The policies on public signage in minority languages and their reception in four traditionally bilingual European locations

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Abstract

In contemporary Europe, support for autochthonous minority languages is expressed by displaying messages in these languages alongside messages in the majority language(s) on public signs, such as road signs, street signs, signs on the buildings of public institutions etc. Such form of support is part of explicit language policies at the national level in a number of countries of Europe as well as at the Council of Europe level. This study deals with the implementation of these policies and their reception by the local populations in Wales, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia. The responses to the presence of minority languages on signs vary and have a number of motivations. The qualitative analysis presented in this study has identified several features as significant for the implementation of bilingual signage and its reception across the research locations: (1) decentralization of public administration, (2) ethnicization of language policies, (3) territoriality of signage, (4) collective historical memory, (5) bilingual sign design and (6) the indexical vs. symbolic functions of bilingual signage.

Keywords

language policy, bilingual signage, bilingual signs, minority languages, Wales, England, Czech Teschen, Békéscsaba, Hungary, Pula, Croatia

Introduction

This study deals with four traditionally bilingual European locations in which bilingual signs in the majority and the local minority language appear in public spaces as a result of directed language policies. In today's Europe, it is an expression of support for minority languages (or for the communities speaking minority languages) to display messages in the

minority languages alongside messages in the majority language on bilingual or multilingual signs. This form of minority language support can also be legally binding having been incorporated into various legal statutes, such as most notably within the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Art. 11) and the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Art. 10, par. 2g), both treaties of the Council of Europe. The minority languages supported in this way concern only autochthonous languages which have been used in Europe traditionally, i.e. which are in an analogous position to the Ainu language in Japan and, therefore, do not include most languages of the non-European immigrants to Europe.

The present study investigates the observation that minority languages on signs in the landscape have become objects of attention. Their presence, or sometimes their absence, also provokes various reactions, including the painting out of signs in an "undesirable" language, which is a well-known phenomenon in Europe. This is not surprising, since signs in public spaces are important for our everyday life: they help us to structure physical space, to mark it, give it meanings and thus to create particular places and landscapes in which we live and act, which have a practical and emotional value for us and which are sources of our identity.

Minority languages on signs in the landscape have recently received much academic attention in the framework of the research into the so-called "linguistic landscape" (e.g. Gorter et al., 2012). Linguistic landscape (or "paysage linguistique") is a term which had been previously applied mainly in connection with the study of interethnic relations in the bilingual parts of Canada (Landry and Bourhis, 1997). The term reflects the original "collective" understanding of signs not as individual objects, but as parts of a larger unit — the landscape. However, the theoretical approaches and methodology in linguistic landscape research have diversified with the spread of this research around the world (see e.g. Shohamy and Gorter, 2009).

The approach, methodology and data

The major part of the research which we are presenting in this paper took place in 2008-2010 and was carried out in five cities or towns in four areas in various parts of Europe considered to be traditionally bilingual ones: Llanelli and Cardiff in Wales, Český Těšín in the Teschen (Těšín) region of the Czech Republic (hereafter "Czechia" for short), Békéscsaba in south-eastern Hungary and Pula on the Croatian peninsula of Istria (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Geography of the researched locations

Each of these locations is distinguished by a different institutional infrastructure developed and used for minority language support as well as by differing histories of political and socio-economic development. Whereas this development was rather continuous and gradual in Wales, it was dramatic in the other three countries in the past decades. At the same time, the latter three countries are also distinct, as Croatia belonged to Yugoslavia and the other two, Czechia and Hungary, used to be part of the Soviet bloc, each with a different language-political history of its own.

In the linguistic landscapes of these locations it was not, however, the signs themselves that were of primary interest in our research project. Rather, we were interested in human activities which evolved around and in connection with them. The main research questions we asked were how the inhabitants of and visitors to these locations perceived the languages on signs and the problems related to them that they experienced and how they managed these problems.

Two theoretical frameworks which can help answer these questions were a starting-point of this study: Language Management Theory and Advocacy Coalition Framework. The former is a theoretical framework originally developed by Jiří V. Neustupný and Björn H. Jernudd since the 1970s (cf. Jernudd and Neustupný, 1987; Nekvapil, this volume).

This framework deals with the complex phenomenon of a human's behaviour toward language, including *inter alia* language policy as an organized form of language management. In particular, we have chosen the model of the language management process, since we were interested in the forms of the individual stages of this process, i.e. the expectations and norms which social actors apply to the linguistic landscape, the noted deviations from these, the evaluations of the deviations, and the possible plans and attempts to deal with them (for details on the theory, see e.g. Nekvapil and Sherman, 2009, or Nekvapil, this volume). Advocacy Coalition Framework, the other theoretical approach that we have selected, comes from the study of the policy process (see Sabatier and Weible, 2007). We have used this framework to analyze the structures and capacities of wide groups of actors of various types who try to assert a certain language policy. In our case, this concerned the policies on bilingual public signage in minority languages.

We collected data from a wide variety of sources reflecting both frameworks, including dozens of photographs of signs, texts of various types ranging from legal and policy documents to Internet discussions, and interviews with more than 140 respondents (almost 40 in the Welsh cities, almost 20 in the Czech Teschen region, more than 60 in Békéscsaba and its vicinity, and more than 20 in Pula, Croatia). The groups of respondents included people of various language preferences, ethnic identities and positions in the local communities — from visitors to members of local governments.

Some of the results of the research have been published in two papers. The first one (Sloboda et al., 2010) focused on the nature of language management and on the activities of advocacy coalitions in asserting a language policy. The second paper (Szabó Gilinger et al., 2011) emphasized the discursive aspect: how citizens of the researched locations argue for and account their understanding of the sense and legitimacy of the signs in minority languages. Instead of another analysis according to a common descriptive "matrix" for the four diverse locations, we proceed in a different way in the present study. Each of the authors worked up a description of one of the locations independently of others, which should foreground the interesting aspects specific for the individual locations. Therefore, the following sections of this paper consist of brief studies on Wales, the Czech Teschen region, Békéscsaba and Pula. In the concluding section, however, we deal with the common, cross-cutting aspects which have shown relevant for all the four research locations and, we believe, are relevant in the issue of bilingual signage as such.

Case 1: Wales

Wales has seen the gradual implementation of a bilingual signage policy over the last thirty years. This has meant much higher visibility for the regional, minoritized language, Welsh, and arguably a consequent elevation in its status. The realization of this project has occurred in a context where Welsh is competing for space in the linguistic landscape with English, demographically overwhelming in the United Kingdom and a global marker of prestige and modernity. Increasingly there are other languages in the Wales linguistic landscape used either for indexical purposes e.g. French and Italian shop and restaurant names, linking to widespread sociocultural perceptions through language and languages used for instrumental purposes e.g. Polish or South Asian languages. The total population of Wales is just 3 million, of whom only 21% (c. 580,000 people) were reported to be Welsh speaking (12% were fluent and 9% not fluent) (Statistics for Wales/Ystadegau ar gyfer Cymru, 2011). Geographically high concentrations of speakers are located in the north and west while there are also substantial numbers, although forming a much lower proportion of the population, in the south-east, due in part to greater work opportunities in general and work that requires Welsh language skills in particular and also as a result of the growth of Welsh-medium education in this region.

