of as "normal" in the West was particularly high. The paths to nation-state construction implied intense conflicts, frequent boundary changes, ethnic cleansing, and the expulsion of substantial segments of the former population of several countries. The holocaust perpetrated against the European Jews by the Nazis retains an extreme and singular character in a historical context marked by an obsessive and often violent striving for homogeneity.

With hindsight, if we face the long-term results, the success story of the European nation-state, a story referring to a mode of rule that combined the goals of territorial integration and cultural standardization, may be regarded to some extent a myth (as Charles Tilly

(1992) has argued). Moreover, in contrast with former times, diversity has nowadays become a pivotal normative reference in the official discourse of European integration: it is revealing, in this respect, that the official motto of the European Union (EU) reads *United in diversity*. It is hard to deny, however, that cultural homogenization represented one of the dominant paradigms of European modernity, and was an objective pursued by state makers and nation builders all over the continent. If we focus on the city level, it should be noted that only a few of Europe's capitals and metropolitan centers are officially multilingual, with this multilingualism being generally restricted to no more than two languages. I will take this point up in more detail in the next sections.

Against the background sketched out so far, the changes Europe has been experiencing during the last decades appear to be quite far-reaching. A secular trend has been reversed, especially if we consider the situation in West European cities. Here, the influx of migrants both from Europe's peripheries and from other continents has reintroduced heterogeneity. This is largely reflected in the profound sociolinguistic transformation of many urban settings. At present, the picture is additionally complicated by the powerful expansion of English as a regular means of communication at the higher levels of society. Thus, in many cities, English is displacing the local vernacular in elite-dominated contexts. It may not be too much of an exaggeration to compare this new heterogeneity to former manifestations of cultural and linguistic diversity, which were characteristic of medieval towns and survived into the first half of the 20th century in many areas of the European East. In the big cities of Western Europe, the patterns of stratification and of linguistic differentiation tend to overlap again, at least when we look at the two ends of the social spectrum. The upper segments of the staff employed by transnational corporations, IT experts, bankers, as well as people working in research centers or universities often use English as their regular medium of communication. At the other end of the scale, we find the bulk of the immigrants from North Africa, South Asia, Turkey, and other regions of the globe, who continue to use their mother tongues, thereby giving languages such as Arabic or Turkish a significant weight on Western Europe's sociolinguistic scene. A trend often observed with a good amount of concern by the members of the local middle class is pointing towards a future that seems to come pretty close to our past.<sup>2</sup> Apparently, the "new medievalism" – a concept introduced by social scientists who want to highlight the consequences of the successive uncoupling of territoriality, political control, and cultural identity we are currently experiencing – is leaving some of its most immediate traces in the sociolinguistic configuration of our urban spaces.

It is an open empirical question whether, regarding the second and third generation of migrants and the influx of new migrating groups, tendencies that work towards linguistic assimilation will prevail, or if language maintenance will turn out to be the rule and lead to a long-term stabilization of multilingual structures. The interplay of the dynamics of international migration with the cultural hegemony

attained by global English implies that the particular features of the local linguistic context will be a critical factor in shaping future developments. Thus, it may be plausible to hypothesize that the potential for the assimilationist pull of English in London will be stronger than the hegemonic capacity of, say, Swedish in Stockholm.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, however, it seems reasonable to assume that the new heterogeneity will leave a long-lasting imprint on the cultural landscape of most European cities. Such an assumption can be based both on structural grounds and on normative considerations.

On the *structural* side, the spread of new telecommunications and information technologies plays a central role. The availability of these technologies has created a broad range of new possibilities for sustaining collective identities on a non-territorial basis. Again, the most manifest cultural effects of a sweeping transformation can be witnessed in cities. In places like Berlin or Brussels it is no problem to receive several TV stations broadcasting, for instance, in Turkish via satellite or through the cable network. At the same time, even if the dominance of the English language in cyberspace is unquestioned, the Internet seems to offer smaller and dispersed language groups a solid infrastructure for creating new communicative networks that are templates for reproducing particular cultural identities across long distances. To the extent that they have become part of the emerging global informational society, European cities may experience a flourishing of “virtual ethnic communities” (Elkins 1997), of communities that will remain attached to their specific languages. In addition to virtual mobility, recent forms of migration also seem to imply an intensification of the real physical mobility of persons in time and space, thus entailing an intensification of direct interactions within collectivities dispersed across state borders and world regions. In the end, structural developments of this kind are contributing to a phenomenon well analyzed both by experts on migration and by social anthropologists: urban spaces are successively being transnationalized and integrated in the communication flows linking countries of origin to countries of destination.<sup>4</sup> This “transnationalization” has an evident linguistic component (Vertovec 2009: 70–72).

