

## Introduction to the theme of the symposium

This year's event is *the third ECSPM symposium in a row* focusing on HE which, as a producer of knowledge, has an important role to play in democratic societies through:

- **increasing access to quality education** for everyone,
- **raising awareness** about issues of social importance not only among faculty and students but also for the social milieu,
- **helping transform societies** for sustainable development through technology transfer and practical application of knowledge and ideas,
- **engaging** with the community at local and transnational levels in pursuit of human and social development

HEIs are well positioned to deal with global challenges through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teaching and learning, as well as sustainability-driven research. They are also well placed for interacting with civil society and providing community service alongside their two other core functions, i.e. teaching and research. This year's symposium theme is in recognition of the importance of HEIs' engagement with civil society: **THE SOCIAL ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Developing the civil society's awareness and impacting policies on the role of multilingualism in education.**

The two previous ECSPM symposia considered issues related to multilingual scholarship and epistemic knowledge in HE. Specifically:

**The 2021 affair**, hosted by the Centre for Multilingualism at the University of Konstanz, examined the role of languages in HE and English in particular, as it has been viewed:

- as a vehicle for economic and symbolic profit – through international student enrolment
- a facilitator for higher scores in university rankings and
- a channel for the recruitment of 'more competent' staff and 'brilliant' students.

EMI and the wider Englishization of HE was discussed critically, with symposium contributors expounding on the socio-cultural and political consequences of this situation which, despite critique, continues to escalate – even though the pedagogical consequences in non-English speaking countries have not been substantially documented.

Appraisals of the monolingual tradition of universities, whether it is the local official language or English –linked to the internationalisation and commercialisation of HE– was undertaken by distinguished academics from different parts of Europe, Australia, and India. They presented their position and vision, research findings and their proposals regarding the monolingual ethos and the colonisation of curricular knowledge in HE.

They also moved beyond critique to constructive proposals highlighting the importance of writing an explicit language policy – an issue addressed at our 2022 symposium by Joseph Lo Bianco (University of Melbourne) who discussed endeavours of producing critical policy which also has traction in teaching and administration, change in the production of knowledge, in management as well as in the interaction between HEIs and the surrounding society.

“Multilingualism as a resource of the sustainable university” was the issue considered by keynote speaker, Ingrid Gogolin (University of Hamburg), while “Multilingual education for social justice and the need for linguistically inclusive HE” was the theme addressed by Eva Vetter (University of Vienna), and project results from “Researching multilingually: perspectives on/from researcher education” were presented by Jane Andrews (University of West England, Bristol) and Richard Fay, (University of Manchester).

Representatives of European University Alliances, working *collaboratively* to develop and implement explicit language policies supporting multilingualism and plurilingual pedagogies, presented their efforts to design student-centred curricula, delivered jointly across inter-university campuses, and to offer students and staff opportunities to enjoy physical, virtual, or blended mobility to study, train, teach, do research, and share services with cooperating partner institutions from different EU Member States. These efforts were discussed as a bottom-up approach to multilingualism in HE in a panel chaired by Theodoros Marinis (University of Konstanz).

The PPT presentations of speakers and panellists at this and all other ECSPM symposia are uploaded on our website, the events webpage, and they are freely available to all interested parties.

**The 2022 affair**, hosted by the Centre of Excellence with permanent linguistic observatory for Italian abroad and immigrant languages of the University for Foreigners of Sienna, focused on multilingualism, academic literacies, and the linguistic construction of academic knowledge in European universities. Distinguished speakers from Europe, Australia, Canada, China, the USA and beyond presented their views on these issues and discussed them with other participating scholars.

We focused on the mono- or multilingual scientific practices, on questions of ethics and social justice in academic practices, as well as the multilingual construction of scientific knowledge, which was the topic of the presentation by Anne-Claude Berthoud (University of Lausanne), but also of the presentations in a panel chaired by Laurent Gajo (University of Geneva). They informed us of an ongoing project dealing with multilingualism in research and teaching practices in HE.

The symposium also approached the issue of the construction of knowledge about language, through language and languaging in a panel discussion that involved Antonella Sorace (University of Edinburg), Ianthi Tsimpli (University of Cambridge), Raphael Berthele (University of Freiburg) and Paul Thibault (University of Agder). The panellists examined theories of language and paradigms of linguistic studies responding to the exigency for a multilingual turn in education and plurilingual pedagogies consistent with social demands for inclusive societies, social and epistemic justice.

Other distinguished scholars from European universities and their discussants contributed to our understanding of the issues at hand and a panel with colleagues from different continents, chaired by Sinfree Makoni (Pennsylvania State University) carried out an

interesting discussion on decolonizing the language of scholarship and pedagogy in HE in the Global South.

On another note, Michelle Gazzola (University of Ulster) proposed the promotion of multilingualism through university rankings which currently use indicators that have created a strong incentive structure that results in an artificial promotion of monolingualism in teaching and research, in favour of English.

The desire for change in criteria for university rankings, through collaborative European action, led the ECSPM to sign “The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment” and become a member of CoARA – a coalition of research (funding and performing) organisations, national/regional assessment authorities and agencies, as well as associations of the above organisations, learned societies and more for a shared direction of changes in assessment practices that will hopefully produce different forms of knowledge, constructed through linguistic and cultural practices.

