

Multilingualism as a Resource of the Sustainable University

Project 4: Languages on Campus



Multilingualism as a Resource in Sustainable University Governance

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The majority of the world's population speak more than one language. The majority of the world's nation states are bi- or multilingual. The population of Hamburg consists of people from approximately 190 different nationalities. These people have brought their languages with them. However, nobody knows how many languages these are.

Multilingualism 'lives' everywhere in the city: on its streets and markets, in its shops, its companies and businesses, in its administration and its schools and at its university, too.

A university with a genuine policy of sustainability needs to find forms of communication that allow better understanding under these conditions of multilingualism. This is necessary to meet its expectations in research, teaching and education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

We aim to discover what role multilingualism plays for the university staff in technical and administrative roles.

- Which languages other than German are spoken among the staff?
- Which particular areas of the staff's daily working routine are 'multilingual'?
- What linguistic challenges and obstacles have to be overcome?
- In which areas does multilingual communication work particularly well?

We would like to design a 'language map' of the university that shows how many and which languages surround us.

METHODS

We are conducting a survey using an online-questionnaire. All (approximately 2600) members of staff in technical and administrative functions are invited to participate. The participation will be voluntary and anonymous. Among other things, we are asking for information on:

- The participants' language repertoire
- The usage of languages other than German in their daily working routine
- Situations in which communication in languages other than German is necessary

MAIN QUESTIONS

Some of the questions we are trying to answer are

- What languages other than German are spoken by actors in the university's governance, by its employees and in its administration?
- For which working areas is multilingual interaction particularly important?
- How do we overcome obstacles and challenges posed by multilingualism?



HYPOTHESES

Multilingualism and the language repertoire of the university's staff are an important asset for the 'sustainable university'.

We consider it crucial

- To raise awareness about the value of this resource or asset, and
- To identify ways which can help us to maintain and foster this resource in a future-oriented manner.

LITERATURE

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