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MIME
Mobility and Inclusion in a Multilingual Europe

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MIME

Mobility and inclusion in multilingual Europe

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EUROPEAN

POLICYBRIEF

MIME—Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe

MIME is a research project on multilingualism in Europe. Using an innovative, highly interdisciplinary model, MIME offers a public policy treatment of linguistic diversity that simultaneously handles dimensions of multilingualism (political, sociolinguistic, educational, communicational, socioeconomic, legal) that are usually considered in isolation. Specific measures are developed in the *MIME Vademecum*, which proposes thorough, yet accessible answers to 72 questions of language policy.

September 2018

Introduction

MIME is a research project funded by the European Commission within the 7th Framework Programme in the domain of the social sciences and humanities. During its four years of activity (2014-2018), it has developed a deeply innovative approach to the management of linguistic diversity as challenge for European society.

The key features of the project have already been described in a preceding *Policy Brief*, and only the essentials are summarised here for the benefit of the reader encountering the MIME project for the first time.

First, MIME treats the management of linguistic diversity as a form of public policy. Instead of plunging straight into the specifics of one dimension or another of multilingualism (such as running schools with a linguistically diverse student body; trying to ascertain the "optimal" number of languages that the interpreting services of a given institution ought to use; etc.), MIME approaches language policy as a form of public policy. Therefore, language policy should be submitted to test similar o those with which other public policies are vetted, and very general questions must be addressed, in particular:

- what do we want, and for what reasons?
- what are the most efficient ways of using language polices to achieve what we want?
- what are the material and symbolic costs of alternative language policy scenarios?
- how can we get the most of our resources and make language policies cost-effective?
- what is "fairness" in language policy, and how can fairness be assessed – and ensured?

Secondly, MIME proposes a comprehensive treatment of linguistic diversity, because language pervades all aspects of social, political, economic and cultural life. The challenges of multilingualism are usually addressed by specialists working from their specific angle. This often results in somewhat fragmented approaches and, ultimately, uncoordinated (and possibly mutually contradictory) policies. Typically, language policies so far have tended to focus on a relatively narrow *subset* of questions within one of the following broad sets of issues:

- *educational or pedagogical matters*: these have received growing attention in recent years, largely because of a widely shared concern for the effects of the immigration of third-country nationals into EU member states. Issues such as the choice of languages included in education systems, to what ends, and using what approaches, also raise questions regarding the likely effects of different bundles of language skills on employability (for majority as well as minority residents as well as more recent immigrants, which means that language education policies must deal with the highly different situations of actors with different language repertoires);
- *legal-political questions*: such questions increasingly call for international- as well as domestic-level responses through treaties, constitutional arrangements or legislation. They require us to define an allocation of language rights to various groups in society, including minorities. Such issues simultaneously raise questions of human rights, minority rights, and geopolitical security;
- *sociological challenges*: many EU member states are now host to populations who bring with them a broader range of linguistic and cultural diversity. Such challenges often raise delicate questions, notably that of the extent of the linguistic requirements, to individual residents, to society as a whole, and to the state, that should be met to ensure harmonious, inclusive societies. These questions can only be answered with clear criteria about the just allocation, between people, of rights and duties;
- *technological issues*: much hope is placed in the better use of recent technological advances, for example in automatic translation, in order to manage linguistic diversity in various areas such as the provision of public services. In a globalising economy, such developments are also relevant to the production and distribution of goods and services by the private sector. The associated question is how far we can rely on technological progress to rise to the challenges of multilingualism, and what policy arrangements are needed to take advantage of this progress in democratic societies.

