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Zur Evaluierung von Sprachrevitalisierung. Der Fall *Zorja*

Das *Zorja*-Projekt ist das erste immersive Sprachlernprogramm für Erwachsene im Kontext des Niedersorbischen. Die Neuartigkeit des Ansatzes wirft eine Reihe von inhaltlichen und methodischen Fragen für seine Bewertung auf. Im Zusammenhang mit der Sprachpolitik gegenüber Minderheitensprachen in Deutschland sind systematische Evaluationen bisher kaum etabliert. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist es das Ziel dieses Artikels, einen anschaulichen Evaluationsansatz für die Sprachrevitalisierung zu entwickeln und grundlegende Konzepte der Evaluationsforschung in die minderheiten- und sprachenpolitische Debatte einzubringen. Es zeigt sich, dass uns nicht nur Referenzdaten fehlen, sondern dass wir für einige Kriterien manchmal sogar keine geeigneten Maßnahmen zur Beobachtung von Veränderungen haben. So stellt die Evaluierung des *Zorja*-Projekts selbst eine Lernreise über eine integrative Lernumgebung und die Evaluierung von Lernprogrammen dar.

Schlüsselwörter: Evaluation, Niedersorbisch, Sprachkompetenz, soziale Integration, Innovation, Revitalisierung

Evaluating Language Revitalization. The Case of *Zorja*

The *Zorja* project is the first immersive language-learning programme for adults in the Lower Sorbian context. The novelty of the approach raises several questions regarding the evaluation of its content and methodology. Systematic evaluations have not been comprehensively established for assessing language policy for minority languages in Germany. Against this background, the aim of this article is to develop a clear evaluative approach to language revitalisation, and to introduce basic concepts for evaluative research into the minority/language policy debate. It becomes apparent that we not only lack reference data, but for some criteria we sometimes even lack suitable measures to observe change. As a result, even the evaluation process of the *Zorja* project itself represents a learning journey about an integrative learning environment and the evaluation of learning programmes.

Keywords: Evaluation, Lower Sorbian, language proficiency, social integration, innovation, revitalisation

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Evaluating Language Revitalisation
The Case of *Zorja*[*]

1. Introduction

After years of planning and a year of preparation, in September 2023, the *Zorja* project – a language nest for Lower Sorbian – started to train its first group of learners. The Sorbian community is accompanying the launch and the progress made by the *Zorja* participants with great interest as well as some scepticism and hope. It is the novelty of the concept – at least in the Sorbian context – as well as the great enthusiasm of the organisers that have raised expectations among supporters and speakers of Lower Sorbian (LS) that *Zorja* will become a key measure for revitalisation and turn around the long-lasting and continuing trend of declining speaker numbers.

But what can we realistically expect from *Zorja* without overburdening those involved? What goals are being strived for, and can they be achieved? Do the participants have sufficient personnel and capacities to implement their project? To what extent and how can the results be transferred to other projects? Does the chosen concept require improvement? How can the framework for implementation be improved? Are there criteria that can be used to evaluate the effects of the programme and the efficiency with which the resources employed are used, independently of the participants themselves?

Answering such questions is usually the subject of a project evaluation. Evaluation refers to the systematic application of social research methods to analyse the performance and implementation of an intervention, a measure, or a project. The reasons for evaluations are to improve the measure, to justify it to funders and target groups, and to generate knowledge. Evaluation represents a systematic and indispensable building block in the process of 'learning'.

In the context of language policy for minority languages in Germany, systematic evaluations have not been comprehensively established to date. Internationally, there is a growing body of literature that addresses the need for evaluation. In an often-cited publication, Leanne Hinton addresses evaluation as one key element in the language revitalisation process, which, with reference to Lucille Watahomigie, she calls PIE (Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation; HINTON 2001: 52). It is important that her focus is on community-driven revitalisation and thus highlights that evaluation can also be community-based. However, it may include what she calls 'informal' processes, "where people meet to discuss good and bad points of the program, or it may involve more formal processes such as the administering of tests to students" (ibid.: 57). In Europe, evaluation has recently been approached from an economic public policy perspective. This approach is based on a growing body of policy agreements and regulations aimed at protecting minority languages. However, despite these efforts, small languages continue to disappear at an alarming rate (GRIN 2003; GRIN/MARÁCZ/POKORN 2023, GRIN/VAILLANCOURT

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1998, 1999). Political authorities are found to be "surprisingly ill-equipped" when they are "confronted with the need to develop policy measures in the field of language (that is, to formulate a language policy) (…)" (GRIN 2003: 7). According to GRIN (2003), this is also due to a research gap. The existing strands of scholarship on language matters "constitute a necessary, but still not a sufficient basis for moving to action (...)" since "they tend to leave an analytical gap between" the two poles of "on the one hand, the legal and political obligations of states towards regional or minority languages and, on the other hand, a set of procedures for the implementation of measures giving substance to this obligation" ibid.: 6). Evaluation in this view is a building block in a structured approach that bridges the different strands of language research and the political practice that requires "tools for the selection, design, implementation and evaluation of policy measures" (ibid.).

In Germany, we are observing a similar, growing interest from decision-makers to implement measures in a goal-oriented manner, to define targets, and to monitor their implementation. In the context of the Sorbs/Wends, this development is being fuelled on the one hand by the grants awarded on the basis of the Coal Regions Investment Act to promote the Sorbian language and culture during structural change and, on the other hand, increasingly by school policy demands to develop an education monitoring system. Although it receives public funding, the Sorbian community is largely self-regulated, so the measures to be evaluated are largely community-driven. In this context, evaluation must address the requirements of the language community and the public authorities, which should be reflected in the evaluation design.

This raises numerous methodological as well as content-related questions, not least because the objectives of political authorities and language revitalisation are not always in harmony. Against this background, the aim of this article is to develop an illustrative evaluation approach for language revitalisation using the example of *Zorja* and to introduce basic concepts for evaluation research in the minority/language policy debate.

For these reasons, this article begins with a brief introduction to the topic of evaluation in which we describe the types and content of evaluations and explain the basic procedure. In the second section, a needs or problem analysis is then carried out. In this section, we also attempt to quantify targets and their achievement. From a revitalisation perspective, it is evident that a dual objective of language acquisition and community integration must be pursued. In the third section, we briefly introduce the *Zorja* project and attempt to decipher the project theory with the help of a l o g i c m o d e l. On this basis, the methodological concept is developed in the fourth section. The text ends with a concluding discussion.

2. What is Programme/Project Evaluation?

"Program evaluation is the systematic assessment of programs designed to improve social conditions and our individual and collective well-being. (…) To answer key questions about the performance of such programs, evaluators apply social science research methods to provide answers to stakeholders" (ROSSI/LIPSEY/HENRY 2019: 1). Evaluations arose from the need to analyse the impact of political measures and projects. Based on a rational understanding of politics, they therefore aim to assess whether measures and projects achieve the desired result. An impact analysis is often extended to include an economic analysis, in which the costs of a programme/project are considered. If the goals can be expressed in monetary terms (e. g. income), economic cost-benefit analyses (CBA)

are used; otherwise, cost-effectiveness analyses (CEA) are employed. The ratio of impact to costs is referred to as efficiency. Efficiency can itself be used as a benchmark to compare different measures.[1] For many social objectives, monetisation, i. e. the conversion of utility values (e. g. the knowledge level of students of a language) into monetary values, is difficult, which is why CBAs and CEAs are mostly used in parallel. However, as CBAs offer numerous advantages due to their calculability, the 'Social Return on Investment' (SROI) approach was developed to monetise social target values as far as possible (SCHOBER/THEN 2015).

