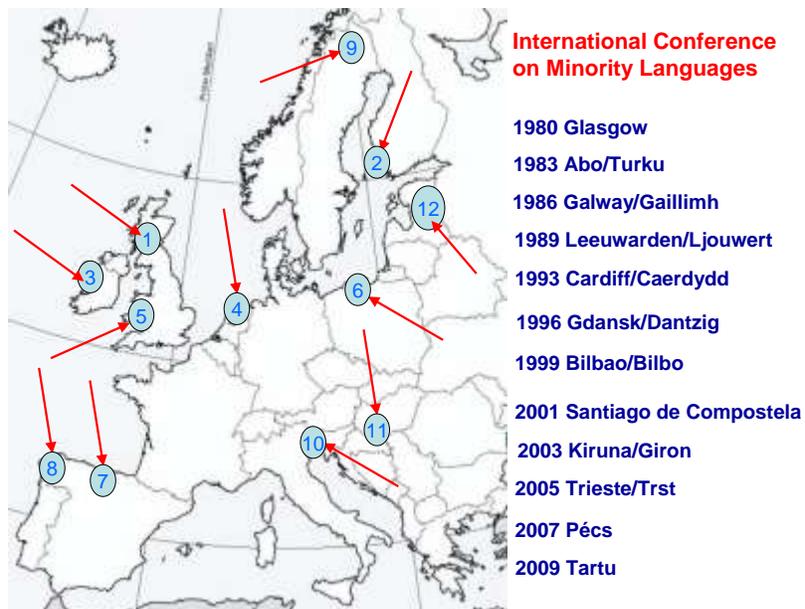


Minority Languages Today: a short history of the International Conferences on Minority Languages (1980-2009)

Durk Gorter, Ikerbasque/University of the Basque Country

Introduction

May Williamson was the charming and efficient treasurer of the ‘First International Conference on Minority Languages’ held in Glasgow in 1980. Since March 1978 she had attended no less than twenty-one meetings of the conference organising committee under the chair of first Seumas Simpson and later Derrick McClure. During those meetings neither she nor her academic colleagues probably ever dreamt of the possibility of a series of ten consecutive conferences in places all over Europe that would follow the week-long event they were in the process of organising in Glasgow from 8 to 13 September 1980. It is at the same time clear though that May Williamson and her co-organisers of the *first ICML* were hoping for successor conferences. They realized the discussion about the problems of ‘minority languages’ could not be exhausted in one time. And as the President of the Conference Arthur Aitken wrote in the Foreword to the proceedings, they were also aware that earlier conferences on similar topics had been organised and they learned later about other conferences that were organised on European cultural and linguistic minorities around the same time. This ‘*first ICML*’ had grown out of a suggestion in 1975 by James Chisholm to organise “a symposium for mutual information and comparison of cases between scholars of Scots and Frisian” (Aitken 1981: xi).



The actual conference got a much wider remit. The central theme of the first ICML was the discussion about the term ‘minority language’. It turned out to be a recurring theme in all the conferences that followed. The Scottish organisers were well aware of “*the paradoxes and uncertainties*” of the definition of the term minority language. “*Minority languages were defined as those ‘at risk’ because of a culturally dominant language ... and furthermore they are not usually the languages used in all areas of activity indulged in by their speakers*”. And further “*Our first concern was thus to be the present circumstances and future prospects of languages ‘at risk’ today – or threatened, pressured, beleaguered, being encroached on, in recession, declining, dying*” (Aitken 1981: vii). These are words of concern very much to the later conference organizers in other European cities as well.

At the closing session of the 11th ICML in Pécs in July 2007 I gave a PowerPoint presentation that also had a brief overview of the whole series of all ten previous conferences. I used screen shots from Google Earth to fly from one place to the next and give a bird’s eye view of the conferences. In this article I want to elaborate on that presentation and give a more historical account of the ICML’s that have taken place thus far. I will look at the organizing institutes, the language communities where the conferences took place and deal with some general issues concerning minority languages that have also concerned the organisers, the speakers and the participants. This is, of course, a personal account of someone who was involved with the conferences from the beginning and who has been related somehow to all of them. I hope it documents the history in a useful way for former and for future participants to ICML. I invite others to add to and to complement this overview.

1-ICML

The first ICML was organised under the auspices of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies.



Association for Scottish Literary Studies - www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS

The ASLS aims to promote the study, teaching and writing of Scottish literature, and to further the study of the languages of Scotland. To these ends, ASLS publishes a variety of materials: ASLS *Annual Volumes* series, *New Writing Scotland*, journal *Scottish Studies Review* journal *Scottish Language*, *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, newsletter *ScotLit*, *The Bottle Im*, *Scotnotes*, *Teaching Notes*, *Audio CDs*, *Occasional Papers* and *Treasure Islands: a guide to Scottish fiction for young readers aged 10–14*

ASLS also holds regular Conferences on Scottish language and literature: Annual Conference, held each May in locations around Scotland; Schools Conference, held annually on the first Saturday in October; Languages Conference, held every November.



The conference attracted almost 100 scholars from 19 different countries. The proceedings were published in 1981 by Edinburgh University Press as *Minority Languages Today* edited by Einar Haugen, J.D. McClure and D.S. Thompson. The hardcover book contained all eight plenary papers as well as a selection of 16 out of the 35 other papers presented at the conference (the full list is in the proceedings). The names of several of the presenters would reappear many times in later publications on minority languages, bilingual education, multilingualism and linguistic diversity. The title was well chosen and I use it again for this historical overview. The book was well received. Some of the papers are still worth reading today. Nine years later, in 1990, a paperback edition of the book appeared by the same publisher, with some corrections and additions.

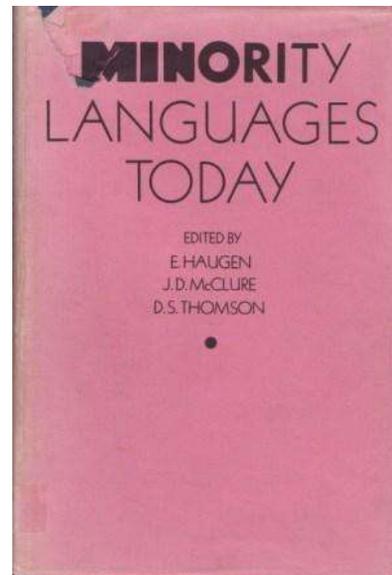
Scots and Gaelic

Glasgow city is located in Scotland where two indigenous minority languages are spoken, *Scots* and *Gaelic*. English may be spoken by a majority of the population, but it has been estimated that 30 per cent can speak Scots or 1.5 million people. No more than 1.5 per cent of the population speak Gaelic, or some 60.000 people.

Scots is a Germanic language closely related to English. Gaelic is a Celtic language related to Irish, Manx, Welsh, Cornish and Breton. Scots is the language of Lowland Scotland and the Northern Isles. It is also used in parts of Ulster, Northern Ireland.

Both languages have declined for many years, but more recently efforts at revitalization have caught on and both languages are used to some degree in education, the media and administration.

The timing of the ‘first’ conference was excellent because the attention for minority languages was on the rise, not only in academic circles but also in the political arena. In the *Foreword* to the proceedings Aitken (1981: xii) refers to the report on minority languages that was published around the same time by the Culture and Education Committee of the Council of Europe. That report was one of the steps in a process inside the Council of Europe that would ultimately lead to the acceptance of the *European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages* in 1992. What Aitken does not mention is that a bit earlier, in September 1979, the first directly elected European Parliament saw two very similar motions being tabled by the Italian representative Gaetano Arfé on a ‘Charter for Ethnic Minorities’ and by the delegate from Northern Ireland, John Hume, who called for a ‘Bill of Rights of the Regional Languages and Cultures in the Community’. These two motions would lead two years later to the acceptance by the European Parliament of the famous Arfé-report. One of the outcomes of that report was the establishment of the *European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages* (EBLUL) (Ó Riagáin 2001: 35-36). Both the European Charter and the EBLUL would play an important role in the series of international conferences on minority languages that would follow the successful kick-off in Glasgow.



This series of conferences has every time taken place in a town in an area where at least one indigenous minority language is in daily use by an active speech community. Since minority languages are usually not spoken in the capital of a state, these places are all located more in the periphery of the European states. Most of them are regional capitals and many also have a bilingual name: Åbo/Turku, Gaillimh/Galway, Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, Caerdydd/Cardiff, Gdańsk/Danzig, Bilbo/Bilbao, Santiago de Compostela, Giron/Kiruna, Trst/Trieste, Pécs/Fünfkirchen and in 2009 Tartu/Dorpat.