On the *normative* side, the main argument to be made is that pretensions to strive for a quick and complete linguistic assimilation of immigrant groups have lost much of the political appeal they may have had in former times. In the recent past, international organizations such as the UN and UNESCO have put great emphasis on securing an independent status for cultural rights, including linguistic rights, as a necessary complement to the civil, political, economic, and social categories of human rights. The impact of the new discourse on rights and recognition has been remarkably strong in many Western societies, where issues concerning the material dimensions of citizenship have become closely connected with questions related to the field of symbolic representation and cultural identity (Pakulski 1997). European institutions defining transnational rights standards for the European Union, the Council of Europe, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have played a pioneering role with regard to this. It is true that the main targets of the regulating

activities of these institutions have thus far been autochthonous groups that are entitled to be considered as regional or national minorities. Yet it appears to be increasingly difficult to draw a clear-cut demarcation line between the claims of collectivities of this kind and the claims of migrant groups who have become firmly established in their host countries. Accordingly, the cultural rights discourse is swiftly spilling over from old to new minorities, and Europe is facing a growing pressure to include migrants in its transnational minority rights regime.

Another significant element in this normative constellation is EU citizenship. It has an increasing importance for the regulation of education and schooling in the member states. In the context of intra-European mobility, EU member states are supposed to make concessions towards the protection of the linguistic and cultural identity of citizens who move across borders. From a normative perspective, then, to draw a discriminatory line between the children of EU citizens and the children of citizens from non-EU countries when the local school curriculum is adapted to the challenges of the new heterogeneity is a problematic strategy. At the same time, it is obvious that the right to preserve one’s cultural identity and to maintain one’s mother tongue has its most immediate institutional relevance in those urban zones where migrants are typically concentrated.

### 3 Urban multilingualism and its challenges: the examples of Helsinki and Barcelona

Let me flesh out the general argument put forward so far with two empirical examples. They cannot obviously be taken as evidence that has been gathered following systematic criteria, nor allowing us to draw general conclusions. What they do provide, though, is a basic illustration of the problems related with urban multilingualism in Europe today. The topic under scrutiny certainly deserves a good deal of detailed comparative research. Accordingly, the issues that are going to be addressed in an exploratory way on the following pages might offer some hints for developing a more general focus of analysis, in spite of their being inserted in specific local settings.

Barcelona and Helsinki belong to the small group of European capital cities that stand in striking contrast to the general trend diagnosed by Therborn. They resisted the push of homogenization and retained a multilingual profile that is a part of their institutional reality. This means that they are *de jure* and *de facto* bilingual cities, the two languages officially in use being Castilian (Spanish) and Catalan in the case of Barcelona; or Finnish and Swedish in the case of Helsinki.

Among the larger West European cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants, only Brussels (institutionally bilingual in Dutch and French) and Dublin (Irish and English) have similar characteristics to Helsinki and Barcelona. In Dublin, however, the presence of Irish in everyday life has to a great extent a symbolic, basically *de jure* character. In practice, the city largely functions in English. I will also leave Brussels aside in my discussion of urban multilingualism. Although it

would make sense to compare the Belgian capital to the other two cases in terms of its main socio-linguistic attributes, Brussels is different from Barcelona and Helsinki in two important respects: First, the massive influx of foreign population dates back to the 1960s, while the Mediterranean city and its Baltic counterpart only have registered a significant increase of immigration from abroad since 1995. Second, Brussels has unique characteristics as the semi-official capital of the European Union, as it hosts a substantial portion of a foreign population who belong to the trans-European elite, an attribute for which there is no proper correspondence in Barcelona and Helsinki.<sup>5</sup>

To get back to our starting point, Helsinki and Barcelona appear to be particularly interesting laboratories for the study of the challenges connected with present-day multilingualism, because of their combining of a well-entrenched *endogenous* patrimony of linguistic diversity, together with the politics this patrimony has entailed, with new layers of *exogenous* linguistic differentiation introduced by recent waves of immigration. Both cities are also subject to the impact of Europeanization, an impact that on the communicative side becomes palpable with the continuous spread of English as a trans-European lingua franca, which is being more frequently used not only at the level of high business, research, and academic networks, but also in service sectors such as tourism and commerce. We can thereby assume that in both Helsinki and Barcelona the linguistic cleavages of the past intermingle in intricate ways with the imprint of the new heterogeneity. Let me now offer a rough first assessment of how this happens.

#### 4 Helsinki

As the capital of Finland, Helsinki is the center of an officially bilingual country. This official bilingualism finds its foremost expression in public institutions, which are formally committed to functioning both in Swedish and in Finnish. In practice, this commitment is to a great extent regulated in correspondence with the number of citizens assigned to a language group at the local level. The respective figures follow the registered linguistic census data. Municipalities can be unilingual in either of the two languages, bilingual with Finnish as majority language, or bilingual with Swedish as majority language. Language provisions vary accordingly. Helsinki, with a substantial minority of Swedish speakers, is a bilingual municipality (*Oikeusministeriö* 2009).