Impact analyses are traditionally carried out at the end of a project ('ex-post') and are summative in nature, i. e. they are aimed at a final assessment. Considering the economic costs as well, they often provide reasons for whether a measure or project should be continued, modified, or even terminated. For this reason, they tend to be feared in practice by those involved in implementing programmes and projects, as such evaluations can potentially lead to a negative assessment of the work carried out and may also threaten their own professional position. Therefore, the evaluation process itself may be associated with negative side effects if those involved start to inflate their results, for example, by focusing their actions one-sidedly on targets that are the focus of the impact analysis and neglecting other important areas, or even manipulating data and actively opposing evaluations. Conversely, there may also be political pressure on the evaluators from those commissioning the evaluation to change the evaluation results in one direction or another. Despite their scientific and methodological claims, evaluations are therefore always political, as the social interest groups concerned may try to influence the results directly, or at least influence the interpretation of the results.

Since its beginnings, the understanding of evaluation in evaluation research has evolved regarding the aim, the object, and the timing of an evaluation. Regarding the aim, in many contexts, a clear shift from (purely) 'summative' to 'formative' evaluation can be recognised. Formative evaluation aims to improve the results of a programme or project while it is still ongoing (ROSSI/LIPSEY/HENRY 2019: 11). This also broadens the understanding of evaluation in terms of content, as not only the effects, but also implementation, the existing capacities and conditions, and the project process become the subject of the evaluation. Evaluation thus moves further forward in time and takes place either at one or more fixed points during the course of the programme/project (e. g. as a midterm review) or as a continuous ongoing evaluation, often also referred to as 'monitoring'.

Going one step further, the inclusion of evaluations in political planning changes the subject, timing, and objectives of the evaluation. The aim of such 'ex-ante' evaluations (in advance) is to avoid design errors in programmes and projects before they start. This can be achieved by reviewing the explicit and implicit assumptions and the project design (the so-called 'programme/project theory' or 'logic' of a project), including existing capacities as well as an analysis of the situation and needs ('needs assessment'). The latter serves not only to describe problems and identify target groups and interdependencies, but also to quantitatively assess needs.

Evaluations can also be carried out independently with the aim of gaining knowledge. Such generally scientific and often independent evaluations can be based on new theoretical developments, e. g. with the aim of testing new hypotheses, or can be aimed at trialling new ideas and innovations, e. g. in the context of pilot projects. Such

[1] For a detailed discussion of the notions of effectiveness, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in the context of language policy evaluation see GRIN (2003: 99–100).

evaluations are often designed to test the programme/project theory, i. e. to explore causal relationships and quantitatively assess the effects of (new) measures. From today's perspective, there is a comprehensive understanding of evaluation that can encompass five domains: "The evaluation of a program involves answering questions about the program that generally fall into one or more of five domains: (a) the need for the program, (b) its theory and design, (c) its implementation and service delivery, (d) its outcome and impact, and (e) its costs" (ROSSI/LIPSEY/HENRY 2019: 29).

The key purpose of evaluations is to assess. To accomplish this task, comparisons and reference values are required which evaluators can refer to for their assessment. The ideal form of impact analysis is therefore the randomised experiment. In such an experiment, two groups are randomly selected (randomisation), one of which is exposed to a measure (intervention group), while the other is considered the control group. Data is collected and compared before and after exposure for both groups. Randomisation ensures that participants' personal characteristics that could influence the results can be controlled. However, in social research and in many policy areas, experimental designs are often not possible. In programmes with voluntary participation, for example, there is a risk of s e l f - s e l e c t i o n b i a s, which can distort the results of a programme. In the case of compulsory programmes, on the other hand, by definition, there are no control groups. Given this situation, evaluation research has developed various forms of quasi-experimental or non-experimental evaluation designs. Alternatively, it is possible to refer to empirical values from other contexts or to the target values specified by decision-makers.

A common problem with evaluations is that although they generate a lot of knowledge about projects and programmes, this often does not lead to the necessary changes. This may be because those to whom the evaluation is addressed do not have the means or the interest to make certain changes. The evaluation is therefore carried out in a way that ignores the conditions affecting how its results are utilised and, in particular, the information needs and action requirements of the evaluation's primary users. Consequently, the demand for a 'utilisation-focused' evaluation arose, which should be closely aligned with the primary stakeholders' information interests and intended use of the evaluation results. "The core of utilisation-focused evaluation is to focus throughout an evaluation on intended use by intended users" (PATTON/CAMPBELL-PATTON 2022: 10).

In this view, utilisation-focused evaluation is as much an interactive process with key stakeholders as it is a methodologically rigorous approach. It requires close coordination with the primary users, timing evaluations with decision-making cycles, and generally good communication of problems, methods, and results. For the evaluation of the *Zorja* project, the above-mentioned combination of CBA and CEA analysis will be applied, starting with a detailed needs assessment.

3. Needs Assessment

To assess which language needs exist, the current situation of LS is briefly outlined. On that basis, difficulties are described and quantitative targets for speaker numbers modelled.

3.1 Situation Analysis

The number of LS speakers is continuously declining. Language transmission in families has become the exception rather than the rule. Adults' language competence is low, and

LS is scarcely used as a family language. Thus, only a few children are (neo)native speakers,[2] and language acquisition at school has become the main path for language transmission. However, the school system has turned out to be rather ineffective in producing fluent, active speakers (WERNER/SCHULZ 2017: 158), while adult education remains underdeveloped.

With the WITAJ Project, addressing pre-school and primary school children, the Sorbian community has tried to counteract the lack of intra-family (and community-based) language transmission. Although the programme has shown some success, as yet it has failed to reverse the general trend. The programme suffers particularly from the lack of nursery and primary school teachers with sufficient language skills (ibid.: 154–158), which itself is a long-term consequence of the decline in speaker numbers. Some teachers are also not well integrated into the speech community and thus lack language practice. The number of new teachers remains small, so the total number of LS teachers is declining. Additionally, the continuation of the language learning process in further education steps is hindered by an insufficient geographical coverage of the settlement area.

In addition to language acquisition itself, the mere use of the language is another part of the problem because potential speakers are often not well integrated into the speech community.[3] A key issue here is the lack of language spaces (often mentioned in sociolinguistic literature as 'safe spaces' or 'breathing spaces' – BELMAR/GLASS 2019: 9, see also BĚRINKOWA/LASCHEWSKI 2025), where those who have acquired some LS might use it with other, proficient and non-proficient speakers, to practise the language and become fluent in it. Thus, after school, most young people will have no or only little contact with other LS speakers and therefore do not benefit from nor contribute to an active speech community. Consequently, a revitalisation strategy must target both language acquisition and opportunities to speak.

The prestige of LS was very low for many years, but it seems to have improved over the last decade. The number of learners within the school system remains stable over the last 15 years (LASCHEWSKI 2024: 21–23). At the very least, verbal commitments to address Sorbian issues are often expressed in public discourse. We also observe that Sorbian cultural events generally enjoy growing popularity and a positive response. The School for Lower Sorbian Language and Culture recognises a growing interest among adults to learn LS, but we lack the figures to quantify this potential demand for adult education programmes. However, today, this demand is neither met by a sufficient supply of training opportunities nor by flanking strategies for the integration of adult learners into the speech community.