The most significant legislation in the past in respect of the language was the Welsh Language Act 1993 which put Welsh and English on an equal basis in public life in Wales, placing a duty on the public sector to treat Welsh and English on an equal basis, when providing services to the public in Wales; giving Welsh speakers an absolute right to speak Welsh in court and establishing the Welsh Language Board to oversee the delivery of these promises and to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. The Welsh language has a prominent role in identity and boundary construction in Wales and after the referendum on devolving some powers to a National Assembly in 1998 the new government declared that "language is part of a nation's identity but debates over the place of Welsh in contemporary society have been long and divisive. The Welsh Assembly Government intends that Wales should be *seen* as a truly bilingual nation" recognizing the importance of visibility in confirming the presence of the language (Welsh Assembly, n.d., our emphasis). It made a commitment "to ensuring that the Welsh language is supported and is given the right environment to flourish" and in 2003, with the publication of *Iaith Pawb — A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales*, it explained how it intended to achieve the revitalization of Welsh and the creation of a bilingual Wales. *Iaith Pawb* ("Everyone's

Language") set out a course of action whose objective was to stimulate growth in the prominence of Welsh "in every aspect of everyday life, including work, leisure and social activities" (Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru, 2003: 11).[1]

Since 2010, the Welsh Assembly has the power to legislate in matters concerning the Welsh language, and a new piece of legislation, *The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure* came in to force in February 2011. This measure's main points include the confirmation of the official status of the Welsh language (which does not change the status of English in Wales); the creation of a system that places duties on bodies to provide services through the medium of Welsh. The government asserts that: "The duties placed on organizations in the form of standards will lead to *rights for citizens* to receive services in Welsh," although Cymdeithas yr Iaith (Welsh Language Society) does not believe that this will lead to linguistic human rights (Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government, 2011, our emphasis). The impact of this legislation in the linguistic landscape will be most noticeable in the private, business sector where bilingualization has been much slower than in public institutions.

The visibility of Welsh in public spaces now is in marked contrast with its very limited presence until the second half of the 20th century, despite being the language of the majority of the population and its widespread use in print. "In the mid 1950s almost the only visible official Welsh was the few bilingual signs erected on county boundaries" (Davies, 1992: 625, our translation). It was not until the 1970s that directional road signs in Welsh (in addition to English) were introduced. This was in response to vigorous campaigning from the 1960s onwards by, most notably, Cymdeithas yr Iaith whose espousal of direct action made contestation visible on the landscape with posters, graffiti and by the painting out and removal of English signs (Merriman and Jones, 2009). It was fundamentally a campaign for an improvement in the status of the Welsh language, since there were already few Welsh-speakers who could not function effectively through English, however inequitable and displeasing it might be for them. Thus the symbolic significance of the bilingualization project has been a core element from the outset.

In the systematic implementation of bilingual signage on highways, Wales has not adopted any distinguishing typeface or colour for the regional language, thus its visual appearance is the same as that of English, unlike the practice adopted in other Celtic countries such as Ireland, Scotland and Brittany. Local authorities, at the county administrative level, are able to decide whether English or Welsh occupies the preferred code position i.e. uppermost, on road signs (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: 120). On and in buildings

the relative positioning of the codes is also left to the discretion of the local authorities although the government expresses a preference:

> "All temporary and permanent signs and new and replacement signs will be bilingual. We will prefer that both languages be placed side by side with the Welsh on the left. Where one language is placed above the other the Welsh version will be placed above the English" (Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government, 2007: 73).

However, where signage is not strictly controlled, Welsh becomes the marked form by the use of different colour e.g. on railway signage and/or typeface e.g. pedestrian signs in Cardiff.

The presence of Welsh in the linguistic landscape is now well-established, the sign-painting campaigns of the 60s, 70s and 80s largely forgotten particularly by the young and tolerated, even welcomed for their symbolic value in areas with low percentages of Welsh speakers such as the capital, Cardiff (Szabó Gilinger et al., 2011). As a political consensus emerged to adopt more energetic measures for revitalization, changes in the linguistic landscape foregrounded the process and were inescapable while the expansion in Welsh language media and Welsh-medium education were arguably less visible because participation was optional. Nevertheless, Welsh medium education has proved particularly popular in areas where language shift to English is more or less complete i.e. in the south-east, Cardiff and the Valleys and Flintshire and Denbighshire in the north-east. Arguably the choice of bilingual education by English speakers for their children in these areas has been a conduit for positive attitudes towards Welsh in these Anglicized districts, near to England and far from the Welsh heartland communities.

The border between England and Wales remains largely symbolic although differences in legislation and administrative practice have increased since devolution and the institution of the Welsh Assembly. Further distinction between Wales and England may ensue from the 2011 increase in its legislative powers. However, for most of its length the administrative border does not correspond with a change in language practices. Historically language shift from Welsh to English has occurred in a westward direction from the districts bordering on English counties towards the interior of the country, a process that was already active by the early 18th century (Jenkins, 1997). The proportion of Welsh speakers in the total population had decreased from an estimated 80% in 1801 to about 67% in 1851; a major contribution to this decline was the large population movements to Wales

as the Industrial Revolution intensified (Davies, 1992: 36). In one south-eastern county, Monmouthshire, the percentage of Welsh speakers had declined to 2.1% by 1991, although this had increased again by 2001 to 9.3%. Monmouthshire has also had an anomalous relationship with Wales, and was associated with England for some purposes for historical reasons, although all legislation passed in the UK parliament that was specific to Wales also applied to Monmouthshire. This historical ambiguity and social ties across the border may account for Monmouthshire inhabitants displaying lower levels of identification as Welsh (48%) than neighbouring communities only a little further to the west e.g. Caerphilly (78.5%) in a similarly Anglicised environment (StatsWales, 2009). The political commitment to revitalization in *Iaith Pawb* that envisages Welsh as part of the heritage of Wales as a whole is made manifest by its implementation throughout the territory in areas such as those along the border where Welsh has not had a significant presence as a medium of communication for two hundred years. Even in these areas, in the public space, government and municipal buildings must display bilingual signage and roads are signposted bilingually. An apparent anomaly in the implementation of the bilingual policy relevant to border areas was that place names in England that have commonly used Welsh forms were not displayed in bilingual signs. However, this was addressed in the 2007 Welsh Language Scheme: "Signs containing place names in England will contain the Welsh and English versions of the name" and there are now some signs that offer the Welsh versions of place names in England e.g. Henffordd/Hereford (and Caer/Chester in NE Wales) and more recent signs on the southern motorway in Wales (M4/M48) now carry Welsh equivalents for London, Llundain, and Bristol, Bryste (Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru/Welsh Assembly Government, 2007: 73). Thus the principle of territoriality — if the sign is *in Wales* its content should be bilingual — extends to "extraterritorial" content as well, a practice now followed in bilingual announcements on railways.

The border region of Wales and England highlights other issues in the relationship between dominant and regional languages as a consequence of mandatory bilingualism in the linguistic landscape. Not only have regulatory requirements brought attention to the *absence* of the regional language — the pressure group, Cymdeithas yr Iaith, continues to highlight lapses in the application of bilingualism in its campaign *Ble mae'r Gymraeg?* ("Where's the Welsh?") — but it has also generated sensitivity to its *presence* that emerges in debates over validity. The Welsh language has had an important role in connoting an authentic Welshness of heritage, if not of contemporary language use, which has been a compelling justification for bilingual policies. However, although the Welsh Language

Board's research shows that 4 out of 5 people support the language, for many inhabitants self-identifying as Welsh, the Welsh language is not necessarily an essential element in this identification. The visibility of Welsh in areas and contexts that had hitherto been monolingual has caused disquiet in some of these communities, in part because bilingualization is often understood as providing a Welsh version to accompany an unmarked English "original", hence, critics of bilingual signs see Welsh forms as "renaming" or "translating".

Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) argue that the linguistic landscape is "the very scene... where society's public life takes place" and sees that scene as "the emblem of societies, communities and regions" (p. 8). The emblematic nature of language in a specific setting, particularly the name of a community, defines for a community how it wishes to be represented. While bilingual signs have enabled Welsh speakers to restore a hitherto concealed identity, some communities in Wales have rejected the historical identity that two languages give them. Two villages near the Wales/England border in Monmouthshire successfully petitioned the local authority to have the Welsh forms of their names removed from the signs at the entry to the villages (BBC Cymru Newyddion, 2010). Although the signs were in place since 2004, disquiet with the names grew and representations were made to the county authority to remove it. The Welsh name "Llanoronwy" used on the sign for Rockfield was based on a tentative attribution: "Rockfield has been identified with lann Guoronoi c. 970, Lannguronoi c. 1020 recorded in LL c. 1145[2] [...] but it is difficult to be certain on the available evidence" (Morgan, 2005: 187). The name was used without consultation either with the inhabitants or with the Welsh Language Board, who in their guidance to place name usage state they do not endorse the use of "pedantic or revived antiquarian forms [...] unless there is sound evidence that they are in common use both locally and nationally" (Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg/Welsh Language Board, 2010: 2). However, an editorial comment in the community newsletter suggests that there were other issues at stake: that the Welsh name was inauthentic because it indexed a sociocultural identity — Wales — that the village felt was alien to it:

> "The deliberate selection of difficult [to pronounce] and Welsh names is a sop to Welsh nationalism and is misguided and counter-productive. One name, whether spelt in both languages or just in Welsh (Rocffild), is far less confusing to the motoring navigator" (Hughes, 2011).

There are other examples of contestation of bilingual signage in the Wales/England

border region which suggest some sensitization to language issues brought about by the "leaky" nature of a largely symbolic boundary. Five hundred metres east of the border, i.e. in England, on a main road (A465), temporary bilingual traffic control signs for bridge maintenance works in both directions were modified by painting over the Welsh wording (see Figure 2). It is not clear whether this was done for legal reasons or as a mark of sensitivity to English road users, although as the road runs between England and Wales it is likely that there will be as much Welsh as English traffic. As the work was being carried out by subcontractors, maintaining signs that were valid for work on both sides of the border would appear to the most efficient and least costly business solution. A contributor to a web forum about the built environment and infrastructure noted in a discussion on bilingual signage:

> "The only time we see bilingual Welsh signs in England is sometimes temporary warning signs at road works if the contractors are from wales [sic] or picked up the signs from a depot that serves both sides of the border" (SkyscraperCity, 2010).

Bilingual signs have been noted a long way from Wales in the same web forum, prompting an online debate about their legality in other areas of the United Kingdom. While the impetus behind bilingualization has hitherto been related to the *absence* of Welsh,

Figure 2: Painted-out Welsh word on a road sign close to the border of England and Wales

noting this as a deviation and enabling its rectification, bilingual signage in itself can appear as a deviation from expectation and either as a consequence, or as a precaution, these signs were modified. Ironically, the signs in question were used on the outskirts of a village called Pontrilas — a Welsh name — in a region which was historically an ancient Welsh kingdom, Euas or Ewias, incorporated into the English shire system by the Acts of 1536 and 1543. Many village and farm and house names remain Welsh and thus the presence of Welsh in the linguistic landscape is long-established.

Both of these examples suggest that the extension of bilingual signs throughout Wales, applying the principle of territoriality derived from an ideological position that the Welsh language is a major component of Wales's heritage, has sensitized people to language issues. It appears that the very success of the campaign for parity between Welsh and English, in as much as it is an expression of a bottom-up language policy, has prompted some people to contest the omnipresence of Welsh in the LL. The extension of bilingualization to all corners of the country has generated a cumulative dissatisfaction that emerges in specific local campaigns.

While the presence of the regional language on signage may signify homeliness, familiarity and an acknowledgement of a language repressed, there are some communities that remain unconvinced of its relevance to their lives. These communities tolerate bilingual signs on roads and public buildings within a national system with which they do not associate strongly anyway. However, bilingual place name signs at a specific site can disturb an intimate network of identity connections between the local, emblematic and affective and are rejected.

Case 2: Czech Teschen region

The historical region of Teschen (Těšín in Czech, Cieszyn in Polish) has been divided between Czechoslovakia and Poland on the basis of an agreement which followed the armed conflict between the two countries in 1919. The conflict culminated in military action again in 1938-1939. The historical memory of the ethnic conflict persists among the population up until the present day and also influences the reception of Czech-Polish bilingual public signs in the Czech part of the region.

In 2001 Census, only 9% out of the 300 thousand inhabitants of the Czech Teschen territory (excluding the cities of Ostrava and Frýdek-Místek) declared Polish ethnicity, while 81% declared a Czech one. The largest municipalities in the region with a signifi-

cant share of ethnic Poles include the town of Karviná (65 thousand inhabitants, 8% Polish), Třinec (39 thousand, 18% Polish) and Český Těšín (26 thousand, 16% Polish) (Czech Statistical Office, n.d. and 2005).

The Polish national (ethnic) minority in Teschen is well organized. The most significant organizations include PZKO (Polski Związek Kulturalno-Oświatowy — Polish Cultural and Educational Union). Several organizations, including PZKO, are associated in the umbrella organization Congress of Poles (Kongres Polaków). Representatives of these organizations are also present in the bodies of municipal governments, most of which have a Committee for National Minorities which is a municipal government's advisory body. The Polish minority has also two representatives in the Government Council for National Minorities which is an initiative and advisory body of the Czech Government.

Signs in Polish had appeared in the Czech Teschen region before 1989, in accordance with the ethnic minority policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Part of the region's population still remembers the existence of these signs which gradually disappeared during the 1990s, i.e. after the fall of the communist regime. However, the current efforts of the Polish minority representatives and of the state administration are not explicitly derived from this tradition. The current policy on bilingual signage relates above all to the Czechia's accession to the Council of Europe in 1993 and to the adoption of the Council's international treaty the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1997. A simultaneous reform of public administration — a delegation of a part of the state power to the local autonomous administrations — was taking place at that time. As part of this process, the Czech Parliament passed a new Municipality Act (No. 128/2000), whose original version of article 29 used to govern the implementation of the right to signs in the "languages of national minorities" in the following way:

> "In a municipality inhabited by national minorities the names of the municipality, its parts, and other public areas, and signs on buildings of government agencies and territorial self-governing units are also written in the language of the national minority, provided in the last census at least 20% of the inhabitants of the municipality claimed to have the nationality and provided at least 50% of adult inhabitants of the municipality claiming to be part of the national minority have petitioned for it" (Art. 29, par. 2, our translation).

The 20% threshold, however, excluded most of the municipalities with a considerable

share of Polish population, including Třinec with 18% and Český Těšín with 16% of Poles. In view of a possible failure to implement its international commitments, the state adopted a new legal regulation (Art. 15 of the act No. 273/2001) which reduced the threshold to 10%, thus qualifying more than 30 municipalities of the Teschen region for the implementation of the signage. In some of the municipalities, however, the practical fulfilment of the second condition — the organization of petitions — provoked negative reactions from a part of the local population and damaged interethnic relations. After several years during which the representatives of the Polish minority drew attention to this problem (GCNM, 2003, 2005, 2006), the Parliament eventually adopted another amendment (in force since 2006) which has replaced the petition requirement with the following condition:

> "if representatives of a national minority request [signs in their language] through the Committee for National Minorities [of the local government] and if the Committee resolves to endorse the request" (Act No. 234/2006, Art. 24, our translation).

In spite of this legal provision, it proved very difficult to implement the signage, mostly in connection with another article of the same act, namely, that "streets and other public areas are signposted by the municipality at its expense" (Act No. 234/2006, Art. 30, our translation). The costs for the production and installation of bilingual signage presented a significant obstacle for local municipalities. In connection with the 2006 ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the government provided several subventions earmarked for the implementation of the Charter, which could have been used for bilingual signage as well. Nevertheless, even with this measure the implementation of the signage was not unproblematic. As a former secretary of the Government Council for National Minorities, Andrej Sulitka, reports:

> "Many mayors received the commitment resulting from the Charter with indignation, in particular they argued that the state, when making a commitment to some action, should also pay for it. But even when the state later offered to pay for the increased expenditure incurred by the municipalities a number of problems ensued in the communications between the local authorities and representatives of national minorities, which complicates the Charter's implementation anyway" (Sulitka, 2010: 73, our translation).