The language question is linked in intricate ways with the history of Finnish nationalism. After independence (1917), the co-official status of Swedish was for some time contested by the more radical wing of the *Fennoman* movement, but in the 1930s a consensus emerged, which has endured into the 21st century.<sup>6</sup> As a national language with a constitutional standing equal to Finnish, Swedish has been able to maintain such a high profile in schools, the state administration, and the public media that the Swedish-speaking Finns are often portrayed as a generously protected group by all comparative

European standards. At the same time, however, linguistic census data show that the proportion of Swedish speakers has been declining since independence: while in 1920, the group comprised 11.0% of the Finnish population, the figure had gone down to 5.4% in 2009 (*McRae* 1999: 86).<sup>7</sup>

The trend is even more palpable in Helsinki, a city that was more or less evenly bilingual around 1900, if we recall the evidence offered by Therborn (1995: 44). Five decades later, in 1950, this picture had already changed substantially, with a percentage of Swedish speakers at 19.0%. For 1980, the figure was 10.6%, and in 2010 it had dropped to 6.0%.<sup>8</sup> To explain this decline would require a thorough sociolinguistic analysis, which cannot be offered here. In a nutshell, the language dynamics in the capital are in line with the overall dynamics at the national level. The key point to be made in this context is that Finnish nationalism effectively succeeded in overcoming a situation of diglossia, in which Swedish was the language of “higher” communication, while Finnish was used in “lower” functional domains (*Kraus* 2008: 103–104). Laponce (1987: 33–42) has made the point that a non-diglossic bilingualism – that is, a bilingualism characterized by an equal social status of the two languages involved – tends to be unstable if language communities coexist within the same territory, ultimately giving way to a generalized dominance of the (demographically) stronger language. This is what basically happened in Helsinki in the course of the 20th century. Thus, one may conclude that even a very generous level of protection of a minority language is no automatic guarantee for the language’s long-term reproduction.

On the Swedish-speaking side, there have thus far not been many signs of discontent about the loss of demographic weight of Swedish in the capital area. The issue has an intricate character. On the one hand, the gradual supersession of the Swedish language by Finnish entails consequences for Swedish politics in Finland. Traditionally, the *Svenska Folkpartiet* (SFP: Swedish People’s Party), which acts as the main ethnolinguistic representative of the interests of the Finland Swedes, gets the bulk (that is around 70%) of its vote from Swedish-speaking citizens (*McRae* 1999: 192–194).<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, the relative decrease in the number of Swedish-speaking population poses an obvious threat for the political future of the SFP. On the other hand, in a system firmly dominated by the logic of consensus (*Pesonen & Riihinen* 2002: 285), the SFP has been able to play a significant role in decision-making both at the national and at the local levels. In legal terms, the frame of language policy is highly institutionalized, so that, all in all, Swedish does maintain a significant presence in public settings. In a bilingual municipality such as Helsinki, for instance, institutional bilingualism implies that there exists a full-fledged Swedish school circuit parallel to the Finnish one. To re-politicize the language issue against the background of demographic trends therefore entails an obvious risk from the Swedish angle, as it might lead to a general reassessment through which an officially national language might ultimately be declared a minority language. Since 1945, at the latest, the main rationale for language policies in Finland has been to avoid any exacerbation of linguistic

strife by defining the country's linguistic diversity as a key element of national identity. Up to now, state institutions tend to embrace multilingualism as a positive feature of Finnish society, as a feature that contributes to giving Finland a competitive advantage vis-à-vis linguistically poorer environments. Against this background, we may define the Finnish approach towards linguistic diversity, which is also the approach adopted in the Helsinki area, as an *integrative multilingualism*.

What are the implications of integrative multilingualism when it comes to immigration? Finland only became a country of immigration in the 1990s, and even after that turning point Finnish immigration figures have remained low, compared to those of most other West European countries. The number of foreigners registered in Finland in 2010 was 167,954, equating to 3.1% of the total population.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, immigration is largely an urban phenomenon. It is concentrated south of the axis between Tampere and Turku, the capital area in and around Helsinki attracting a substantial portion of the foreign population. Thus, in 2010, 7.2% of the people living in Helsinki were foreigners. To get a fuller picture, one has to add the Finnish citizens born abroad to this figure. Overall, then, the speakers of non-domestic languages among the inhabitants of Helsinki at present make for 10.2% of the city population ([Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskus 2010: 1, 6](#)).

Around 150 languages are nowadays spoken in the Finnish capital. Most of the language groups are small, with only three languages breaking the threshold of 5,000 speakers. Among these three, the 13,000 Russian speakers constitute by far the largest language community. Russian is spoken by twice as many people as Estonian and Somali, the languages of the next two larger linguistic communities on the list of non-official language groups. In the case of Russian and Estonian, we are dealing with languages whose "home territories" are in close geographical proximity to the Helsinki area. It seems safe to assume that mother tongue use among Russian- and Estonian-speaking immigrants is supported by the dense trans-border networks that exist between Helsinki, St. Petersburg, and Tallinn. The structures of migrant transnationalism that connect these locations have an obvious linguistic dimension and certainly contribute to the maintenance of Russian and Estonian in the capital of Finland.<sup>11</sup>