In contrast with most received approaches to language policy and planning (LPP), MIME addresses these various issues as explicitly interconnected facets of the same multilingual reality. The MIME approach rests on an integrative model in which various dimensions of diversity management are considered jointly (see following section). In addition to gathering and processing factual knowledge on a wide selection of diversity management issues, the MIME project develops conceptual and practical tools for an integrated approach to language policy. These tools aim at facilitating consistency between the measures adopted in various areas. To quote but a few examples of the tools developed in the MIME project, let us mention:

- a set of formal normative criteria to assess the respective degree of fairness of alternative policy plans;
- simulation-based models with which the effect of changes in surrounding conditions on the patterns of intergenerational transmission for minority languages can be estimated;
- a methodology for the psychometric measurement of the relationship between individual multilingualism and creativity.

It follows that MIME is, of necessity, a deeply interdisciplinary enterprise. It combines inputs from no less than eleven disciplines (political science, philosophy, sociolinguistics, translation studies, sociology, education sciences, history, economics, geography, law, and psychology). Rather than working in parallel, separate silos, all teams have applied a common analytical framework.

Thirdly, the MIME approach takes due account of the fact that when it comes to managing linguistic diversity through actual policies, specific conditions have crucial importance. Each case is a special case. Moreover, in times of rapid change, what was a sound strategy in a given context

at a certain point in time may no longer be just a few years later. Therefore, we do not believe in the somewhat hackneyed notion of "best practice" and never use it throughout the project. The focus is on providing *tools* that users can *adapt* to the goals, conditions and constraints of the specific cases in which they operate. Many of the tools that we propose are novel, and their validity is assessed on the basis of a theoretical examination (this is often the case, for example, in the choice of alternative criteria to assess the degree of fairness of alternative language policies) or with fresh data collected though qualitative or quantitative methods. In most cases, the tools presented are illustrated by examples of successful practice in a real-world complex. We show how, where, and under what conditions certain practices have been implemented and proved successful. It is then incumbent upon readers to assess whether a particular tool appears well-suited to a given problem that they are facing, and to adapt it to the context concerned.

These three key features result in a very innovative treatment of linguistic diversity as a public policy challenge for European society. This emphasis on policy choices marks a significant departure from most earlier projects on multilingualism which, being mainly anchored in the language disciplines, tended to focus on language practices and/or on the associated ideological implications, as revealed, for example, through discourses about languages and multilingualism – thus often leaving aside some of the practical policy questions that linguistic diversity raises.

Our observation that contemporary European society needs to formulate sound, rigorously assessed policy responses to the challenges of diversity is borne out by the electoral success, in various EU member states, of parties that are openly hostile to the European political, social, and economic venture. This hostility feeds on the rejection of a model that, arguably, has often turned a blind eye on language questions; they have frequently ignored that they actually matter to citizens, owing in particular to the important effect that language has on people's sense of space. For example:

- the presence of linguistic "others", usually as a result of recent immigration from other EU member states or third countries, is not always experienced as unproblematic. Even if the very notion of "otherness" may be questioned (largely because it may itself result from a discourse of "othering"), very practical questions, for example for school curricula, still need to be addressed.
- many Europeans have reservations about the unchecked, apparently unmanaged increase in the use of English. Even if they see the usefulness of having the means (through English or through other strategies) to communicate widely and welcome the possibility of appropriating this tool, this does not imply that other tools are not relevant, and certainly does not amount to an endorsement of the marginalisation or eviction of national languages by English, for example in tertiary education in some member states.

What a number of different situations have in common, then, is the risk that citizens feel threatened in their sense of space, of which the use of a locally dominant language, typically a national language, usually is an important feature. This situation, in turn, may give rise to various forms of backlash, which all harm Europe as a shared political, social, economic and cultural venture.

Ensuring the success of an open and vibrant society requires appropriate instruments to confront these language-related problems, and this is what MIME has set out to develop.

Evidence and Analysis

Linguistic diversity carries benefits and costs, a little like environmental quality. Moreover, in both cases, benefits and costs behave in a similar way.

