

ECSPM Symposium 7-9/12/20



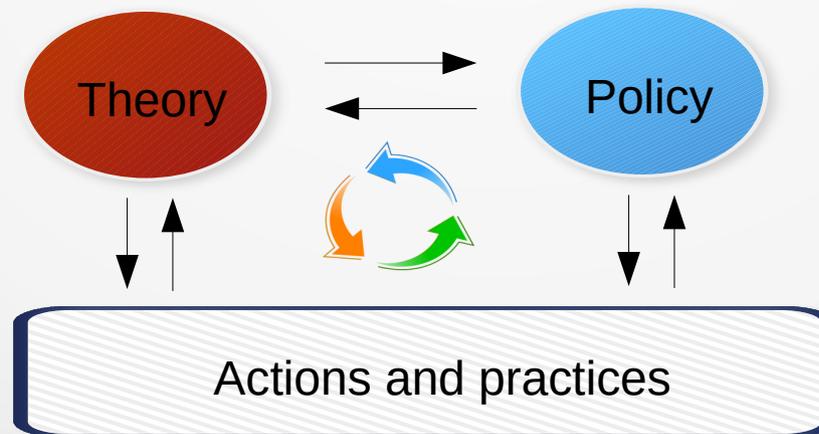
# (SUPER)DIVERSITY & 'NATIONAL' LANGUAGES

*Implications of the increasing diversity of our societies  
for the national languages & their policies*

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# Superdiversity at work

- From theory and policy to action and practices...
  - Theory doesn't find its way to action/practices...
  - Doesn't policy find its way to practices? Or is there more to it than that?
  - Which relationship between theory and policy? Do they form one entity?
- Things seem more complicated!



# Elements of complexity



Theory



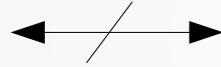
Policy

Policy



Practice

Theory



Practice

Ideology / convictions



Facts



- How can we connect these different 'worlds'?
- How can we break through in- and miscomprehensions?

# Multi-/plurilingualism...which?



What do we mean when we say that Europe is multilingual?  
Something like multilingual **Belgium**, but larger?



= set of monolingual territories (and Brussels as a mixed territory of largely separate(d) realities)

# Also for Europe?



## But what about:

- Regional / minority languages?
- Internal mobility within a Europe without internal borders?
- Migration / presence of languages & cultures from outside Europe?
- International and cross-cultural needs, e.g. in science, business etc...
- Offline and online communication / networks?
- Cities / regions in networks vs. the old containers of the nation-state?
- (...)

# Challenging changes...



A **new social reality** has come into being and it constitutes a major challenge to the traditional language policy of the dominant languages of the nation-states!

**Space of flows** rather than space of places! (*M. Castells*)

- 'Space' of interaction is no longer predominantly a mere geographical space from local to global, with the nation-state as its predominant political scale of reference (local – regional – national – European – global), but increasingly
- A globalised society with large urban areas as nodes in a global network, where offline and online interaction intertwine.
- The urban areas are more and more in contact with other urban nodes in the global network, and not merely or predominantly with their traditional *hinterland* (surrounding region – state).
- The urban areas are increasingly multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual; places where the local and global dimensions of society meet and interact, with mobility patterns along these nodes.

## With politics lagging behind...



- These changes are creating increasing **tension** between real world interaction within the socio-economic reality and the existing scales for political organisation and representation, based on the nation-state;
- The language policies for the official languages within their historical linguistic territories of dominance are entirely embedded in the traditional scale of political representation;
- As a consequence, these policies show an increasing tension with the real-world linguistic landscape, with real-life interaction patterns and with the real communicative needs of individuals.

# Aspects of tension:



- Plurilingualism is the rule, not the exception
- '*Mother-tongueness*', i.e. of one basic language of reference (with L2 / FL as compliments), linked to the ideal of native speaker competence
- *Territoriality* of languages, traditional territories of dominance are permanently perforated, penetrated and challenged by other languages (multi- & interscale!)
- Language competence as the competence to make conscious choices within an increasingly vast linguistic repertoire

# A threat or an opportunity?



- What does that mean for the status & use of our national languages?
  - from uncontested monopoly to shared spaces, in contact, sometimes in competition
  - from mother tongue of the citizens to vehicular language of the community
- Re-define the role of the national languages in this new reality
  - from the language of the community as a whole towards language of contact between different sub-communities (*bridging* type of social capital)
  - from constituent of national identity to regulator of interaction between different identities
  - from a factor in *othering* to a factor of encounter
  - (....)
- The role might change but will remain indispensable!

Thanks!



Problems more than solutions...

I hope this contribution will stimulate your own reflection  
on language and society

See you in our session!