Following the 2022 symposium the idea of drafting the “ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism” was born. It has now been translated in about 20 languages. It will be presented and discussed at this year’s symposium, which has the support and corroboration of our most gracious hosts here at the University of Strasbourg. Once the Declaration is finalised and approved, it will be uploaded to a platform with a petition for change addressed to: (a) the Education Department of the Council of Europe, (b) the Higher Education Unit of European Commission (EAC.B.1), (c) the European University Association (EUA), and (d) the Higher Education Institutions across Europe.

**This year’s symposium** is a follow up of the work the ECSPM-CURUM are doing for research-based policy recommendations and scholarly inquiry with the intent to strengthen the role of European HE in transforming attitudes to languages, multi- and plurilingualism, so as to facilitate more inclusive learning environments and to make international communication possible without jeopardising social agents’ linguistic and cultural identities. The vision of our organisation is related to the potential of universities to contribute to human and social development in democratic societies, through respect for linguistic-cultural diversity and heteroglossia.

We who are taking part in this symposium today are fully aware of the fact that language difference can be constructed as a stigma and attract discrimination. We also know that the differential experience of multilingualism constitutes an advantage for some – depending on the value attached to the languages they speak – and a disadvantage for others. Language difference may cause injustice related to other socially constructed and contested differences including ethnicity and race, class, gender, (dis)ability, and religion.

Social (in)justice related to language diversity particularly affects bilinguals /multilinguals from marginalized communities, including immigrants and refugees, who must learn, un-learn, and re-learn multiple languages over their life span. For these groups more than any others, language learning can either open or obstruct access especially to HE.

Yet, equity in access and success in HE is a prerequisite today in a world which has experienced spectacular expansion and intellectual achievement in the last half century, but which has also suffered severe disparities. A disproportionately high share of students entering universities still comes from privileged homes even in countries where academic education is considered a human right and is therefore fully funded by the state. Demands for internationalisation of HEIs has not lessened structural inequality and disparities that exist across groups and societies, often due to discriminatory norms that are based on ethnic, linguistic, and sociocultural characteristics. On the other hand, linguistic social injustice, discrimination, and the refutation of multilingualism and its benefits, of plurilingual pedagogies and its advantages in education, is largely due to what kinds of understandings wider segments of the population have developed about language and communication, how we acquire and how we *language* knowledge.

What is the responsibility of universities in challenging values and beliefs about languages, multilingual practices in education and plurilingual pedagogies especially in the last decade when:

- the world has experienced a democratic recession with rising authoritarianism,
- a big part of the world's population is currently living under autocratic rule as a result of coups, anti-pluralist polarisation, and subversion of democratic processes,
- the use of misinformation and propaganda manipulates and controls the electorate.

Academia, as part of civil society with a leading role in civic engagement, can and must, at this time in history, play an important role in promoting and cultivating democratic interests locally and globally. HE is challenged to reconsider its/our mission with regard to its/our social responsibility. To this end, scholars/educators might rethink what it means to be a socially responsible institution, as well as our collective and individual role in civil society.

New understanding of language as languaging, the economy of semiotic resources during communication and the discursive construction of how people learn and communicate with one another.

What we are suggesting at this year's symposium is that transforming ideas and values *about languages, about how we language reality, about the economy of semiotic resources during communication and about how people learn and communicate with one another* is, at least in part, the responsibility of HEIs. They need to help the wider public, community groups and civic organisations think differently about language through civic engagement.

Moreover, putting aside the institutional and individual academic arrogance, HEIs need to recognise the role that civil society plays in transitional justice processes. It needs to get off its high-horse and recognise, as political actors, traditional civil society and social movements that have driven democratisation in various parts of the world and can be credited as integral to the creation of the discourse of transitional justice -- linguistic and other social forms of justice. In their civic engagement, HEIs stand to gain. Not only does civil society help to build needed social and cultural capital but it complements the other sectors and, some would

argue, it also serves as a check-and-balance on the other sectors, which is important for the proper functioning of a democratic society.

Today, there is a large number of civil society organisations to represent the diverse needs and interests of society. The more diverse, fragmented, and pluralistic the society at large, the more likely there will be an equally diverse, fragmented, and pluralistic civil society. Within a globalised context, the reach and impact of civil society extends well beyond conventional political, economic, social, technological, and environmental boundaries.

It is not surprising that the role, scope, and impact of civil society has increased dramatically in recent years. This is especially true for issues that transcend national boundaries, for issues which are very complex and large in scope including the environment and immigration, cultural identity, human rights, and social justice. In such cases inter-governmental organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations and UNESCO, and non-governmental organisations, like the International Association of Universities and the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association, help to bridge the gaps between sectors by addressing important issues that may be beyond the remit or capability of stand-alone and siloed institutions. However, this does not relieve HEIs from our responsibility to transform the curriculum but also interactional and discursive practices which will help make knowledge relevant to the issues of the emerging world and to engage with the civil society.