Consider first environmental quality: starting out from a certain level, improvements will carry benefits (cleaner air and streams, quieter streets, and more diverse fauna and flora). However, whereas initial improvements will generally have a notable impact, subsequent ones will be less

noticeable, and will make less of a change on our quality of life. The effect of successive improvements is always positive, but decreasing (benefits increase, but at a decreasing rate). In parallel, the cost of these improvements will display symmetrical properties: initial measures tend to be obvious and relatively cheap; but the further we push the effort towards higher environmental quality, the more it will be necessary to implement more complex, and typically costlier measures. The cost of each of these successive improvements is positive and rising (costs increase, but at an increasing rate).

The same applies to linguistic diversity. Assume we start out from a situation of relative uniformity. More linguistic diversity is typically associated with various benefits, and this association may be direct or indirect. For example, we often observe greater vibrancy and dynamism in the social and cultural life of diverse, open societies. Let us also think about citizens' mobility: one of the processes that generates linguistic diversity is the fact that people move about, and they do so because this mobility affords them access to better conditions for study, work, retirement, or leisure. Diversity, therefore, is closely linked with various types of benefits, both material and symbolic.

At the same time, however, linguistic diversity can generate costs, which can also be material or symbolic. An obvious direct cost is that of ensuring efficient communication between people from different linguistic backgrounds: this requires devoting resources to language learning, translation (whether human or automatic), and/or interpreting. Linguistic diversity may also entail indirect costs, and some of them are particularly tricky because they are closely connected with a specific benefit, namely, mobility itself. Consider the case of mobile people who move about, bringing their language and culture with them and settling in a country where traditionally, another language is used. Much, then, depends on the terms on which the newcomers settle in their new surroundings. The crux of the matter is whether these terms are conducive to the inclusion of the newcomers in the host society. Inclusion is desirable *per se*, because it is a prerequisite of social cohesion, and also because it is one of the conditions of Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity in general. Europe is diverse because the various languages and cultures it harbours are different from each other. However, if inclusion into the linguistic and cultural fabric of the host society proves problematic, diversity (in particular diversity stemming from people's mobility or, in plainer terms, from immigration) may be perceived as a cost.

Summing up, diversity entails both benefits and costs (material and symbolic); and these benefits and costs are inextricably linked to each other, particularly through the dynamics of mobility and inclusion. The MIME project is built around this idea: linguistic diversity *is* a challenge for the European citizen precisely *because* it carries both costs and benefits, *and* both are so intimately connected. It follows that Europe's response to the challenge of linguistic diversity should take due account of these interconnections.

The MIME approach, therefore, centrally rests on responses to the *trade-off between mobility and inclusion*, both of which are desirable aims: in general, more mobility carries a potential cost in terms of inclusion; reciprocally, more inclusion may hamper mobility (this trade-off is examined in more detail in the November 2017 *Policy Brief* of the MIME project). The challenge of dealing with linguistic diversity, then, requires identifying:

- in a given context characterised by an *existing* set of features (such as legal and constitutional provisions, an education system, a certain range of attitudes among the population, etc.), the best balance between mobility and inclusion, given their respective benefits and costs, as well as the policies that can be designed and implemented in order to move closer to a good balance,
- the policies that can help to *modify* the existing context and relax the trade-off between mobility and inclusion – which means facilitating mobility without compromising inclusion, and/or strengthening inclusion without hampering mobility.

Obviously, the two sets of issues blend into each other: the very policies initially developed to improve the balance between mobility and inclusion in an existing context may be expanded and become more far-reaching, by modifying the context in which mobility and inclusion are balanced against each other. However, both sets of questions give substance to the project's integrative

approach to language policy, highlighting the fact that *MIME's core contribution lies in the design of an integrative framework* that helps us think about *the linguistic environment* that we want to live in.

In the MIME project, these structuring questions have been applied to various domains (political, social, educational, communicational) in which linguistic diversity requires attention, in order to generate case-sensitive policy responses to the challenges of diversity.