So do the local authorities, whose tendency is to apply the approach of integrative multilingualism with regard to the concerns of immigrant communities. On the website of the City of Helsinki's Education Department, one finds a clear commitment to multiculturalism,<sup>12</sup> which may seem surprising enough in view of the general multiculturalist backlash that has been experienced all over Europe in the last decade.<sup>13</sup> While the Department emphasizes the importance of the acquisition of Finnish from the preparatory level, it also highlights its will to support the mother tongue skills of immigrant children. The support explicitly aims at mother tongue retention. With this purpose, schools provide two hours of complementary (i.e. extra-curricular) maintenance language instruction per week, which

are financed by the municipality. To organize a group of pupils that receive instruction of their own language, a quorum of four participants is required. On this basis, as the Education Department is eager to point out, approximately 4,000 school children of immigrant origin received mother tongue instruction in Helsinki in 2010. About 40 languages were taught in the corresponding programmes, the largest language groups being Russian, Somali, and Estonian. The list of languages taught as maintenance language also includes Bengali, Uyghur, and two variants of Kurdish (Sorani and Kurmanji).

By comparative European standards, the Helsinki approach to mother tongue instruction is exceptionally generous. It implies, at least in theory, that even at the level of comprehensive schools children have the option to leave school equipped with four languages: Finnish; Swedish, which is compulsory as the other national language; English; and, finally, their mother tongue.<sup>14</sup> This is a clear break with the principles of linguistic homogenization associated with the making of nation-states in Europe, as well as a departure from the agenda of assimilationism, at any rate in its linguistic form. One should not exaggerate the point: the dominance of Finnish in everyday communication in Helsinki remains unchallenged. At the same time, while Swedish retains its public presence, the weight of Russian as an immigrant language has grown considerably. Against this background, it is worth noting that English is playing an increasingly significant role as the lingua franca allowing for communication between different language groups. Moreover, it is gaining additional strength due to the ongoing "Anglicization" observable at the level of the institutions of higher education, as well as of the work routines of international firms.

Paradoxically, the recent dynamics may be undermining the very basis from which the approach of an integrative multilingualism once emerged, namely the consensus on conceiving of Finland as of a bilingual political community. At any rate, in the urban setting of Helsinki, a setting that is of great importance for symbolically displaying the cohabitation of the two national languages, Swedish is to some extent being displaced by larger immigrant languages, such as Russian, and by English, which is becoming the standard lingua franca when Finns communicate with citizens of neighboring Nordic countries. The fact that the bulk of immigrant children in the Helsinki area experience their linguistic immersion in the host society through the Finnish-speaking school circuit puts additional demographic pressure on Swedish. It is in this convoluted situation that language is re-emerging as a salient political issue. Over the last couple of years, the question of whether Swedish should maintain its status as a national language, to be acquired at least at some basic knowledge level by all Finnish citizens irrespective of the linguistic composition of their area of residence, has become the subject of intense debates in the media (Saukkonen 2011). Parallel to this development, the populist *True Finns* party has begun to put more effort into reinvigorating the *Fennoman* cause, turning "compulsory Swedish"<sup>15</sup> into one of the main targets of their campaign against what they perceive as alien to the "Finnish soul" and to "Finnish values". A long tradition of

institutional openness towards multilingualism is thereby exposed to risk of being eroded by the pressures of a resentful and ethnocentric identity politics.

## 5 Barcelona

In political terms, the main difference between the two cities under scrutiny here is that Helsinki is the capital of a sovereign state, whereas Barcelona “only” hosts the governmental institutions of Catalonia. In the European press, Catalonia is often categorized as a “region”, and this is also the status it is assigned in the institutional context of the EU, where it is one of the, at present, 344 members of the Committee of the Regions. The majority of Catalan citizens, however, tend to conceive of their country as a nation, albeit a stateless one. Since 1980, Catalonia has the status of an Autonomous Community within the semi-federal structures of the Spanish state. In similar ways as the Scots or the Quebeckers, many Catalans aim at higher quotas of sovereignty, which are to be conquered either by obtaining additional space for self-government from Madrid, or by means of achieving independence.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, as an Autonomous Community provided with a substantial portion of devolved powers, Catalonia holds significant competences in the field of language policy, the main constraint to these lying in the fact that the Spanish constitution defines Castilian as the official language in the whole of Spain’s territory, other languages – that is, Basque, Catalan, and Galician – being given the option of sharing a co-official status with Spanish in the Autonomous Communities where they are spoken. Thus, as Finland, Catalonia has two official languages, Catalan and Castilian/Spanish.

