BRUSSELS DECLARATION

Enhancing motivation for language learning through institutional and system-based policies, strategies, and practices

FOREWORD

The Brussels Declaration results from activities undertaken in the MOLAN network project (Network for the exchange of information about good practices that serve to **mo**tivate **lan**guage learners); MOLAN was carried out with the support of the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme, Key Activity 2 – Languages, in the period December 2007 to February 2011. The partnership of the trans-sectoral network was comprised of 37 education institutions (schools and higher education institutions), networks, organisations, and authorities based in 18 participating countries and in Switzerland. In addition, 9 experts from education institutions based in seven participating countries made substantial contributions in their capacity as sub-contractors.

The overarching aim of MOLAN was to identify and analyse policies, strategies and practices (PSPs) that could be shown to have the effect of motivating young Europeans in all sectors of formal education to learn foreign languages, and to disseminate these evidence-based PSPs to a wide range of stakeholders. The rationale underlying MOLAN was the frequently observed gap between agreed EU policies on the one hand and reality on the other; there is a widespread trend towards English only and the practice in some countries of students in upper secondary education discontinuing their language learning altogether.

In designing and carrying out its activities, the MOLAN partnership was guided by the following two convictions.

(i) Language learning and proficiency in a number of languages are of major importance to personal development, the acquisition of new knowledge, mutual understanding and social cohesion, economic performance and sustainable employability.

(ii) Motivation is key to language learning. Professional, highly motivated teachers and quality materials and resources alone are not enough when it comes to enhancing learner motivation; they need to be complemented by institutional and system-based PSPs. At the same time, MOLAN provided ample proof of the fact that the most promising initiatives will come to naught if funding is withdrawn – for example, as a result of the financial crisis.

MOLAN partners, and institutions close to MOLAN, prepared more than 80 case studies that show that PSPs designed to enhance learner motivation have a major role in the successful implementation of EU language policy. However, the case studies also show that no one size fits all, and that successful PSPs have to be viewed within their specific contexts.

During the course of the MOLAN network project, partners became fully aware of and encountered major, if not to say dramatic changes in the fields of politics, economy, society, education and technology, which have had and continue to have a major impact on the linguistic fabric of our societies, language use, language learning, and individual language profiles. Because of this, many of the successful PSPs identified, described, analysed and disseminated by MOLAN partners will probably have to be adapted in the not too distant future. This is one of the reasons why the Web-based system for targeted information retrieval which was developed by MOLAN will continue to be maintained and will be updated beyond the end of the project period by one of the leading MOLAN partner organisations, the Conseil européen pour les langues / European Language Council (CEL/ELC) - http://www.molan-network.org/.

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I.   Preamble

1   There is evidence that mobility between jobs, geographical mobility, and trans-national co-operation are becoming an accepted part of the working lives of a large percentage of EU residents. In a sense, this kind of mobility and co-operation is a corner stone of the EU's Europe 2020 strategy.

2   Communication between speakers of different languages is no longer only, or even primarily, a matter of cross-border communication. As a result of migration and trans-European mobility, all EU Member States – in fact, all European countries – have become multilingual societies; many of our schools and universities are now multilingual institutions.

3   As a result of these and similar developments, Europe is today confronted with a multilingual challenge of unprecedented size and complexity, a challenge that is of paramount relevance to Europe's education systems and institutions as well as to young people in formal education. Young people need to be enabled and encouraged to learn other languages – both for their own benefit and for the well-being of our societies.

4   In spite of the multitude of evidence available, many of those responsible for education systems and institutions as well as young people and parents have not yet grasped the fundamental importance of language learning for the future of Europe and for individuals living in Europe. In fact, the message to be sent is very clear and simple – the learning of other languages must be regarded and treated as an integral part of all education and training (pre-school, primary, secondary, higher, adult, and continuing education and training) – today and in future.

5   Motivation is key to all learning, not just language learning. For reasons that urgently need to be researched, roughly a quarter of young people living in the EU today are not even motivated to properly learn their first language. Clearly, when it comes to language learning, attitude is more important than aptitude.

6   Focus on learner motivation puts the learner at the centre of the learning process, which can be shown to be important for the sustainability of learner motivation. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that enhancing motivation for language learning is not just an issue for the individual – the future of our societies depends to a large extent on young people's ability and motivation to learn languages

II Enhancing learner motivation – a conceptual framework

7 System-based and institutional policies, strategies, and practices
A large amount of research has in the past been devoted to identifying and analysing different types of learner motivation; this kind of research has had relatively little impact on language learning. Much more important in this respect has been the professionalisation of teacher education. However, individual language teachers, no matter how good their training and how strong their motivation, will hardly be able to bring about a general shift in learner motivation. For this, appropriate system-based or institutional policies, strategies and practices (PSPs) are needed. This is one of the key outcomes of the MOLAN network project.

8 The context-success factors-success indicators triangle
Enacting a general shift in learner motivation is not simply a matter of copying examples of successful practice. Rather, the following parameters should be carefully considered –
- the **context** in which a new initiative is going to be taken, and
- the "input" constituting the new initiative in relation to the given context – in other word, the **potential success factors**.

Those taking the initiative will want to check the success or otherwise of their initiative over time on the basis of **success indicators** related to the aims and objectives of the initiative. It is quite likely that a new initiative of this kind will not immediately have the success hoped for; if this is the case, those responsible will have to reflect on the context-success factors-success indicators triangle and make adjustments. Initiatives of this kind will have to be checked regularly as their contexts are likely to change.