Sample results are reported in the preceding *MIME Policy Brief*, covering five areas: **politics**, **society**, **education**, **communication**, and **policy selection and design**. In addition, one sample result is drawn from the set of pilot studies whose function, in the MIME project, is to explore additional facets of multilingualism.

These findings will not be repeated here, but readers can easily access them thanks to the *MIME Vademecum*, a collection of 72 language policy questions handled in two pages each, travelling across the full range of issues addressed in the project. This volume is chiefly intended for people who, because of their professional or political activities (such as civil servants or parliamentarians, whether at regional, national or supra-national level), are led to examine language policy questions and sometimes take a stand or even vote on them. Readers can use the *Vademecum* as a tool to get acquainted with the latest advances in language policy research, obtain information on real-world cases, and develop their own responses to the questions that need addressing in specific cases. The *MIME Vademecum* can also prove very useful for the media and, ultimately for society at large, because it provides factual knowledge, concepts and analytical tools that can make for better-informed public debate.

All entries may be read independently of each other. Each of them opens with a brief characterisation of an issue, followed by an account of research results, illustrated by factual evidence. The closing section of each entry is devoted to policy implications. A set of key references is provided for readers who want to delve deeper into a particular question. Although it would not be possible here to list all the 72 entries, here is a sample of twelve questions handled in the *MIME Vademecum*, which give an idea of the range of issues on which the *MIME* project offers guidance:

Q3 – Can the free market manage linguistic diversity?
Q5 – How should we identify and measure linguistic disadvantage?
Q13 – What are the general legal implications of MIME research?
Q17 – How important is demolinguistic concentration for the survival of minority languages in a world of increasing mobility?
Q22 – How should neighbouring states cooperate in the management of diversity?
Q27 – Do mobile EU citizens see themselves as "Europeans"?
Q42 – How can non-formal and informal learning networks be harnessed in support of multilingualism?
Q51 – How can migrants' existing language skills be used to help them learn the host country language?
Q55 – What is intercomprehension and what is it good for?
Q58 – Should machine translation be used when providing public services?
Q66 – Are multilingual individuals more creative?
Q72 – How can multilingualism be promoted in EU consumer legislation?

Neither the *MIME project* in general nor the *MIME Vademecum* in particular make formal recommendations and, as noted above, we deliberately keep clear of any notion of "best practice". The core principle of the project, also reflected in the *Vademecum*, is to provide orientation and, hopefully, inspiration for language policies.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Beyond specific responses to specific problems, the meta-level results of the MIME project may constitute its most useful long-term contribution to the management of multilingualism in Europe. Three meta-level results are summarised in the closing section of this *Policy Brief*.

1. *Reconceptualising the notion of social cohesion at the European level*

The notion of social cohesion is frequently invoked in public debate, but what this term actually refers to is often left conveniently undefined. Our results help give more substance to the notion of cohesion. They suggest that cohesion, at the European level, is the product of the *balanced combination of mobility and inclusion*. This balance, of course, is something dynamic that changes over time, but the general perspective on cohesion can be summarised as follows: in the long run, European society will be cohesive if its citizens can easily move between member states and are not confined to a country where they happen to have been born or to have studied; this requires support for arrangements and institutions that facilitate mobility. At the same time, cohesion requires citizens, wherever they come from, to be included in the local community where they choose to live, whether it is for a short or for an extended period. This implies support for the vitality of diverse communities, big or small, which differ from each other and manifest their uniqueness, in particular, through their specific linguistic features. Cohesion, thus, also depends on a proper understanding of the meaning of inclusion.

2. *Understanding the meaning of "inclusion" in a language policy for Europe*

For genuine inclusion to take place, there needs to be a lively, sustainable social fabric for the "other" to be included into. Inclusion, therefore, does not amount to a drift towards a form of cosmopolitanism that would deny, lessen or erase the specificity and uniqueness of different parts of Europe. The implication of the European Union's professed goal to respect its linguistic and cultural diversity is that different locales in Europe must be encouraged to cultivate their uniqueness (which may be a historically *multilingual* uniqueness, as in Luxembourg).

