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Abstract

The purpose of this report is to generalize the findings of a research conducted in the City of Sofia under the Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe (LUCIDE) project. The research aimed at collecting primary and secondary data on multilingualism/plurilingualism in the city in five spheres: education, the public sphere, economic life, the private sphere, and the urban space. The report examines some background information on language diversity in the city and its contemporary perspectives before indulging in primary and secondary data analysis. One of the major issues that came up from the research was how residents feel about multilingualism in the city. It seems they like the idea of a multilingual city but cannot relate it to Sofia based on comparisons with cosmopolitan cities like New York or London. To most of the respondents language diversity encompasses mostly foreign languages and is therefore considered an asset. Very few people include minority and migrant languages when talking about multilingualism, and even fewer think to include the languages of people with disabilities. That aspect of multilingualism is highly sensitive. Another sensitive issue is the effect of multilingualism on the Bulgarian language since there are concerns that multilingualism reduces native language competency and amends the language system and structure. At the local level there are strong actors in the field of multilingualism but weak underdeveloped policies. Local authorities have the autonomy to introduce language policies in certain fields like public services offered in more than one language; street and other signage; events and activities predominantly in the cultural sphere that provide opportunities for different language use and exposure. The prerogatives of local authorities in the educational sphere are limited since this is a national domain but still there are opportunities which could be used, even on the basis of pilot projects, such as extracurricular school activities – competitions, fairs, festivals, exhibitions – to raise awareness of language diversity.
1. Introduction

Multilingualism in the city as a locus where different cultures and languages meet and interact becomes a topical issue, especially in the light of the EU strategy and commitment to encouraging linguistic diversity and the learning of languages within its confines.

The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (Art. 3) postulates that the only official language in the country is Bulgarian. It, however, guarantees the right of members of different ethnic groups to study and use their own languages (Art. 36). Article 54 entitles them to develop their own culture in accordance with their ethnic self-identification, which is recognized and guaranteed by law.

There have been attempts to pass a Law on the Bulgarian Language in Parliament in the past years, none of which has been successful. In May 2012 two separate versions of a new law on the Bulgarian language were discussed and did not pass in plenary in the Parliament. Their main thrust is improving the language culture and literacy in Bulgarian society. During the debates it was acknowledged that language issues are dealt with and tackled in about 100 other pieces of legislation and the Constitution of the country, which makes the new draft proposal to hardly any indispensable purpose. There is a Law regulating the studying of foreign languages. Four minority languages are recognized in Bulgaria – Turkish, Roma, Armenian and Hebrew¹ (the last 2 having a very limited number of speakers). The representatives of these minority groups are entitled to the right to study their own mother languages.

Bulgaria is a signatory to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as of May 7, 1999. However, Bulgaria has not signed and ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.²

The Demographic characteristics of Sofia give a reliable picture of the languages spoken and the state of multilingualism in the city. According to the last national census conducted in 2011, the size of the population of the City of Sofia amounts to 1 291 591 people, or 17.5% of the total size of the country’s population (7 364 570 as of February 1, 2011). In the period between the two censuses (2001 – 2011) the population of Sofia has increased by 10.3% or 120 749 people. Nationwide, 5 659 024 people, or 85.2% speak Bulgarian as a mother tongue, 605 802 (9.1%) speak Turkish, and 281 217 (4.2%) speak Roma. Sofia is attractive for internal migration; 32.1% of the people who changed their place of residence have settled in the capital city. In terms of population structure (as of February 1, 2011), 96.4% of Sofia’s residents are of Bulgarian ethnic origin (meaning also speakers of Bulgarian as a mother tongue), the rest belong to Roma, Turkish or other ethnic groups.

On the basis of these figures, we can hypothesize that, from the point of view of first language, or mother tongue speakers, Sofia is predominantly a monolingual, Bulgarian-speaking city, while many of its inhabitants are bilingual or plurilingual (meaning that they speak one or more foreign languages).

¹ It is worth noting that the entire Bulgarian Jewish population of about 50 000 was saved during World War II. Following 1948, most Jews left Bulgaria and settled in the newly created State of Israel, thus leaving a small number in Bulgaria.

2. Short history of language diversity in the city

The first settlements on the territory of what is now known as the City of Sofia date back to five thousand years B.C., making it one of the oldest cities in Europe. It has been given several names in the course of history and has been a crossroads of different cultures and languages. The remnants of the old cities can still be seen today. Sofia is the capital of Bulgaria and the economic, political, administrative, cultural and educational hub of the country, with approximately 20 universities and academic centres. Its population size expands rapidly; today the population of Sofia is over 1 200 000 people. Sofia during the centuries has integrated different linguistic communities and it accommodates new migrants as well. This makes Sofia a multicultural city with increasing linguistic diversity. As of late, Sofia is turning from a transit point to a final destination for new immigrants, which raises issues of integration, language policy and multilingualism at the city level. Sofia is also candidate for European Capital of Culture 2019, which would further increase the importance of multilingualism and language policy in the city.

Sofia has an ancient history and a geographic location at the crossroads where the East-West and North-South Axis intersect. Throughout the centuries, the city has been a meeting place for different peoples of different ethnicities and creeds, and speaking different languages. The ethnic composition has changed over time but multilingualism has been a reality throughout much of the city's history. The need for tolerance and respect of diversity dates back to the Edict of Toleration (which predates Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313), regarding the end of the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. It was issued in Sofia, then Serdica, in 311, by the Sofia-born Roman Emperor Galerius. This respect for diversity can also be exemplified presently by the fact that the temples of the major religions in the center of Sofia are in such proximity that is rare for the European cultural landscape.

