Language Planning and Socio-Economic Development in Ireland: Towards an Integrated Framework?

by John Walsh
Dublin City University
John.Walsh@dcu.ie

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Introduction

The threat posed to linguistic diversity by the global economic order is well documented, with large numbers of languages expected to become moribund or extinct within decades (see, for example, Fishman 1991 & 2001; Crystal, 2000; May, 2001; McCloskey, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995; Phillipson, 2003). Powerful and dominant global forces which engage in ‘the denunciation of ethnicity’ (May, 2001: 19-51), have frequently employed a form of economic Darwinism in order to justify the marginalisation or extermination of threatened languages or to oppose multilingualism generally. Mutual distrust and antagonism has been commonplace between proponents of minority languages and those pursuing economic development models based on growth and prosperity (Grin, 2003: 213). This paper is based on an alternative approach which posits that all languages, regardless of their status or numerical size, can be integrated into processes of socio-economic development, and that none is inherently anti-development. Such integration, however, presupposes a radically altered concept of development which prioritises social and cultural elements, such as participation, education, equality, elimination of poverty and cultural security over economic indices such as growth rates, employment creation or levels of consumption. The integration of language planning measures for threatened languages with policies on socio-economic development has the potential both to consolidate the position of such languages, by integrating them into
broader society, and to broaden the concept of development itself, by introducing factors other than the economic.

Over the past century and a half, several Irish political leaders and language activists have argued that such an integration is possible between the Irish language and Ireland’s social and economic renewal (for a detailed discussion, see Walsh, 2004b). This paper examines critically contemporary language planning initiatives by state agencies in the Republic of Ireland and assesses the extent the potential for integrating them with policies on socio-economic development. Because of state restraints, it does not consider in detail either the voluntary sector or state policy on Irish in Northern Ireland, except through the work of the cross-border language body, Foras na Gaeilge.

Irish Language: Community and Status

Irish is spoken as a minority language throughout both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. According to the Republic of Ireland Census of 2002, 43 percent of the population reported that they could ‘speak Irish’. However, less than 10 percent said they spoke it every day, and these figures are inflated by a large population of school-going age which is obliged to study Irish (CSO, 2004). Native speakers of Irish are not thought to number more than two or three percent of the population. They are located mostly in the Gaeltacht, 24 non-contiguous areas of territory in 7 counties designated by law as officially Irish-speaking districts (Walsh et al., 2005, forthcoming). In Northern Ireland, where the question is different, the Census of 2001 reported that 10.4 percent of the population said they could ‘read, speak, write and understand Irish’, although the levels of ability are not assessed (NISRA, 2002: 73). Therefore, despite a relatively large passive knowledge of Irish, particularly in the Republic of Ireland where the subject is obligatory in schools, the numbers of highly competent speakers of Irish, who use the language regularly, are very low. In the Republic of Ireland, Irish is recognised in the 1937 Constitution as the ‘national language’ and ‘first official language’ and under the Official Languages Act, 2003, all state services are obliged to provide services in both Irish and English (for a background, see Ó Murchú H. & Ó Murchú, M., 1999; Office of the Official Languages Commissioner, 2005). In Northern Ireland, Irish is recognised under the 1998 Belfast Agreement and is given protection (at level three) under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (see Council of Europe, 2005).