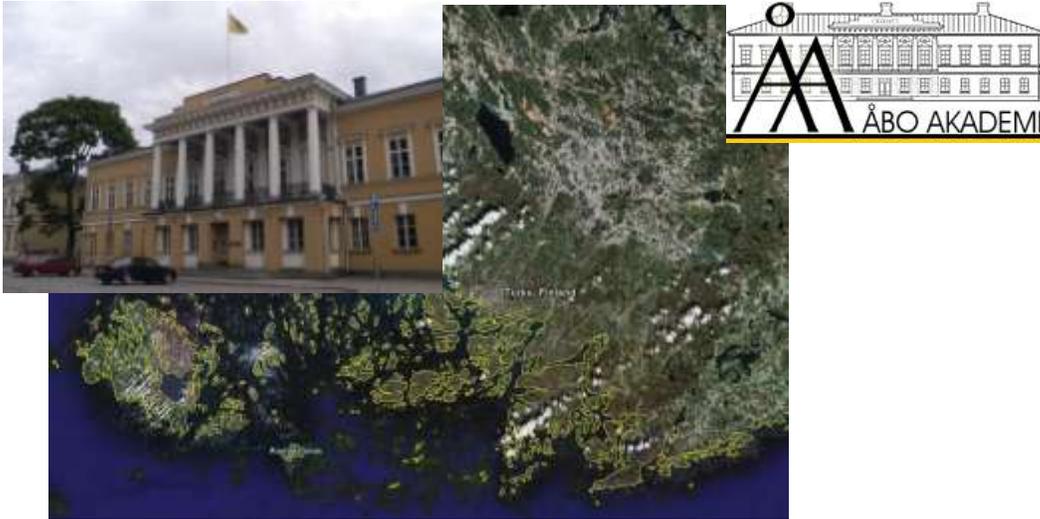


The conferences clearly have a European base, and its participants come for the most part from Europe, although many also have come from across all continents. The central themes are every time different, but the presentations are always relevant to minority languages. The focus is on indigenous minority languages, but there have also been presentations on sign languages and on immigrant minority languages.

The participants are primarily academic scholars who participate in applied research, either from a linguistic, a sociolinguistic or a more social scientific perspective. They have also attracted the interest of stakeholders such as policy makers and language activists. Generally, the papers are seen by many decision makers and politicians as not applied enough for their purposes and as not principal or ideological enough for the activists. The field of minority languages studies is not 'purely academic' and most of the researchers are in close contact with these stakeholders as well as with the language communities themselves.

2-ICML

It was decided in Glasgow to have the second conference organized by the Nordisk språkråd (Nordic Language Council). The *Second International Conference on Minority Languages* (2-ICML) took place from 6 to 12 June 1983 in Åbo/Turku, situated between the two main heartlands of the Swedish-speaking minority on the west and south coasts of Finland. The local host was Åbo Akademi, which nowadays calls itself Åbo Akademi University in English.



Nordisk språkråd

The Nordic Language Council www.nordisk-sprakrad.no (now called Nordens språkråd), is an advisory body of the Nordic Council of Ministers where the Nordic countries Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland collaborate on a common language policy. As a professional and co-operating bod it has the following goals:

“· To promote inter-Nordic language understanding· To strengthen knowledge of language in the Nordic countries· To promote democratic language policy and outlook on language in the Nordic countries· To strengthen the status of the Nordic languages within and outside the Nordic countries”¹

The **Abo Akademi University** www.abo.fi has locations in Abo/Turku and in Vasa/Vaasa. It is the Swedish language university in Finland, with, today, some 7,500 students.

1 <http://www.norden.org/sprak/sk/index.asp?lang=6> [accessed 10 March 2008]

The theme of the second installment of ICML was “*Language planning and language preservation, particularly with reference to the minority languages of the Nordic countries, the British Isles and the north-western European continent*” (Molde 1984: 193). The discussion on the social position of minority languages that had begun in Glasgow was continued. The theme shows that the second conference still had a strongly northern European emphasis.

Swedish speaking minority

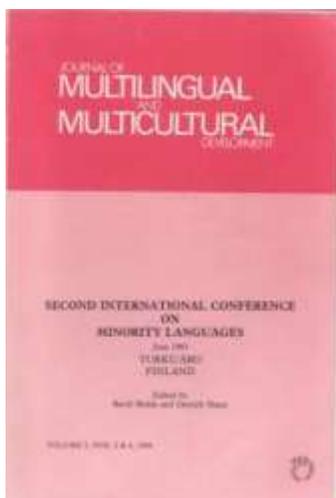
The Swedish speaking minority in Finland is probably the best protected minority group in Europe. Both Finnish and Swedish have the same official status. All citizens are provided with the same services in both languages. There are however some problems with putting this principle in practice, e.g. in education or in the media and many bilingual communities are dominated by Finnish speakers. There are about 290.000 Swedish speakers in Finland, or 5.6% of the total population².

Approximately 60 participants attended the conference, which makes it the smallest of all ICMLs. Although ICML has never grown in size as much as other conferences. There are examples in related fields of conferences that started around the same time and also were similarly small, but that have become conferences with over 500 participants. I am thinking here of the Sociolinguistics Symposium or the International Symposium on Bilingualism. Perhaps ICML could have grown as big in size, and the reasons it did not was that it was sometimes not very widely advertised or because it was held in a relatively remote area in Europe. What also may have been a factor is the circumstance that during the past two decades there have been other ‘competing’ European conferences that put the theme of minority languages central to its program. There have been several of such conferences e.g. individual conferences with financial support of the European Commission from the budget line for minority languages, or later, a series under the name ‘Partnership for Diversity’ organized by the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, the ‘Mercator Symposia’ by the Mercator centers, as well as small and large international meetings related to the work of the Council of Europe with regard to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages or the Framework Convention for National Minorities or other projects.

The proceedings of ICML-2 were published in 1984 as a special double issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (volume 5, numbers 3 & 4, pp 193-350). It contains 15 articles. Over the years the JMMD has become a rich source for all kinds of scientific articles on minority languages. It was the first involvement with ICML of the then still young publisher Multilingual Matters

² <http://virtual.finland.fi/netcomm/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=26218> [accessed 10 March 2008]

(www.multilingual-matters.com). This publishing house would become well-known among researchers of minority languages in later years. Also the proceedings of the next episodes were going to be published by them.



After Glasgow and Abo/Turku the conferences started on a tour across Europe, in the next steps still the northwestern parts, but later also the east and the south. The Third ICML took place in Gaillimh/Galway, in Ireland and three years later the Fourth ICML in 1989 in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, in the province of Friesland in The Netherlands. The three-annual rhythm was broken because the conference was supposed to move to Canada, but that failed at a late stage. So it went back to the ‘Celtic lands’ and was held in 1993 in Caerdydd/Cardiff, in Wales. Then in 1996 it went for the first time to central Europe and was held in Gdańsk, Poland. The next stop was in 1999 in Bilbo/Bilbao in the Basque Country and in 2001, the European Year of Languages, its location was Santiago de Compostela in Galicia (Spain). Thereafter in 2003 it went to the far north beyond the polar circle to Giron/Kiruna in Sweden and in 2005 the 10th anniversary edition was in Trst/Trieste among the Slovenes in Italy. Finally in July 2007 the location was Pécs in the south of Hungary. The 12th edition of ICML takes place in Estonia, in Tartu in May 2009.

3-ICML

The third conference in Galway shifted the focus from the social to the linguistic. The theme was “*the linguistics of minority languages*”. The hosts were from the Department of Old and Middle Irish and Celtic Philology of the University College in Galway. The enthusiastic main organizer was Professor Gearóid Mac Eoin, who was assisted by Dr Anders Ahlqvist (a Finnish specialist in Celtic Studies) and Dr Donncha Ó hAodha.



University in Galway

The Department of Old and Middle Irish and Celtic Philology is now part of the College of Arts, Social Sciences, and Celtic Studies (www.nuigalway.ie/arts), and it is now the National University of Ireland in Galway. Today the name is School of Irish, *Scoil na Gaeilge*, and it specializes in Celtic Studies, Irish language literary studies, linguistics, sociolinguistics and folkloristics.

Over one hundred *'members of the conference'* are listed in the proceedings. The ICMLs, however, never evolved into a formal umbrella organization with a board and formal membership. Every installment of the conference has been handed down in relay from one organizing body to the next. Each organizing committee became fully responsible for the format, content, theme, program, plenary speakers, time-table and any other aspect of its own conference. The consequence of this freedom was of course that the conferences differed among each other and that each episode had a strong 'local flavor'. At the same time there was continuity, not only because of the name or because the overarching problematic was 'minority languages', but also because many participants kept coming back. As said the first two times the discussion focused on defining the field and even much on 'what minority languages are'. In his summing up of the conference Mikael Reuter concluded "*In any case we all know, approximately, at any rate, what the term 'minority language' means*".