In medieval times Bulgaria had three major cultural and literary centres – Preslav, Ohrid and Veliko Tarnovo. Under Ottoman rule (end of 14th – end of 19th century) Bulgaria was a multilingual society meaning that on this geographic territory several different languages were used by different ethnic communities. During the Revival many intellectuals and tradesmen were plurilingual, meaning that they had command of several languages, while at the same time preserving the Bulgarian language and counteracting the mainly Turkish and Greek linguistic influences. Turkish - the language of the conqueror - was the official language in Bulgaria during the Revival period. Greek was widely used in church matters and homilies causing popular discontent among the Bulgarian population that culminated in the Independent Church movement, one of its goals being the establishment of the Bulgarian language as the language of worship, sermons and other church rites. This was accompanied by an increased studying of the Bulgarian language in the schools of the Bulgarian communities throughout the Ottoman Empire. This trend to focus on the mother tongue as a token of ethnicity and national consciousness was accompanied by introduction of other languages as well in the communal school system.
3. Contemporary perspectives

Cities as natural centres of economic activity attract diverse populations who contribute to the multilingual mosaic, and who, living side by side, learn each others’ languages to help promote trade, communication, interaction and other activities. Sofia as one of the important trading centres was no exception to this trend.

Following the liberation of Bulgaria, the ethnic composition of the city changed and with it also changed the territorial distribution of languages. As Turks and other nationalities left and Bulgaria was proclaimed capital of Bulgaria, Bulgarian nationals from throughout the country, as well as from territories populated by Bulgarians but left outside the borders of the newly established state, started to settle in the city. This influx of Bulgarian refugees, many of whom settled in Sofia, and the internal migration from the countryside to capital, a process that continues today, changed the linguistic landscape so that now with much certainty one can posit that Sofia is predominantly a monolingual city.

Sofia during the centuries has integrated well different communities such as Jews or Armenians, and it accommodates new migrants as well (such as people who have settled in Bulgaria in the 1970’s and 1980’s from Arab countries and Latin America, who are well integrated into the mainstream of society).

From the viewpoint of languages, present-day Sofia is largely monolingual; however, many of its inhabitants are bilingual or plurilingual, especially younger generations, and language learning is highly esteemed, encouraged and widely reflected in school curricula and out-of-school linguistic centres where foreign languages are taught.  

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3 For more on multilingualism in education refer to section 4.1, secondary data.
4. The LUCIDE Network

This section outlines the research activities of the LUCIDE network in 2012. The LUCIDE network (Languages in Urban Communities: Integration and Diversity for Europe) is composed of university and civic partners from thirteen European cities\(^4\), along with research teams from Ottawa and Melbourne. The aims of our network are to depict how communication occurs in multilingual cities and to develop ideas about how to manage multilingual citizen communities.

In LUCIDE’s research activities, we are therefore interested in the real-life complexities faced by individuals in various spheres and aspects of city life. The five overarching topics we have set out to explore are:

1. Good practice in the provision of language learning opportunities for immigrants: How do immigrants learn the language of the host country and how are they helped to maintain their own languages? What happens in schools and also in adult education?

2. Social inclusion: How do cities support social inclusion through linguistic support in social services, health etc. and what kind of training is desirable in these areas? What happens about translation and interpreting?

3. Neighbouring languages: How do cities provide for communication and cultural exchange with “neighbouring languages”? What do we mean by neighbouring languages in a city context?

4. Intercultural dialogue: How do cities promote intercultural dialogue and understanding by celebrating community cultures in common spaces? What is the culture of a multilingual city?

5. New patterns of migration: Do particular challenges confront cities in countries that have traditionally been countries of emigration but are now receiving many immigrants? How do they respond to this changed perspective and what is the impact on civil society?

In defining what our network understands to be ‘multilingualism’, the distinction drawn by the work of the Council of Europe is helpful. We therefore employ the terms ‘multilingualism’ and ‘plurilingualism’ to distinguish between societal and individual multilingualism. Multilingualism refers to societal multilingualism: the co-existence of many languages, for the purposes of this study, within a city. Plurilingualism refers to an individual's repertoire of languages, or “the capacity of individuals to use more than one language in social communication whatever their command of those languages”.\(^5\)

Our approach to researching multilingualism and plurilingualism in our cities considers language in its communicative processes and practice rather than from a more static perspective (e.g. counting people/languages). These communicative processes and practices may be understood within a typology of language use:

- Symbolic/representational use of language (bottom-up, realities of everyday life – how we use language to send messages)
- Transactional/communicative (e.g. pragmatic use/unofficial acceptance of ML/PL by authorities on the ground, for communicative efficiency)
- Authoritative/directive (official, uni-directional, tends towards monolingualism)

Our network is involved in secondary data collection and primary data collection. These two phases of data collection were designed to feed into the content development of our network: inter alia, its seminars, workshops and city reports. We present these two phases of our research activities below.


LUCIDE partners conducted meta-surveys of recent secondary data on multilingualism/plurilingualism in the network’s cities. The aim of this phase of our research was to help create a multiplicity of up-to-date narratives on the multi/plurilingual realities of the cities in our network, referring to data related to multilingual practices, processes and products in local contexts, and to develop original research questions for the next phase of primary research. As well as the more traditional academic or policy documents on multilingualism, we were also interested in examples of multilingualism. These varied in each sphere. When surveying pre-existing data, we took a broad rather than a narrow approach when deciding what could be included in the first phase of our research. In this phase of our research activities, we focused on recent data, published in 2010 and onwards, or the most recent possible, in order to ensure that we created up-to-date and fresh narratives of languages in each city, and to help formulate valid research questions for the primary data collection phase.