Possibly the largest problems are nowadays in the town of Třinec, where the representatives of the Polish minority have not been able to gain support of a sufficient number of other members of the town's Committee for National Minorities to adopt a recommendation to implement bilingual signage according to the Municipal Act. Thus Třinec, a town with seven thousand Polish inhabitants, does not have these signs as of 2011 in contrast to the surrounding municipalities. However, the implementation of bilingual signage was also problematic in Český Těšín, one of the first municipalities to have installed the bilingual signs. The proposal of the Český Těšín Committee for National Minorities encountered resistance at the meeting of the municipal council where it was discussed for the first time (Lupková, 2006b).

As a response to such cases, the Ministry of Interior has been preparing an amendment to the legal regulation which would oblige the municipal governments to install signs in the languages of national minorities when a non-governmental organization which represents the interests of a national minority and has worked in the municipality for at least five years asks for the signage (GCNM, 2009a, 2010). In practice, such a provision would enable, for example, the PZKO organization to initiate the process of bilingual signage implementation in Třinec and some other municipalities.

To sum up, the reluctance of local governments to implement the international commitments to the protection of minority languages adopted by the central bodies of the state is a major obstacle to the implementation of the right to public signage in minority languages in Czechia today.

The design of bilingual signs, particularly the form of the road sign marking the city and village limits, has also been subject to change. According to the regulation of the Ministry of Transport and Communications (No. 507/2006), the city/village names in the languages of national minorities should appear on a separate sign which also differs in colour from the sign carrying the name in Czech (see Figure 3, in which the sign in Polish is also smaller). Following the proposal by the Government Council for National Minorities, however, the Ministry later adopted an amendment (regulation No. 91/2009) to make the design of both signs identical (GCNM, 2009b). Nonetheless, the name in the language of a national minority remains placed below the sign in Czech and on a separate sign.

One circumstance was particularly favourable to the implementation of the bilingual signage policy in the Czech Teschen region, namely the modernization of a railway corridor which passes across the region. In 2007, the local authorities made an agreement with the Czech Railways company (České dráhy, a. s.) that the company would place

Figure 3: The original unequal design of the Český Těšín's name in Czech (above) and in Polish (below), 2008 (source: Wikimedia Commons, photo by Czesil)

Figure 4: A bilingual sign with the Polish name of the railway station in brackets, 2008 (photo by Dorota Havlíková)

bilingual signs in stations during their reconstruction (GCNM, 2008: 4); the costs would also be covered by the railway company (Havlíková, 2008). In comparison to the multilingual sign designs in other regions of Europe, the solution used in the station Bystřice/Bystrzyca is interesting in that the Polish text has the same colour, type and size of letters as the Czech text, but stands in brackets (see Figure 4). Nevertheless, even such bracketing of Polish did not prevent the damaging of this sign by an unknown person(s) (Motýl, 2010).

Extensive anonymous damaging and painting out of Polish texts on signs in the whole region is one of the reactions of a part of the population to the presence of Polish in public signage. According to the secretary of the Government Council for National Minorities, "this criminal behaviour has already reached such an extent that some local authorities consider giving up repairing the bilingual signs and erecting any new ones" (GCNM, 2009c: 6, our translation). The identity of the offenders has not been disclosed so far.

Polish language signs receive indiscriminate negative evaluations particularly in anonymous Internet discussions. Even here, however, the vast majority of discussants, as well as the local authorities, disapprove of the damaging and stealing of signs; local governments and advocates of the bilingual signage in particular also argue that, whereas the installation of the signs receives subsidies from the state, their repair has to be financed by the municipalities from their budgets. Extract 1 from (a relatively moderate) Internet discussion illustrates some of the main arguments frequently used on the World Wide Web.

Extract 1

http://www.ihorizont.cz (our translation)

07.09.2008, 14.40, Tomáš Jedno

Another one of many

You know what, Alfred? We've paid for it! And damn it, the Polish silliness and their intolerance for coexistence is a crying shame! The signs cost more than one hundred thousand crowns and if the local minority had anything in their heads other than their nationalism the money could have been channelled in a more deserving direction than be used by the local Poles to see that they were standing on the "Rynek CSA" or whatever they say in their lingo...

07.09.2008, 14.45, Tomáš Jedno

part 2.

Whoever wants to live in our country, let them adapt and follow the rules! If it's too much for their Polish ego, let them go back to where they came from... [...]

08.09.2008, 15.18, Beno

rules

What rules are you writing about? Surely you don't mean laws of the Czech Republic that order the municipality of Český Těšín to put up the Czech-Polish signs. [...]

[...]

10.09.2008, 15.50, Ivoš

For BENO

Sure, everything's in conformity with the law. Can you explain to me, please, the sense and benefit of such signs. Thank you in advance for your answer.

10.09.2008, 20.51, Beno

sense

I think every citizen of the Czech Republic has a right to see his mother tongue in his town and all around and can also use it without any restrictions in public and private life.

12.09.2008, 20.13, helenka

For Beno

Well, I don't know whether this nonsense with signs makes any sense.

[...]

22.07.2009, 18.12, Domin

anonym or whoever

[...] You know, my dear, I think people don't mind the Poles who have lived here and will continue to live here because there are other numerous minorities as somebody wrote below, for example Slovaks, Greeks or Vietnamese and they all try to keep alive their cultural traditions and nobody stops them, but none of the minorities is as cocky as the Poles and that's what upsets people.

22.07.2009, 18.55, josef

Yep, you're right. Sit quietly in fear. Just the thing to do in the Czech state.

Some discussants in this extract evaluate the Polish signs as waste of money, an expression of intolerance and nationalism of the Polish minority representatives, as the Polish minority ignoring certain rules, and even represent the local Poles as immigrants, not autochthons. An advocate of the signs argues that these signs should be judged from the perspective of the laws of the Czech Republic, which the other discussants have accepted. However, the explanation of their sense, namely, that the signs relate to the right of every Czech citizen "to see his mother tongue in his town and all around and can also use it without any restrictions in public and private life" remained incomprehensible. The reason may be that it contradicts the widely-held conviction in Czechia, that Czech alone should be used in public life in the country. Signs placed to address foreigners and commercial or private signs are exceptions to this. Numerous Polish signs on shops in the region have not become objects of (at least explicit) reactions by the population. This

differentiating perception of signs on the part of the population corresponds to the difference made between top-down (public) and (bottom-up) signs in the theory of the linguistic landscape research (e.g. Ben-Rafael et al., 2006).

It might appear that the controversy over bilingual signs in the Teschen region divides the population along the ethnic lines, but this is not entirely so. Although the initiative comes from Polish minority representatives, not all local Poles approve of their policy. For example, a Český Těšín citizen of Polish ethnicity stated in a local newspaper:

> "We are in Czechia, this is why I do not see a single reason why bilingual signage should be introduced. It is ridiculous if someone needs to translate the names of the streets. I attended Polish [minority] schools where they taught us to use both Czech and Polish well. I consider this a waste of money. Such demands show our minority in a bad light in the eyes of Czech citizens" (Lupková, 2006a, our translation).

In our questionnaire survey at three secondary schools in the region,[3] which took place in the 2008/2009 school year, students aged ca. 18 years were asked how many Polish signs there should be in the region. Only 12% of the respondents chose the answer "more than at present"; 30% answered that they should be less, 33% that their amount is sufficient and 25% did not mind (n = 167). Even as few as 18% of students of the Polish secondary school (n = 66) were for more signs in Polish; almost a half of them stated that the amount was sufficient.

The main arguments frequently used against Polish (public) signs can be summarized in the following way:

- In Czechia, signs should appear only in Czech.
- Signs in Polish are too costly and futile, because the local Poles understand Czech.
- While there are no Czech-language signs in Poland, there should not be Polish-language signs in Czechia.
- The Polish minority should behave as other ethnic (national) minorities, it should conform and not stand out.

The main arguments used, in contrast, in support of the signs are well summarized in a letter by a representative of the Congress of Poles published in a local newspaper:

> "Whom should the Polish signs serve, then? I think that the whole population.

