

# Key concepts in supporting minoritised languages being used in the context of the RISE UP project

MERCATOR International Conference 2024 | Leuwaarden, NL

8th November 2024 | 11.30 – 13.00

MINDS & SPARKS



This project has received funding from the Horizon Europe Framework Programme under grant agreement No. 101095048



Description	Presenter
Introduction	<b>Gisela Hagmair</b> <i>MINDS &amp; SPARKS GmbH (AT)</i>
Language ecology (SOAS & RU)	<b>Julia Sallabank</b> <i>SOAS (UK)</i> <b>Eva Duran Eppler</b> <i>Roehampton University (UK)</i>
Broadening Notions of Legitimate Speakerhood: New Speakers Frameworks	<b>Maarja Veisson &amp; Ode Oras</b> <i>University of Tartu (EE)</i>
Suggesting a usage-based approach to learning minoritised languages: Considerations regarding language policies and their implementation in the RISE UP digital toolkit	<b>Eva Vetter &amp; Stefanie Cajka</b> <i>University of Vienna (AT)</i> <b>Yash Shekhawat</b> <i>NuroGames (DE)</i>

# Introduction

**MINDS & SPARKS GmbH**

Gisela Hagmair | Coordinator

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# Facts and figures

## Key information

### Programme

Horizon Europe

### Project Type

Coordination and Support Action

### Project duration

36 months (01/02/2023 – 31/01/2026)

### Person months

295.5

### Partners

8 from 6 countries

### Budget

1,872,192.00 € (EU contribution)

## Topic description (Extract)








*„When languages disappear, our cultural diversity is **impoverished**.“*

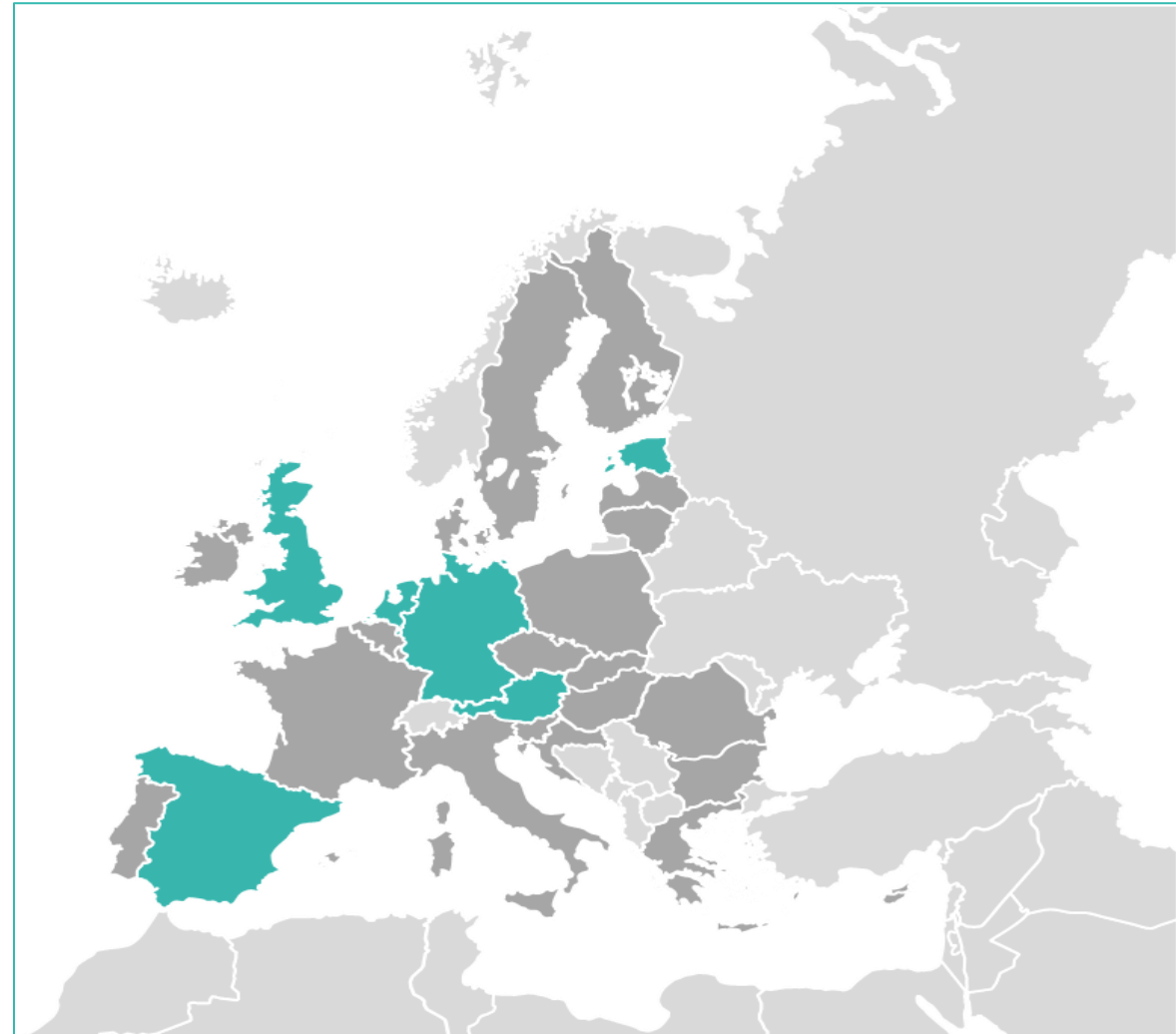
*“Many of the **regional, minority and local languages**, which are spoken today in the European Union, Associated and Neighbourhood Countries, are in danger of disappearing”*