Success is not just a quantitative issue – i.e. of how many more pupils and students are now learning languages and of how many more languages are now being learned. Language learning should be seen as a matter of acquiring the ability to communicate effectively, and not just to express basic needs. The issue of motivation cannot be separated from the issue of quality, in particular from the issue of learning outcomes.

9 The relevance of examples of successful practice
In spite of the fact that the national/regional/institutional/systemic contexts of language teaching and learning vary considerably across the EU, properly presented examples of successful practice are immensely useful in that they can provide inspiration and encouragement to people and authorities keen to enhance learner motivation. This principle should be observed whenever an exchange or a dissemination of examples of successful practice is undertaken. In fact, whenever examples of successful practice are presented at European level, attention should be paid to the issues of generalisation and transferability.

10 Four broad categories of success factors
At present, success factors for enhancing learner motivation can be grouped into four broad categories.
- innovative teaching and learning practices;
- language policy;

- co-operation with other stakeholders;
- integration, accreditation and certification of language learning.

Each thematic category should be understood to be comprised of a number of sub-categories, together representing a cluster of success factors. For example[1], innovative teaching and learning practices may well include such approaches as extracurricular activities, e-Twinning, independent language learning, and various forms of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

11 *The overarching importance of co-operation*

Co-operation is a key transversal success factor, not just in enhancing learner motivation, but also in motivating the motivators – education authorities, head teachers, and senior management. This includes whole-institution approaches, and the creation of local and regional language learning networks, for example, networks based on co-operation between schools and higher education institutions, as well as the involvement of all stakeholders – teachers, students, parents, former students, pertinent specialist and non-specialist organisations, public and private employers.

12 *Using new technologies for language learning and language use*

Young people are attracted to new technologies. Sending SMS and email messages and using Facebook and Twitter have become second nature to them. While it is true that these new forms of communication have in many cases led to a decline in literacy, MOLAN case studies provide ample evidence of the fact that if introduced and used appropriately, new technologies can be a major factor in enhancing motivation for language learning. In fact, the use of new technologies constitutes another key transversal success factor.

III   New challenges and opportunities

13 *Multilingual learners*

Motivation for language learning is still very much seen in terms of motivating monolingual young people to take an interest in other languages and cultures. However, an increasingly large number of young people in formal education have two or even three first languages, without necessarily being literate in both or all of them. Many of these young people are highly motivated to maintain and further develop their bilingual or multilingual proficiency – but more often than not our education institutions and systems are not prepared for this, which is not surprising given the fact that in Europe as a whole more than 400 languages are spoken today. However, we cannot encourage Europeans to exercise their right to live and work in other Member States without reflecting on the educational implications of this policy. In other words, we have to find ways of positively responding to the motivation of children of mobile Europeans to properly learn their first language or languages.

14 *Heterogeneous classrooms and learner groups*

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[1]   Details can be gauged from the MOLAN Handbook.

Migration and mobility are increasingly resulting in heterogeneous classrooms – and this both in schools and higher education institutions. Quite frequently, there are students in language classroom that have more advanced partial skills in the language in question than their peers. This is known to have a demotivating effect on all the learners in the classroom. But that does not have to be so – on the contrary. Building on examples of successful practice, methods have to be developed and implemented that can provide all learners in heterogeneous classrooms with a sense of achievement and hence stimulate motivation for the learning of the language in question.

15 *Opportunities arising from these developments*
In sum, every effort should be made to exploit the potential inherent in these developments. Above all, ways will have to be found to validate all the linguistic competences young people have; this strategy has been shown to increase motivation for language learning in general.

IV Fundamental issues

In view of the new multilingual challenge Europe is confronted with as well as the EU's new policy agenda, it is important to bear in mind that the promotion of language learning is not just a matter of enhancing learner motivation, but an issue of fundamental rights. All young people living in the European Union and in Member States of the Council of Europe must be given the opportunity to achieve literacy in their first language or languages, to achieve full competence in the language of education, to learn other languages from an early age and to continue learning these languages throughout formal education. Moreover, all young people must have the opportunity to have their linguistic competences validated, irrespective of whether these competences were acquired in formal education or through non-formal and informal learning. In this way, young people will be enabled to acquire and demonstrate skills that are becoming increasingly important in a European labour market subject to rapid changes as a result of globalisation and the emergence of new kinds of jobs.

V European co-operation

European co-operation, notably European projects in the fields of education and training continue to be of fundamental importance to innovation in our education systems and institutions. During the latter half of the MOLAN network project, there were clear indications that experts from partner institutions and organisations were – due to pressure at home – finding it increasingly difficult to fully participate in project activities. At the same time, participants expressed their firm conviction that as a result of European co-operation they had been encouraged to launch new initiatives and to pursue their own initiatives with new vigour. Clearly, the challenges described in section III call for reflection and action on a European scale, and European projects should be regarded as a major instrument in this respect.

One of the main challenges confronting European projects – and projects in general, for that matter - is the continuation of activities beyond the life of the

project proper. As the MOLAN network shows, IT solutions can provide answers to this challenge; the MOLAN Information system functions as a dynamic virtual network, enabling interested parties to retrieve information in a targeted manner, and encouraging members of the languages community to upload new case studies and to update previously provided case studies.

Given the fact that cooperation and partnerships are increasingly being recognised as major drivers, it is strongly recommended that the EU – through its programmes – should seek to encourage the launch of projects involving schools, universities, education authorities, and business representative organisations / enterprises, to mention just the most important stakeholders. This would be particularly relevant for networks and projects designed to promote the requisite development of multilingual skills.