Contemporary Language-Related Agencies

There are four state bodies, in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which have either full or partial responsibility for promoting the Irish language: the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (in Northern Ireland). This paper will concentrate on the first three bodies.
Despite its misleading title, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA) is responsible for Irish language policy throughout the Republic, including the Gaeltacht (DCRGA, 2004d: 25). The most recent annual report from the DCRGA lists five main areas of responsibility: community and local development; national drugs strategy; rural development; islands; Irish language and Gaeltacht; North-South co-operation. Most of these areas have nothing to do with language planning, however, and there is no sense that Irish language policy is of paramount importance to the Department's operations. It funds two statutory organisations which are responsible for promoting Irish, or for developing areas where Irish is the community language: Foras na Gaeilge and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Foras na Gaeilge (established in 1999) is the Irish language part of The North/South Language Body, one of six cross-border implementation bodies established under the 1998 Belfast Agreement on Northern Ireland. It is responsible for promoting Irish throughout the island of Ireland: most of its funding is provided by the DCRGA in the Republic, and the remainder by the Department of Arts, Culture and Leisure (DCAL) in Northern Ireland. To further complicate matters, Foras na Gaeilge is linked institutionally to another agency, Tha Boord o Ulstèr Scotch (Ulster Scots Agency), which is charged with promoting the Ulster Scots language. Údarás na Gaeltachta (established in 1979) is answerable directly to the DCRGA and is responsible for the industrial development of the Gaeltacht, although its role may be extended in the future (see below). The Office of the Official Languages Commissioner, established under the Official Languages Act, 2003 to monitor the implementation of bilingual services by public bodies in the Republic of Ireland, is an independent body and will not be examined here. As this brief description illustrates, the institutional structures for promoting Irish are complicated and spread between two jurisdictions.

Language Planning Initiatives

There is no clear delineation of roles in relation to language planning between the various state agencies with responsibility for Irish. This is to be expected because there is no national plan for Irish or for the Gaeltacht. Furthermore, it is not clear which institution, if any, is responsible for developing and implementing such a plan. The last attempt to produce a plan was in 1995 and was due to the voluntary sector, not the state. The plan was produced by Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, the umbrella body for the voluntary sector, but it was stymied by lack of funding (Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, 1995). The plan also provoked a hostile reaction from the Department of the Gaeltacht, which attempted to block its development (communication with Ó Flatharta, 2005). It is regrettable that the government department responsible for Irish would attempt to prevent the voluntary sector from developing a national language plan when it itself apparently had no alternative to offer. The current situation is exacerbated further by a lack of language planning approaches which are based on international examples of best practice.
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, as it is currently known, was allocated a budget of €330 million by the exchequer in 2005, €92 million of which was spent on the Irish language and the Gaeltacht (Government of Ireland, 2005: 58-9). As its title indicates, only part of the Department is dedicated to language policy, and issues ranging from drugs strategy to rural development also come under its remit. This dilutes the attention to Irish within the Department. Even the section responsible for ‘Irish language and Gaeltacht’ also covers policy on the islands off Ireland’s coast, many of which are not Irish-speaking. One of the Department’s ‘goals’, as outlined in its annual report, is also problematic: ‘To increase the use of the Irish language countrywide and to support the maintenance of the language in Gaeltacht areas’ (DCRGA, 2004d: 25). It is unclear why the Department would wish to ‘increase’ the use of Irish throughout the country but seek only its ‘maintenance’ within the Gaeltacht. Recent studies have revealed a significant decline in the daily Irish-speaking population in the Gaeltacht (see, for example, Ó Gadhra, 1989; Hindley, 1990; Ó Riagáin, 1997; Ó Cinnéide et al., 2001; Coimisiún na Gaeltachta, 2002; Walsh, 2002; CSO: 2004; Ó hÉallaithe, 1999, 2003 & 2004). Therefore, given that the Gaeltacht is the last remaining community in the world where Irish has some degree of dominance as an everyday community language, it is surprising that the Department would not deem it to be of the utmost importance to increase its usage there too.

However, the most significant weakness in the Department’s approach in recent years has been its failure to date to develop a national plan for Irish, or a national planning framework. In 2001, a key document on language policy - produced for the government-appointed Gaeltacht Commission by a group of researchers from the National University of Ireland, Galway - was extremely critical of the Department due to what it perceived as a total lack of co-ordination on language planning efforts:

An chéad mhórdheacracht a thagann chun solais nuair a dhéantar anailís ar ról na Roinne sa chomhthéacs thuas [pleanáil teanga], ná nach bhfuil an próiseas pleanála sa Ghaeltacht, sa mbéid gurb ann dó ar chor ar bith, faoi stiúir ionlán na Roinne ná faoi stiúir aon eagraíocht eile a chombh beag (Ó Cinnéide et al., 2001: 141).