Since the re-establishment of Catalonia’s autonomy after the end of the Franco dictatorship, the co-official status of Catalan has recurrently been a matter of political disputes. As the Catalan language was publicly banned and prosecuted by Spanish authorities for much of the 20th century, and underwent a long period of intense repression after the end of the Civil War and the conquest of Catalonia by Franco’s troops, the institutions of the Generalitat – as the Catalan government is officially called – have put (and continue to put) major efforts into improving its sociolinguistic standing. The autonomy provisions define Catalan as Catalonia’s “own” language, thereby giving it a symbolically somewhat higher position than Spanish (Kraus 2007: 208). Whereas broadly accepted in Catalonia itself, this approach has generated some animosity on the Spanish side, especially (but not exclusively) on the right wing of the political spectrum, where there is concern about the questioning of the hegemonic status which the Castilian language has enjoyed for centuries all over Spain by mobilized peripheries with distinct linguistic features, such as the Basque Country and Catalonia.<sup>17</sup>

In practice, the own language formula has meant, for instance, that the regular language of instruction in most subject areas at Catalan schools is Catalan. At the same time, the schools have to

make sure that all students achieve the same levels of competence in Castilian as in the Catalan language. Catalonia thereby applies a different model than Finland, where educational institutions are differentiated according to linguistic criteria. In contrast with Finnish, Castilian has a long record as a dominant language. The philosophy of Catalan language immersion programs has therefore been grounded on the premise that establishing a more balanced bilingualism in Catalonia requires special institutional support for Catalan (Balcells 1996: 189–190), a support given according to the logic of “positive discrimination”. In this respect, one can summarize that the forces of Catalanism – a term which is used here for denominating those actors, not necessarily all nationalists, who are supportive of the Catalan cause – aim at achieving an objective that was also prominent among Finns several decades ago, namely at overcoming a situation of diglossia that they consider unfair, as it entails an inequality of linguistic status between Spanish and Catalan.

Throughout the last decades, the language issue in Catalonia has been characterized by an extraordinarily high level of politicization. The parameters of language conflict are more intricate than in Finland, as “internal” factors interact with “external” ones. On the internal side, there is a remarkably strong consensus, shared by the bulk of the political parties represented in the Parliament of the Autonomous Community, on the priority of giving Catalan special protection, not least because of the structurally weaker position it has had vis-à-vis Spanish. On the external side, this view collides with the approach generally adopted by Spanish decision-makers in Madrid, who are not prepared to accept what they perceive to be a relegation of Castilian to a secondary role (Kraus 2007: 211–214). What ultimately explains the salience of linguistic issues in the Catalan context is that language occupies an important space on the battleground of two competing – and, as it actually seems, to some extent incompatible – nation-building projects: the objective of reframing Spain as *one* nation after the Franco dictatorship is challenged by Catalan aspirations for higher quotas of sovereignty. In consequence, language policies in Catalonia are largely determined by a context of *conflictual multilingualism*.

How does this conflictual multilingualism impact on the linguistic scenery in the city of Barcelona? In contrast with Finland, there are no proper census data on the linguistic identity of citizens in Catalonia. The political regulation of language issues is based on the assumption that bilingualism applies evenly over the Catalan territory. Still, language competence and language use have been scrutinized in numerous studies and surveys undertaken in autonomous Catalonia over the last three decades. As a comprehensive survey from 2008 shows, Catalan is the first language of 31.6% of the population of Catalonia older than 15 years; for Castilian, the corresponding figure is 55.0%.<sup>18</sup> When it comes to linguistic competence, according to the same survey, 94.6% understand Catalan, 78.3% speak it, and 61.8% can write it; for Castilian, the figures approach 100% for the first two competence levels, the writing competence being 95.6% (Generalitat de Catalunya 2009: 139, 142). It has to be noted that

writing proficiency in Catalan increases considerably among younger age cohorts, as school instruction of Catalan was banned for most of the Franco period, but became successively normalized after 1975. Moreover, interestingly enough, there is no strict coincidence between the proportions of what people indicate as their “first language” and their “language of identification”: thus, 46.5% give Castilian as their language of identification, 37.2% Catalan, 8.8% both Catalan and Castilian, 2.4% Arabic, and 4.3% other languages (Generalitat de Catalunya 2009: 48).

When we focus on the metropolitan area of Barcelona, the figures do not deviate massively from Catalonia as a whole, although Castilian is stronger in the capital than in rural areas. In Barcelona, 24.7% indicate Catalan as their first language; the figure for Castilian is 63.1% (both Catalan and Castilian: 4.2%; Arabic: 1.8%; other languages: 5.5%). With regard to competence, 94.6% of the metropolitan population understand Catalan, 78.3% speak it, and 61.8% write it (Castilian: 100.0%; 99.9%; 96.7%) (Generalitat de Catalunya 2009: 45, 139, 142).<sup>19</sup> The survey data demonstrate that, at the aggregate level, bilingualism has a more balanced profile in the conurbation of Barcelona than it has in Helsinki. Moreover, the use of two languages in everyday communication is an extended practice at the individual level too (Generalitat de Catalunya 2009: 57–82).