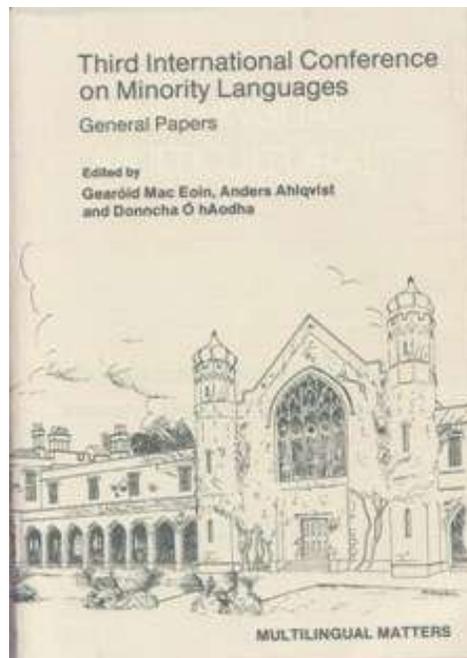
In the official opening ICML-3 was addressed by John Hume, then Member of the European Parliament Later, in 1998, he would become a Nobel peace prize laureate. John Hume played an important role in the promotion of lesser used languages. He encouraged with others the initiative to establish the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages. The EBLUL was established in Brussels in 1982 and had during the first years its main office in Dublin. At 3-ICML its secretary general Donall Ó Riagáin explained the work of EBLUL to the participants.

The 3-ICML was held from Friday evening 20 June 1986 with an informal get-together through to Thursday 26 June: a full week. The location in Gaillimh/Galway made it possible to have a full day excursion on Sunday to the Connemara, one of the Gaeltacht areas.

Irish language

Gaeltacht is the name for officially recognized Irish speaking regions mainly located in the western part of Ireland. The major areas are in the counties of Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry and Mayo, with a total population of around 90.000. Almost half live in the Galway Gaeltacht. In all Gaeltacht together some 64.000 persons are speaking Irish, more or less frequently. The Irish Republic as a whole has a population of around 4.2 million, of who 1.6 million are considered as Irish speakers (2006 census figures)³.

This time the result of 3-ICML were two publications. Again a special double issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, (volume 8, numbers 1 & 2, 1987, pp 1-229) was published. Separately a book with all the Celtic papers was published, also by Multilingual Matters. That volume was edited by Gearóid Mac Eoin, Anders Ahlqvist and Donncha Ó hAodha with as title *Celtic Papers from the 3rd International Conference on Minority Languages*.



³ http://www.cso.ie/census/census2006_volume9.htm [accessed 10 March 2008]



4-ICML

The next ICML indicated an effort to move away from discussing the basic concepts and go forward. Its central theme was announced as “*Comparative research on minority languages and development of theories*”. As it is being said in the introduction to the proceedings the rationale for the theme was “*if we ought to know by now what one such language looks like, it may be time to begin compare two (or more) of them on certain aspects in order to classify the similarities and the differences*” and further there is “*a need for theoretical work in the heterogeneous field of minority language studies*”. The two volumes of publications underline the ambition of a more research oriented emphasis and present at the same time a broadening of the scope. Volume I has as a subtitle “*General papers*” and Volume II “*Western and Eastern European Papers*”. Volume I was also, again, published as a special issue of JMMD (volume 11, numbers 1&2, 1990). These proceedings contain a number of contributions that even almost 20 years later are still of special relevance to the development of the minority languages field. Joshua Fishman presented as a plenary paper a forthcoming chapter from his book on *Reversing Language Shift* (Multilingual Matters 1991). His book would introduce a new area of studies for the years after. It somehow contrasts with the plenary paper by Howard Giles who presented an elaborated and improved version of his then already famous ‘ethnolinguistic vitality model’. He called it a “*theoretical conspexus*” of “*an interdisciplinary*

predictive model of minority language survival/non-survival". But perhaps because of these complex labels the new model never caught on and also in the current literature on vitality of minority languages the original, simpler three-fold model is usually taken as point of departure for the discussion. At least three other contributions had lasting importance for the field of minority studies, without wanting to belittle the other remaining papers. First of all the paper by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas who discusses the role of researchers in the field and introduced a human rights argumentation, on which she also later has published extensively. John Edwards presented his well-known typology of minority languages, which distinguishes the three dimensions of unique/non-unique/local only, adjoining/non-adjoining and cohesive/non-cohesive. François Grin published his first paper on "The Economic Approach to Minority Languages", a specialism he would fruitfully develop in later years. The second volume had two rather special papers, namely on Eastern Europe which was rather new. One paper by Alfred Majewicz and Tomasz Wicherkiewicz documents for the first time extensively all the minority languages in Poland, a country then in a stage of transition to a post-communist era. The second paper was on language policy and Siberian Estonians, written by Juri Viikberg, at a time when Estonia was still part of the USSR, and to become independent in 1991.



The Fourth International Conference on Minority Languages took place from 20 to 24 June 1989 in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden. The hosting institute was the Fryske Akademy and the location was the Hotel Management School.

Fryske Akademy

Founded in 1938 the Fryske Akademy (www.fryske-akademy.nl) is the research institute for Frisian language, history and society. It carries out projects such as the larger Frisian dictionary, a language database of Old Middle and New Frisian, a cartographic database that spans centuries of landownership, but also sociolinguistic surveys of language use and language attitudes and studies of education. Through the Mercator Research Center (www.mercator-research.eu) the Fryske Akademy is also involved in comparative studies of minority languages.

The location of the conference was the brand new **Hotel Management School**, today part of the Stenden University (the new name since 1 January 2008 formerly know as the CHN, www.stenden.com). The participants to the conference might not remember much about the lectures, but even many years later could still discuss in vivid detail the lunches that were prepared by the students and were served in the large hotel kitchen.

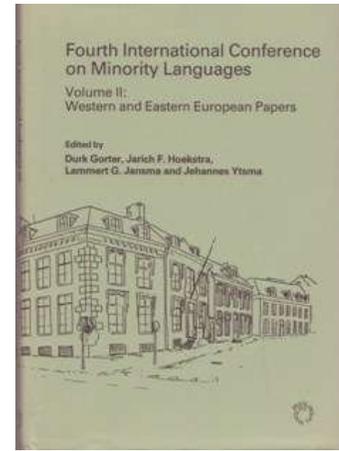
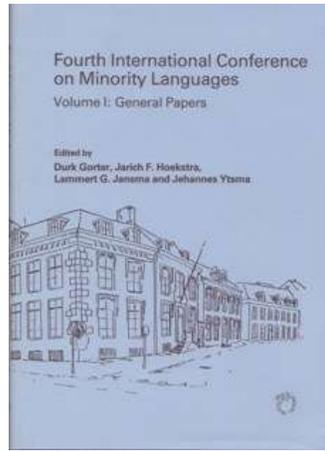
At the conference 5 invited plenary speakers gave a presentation, another 57 individual papers were read and a total of 137 participants from 22 different states attended.



Frisian

The Frisian language has approximately 400.000 speakers. Compared to other European regional minority languages it is moderately well protected and promoted. Efforts at revitalization for Frisian are much less than for Welsh, Basque or Catalan, but seem better than for Friulan, Kashubian or Breton. Legal arrangements have been emphasized much in language policy; more recently the focus has shifted to obtaining practical results. The efforts so far do not seem strong enough to reverse a slow ongoing language shift.

North Frisian and Saterfrisian are both spoken in Germany; those two languages have a history that separates them for over 1.000 years from Frisian in the Netherlands and thus they may share a name but are different languages altogether.



The introduction of the proceedings also gave testimony to the fact that the study of minority languages is not a purely academic affair: *“We share a common goal. We are not just neutral, indifferent spectators merely watching the processes and developments that go on in those language communities. All of us are engaged in one way or the other, many of us being members of the communities we study.”* In that same introduction we still wrote *“5-ICML to be held in Ottawa 1992”*, but due to unforeseen circumstances that step outside Europe would not happen and things took a different path.



5-ICML

The Canadian conference organizers failed at a late stage, just a few months before it was supposed to happen. The Welsh colleagues were ready to step in and save the conference from disappearing. They needed, however, enough time for preparation and thus the conference took place one year later than originally planned. The Fifth ICML was from 5 to 9 July 1993 in Caerdydd/Cardiff, the capital of Wales. The theme was very fitting *‘Mobility and minority languages’*. It is a theme that one way or the other is of relevance to almost all minority language communities. It points obviously also to immigrant minority groups, but also regional minority groups are faced with a two-edged sword of mobility: talented young speakers may leave the region to find jobs elsewhere and newcomers who do not speak the language may come in and have to be accommodated.