The Department was criticised for failing to initiate research on language behaviour in the Gaeltacht and for not influencing the policies of other state bodies dealing with the Gaeltacht (145). It was also criticised for failing to extend the role of Údarás na Gaeltachta beyond its narrow industrial function in order to give it greater responsibili-
ty in relation to language. Arguing that the Department was entitled to do so under Article 9 of the Údarás na Gaeltachta Act (1979), the report commented:

\[ \text{Ní léir go bhfuil aon fhonn ar an Roinn cur le feidhmeanna reachtúla an Údaráis ar mbaithi le cur ar a gcumas freastal ar éilimh atá ag teacht ón bpobal go nglacadh an Údaráis ról níos cuimsíthí i bhfhorbairt saol sóisialta, cultúirtha agus teanga na Gaeltachta (Ó Cinnéide et al., 2001: 141).} \]

In 2002, the Gaeltacht Commission recommended the ‘development and implementation of a National Plan for Irish containing clearly defined targets and illustrating the role of the Gaeltacht in the national effort’. It also called for the ‘development of a National Language Planning System based on best international practice’ and to ensure that adequate staff are trained to operate such a system. The Commission also requested the ‘establishment of a dedicated Third Level Education Unit for Irish language sociolinguistic studies and language planning’ (2002: 17).

None of these recommendations has been implemented, and there is no indication of an imminent breakthrough. In 2004, in response to the criticism, the Department announced a ‘Joint Language Planning Strategy’ in co-operation with Údarás na Gaeltachta, under which micro-level language planning initiatives would be funded in the Gaeltacht (DCRGA, 2004c). However, the amount of money involved is very small (?1.5 million over three years) and the whole project in essence amounts to putting the linguistic cart before the horse, because there is still no national plan or training structure for language planners. The situation is not helped by the dearth of research in language planning being conducted in Ireland at the moment (for a further discussion, see Walsh, 2006, forthcoming). The Department said in 2004 that it had a ‘strategy’ to develop plans at three levels: at local level in the Gaeltacht, regionally in the Gaeltacht as a unit, and nationally, but it has neither costed such plans nor defined a timetable for their implementation (personal communication with Mac Eoin, 2004). Furthermore, there is confusion about the delineation of roles between the three agencies (DCRGA, Foras and Údarás) in relation to language planning. Although Foras na Gaeilge announced a year ago that it was ‘completing’ a discussion document on language planning (the document has still not been published), the Minister stated just a few days later that he was establishing an advisory committee, ‘Fóram na Gaeilge’, to discuss a strategic plan for Irish over a 20 year period (Mac Donncha, 2004; DCRGA, 2004b). It was unclear whether the committee or Foras na Gaeilge was to be responsible for the plan (see below).

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2. It is not apparent that the Department has any desire to add to the statutory functions of Údarás in order to enable it to meet the demands of the public that Údarás be given a more comprehensive role in the development of the social life and of the culture and language of the Gaeltacht (author’s translation).
Údarás na Gaeltachta was established in 1979 as an industrial development agency for the Gaeltacht, replacing the existing agency, Gaeltarra Éireann.

Gaeltarra was successful in terms of employment creation, but its role in relation to Irish was very weak, its board comprised government appointees, and its headquarters were in Dublin, a long way from the Gaeltacht. A Gaeltacht campaign throughout the 1960 and 1970s agitated for a directly elected body with a wider range of social, cultural and linguistic functions (see, for instance, Comhairle na Gaeilge, 1971; Gaeltarra/SFADCO, 1971).

The linguistic demand appeared to be met by Article 8 (1) of the Údarás na Gaeltachta Act (1979), entitled ‘Functions of An tÚdarás’, which reads as follows:

An tÚdarás shall encourage the preservation and extension of the use of the Irish language as the principal medium of communication in the Gaeltacht and shall ensure that Irish is used to the greatest extent possible in the performance by it and on its behalf of its functions (Article 8(1), Údarás na Gaeltachta Act, 1979).