It is also important to recall that *inclusion*, by definition, should be for everybody. A concern for inclusion, therefore, also implies paying attention to the concerns of those who chose *not* to be mobile and have no particular reason to move about. Nevertheless, as members of a host society, they play a crucial role in the management of linguistic and cultural diversity, because it is incumbent upon them to welcome and accept newcomers in their midst. The arrival of mobile, and linguistically and culturally different people, starting with citizens from other EU member states, should be experienced as an enrichment. For this to happen, however, security in one's sense of place is crucial, and language policies, consequently, must embody measures that preserve the uniqueness and distinctiveness of each part of Europe. This distinctiveness does not require immutability, but it remains a precondition for being able to welcome the linguistic and cultural "other" and offer him or her the possibility of being included. When seen in this light, inclusion does not require newcomers to relinquish their own linguistic and cultural heritage; inclusion as defined here fosters an organic, interactive version of multilingualism.

3. *Interdisciplinarity is necessary for good policy selection and design*

Language issues are transversal, and language issues typically cannot be left to themselves; the management of linguistic diversity through public policy is both necessary and unavoidable. Societies must make decisions about which languages to use or not to use in various contexts, which languages to protect and promote, and how to arbitrate between competing interests when this competition crystallises in language issues. Putting it differently, there is no such thing as "no language policy". The selection, design and evaluation of sound language policies, then, require a profoundly interdisciplinary outlook, in which *policy analysis* has a federating role to play. This is not because it emphasises any particular part of diversity management, but precisely because it does not, and offers, instead, a framework within which a whole range of political, social, educational, communicational, cultural, and other issues can be handled through a transversal, consistent approach. In order to do justice to the complexity of diversity management, then, a concerted effort is necessary, drawing on the questions, concepts, methods, and findings of disciplines spanning the full range of the social sciences and humanities. This, in turn, requires

creating, supporting and maintaining the conditions for constant interdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation, first in research (where interdisciplinarity must be much more actively supported by funding bodies), but also when dissemination research results and making them available to the authorities, politicians, the media and civil society.

Research Parameters

The MIME project comprises 25 teams from 22 institutions spread over 16 countries across Europe. 23 of the participating teams focus on research tasks; one team is specifically entrusted with project management, communication and dissemination, and another with stakeholder involvement and training, including the practical organisation of the MIME doctoral schools.

The MIME research teams combine theoretical and empirical work, engaging in desk research on secondary sources as well as terrain research with collection of new data. Most of the empirical research is qualitative, but some teams use quantitative methods and have gathered samples of representative observations for statistical treatment.

A defining feature of the MIME project is its deep-seated interdisciplinarity, involving researchers from eleven different disciplines. Crucially, none of these disciplines holds a majority in the MIME community, allowing for a genuine, balanced co-operation between the participating disciplines.

Dissemination plays an important role in the MIME project, which has set up a *Stakeholder Forum* meeting once a year in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, in order to establish and facilitate contact and exchange between research teams and four different groups of practitioners, respectively representing professionals in (i) translation and interpreting; (ii) second/foreign language teaching; (iii) immigrant integration and (iv) language policy agencies and commissioners.

The project has produced a considerable scientific output including internal research reports, articles in scientific journals, chapters in edited volumes, presentations at scientific conferences and workshops, and dedicated panels and workshops (see detail on the MIME project, its activities and research outcomes is available on www.mime-project.org). A volume synthesising the project's main results for an academic readership is in progress; the *MIME Vademecum*, aimed at a more general public, is freely downloadable from www.mime-project.org/vademecum.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME

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WEBSITE

http://www.mime-project.org

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(see also selected publications listed in 2nd *MIME Policy Brief*, November 2017)

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