The organizer of 5-ICML was the University of Wales, department of Celtic studies (now the School of Welsh at Cardiff University). The size of the conference was about the same as in Friesland with 142 participants from 23 countries. It was estimated that 40% came from Wales and 16% from England. A total of 63 papers were read written by 76 authors.

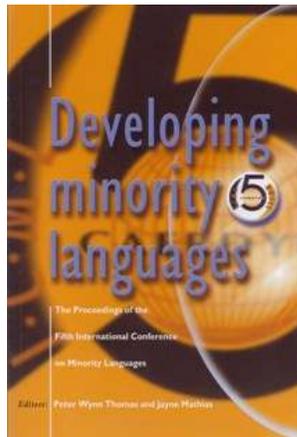
School of Welsh/Ysgol y Gymraeg at Cardiff University/Prifysgol Caerdydd

The School of Welsh is one of the oldest departments of Welsh in Wales. For over a century the department has contributed to the life and culture of Wales. The School offers a wide range of degree schemes, and has a commitment to working with the local community. The heightened awareness of the culture and language of Wales since devolution has further enhanced the prominent position of the School of Welsh in academia, government and society. www.cardiff.ac.uk/cymraeg

Cardiff University says about itself on the website that it is a 'dynamic and successful centre of higher education with an international reputation for high quality teaching and research'. Today it has 26,000 students and 6,000 staff of which 2,750 academic. Research is undertaken in each of the 28 schools. www.cardiff.ac.uk

In 1994 some reasonable time after the conference again a special double issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* appeared (volume 15, numbers 2 & 3) with a selection of the papers. It could not be known then, that this would be the last time that the proceedings were going to be published in

JMMD. The times were changing and publishers, also Multilingual Matters, changed their policy in regard to conference proceedings. They acknowledged that the quality of the publications would be served by having papers presented at a conference go afterwards through a stricter selection process by having them rewritten for publication and then anonymously peer-reviewed. Notwithstanding these changes in publication policies, the Department of Welsh in collaboration with Gower Press in Llandysul did publish one volume of 763 pages with 53 of the 63 papers presented at 5-ICML. The volume was edited by Peter Wynn Thomas and Jayne Mathias under the title '*Developing Minority Languages (The Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Minority Languages)*'.



However, it took some time to get the book ready. This second publication appeared at the end of 2000, almost 8 years later... In the Preface the editors refer to the many changes which had occurred in relation to minority languages since the previous ICML. They mention the adoption of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the discussion on the Killilea report in the European Parliament as well as the new Welsh Language Bill. Because of these developments the need for research becomes ever more important and they mention that "*The conference well highlighted areas in which research might be done: bilingual education, parental attitudes, language transmission in the home, the economy, the breaking down of barriers for learners ... and the new discipline of marketing. We also heard of language grief and languages death, but the main thrust of the conference was a celebration of diversity rather than what Barbara Boseker so poignantly called the 'trail of tears'.*" The editors also acknowledge that "*Wales, as a host nation, has naturally featured prominently in the Fifth International Conference on Minority Languages*".

Welsh

Welsh is a Celtic language, closely related to Cornish and Breton. The Welsh of today is descended from the language of the sixth century. At the start of the 20th century, the Welsh language was spoken by almost half the population of Wales. The 1911 Census recorded that nearly a million people regarded themselves as Welsh speakers. However, the number of Welsh speakers has decreased steadily. There are many reasons for this, such as: migration patterns from rural to urban areas, inward migration of English speakers, increased availability of English-language media, and a general secularization of society. It led to the erosion of Welsh in communities which were once almost entirely Welsh-speaking. By 1991, the number of people able to speak Welsh was still more than half a million, but only 18.7% of the population. This implied an increase among the number of young people who can speak Welsh. This trend continued in the 2001 census, which recorded that 20.8% or 611.000 of the population could speak Welsh. Further information at Welsh Language Board www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk

In my own ‘Summing up’ to the conference in the Proceedings (pages 7-11), I proposed a ‘Policy Statement’ for the ICML. I think it is still of relevance to the ICML and thus it may be worth repeating that statement here:

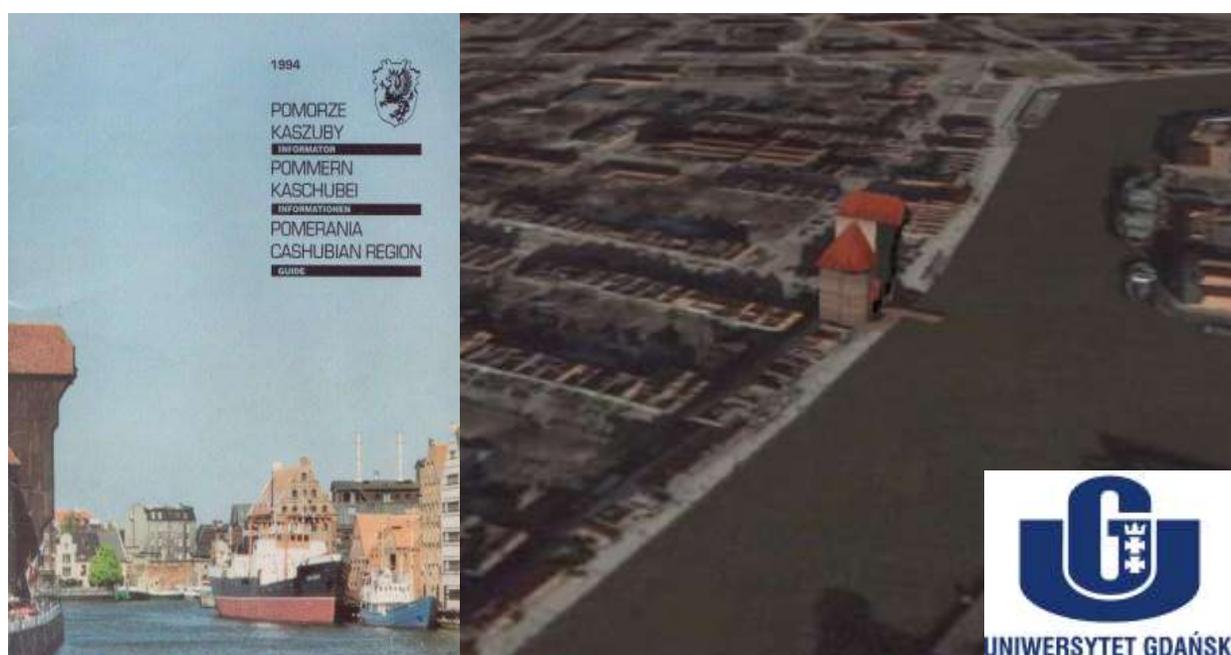
“The aim of ICML is to give every minority language scholar the opportunity of meeting other scholars by focussing on the whole range of minority languages studies. To this end ICML believes:

- (1) That minority languages are an important scientific topic in their own right. As much scientific knowledge should be brought to bear upon their problems as possible and minority languages, and minority languages alone, should be in the centre of attention.*
- (2) That minority languages are fundamental to a society's political, economic, linguistic, social and cultural development. Every possible opportunity for stimulating those languages should be ensured.*
- (3) That all scholars, whatever their disciplinary background, benefit from the experiences that ICML provides. Scholars from other field should be welcomed at ICML.*
- (4) That the community is the foundation of a minority language's development. Every possible opportunity for communities to support minority languages should be ensured.*
- (5) That continuity of ICML is of fundamental importance to the study of minority languages. To this end the Authorities are asked to financially and otherwise support any further ICML so that scholars wishing to do so can attend.”*

6-ICML

After three of the five installments were held in the 'Celtic lands', the conference went for the first time to Eastern Europe. It was held from 30 June to 5 July 1996 in Poland, in the city of Gdańsk, near the region where Kashubian is spoken as a minority language. As other countries formerly behind the Iron Curtain, Poland had undergone great changes since the transition from the communist regime. This was reflected in the central theme of the conference "*Minority Languages and Language Minorities in Changing Europe*".

Those developments are hopeful for minority languages such as Kashubian and hosting a European conference can have as a side effect the boosting of the official recognition and prestige of the language community.