## Project is expected to

*“Create a European language preservation **ecosystem**, in particular with the establishment of a set of **guidelines** for revitalizing endangered languages in Europe and the setting up of a comprehensive website”*

*A set of identified guidelines should be validated by the use of **existing cases of language revitalization**.*

<p><b>MINDS &amp; SPARKS GmbH</b> <span>1</span></p> <p>Vienna AUSTRIA <b>MINDS &amp; SPARKS</b></p>	<p><b>University of Tartu</b> <span>2</span></p> <p>Tartu ESTONIA </p>
<p><b>University of Vienna</b> <span>3</span></p> <p>Vienna AUSTRIA </p>	<p><b>Lemongrass Communications SL</b> <span>4</span></p> <p>Barcelona SPAIN </p>
<p><b>Nurogames GmbH</b> <span>5</span></p> <p>Köln GERMANY </p>	<p><b>Youth of European Nationalities</b> <span>6</span></p> <p>Leeuwarden NETHERLANDS </p>
<p><b>School of Oriental and African Studies</b> <span>7</span></p> <p>London UK </p>	<p><b>University of Roehampton</b> <span>8</span></p> <p>London UK </p>





## ANALYZING

past and present language policies, language ideologies, and sociolinguistic, legal and economic reasons for language endangerment.



## DEFINING

a European Language Promotion Ecosystem which aims at ensuring linguistic diversity by giving voice and support to smaller linguistic communities in order to empower them.



## CREATING

guidelines and methodologies to revitalise endangered languages.



## FACILITATING AND ENHANCING

exchange about resources and tools among endangered language communities.



## DEVELOPING

a RISE UP digital toolset to support revitalisation of endangered languages.



## LINKING

educational/cultural/creative sectors with regional development.

# Selected language communities



Aranese



Aromanian/Vlach



Burgenland Croatian



Cornish



Seto

# Linguistic Ecosystems

How can we create healthy multilingual environments for minoritised languages in Europe?

Julia Sallabank, SOAS, University of London  
Kingsley Ugwuanyi, SOAS, University of London  
Eva Eppler, Roehampton University, UK

**Mercator International Conference: *Shaping Policy for Minority Languages and Multilingualism.***

7-8 November 2024





# Linguistic Ecosystems can be defined broadly or narrowly:

- Language only, in relation to other languages in the (sociolinguistic) speech community  
e.g. domains, vitality, multilingual repertoires, variation, writing and standardisation
- Extra-linguistic factors (social, political, economic, environmental ...)

## Dimensions to take into account:

- Macro- and micro- levels of language policy and planning
- Language and ethnolinguistic vitality scales
- Responses to language endangerment from various stakeholders
- Postmodern views: language repertoires, language mixing translanguaging
- Sustainability and resilience

Interactions between the above: Intersectionality

**Question to think about:** is there a difference between linguistic ecosystems and language ecologies?



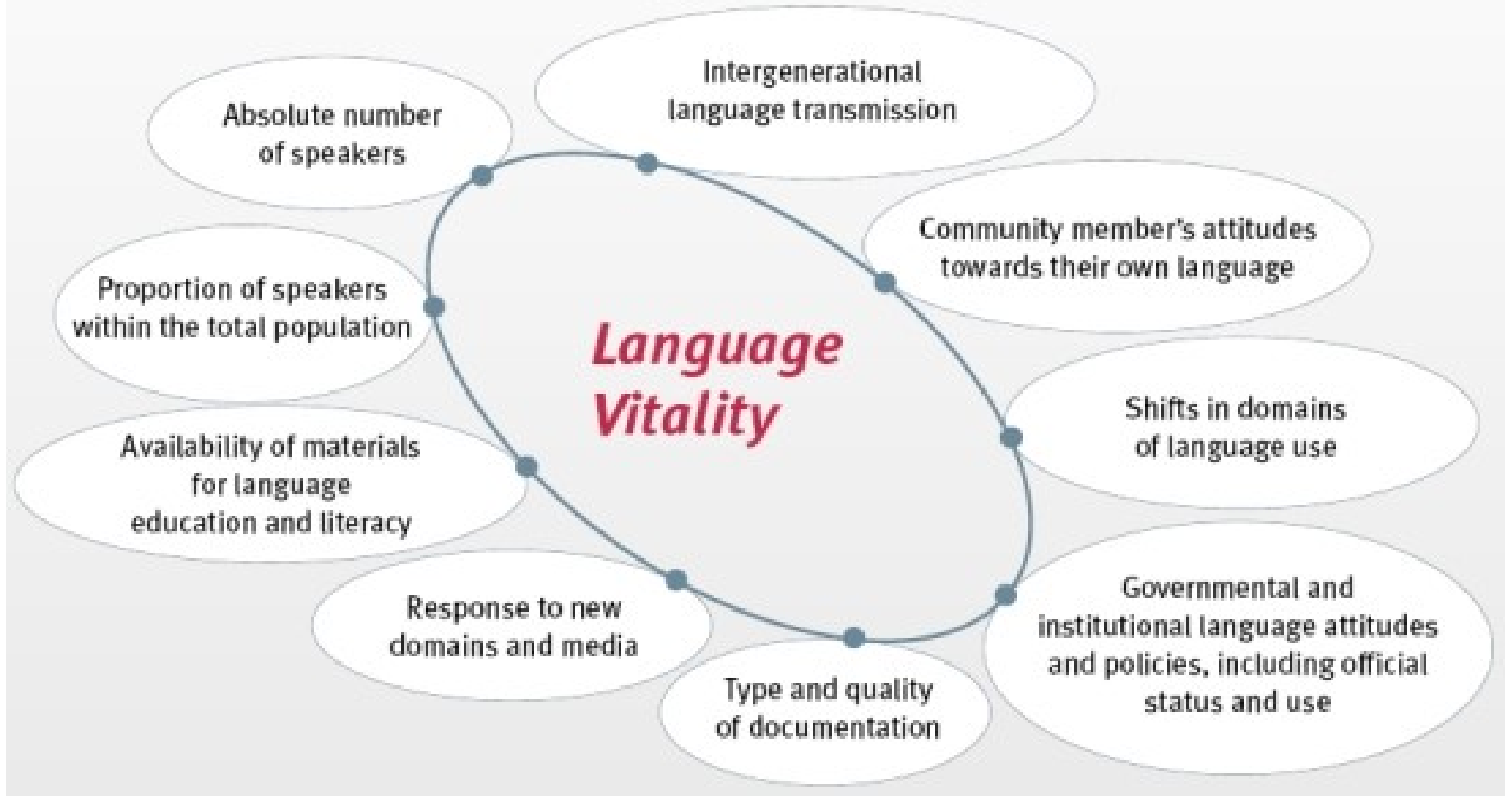
## Extra-linguistic factors in linguistic ecosystems

