

The ECSPM consolidates the bond between civil society and academia: Our CURUM constituent

What is Civil Society?

Civil Society is a space that exists over or against the state and partially independent from it, as an intermediary between the private sector and the state. It includes those dimensions of social life which cannot be confounded with the state, represented by community groups, unions, non-governmental or non-state organizations, professional associations and foundations which have the power to debate and tackle action, as well as the potential to defy authorities' decisions that do not serve the wider public interest. When mobilized, civil society has the capacity to influence the actions of elected policy-makers and the market.

Academia as Civil Society

Though academia is a crucial part of the social reality today, leading thinking processes, facilitating balanced, unemotional decisions and assisting public debates based on reason, academic and research institutions are not instantaneously thought of as 'civil society'. Yet, academics and intellectuals have always thought for society. When a problem or injustice occurs in society, academics oppose such activity through their writings and speeches and try to mobilize public opinion for a just society. Now, more than ever, as contemporary society is evolving, in response to technological developments and more nuanced changes within individual and supranational states, the role of academia is becoming critical. The research expertise and dedicated skills of academic researchers, coupled with rigour in methodology, ethics processes and evidence validation are valuable compliments to practitioner approaches for fairer decision making and strategy planning by policy makers and public officials. Evidence-based arguments can better convince superiors and stakeholders to champion a fundamental rights cause.

In this light, we have from the start created a Multilingualism Expert Group (MEG) whose responsibility is to engage the wider academic community in meaningful discussions about issues related to (a) languages & language policy issues, (b) language education, (c) translation & technology, and (d) arts, culture & media. Position papers will appear in each of the themes and discussants will be invited to send us their pro or con comments to be published alongside each position paper. For the names of reputable academics on the MEG see [here](#).

The CURUM constituent

Also, the ECSPM honours the interrelationship between civil society, academia and social action, by generating the **Cluster of University Research Units** focusing on **Multilingualism (CURUM)** and related issues such as language learning, teaching and assessment, as well as language in society/the public space. The university units that are members/partners of the ECSPM so far are:

- The Babylon Center for the Study of Superdiversity, University of Tilburg, NL
- The Centre for Literacy and Multilingualism, University of Reading, UK
- The Center for Multilingualism, Universität Konstanz, DE
- The Multilingualism Research Group, University of Tübingen
- The Division of Multilingualism, Institute of Linguistics and Literary Studies, Technische Universität Darmstadt, DE
- OLBI - Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute of the University of Ottawa, CA.

With other such units soon to join our CURUM constituent, the overriding goal is to attempt a to bring together European and international research into multilingualism from different disciplines.