

# Language policy for linguistic minorities on the basis of cost-benefit arguments

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Formal language rights, such as the status as official, working, national, or regional language, are normally conferred on a language in a well-defined territory, be it a county, a province or an entire country. For a minority language, the status as a rule varies from one jurisdiction to another, depending on the number of speakers in the various jurisdictions of the state.

We provide a normative background for this type of language policy with an approach based on the cost structure of the different *planning measures*. We analyze language policy on a cost-benefit basis, first defining and discussing the benefit or “demand” side assuming that benefits are basically proportional to the number of beneficiaries of the planning measure in the jurisdiction considered. We then argue that the *costs of a planning measure* can be described as a function of two variables “number of beneficiaries” and “size of area of application”. This lets us analyze planning measures in a two-dimensional model fully characterized by the number of beneficiaries and their geographical distribution in the jurisdiction under consideration.

The *cost structure* as well as the *magnitude of the costs* of given planning measures imply different optimal planning rules for different measures. However, a rule has to be simple to administer. That is, a feasible rule will not perfectly balance costs and benefits. An *optimal planning rule* will hence be approximate and give rise to planning errors. Also, for practical purposes, only a small set of *policy categories* is tractable. This leads to a multistage optimization problem. For each possible category – collection of planning measures – the optimal planning rule leads to certain planning errors of the category. The design of an *optimal policy* should then consist of the choice of a collection of planning categories such that planning errors and implementation costs are reduced to a minimum. The policy maker needs to determine both the allocation of the planning measures to categories as well as the total number of categories in the policy. The allocation of measures to categories should minimize the costs of planning errors for a given number of categories, and the number of categories should be such that the sum of the costs of the planning errors and the costs of administering the policy should be minimal. The dependence of the various steps of the optimization on the structure and size of costs is analyzed.

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