Five key spheres were delineated in order to provide for comprehensive and systematic exploration of how languages are encountered, used and learned in city life. These spheres included the public sphere, economic life, the private lives of citizens, and urban spaces or the ‘cityscape’. It was decided to examine education as an individual sphere, given the focus of our network on language learning, although often it falls within the public remit.

In the second phase of our research, we sought to question city respondents about the reality of multi/plurilingualism in their city, about language policy/practice, visibility, affordances and challenges. A qualitative research design was deemed the most appropriate model, given the diversity of research sites, and the importance of gathering input from key stakeholders. A semi-standardised research design based on stakeholder interviewers was created to support primary data collection in each partner city. This phase involved the targeted questioning of selected individuals in the different spheres. Interviews were administered in a variety of modes: face-to-face, over the telephone/skype, and via email. In the case of face-to-face and telephone interviews, these were recorded (audio only) and transcribed where possible.

Sofia interviews

The purpose of the research in Sofia was to collect primary and secondary data on multilingualism/plurilingualism in the City of Sofia in the five mentioned areas: education, the public sphere, economic life, the private sphere, and the urban space. In the course of data collection 25 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted following the basic methodology and questions outlined in the Primary Data Collection Guide. The interviews were conducted in the period 5 – 21 November 2012.

Most of the interviews were audio recorded on digital devices and subsequently transcribed in Bulgarian. The SDA team which organized the research was of the opinion that the proposed questions were too professional and quite unintelligible to the non-expert. Therefore, it had to redraw and adapt them to make them more intelligible to people who are not particularly involved in linguistics and sociolinguistics.

We also considered that the total of 10 interviews in five spheres is not a representative sample in two respects. First, we could have sought to conduct interviews with people who are knowledgeable of the matter and thus distort the sample. Second, if we had interviewed people who were not experts on multilingualism, this could have also distorted the sample since most of the questions were too specialized to the non-professional. Another problem is that the questions are too general in a sense that they do not reflect the specifics of the five spheres and thus elicit general responses. It seems that they should have been devised differently for the different spheres in order to find out more about the particular sphere.

To make the sample more representative we 1) adapted the questions (see Appendix 1), and 2) increased the number of interviewees to 25 in order to encompass more viewpoints on the matter. Therefore, as is usually the case with qualitative research, certain imbalances may become evident. Thus, on the basis of these interviews we will abstain from making valid and general conclusions on multilingualism in Sofia; rather, we will acknowledge these interviews as the personal opinions of the respondents – citizens of Sofia, without generalizations for the city as a whole.
Interviewers were MA students majoring in European Projects at Sofia University, who served as interns at Sofia Development Association during the fall semester. They underwent basic instruction as to how to conduct the interviews. They were also asked to interview each other in order for us to ferret out whether the questions are understandable to a non-linguist. This insight also helped considerably in the adaptation of the questions.

It should be reiterated that the 25 interviews do not constitute a representative sample, and therefore, generalizations about the City of Sofia cannot be made on this basis. The interviews present solely the opinions of some people from the city. See some quotations taken from the interviews in Appendix 2.

According to their profiles (background questions 1-6) the respondents are individuals from the five proposed spheres. In quantitative terms they can be divided as follows:

Total number of interviews: 25

Respondents’ profiles

In terms of ethnic origin most of the respondents are: Bulgarian (21), Turkish (1), Roma (1), Bulgarian-Arab (1), and Atheist (1).

Three people have declared they are monolingual, 9 are bilingual, and 13 are plurilingual. Two of the monolingual respondents work at municipal and state institutions; the lack of language skills in the public administration is a problem, especially among the older generations of public servants/administrators.

Some respondents are not clear on the meaning of multilingualism; they say they are monolingual and at the same time declare they use actively one or more foreign languages in their private or professional lives.

All interviewees speak Bulgarian in their private lives along with other languages such as English (20), French (4), Spanish (2), German (1), Russian (1), Serbian (1), Turkish (1), Balkan languages (1) and Arabic (1). Many of the respondents speak two or more languages.

The figures on professional/work life show that all of the respondents use Bulgarian at work followed by, more or less regularly, English (24), French (4), Spanish (2), German (4), Serbian (1), Turkish (1), Balkan languages (1), Italian (1) and Arabic (1). Many respondents speak a combination of two or more languages.

Twenty people say they are interested or rather interested in learning languages. One is interested but is not good at learning languages, two are not/rather not interested in learning languages, and two are not interested but had to learn languages because “it is imperative in the globalizing world”.

In terms of most significant language learning experience, the responses are quite diverse. Among these we can distinguish: 1) to get acquainted with different cultures, nations/communicate with people incl. native speakers (8 people); 2) no response (2), 3) being able to understand, being able to find directions alone and use the language in real situations, 4) studying languages like Chinese or Latin, 5) reading literature and learning new things, 6) the freedom to express yourself in a language different from your own, etc.

Respondents’ occupations are listed within their respective spheres below.
4.1 Multilingualism and plurilingualism in education

4.1.1. Primary data

Four of the respondents work in the area of education: a student of Turkic languages; a student majoring in Balkan studies; an external expert on projects at the Ministry of Education and Sofia University; a kindergarten teacher.

To most of the respondents in this sphere multilingual city means a big city, metropolis/megapolis like New York or Berlin, where people of different ethnic and national backgrounds live, including immigrants. It has to do with the size and dynamics of the city, as well as with the presence of many autonomous or integrated cultures.