The second sub-section of Article 8 states that the Údarás ‘shall carry on, control and manage (either directly or, in any particular case, through a body corporate controlled by an tÚdarás) the industries and productive schemes of employment carried on, controlled or managed, directly or indirectly, by Gaeltarra Éireann’ (Article 8(2)). This ordering of ‘functions’ gave the impression that promoting Irish was one of the organisation’s objectives, and there is a perception that this is the case (see for instance, Ó Cinnéide et al., 2001: 148; Ó hÉallaithe, 2005). However, two Attornies-General have advised the DCRGA in recent years that Article 8 (1) is not in fact a ‘function’, but simple a preamble to the organisation’s industrial functions, in other words, that Údarás does not in fact have any function in relation to Irish (communication with O’Brien, 2005).

Leaving the legal arguments aside, it is reasonable to expect that ‘the preservation and extension of the use of the Irish language as the principal medium of communication in the Gaeltacht’ would be of paramount importance to Údarás na Gaeltachta. After all, if it were not for the Irish language, there would have been no need for organisations such as Údarás na Gaeltachta (or indeed, the DCRGA) in the first place.

Today, Údarás na Gaeltachta is a significant player in Gaeltacht economic development, receiving £32.7 million from the DCRGA in 2003 (DCRGA, 2004: vii). Of the Gaeltacht workforce of 38,433 people, 7,346 (19.1%) are full-time employees in companies assisted by the Údarás. A further 4,220 people are employed on a part-time or seasonal basis in such companies (Údarás na Gaeltachta, 2004: 24). Employment in Údarás-assisted companies reached a peak of over 8,000 in 2000 but has been falling since then (Údarás na Gaeltachta, 2004: 11). Despite the obvious success of Údarás in creating jobs, concerns persist that economic development of this type, which does not consider linguistic factors, is insufficient for the Gaeltacht’s distinct needs. According to Ó Cinnéide et al., the industrialisation strategies of Údarás cannot be considered in isolation from lin-
guistic factors and they claim that the industrialisation strategy has led to the increased anglicisation of the Gaeltacht (2001: 148).

Although it is somewhat unfair to blame anglicisation on Údarás when it is part of a process which has been occurring for hundreds of years, even a cursory glance at the Údarás annual reports reveals that most of the companies supported have nothing to do with the Irish language and had in fact been attracted in from elsewhere in Ireland or abroad. There was harsh criticism of this industrialisation strategy late in 2004 when Údarás succeeded in attracting a Scottish company to set up call centres in Gaeltacht areas of Counties Kerry and Donegal, where employees would speak English on the telephone throughout the working day (interview with Mac Gearailt, 2004). It is difficult to see how this decision is related to the ‘preservation and extension of the use of the Irish language as the principal medium of communication in the Gaeltacht’, as the legislation states, or indeed why this task could not have been undertaken by the national development agency for overseas firms, IDA Ireland.

The Ó Cinnéide report states that although Údarás has supported certain aspects of the social and cultural life of the Gaeltacht (as opposed to the economic/industrial), this support was extremely limited because the budget had to come from the surplus of current expenditure, rather than any specific fund set up for this purpose (Ó Cinnéide et al., 2001: 147). The report also revealed that less than 1% of the budget of Údarás na Gaeltachta was being spent on the Culture and Language Division of the organisation:

[It is difficult to imagine that the staff in question could exert much influence given the mean resources allocated to it. It is also difficult to imagine that companies or the public in general will accept that the establishment and maintenance of Irish language behaviour in companies is a priority of Údarás given the level of investment which they are making in this area (author’s translation)].

