

Contextual Considerations: Setting the Scene for Cornish – Community Involvement in recent Welsh and Irish Language Policies

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The research addresses the role of civil society through community organizations in securing the future of minority languages in the context of public policy, and adopts a comparative case study design to look at two minority language communities in Ireland and Wales, where it is government policy to support the Irish and Welsh languages using community organisations. This 'bottom-up' approach is expected to direct and inform policy and, perhaps more critically, resources and expenditure.

The strength of Welsh and Irish as community languages in these heartland communities is coming under serious pressure, with declines evidenced in these areas in recent census returns. Language policy experts and community activists have pointed repeatedly to the importance of improving socio-economic infrastructure for these communities, in addition to improvements to status needed for the two languages. Recent government strategies in policy to stabilize the languages in these heartland areas include the incorporation of 'capacity-building' strategies, in the hope that by increasing the organisational and institutional capacities of these communities (Taylor, 2011) – they can 'empower' these heartland communities. It is unclear exactly what is meant or understood by empowerment in these new policy documents-there is the possibility that the different stakeholders have different understandings of empowerment also.