An implicit and crucial part of language ecology is the fact that language is not isolated from other social, cultural and ecological factors but interacts with them (Grenoble 2011)

Mühlhäusler (2000, p. 308) characterises ecological thinking as follows:

- Consideration of not just system-internal factors but wider environmental ones
- Awareness of the dangers of monoculturalism and loss of diversity
- Awareness of the limitations of both natural and human resources
- Long-term vision
- Awareness of those factors that sustain the health of ecologies.





UNESCO's 9 factors in language vitality (2003)

## The situation of RISE UP languages

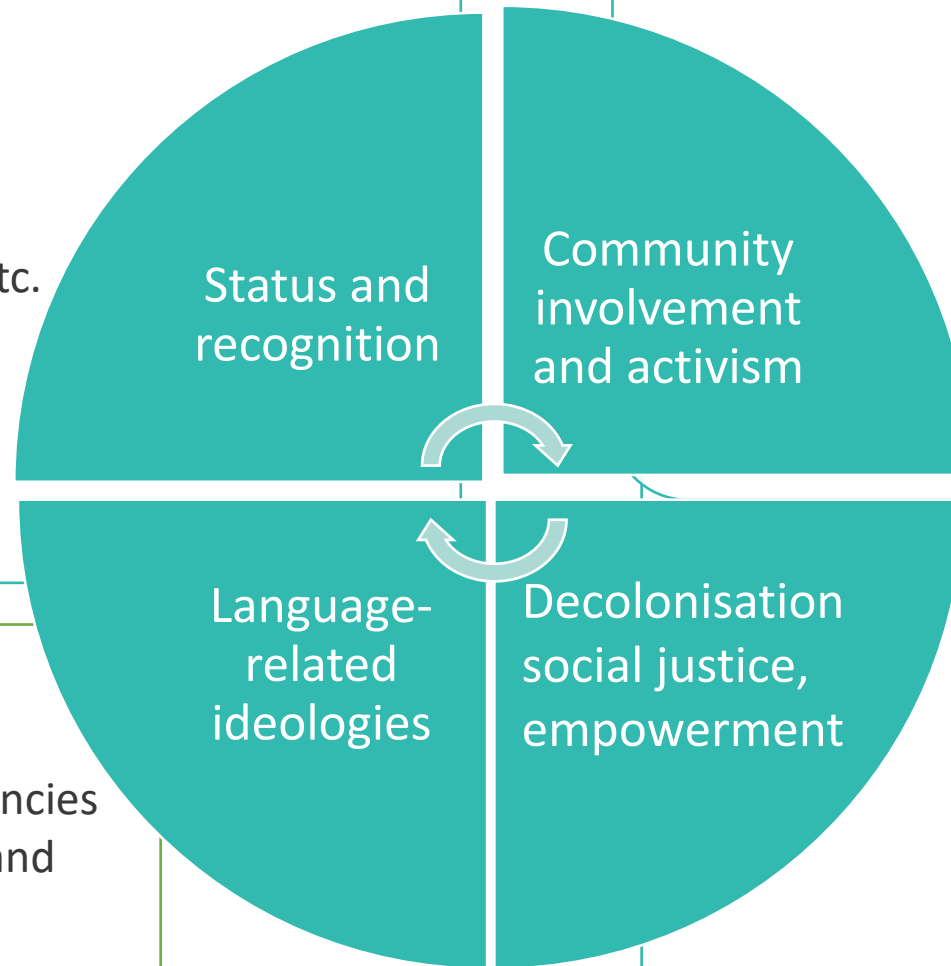


<i>Language</i>	<i>Country/countries</i>	<i>Political status</i>	<i>Approx. speakers</i>	<i>Vitality</i>
Aranés	Spain (Catalunya)	Official language; used as medium of education	c. 2,600 + c. 2,100 non-native (2001)	Vulnerable – little community use by young people
Aromanian (Written in two scripts)	Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia	Officially acknowledged in North Macedonia and Albania, not in the other countries	estimated 210,000 (2018)	Vulnerable
Burgenland Croatian	Austria	Officially acknowledged, Official language in most districts in Burgenland	est. 50–60000; of whom c.19.400 in Burgenland (2001 census)	Threatened, used by some young people
Cornish	UK	Officially recognised but little support	563 (2021 census) - 1000	Revived language
Seto	Estonia, Russia	Not acknowledged as a minority language	13,000 (2011 census)	Endangered -Speakers are middle aged or older