Following this criticism, Údarás now spends 20% of its capital budget on language-related activities, but the majority of its expenditure is still on industrial development. Údarás claims that calls for its social, cultural or linguistic roles to be enhanced are fraught with dangers, because the legislation under which it was established views it primarily as an industrial development agency (interview with Ó hAoláin, 2004). To its credit, the agency’s new strategy statement for 2005-09 stresses the need to develop social and culturally based industries in the Gaeltacht (interview with Ó hAoláin, 2004). However, it is clear that if a radical change of policy does not come about, the areas in which Irish has any degree of dominance will cease to exist, undermining entirely the rationale for
the continued existence of Údarás na Gaeltachta. In 2004, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs sought submissions from the public on amending the legislation in order to change the roles and functions of Údarás, and it is clear that the coming year will be critical for the organisation (DCRGA, 2005).

**Foras na Gaeilge**

As stated above, Foras na Gaeilge was formed in 1999 as the Irish language part of The North/South Language Body established under the Belfast Agreement. The Republic's state board for the Irish language, Bord na Gaeilge, was dissolved and its functions transferred to the Foras (Article 28 (1), British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999). The Irish state effectively ceded its sovereign responsibility for promoting Irish to a structure which is linked to the British state and to an unstable peace process in Northern Ireland (for a further discussion, see Ó Mur chú, 2002: 15). It is difficult to imagine the Irish government being willing to do this in any other area of national policy. For instance, the establishment of another cross-border body, InterTradeIreland, did not lead to the abolishment of any of the Republic of Ireland’s public bodies with responsibility for business or trade (see British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999).

The new body’s principal function was the ‘promotion of the Irish language’, but it was also required to advise both governments, to fund projects, to undertake research and promotional campaigns, to develop corpus planning and to support both Irish-medium education and the teaching of Irish (Part 5 of Annex 1 to British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999). The Foras took over responsibility for funding the Irish language voluntary sector, previously the responsibility of the Department of the Gaeltacht (Article 28 (2) (a), British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999). This was a contentious decision at the time, and continues to cause considerable controversy (see below). Foras na Gaeilge has a board of 16 members appointed by the North-South Ministerial Council established under the Belfast Agreement. Although Foras na Gaeilge is not prevented by the legislation by operating in the Gaeltacht, it has not done so since its inception.

The 2005 budget for Foras na Gaeilge is £22 million (£15.1 million from DCRGA and £6.8 million from DCAL) (communication with Shimmon, 2005). However, it is difficult to obtain clear information about the organisation’s current policy and activities, because Foras na Gaeilge has neither published an annual report, audited accounts nor a policy or strategy document since it was established in 1999. The chief executive of Foras na Gaeilge cites historical tensions with government departments, internal difficulties and lack of in-house expertise as reasons for this, but points out that corporate and business plans are imminent (interview with Mac Donncha, 2005). However, given that one of the roles of Foras is to advise both governments, and was preparing a discussion document on a national language plan, it is unclear why the Minister established an advisory committee in apparent contradiction of this (see above). The chief executive of Foras...
has said that he does not know which branch of government is now responsible for developing a national plan (interview with Mac Donncha, 2004).

There are also problems in the relationship between Foras na Gaeilge and the voluntary sector which it funds. In 2004, a report by Trinity College Dublin and Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge (the umbrella body for the voluntary sector) found that Foras was ‘in competition’ with the voluntary bodies rather than supporting them and that there was considerable confusion about what its precise role was (Donoghue, 2004: 35; Ó Gairbhí, 2004). A bitter dispute broke out in 2005 between Foras and the voluntary sector, after funding for some projects was cut. An unprecedented statement from Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge lambasted Foras na Gaeilge for its ‘unsatisfactory and unprofessional approach’. It was unhappy with the ‘demand for transparency’ although the Foras itself had never published a ‘report, plan or accounts’ and it accused the organisation of undermining the independence of the voluntary sector. The chief executive of one of the main voluntary bodies, Conradh na Gaeilge, resigned in protest at the funding cuts, saying that she had ‘no confidence’ in Foras na Gaeilge. She also questioned their commitment to planning and partnership (Ó Muirí, 2005). An anonymous survey of 30 voluntary bodies revealed that the majority shared these views (Ní Mhárta & Ní Nualláin, 2005; see also Daily Ireland, 2005). While the funding issue is undoubtedly of concern to these bodies, many of which are operating on a very small income, it is merely indicative of the deeper problem, the lack of a co-ordinated planning framework (these extracts are the author’s translation; see full statement in Irish in Appendix 1).