3.2 Scope of the Problem

There are no statistics providing information about the number of LS speakers in Brandenburg. The last empirical estimate based on a handful of village studies in the late 1990s suggested that the total number of speakers in the broadest sense[4] was below 7,000 (JODLBAUER/SPIESS/STEENWIJK 2001). Given the continuous decline due to demographic

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2 As noted by Ó GIOLLAGÁIN (2011: 103), neo-native speakers acquire the language in a familial and communal setting. However, they are the offspring of co-speakers of a minority language who are not native speakers themselves but speak the language within their households.

3 We define the speech community as all people ('traditional' and 'new' speakers) who are able and willing to use LS.

4 For a comprehensive typology of speakers see GRINEVALD/BERT (2011).

change in the region over the past thirty years, we can assume that the current number of speakers is substantially lower. Furthermore, as with many declining small languages, the age structure is unevenly distributed. Elderly speakers are overrepresented, so the numbers are expected to further decline rapidly in the years to come.

There is no clear evidence about the minimum number of speakers that are required to keep a small language alive. Studies show that natural (family) transmission and intergenerational use are better predictors for the future of a language than the number of speakers per se (BARREÑA et al. 2007: 136–138). A key issue is the lack of family transmission of LS and the decrease in the use of the language. While eventually the re-establishment of family transmission should be a goal, it is the most difficult form of transmission to re-establish. In the short run, other types of intergenerational language transmission (through school, community socialisation, adult education, etc.) have been shown to function very well.[5]

Consequently, a minimum political aim is to stabilise the current number of speakers and to encourage adults to learn the language, to actively promote language use in the community, and to educate children as neo-native speakers (MWFK 2022). The survival of a language depends primarily on its transmission to subsequent generations and less on the total number of speakers. However, in the context of LS a larger number of speakers brings certain advantages, such as greater social visibility, more opportunities to use the language, and perhaps even a greater chance of re-establishing LS as a household language. Therefore, one goal should be to increase the number of speakers, while any particular quantitative target remains arbitrary.

Still, there are no statistics available about LS speakers. Thus, we need to derive quantitative targets for adult education in LS from general statistics. One simple way to deal with this issue is to put the number of (active) speakers in relation to the total regional population in the officially recognised Sorbian Settlement Area. Table 1 gives an impression of the quantitative implications of different shares of speakers. The last row provides an estimate of how many new speakers must be trained and integrated each year to maintain a certain population of active LS speakers. For example, if we consider 3 % of the total population a reasonable target, this means that more than 100 proficient speakers need to learn the language each year and become integrated into the speech community. Keeping these figures in mind is important to contextualising how much the *Zorja* project can contribute to language revitalisation.

Estimated Population in the Sorbian Settlement Area in Brandenburg (2020)[6]	Share of LS speakers	Absolute	New (active) proficient speakers needed per year (life expectancy 80 years)
283,000	1%	2,380	36
	3%	8,490	106
	5%	14,150	177
	10%	28,300	354

Table 1: Quantitative targets in relation to the total population (authors' calculations)

[5] Relevant examples are provided in HORNSBY/MCLEOD (2022).

[6] The estimate is calculated as the sum of inhabitants of communities in the settlement area based on data provided by the Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung (BBSR 2024). Since in some cases communities and the settlement area do not overlap completely, the figures slightly overestimate the target population.

According to table 1, a successful *Zorja* project that trains ten proficient speakers per year provides almost a third of the required number of proficient speakers needed, if the target is a share of 1 % of the population. The figures in table 1 help to roughly assess how many training programmes are required if *Zorja* is to become a key tool for language revitalisation.

However, a sole focus on individual language acquisition without addressing the issue of community integration is insufficient. It is the nature of all communities in open societies that they tend to lose individuals for various reasons.[7] Thus, to keep the population of the speech community stable, new members must either be integrated, or the internal reproduction rate must compensate for such losses. Table 2 illustrates the quantitative implications of exits for the speech community.[8] The demand for training proficient speakers increases significantly the higher the 'exit rate' is.

New (active) proficient speakers needed per year (life expectancy 80 years)			
100% integration/no exit	exit rate 10%	exit rate 25%	exit rate 50%
36	40	48	72
106	118	141	212
177	197	236	354
354	393	472	708

Table 2: Required new speakers given different exit rates (authors' calculations)

As with the real size of the speaker community, we currently lack any figures on exits. However, table 2 shows that an exit rate of 50 percent implies that twice as many new speakers must be trained in comparison to the 'no exit' case. Thus, an efficient training programme must address both language acquisition and community integration.

In this regard, *Zorja* may help to answer a basic question: what teaching conditions are necessary to create active speakers of LS?

4. About *Zorja*

Following the description of the *Zorja* programme and its components, a logic model illustrating the links between resources, project activities, and outcomes is presented. Subsequently, the problems and biases that may arise concerning the assumptions regarding *Zorja's* target group and how the required resources and capacities for the project will be built are outlined.

4.1 Programme Theory

Zorja is a pilot project for an immersive adult language training programme for LS. It uses scientific findings on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and immersive language learning. The aim is to teach the language with a plethora of methods in order to set varied cognitive stimuli and keep the adult participants motivated for a long time. It tries to

[7] In modern societies we probably consider closed communities without any exits as fundamentalist groups.

[8] Exit in this context means that individuals do not continue to use the language and, thus, do not remain 'active' members of the LS speech community.

include and combine new training approaches, which are partly specifically designed for language teaching in revitalisation contexts, and which have never been applied before in Sorbian training courses, into a new, unique language curriculum.

Since *Zorja* is an intensive long-term learning project providing scholarships to its participants, it is extremely important to select them carefully. Candidates must pass a multi-level assessment to prove their enduring interest and motivation to both learn the language and contribute to the language community during the course and after its completion.

In revitalisation contexts, speakers of small languages must be able to assert themselves with their language in an environment that operates primarily with the majority language. This requires fluency more than grammatical correctness. Thus, the dominant teaching methods in *Zorja* focus on oral communication to reduce speaking inhibitions already in early learning stages and make the learner feel both competent and comfortable when speaking. However, receptive and productive competences to cope with written communication are also addressed to ensure that *Zorja* participants leave the programme with extensive LS literacy.

ASLA – Accelerated Second Language Acquisition, developed by Neyooxet Greymorning, is an image based, immersive training approach. This method of teaching language involves using pictures instead of the written word. TPR – Total Physical Response, was created by Dr. James J. Asher. It is based on the way that children learn their mother tongue. Parents have l a n g u a g e - b o d y c o n v e r s a - t i o n s with their children, the parent instructs, and the child physically responds to this. TPRS – Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling was created by Blaine Ray, a Spanish teacher, in the late 1980s. It is a language teaching method based on the idea that the brain needs enormous amounts of Comprehensible Input (CI) to acquire a new language. In addition, teachers and students interact and create opportunities for students to speak and try out their new language, resulting in rapid gains in fluency.

Table 3: Teaching methods applied in *Zorja*

Zorja employs a particular combination of teaching methods and a set of activities to both create new speakers and to integrate the group members into the LS community. The project seeks to create benefits for learners, but also for the whole speech community, by serving as an additional language space and promoting the use of LS. Adult learners may also become language multipliers with friends, family, etc. They could even become activists in the speech community and thus promote ongoing revitalisation efforts.