As far as multilingualism in Sofia is concerned, opinions diverge: some consider Sofia a multilingual city because of the presence of many foreigners, foreign students and guests; others think that it cannot be dubbed a multilingual city. The interviewees are of the opinion that multilingualism is not a sensitive topic in the City of Sofia, but the use of different languages needs to be encouraged even further. Most visible languages in Sofia are naturally Bulgarian and English (as a lingua franca), but more signs in English are still needed, especially as far as street signs or names of institutions are concerned. A further boost of English might be beneficial for Sofia as a tourist destination. The respondents in this sphere are largely unacquainted with the policies of Sofia Municipality on multilingualism or think there are no such policies and that there is much to be done in this respect.

According to some respondents, language barriers are surmounted more easily when it comes down to written communication, because things can be thought over before putting them on paper. Oral communication as direct expression is more difficult. Some interviewees, who do not speak a given language so well, are of the opinion that oral communication is easier because one should not account so much for grammatical mistakes and can get along relatively easy. All means of handling barriers are used incl. translation by a friend, translation by a professional translator/interpreter, online translation and online dictionaries, depending on the occasion.

Foreigners/tourists have difficulties because of the lack of street signage in English, according to the interviewees. All the street signs in Sofia are in Bulgarian with a few minor exceptions. Thus, one thing that needs improvement is that street signs must be written not only in Bulgarian but also in English. More maps of the city are needed that are not only in English, but also in German, Spanish, French, etc. The lack of English language proficiency among people working in various institutions and administrations, or in the service sphere, policemen and so on is a hindrance for foreigners who need public services or simply directions. English in this case is a must. Foreign students are often accompanied by their Bulgarian colleagues in order to get along with the university administration.

4.1.2. Secondary data

The study of foreign languages starts in Kindergarten and is part of the primary and secondary School curricula. Besides, there are specialized foreign language high schools. Apart from the traditional English, French, German and Spanish language schools, there are schools that teach languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, etc. Private schools also stress the extensive study of foreign languages. There is an American College operating in Sofia with English as the language of instruction. Italian is intensively studied at the Italian lyceum. Foreign language schools are popular in Sofia and Bulgaria. Various cultural representations of foreign countries such as the British Council, Cervantes, or Goethe Institut, organize courses in the respective language. See table in Appendix 3 for some data on language learning at specialized language schools.

In terms of recent studies on multilingualism, we can point out two surveys that convey certain understanding of the state of affairs of multilingual research.

A survey was conducted among 600 first year university students at the University of Sofia in the period 2009-2011. This involved both written questionnaires completed by a broad representation of non-language students (Law, European Studies etc) and in depth interviews with selected students to establish a rather more detailed understanding of their motivations and attitudes. The survey has gathered reliable data in two respects: language choice (including
claimed levels of competence) at the exit level of secondary education and the prevailing attitudes related to this choice of languages. The views of this specific group of students have been tested against a larger sample of students from other Bulgarian universities and other countries within the context of a KA2 project. The Bulgarian educational system provides for the teaching of two foreign languages, so conforming to the European objective of a language repertoire of mother tongue plus two. Officially 6 officially languages may be chosen. However, the great majority of first year students report language repertoires with English included. Data related to the reported three, four and five language repertoires is also analyzed to identify some trends in language attitudes towards forming a plurilingual repertoire and the interaction of languages in the course of their learning, the acquired level in the languages taught at school and outside school according to the CEFR levels based on students’ self-assessment. One unanticipated outcome of the research was an insight into the motivations of students for language learning which varied from the brutally instrumental to a more personal integrational approach. There was also variation between languages in this respect.

Action research studies on plurilingual learners’ repertoires were conducted by MA students under the framework of the Master Programme “Linguistics and Didactics”, New Bulgarian University. These MA students have mostly graduated in languages/philosophy studies and work as language teachers at schools (primary, secondary, vocational), at universities, language schools, etc. The action research assignment is applied as a method of improving of language teachers’ competences. It includes the following steps: identification of a problematic area that needs reflection and improvement, study of the issue, planning a small scale action research, collection of data and analysis. The main topic of the action research assignments for the past three academic years has been ‘learners’ plurilingual repertoires’ using self-assessment vs. assessment methods. A major step of the action research has been outlining of the learners’ individual plurilingual repertoires and reflection on the interaction of languages. The result of the practice is a series of small scale studies of language competences and in particular of plurilingual repertoires of various types and categories of learners.

4.2. Multilingualism and plurilingualism in the public sphere

4.2.1. Primary data

Eight respondents come from the public sphere as follows: Chief expert in public administration at the Ministry of Education; Intern at the Ministry of Culture; web editor at a TV channel; expert at Sofia Municipality; administrative worker at public agency; PR, National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria; Assistant at EU Information Centre; Investigator/policeman at the Ministry of Interior.

The respondents from this sphere consider the multilingual city as a city where large segments of its residents speak different languages, a big city with more than two languages. One respondent claims that a city is multilingual if 1/3 of its population speaks a different language, so from this perspective Sofia is not multilingual. Again, however, the respondents are split on the issue of whether or not Sofia is multilingual. A respondent says that Sofia is making first steps towards multilingualism. According to another respondent multilingualism in Sofia comes down to the use of Bulgarian, English, Russian and Turkish. Sofia is a monolingual city with many plurilingual inhabitants, says an interviewee. Cities like London and New York can be considered multilingual.

The survey respondents are also divided on whether multilingualism is a sensitive topic in Sofia. Most of them think it is not. However, in certain situations ethnic tension might arise, especially at the workplace where interpersonal conflicts may be caused due to the lack of proficiency in the major language (or other languages that are essential for various types of work). Bulgaria is not a bi- or multilingual country (meaning two or more mother languages, or two or more languages having equal official status), and command of Bulgarian is essential at the workplace. One of the respondents considers the topic sensitive due to its very existence, but it has not been reflected as sensitive in the public space.