What can be said in terms of a first attempt at assessing how the “endogenous” patterns of bilingualism interact with the multilingualism introduced by immigration in Barcelona? Two aspects of immigration stand out in comparison with Helsinki. First, one has to be aware of the sheer quantitative dimensions of the phenomenon: from January 2001 to January 2010, the number of foreigners in Barcelona went up from 74,019 (4.9% of the total population) to 284,632 (17.6%). Evidently, the impact of immigration on the city’s demography has been massive. Second, if we look at the data for 2010, immigrants from Central and South America comprise 40.7% of the city’s foreign population.<sup>20</sup> The vast majority of these immigrants have Spanish as their first language, so that there is a significant overlap between “old” and “new” varieties of multilingualism in the Catalan capital. In difference to Helsinki, there is no immediate information about the linguistic affiliations of the city’s residents available for Barcelona. Still, the ranking of foreign nationals does offer some indirect evidence on the languages of the immigrant communities, and in view of the relative strength of citizens from North Africa and from Pakistan among the foreign population, one can conclude that Arabic and Urdu carry special weight in Barcelona’s changed multilingual setting (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2010: 116). Otherwise, the linguistic composition of the immigrant universe is as manifold as in Helsinki.

To assess the institutional response to the new multilingualism, we have to keep in mind that Barcelona differs from Helsinki in one very important respect: whereas in Finland, education and schooling are to a great extent a municipal matter, in Catalonia it is the *Generalitat* that holds key competences in the field of education. Thus, how multilingualism is regulated in the schools of Barcelona follows substantially from policies designed by the Department

of Education of the Catalan government. Yet, at the same time, the principles endorsed by this Department in its approach toward mother tongue instruction come very close to what we find at the local level in Helsinki. In general terms, the *Departament d’Educació* embraces multiculturalism and multilingualism as the appropriate means for creating positive models of coexistence for an increasingly diverse citizenry. In addition, great emphasis is placed on linking the sensitivity towards difference and the rejection of linguistic prejudice with the aim of achieving social cohesion.<sup>21</sup> Another specific aspect of the approach developed for tackling multilingualism in Catalan schools is the explicit support shown for minority languages: when depicting the linguistic situation in the countries of origin of immigrant children, such as Morocco or Bolivia, special and extensive mention is made of Berber and Quechua. This may be taken as a statement of intent based on the Catalans’ own experience as a linguistic minority. To some extent, one might venture, the context of conflictual multilingualism reverberates in the field of organizing immigrant mother tongue instruction.

Against this background, similarly to all Catalan schools, the schools in Barcelona are also encouraged to offer extracurricular classes in foreign pupils’ languages and cultures of origin both at the primary and at the compulsory secondary level. However, a key difference with Helsinki is that the institutional input, as defined in the regulations formulated by the *Departament d’Educació*, does *not* include the supply and the remuneration of teaching staff, but is essentially limited to providing school locations. The financial funds for mother tongue instruction have to come from other (non-public) institutions or bodies. As a result, the scope of mother tongue instruction thus far remains modest. On an Education Department web page containing information about mother tongue instruction in the school period 2010–2011, we learn that nine languages have been on offer for extracurricular classes. The number of pupils in these classes totals 2,952.<sup>22</sup> It has to be noted that the figure is for the whole of Catalonia. There is no breakdown for the municipal level. Hence, given that in Catalonia, in contrast with Finland, immigration has affected the rural areas as heavily as the urban ones, we can extrapolate that the figure for Barcelona must be significantly lower.<sup>23</sup> The obvious conclusion is that Barcelona lags clearly behind Helsinki when it comes to setting up and implementing mother tongue retention programmes. The importance that is given to the fostering of an extensive multilingualism in official discourses is thus far not really matched by material efforts.

On the other hand, and, again, somewhat paradoxically, the salience of language conflict may contribute to how, in Catalonia, immigrants achieve a comparatively high level of effective proficiency in the two official languages. A recent survey with data from 2010 shows that 40% within the population segment composed of those born abroad have learnt to speak Catalan (fundacc 2011). The figure can be considered rather impressive, if we take into account the linguistic background of the many immigrants from Latin America, and the lingua franca qualities of Castilian, which is spoken by virtually all

Catalan citizens and serves as the vehicle of communication not only between Catalonia and Spain, but also between Catalonia and other parts of the world. The lingua franca role that English has in Finland is replicated to a considerable extent by Spanish in the Catalan case. Thus, the capacity of cultural penetration into allophone communities (including the Spanish speaking groups) exhibited by Catalan must be related to the weight this language carries as a symbol of political identification.

As in Finland, multilingualism in Catalonia is a phenomenon to stay. It becomes manifest in varying combinations of “endogenous” and “exogenous” languages. On the “exogenous” side, English has to be added as an increasingly significant factor: an ever growing number of Catalans uses the emergent European lingua franca as their main external communication tool.

## 6 Citizenization as multilingualism

By connecting the effects of the “new” heterogeneity and “old” cultural cleavages in particularly intricate ways, cities like Barcelona and Helsinki offer laboratory-like qualities for studying what transnationalism represents in environments where national identities of different types are still powerful forces (Calhoun 2007). The politics of multilingualism demonstrates how the national is “transnationalized”: think, for instance, of the multiple ways of relating established ethnolinguistic patterns of identification – Finnish versus Swedish, Catalan versus Castilian – to the new cultural and communicative practices introduced by immigrant groups. In a parallel way, the politics of multilingualism is a politics that nationalizes the transnational: in the referendums on independence organized in a great number of Catalan municipalities by civil society actors between autumn 2009 and spring 2011, mobilizing (in Catalan) for immigrant participation was a strategic goal shared by all convoking local entities. Although the “hybridization” that is often associated with the dynamics of immigration may well change the parameters of identity politics, it apparently does not entail the waning of all cultural identities in a cosmopolitan pastiche of sorts.