Kashubian

Kashubian is a unique minority language, spoken only in Poland. Kashubian is a member of the West Slavic group of Slavic languages. Kashubian is often considered merely a dialectic variation of Polish, and until 1989 this was the general opinion of linguists. However, Kashubian began to emerge as a distinct language during the 14th century; it has a lot of specific features which make it a language in itself. There are estimates between 200,000 and 350.000 speakers. It is used on an everyday basis by far less people. Most Kashubian speakers live in north central Poland in the region of Pomerania on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea between the Vistula and Oder rivers. For Kashubian in education a lot has happened over the

past years. Currently only a handful of private kindergartens offer Kashubian, over 50 public primary schools with over 2,500 children offer Kashubian as a subject. Only 3 secondary schools offer some Kashubian. A number of books and magazines are published in Kashubian, and there are some radio and TV programs in the language.

The three organizing institutions were the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, the University of Gdańsk and the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. The conference was held at the premises of the University of Gdańsk/Uniwersytet Gdański. The program included a field trip to the Kashubian community.

The **Kashubian-Pomeranian Association** (*Kaszëbskò-Pòmòrszczé Zrzeszenié*) is a regional non-governmental organization in northern Poland, based in Gdańsk. (www.kaszubi.pl)

University of Gdańsk

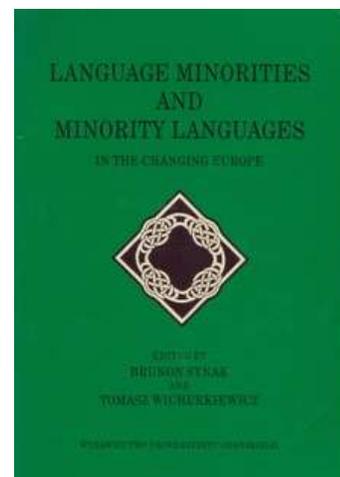
With almost 33,000 students in the nine faculties and 1,700 academic staff members the University of Gdańsk is the largest institute of higher education in the Pomeranian region.

www.ug.gda.pl/en

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan

Adam Mickiewicz University was founded in 1919. It is one of the largest academic centers in Poland with over 2,100 faculty members and over 49,000 students. It is organized into 13 different faculties, among which the faculty of modern languages and literature where a large range of languages can be studied as well as applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics. www.amu.edu.pl/nowa-eng.php

It took the organizers and editors Brunon Synak and Tomasz Wicherkiewicz not too long to produce a book of over 400 pages with a selection of about half of the 80 papers that were presented. In 1997 *Language Minorities and Minority Languages in the Changing Europe* appeared in Gdańsk with the university press, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego. This time the book was locally produced and this has not helped its wide distribution among the scientific community of scholars interested in minority languages.



7-ICML

Already in Wales it had been decided to organize the conference after Gdańsk in the more southern parts of Europe, so the Seventh ICML was in Bilbo/Bilbao, in the Basque Country, Spain. The organizer was this time not an academic institute, but the Deputy Ministry for Language Policy of the Basque Government. For the first time ever ICML had a multilingual theme: *“Reversing Language Shift / Experiencias de Inversión del Cambio Lingüístico / Récupération de la Perte Linguistique/ Hizkuntza Biziberritzeko Saiioak”*. The theme was a reference to the title of the then already famous book by Joshua Fishman which points out so well what the Basques and many other minority language groups are trying to establish. The multilingual character of the conference implied that four languages, English, Spanish, French and Basque were present all the time in the written material as well as in the simultaneous translation into the four languages of all plenary speakers. The fact that everyone had been given headphones made it also possible to have parallel sessions in the same big hall with just a small barrier of plants separating the sections and with the speakers using a microphone and the listeners having the original sound on their headphones.



Basque

Basque or Euskera is an isolate language of unknown origin not related to any European language. Basque today is unified – Euskera batua - on the basis of different dialects. The area where Basque has traditionally been spoken is called Euskal Herria, the Basque Country. This name is now applied to an area comprising seven historical provinces, four in Spain and three in France. The total population of the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community was 2.1 million in 2006. About a quarter of the population are competent in Basque, in addition to Spanish.

The Basque language (Euskera/Vasco) is recognized as the co-official language of the Basque Country, and is also spoken in Navarra and in the French Basque Country. All schools in the Basque Autonomous Community teach Basque in one way or another, varying between the use of the language as a medium of instruction and Castilian being taught as a subject, both languages being used as mediums of instruction and the use of Castilian as a medium of instruction and Basque being taught as a subject. Most schools also teach English from a young age onwards

<http://www.euskadi.net/>



Thus far these conferences had attracted around well over one hundred participants. This time in Bilbao that figure was multiplied and over four hundred participants attended. Most of them were local and either students or actively engaged in language planning. The paper by Joshua Fishman from Yeshiva University had as a title “*Why is it so hard to save a threatened language?*” It would become again chapter from a forthcoming book of his. That is the sequel to Reversing Language Shift and it appeared in 2001 under the title “*Can*

Threatened Languages Be Saved?” Fishman himself was invited, but could regrettably not attend. His contribution was read ‘in absentia’ by Richard Bourhis. Lluís Jou, Director General of Language Policy from the Generalitat de Catalunya spoke on “*La recuperación de la lengua propia en Catalunya*” (The recuperation of Catalonia’s “own language”). Colin Williams from Cardiff University presented a paper on “*Language planning and revitalization: seizing the opportunities in Wales*”. Xabier Aizpurua coordinator from the Language policy division of the Eusko Jaurlaritza (Basque Government) contributed on “*Euskara: bizirik irautetik biziberritzera*” (Basque: from survival to revitalisation). Finally, Jean Claude Corbeil of the Gouvernement du Québec in Montreal spoke about “*Le maintien du français au Québec face à l’anglais du reste du Canada*” (The maintenance of French in Quebec in the face of English of the rest of Canada).

Language policy division of the Basque Government

www.kultura.ejgv.euskadi.net/

The Division of language policy is part of the ministry of Culture of the regional government of the Basque Autonomous Community. The main function of the Division is to take care of the language policy in order to ‘normalize’ the use of Basque. It proposes, modifies and applies the regulations concerning the language. It further coordinates and takes measures for all public authorities and promotes new initiatives. It is also responsible for the linguistic profiles for civil servants and the criteria for the levels of knowledge of Basque. It supports numerous activities, projects and institutions that work for the support of Basque.

In 2002 the Basque Government published a voluminous book of the proceedings (675 pages!), which included the 5 plenary speeches and 39 other papers (and summaries of all in four languages) plus a CD-rom. The papers of the conference are also available on-line in PDF format⁴.



⁴ Available on/line as

http://www.euskara.euskadi.net/r59-738/es/contenidos/informacion/argitalpenak/es_6092/adjuptos/EREMU.PDF [accessed March 2008]

In his closing speech Richard Bourhis (2002: 653-662) pointed at the two major themes of the conference: the demographic vitality of threatened groups and the provision of institutional support for minority languages. He connects the two themes by combining the ethnolinguistic vitality model with the model of reversing language shift. The result is a two-dimensional framework using a 'wellness-illness' metaphor. In that framework he distinguishes between diagnoses of (1) 'on the road to full wellness', (2) 'problematic illness', (3) 'stable but problematic illness' and (4) 'critical illness condition'. In his conclusion Bourhis suggests that *"Many more years of Sociolinguistic research and Language Policy application will be necessary to uncover the best ways of improving the health and vitality of threatened language minorities across the world."* Speaking towards the end of the millennium, his final words contain an important message: *"Will the fundamental and applied research needed to achieve these goals be accomplished in time to save at least some of the many threatened languages in danger of disappearing in the early part of the 21st century?"*

Most other ICML's thus far were organized in the summer months of June or July, but this time the event took place towards the end of the year, from 1 to 3 December 1999. It was right after the announcement by ETA of the end of a 14 month period of cease fire proclaimed since September 1998. One of the most dramatic and impressive moments of the conference for the foreign visitors was when all participants stood three minutes in silence in front of the building to protest against the violence.

Again the relay system of the conferences almost broke up. It was decided at a special meeting at the 7th-conference to organize the next ICML in Brittany two years later. Somehow this proposal failed and in stead the conference went to Galicia in 2001.

8-ICML

The 8th ICML took place from 22 to 24 November 2001 in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia.



The European Commissioner for Education, Youth and Culture Viviane Reding came all the way from Brussels to address the conference in its opening session. The reason was that this ICML was one of the activities in the *'European Year of Languages'*. The European Union and the Council of Europe jointly organized this special year in 2001 in order *"to promote multilingualism and a greater languages capability across Europe"* (www.eyl2001.org.uk). The central theme was the 'celebration of linguistic diversity'. Since then the activities of the European Year of Languages continue annually through the European Day of Languages on 26 September⁵.



