

Language Politics in Latvia: the Role of Formal and Informal Norms

“Interdisciplinarity and the future of
multilingualism research”

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Panel: Language, politics and society

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- **Introduction**
- **Theoretical Framework**
- **Policies Regulating the Language Use in Public Space**
- **First results**

- **MIME: identity-building processes in three settings of complex linguistic diversity: Barcelona, Luxembourg City, Riga**
- **In the Latvian case: Sharp contrasts between official monolingualism and societal multilingualism**
- **Latvia as case of a post-Soviet context with only one official language (Latvian) but large Russian – speaking minority**

- Analytical distinction between the level of system integration and the level of social integration (Lockwood 1964; Mouzelis 1974)
- System integration: How do institutions influence the behaviour of (collective) actors?
- Social integration: How do (collective) actors manipulate the institutions?

- **Example for formal norm:**
 - **Language Law, art. 6 and 8: Employees, officials or members of companies or organisations have to speak Latvian and provide information in Latvian “if their activities affect the lawful interests of the public”**
 - **Compulsory language skills for employees in the public sector**
 - **Monitored and controlled by State Language Center**

- **Example for informal norm:**
 - **Cleavage between pro-Russian and pro-Latvian parties**
 - **Latvian parties exclude pro-Russian parties from government coalitions**
 - **Language policies only represent position of ethnic-Latvian parties**

- Objective of “[ensuring] the use of the Latvian language in the public space of Latvia” (Cabinet of Ministers 2014: 6)
- Language Policy Guidelines 2015-2020: new emphasis on controlling what languages are used in public

- Illustration: increase of budget of the State Language Center

	2004	2015
State budget allocated to the State Language Center	68 298,27 €	785 541 €
Number of controls of the language use in institutions and companies	1 931	5 781

(data: yearly reports by State Language Centre, available online:
http://vvc.gov.lv/index.php?route=product/category&path=65_73)

- **Conflict on the level of system integration: Enforcement of Latvian by state vs. Russian-dominated local political elite and (parts of) labour market: lack of incentives for the Russian-speaking population to use Latvian**
- **Conflict on the level of social integration: Municipal government introduced own language policies which are undermining state policies**

Thank you for your attention!



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