> Bilingual street signs should show the visitors that our region is different from other regions in the Czech Republic in some respect: that it is richer. Not only Czechs live here. They should remind the Polish linguistic minority that the Czech majority respects them. [...] This is, thus, not only a demand of the Polish minority — this is a European trend, a demand of the Council of Europe expressed in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. From its Preamble onwards, the Charter emphasizes the value of mutual interaction of cultures and of linguistic diversity which deserves protection. [...] The Teschen region is not the only region of Europe to which the principle of dividing territories along ethnic lines was not applied after World War I. There are about 40 regions in Europe like this" (Walicki, 2006, our translation).

Other advocates of bilingual signage argue in a similar way. Their argumentation shares the following three points:

- Bilingual signs express the respect of the majority to a minority.
- The signs result from the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and are in line with the Czech law.
- Bilingual signs are common/normal in a number of other European regions.

The regions mentioned as examples often include South Tyrol, sometimes Alsace and Brittany in France, Austrian Carinthia or Southern Slovakia.

It is difficult at the moment to predict how successful these justifications for bilingual signs will be. The advocates of this policy as well as the local authorities (GCNM, 2007: 144) underestimated or neglected the importance of informing and persuading the public about the purpose of the signs in advance as well as at the beginning of the stage of the policy implementation. At the same time, *who* precisely will lead the discourse in support of the bilingual signage is also important. Efforts to influence local opinion by Polish minority organizations do not seem to have had much effect, as the organizations do not have the trust of a significant part of the population. Success could possibly be achieved by involving other social actors, such as the local governments, schools, academics or other experts.

Case 3: Békéscsaba

Being a medium-sized town in South-East Hungary (see map in Figure 1), Békéscsaba serves as a local centre for culture, commerce, industry and transportation. Historically its Slovak population constituted the majority, and hence had a very important influence on local culture and on the rise of Békéscsaba as a local centre in Békés county. Its current demographic situation, however, does not invoke a former flourishing Slovak town. A town now with a population of 68 thousand people has 5% Slovak and 94% Hungarian residents according to the 2001 census (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2004).

When one enters Békéscsaba, the city limit signs are bilingual, Hungarian and Slovak, but other such signs in the city are a lot less frequent. The official municipal buildings and educational institutions where Slovak is used as the language of instruction bear bilingual signs, but there are no private bilingual or monolingual Slovak signs. Two special local features characterize Békéscsaba's linguistic landscape, both commemorating the work and influence of those who contributed to the development of Békéscsaba and were of Slovak origin: bilingual street signs on specific streets (see Figure 5) and memorial plaques (see Figure 6) remind contemporary residents of a long and rich history of ethnic Slovaks in Békéscsaba. Active priests, local patrons of the arts and craftsmen who benefited Békéscsaba with their work are memorialized these two ways. On the whole, even though

Figure 5: Bilingual Hungarian-Slovak sign bearing a name of a Slovak figure, monolingual Hungarian sign bearing a name of a Hungarian figure, 2009

Figure 6: Bilingual memorial plaque commemorating the pastor and ethnographer Gyula Dedinszky, 2009

Slovak is present in the linguistic landscape, the overall impression of the local population is that Slovak signs are not informative in nature, and they follow basic policy regulations but do not cater for local minority or majority needs (see below).

One of the most articulated impressions of locals on Békéscsaba's linguistic landscape is a historical reflection on the change between a previous, more regulated and a contemporary, less regulated public signage practice. An example of the expression of this sentiment can be found in Extract 2.

Extract 2

(for transcription conventions see Appendix)

> Respondent 3 (in Hungarian, our translation): In the old times, in socialism this was some kind of an obligation/I remember when I was a kid, the community centre had a [bilingual] sign/but there were no city limit signs/we didn't use to have city limit signs only later (.) but erm I know since we have the new municipal system, many local governments consider it a success to have a couple of city limit or street signs up in Slovak.

Other subjects also refer to a certain nostalgia for a now bygone situation of the 1970s which was clear-cut, a win-win situation for all parties involved: the minority was content with the abundance of bilingual signage and the majority decision makers were eager to satisfy the wishes of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, the only party present on the

political scene. Bilingual signage was, thus, automatic and unquestioned, governed by a tacit understanding of the necessity of explicit regulations by the Party (Szabó Gilinger et al., 2011).

The historical perspective also allows for the linking of bilingual landscape and the minority community indexically: in the same interview our respondent reminisces in Extract 3 about a more intensive demographic situation resulting in additive bilingualism/bidialectism.

Extract 3

Respondent 3 (in Hungarian, our translation): Like (.) 40 (.) 30 years ago if somebody moved, they used to learn the local dialect, but now, not any more.

These fond memories link the satisfying amount and visibility of signs and an important number of minority language speakers, salient for all community members, creating hence an indexical relationship between the size of the minority community and the linguistic landscape. And, at the same time, a relationship is a two-way connection, as the language maintenance efforts in the homes and in schools led to an efficient fight for political recognition, hence the bilingual signs and a complete bilingual education system — now vanished.

As for the evaluation of the present linguistic landscape situation the indexicality connection is not recognized any more. On the one hand, those who identified themselves as members of the majority community (monolingual Hungarian) emphatically mention the instrumentality of signage. The extract in Extract 4 illustrates a strong opinion on the usefulness of minority language signs.

Extract 4

Respondent 11 (in Hungarian, our translation): I actually think that there are no [bilingual signs] because there is no need for them/so yes, it is true the population is of Slovak origin/but everybody speaks Hungarian

What is interesting in this extract above and in the other answers as well is the concept that those who answered our questions do not seem to be questioning the visual underrepresentation of the Slovak community in the linguistic landscape, even though the local minority community is obviously present, has a positive connotation and our subjects claim

to have (close) familial ties with it.

This underrepresentation is also quite omnipresent in our data. The exchange in Extract 5 is a typical one (with some variation of course) in our interviews.

Extract 5

Fieldworker (in Hungarian, our translation): let me ask you when you are walking around in Békéscsaba what bilingual signs do you see? What kind have you noticed?
Respondent 12: Hungarian.
Fieldworker: Hungarian.
Respondent 12: Certainly Hungarian.
Fieldworker: uhuh (.) and any other languages?
Respondent 12: no other

In some of the interviews our specific questions helped elicit some answers: most frequently upon prompting some of our subjects remembered bilingual street signs, and a couple of them even remembered the memorial plaques. Yet, in another interview our subjects remembered having seen English signs at the railway station, when in reality, there are none there. Our interpretation of these accounts is that the multilingual landscape of the city is not as salient as the monolingual Hungarian landscape which can be explained by two theories. Firstly, it is a sad statistical fact that Hungarians are very reluctant to learn foreign languages as the numbers documenting foreign language proficiency put Hungarians in the bottom quarter of European statistics (cf. Medgyes, 1992: 275; European Commission, 2006: 9), foreign language signs, therefore, make no sense to most passers-by. Secondly, even if locals are aware of the historical importance and the present demographic of the Slovak community, they do not connect the community to the language on signs. Or, in other words, they don't understand linguistic landscape to be of indexical of an existing and active community (Szabó Gilinger et al., 2011).

On the other hand, those whom we interviewed from the Slovak minority community also find the indexical link to be an unacceptable interpretation. In their understanding the paucity of signs cannot point at decreasing demographic numbers but rather to an insufficient symbolism: bilingual signs symbolize the bilingual community with its history (cf. the street names and memorial plaques) and not the present numbers and struggles for a more monolingual/monocultural/distinct community (Szabó Gilinger et al., 2011).

The respondent in Extract 6, for example, comments on the scarcity of signs, but also

places this perception in the context of minority-majority relations, where signs are to play a symbolic/pedagogic role for the majority community.

Extract 6

Respondent 1 (in Hungarian, our translation): There are few, very few [bilingual signs]/I would like to emphasize that.

[...]