This type of international attention is important for minority language communities because it means that their problems of language revitalization are on the agenda of politicians and decision makers. However, by far most activities during the European Year of Languages and also later activities to promote multilingualism and language awareness are primarily aimed at the national state languages, including strong and dominant language such as French, German and Spanish. The smaller languages may get some attention, but they are in a supporting role and absolutely do not play the leading part.

Of course, the theme of the conference was related to European developments: *"Linguistic and Educational Policies in the European Community"*. The main organizer was the Dirección Xeral de Política Lingüística, Xunta de Galicia, Consellería de Educación e Ordenación Universitaria (the department of language policy of the ministry of education of the Galician government).

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/awareness/day_en.html ; see also: www.ecml.at/edl/default.asp?t=EYL , www.ecml.at/edl/pdf/diversityE.pdf and http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/booklet_en.pdf [accessed March 2008]

The **Dirección Xeral de Política Lingüística (DXPL)** of the Xunta de Galicia (www.edu.xunta.es/dxpl)

The Dirección is responsible for the language policy for Galician. The DXPL was created to carry out the process of ‘normalization’ of the Galician language in public life and in cultural and information domains. Galician is promoted in all areas of society, especially in the family, in cultural and leisure activities, in the social media, in advertising, in the workplace, in the public administrations and in religious institutions and activities.

There are several other institutions working to promote Galician. The Real Academia Galega is co-author of the official norms of the language together with the Instituto da Lingua Galega (ILGA). The Mesa pola Normalización Lingüística is an organization which aims to extend the use of Galician in education, but also in society at large. There are many organizations, around 20 to 30, which are subsidized by the DXPL.

Of the series of ICML’s the one in Galicia had probably the least international character. Except for the plenary speakers and a couple of paper presenters the conference attracted few visitors from abroad but it had a huge attendance by local people. Plenary speeches were given, among others, by the grand old scholars of minority languages, the golden agers Robert Lafont and Miguel Siguan.

This ICML was the first conference with its own proper website (no longer active). It is hard to imagine today how conferences could be organized without electronic communication through email and the internet.



Galician

Galician or Galego is a Romance language, spoken in the Autonomous Community of Galicia in north-western Spain. The total population is 2,740,000 and almost 68% speaks Galician on a daily basis. 86% claims to be able to speak it, and 97% understands the language. Research shows a recovery of the language skills of Galician, especially in reading and writing. Persons over 45 did not study Galician at school and they have little knowledge of writing their language. People under 30 have been taught Galician and most of them can speak, write and read Galician, although less than half does so every day.

The publication of the proceedings, again a voluminous book of 670 pages, was in 2002 by M^a Xesús Bugarín López, José Cajide Val, Agustín Dosil Maceira, X. Gregorio Ferreiro Fente, Manuel González González, Miguel Anxo Santos Rego as editors. The book has the title *Actas da VIII Conferencia Internacional de Linguas Minoritarias*. The publisher was the government Xunta de Galicia in Santiago de Compostela; it is available on-line as well⁶. In their conclusions the organizers (p 657-658) emphasize the importance of new technologies for the development of minority languages, in the field of terminology, automatic translation, computer assisted language learning, man-machine interaction, etc.



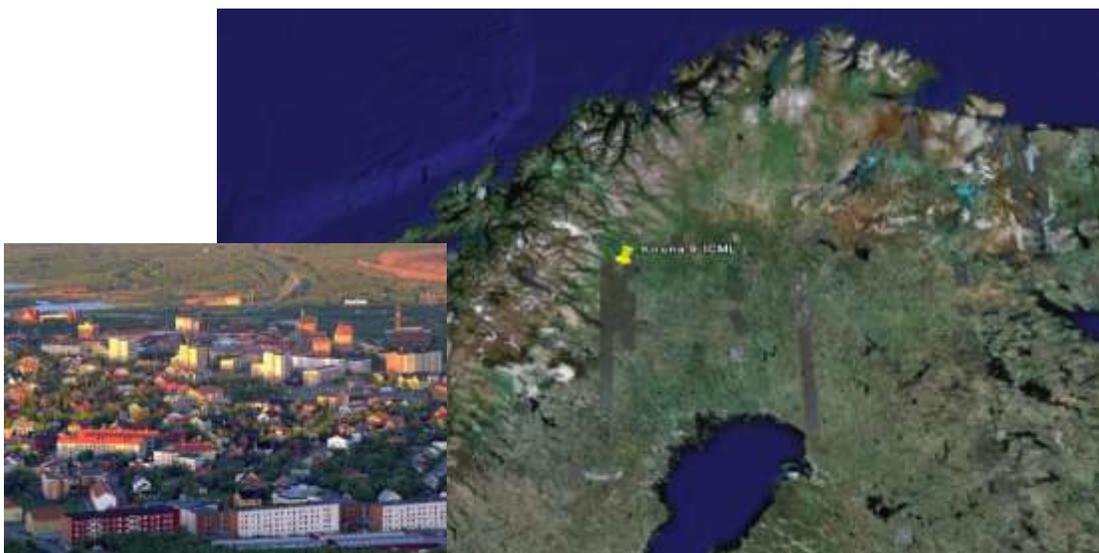
VIII conferencia internacional
de linguas minoritarias



9-ICML

The conference had two consecutive occasions in the south of Europe, so it seemed time for ICML to move north again. Thus it went to the far north: 145 kilometers inside the polar circle in the town of Giron/Kiruna the most northern city in Sweden (www.kommun.kiruna.se). The city has a population of about 18.000 inhabitants and is located in Sapmi, the land of the Sámi people. Four official languages of Sweden are spoken in Kiruna: Sámi, Meänkieli, Finnish and Swedish.

⁶ Available on/line as www.xunta.es/linguagalega/arquivos/ACTAS_PDF.pdf [accessed March 2008]



Sámi and Meänkieli

The Sami people live in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola peninsula. The Sami are a minority in their region of settlement. An estimated 50-65,000 Sami live in Sapmi; of these, between 17,000 and 20,000 live in the Swedish part. The Sami languages belong to the Finno-Ugric family. There are three main variants, East Sami, Central Sami and South Sami and a number of smaller languages with very few speakers.

Meänkieli has developed more or less independently from Finland Finnish. It is a regionally based historic variety, dating back to the 11th century. It is spoken in the border region of Tornedalen. Until about 1980, Meänkieli was mainly considered a dialect of Finnish, and referred to as Tornedalen Finnish. Meänkieli is distinguished from standard Finnish by a lack of influence from modern 19th and 20th century developments in that language. Most speakers of Meänkieli are bilingual in Finnish/Meänkieli and Swedish, with Swedish as dominant language, some have Sámi as their third language.

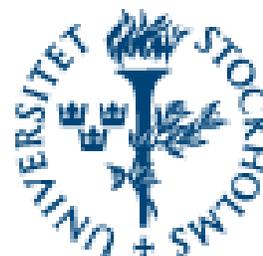
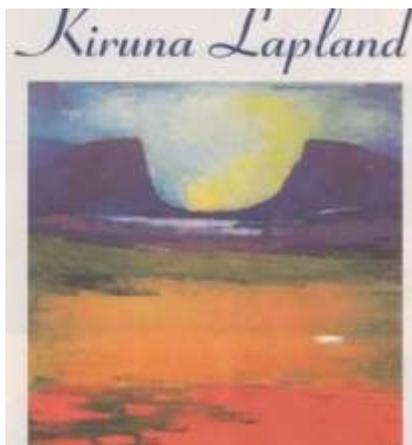
The 9th ICML was held on 6 and 7 June 2003. The length was reduced to two days, which is in line with general developments when it comes to conferences: it has to be short, compact and intensive. It is quite a change from the first conferences in the eighties which lasted a full week.

This time it was the middle of summer and thus the participants could experience the 'eternal light' of the midnight sun standing at mount Luossavaara overlooking the wide landscape surrounding the town.



The main aim of the conference was of course to shed light on the issues related to minority languages. The central conference theme was *“Revitalization of use of languages, especially languages used by small groups of people”*. There was a series of related sub-themes:

- * Revitalization of minority languages, especially case studies of actual practice.
- * Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages with particular attention to smaller language groups.
- * Language policies concerning smaller language groups.
- * Language planning by smaller language groups.
- * Cultural development and quality of life in regions where smaller languages are used.
- * Experiences from bilingual education and immersion classes for children who use smaller languages.
- * Any topic concerning the smaller languages in the Barents and Baltic regions.



Not only had the conference shifted location from the south of Europe to the far north, also the emphasis shifted from the development and challenges of relatively stronger minority language groups such as Galician and Basque speakers, to the problems of smaller groups such as Meänkieli speakers or the different groups of Sámi speakers. It turns out that all groups face a number of the same problems such as maintenance of the language between the generations but that they also have different problems for instance related to the economies of scale. The organizers, guided with great enthusiasm by their chair Birger Winsa, were from the University of Stockholm, the department of Finnish.