Firstly, some speakers are trained in the teaching methods in table 3 and are thus enabled to teach *Zorja* participants, but also to use different techniques for their learning or as multipliers in their environment. Secondly, older, still existing L1 speakers of LS are integrated, which is especially relevant for the participants to get to know the speech melody and intonation, dialectal differences, and the original environment where the language was spoken.

Additionally, the Mentor-Apprenticeship Program, which today is a widespread approach in First Nations revitalisation processes (MCIVOR/JACOBS/JENNI 2024: 719), is also applied in *Zorja*. Therefore, each participant is assigned a fluent speaker as a mentor with whom they meet regularly (at least weekly) and with whom communication flows only in LS. Existing speakers, on the other hand, become involved in the project and are expected to experience responsibility and self-efficacy by transferring their knowledge to

their mentees. Furthermore, they themselves might acquire new knowledge and competences (e. g., linguistic assertiveness; cf. EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2020). The intention is also to open the language nest occasionally for external learners and thus enable peer-based learning and networking, e. g. in the form of a language café.

Zorja is not only about language acquisition. Learning about LS culture and history is also an integral part of the project. Participants learn in the field, which encompasses hikes (e. g., collecting mushrooms, classifying plants), helping elderly speakers by working on their farms, cooking together, participating in traditions, and visiting exhibitions, museums, and other places where Sorbian culture can be experienced.

Zorja also intends to individualise the learning process as far as possible. Therefore, the participants are expected to conduct and document an individual project which is related to LS. This is to fulfil learners' need for autonomy by enabling them to strengthen their language competence in a domain of personal significance. Each participant is also expected to conduct a month-long internship in the Sorbian context, e. g., in the fields of education, media, or academia. By doing so they are active in the community and engaged with it. They furthermore get to know both language community members and job possibilities.

As a pilot project, there is a degree of uncertainty surrounding the basic assumptions the project is built on. These relate to both the causal mechanism and outcomes, and especially to whether students will remain in the programme until the end and in the speaker community afterwards. On the positive side, adult education has the advantage that dropouts are less likely since adults usually participate in training programmes voluntarily. Furthermore, their life plans and goals may be more consolidated and thus their learning is much more purposive. However, adults, in contrast to younger learners, have to earn a living and often take care of dependants. Thus, participating in language training requires additional organisational, temporal, and financial effort.

Zorja wants to contribute to the revitalisation of LS by creating at least 10 new proficient speakers per year who will be integrated into the speech community, and who will actively contribute to the development of the LS language in the region.

Expected outcomes are:

- A specific number of proficient and integrated/active new speakers
- Spillover/multiplication effect
- Creating a language space
- Motivating new learners
- Strengthening the language community
- Generating new solutions applicable in other learning contexts.

4.2 Logic Model

To illustrate the linkages between project activities and their outcomes, we use a simple logic model (LM). LMs are a common tool used in project planning and for the evaluability assessments (MCLAUGHLIN/JORDAN 2015). An LM is either a graph or a table that illustrates how a project's resources, activities, and outcomes are connected; it is therefore a representation of the project 'theory' or project 'logic'.

The LM is a simple method that connects the elements in linear causal chains. It may be used as a heuristic to illustrate how project elements are interconnected. It can also aid in thinking realistically of outputs/outcomes in quantitative terms.

Elements of a Logic Model
Elements of the LM are resources, activities, and outputs as well as short-term, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes.
Resources/inputs: human and financial resources as well as other inputs required to support the programme.
Activities: all the action steps necessary to produce programme outputs.
Outputs: products, goods, and services provided to the programme's direct beneficiaries.
Target group beneficiaries: people reached in comparison to people in need/at risk;
Outcomes: changes or benefits resulting from activities and outputs.

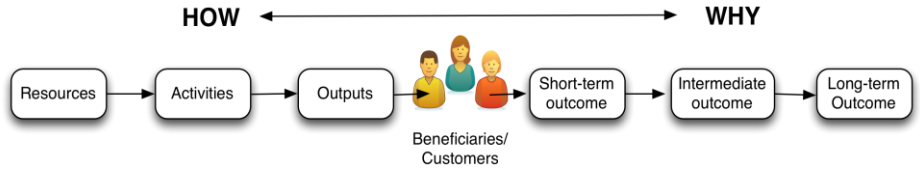

Figure 1: Elements of a Logic Model

The benefit of LMs is that they provide a simple and accessible way to make the assumptions of the project plan transparent and therefore may serve as tools to communicate the programme logic to other stakeholders. In the context of programme evaluation, an LM points to "evaluation issues and a balanced set of key performance measurement points, thus improving data collection and usefulness and helping managers and staff to meet performance reporting requirements" (MCLAUGHLIN/JORDAN 2015: 68). For a wider discussion of the process of building and using logic models and a critique see MILLAR/SIMEONE/CARNEVALE (2001) or MCLAUGHLIN/JORDAN (2015).

In what follows, we show a stylised LM in the form of a table, which we created based on the *Zorja* project description. The LM illustrates key linkages between resources, activities, outputs, and selected outcomes. Thus, we do not provide a complete model, but we focus on key elements. Moreover, we did not provide quantitative estimates for all outcomes to highlight that for some of the activities we lack data. Additionally, due to the pilot project character of *Zorja*, some aspects were initially not planned in detail. Consequently, the figures are for illustrative purposes only and serve to clarify that there are short-term and long-term effects and that they may differ.

Resources/ inputs	**Activities**	**Outputs**	**Target group reached**	**Outcomes**		
				Short term	**Medium term (5 years)**	**Long term (10 years)**
Funding for personnel, grants, facilities	Teaching	Innovative teaching programme, 1,080 teaching hours p. a., teaching materials	80 non-speakers / language learners	> 72 of 80 meet language proficiency goals	> 64 of 80 meet language proficiency goals	> 56 of 80 meet language proficiency goals, +x native speakers (children)
	Grants	70–80 scholarships				
Volunteers	Mentor-apprentice bilateral activities	30–40 bilateral activities		Integration of isolated speakers		
Experts, innovative teaching methodology	Training teachers, self-learning,	Hours of training, number of conferences attended, self-learning hours	3–10 speakers	3–10 newly trained language teachers		
	Community events, media activity	32 (quarterly community) events, 20–100 participants per event	1,600 members of community members reached	Vitality Increasing density of activities Integration of isolated speakers Visibility Increasing visibility of LS speech community Increasing additional language nests established		
Institutional / business partners	Internship	80 internships	~ 20–30 institutional / business partners	3–5 newly filled jobs in Sorbian institutions per year		

Table 4: *Zorja* Logic Model (draft) (authors' compilation)

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4.3 Target Groups, Coverage, and Bias

The project assumes that there is a target group of adults who are willing and able to spend several months learning LS and who want to engage actively in the LS speech community. In quantitative terms, the assumption is that the target group members have two needs: they have few or no LS language skills or cannot achieve the results in alternative ways, and they are relatively distant from the Sorbian community or do not even have access to it.

The maximum benefit of the project occurs when demand can be fully covered, that means that participants with no or rudimentary language skills before the course achieve high levels of proficiency, and participants with a large social distance to the community are integrated and become active community members.