Bulgarian is the most visible language as mother tongue of the huge majority of the city’s residents. English comes next, especially in the media and advertisement, but this makes bad impression on some people because this shows disrespect for the native language. Large part of the foreign language literature is in English, and often one must keep his/her correspondence in English. To some extent Turkish is visible, not so much in Sofia, though, with the exception of the newscasts in Turkish, and around the mosque during Friday prayers. English language proficiency in public institutions has not attained the necessary level to be used as a working language by a large number of administrators and public servants. Computer/Internet languages are visible.

More or less opinions on boosting the use or visibility of a language overlap. These are mainly literary Bulgarian that is undermined in its correct usage in everyday speech, and English as the most common world language.

Most respondents are not aware of particular municipal policies as regards multilingualism. Street signage in English in addition to Bulgarian is one area that must be improved. The same holds true for short English language texts on historical sites in the city. Public institutions should maintain bilingual websites (Bulgarian and English), and where necessary – in other languages. In court, as a rule, interpretation is provided for people who do not speak Bulgarian. The municipal Tourist Information Centre in downtown Sofia provides multilingual information for tourists on different tourist destinations in the city. Its personnel are proficient in foreign languages and can adequately provide information on services, routes and directions. More such centres are needed around the city though.

Most respondents overcome language barriers more easily when it comes down to written communication. Various technologies like dictionaries, phrase-books, Google translator and online dictionaries are also used.

Foreign tourists and foreign investors most commonly experience difficulties when asking for directions and not being able to understand because not all Bulgarians speak foreign languages. Foreign students (who study in Bulgarian as the language of instruction) are often not able to fill in their documents in Bulgarian, which means that something is wrong with their Bulgarian language proficiency (which is needed to complete their studies). This reflects the quality of teaching, but also the quality of learning.

The correct usage of literary Bulgarian should be fostered in schools, institutions and the media, along with the preferable use of Bulgarian instead of loan words from other languages, mainly English. Two respondents say that Roma language needs a boost, but that Roma people must also learn proper Bulgarian in order to attain higher level of integration. One says Turkish also needs a boost.

### 4.2.2. Secondary data

Article 49 of the Radio and Television Law, enacted in 1998, provides for the production of national and regional programs, overseas broadcasts, including for Bulgarians living abroad, broadcasts for Bulgarian nationals whose mother tongue is different from Bulgarian, including in their own language, programs in minority languages. There is Turkish language news broadcast on the Bulgarian National Television. In 2004, the Union of the Deaf in Bulgaria has created a National Centre on Sign Language. The Bulgarian National TV in its 16.00 hrs newscast offers daily translation into sign language.

Newspapers in foreign languages are being sold in Sofia. Some Bulgarian newspapers have supplements in foreign languages, mostly English. The public Bulgarian National Radio, stationed in Sofia, is an example worth mentioning with its broadcasts from Bulgaria for listeners abroad. It broadcasts 60 hours daily to Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America on short and medium wave in Bulgarian, English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Serbian, Greek, Albanian, Arab and Turkish – 11 languages altogether. The BNR also has a webpage in these 11 languages where information from broadcasts is being uploaded. The Turkish language programs also target the population of Turkish ethnic origin in Bulgaria. The daily information broadcast of the Bulgarian National Radio on the level of the Danube River has been for years in three languages - Bulgarian, French and Russian.

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The website of Sofia Municipality is bilingual – Bulgarian and English.

Many foreign films on different Bulgarian TV channels are subtitled, with the exception of soap operas which are generally dubbed.

Interpreters are provided at trials in courts and preliminary investigations.

Administrative municipal forms a printed in Bulgarian only, which makes it difficult for foreign users of municipal services. Since Bulgarian is the official language in the republic, all municipal services, documents and forms are in the Bulgarian language. No municipal services in foreign languages are provided.

In regard to migration Bulgaria has been mostly a transit point in the past, but it now has become a final destination for new immigrants, the major centre of attraction being Sofia. Immigrants are accommodated in certain places and villages around Sofia where they are provided with food and legal counsel until their legal or illegal status is examined (each case is handled separately). Sofia Municipality organizes courses in Bulgarian and citizenship training to explain basic legislation for new immigrants, and, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, organizes labour/vocational training. The main lesson of Sofia is that coexistence is possible, based on respect, human rights and dignity. Immigrant languages, however, are something of a novelty in Sofia.

Many international festivals are held in Sofia. The policy on public signage and advertising is liberal and non-restrictive.

4.3. Multilingualism and plurilingualism in economic life

4.3.1 Primary data

Three interviewees belong to this sphere: expert in a bank; advertising agency; private business - advertisement and design.

In this sphere again big metropolitan cities are considered to be multilingual. Multilingualism is a reflection of the cultural diversity in the city, so from this perspective one of the respondents deems Sofia to be a multilingual city. Another respondent however disagrees with that and says Sofia is not multilingual. A city in Switzerland, where there are three official languages, can be seen as a multilingual one. So, from this perspective Sofia is not. One respondent sees multilingualism as the difference among the various dialects spoken in Sofia. On this basis the interviewee thinks that there is a tension between the speakers of different dialects, pitting people from Sofia against people from the country.

Two respondents in this group do not see multilingualism as a sensitive topic in Sofia. However, some linguistic communities need to be taught Bulgarian in order to get out of their closed communities and foster integration.

Bulgarian, being the language of the majority of Sofia inhabitants, is the most visible language. English is one of the most visible foreign languages in Sofia, especially in economic life where much of the interaction with foreign business representatives is in this language. One of the interviewees is annoyed because quite often some people pretentiously insert English words in their Bulgarian speech. The use of other languages is considerably less visible.