# Initial Thoughts on Factors in Linguistic Ecosystems

- Both political and social status
- Indigeneity as a concept
- Cross-border languages
- Language rights
- Political autonomy
- Visibility of the language: normalisation in media, signage etc. – orthography issues
- Funding
- Infrastructure
- Poverty

- Intra-community dynamics
- Inclusive/exclusive, particularise/universalist tendencies among activists, communities and stakeholders



- Intra-community dynamics
- Inter-community differences
- Gender equity and roles in revitalisation movements
- The role(s) of new speakers, schools, young people, adult learning, family transmission, elders
- The roles of dispersed, diaspora and cross-border communities

- Decolonisation, Indigeneity
- Reciprocity in research
  - Relationality (Leonard 2021)
  - Cultural sensitivity
- What can the language do for people? (not just how can people save the language)
  - The value of cultural expression: music, arts, media

**A growing and evolving list!**

# Cornish case study

## History of colonisation, marginalisation, language shift

- Inequalities: juxtaposition of industrial decline with tourism

## Increased pride in Cornish identity in last 20 years

- Interest in language revitalisation
- Increased visibility in linguistic landscape
- Some pressure for political autonomy
- County council (regional) support for language revitalisation but little from UK govt.
- Vibrant arts scene

## Internal divisions within language revitalisation movement

- well-known spelling controversy (signifies deep ideological differences)





# Aromanian case study

**Inter-community differences - migration, marginalisation, language shift**

Decline of transhumance pastoralism, change in trade (methods and routs);

Border re-drawings & population resettlements

**Intra-community dynamics**

Orthography and spelling controversies (signify deep ideological differences)

Pro-Romanian, pro-Greek & pro-autonomy stances

**Increased “coming out” and pride in Aromanian identity in last 20 years**

Interest in language maintenance & revitalisation; important role of the internet & social media

Some regional and national support for language esp. in N Macedonia

Vibrant arts scene (music; dance; visual arts; etc.)

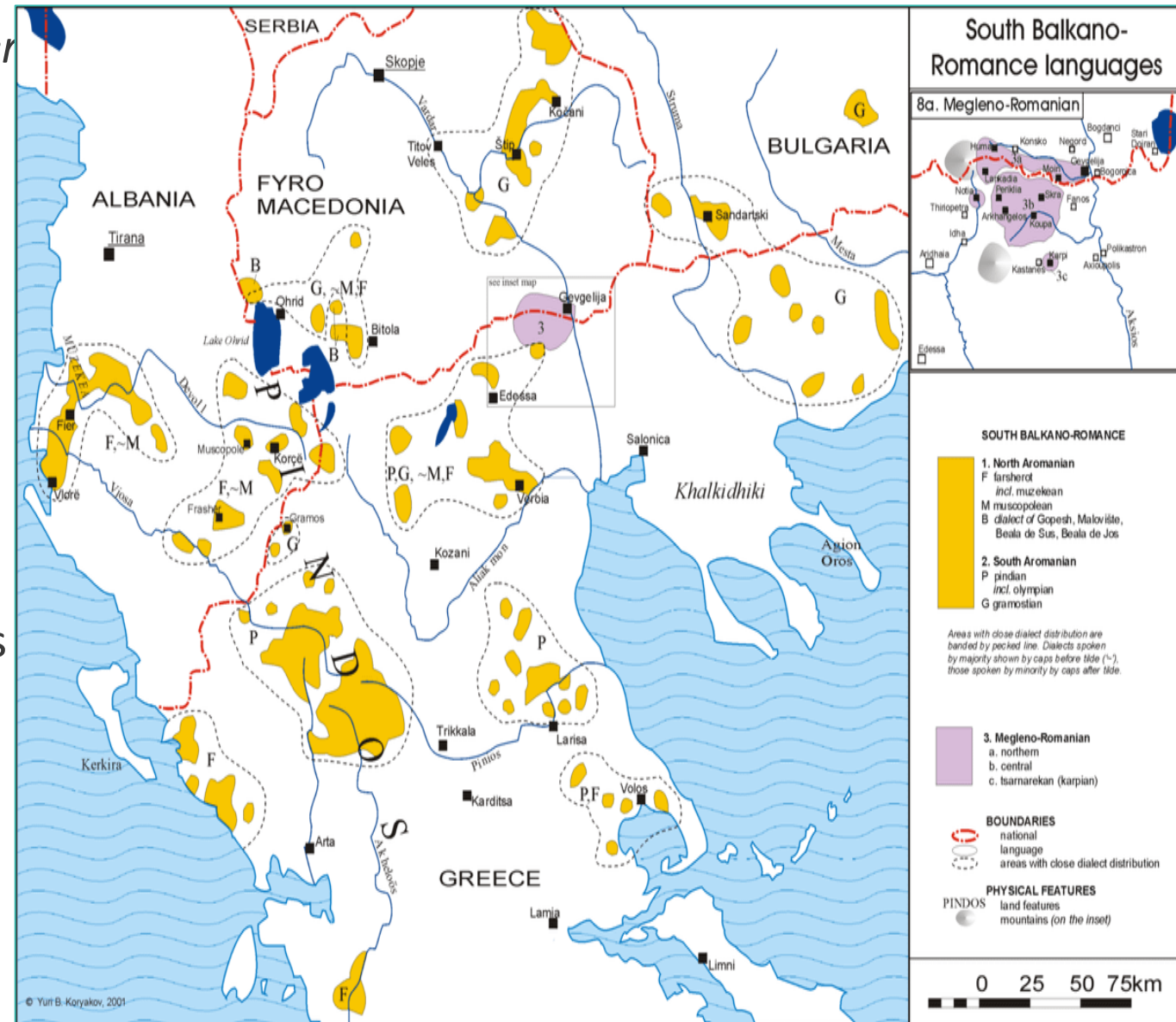


# Inter- and Intra-community differences

*Die inselhafte Verbreitung der Aromunen über weite Flächen Südosteuropas hat den Kontaktverlust zwischen einzelnen Bevölkerungsgruppen verursacht und vielerorts die Beziehungen zu größeren Nachbarvölkern in den Vordergrund gestellt.*

(Kahl & Pascaru, 2018: 58)

(‘Due to the distribution of Aromanians in small pockets across vast areas of southeastern Europe, individual communities lost contact with each other and – in many places/cases – foregrounded the relationship with bigger neighbouring peoples/communities’.)