Problems of demand can occur when:

- the demand for course participation is insufficient, so that the course cannot teach the full number of participants as expected in the project plan (oversupply);
- a high demand cannot be met (insufficient supply).

Given that the real demand is unknown, oversupply or insufficient supply are not a real problem for the assessment. Instead, the project will help to collect better knowledge about the target group. Oversupply would mean that the project must be improved or better promoted. On the other hand, insufficient supply would show the necessity to expand the project. Furthermore, it is expected that the successful completion of the project will generate a dynamic of increasing returns within the target group based on the positive experience of the first trained students.

Biases occur when certain segments of the target group are less likely to participate. Biases are commonly caused by participant selection. A bias either reduces the benefits of the project (which implies an inefficient use of resources), or participation is constrained by conditions set by the project. Forms of biases occur:

- due to self-selection, e. g., participants with low language skills do not apply to the programme;
- because of selection caused by the project's programme, e. g., the requirement to conduct an individual project may deter people with lower general educational qualifications from applying;
- due to the general setting of the project, e. g., potential candidates closer to the training location are more likely to apply than candidates who must commute longer distances (geographical coverage); grants may be more attractive for people with lower incomes/education than people with higher incomes/education; etc.

Some selection biases can only be partly avoided. They may indicate that different types of projects (e. g., part-time instead of full-time) or even a replication (e. g., in a different location to meet uneven geographical coverage) are required.

In any case, coverage and bias issues require research on the target community. The methodological problem is to identify potential candidates for the project who do not apply and their reasons for not doing so.

4.4 Resources and Capacity Building

Zorja needs teachers who are both fluent in LS and can implement and critically reflect on the selected didactic approaches. Ideally, these teachers identify as Sorbs or have personal and cultural ties to the community. In advance of the programme starting, these teachers must be recruited. Due to the regional lack of teachers, which is even stronger in the context of the minoritised LS language, fluent speakers without any previous teaching experience might act as teachers. They would then need to be upskilled in pedagogical and didactic approaches in advance of the programme starting to guarantee the required teaching quality. After the first year, it is possible that former *Zorja* participants will fill these positions.

In terms of financing, most of the public funding is used for grants to cover the participants' living costs. Therefore, the exact amount of money paid out may depend on the participant's life circumstances, e. g., an employed person with dependent children would receive a higher grant than a student without children. This is why it should be ensured in the application process that the applicant can live from the grant and therefore is able to dedicate their full attention to the programme.[10] On average, the calculation allows for ten grants to be awarded so that there is a minimum of ten participants per year.[11]

Notwithstanding that *Zorja* and its participants aim to appear and act within the whole Sorbian settlement area, the geographical core is an old, renovated farmstead in Dešno/Dissen, around 8 km north of Chóśebuz/Cottbus. Dĕsno/Dissen has approximately 600 inhabitants and was formerly one of the villages with the highest percentages of LS speakers (TSCHERNIK 1954). Most of the village community has a positive attitude towards LS and still lives Sorbian traditions. Furthermore, it has a lively local museum, a bilingual German-LS or even monolingual LS linguistic landscape and is surrounded by nature reserves. This specific rural setting is expected to create both a stimulating and authentic learning environment for LS. The farmstead where the project takes place is thought of as a "rĕcne gnĕzdo" (inspired by Kōhanga Reo, the language nest to learn Te Reo Māori (MCIVOR/PARKER 2016: 24)), which means that it is a safe space for people to learn and speak the language both in formal and informal settings (e. g., cooking, gardening, manual work). It offers plenty of space for learning activities indoors and outdoors as well as the required technical equipment.

An integral part of *Zorja* is the mentor programme, which assigns the *Zorja* participants a fluent-speaking mentor who also acts as a broker to the language community. For financial reasons, the mentors are expected to work unsalaried but could receive an allowance to cover their expenses (e. g., for travelling or learning materials). The mentor-mentee relationships are intended to foster integration into the speaker community and, thus, the long-term use of LS. To achieve this goal and to address life-long learning, internships and an individual project are also part of the *Zorja* programme and may require additional commitment from community members.

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[10] The project is planned for 30 hours per week, so that minor employment ("Mini-Job") would still be possible.

[11] If a participant is funded by other means (e. g., current employer) the number can be higher than ten.

5. Evaluating *Zorja*

The logic of the evaluation follows the principles of a formative assessment, which enables timely modifications of project specifications. Therefore, the process will be monitored and the impacts documented. The efficiency of the project must be judged in the long term, which means that both ongoing and ex-post evaluation will be conducted.

The key indicator for success is the individual participants' language gain, that is, the difference in candidates' language proficiency at the beginning and at the end of the *Zorja* project. However, the before-after comparison is only a descriptor of the gross impact. The net effect must consider a realistic comparative alternative, such as learning LS by attending adult education classes or using online learning tools. The possible gains, which may also be achieved via an alternative path, must be subtracted (deadweight) from the (gross) language gains achieved through *Zorja* (SCHOBER/THEN 2015: 49–51).

However, we lack data about learning achievements in adult education in the LS context. Thus, we have no information for estimating the extent of deadweight.

The primary intended effects that we want to assess are, on the one hand, the acquired language skills and, on the other hand, the participants' integration into the speech community. Possible secondary/indirect effects are effects of the project on community life and other community members who were in contact with *Zorja* (especially mentors), as well as the long-term effect on intergenerational transmission. Further objectives of the evaluation are to assess the efficiency and the innovativeness of *Zorja*.

5.1 Definition of Performance Criteria and Standards

In the following section, we discuss the issue of measuring and assessing *Zorja's* performance and present the data sources used for the evaluation. We distinguish effectiveness (regarding the objectives of language proficiency and social integration), efficiency, and innovativeness as key performance criteria.

However, evaluation requires (quantifiable) measures to be able to observe changes, and reference values to assess the significance of the changes observed, and, as we will show, in the LS context, we lack both reliable and tested measures as well as justifiable reference values. The latter is particularly problematic as we cannot follow a (quasi-)experimental design, and, thus, we cannot clearly distinguish between effects of the training and effects which are caused by the learning group's composition.

Consequently, *Zorja* is also a pilot project in the sense that it offers a first-time opportunity to collect data on LS adult language training courses which may serve as a benchmark in future research. Thus, the following passages address information needs to be satisfied through future research.

5.1.1 Language Proficiency

The primary goal of *Zorja* is to 'create' new, proficient speakers of LS, which poses the question of what exactly this proficiency includes. In the literature, the terms 'language competence', 'language skills', and 'language proficiency' are often used interchangeably and without much differentiation, following the preferences of the authors.

For this evaluation, we base our considerations concerning language gains on the Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR-CV). It was compiled by about 1,500 experts from 300 institutions in a six-year

project and thus delivers a condensate of language teaching, learning, and assessment research from the past two decades since the first publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in 2001.