Department of Finnish www.bafity.su.se/

After a recent merger in 2005 there is now a Department of Baltic, Finnish and German studies at the university of Stockholm. The department offers language and literature courses ranging from beginning/introductory courses to masters' and PhD programs. Stockholm University, located in Sweden's capital city, is the region's centre for higher education and research in humanities, law, the natural and social sciences. With over 50,000 undergraduate and master's students and 1,800 doctoral students, it is one of the largest universities in Sweden.

The number of participants was much smaller than in Galicia or the Basque Country: 93 names are in program booklet. The international spread however had increased substantially. For the first time there has not been a publication of the papers.

The plenary speeches were given by well known names from the field of language planning and minority language studies: Nancy Hornberger, Georg Lüdi, Marilyn Martin-Jones and Crister Laurén. The website of the conference is no longer on-line, but can still be found in the internet archives⁷.

10-ICML

After 2003 the series of conferences was well on track again and went to Italy, the border region with Slovenia. On 1 and 2 July 2005 the 10th edition was in Trieste/Trst, organized by the SLORI-institute.

⁷ At <http://web.archive.org/web/20040515052454/http://www.finska.su.se/konf03.html> (version 15 May 2004).



SLORI www.slori.org

The SLORI is the research institute about the Slovene minority in Italy, established in 1974. It focuses on the Slovene language minority in the Trst-Trieste, Gorica-Gorizia and Videm-Udine provinces. Its research provides the basis for the planning of the Slovene minority's strategy for development. It has some 8 researchers on its staff.

The main theme of the conference was *'Minority languages in post-2004 Europe: problems and challenges.'* The theme was chosen in relation to the enlargement of the European Union with 10 new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. The Slovene minority in the Trieste area lives in one of the important 'contact' areas of Europe. As the conference organizers write *"Trieste represented in the past a symbol of the multicultural Hapsburg empire, its limits and potential. But later on, during the fascist regime, it also became a symbol of ethnic and linguistic intolerance and nationalism. In the Cold War period, it represented a peripheral border town between West and East. Now it is re-emerging as a meeting-point between different ethno-linguistic environments, languages and societies. As Trieste has to re-consider its own position and function in an enlarged Europe, the ICML-X would like to re-think some basic considerations concerning minority languages in the post-2004 Europe that will quite soon lead towards a possible United Europe."*

The focus was very much on minority language communities that are at the same time a majority in another state, which is the case for the Slovenes: they are a minority in Italy, Austria and Hungary as well, but a majority in Slovenia. The reverse also exists with an Italian minority in Slovenia.

Slovene in Italy

Slovene is a Slavic language with a highly developed inflection. Compared to other Slavic languages, it has several phonetic, morphological and lexical particularities. It has a rich dialectal variety.

The number of Slovenes in northern Italy is contested. Estimates in the 1990s vary from 46.000 to 96.000. Over 100.000 are able to speak and some 180.000 can understand the language.

The Italian state only recognized the minority after the adoption of a general law on minority languages in 2001. The lack of recognition had negative consequences for the use of Slovenian in general and for education in particular.

Minorities have been determined to a large extent by the state, by which majorities and minorities were defined. In a European Union where borders seem to become less important, across border relationships are facilitated, but in most cases the relationship of the minority with the central state is still important for obtaining rights, recognition, self-governance, etc. The five plenary speakers each highlighted different dimensions of this complex of problems. Tullio De Mauro (La Sapienza University in Rome) addressed the 'Crisis of the linguistic monolithism and aspects of the situation of the more or less spread languages'. The basic ideology of monolingualism is still wide spread. Inka Štrukelj (from 'Društvo za uporabno jezikoslovje Slovenije' = Slovene Association of Applied Linguistics), picked up the topic once again of 'Ethnolinguistic vitality: Some consideration concerning minority languages maintenance', which showed that the strength and chances of survival of minority groups is an ongoing concern. Colin Williams (Cardiff University) spoke on 'Governance without conviction?' Tomasz Wicherkiewicz (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland) analyzed the issue of 'Welcome and unwelcome minority languages'. Fernand de Varennes (Murdoch University, Perth, Australia) introduced the legal angle by speaking on 'Language Rights Standards in Europe: The Impact of the Council of Europe's Human Rights and Treaty Obligations'.

Two publications with a selection of the papers are still in progress. The first part will appear in English with Palgrave-Macmillan and the second in Italian will be published by Slori.

Information about the 10th International Conference on Minority Languages is still available on the conference website www.slori.org/conference.



11-ICML

Two years later the conference moved some 600 kilometers further to the east and was organized in Pécs, in the south of Hungary on 5 and 6 July 2007. The organizers of ICML-XI were the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), the Research Institute for Ethnic and National Minority Studies HAS, and the Faculty of Political and Legal Sciences of the University of Pécs. The work was coordinated by Dr. Csilla Bartha.

Research Institute for Linguistics www.nytud.hu/eng/

The Research Institute for Linguistics was founded in 1949. It is part of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1951. It does research in Hungarian linguistics, Uralic linguistics, and phonetics, as well as work on a comprehensive dictionary of Hungarian. Other research projects concern different variants of Hungarian as well as minority languages in and outside Hungary, including issues of language policy.

Research Institute for Ethnic and National Minority Studies

<http://www.mtaki.hu/english/>

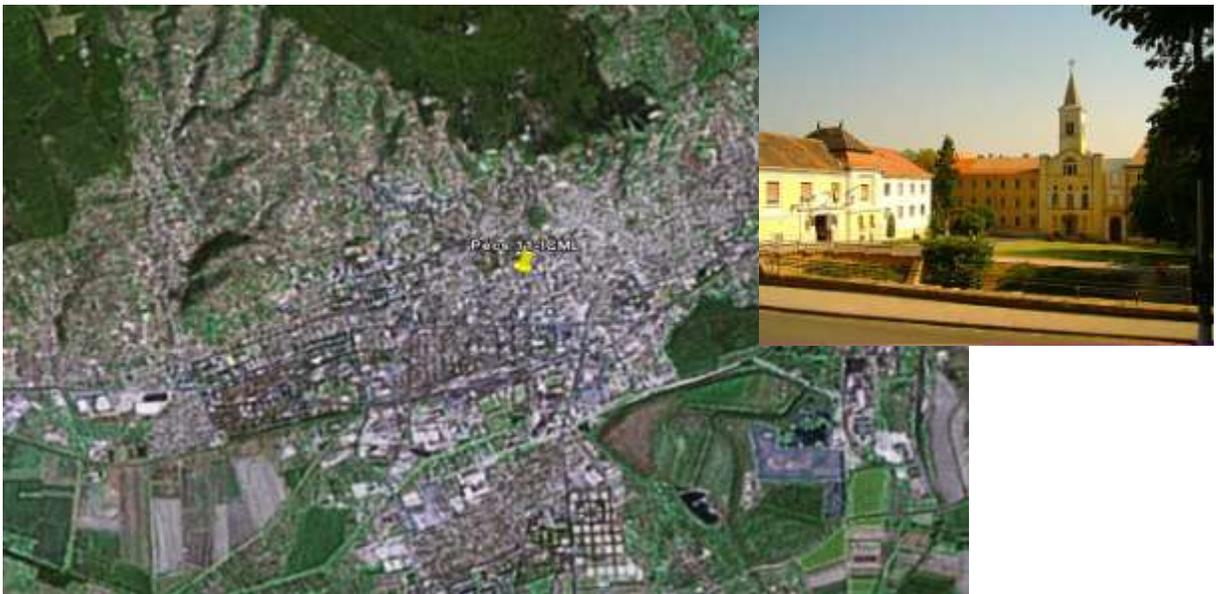
Research Institute for Ethnic and National Minority Studies is also part of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. It carries out studies on the situation of the Hungarian and Roma minorities in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the non-Hungarian minorities in Hungary. The Institute does research on changing languages and identities, models of minority self-government, minority institutions, interethnic relations and conflicts, and migration processes. The Institute also supports programmes of minority community building.

Faculty of Political and Legal Sciences, University of Pécs

<https://www.law.pte.hu/?lang=en>

The roots of the university of Pécs go back to the 14th century. In its current form the university was established in 2005 by the merger of three existing universities and colleges. Legal studies have always been an important component of the academic programs at the University of Pécs.