Minority rights are nowhere dependant on population numbers/It is not because of the minority that two languages should be used but because of the majority/so that they could tolerate them/that things are not exclusively in Hungarian/however strange it may sound.

In the account of this particular subject, signs and the linguistic landscape as symbols play a very instrumental role in the instruction of the majority community, in an ideal scenario, we have to add.

Another respondent of ours mentioned the other possible interpretation for minority language signs: symbols for the minority community itself (see Extract 7).

Extract 7

Respondent 20 (in Slovak, our translation): unfortunately./.hh they are too few/they are really too few and also.hh for the Slovaks uh: living in this town it would be good/ if there were more of them on shops/o: r I cou: ld also imagine that inside the shops./ you know/.hh that uhm: the/goods./when the texts would be bilingual.

Focusing on the possible positive effects of more bilingual signs, this subject also erases an indexical interpretation, and creates a more symbolic link between the community and the quality and quantity of bilingual signs.

Continuing with the possible effects of signs on the minority community, the Slovak respondent lists (in Extract 8) specifically potential positive changes in the life of the community as inspired by more Slovak signs.

Extract 8

Respondent 20 (in Slovak, our translation): that would mean much also to the Slovaks living here/.hh because their vocabulary would enlarge/

[...]

Respondent 20: and also for the locals/because in this w- uh- the prestige of this language/

Fieldworker: uhm: it [wou: ld/increase.

Respondent 20: [that it would/increase/much.

[...]

Respondent 20: and for children too/you know/it would be good/when they wou: ld see it written everywhere/then- uh uh the feeling of national pride/they would see that yes/we are also equal citizens/yes/yes?

[...]

Respondent 20: uh: some- uh: some people say/that it is just like a decoration/you know/that in a town/where everyone speaks both Slovak/and Hungarian/that- th- the bilingual signs for example are useless/or street names/but precisely/as we have.hh already talked about/this topic/the opposite is true..hh that that would uh./well./mean very very much for this nationality/as well.

It seems that both majority and minority language speakers evaluate signs to be instrumental, but the effect of an imagined adjustment plan (to use Language Management Theory terms) is less signs in the first case, and more signs in the latter in order to have a more proficient, more self-confident and younger Slovak-speaking community.

The interpretation of bilingual as instrumental/symbolic signs is inevitable by both Hungarian monolingual and Slovak-Hungarian bilingual speakers: if the first took the responsibility of a majority community as imagined by European policy makers, it would bestow the financial and cultural burden of constant support on them. And, if the latter interpreted linguistic landscape as indexical, their own future would seem bleak at best, foreshadowing complete language shift.

The understanding of linguistic landscape in Békéscsaba in our interviews as an index or a symbol is in a direct relationship with its evaluation as a positive or negative phenomenon, as its quantity being enough or scarce and with the self-positioning of the individuals as members of the local minority or majority community with stronger or looser ties to the minority community.

As a result of our initiative to talk about linguistic landscape, when doing our "member-check" and while conducting the interviews, local Slovaks, drawing on memories of recent events when things were different, expressed their interest in understanding the

minority's responsibility of putting signs up, especially those with local meaning (e.g. bottom-up signs) and in trying to make the minority culture more interesting to the majority.

Case 4: Pula, Istria

Among 22 officially recognized national minorities in Croatia, Italians are the largest "old" minority group (Tatalović, 2005: 9).[4] The Italian minority is also considered an autochthonous minority due to the continuous centuries-long settlement of the Eastern Adriatic Region and in particular its northern parts. Besides geographical vicinity, strong economic and cultural ties with the Venetian Republic (since 10th century), and especially its political domination were determinant for the shaping of population structure in Istria. This special, privileged position of the Italian minority is also recognized in the legislative framework for minority protection.

According to the last available Census data from 2001, almost 20 thousand citizens of the Republic of Croatia identified as ethnic Italians. The vast majority of them (14thousand) live in the Istrian County. It is interesting that, according to the 2001 Census data, Italian is the only minority language in Croatia declared as a mother tongue by a population larger than the Italian minority itself, which indicates strong linguistic vitality of the Italian language in Croatia.

In this section on Istria, western Croatia (see map in Figure 1), we focus on the town of Pula which is a regional centre on the Istrian peninsula. The town's population is approximately 60 thousand. Due to its history and borderland position, it is home to several autochthonous and immigrant ethnic groups. Croats comprise approximately 72% of the population, Serbs 6%, Italians 5% and others at lower percentages totalling 17% (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, n. d.).

The standard variety of Italian is present mostly in the media and formal education, whereas throughout Istria the most widespread is a variety of Venetian called Istro-Venetian. However, due to the pervasive influence of the Italian *la lingua*, the local/regional variety is slowly losing its ground by levelling processes and advergence to the standard Italian — the process affecting most European (primary) dialects nowadays.

Based on various international legal instruments, including the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (both ratified in 1997 and in force since 1998), several national laws are

relevant in the context of the protection of the rights of national minorities. Two of them explicitly deal with the issue of bilingual signage, namely, *Ustavni zakon o pravima nacionalnih manjina* (Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, *Official Gazette*, no. 155/2002, enacted on December 13, 2002) and *Zakon o uporabi jezika i pisma nacionalnih manjina* (Law on the Use of the Languages and Scripts of National Minorities, *Official Gazette*, no. 51/2000, enacted on May 11, 2000).

According to the former, members of national minorities have the right to freely use their language and their alphabet in both public and private sphere, including the right to put up signs and other information in their language (Art. 10). However, equal official use of a national minority's language in a unit of local self-administration can be granted only if the members of a minority make up at least a third of the entire population of such a unit (Art. 12, § 1) or if such a right is granted on the basis of international agreements and prescribed by a local administrative unit or regional self-administration (Art. 12, § 2). Article 13 of the same document states that the measures for preserving traditional names and for giving names of special (historical and cultural) meaning for a particular minority to settlements, streets and squares are prescribed by the Law on the Use of the Languages and Scripts of National Minorities or local/regional statutes.

The Law on the Use of the Languages and Scripts of National Minorities from 2000 mentions the use of bilingual signage several times. Namely, bilingual signage, among other things, is obligatory in those administrative units where a minority language has an official status (Art. 8).[5] Article 10 stipulates that in officially bi-/multilingual municipalities and towns the same letter size is to be used in Croatian and (a) minority language(s) on:

(a) written traffic signs and other traffic written signs in traffic;

(b) names of streets and squares;

(c) place names and names of geographical localities.

Other details are to be regulated by local statutes (e.g. if this applies to the whole administrative unit or, exceptionally, to some of its parts; the extent to which this rule applies to natural persons and legal entities not mentioned previously, etc.) (Art. 10).

Besides the two laws that apply generally to all national minorities in Croatia, a special bilateral agreement was concluded between Croatia and Italy (Treaty Between the Republic of Croatia and the Italian Republic Concerning Minority Rights, signed on November 5, 1996). This is a very general agreement on mutual protection of minority rights in which language rights were not mentioned specifically. However, the autochth-

onous character of the Italian minority was confirmed once again (Art. 1).

Because the Italian minority in Istria is considered an autochthonous minority, the Statute of the Istrian County (enacted on November 5, 2009) guarantees equal and official use of Croatian and Italian on the level of the whole County. However, local self-administrative units have an option regarding the proclamation of official Croatian-Italian bilingualism, which is the reason why not all municipalities in Istria bear official bilingual names.[6]

According to the Statute of the City of Pula (passed end of 1990s), the official languages of the City of Pula are Croatian and Italian. This means that whereas all ethnic minorities are granted the right to publicly display signs of their ethnic identities, the Italian language has to be used (along with Croatian) in the names and all official documents released by any of the institutions under the direct jurisdiction of the City of Pula and on all the signs bearing the names of places, streets and squares. In the Statute two entire sections are devoted exclusively to the protection of Italian minority and Italian language in Pula: Section XVI: "Protection of autochthonous, ethnic and cultural specificities of the Italian national community" and Section XVII: "The use of the Italian language by the bodies of the Town of Pula, public partnerships/companies and other legal entities of the City of Pula." The members of the Italian minority are granted full affirmation of their individual and collective identity regardless of their proportion in the total population (Art. 136) as well as free and equal use of Italian language including education in their mother-tongue (Art. 137). All buildings that are the seats of municipal government in Pula must have both Croatian and Italian flag (Art. 138) as well as all the inscriptions/signs written in both languages (Art. 146). Besides, all official documents produced by the municipality must be available in both Croatian and Italian (also Art. 146): various forms, invitations, certificates, decisions, public notices and announcements, reports, minutes, etc.