Language barriers are overcome mainly by interpretation and the use of language technologies such as dictionaries and online translations. Many foreigners who try to make their way around Sofia are often misled by people who do not speak languages but are trying to give directions. The services of various firms are also used for translation and interpretation.

People from traditional ethnic communities in Sofia do not experience difficulties of communication since almost everyone speaks Bulgarian, but the respondents often witness foreigners who encounter problems with their communication.
Perfection of the Bulgarian literary language is needed because many people make mistakes in terms of grammar and punctuation, even vocabulary. English as a lingua franca also needs a boost. With this in mind, people should be encouraged to learn at least English if a positive change is to be brought about in the city.

The respondents are not familiar in detail with municipal policies in the area of multilingualism. Nevertheless, a good example of language policy is the bilingual signage of some major streets and boulevards. During cultural events information is provided in at least two languages – Bulgarian and English.

The establishment of more multilingual information centres across the city will be a good multilingual practice. The study of languages in school should be stimulated, as well as student mobility. The introduction of new language learning technologies will be quite useful for students and should be further promoted.

4.3.2. Secondary data

There are signs in English in banks and currency exchange bureaus, and service in English can be provided to foreigners. Many of the bank officers speak English and provide services to foreigners in this language.

A study on Bulgaria under the Language Rich Europe project of the British Council shows that there is still more to be done with respect to multilingualism in business. In the 24 companies surveyed, almost half have some form of language strategy. “Business English is used by two-thirds of the companies in addition to Bulgarian for promotional purposes and on the web. Other languages are rarely used and training in languages is not provided other than occasionally in business English. A few companies have partnerships with the education sector to support language training, and a very small number make use of international networks to support language skills of employees.”

4.4. Multilingualism and plurilingualism in the private sphere

4.4.1. Primary data

Nine people work in the private sphere: Office manager, NGO; project administrator; Program Director, NGO; President of NGO Forum on Arabic Culture; NGO president; coordinator at NGO; Project manager at NGO; Atlantic Club, HR at NGO.

A multilingual city is one that has diverse population and encourages the use of different languages and facilitates public services in various languages, a cosmopolitan city – metropolis like New York, but also a city in which people can find information in different languages. From such a perspective Sofia is not a multilingual city.

Multilingualism is not viewed by the majority of respondents in this sphere as a sensitive issue and as one that causes ethnic tension. Ethnic tension is not caused by linguistic issues but by other things, the reasons being mostly social, economic, or political. One respondent is of the opinion that the issue is not sensitive with one exception – Turkish language which often is a cause for conflict, a fact that needs more serious attention.

Visible languages are Bulgarian and English, the latter because it has become the recognized international, universal language for many people around the globe. Some say that one can also hear Roma, Serbian, Russian. In terms of languages that need a boost, most interviewees say these are literary Bulgarian or English. With the domination of English, according to one respondent, all other languages seem neglected. Another respondent, however, hails the status of English as lingua franca because this will facilitate communication between different peoples.

Visible languages are to be found in the media or social media/networks. A respondent sees no point in trying to make

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a language visible, especially one that is not widely used. Language diversity is seen as a fact, not a phenomenon, and therefore there is no need for deliberate boosting. Others think that more information on the value of multilingualism should be provided. A respondent says that services should be provided in the national language only. One respondent in this group says that more attention should be paid to boosting sign language for deaf people and the Braille writing system for blind people.

Most interviewees from this sphere are also largely unaware of policies on multilingualism at the municipal level. In terms of language policy in Sofia, it could be said that some street signs are already bilingual. The bilingual street signage however should be further improved and expanded in range. Some say that street names should be translated in English in order to stop the use of ridiculous transliterations like “ulica” or “car” instead of “street” or “king”.

The public administration should recruit also people who speak languages other than English, because command of English is not always enough. People working in the administration should also undergo linguistic training. Promoting multilingualism is one thing that needs to be done in Sofia. Drivers in the public transport – buses, trams, trolleys, metro, etc – as well as taxi drivers generally do not speak languages, which is a major communication handicap. Policemen in the streets, too, do not have reasonably good command of languages.

In handling language barriers, a whole range of means is used: translation and interpretation, dictionaries and online dictionaries, internet translations, etc. Written communication is easier for most interviewees as compared to oral communication, but to some oral communication is easier.

Tourists most commonly find themselves in difficult situations due to the lack of mutual understanding with people whom they interact with in the city. Foreign students (from Greece and Turkey) also experience linguistic problems.

Tourist information should be provided in several other languages but English. Information centers must hire personnel speaking different languages in order to be able assist a larger number of tourists.

In terms of languages used in their private lives, all interviewees who took part in the survey claim that they speak Bulgarian along with other languages such as English (20), French (4), Spanish (2), German (1), Russian (1), Serbian (1), Turkish (1), Balkan languages (1) and Arabic (1).
Jarošlav Seifert (1901 – 1986)
Nositel Nebelevy ceny za literaturu (1984)

C šáplka v růžataj s
křeča iz ulicité na Prah
i se děkovan do nejvnite kamčyn
Te i tółkova grapavia,
no sa obšípá na větváých na pojet.

Jeřslav Cysters (1901 – 1986)
Nositel na Nobelova награда за литература (1984)
4.5. Multilingualism and plurilingualism in urban spaces

4.5.1. Primary data

One respondent – a salesperson/consultant in a Shopping Mall – is from this sphere.

The interviewee thinks that a multilingual city is one in which different languages are spoken either because they have local population who have different tongues, or because of the presence of foreigners, tourists, etc. Multilingual cities generally are big cities. Multilingualism in Sofia is not a sensitive topic and the topic is not tackled by the media as well. Another aspect of this issue, however, is that young people must learn languages if they are to be competitive on the job market. Multilingualism does not cause ethnic tension in Sofia.