What comes to the fore with the new heterogeneity in the settings of Barcelona and Helsinki is not just an exuberance of diversity, in the sense of a ubiquitous proliferation of interlocking, complementary, or interchangeable cultural and linguistic attachments. As we have seen, institutional attempts at coming to grips with the challenges of multilingualism rather involve a delicate exercise in defining the proper space for acquiring and using different linguistic competences. At the individual level, the situation to tackle may not be less demanding. To give one concrete example: the children of Moroccan immigrants with a Berber background in Barcelona will have to make substantial efforts to acquire a linguistic repertoire that “fully” corresponds to their equally multinational as transnational environment. Such a repertoire would have to include Catalan, Spanish, Amazig, and Arabic, as well as ultimately English. This type of situation takes

us far away from the *one nation – one language – one state* approach that was characteristic of the high time of European modernity. In cities like Helsinki and Barcelona, multilingualism and its politics are prime examples of the challenges posed by *complex diversity*. The concept underlines the multi-dimensionality and fluidity that diversity has attained in our societies. Its use may therefore help us to avoid essentializing simplifications when we talk about culture and identity. Yet, at the same time, the concept of complex diversity also renders tribute to the relevance culturally embedded contexts of praxis – such as languages – continue bearing for articulating a reflective identity politics.<sup>24</sup> To the extent that the approach sketched out here holds, we may conclude that the situation in multilingual cities such as those discussed here is possibly more instructive for grasping the intricacies connected to the politics of diversity and transnationalism than the scenery offered by the somewhat stereotypical global urban settings of London, New York, or Toronto, where the link between the local and the global realms is “naturally” established in English. Thus, our bringing complex diversity and multilingualism into focus ultimately confirms the old wisdom that “far away from where it’s at is where it’s at”.

How shall we tackle the challenges that multilingualism entails for urban politics? Where can we look for the foundations of a normative approach to the new heterogeneity that is both open to the legitimate articulation of diversity and able to overcome the risks of fragmentation? The first suggestion I would like to make in these final paragraphs is that the normative basis for formulating an appropriate political strategy for the multilingual city is recognition. Obviously, recognition here means primarily recognizing linguistic diversity. The very core of the potential to act as a citizen – be it in ancient Athens, in Renaissance Florence, or contemporary European cities – is formed by communicative resources. Citizens need to be equipped with such resources to be able to act in autonomous and enlightened ways, to participate in collective deliberation, and to influence decision-making, locally, nationally, and transnationally. Our freedom as citizens is constituted through specific social practices, which by definition are linguistically embedded. Multilingual cities must be sensitive to this embeddedness and recognize the importance language has for the constitution of the personal/social identities of their inhabitants. They should formulate a responsive approach when it comes to dealing with the particular needs of persons with diverse linguistic backgrounds in schools or in the organization of their public services.

In the end, the “politics of recognition” (Taylor 1992) is built on the evidence that the cognitive components of civic identities cannot be taken as something uniformly given. To overcome both cognitive and normative monism, we have to question the idea that there is *one* standard curriculum that will do for all equally and evenly, irrespective of their socio-cultural background. Hence, and this is my second observation, “citizenization” (Tully 2008: 310–314) and its institutional regulation must be regarded as a fundamental aspect of articulating a framework for political participation that is compatible with complex

diversity. In view of the linguistic embeddedness of civic identities, the worth of languages reaches far beyond their instrumental functions. By just political standards, cities concerned with how to confront a diverse citizenry should open up to introduce varying combinations of a multilingual repertoire at the level of their institutions.

Recognition must not be taken as a means for segregating different groups according to their cultural attributes; nor has it to be conceived of as a principle thrown out to please group narcissisms camouflaged behind a multicultural rhetoric. In the sense that the concept is given in these brief normative considerations, recognition aims at working out an approach for dealing with the challenges of diversity that is primarily inspired by democratic motives. The openness of institutions for the articulation of different identities is meant, in the end, to be conducive to the creation of a shared civic space, which both respects and transcends diversity. Seen in this light, recognition becomes indeed the very precondition for sustaining processes of citizenization in contexts of urban diversity. This is so because recognizing different cultural and linguistic identities is not just a legitimate end in itself, but a decisive step for creating reciprocal attachments among those supposed to participate in the making of a vibrant public culture, a culture that will imply some common standards, including linguistic standards. However, it has to be emphasized that such standards must be developed without replicating the homogenizing logic that characterized the model of the European nation-state.