Language policy as applied to public signage remains quite unquestioned and seemingly unproblematic. We have not noticed any destroyed (ruined, broken or sprayed over) signs in the linguistic landscape of the city centre. Although this fact does not exclude the possibility of existence of such interventions on signs elsewhere in the city area, the evaluation and beliefs expressed in 23 semi-structured interviews do reflect pretty much the same indifference and acceptance as well as the absence of any open opposition or extreme behaviours by different stakeholders.

The main reasons underlying such an accepting attitude lie in the fact that all (at least

locally born) citizens are aware of the autochthonous character of the Italian minority in Pula and Istria in general and thus consider Italian as an intrinsic part of Pula's cultural tradition, history and identity. Moreover, the number of Italians in Pula is significant compared to other minorities.

Both the "heritage" and the "sufficient number" argument are translated into relevant legal measures, which in turn contributes further to their (largely) unquestioned acceptance. Occasional disagreements among the local population are mostly limited to certain policy preferences. Some of them include the Italian minority group's claim to the need for equal treatment of Italian and Croatian on signs. More specifically, their expectation of equality concerns two aspects: (1) the number of signs in Italian, and (2) the bilingual design of the existing signs.

The set of signs to be bilingual is defined in the Statute of the Town of Pula (www.pula.hr). However, the formulation — "the signs bearing names of places, streets and squares" (Art. 147) — is rather vague due to the use of the word "places" (mjesta) the meaning of which can be very broad. Although not explicitly stated, according to an explanation of a municipal official, the vague term "place" in this article refers to geographical names only, namely "places larger than objects", thus excluding e.g. indications for tourists — which, interestingly, appear in Croatian only. However, such an explanation can be seen as very arbitrary as the word "place" in Croatian comprises a much broader range of meanings.

Another disputed claim regarding the number of signs in Italian concerns the delimitation of official bilingualism to "the local self-government affairs of the city of Pula" (Art. 144). Namely, according to Article 145 of the Statute of the City of Pula the right of Italian minority members to oral and written use of Italian language is limited to contacts with officers and/or in institutions under the jurisdiction of a municipality and/or county. This article and the previous one also exclude private sector or any higher-level, e.g. state, institution. The same applies to the linguistic landscape dealt with in Article 147.[7] The problem occurs as the term "municipal jurisdiction" is interpreted differently by different stakeholders. While some claim that this term implies everything that the municipality governs, others (mostly the Italian minority) believe that it should comprise everything found in the locality of Pula. This becomes visible in the differential treatment of official (top-down) signs depending on whether they designate City/County (bilingual signs) or state institutions (monolingual signs) (see Figure 7).[8]

Concerning the bilingual design, the *size of the letters* on the signs of the Istrian County

Figure 7: Several official signs put by state authorities (monolingual) and regional and city authorities (bilingual)

and the City of Pula is prescribed in their respective Statutes (see www.istra-istria.hr and http://www.pula.hr). The languages' *position* vis-à-vis each other on a sign is not prescribed, however, and the order in which languages should appear and the uniformity of pattern — Croatian preceding Italian — implies that the order is presumed on the basis of the relative size of the readership of such signs, which is occasionally disputed by some Italian minority members.

The Council for the Italian National Minority, an advisory body of the Pula municipal government, can be considered the main advocate of the bilingual signage policy. However, the decision-making power rests with the Town of Pula (the Mayor, two Vice-Mayors and the Town Council) and the Istrian County self-government. While there does not seem to be a coalition opposing the policy as such, there are disagreements between the political actors over the policy scope, i.e. the set of signs that should be bilingual. While representatives of the Italian minority tend to advocate for more bilingual signs, the administration is usually happy with the status quo.

Concerning other minority languages, their absence from the cityscape is not usually interpreted as a fault by the local people. The position of Italians and Italian among other minority communities and languages is generally perceived as pre-eminent in Istria (Orlić, 2009). The discourse on multicultural Istria with the prominent position of Italians, the prestige of Italian culture and language and the presence of the Italian minority representatives in the self-government of the city are the major factors facilitating implementation of the bilingual signage policy.

Concluding discussion

The individual studies and locations differ from each other to a large extent. The study from Wales focused on the issue of the acceptability of Welsh on signs in an area on the border between England and Wales, within the territory of which a relatively separate Welsh language policy is implemented. The study from the Czech Teschen region focused on the thorny path of implementation of the right to signs in the languages of national minorities and on the main arguments in the public debate over public signage in Polish. The study from Békéscsaba, Hungary, concentrated on how local citizens perceive signs in the minority Slovak language, if they view the signs as an index or, rather, as a symbol of the local Slovak community. Finally, the study from the Istrian Pula, Croatia, presents a situation in which public signs in Italian have not evoked many reactions and in which the main disagreements concern (1) the question of which signs should feature Italian and (2) the design of Croatian vis-à-vis Italian texts within a bilingual sign. Despite the differences and specific features of the individual locations, we have found a number of common aspects. In what follows, we shall address just some of them.

(1) The *decentralization of public administration* is an important factor for the bilingual signage policies in all of the locations. In Wales, devolution, which included the establishment of separate legislative and executive bodies for Wales, has permitted greater autonomy in matters of language as well. In Croatia, Czechia and Hungary, previously heavily centralized states, part of the state power was delegated to the municipal and regional authorities. As far as the Czech Teschen is concerned, this development has been unfavourable to bilingual signage in the sense that some local governments at the municipal level are reluctant to introduce this signage (an international commitment assumed by the state), especially so if it is to be executed at the municipality's expense. In the other locations, however, decentralization has had a positive effect: minority language advocates

have better access to the decision-making processes concerning these issues and directly participate in them at the municipal or regional level. In Wales, there is also a special legislative body, currently with a strong presence of Plaid Cymru (Party for Wales); in Békéscsaba, the Slovak minority self-government proposes lists of streets for bilingualization, for example; and members of the Italian minority are significantly represented in the government of the Istrian region as well as of the town of Pula itself.

(2) *Ethnicization of language policy* — its incorporation into the ethnic minority policy — is another important aspect. There is a significant difference between Wales and the other locations in this respect. In Wales, language policy has separate institutions, legal regulations and policy documents which deal specifically with language issues; these include the Welsh Language Board, *Welsh Language Act*, 1993, *The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure*, 2011, and *Iaith Pawb*. The language policy goals declared include "putting Welsh and English on an equal basis in public life" and securing "the right for citizens to receive services in Welsh", i.e. the policy embraces the principle of equality of languages and of citizens. In the Croatian, Czech and Hungarian law, in contrast, bilingual signage appears as an ethnic (national) minority right, not a citizens' right or an expression of language equality. These three countries have adopted the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages which has been conceived to support languages without any link to ethnic groups. As the Explanatory Report by the Council of Europe (1992) declares "its aim is not to stipulate the rights of ethnic and/or cultural minority groups, but to protect and promote regional or minority languages *as such*" (par. 17, our emphasis). However, language policy in Croatia, Czechia and Hungary has traditionally been part of ethnic minority policy; the countries' reports on the implementation of the Charter (http://www.coe.int) interchange languages for nationalities; the term "the regional or minority language" is apparently understood as identical to "the language of ethnic minority". A recent factor which has strengthened this traditional ethnic interpretation of the minority language concept may be that the adoption of the Charter was preceded by the adoption of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and that the national legislative processes in these three countries followed this course of events. In Czech Teschen, the deep-rooted interconnection between a language and the nationality of the same name (Sloboda, 2010) has had detrimental consequences: the population usually understands and opposes bilingual signage as a requirement by Polish minority organizations. A hardly viable, although possibly desirable alternative would be to change the symbolic meaning of the Polish signs (i.e. that support for the Polish language

implies support for the Polish ethnic minority) and, instead, base the language policy primarily on the principle of linguistic or civil equality. In contrast, in Békéscsaba, as we have seen, the perception of Slovak as the language of Békéscsaba Slovaks facilitates the acceptability of Slovak signs in the town as many of the ancestors of contemporary monolingual Hungarian residents were of Slovak origin. We do not have enough information on this issue from Pula; we can say, however, that connecting the Italian language to the Italian ethnic identity does not present an obstacle to the existence of bilingual signage. The fact that there are more self-declared Italian speakers than there are members of the Italian national minority indicates both a positive perception of Italian and its linking not exclusively to the Italian ethnicity but to overall cultural heritage of the region. This also explains why Italian is accepted more by native-born Istrians, and much less so by Croats born or living elsewhere.