The most visible language in Sofia is the one that is most widely used and this is Bulgarian. The most visible foreign language is English as a common means of communication with foreigners, including in the urban space of the shopping mall. Bulgarian is most visible in the streets, at work, in the media (with the exception of the news in Turkish on National TV).

No language needs a boost in use or visibility in Sofia. The people who must know languages in order to find jobs need a boost. There should be language training for unemployed people. People must be encouraged to learn a new language or perfect one that they already speak. The respondent is not familiar with city policies and confesses that this is his first time that such an issue has been brought to his attention.

When the respondent handles language barriers when encountering language he does not understand, he uses mainly body language - gestures, mimics, etc. The interviewee professes that he is against the Turkish language news on TV (which is there for political reasons), but at the same time expresses the contradictory opinion that this does not disturb anyone. According to him, Bulgarian must be spoken in Bulgaria.

4.5.2. Secondary data

The policy regarding signs is quite liberal and unrestrictive; therefore, in Sofia and Bulgaria too many signs of restaurants, hotels, and so on, written mostly in English along or instead of Bulgarian, can be seen. However there is a problem with the transliteration of these signs. Although the central government has adopted specific rules for transliteration in the public space several years ago, Sofia municipality signs do not often follow these rules, which is a problem. An example of this is a street sign saying “Car Simeon” for “King Simeon” instead of Tsar or Czar Simeon.

There is policy of using subtitles instead of dubbing foreign films in Bulgarian. Bulgarian films that are played in cinemas, however, are not subtitled in a foreign language, which makes it impossible for a foreigner in Bulgaria to get exposed to the products of Bulgarian cinematography.

There are no generally public transportation signs written in other languages but Bulgarian (a good exception is the subway where signs are bilingual – Bulgarian and English) which poses difficulties for foreigners who do not speak Bulgarian. Measures in that regard are to be recommended as part of an overall municipal policy on multilingualism.
5. Analysis of key themes/discussion

One thing that comes to the surface from the research is that most of the respondents, who are young people, are bilingual or plurilingual. This is partly due to the prevailing understanding that being able to speak languages is important if one is to pursue a career, partly – to the education system which encourages the study of languages.

What is remarkable is that out of 3 respondents who work in state or municipal administrations, 2 claim to be monolingual. This is a serious deficit for people who work in the administration, and it occurs especially among the older generations of public servants and administrators and even more so at the local level. With the change of generations, however, this is likely to change in a positive direction.

Another major inference that can be made is that some people claim they are monolingual, but they speak two or more languages at work. If we are to account for this discrepancy, one possible reason is that they understand plurilingualism wrongly (or differently from us) – supposedly as the number of languages spoken as mother tongues by one person.

Some of the respondents expressed their dislike of having Turkish language news on the Bulgarian National Television.

The respondents are generally not aware of municipal policies on multilingualism.

Improvement of bilingual signage is very important and will be a change in positive direction in the city. This will make Sofia friendlier for foreigners and will open up further opportunities for tourism and economic activity, especially in the light of the city’s candidature for European Capital of Culture 2019.
Since the survey questions are not sphere-specific, more or less the responses of people from different spheres and areas of expertise overlap.

Roma are the largest minority in Sofia, yet the respondents do not acknowledge their language as visible or as needing a boost. This language is largely neglected from that point of view.

One approach of looking at multilingualism is from the socio-economic perspective of the city as a natural environment enhancing the effective functionality of languages and the functional aspect of multilingualism.

Research with regard to multilingual cities is not always measurable and is therefore partly subjective but on the other hand the sense of city, the way people feel about it is definitely critical for its multilingual image. Nevertheless, research regarding multilingualism is accepted with significant interest since the topic is growing in popularity and in addition it is a deliverable that stirs media interest as well. Sofia specific research also provokes interest and curiosity.

The topic of language sensitivity, and the perceived scope of multilingualism, is interpreted mainly as “foreign languages”, excluding minority languages. An important result is the existence of neglected languages such as languages of people with disabilities.

In business/economic terms, speaking languages is viewed as an asset, but this is not sufficient for start-ups; a combination is needed of innovative product, understanding of entrepreneurship and willingness to understand cultures. In its core this is a private endeavour but could be effectively facilitated by public support.

One of the major issues that came up from the research was how residents feel about multilingualism in the city. It seems they like the idea of a multilingual city but cannot relate it to Sofia based on comparisons with cosmopolitan cities like New York or London. To most language diversity encompasses mostly foreign languages and is therefore considered an asset. Very few people include minority and migrant languages when talking about multilingualism, and even fewer think to include the languages of people with disabilities. That aspect of multilingualism is highly sensitive.

Another sensitive issue is the effect of multilingualism on the Bulgarian language since there are concerns that multilingualism reduces native language competency and amends the language system and structure.
6. Conclusion

One of the main conclusions is that at the local level there are strong actors in the field of multilingualism but weak underdeveloped policies. The local authorities have the autonomy to introduce language policies in certain fields like public services offered in more than one language; street and other signage; events and activities predominantly in the cultural sphere that provide opportunities for different language use and exposure. The prerogatives of local authorities in the educational sphere are limited since this is a national domain but still there are opportunities which could be used, even on the basis of pilot projects, such as extra curriculum school activities – competitions, fairs, festivals, exhibitions – to raise awareness of language diversity. The establishment of a “multilingual fund” can be of use to enable different players to diversify languages used (for publications, event management, etc.)

The issues of multilingualism are to be addressed not only to the local authorities but also to the multilingual players themselves: a call for better coordination and unification of their efforts leading to a rich cultural calendar of relevant events/products, a body of research, methods for language audits of public and private bodies (academic institutions, libraries, etc.) applied and improvements implemented.