Another element of confusion relates to the surprise announcement by the government, late in 2003, that the head office of Foras na Gaeilge was to be moved from Dublin to the Gaeltacht of Donegal as part of the government’s decentralisation plan. The Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has repeatedly defended the plan in robust terms, although it is difficult to understand why all three institutions (Foras, Údarás and DCRGA) would operate from within the Gaeltacht. The announcement is even more surprising given the fact that Foras na Gaeilge has never operated in the Gaeltacht. Due to strident opposition from civil servants, the decentralisation plan has been scaled back considerably but, officially at least, Foras na Gaeilge is still due to be decentralised out of Dublin (Ní Chiaráin, 2004: 3).

It is difficult to see, therefore, how the various agencies promoting Irish co-ordinate their efforts, or what the overall policy is. For instance, as outlined above, it is unclear whether the DCRGA or the Údarás is responsible for language planning in the Gaeltacht and whether Foras or the DCRGA is responsible for the national plan. A survey in 2004 revealed how various community language projects, many of them in themselves worthy of support, were operating in complete isolation from each other and under different sources of funding (Ó Flatharta, 2004). Another complicating factor is that, since the establishment of Foras na Gaeilge, the structures and policies of two sovereign governments have to be considered, as well as the vastly different political and socio-economic contexts in both states.
Integration with National Socio-Economic Policy

In both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, language planning and socio-economic development policies have been pursued in complete isolation from each other. Examples of this in the Republic are recent major policy documents on development, the National Spatial Strategy and the National Development Plan, neither of which contains more than scant references to language, culture or the Gaeltacht. Information obtained under Freedom of Information legislation reveals that discussion of these issues was extremely marginal to the consultation process (FOI information from DCRGA, 04.11.2003). This is perhaps unsurprising, given the fact that the Irish language voluntary sector is excluded from the structure of National Partnership which has since the 1980s been recognised by the government as a central tenet of socio-economic development. In 1996, community and voluntary organisations were invited to take part as a fourth partner, thereby opening up valuable communication channels with government for this sector. However, as illustrated recently by Ó Murchú (2003), the Irish language voluntary sector is not included in this fourth partner with the state. It is similarly excluded from the Community and Voluntary Pillar established under the national pay agreements, Partnership 2000 and Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (Government of Ireland: 2001) and is not linked to the structure of local partnerships for socio-economic development in deprived regions (Ó Murchú, 2003: 1-4). The Irish language sector was not, and is not involved in these important structures through which national socio-economic development is planned. It did not seek an active role for itself, and it appeared that the State did not consider it relevant to the processes being planned (Ó Murchú, 2003: 3). Furthermore, a survey of major national policy documents on entrepreneurship reveals a striking paucity of submissions from semi-state bodies charged with implementing language policy (Ní Bhrádaigh, 2004).

In Northern Ireland, Irish was denigrated by decades of hostile Unionist government until very recently (see, for example, Maguire, 1991; Mac Póilín, 1997; O’Reilly, 1999). However, despite highly vocal and committed communities of speakers in some areas, levels of usage of Irish are low by the standards of the stronger traditional Gaeltacht communities in the Republic (NISRA, 2002). For political reasons, the mainstreaming of Irish in other policy areas is probably a long way off, although the umbrella body of the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, POBAL, has put considerable pressure on government departments to provide services to Irish speakers in the context of the European Charter (Gorman, 2002; 8-9; Ó Liatháin, 2002; Lá, 2003; Ó Liatháin, 2004; Ó Néill, 2004a & 2004b; Ó Liatháin, 2005; Muller, 2005). There are also encouraging signs of partnerships emerging between language bodies and socio-economic development agencies in the Gaeltacht Quarter Project, which aims to consolidate clusters of Irish language industries and services in the economically deprived area of West Belfast which contain relatively high concentrations of Irish speakers (Dutton, 2004).