Following the description in the CEFR-CV, we opt for the term 'proficiency', which is "guided by 'can do' descriptors rather than a 'deficiency' perspective focusing on what the learners have not yet acquired" (CEFR-CV 2020: 28). Overall language proficiency consists of the three main areas of competences, activities, and strategies, which are inseparably linked to each other:

> The CEFR represents a departure from the traditional distinction made in applied linguistics between the Chomskyan concepts of (hidden) "competence" and (visible) "performance" – with "proficiency" normally defined as the glimpse of someone's underlying competence derived from a specific performance. In the CEFR, "proficiency" encompasses the ability to perform communicative language activities ("can do …") while drawing upon both general and communicative language competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic) and activating appropriate communicative strategies. (CEFR-CV 2020: 34)

The CEFR-CV model of overall language proficiency introduced above is based on a social constructivist view, which considers language a social action carried out by several language users who co-construct meaning (ibid.: 33). As with any model, it simplifies reality, in this case to make it more measurable. In theory, competences, activities, and strategies are definable and describable, whereas in practice they show up in combination with each other. That means that even though the single components of the model are measurable, language lessons usually train several competences, activities, and strategies at once. For example, a mediation activity will not only address the communicative language activity of mediation but also encompass mediation strategies and promote general and language competences (like the pragmatic question of which register, or tone, is used in the specific context).

The reorientation within the CEFR descriptive scheme "replaces the traditional model of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), which has increasingly proved inadequate in capturing the complex reality of communication" (ibid.). The most attention-claiming innovation is the development of categories for communicative activities, dividing them into creative, interpersonal language use; transactional language use; and evaluative, problem-solving language use.

Another advantage that might be relevant in the context of minority language revitalisation is that the distinction between reception, production, interaction, and mediation represents "the progression of difficulty and so might aid the development of the concept of partial qualifications" (ibid.: 34). In other words, it can be useful to prioritise some communicative actions over others, e. g. production (to have more confident active speakers) or reception (for at least a passive understanding). In any case, further research on this matter is required in the context of LS.

Unlike the common perception of *Zorja* to promote mainly oral skills, the aim of the project is not to prioritise one specific communicative action, but to develop its participants' overall language proficiency.[12] Thus, the ideal evaluation of their proficiency would encompass all the components mentioned above. Language assessments for lesser-used and minoritised languages should also acknowledge community-driven goals (TUL-

[12] Due to *Zorja* being a pilot project, changes to its aims can occur in the future.

LOCH et al. 2022: 2) to better align with the cultural and communicative norms and support the revitalisation efforts of the respective community. However, it is important to acknowledge that this does not question standardised language testing as such but rather the instruments, methods, and benchmarks for testing (MILLER 2004: 1–4).

In the LS context, two test concepts for language proficiency have been developed and applied recently. The first is part of the extensive WITAJ evaluation in Brandenburg, organised by the Institute for Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig (WERNER/SCHULZ 2017). The study participants were pupils in the 4th and 6th grade of primary school with LS either as a second or foreign language. The study was conducted to gain a detailed view of the output of LS educational programmes at schools in Brandenburg (ibid.: 16). Therefore, the conception of the study was geared to the topics and goals given by the curricular framework for primary schools (ibid.: 15), which again was built on the initial version of the CEFR (2001). At two measuring points at intervals of more than a year, communicative competence in the four skills listening (and audiovisual) comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, speaking and mediation; the knowledge of the three elements (grammatical structure, vocabulary, phonology/graphology); and the skill of choosing the right register (BICS and CALP) were the objects of evaluation (WERNER/SCHULZ 2017: 63). Methodologically, the research group made use of various instruments, mainly standardised tests like C-Test or profile analysis, but also open, non-participant observations in lessons and school life (ibid.: 64). Due to the standardisation of the single testing components, the test concept fulfils the quality criteria validity, reliability, and objectivity.

The other test concept was developed by the WITAJ Language Centre and consists of test batteries for the levels A1 to C1 according to the CEFR. For the levels A1 to B2, the corresponding Goethe-Institut certificates for the German language were used as a model and adapted for both Sorbian languages. The C1 test, which is the most recent to have been completed, was elaborated following the example for the Czech certificate. Whereas the latter is already based on the new descriptors of the CEFR-CV, the A1 to B2 level tests have the same theoretical base as the above-mentioned WITAJ evaluation: four skills, three elements, and the distinction of registers. The relevant exam is passed when a minimum of 60 percent of the overall score is achieved. However, the overall score in the context of our evaluation is less interesting than the single components of language proficiency. It is noteworthy that in a case where a participant sits an exam for the levels A1 to B2 at the beginning of *Zorja* and the C1 exam at the end, the incongruities between the test conceptions might complicate the analysis of the components of language proficiency.

It can be assumed that the LS certificate tests also meet quality criteria because they are based on German or Czech certificates that have been successfully audited by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE 2024). The audit processes conducted by ALTE are very extensive and incorporate test construction and analysis as well as marking, grading, administration, and logistics of the tests.

Both test conceptions are suboptimal for *Zorja* evaluation purposes for several reasons. Firstly, regarding content, the University of Leipzig testing concept for WITAJ was created for primary school pupils and not for adults. Additionally, it was based on the curricular framework and not directly on the CEFR, so it is not comparable without restrictions. However, the most important consideration is that the test is rather resource demanding and thus not suitable for a (cost-effective) evaluation approach.

The existing CEFR test for LS appears to be more convenient in terms of the required resources, although it is still comparatively extensive and time-consuming for evaluation

purposes. However, since short but still reliable language proficiency tests for LS are lacking, our measurement of language acquisition will have to rely on the existing CEFR test offered by the WITAJ Language Centre as well as the subjective assessments of both the participants themselves and their teachers. Since *Zorja* is a pilot project, other approaches to self- or teacher assessment, e. g. those developed in North American First Nations contexts (CREED & MCIVOR 2025: 1–2) might be tested in the future as well.

Finally, it should be mentioned that various spillovers regarding language proficiency gains are deliberate or unintended consequences of contact with *Zorja*, since several members of the LS speech community are involved with the project (mentors, internship partners, language café participants, etc.) who may also improve or reactivate their language skills. However, these effects are rather diffuse and difficult to measure, and will, if at all, be reflected in a qualitative analysis.

5.1.2 Social Integration

A core goal of *Zorja* is to integrate the participants into the speech community, thus enabling them to maintain or even improve their language competence, but also to help revitalisation efforts. To assess the effects of *Zorja* we need to measure s o c i a l i n t e g r a t i o n similarly to how we measure language skills.

Both the dimensions and measures of social integration are key issues in social sciences (IMBUSCH/HEITMEYER 2008) and the subject of theoretical and methodological debates in various social policy fields, such as migration (ESSER 1980), community cohesion (LEV-WIESEL 2003), or public health (VONNEILICH/FRANZKOWIAK 2022). Regarding language revitalisation, the relevance of community integration is also increasingly recognised. However, the focus of the literature is more on best practices to promote community formation and integration (e. g. WILTSHIRE/BIRD/HARDWICK 2022), while there is currently little debate on how to measure successful social integration. Thus, we draw from wider social policy debates, particularly from migration studies, to develop a s o c i a l i n t e g r a t i o n s c a l e to measure the integration success of the *Zorja* project.

In social scientific debates, we find two complementary perspectives on social integration. The first perspective takes societies, communities, or social groups as units and then analyses how and to what extent they are i n t e g r a t e d and create a c o h e s i v e whole. Often, particularly in community studies and social group research, the alternative term ‘social cohesion’ is used. In the second perspective, ‘integration’ indicates the position of an individual (or a group of individuals) in relation to or within a society, community, or group. In this evaluation, we will focus on the latter perspective, since we want to understand how and to what extent the social position of *Zorja* participants changes due to their involvement in the project.