(3) *Territoriality* of signs — the assumption that bilingual signage policy should be implemented in a certain territory — is another important aspect. In our four cases, the territories are determined by the borders of Wales, the borders of municipalities meeting the 10% threshold condition in Czechia, the town limits of Békéscsaba which has its Slovak minority government, and the borders of the Istrian County and the town of Pula within which their above mentioned Statutes apply. At the same time, it is an interesting fact that the populations of these territories do not accept different types of signs to the same extent. We describe this issue in the section on Wales, where inhabitants of several villages by the Welsh-English border, albeit in the territory of Wales, perceived the Welsh name of their village in signage as alien and demanded its removal. Similarly in Český Těšín, certain types of bilingual signs are not acceptable everywhere, e.g. street signs in residential areas (in contrast to the town centre).[9] In Békéscsaba, only town-limit road signs were painted out by persons unknown (Lampert, 2008), not street signs and memorial plaques with the names of important Slovak persons who had lived in the town. Similarly in Pula, the question is whether all public signs within the town limits or only those belonging to the town should be bilingual. The differential reception and treatment of private vs. public signs should also be mentioned in this context.

(4) An important role in the reception of bilingual public signage is played by the *collective historical memory*. In the above mentioned peripheral Welsh locations, although situated in territory where Welsh was once spoken, the presence of Welsh on signs now is not interpreted by current inhabitants as a symbolic gesture that is justified because it compensates for past repression or marginalization of the language; collective memory of

language is now exclusively English. On the other hand, the memory of the past Czech-Polish conflicts in Czech Teschen affects the population's reception of Polish texts on public signs, as it is obvious from explicit evaluations of these signs. Pula, in contrast, is interesting in the sense that the memory of Yugoslav-Italian struggle over Istria, according to our data, does not imprint itself in the perception of Italian use in public signage. The memory of the Slovak history of Békéscsaba seems even to legitimize the use of Slovak in signs if their content symbolizes this aspect of its history. The limitation of the bilingualization policy mostly to such symbolic signs prevents possible conflicts in Békéscsaba. However, the case of the nearby village of Csabaszabadi (with 23% of Slovak population), in which — after initial problems — almost all street signs are bilingual, shows that the tolerance on the part of the majority is an important factor when the content of signs does not refer to the Slovak history.

(5) Authors of bilingual signs need to solve the question of the *bilingual sign design*, particularly the visual and material representation of the text in one language vs. the text in another language. The fact that two texts cannot be placed simultaneously in one and the same place necessarily creates a system of choice (Scollon and Scollon, 2003: 120). We have mentioned a few solutions in the individual case studies. In Figure 2, the painted-out Welsh text appears *above* the English text, while on the pictures from other locations, minority languages are *below* the majority ones. In contemporary European culture, the position above (or on the left) is usually the position for the preferred language (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Thus, placing a minority language above the majority one in Croatia, Czechia and Hungary might provoke negative reactions. Why not in Wales? It is important to consider the fact that Welsh is generally perceived as the language of Wales, having no other source of political and cultural power than in Wales itself, whereas such sources of power for the minority Italian, Polish and Slovak languages lies outside the researched locations. Our respondents showed awareness of this situation. Mutual spatial position of languages on a sign is only one way to express preference. Other options already mentioned include: colour, text size, fonts and typefaces. Bringing two languages closer or positioning them farther from each other or separating them by a line or using separate plates are also means to symbolize their more or less complete equality.

(6) The four studies show that bilingual signs can create important meanings as *indexes* or as *symbols*. For some people, the signs should index the number of the speakers of the given language (so small numbers should be, in their view, indexed by a small number of bilingual signs). The signs can symbolize acknowledgement of equality or traditional

status of a minority community in a given area, but they can also symbolize the loss of the majority character of the area or an alleged wish of a minority community to annex the territory to the neighbouring country which is the centre of political and cultural power for the minority language. When scenarios such as these appear impossible, as in the cases of Wales and Békéscsaba, this can be a factor in the majority's positive reception of bilingual signage. However, there is a difference between the other two locations — the Czech Teschen and Istria regions — which both border on such countries. This bears witness to the fact that the proximity of a country which is the political and cultural centre for the minority language does not have to be a decisive factor. The identification of these factors and the ways in which they interact in the public reception of bilingual signage policies can be a topic for future research.

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Notes

1 "Byddwn ni hefyd yn ceisio ysgogi cynnydd yn y defnydd o'r Gymraeg a'i hamlygrwydd ym mhob agwedd ar fywyd bob dydd, gan gynnwys gwaith, hamdden a gweithgareddau cymdeithasol."

2 LL — *Liber Landavensis* — *The Book of Lan Dav* [Llandaff] — a 12th century manuscript that includes much earlier records dating back to the 7th century, of ecclesiastical lands and properties.

3 Secondary vocational schools in Jablunkov and Třinec and the Polish secondary grammar school in Český Těšín.

4 Only Serbian and Bosniac minorities were more numerous in the 2001 Census, but both groups were considered as constitutive nations in ex-Yugoslavia. While Serbs were explicitly mentioned in the 1990 Constitution (*Official Gazette* no. 56/90), Bosniacs were included only twenty years later (*Official Gazette* no. 85/2010). So-called "old" or "inherited" minorities include: Italian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, Ruthenian and Ukrainian national minorities.

5 "Ispisivanje natpisnih ploča predstavničkih, izvršnih i upravnih tijela općina, gradova i županija, kao i pravnih osoba koje imaju javne ovlasti istom veličinom slova" ("Writing of signs of representative, executive and administrative bodies of municipalities, towns and counties as well as of legal entities

that exert public authority using the same letter size") (Art. 8, par. 2).

6 It is worth noting that all local linguistic varieties (dialects) are protected on the level of the County. This is why the Statute of the Istrian County is the only legal document in which a regional variety of Italian, namely Istro-Venetian, is specifically mentioned as protected.

7 "Natpisi na pločama s nazivima mjesta, ulica i trgova ističu se na hrvatskom i talijanskom jeziku" ("The signs bearing names of places, streets and squares are to be written in Croatian and Italian languages") (Art. 147).

8 Another example mentioned is the problem Italians had with putting bilingual notices for presidential elections held on December 27, 2009, and the second round on Sunday, January 10, 2010 (notices containing precise voting places for people from different streets, quarters...): such notices should not be bilingual according to the Statute as they are meant for state presidential elections; however, they are there for Pula citizens (and there are still some old Italians who are not proficient in Croatian) and should therefore be available in two languages.

9 Cf. the discussion below the article "Těšínsko — ohlasy" at http://gotcha.bloguje.cz.

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Appendix: transcription conventions

[beginning of overlapping talk by two speakers
(.) pause
/ end of intonation unit
: lengthening of a preceding sound
.hh in-breath

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