Given the unwieldy and inefficient state structures for promoting Irish, it is unsurprising that there is little integration with policies on socio-economic development.
This self-imposed peripheralisation of Irish was summed up well in a recent paper:

[D]e bharr nach bhfuil a leithéid de pholasaí ann, níl sé éasca treo agus fócas a choinneáil faoi na gníomhaíochtaí agus an fuinneamb ar fad atá á chaithteadh leis na biarrachtí. Ní léir go bhfuil ainnt aon tuiscint ag gníomhairí taobh amuigh de shaol cúing na Gaeilge céard atá ar bun ag na gníomhaíochtaí agus na cúiseanna atá againn leis an teanga a chur chun cinn agus leis an teanga a dhéanamh agus an tábhacht a fheiceann muid. Ní heol dom go mbeadh aon cheann de na pairtnéirí sóisialta ar an eolas faoina bhfuil fúinn a dhéanamh agus an cúiseanna atá againn leis an teanga a chur chun cinn agus an tábhacht a fheiceann muid leis an teanga i saol na tíre seo. Is féidir an rud céanna a rá faoin gcoras riachtanachtaí. Cuid den státchóras ag cur na teanga chun cinn agus cuid eile de ag déanamh dochar as cuimse don teanga (Ó Flatharta, 2004).

Such integration will be very difficult unless the Irish language sector becomes more strategic in its approach, develops a clear language planning remit based on international models and begins to develop a National Plan for Irish.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In essence, an entire structure has to be constructed, a process which will take some time. A proper National Plan for Irish, based on a raft of local and regional plans and giving proper attention to the specific needs of the Gaeltacht, is the only way in which Irish language organisations can be taken seriously by other stakeholders in the socio-economic or any other domain. However, it is essential for the Irish language sector to take this step, because successful language planning depends on the long term on the integration of the weaker language into all facets of life in the territory in which it is spoken. However, this is the end goal of a long process. What steps are needed now to begin working in this direction? The following recommendations are intended to be implemented in parallel.

As has already been suggested by Ó Flatharta (2004), a taskforce comprising representatives of the state and voluntary sector as well as specialists in language planning and policy is needed in order to work out priorities and future directions. The consultative forum, Fóram na Gaeilge, set up in 2004 to advise the Minister on such matters has been ineffectual so far, because it is too large, contains no academic expertise in language planning, and has met on only two occasions. A far more clearly focussed (and smaller)
body is needed, meeting on a more regular basis, which could begin the work to put a
national language planning process in place. The model of the Enterprise Strategy
Group - a mixture of high-profile administrative, business and research representatives
which produced a major report to guide government policy on enterprise - would be far
more appropriate than the present structure (Walsh, 2004b). Among the fundamental
questions to be answered at the outset by such a body would be: why are three separate
state agencies required for promoting Irish in the Republic? How can the relationship
between the state and voluntary sector be clarified? How can two state agencies for the
Gaeltacht be justified when most of the Gaeltacht is no different linguistically to the rest
of the country? Is it possible to develop a single National Plan for Irish given that the lan-
guage is spread between two entirely different jurisdictions in two entirely different political and socio-economic contexts? The end result should be along the lines of, for exam-
ple, the plans which exist in Wales and the Basque Country, or the plan which is being
developed in Scotland (Welsh Assembly Government, 2003; Eusko Jaurlaritza [Basque
Government], 1999; Walsh 2004a & 2006).