A key issue in social sciences regarding i n t e g r a t i o n is its social effects. Recently, the terms ‘social inclusion’ and ‘cohesiveness’ have been discussed as a form of s o c i a l c a p i t a l , both regarding community performance and from the perspective of individual well-being. From the cohesion perspective, social capital finds its expression in better group/community performance, such as adaptability or conflict resolution, while from an individual perspective, social capital is a resource that can be mobilised to substitute economic or cultural capital (PORTES 2000). Thus, in the field of public health or social policy, social i n t e g r a t i o n is very closely related to network/community or group s u p p o r t . Here we will not make use of ‘social capital’ as a concept, but we solely focus on measuring changes in social integration.

While social integration defines a social status (being more or less well integrated), the process of integration is considered a process of rapprochement or adaptation, which

in social sciences is usually referred to as assimilation (ESSER 1980, HILLMAN 2018). The process of social integration encompasses several dimensions of assimilation, such as

- cognitive assimilation (language, skills, knowledge of norms, attitude change, behavioural change)
- identification assimilation (sense of belonging, lack of intention to return, commitment to the community, political participation)
- social assimilation (number of contacts, friendships, marriages/couple relationships, socio-spatial segregation)
- structural integration (professional positions: teachers, academia, Sorbian media and institutions).

There is a wide range of approaches to measuring social integration, community cohesion, individual or community social capital, and social support; the methodological core of these approaches is always very similar. Here, a so-called 'test scale' is constructed. According to test theories, social integration is a (formative) latent variable that can only be observed indirectly (BÜHNER 2006:18–21). Thus, the test scale consists of a set of items (questions) in standardised questionnaires, which participants have to answer at different stages of the project (before, at the end, and some years after the course).

For instance, integration into a community increases the likelihood that an individual has friends in that community. Having friends can thus be considered one (of several) manifest items. The (weighted) sum of responses to several items that are assumed to positively correlate with the latent variable can be interpreted as a score, the degree of social integration. In recent decades, it has been common practice to apply (exploratory/confirmatory) factor analysis to select items and to calculate their weights (ibid.).

5.1.3 Efficiency

Efficiency describes the relation of outcomes to inputs or resources used. The key outcomes of *Zorja* are language proficiency and social integration. Here we focus on language proficiency. The resources used are money, personnel, and time. While the costs of training may differ with the context, time measured, e. g. as number of teaching hours or hours of contact with LS (e. g., on field trips, in the mentorship programme, at events), is less context dependent.

Thus, one way to assess the efficiency of training is to measure language gains in relation to time exposed (teaching hours). As described above, we lack a standard for the average number of language lessons required to pass a CEFR exam for LS. The preparation booklet for the LS exam published by the WITAJ Language Centre, an institution that develops learning material and offers further services in the field of Sorbian language acquisition, suggests the following figures. These stem from the figures for a German CEFR test.

Level	Number of lessons (45 min each)
A1	85–170
A2	170–340
B1	400–600
B2	700
C1	800–1,000
C2	1,200

Table 5: Estimated number of lessons to acquire CEFR levels (NORBERGOWA/SMOLINA 2023: 14).

Zorja lasts 10 months, which corresponds to about 43 weeks. Around 7 weeks for holiday and possible sickness can be subtracted, as well as one month for the internship. This leaves around 32 weeks of instruction. The participants are in the language nest for 8 teaching hours (á 45 min) a day, 5 days a week, totalling 40 hours a week. Even though the language nest concept means that breaks also contribute to the total contact time with LS, we reduced the estimated lessons (á 45 minutes) to 6.75 per day. Thus, in total, the participants attend on average roughly 1,080 lessons. The effective number of lessons taught can only be determined after the end of the 10-month period. Thus, according to the figures given in table 5, *Zorja* participants without previous knowledge are estimated to reach C1 level, or at least B2.

However, we lack any empirical evidence for the extent to which these estimates are suitable for the context of *Zorja*. One question is to what extent the languages are comparable, since some languages are more difficult to learn than others. Yet, this perceived difficulty of learning a foreign language differs according to which languages have been previously acquired. LS is a Western Slavic language that, for people with German as a first language (without prior knowledge of another Slavic language), is more difficult to learn than, for instance, English, due to fewer similarities in grammar and lexis. Furthermore, learning is an individual process that depends on various personal factors like individual capabilities, motivation, and learning time invested (HUFEISEN 2010: 203–204). Additionally, in the case of minority and less learned languages, the availability of conversation partners and language spaces and thus the possibilities for usage-based learning are rather limited (ELLIS 2015: 61–63).

On the other hand, the intensity of the classes also plays an important role. The consequences of high intensity are twofold: Participants in intensive course can better 'dive' into a language because they have fewer other mentally demanding tasks during the day than they would have in evening classes. Moreover, human working memory is limited and thus also the amount of new knowledge that can be acquired throughout a day (COWAN 2008: 323–338).

Another noteworthy point is that the better their language proficiency already is, the harder it is for a learner to improve – somewhat like a 'Pareto principle' in language learning. This so-called (upper) intermediate learning plateau, that must be passed to improve, has been observed mainly in ESL contexts (e. g. RICHARDS 2008, MIRZAEI/ZOGHI/DAVATGARI ASL 2017). We lack data on that phenomenon, but we can say that from our in-field observations that it is very likely to also occur in the context of LS.

In conclusion, assuming that *Zorja* shows the same efficiency as a regular evening school course or is even more efficient, table 5 above might be a reference point. Still, the fundamental difference to the German courses of the Goethe-Institut (where the figures were taken from) is the linguistic environment outside the language nest that is German-dominated with just rare occasions to encounter some LS.

5.1.4 Innovation and Improvement

Before talking about innovations in the conception of *Zorja*, it is crucial to outline our understanding of the term 'innovation'. In the vernacular, there is the tendency to use the word 'innovation' in an inflationary manner as an umbrella term for similar phenomena like change, invention, creativity, or entrepreneurship (FAGERBERG 2005). In recent decades, there has been a broad movement in social sciences and economics to specifically define innovation. A key publication in this process has been the Oslo Manual (OECD/EUROSTAT 2005). It defines innovation as the "implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service) or process, a new marketing method, or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations" (ibid., 146). Although this definition is oriented towards businesses and marketed products, it has been adapted to educational innovation as well. Educational innovation occurs when educational organisations

> (…) (e. g. schools, universities, training centres, education publishers) introduce (1) new products and services, e. g. new syllabi, textbooks or educational resources, (2) new processes for delivering their services, e. g. use of ICT in e-learning services, (3) new ways of organising their activities, e. g. ICT to communicate with students and parents, and (4) new marketing techniques, e. g. differential pricing of postgraduate courses. These new practices are intended to improve the provision of education in one way or another, and therefore, innovations in education should be regarded as "improvements". (VINCENT-LANCRIN 2014: 23)

One challenge in this context is what does 'newness' mean in the context of education? Following HALÁSZ (2018),[13] we define innovative actions in the educational context of *Zorja* as a "deviation from routine operations (in various operational areas) and as the presence or adoption or sharing of novel solutions". This means that, unlike an invention, the innovative action itself does not have to be absolutely new, but relatively new within the context where it is applied. In fact, many components and approaches that have been combined into the project conception of *Zorja* have already been successfully applied in other minority or indigenous communities.

[13] It is impossible to present an extensive overview on the terminological debates surrounding the term 'innovation' within this work. A summary on the definitional discourse and further literature is given in the same publication by HALÁSZ (2018).