It should have become evident that in the framework of this article the concept of citizenship is used in its most literal sense: that is, citizens are people living in cities, and citizenization, accordingly, means to learn to be aware of the social and political implications of living together in a city. To the extent that cities are spaces made of difference, this awareness must include the realm of linguistic and cultural diversity. From such an angle, the dynamics of citizenization in our present urban contexts ultimately demand a further institutional uncoupling of citizenship rights and entitlements stemming from nationality. Eventually, the multilingual city may turn out to be the central site for establishing a more substantial citizenship regime in Europe, a regime that will combine a tolerant attitude towards the articulation of diversity in an interdependent world with the noble democratic goal of creating and reproducing a common public space.

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#### Notes

- 1 In the last few years, these questions have indeed increasingly become a more salient issue in the political debates on integration, naturalization, and citizenship in several European countries, irrespective of their particular trajectories in the field of immigration. For an overview of issues related to immigration and urban multilingualism in Europe see Extra and Yağmur (2004).
- 2 The medievalist Patrick J. Geary (2001: 40) observes: “[I]n the great cities of Europe (...) linguistic and cultural stratification once more characterizes both ends of the population’s spectrum. At the top, major multinational corporations and scientific institutions operate largely in English with little regard for local language traditions. At the lower end of the social scale, these cities have experienced substantial growth in the numbers of people who trace their origins to Turkey, North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and other parts of Asia. These immigrants live their lives speaking Arabic, Turkish, and other languages distant from those spoken by the Middle Class. These developments, which are greeted by hostility and fear as novel occurrences, are actually a return to a much more ancient pattern of ethnic diversity. Europe is indeed beginning once more to resemble its past.”
- 3 At any rate, this is a conclusion one can draw when extrapolating from the analysis of language maintenance in the US (Fishman 1980).
- 4 See the assessment of the dynamics of transnationalization in Faist (2004).
- 5 The interplay of old and new layers of heterogeneity in Brussels is discussed by Favell and Martiniello (1999).
- 6 McRae (1999: 55–82) gives a thorough overview of the impact of the linguistic cleavage on political developments in independent Finland.
- 7 Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland). Available from: <[http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk\\_vaesto\\_en.html#structure](http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html#structure)>. [Last accessed 9.4.2011].

- 8 Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland). Available from: <[http://pxweb2.stat.fi/database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/vaerak\\_en.asp](http://pxweb2.stat.fi/database/StatFin/vrm/vaerak/vaerak_en.asp)>. [Last accessed 9.4.2011].
- 9 Grönlund (2011) offers an updated picture of the positioning of the Finland-Swedes in Finnish politics.
- 10 Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland). Available from: <[http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk\\_vaesto\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html)>. [Last accessed 9.4.2011].
- 11 See Vertovec (2009: 69–74) on types of socio-cultural competence linked to transnationalism.
- 12 Available from: <<http://www.hel.fi/hki/opev/en/Comprehensive+schools/Multicultural+education>>. [Last accessed 5.4.2011].
- 13 For discussions of this backlash from different perspectives see Brubaker (2003); Vertovec and Wessendorf (2009).
- 14 In Swedish speaking schools, the Finnish – Swedish sequence is inverted.
- 15 *Pakkoruotsi*, as the Finnish phrase has it.
- 16 See Requejo (2010) for an analysis of the recent turn from *autonomism* to *independentism* in Catalan politics.
- 17 Linz (1975) offers a thorough examination of the linguistic dimension of center – periphery conflicts in modern Spain.
- 18 The term used in the survey is *llengua inicial*; 3.8% indicate both Catalan and Castilian, 2.6% Arabic, 6.7% other languages (Generalitat de Catalunya 2009: 43). From 2001 to 2008, the Catalan population increased by 16.75%, basically as a consequence of immigration. In 2008, the number of residents in Catalonia born abroad (i.e. outside of Spain) was 1,204,711 (16.4%). The migration cycle has come to a halt since then, so that demographic figures have only changed moderately.
- 19 The metropolitan area includes both the city of Barcelona and its densely populated suburbs.
- 20 For the figures, see Ajuntament de Barcelona (2010: 11, 25).
- 21 See Annex 2 (Protocol for extracurricular classes in foreign pupils' languages and cultures of origin) to the *Language and social cohesion plan* introduced in 2007 by the Departament d'Educació. Available from: <[http://www.xtec.cat/lic/intro/documenta/annex2\\_extracurricularclasses.pdf](http://www.xtec.cat/lic/intro/documenta/annex2_extracurricularclasses.pdf)>.
- 22 Arabic leads the ranking, with 1,682 pupils. It is followed by Chinese (501), Portuguese (227) and Romanian (177). The list also includes Amazig/Berber (98) and Bengali (57). See Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament d'Ensenyament, Servei de Llengües: Llengües d'origen. Presentació. Available from: <<http://blocs.xtec.cat/llenguadorigen/presentacio/>> [Last accessed 30.3.2011].
- 23 With its 1,620,000 inhabitants (2010), the city of Barcelona makes up approximately 22% of the Catalan population.
- 24 A systematic elaboration of the concept of complex diversity can be found in Kraus (forthcoming).

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