# Indigeneity and colonialism in Europe

- Nation-states control narratives of civilisation, language, inclusion and exclusion, integration, minoritisation
- European nation-states practised colonial exploitation (settler, plantation, etc.) on 'home' minorities before exporting the model around the world
- Centralist nation-states promote uniformity over diversity: multilingualism is not valued as a resource (Ruíz 1984)
- Minoritised communities are not recognised as Indigenous
- Their languages are often categorised as 'dialects' of national languages.

## Examples:

- Seto is not recognised as a language in Estonia or Russia. But Indigeneity and Finno-Ugric kinship precede and transcend nation-states; they are connected to discourses of rupture: unity disrupted by modern nation-state borders.
- Seto activists, and others who identify as Seto, commonly envision Seto-ness as part of a larger indigenous Finno-Ugric world
  - kinship and shared struggle is claimed with other named indigenous groups (e.g. Mari, Komi, Saami) in different parts of Russia and Northern and Eastern Europe
- Celtic peoples (including Cornish) are cross-border, and there is archaeological evidence that they were displaced westward from most of Europe.

# Intersectionality and linguistic ecosystems



We need to stress this because for many people, language is simply a means of communication; Communities may be more concerned about wider inequalities, poverty, political issues, environmental degradation, etc.

They may be concerned about cultural loss and identity, but not necessarily include language.

## Wider benefits of language maintenance and revitalisation

- **Community cohesion**
  - Bridge between generations
  - Link to roots
  - Inclusivity
  - Language revitalisation as a joint community endeavour
- **Identity and Pride**
  - Uniqueness
  - Culture: Folklore, Songs, Dance, Arts, Storytelling, Plays, Festivals, shows (traditional and modern)
  - Costume
  - Work, farming, fishing etc.; implements, tools, etc.
  - Games and pastimes
  - Tattoos and slogans
  - 'Secret language' can be motivating for young people



# More benefits of language maintenance and revitalisation



## Financial benefits

- Place branding
- Signage: 'linguistic landscape'
- Local added value for businesses
- Jobs for language teachers and translators (could be self-financing)
- Grants for academic research

## Health

- Cognitive benefits of bilingualism:
  - Intellectual stimulation, brain plasticity
  - Delayed onset of dementia symptoms
- Self-confidence, personal achievement
- Enjoyment
- Use by sports teams: team spirit, competitive advantage
- Youth empowerment
  - Links in Canada between language revitalisation programme availability and decrease in youth suicide rates
- In Australia, links between LR and reducing diabetes rates



# Even more benefits of language maintenance and revitalisation



## Social benefits

- Lessons and conversation groups build/maintain social networks
  - Related activities e.g. walks, visits
- Better provision for elderly: combating isolation
  - Language documentation and mentoring (MAP) benefits learners and speakers
- Language rights: political benefits?

## Educational benefits

- Brain plasticity
  - Enhanced ability to learn other languages (not only related/collateral ones)
- Trilingual approach: Local, national, international languages
- Enriched phonemic inventory (ability to use more sounds)
- Valorisation of home/heritage language and culture promotes better all-round educational attainment in all subjects, including the majority language



## Some learning points from previous studies

### We need to avoid:

- Uncritical, over-simplistic, un-nuanced assumptions about the meaning of language, speakers, groups/communities
- Colonial entitlement to conduct research 'on' minoritised communities
- Essentialised and romanticised views
- Linguicentrism (Spolsky 2014; Labov 1973): assuming language is all-important

### Our strengths:

- Local links and knowledge
  - facilitates ethnographic backup to supplement desk research and self report
- Networking
- Focus on young people's involvement and digital tools





## Guidelines

for linguists and other researchers

working with endangered language communities

### Based on:

- Leonard, Wesley Y. & Erin Haynes. 2010. Making “collaboration” collaborative: An examination of perspectives that frame linguistic field research. *Language Documentation & Conservation* 4. 269-293. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/4482>
- *A Linguist’s Code of Conduct: Guidelines for Engaging in Linguistic Work with Indigenous Peoples*, Anna Belew and Amanda Holmes, Endangered Languages Project <https://fpcc.ca/resource/a-linguists-code-of-conduct/>

1. **Relationality:** Initiate & always circle back to relationships, prioritising them over specific outcomes and committing to them over the long term (not ending with the end of the research)
2. **Humility:** Honour community expertise, be prepared to listen & learn, and respect multiple understandings of knowing, doing, and languages
3. **Listening:** Pay attention to communities' listening practices, appropriate listening "from within"
4. **Flexibility:** Adapt goals as you learn more, re-evaluate and re-clarify aims & needs of the community, practical considerations, relationship conducts, values & boundaries, and accountability
5. **Sensitivity:** Educate yourself on the context & history of the community, invest in training for trauma-informed work
6. **Respect/Transparency:** Communicate clearly without using academic jargon - aims, benefits, background, former collaborations, envisioned collaboration, gathered information; how can you build & strengthen community capacity, knowledge, understanding, resources, & skills
7. **Reciprocity:** Work in mutually sustaining and beneficial ways; co-create and pay attention to real needs of the community
8. **Self-awareness/Self-reflexivity:** Continuously reflect on ideologies of the disciplines, beliefs, ways of knowing, own background, motives, and goals
9. **Responsibility:** Clearly, honestly and continuously discuss responsibilities & obligations, recognise that you carry immense responsibility, share your knowledge to enable informed decisions
10. **Collaborative collaboration:** All parties should have equal agency in creating the research - research *with* participants, co-creating not only outcomes, but already the research design; sharing knowledge, not only information