Area of innovation	**Example**	***Zorja***
Assessment	Assessment centre	Assessment of applicants
Teaching style	Use of demonstrations, reading aloud, time spent for self-learning	Immersive approach
Instructional practice	Games and role plays, individual and group projects, relate learning to real life, discussions, students elaborate their own answers	Innovative teaching methods (e. g., Accelerated Second Language Acquisition (ASLA))
Class organisation	Whole group / spilt groups, autonomy of students, individualised instruction	Breakout rooms
Use of textbooks / teaching material	Introduction of alternative resources	Variety of learning resources used
Curriculum	Curriculum development and improvement	Curriculum for immersive language acquisition
Methods of assessment used in classrooms	Improving assessment to better monitor student performance or to better address students' needs and identify potential solutions for improving their learning outcomes	–
Availability of computers and internet and use of computers in class	Wider or narrower use of computers to serve different pedagogical purposes	Use of digital whiteboards, eLearning platform
Provision of special education	Additional support to catch up, meet specific interests	Mentor-Apprenticeship Program
Extent of teacher collaboration	Sharing knowledge, preparing instructional materials together	Shared pool of teaching materials
Feedback mechanism	Increasing the use of benchmarking, monitoring, and feedback activities	–
Evaluation of teachers/teaching	Definition of required competences, feedback to teacher education, identification of training needs	–
External relations	Create a stronger and supportive sense of community between learners and language community	Mentor-Apprenticeship Program, language café, study field trips, internships

Table 6: Innovational potential of *Zorja* (authors' compilation based on HALÁSZ 2018)

Moreover, the notion of 'improvement' in many public services, including education, can be elusive, and the use of this definition has been challenged. The perception of improvement depends on the perspective of the stakeholders, who may wear several hats: consumer, citizen, and taxpayer (VINCENT-LANCRIN 2014). Assessing the success of companies in the private sector by profit, sales, or growth is widely accepted: whatever their objectives, ultimately, they have a single bottom line which prevails over their other objectives. By contrast, whether public organisations stay in business or close is usually bound to a political decision (rather than a market sanction). Public organisations are assessed on a multiplicity of objectives, such as increased quality, equity, coverage, and efficiency, which are less measurable and can even conflict.

Innovation is as much a process as an activity or output. As HALÁSZ (2018: 559) puts it: "No innovation process can be imagined without inventors, entrepreneurs, adaptors, imitators, or practitioner *bricoleurs*, that is, innovation agents who act as individuals, groups, organisations, networks, or system-level actors."

For an evaluation, these two perspectives require two different types of questions (What? and How?). Here, we will focus on a qualitative assessment of innovation. Thus, we will address the questions about innovation fields in the (group) interviews and will discuss the challenges the teaching team faced, and how they tried to address these challenges. The interviews may reveal

- innovation needs which were identified during the programme,
- assessments of experiences with innovative approaches that were tested, and
- innovations that were not planned.

Table 6 compiles possible areas of educational innovation, possible examples, and potentially innovative practices as they are described in *Zorja*'s project documents. To what extent these innovative ideas may be turned into practice will be the subject of the qualitative assessment.

5.2 Data Sources and Methods of Data Collection

A multipart monitoring and evaluation programme will be conducted to ensure the success of the project (namely the outcomes). Firstly, a baseline study in the form of a standardised questionnaire for the learners will be administered at the beginning of each project cycle to gather expectations, aims, and starting conditions (especially language biography). Furthermore, sociodemographic and socioeconomic data on the participants, such as sex, age, place of residence, and highest educational degree are collected. Additionally, previous knowledge of LS (if any) should be proven by attending a CEFR language test.

The aim is to cover all target groups, but also to keep the efforts manageable for all those involved. The single elements of the data collection process are compiled in table 7.

Target group	**Topics**	**Method**	**Frequency**	**Timing**
Project coordinator	External issues (finances, management, general), key events/incidents, perceived progress, perception of participants	Group interview	annually	ongoing (course end)
Teachers	Routines, teaching experiences, self-assessment, foreseen changes / modification, assessment of didactic approaches, innovation, location, facilities, additional community activities	Group interview	annually	ongoing (course end)
	Basic statistics (applications, dropouts, teaching hours, community activities, etc.)	Project diary/ log	continuously	ongoing (course end)
Participants (ex-post: selected participants)	Expectations, course evaluation (teachers, teaching, logistics, language gains, own situation, finances, mentoring, practice, community activities, learning group)	Standardised questionnaire	twice a year	ongoing (course start and end)
		Group interview	as required	ongoing/ex-post (when required)

Target group	Topics	Method	Frequency	Timing
	Language gains, social integration	CEFR language test	twice a year	ongoing (course start and end)
		Standardised survey	every three years	ex-post (3, 6 and 9 years after participation)
Mentors	General feedback (programme organisation, community integration)	Short standardised questionnaire	annually	ongoing
		Semi-structured interviews	as required	ongoing/ex-post (when required)
Community / Observers (selected community members)	Effects on community / community integration	Semi-structured interviews	every four years	ongoing (after 1, 5 and 9 project years)
Non-participants (applicants / non-applicants)	Perception of the project, application process	Semi-structured interviews	every three years	ongoing (after 3 and 6 and 9 project years)

Table 7: *Zorja* data collection methods by target group

6. Summary and Discussion

In this paper, we developed an illustrative evaluation approach for language revitalisation using the example of *Zorja* to introduce basic concepts of evaluation research into the minority/language policy debate. To start, we introduced fundamental concepts of evaluation theory and outlined that our approach follows the idea of a formative, utilisation-focused assessment.

The first step in the evaluation process is the needs assessment. Therefore, we undertook a brief situational analysis of LS language and tried to quantify existing needs. This scoping exercise made the significance of exits transparent. We concluded that in a revitalisation context, a training programme must address both language proficiency and community integration.

In the third section, we undertook a thorough analysis of *Zorja*'s project design, the underlying programme theory and the programme's basic assumptions. We introduced the logic model tool to gain a more profound understanding of key activities, the objectives they target, and the multiple outcomes *Zorja* may generate. It was also highlighted that several biases may occur that can affect the programme's (net) impacts.

In the final section, we discussed ways to measure key performance criteria. Referring to previous analyses, four key performance criteria are discussed in greater detail. These are language proficiency, social integration, efficiency, and innovation. The ideal type of evaluation applies an experimental research design in which the changes in the performance indicators in the treatment and control groups are compared between two points in time. Since we lack a control group, we require reference data to assess performance. Efficiency assessment is basically impossible due to missing cost data. But we also lack non-monetary data on adult education, such as the number of learning hours, the share of students that reach higher levels, or the total time they require to achieve a higher level.

Finally, it also becomes clear that we not only lack any reference data, but for some criteria we even lack suitable measures to observe change. Thus, in the *Zorja* evaluation, we must work with tests that are less reliable and create new ones.

However, the *Zorja* evaluation offers an opportunity to generate reference data that might help to assess similar projects. Thus, the *Zorja* evaluation itself is a learning journey about an integrative learning environment, but also the evaluation of language projects.

In addition, our analysis has already revealed research gaps beyond the narrow evaluation context, such as the lack of historical research on adult education in the former GDR, the lack of short language tests for learners, and the non-existence of curricula for LS adult education.

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