The organizers formulated the aim of the conference as an opportunity “*to provide a frame for mutual transfer of knowledge between research communities about the current situation of linguistic minorities in Europe - a geographical unit in temporal transition between a past of nation states and a future of the enlarged European Union. It is the historical strength of the concept "nation" that makes us aware of the contrast between the reality of minorities delineated by state borders and the ideal of a supra-national entity in which the word "minority" only has a numerical reference.*” The accession of the new Central and Eastern European Member States to the European Union was seen as opening up new prospects, but at the same time creating new problems with regard to protection and maintenance of minority languages. The organizers further observe “*a need for a re-evaluation of the theoretical questions and research methodologies that guide investigations of minority languages and their communities*”.



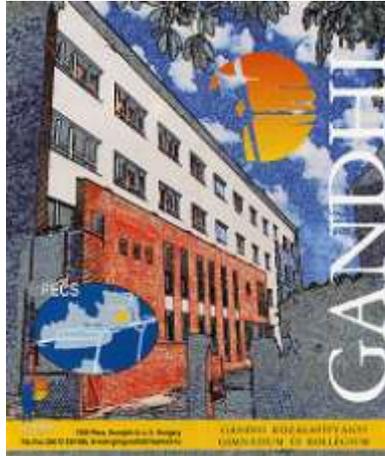
The central theme of the conference was “*Multilingualism, Citizenship and the Future of Minority Languages: Ideologies and Practices of Linguistic Difference in Europe.*”

A whole range of topics were mentioned as possible subject matter for papers, posters and panels: - Bilingualism and education; - Models of language learning in education; - Minority languages and the "new economy"; - Negotiation of identities in a new European context: national, regional and transnational perspectives; - Language policies, language planning and linguistic human rights within national and international legal frameworks; - The challenges of comparative analysis of minority languages; - Patterns of language shift and maintenance; - Minority languages, the media and the Internet; - Minority languages and corpus linguistics; - The Roma minority and their languages in Europe; - Linguistic minorities in the enlarged EU; - Linguistic imperialism and bilingualism of minorities in Europe; - Migration and bilingualism; - Areas of citizenship, human rights, equality, and the trans-national/international nature of the Deaf community; - European Union: Old and New – Common and specific linguistic arrangements in old and new Member States; -The EU and the protection of linguistic minorities. This very broad range of topics shows that the series of conferences had gone a long way from the first installment in Glasgow where the main concern was with defining and discovering about minority languages as such. Still the issue of ‘languages at risk’ is underlying many of the topics that are mentioned.

Roma minority

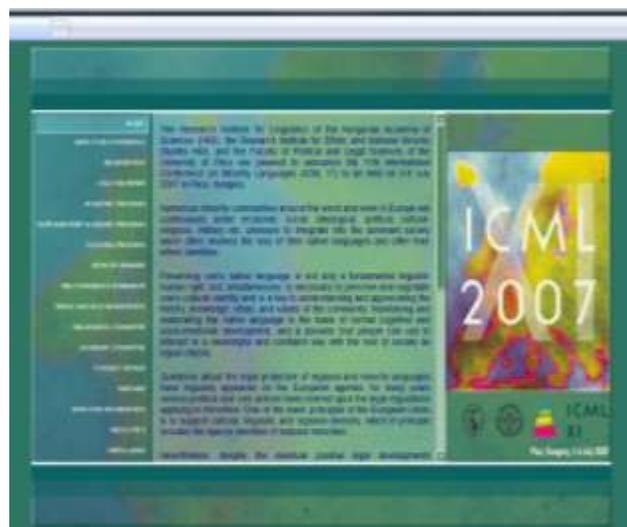
The Roma and Sinti are the largest minority in Europe with some 10 to 12 million members. The Roma have been referred to as a ‘European Minority’ because they are a truly transnational minority and they are important for European integration. Unlike other minorities the Roma have no kin state and are not politically mobilized.

Their language Romani [Romanes or Romany] belongs to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family. The dispersal and differentiation of the Roma since their arrival in Europe (8th century) brought about a fragmentation of the language in distinct groups. The Roma minority living in Hungary can be divided into three large groups: Romungros, whose mother tongue is Hungarian, are the majority. The Olah Roma constitute 20% and have as native language Romani (or better Lovari), and the Beash (Boyash) Roma, who speak a version of Romani called Beash (Boyash), represent about 10% of the Roma in Hungary. The Ghandi Secondary school in Pécs focuses on Roma cultural issues and teaches both Romani and Boyash languages.



The conference was attended by almost 200 persons, mainly from all around Europe, but also from Israel, Canada, United States, New Zealand and Australia. A publication with a selection of the papers is in progress (and this history of ICML will be part of it). A pre-conference one-day workshop was held on the DILING project. The acronym stands for ‘Dimensions of Linguistic Otherness: Prospects of Maintenance and Revitalization of Minority Languages within the New Europe. The project is a Specific Support Activity in the 6th Framework Program for Research from the European Union. The project focuses on the review of the current state of linguistic minorities in eight participating countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

The website of 11-ICML is still active and can be consulted at the following address http://icml11.law.pte.hu/about_conf.html.



In line with Web 2.0 developments participants can reports on-line on the conference. Pictures of the reception with dance can be found at www.flickr.com/photos/kulturnik/sets/72157600918245844/



After a selection process in which no less than six candidates proposed to organize the next ICML in 2 years time, it was decided to have the next conference in the town of Tartu in Estonia from 28 to 31 May 2009. The conference will be number 12 of the series and thus complete the first dozen.



Concluding remarks

The first International Conference on Minority Languages in 1980 already had as a central theme the discussion of the term ‘minority language’ and the debate has continued ever since. To the participants in the series of ICML’s it is obvious that the diversity of languages in Europe is not limited to the 23 official languages of the European Union. A similar number of different languages are spoken as a ‘regional minority language’. These languages are spoken in different geographic language communities, sometimes only in one community in one region, sometimes the ‘same’ language in several geographical regions distributed over more than one state. Thus we can triple the number and over 100 regional

minority language groups are living on territories of the states that belong to the European Union. The precise number of ‘minority language communities’ is difficult to give because it depends on the criteria used to include a language group. Most of these languages are nowadays recognized by the state authorities, but others are still struggling for formal acknowledgement. Some languages may be perceived as to belong to one variant, but they may also be divided up into different languages by others. There are also variants that are considered to be dialects, whereas other variants have established themselves as separate languages recently. The diversity of situations in which minority languages are used makes it hard to arrive at a general acceptable definition.

Since 1980 important changes have taken place at the European level, both inside the European Union as the Council of Europe. Today these two institutions give more importance to recognition of all languages and promoting and preserving linguistic diversity in Europe. Where the European Communities began over 50 years ago with four languages in six founder states, today the European Union has 27 member states and 23 official languages. These include Irish and Maltese, languages until recently conceived of as ‘only’ minority languages. Also Catalan, Basque and Galician have been awarded a special status with the European Commission and Welsh, Frisian and other languages may obtain the same position in the near future.

In 2007 the European Commission has created a special Directorate on Multilingualism and recently has published two reports on the promotion of multilingualism based on the recommendations of experts. Today multilingualism is high on the European political agenda and minority languages are part of the developments. Over the years the European Union has gradually developed a language policy for dealing with different aspects of its linguistic diversity.

The Council of Europe has adopted two major treaties in the 1990s: the Framework Convention for National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Both documents may not have a strong legal status, but they have a great moral appeal. The states that have signed and ratified the treaties are subjected to a periodical review of their policies. The monitoring mechanism subjects the state policies to a European standard of behaviour towards minority groups and makes public where its successes and even more its failures are. The treaties have been very important for the minority groups at hand; for some the recognition at European level has meant an important impetus for promotion, preservation, protection and revival of the language.

The series of International Conferences on Minority Languages offer an opportunity to discuss various disciplinary approaches. Good research practices are transmitted and disseminated. Effective use of dialogue and deliberation leads to an increase in policy formulation and basic research. A lot of progress has been made in the theorizing about minority languages, in the models for comparative

studies and in the application of outcomes of research to the promotion and protection of these language groups. Over the years the series of ICML have brought together hundreds of academics, activists, policy makers and students with a shared interest in minority languages. The conferences were always organised in cities where the minorities are present and the participants could get first hand impressions of the reality of those language groups. Somehow the conferences have contributed to the creation of a community of researchers. The ICMLs combined have in no small measure been conducive to the development of the field of minority language studies.

Publications of the proceeding of ICML's:

1-ICML: Haugen, Einar, J.D.McClure and D.S. Thompson (eds.) (1981) - *Minority Languages Today*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. (A paperback edition of the same book appeared, with additions, in 1990.)

2-ICML: *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol 5, nrs 3 & 4, 1984, 193-350.

3-ICML: *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol 8, nrs 1 & 2, 1987, 1-229
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