# New Speakers Broadening Notions of Legitimate Speakerhood:

Seto Case Study/ A Personal Experience

Maarja Veisson  
Ode Oras  
Christiana Sammal  
Kristin Kuutma

Leeuwarden  
8.11.2024



New speakers - crucial to language revitalization, as lack of traditional speakers one of the main reasons for language endangerment (O'Rourke and Pujolar)

traditional vs new speaker – fuzzy, overlapping categories

New speaker in RISE UP – anyone who has not previously engaged with the language and then starts to learn and speak the language.

Challenges for NS in the community

Our presentation – an example of being a new speaker in the Seto community.

## Seto case context

Setomaa, the Seto region in the borderzone between Russia and Estonia.



Seto language – close to Estonian and Võru

Seto speakers - about 25 000.

Võru - about 97 000 (census 2021)



Seto flag adopted in 2004



Setomaa has traditionally been a rural area





# The Seto are Eastern Orthodox





## Orthodox vernacular traditions – family gatherings and sharing food on ancestors' graves. Commemoration meal



# Seto leelo – polyphonic singing style inscribed on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009

Leelo singing important for transmission/revitalisation of Seto language



Leelo singers on stage during Seto leelopäev singing festival

Seto leelopäev festival audience





# Ode's grandmother's and mother's story

- Great-grandmother Marinna migrated from Setomaa to Tallinn after II World War
- Grandmother Ivi didn't speak Seto to my mom but spoke Seto to her mother
- My mother grew up in a tri-lingual environment (Estonian, Seto and Russian)
- For my mother embracing her Seto heritage was a rebellious act aka punk
- Mother moved to Tartu in 1988 (University town)
- In 2001 they started a band called "Lõkõriq"
- In 2005 a play in Seto language called "Taarka"

Lõkõriq performing in Helsinki in 2004. My mother Merca with *sootska* Evar.



"Taarka" is a play written by Kauksi Ülle about the seto song mother Hilana Taarka. It was staged in 2005 in Obinitsa by the Vanemuine Theatre. The show featured professional actors alongside the members of the community.



## Ode's personal experience

- First exposure to Seto language in early childhood
- Frequent trips to Setomaa started in 2000's
- Low contact with community from 2007-2013
- In 2017 we got a house in Setomaa
- In 2018 my husband found out about his Seto heritage
- Same year I started working in Värskä Museum
- In 2021 daughter started kindergarten in Seto Language nest



## Some observations

- Seto language pronunciation has changed to more Estonian-like
- My mothers pronunciation is said to be "too Russian-like"
- The difference between Seto and Estonian using the example of Siberian Setos
- The question "*Kiä sa olt?/Who are you?*" stands for "Who are your parents?"
- I don't always feel that I have the right to speak Seto or call myself Seto





# Discussion





# Suggesting a usage-based approach to learning minoritised languages

Considerations regarding language policies and their implementation in the RISE UP digital toolkit

Stefanie Cajka | University of Vienna

Yash Shekhawat | NUROGAMES GmbH

Eva Vetter | University of Vienna

1<sup>st</sup> Mercator International Conference | Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, the Netherlands

8 November 2024



our understanding of a **usage-based approach** to learning minoritised languages

its relation to **language policies**

our **strategies for promoting** minoritised languages

the “**Icelandic Village**”

**Linguistic Risk-Taking**

the **RISE UP digital toolkit**

## Our focus in the project

- Policy recommendations
- Recommendations and materials for the communities
- Collection of linguistic resources, methods and tools published on the project website
- Guidelines for language revitalisation
- Building up a Community of Interest
- Identifying and collecting good practices
- Mapping of minoritised languages
- Development of a digital toolkit

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# A usage-based approach to learning minoritised languages

In general

- **Teaching, learning, and using languages** are conceptualised as closely linked (Ellis, 2015)

(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

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- **Language learning as a social activity** that involves interaction



Language learning is less about memorising grammatical structures or vocabulary, and more about meaningful encounters and opportunities for language use

(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

# A usage-based approach to learning minoritised languages

Regarding minoritised languages

- Strongly relates to **new speakers**, which we understand as

“individuals who put their energy and effort into learning and using a minoritised language, be they originally labelled “traditional” speakers with partial competence, newcomers, or any other members of the communities” (Cajka et al., 2024b, p. 12)

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- Minoritised languages constitute a **particular environment**
  - **Potential struggle with isolation** of minoritised language users
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- Can include **any form of (authentic) resources** that allow or encourage exposure

(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

# A usage-based approach to learning minoritised languages

## Categories of resources



### Media

- ➡ Print Media
- ➡ Websites
- ➡ Social Media
- ➡ Auditory Media
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(see Cajka et al., 2024a)



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(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