With regard to the national level policies recommendations can focus on the educational system, particularly its elements concerning the study and promotion of minority and migrant languages. In terms of business and economic development better policies in support of SME in general can be suggested so that entrepreneurs using languages strategically have the chance to start up. A major conclusion is that Bulgaria needs serious efforts to improve its internal climate of tolerance and understanding of minorities (particularly Roma but also Turks) and certain migrant groups.

Among the issues that need to be addressed regarding multilingualism policy development at the local level can be distinguished: 1) what processes to employ; what instruments to use and what indicators to measure; 2) “emancipation” of city (municipal) policies from national ones; 3) the role of Bulgarian language in a language rich city: building on own experiences vs. newly developed good European practices; 4) migrant contributions to host language and literature; 5) bilingual/monolingual literary works of art, their authors, audience and effects; 6) translanguaging: a temporary or perpetual phenomenon; global or different from nation to nation.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, among the area of interest one can point out: 1) language use and multilingualism in the virtual reality, internet, social networks and online communications; 2) recurrent patterns of language-to-language influences over a longer historical period and comparison with the modern-day situation; and 3) autocensoring diversity, including multilingualism.

City openness in the case of Sofia, including its multilingual aspect, is a process going over a period of 20 years or so, in some cases - longer. There are examples of historic periods of multi-language interactions and exchange in the city setting. There are deliberate efforts and spontaneous developments in Sofia during the last decade that brought it closer to the generally accepted image of a multilingual city: broaden interest to “small” languages, to Asian cultures and languages; business and infrastructure developments that offer independency, choice, access (large shopping malls, metro, places of entertainment), etc.
References


Jean-Claude Beacco, From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education (Strasbourg: Council of Europe - Language Policy Division, 2007)


Appendices

Appendix 1: Revised/adapted questionnaire
Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe (LUCIDE)

I. Respondent’s profile/background questions: (asked at the beginning of the interview):

1) What is your role/position, and what type of work do you do? What kind of agency/institution/organization do you work for?
2) How would you identify your ethnic group/origin? (optional, the respondent may not reply)
3) Do you consider yourself to be monolingual/bilingual/plurilingual?
4) Which languages do you speak or interact with in
   (a) your personal or       (b) professional/work life?
5) Would you say that you are a person who is interested in learning languages?
6) If you have learned other languages, what has been the most significant language learning experience for you?

II. Core questions:

1) What, in your opinion, is a multilingual city? What is multilingualism in Sofia and what are its aspects?
2) Do you think that the issue of multilingualism is a sensitive matter in the city of Sofia?
   (For example, does it cause ethnic tensions; is the issue of multilingualism on the agenda of the institutions; other … Note to interviewers)
3) In the study of multilingualism it is noticeable that some languages are more visible than others in the city. In your area of work, are there any particularly important or visible languages? Any neglected or less visible languages? Where are the languages visible? (For example, at the workplace, in the street, in institutions, in the media … Note to interviewers)
4) Is there any one language which needs a boost in use or in visibility in Sofia?
5) Are you acquainted with the city policies and do you agree with the way city authorities approach the issue of multilingualism? Can you provide an example of a recent approach, with which you agree or disagree?
   (For example, in public documents, in the sphere of public services, in the sphere of public policies; with respect to the integration of migrant communities; other … Note to interviewers)
6) How do you handle language barriers when you encounter a language you don’t understand? What means do you use – translation/interpretation or language technology (dictionaries, online translation)? Which language barriers do you surmount more easily, the ones used in written or in oral communication, and by what means?
7) Have you recently witnessed difficulties experienced by an individual or group in Sofia because of a lack of proficiency in Bulgarian?
   (For example, foreign students; immigrants and immigrant groups/communities, representatives of ethnic communities; tourists; other … Note to interviewers)
8) If you could change one thing [about languages] in Sofia, what would it be?
9) Something that we didn’t ask and that you wish to add?
Appendix 2: quotes

Most significant language learning experience

“This is very enriching and has made me a person having a wide horizon to the world”.

“In the process of learning I have met lots of people”.

“The feeling of entering new worlds, the freedom to express yourself”.

What is a multilingual city

“When I hear of a multilingual city, a city in Switzerland comes to my mind, where there are three official languages”.

“To me, it is a city in which several languages are spoken by significant groups”.

“I might be wrong, but multilingual city sounds to me like a cosmopolitan city and Sofia doesn’t seem to me like one”.

Is multilingualism a sensitive topic in Sofia?

“I wouldn’t say so with only one exception – the Turkish language news on national TV, which is often a topic of contention”.

“On an overall basis I would like to say that generally I am against the Turkish language news. In my opinion Bulgarian must be spoken in Bulgaria.”

Which languages are visible? Is there any one language which needs a boost in use or in visibility in Sofia?

“I don’t think so. Rather, the Bulgarian language needs visibility through its proper use”.

“I don’t know why we should boost a language to make it visible”.

“Municipal policies are needed that stimulate the active use of other languages, and in particular, the specific languages of people with disabilities.”

City language policies

“In addition to the Information Centre, last year they started putting signs at the public transportation stops. I support them, of course”.

“My response is negative; I don’t think there is any policy on multilingualism”.

“If we want to be an adequate tourist destination, all street signs must have adequate translations in English. “Tsar Simeon” street should not be transliterated as “Car Simmeon” below.”
Appendix 3: Table – foreign languages learning

**Number of high school graduates – Foreign Language profile: according to district and intensive learning of foreign language in 2012.**

General data on 1,000 schools from expected 1,030 schools; the data on Sofia is in bold letters below.

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<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