In co-operation with other bilingual communities abroad, work should begin
immediately to increase expertise in language planning in Ireland. This can be achieved
through tertiary education or through continuing education or retraining for adults. Obvi-
ously, a voluntary language worker should not be required to have the same level of
expertise as those responsible for drawing up the National Plan, but it is important that
the same principles underpin all language planning efforts and that recognised qualifica-
tions are available at a variety of levels to suit a variety of needs (see Mac Donnacha, 2000
for an example of some of the work done in Ireland in this area).

In conjunction with the training structure, a dedicated national research centre in
sociolinguistics and language planning should be established, as called for by the
Gaeltacht Commission (2002: 17). Without a firm research base no national plan will
succeed.

The Irish language sector should begin to integrate itself with national policy on
socio-economic development. This process could begin by involvement in the consulta-
tive process on the next National Development Plan, or other key national policy docu-
ments, from which the Irish language has been so noticeably absent in recent years. The
end result of this co-operation should be the linguistic proofing of national development
policy, and a broader concept of development including cultural and linguistic factors.

Under future National Development Plans, a new national co-ordinating struc-
ture could be established to bring together representatives of Irish language organisa-
tions and various socio-economic stakeholders.

Some of the basic elements of such a co-ordinating structure exist already in the
Gaeltacht between, for instance, the co-operative sector and Údarás na Gaeltachta. The
changing role of Údarás will be crucial in redefining the relationship between language
planning and socio-economic development. However, no such links exist in the rest of
the country, and language planning and local development aims are rarely integrated. The implementation of recommendations (4) and (5) would go some way to remedying this defect.

The National Plan for Irish, when it emerges, should reflect the linkages outlined above. In other words, the promotion of Irish should be grounded in best practice in language planning and integrated with national socio-economic development (for a further discussion of these and other points, see Walsh, 2004b).

The above proposals may appear optimistic in the extreme given the unwieldy structures which exist at present, the absence of integration between language and development, the predominantly growth-led thrust of development itself, and the collapse of intergenerational transmission of Irish in much of the Gaeltacht. However, a National Plan for Irish and a closer integration with development policy has the potential to transform the language’s fortunes for the better and to broaden and deepen the very concept of development itself, on which the future of society depends.
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APPENDIX 1

Statement by Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, 11.02.2005

“Míshástaacht ar na hEagrais Dheonacha Gaeilge faoi chur chuige Fhoras na Gaeilge”

Ag cruinniú Chomhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge, lárchomhairle na n-eagraíochtaí deonacha Gaeilge, ar an 9 Feabhra 2005, pléadh ábhair tromchúiseacha atá curtha i leith Fhoras na Gaeilge. Léiríodh an-míshástaacht faoi chur chuige ‘míshásúil agus míphroifísíunta’ Fhoras na Gaeilge.

Léiríodh míshástaacht na n-eagrais Gaeilge trína pointí seo a leanas:

• éileamh an Fhorais ar thréidhearcacht nuair nach bhfuil tuairisc, pleán, nó cuntas foilsithe acu féin ó bunaíodh an Foras i 1998
• nach bhfuil sé inghlactha córais nua a bhunú maidir le hiarratais/íocaíochtaí ar bhunmhaoiniú na n-eagras deonacha gan aon inchur i bhfoirm páirtíochta nó fiú plé leis na heagrais dheonacha roimh ré
• gur léir go bhfuil neamhspleáchas agus cearta féinriaradh na n-eagras deonacha á mbaint díobh de réir a chéilenach bhfuil sé inghlactha go mothódh aon fhostaí d’aon eagrais, gan trácht ar phríomhfheidhméannach, gur gá éirí as a bpostanna mar gheall ar mhíshástaacht leanúnach le cur chuige Fhoras na Gaeilge
• nach léir cén critéir a bhí in úsáid i roghnú na scéimeanna pobail.

Bunaithe ar an méid sin thuas tá cruinniú práinneach iartha ar an Aire Gnóthaí Pobail Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, Éamon Ó Cuív, T.D.

CRÍOCH

Tuilleadh eolais:
Adelaide Nic Chárthaigh
Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge
01- 679 4780
adelaide@comhdhail.ie
http://www.gaelpor.com