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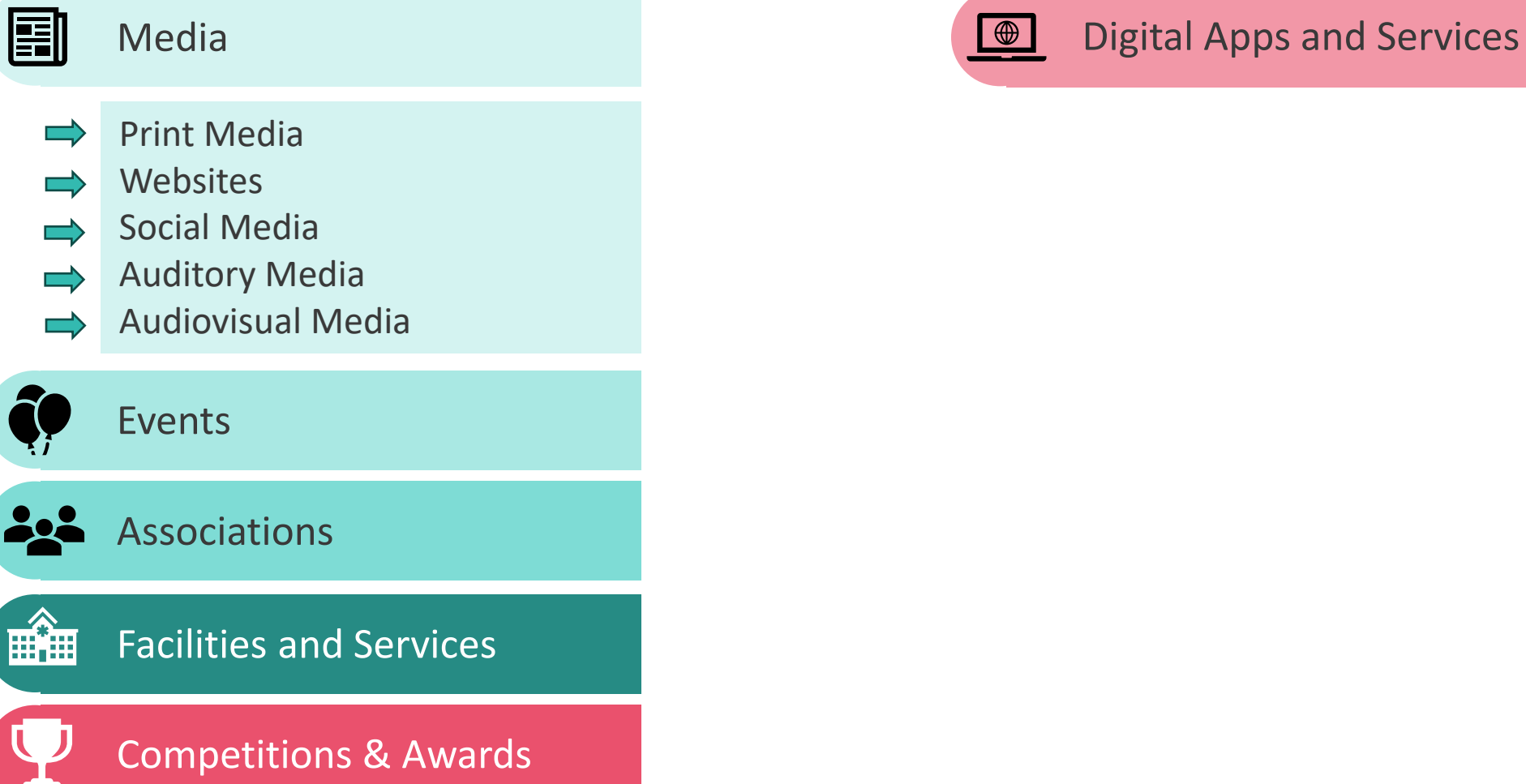


### Competitions & Awards

(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

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### Digital Apps and Services



### Further Resources

(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

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### Books

(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

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### Music

(see Cajka et al., 2024a)

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# Relation to language policies

Including some (preliminary) research findings

- **What is the status of a minoritised language within a community?**
  - Seto is not acknowledged as a minority language in Estonia
  - Aranese as official language in Spain, but Spanish dominates all contexts (Eppler, 2024)



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  - Seto is not acknowledged as a minority language in Estonia
  - Aranese as official language in Spain, but Spanish dominates all contexts (Eppler, 2024)
  
- **What are the attitudes of the majority and/or minoritised language community towards it?**
  - “Beautiful Croatian” vs. Burgenland Croatian
  - Why bother revitalising languages at all?
  - 95.8% respondents to the Burgenland Croatian questionnaire and 85.1% respondents to the Seto questionnaire (strongly) agreed that it is OK for people who are not members of the community to learn the respective language (Burgenland Croatian/Seto)

# Relation to language policies

Including some (preliminary) research findings

- **How do language policies interfere with the use of a minoritised language in everyday life?**
  - Use in education
  - Use in institutions
  - Availability of resources
  - Prestige

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  - Prestige
  
- **Are there (financial) resources to facilitate minoritised language use in meaningful and authentic situations (e.g., through the availability of resources in the minoritised language, such as media, digital tools, or events where one can personally interact with target language users)?**
  - Availability of resources is generally low compared to majority languages (Cajka et al., 2024a)
  - Issues of unpaid language work and research fatigue

# Our strategies for promoting minoritised languages

Potential Challenge		Strategy
Not many speakers	➡	Inclusion of the digital sphere
Few opportunities for face-to-face interactions with other speakers	➡	Focus on interactions with all different types of resources
Using a minoritised language can go along with discrimination	➡	Creation of linguistic safe spaces
Minoritised language users might experience isolation	➡	Fostering community engagement through an online forum
Few (official) language learning materials available	➡	Focus on engagement with all different types of (authentic) resources; development of a digital toolkit

## An offline strategy: The „Icelandic Village“

- Icelandic language learning concept that aims to **promote informal language learning**
- Aims to transform public spaces where language learners can use their target language in a **safe environment** (e.g., bakeries, cafés)
- Both learners and business partners in these public spaces get **instructions and materials** in order to guide their interactions

Source: <https://languagelearninginthewild.com/project/the-icelandic-village/>

- Adapts the concept of Linguistic Risk-Taking (Cajka et al., 2023; Roodi & Slavkov, 2022; Slavkov & Séror, 2019) **for minoritised languages**
- Encourages users to **practise the target language in real-life situations**, promoting confidence and proficiency
- Fosters target language use in **face-to-face interactions**, but also with **different types of resources**



## An online strategy: The RISE UP digital toolkit

- Designed to **support the learning, practice, and revitalisation** of minoritised languages
- Aims to create an **engaging and immersive experience** for users, bridging the gap between traditional language learning methods and modern digital solutions
- See also Shekhawat (2024)



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- Tailored to each language
- Encourage consistent practice by making learning fun and interactive

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- By tracking and rewarding linguistic risks, it motivates users to step out of their comfort zones

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## Community Forum

- Allows users to connect, share experiences, create events, and participate in discussions
- Fosters a supportive network of language learners and more proficient language users, enhancing the sense of community and shared purpose

## Progression Levels and Points System

- Users earn points for completing lessons and challenges and can advance through various levels
- Provides a clear sense of progress and achievement → motivation to continue the learning journey



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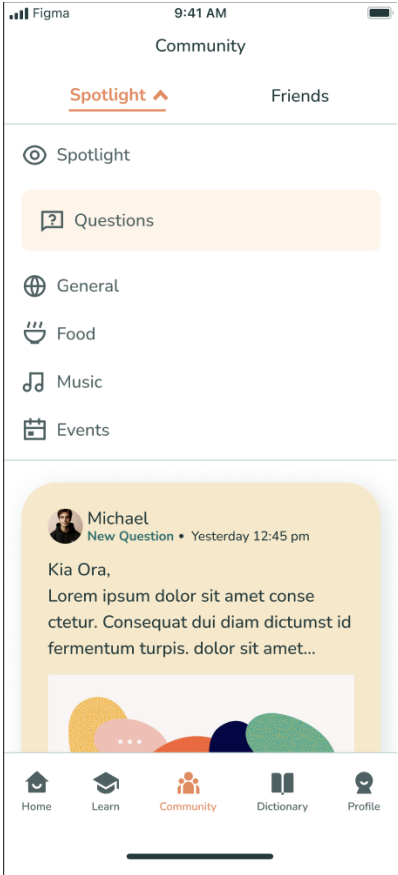
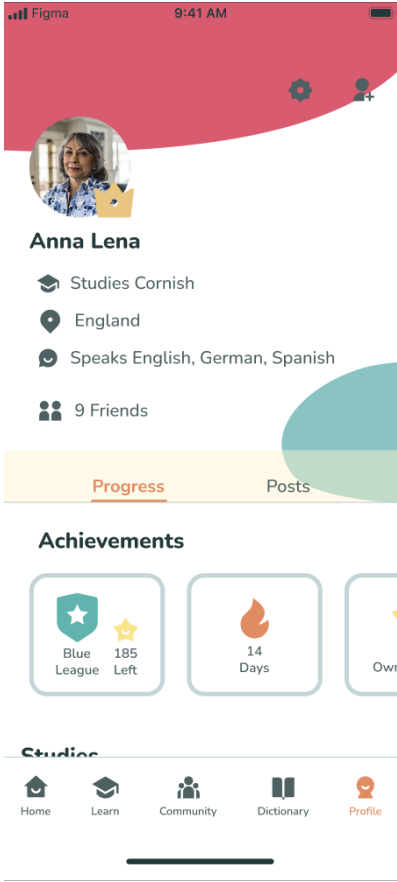
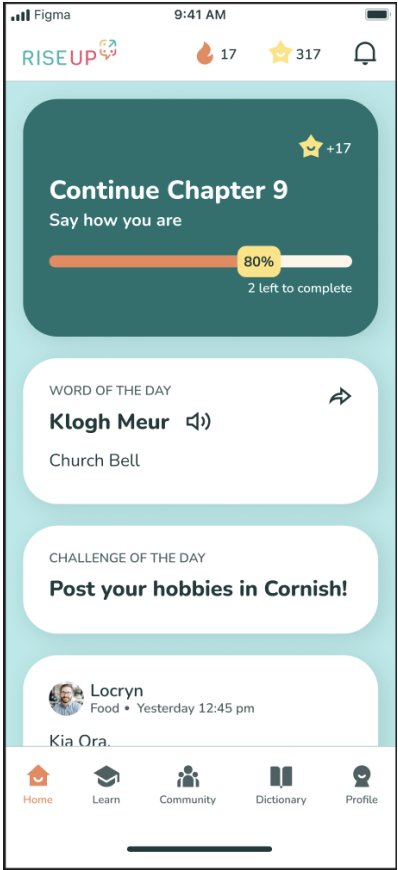
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## Leaderboards and Social Interaction

- Leaderboards create a sense of friendly competition
- Social interaction features (e.g., peer-to-peer communication and group challenges) promote collaboration and community building



- **Learning minoritised languages differs from learning majority languages** → we see one reason for that in the respective language policies at play → becomes strikingly evident in the low availability of resources
- Following a usage-based approach to language learning, we
  - **relate revitalisation efforts with the actual use** of a minoritised language in day-to-day life
  - highlight the **relevance** of minoritised language resources
  - try to **navigate the challenges** that (potentially) arise in minoritised language learning contexts

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