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LANGUAGE PLANNING AS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT? THE GROWTH OF THE GAELIC ECONOMY

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In recent years considerable emphasis has been placed on strengthening the so-called 'Gaelic economy' within the overall context of Gaelic language development in Scotland. Research suggests that there are now well in excess of a thousand jobs in this 'Gaelic economy', a large proportion of them concentrated in relatively peripheral areas of the Highlands and Islands where they make a useful contribution to the overall regional economy (Sproull and Ashcroft 1993, p.iii). Without question, the emergence of this Gaelic economy has been a significant development, for it challenges the long-standing perception that Gaelic has no practical economic value and that the world of employment requires the adoption and use of English — a perception that has been a prime factor in the language shift from Gaelic to English over recent centuries (Durkacz 1996; Withers 1984). Moreover, the understanding that the traditional language and culture of the region can serve as an engine for the promotion of regional economic development, rather than a brake or depressant, has been a new and exciting prospect for planners.

Language development strategies in other jurisdictions, notably Wales and Catalonia, have long emphasized the importance of integrating the minority language into the world of employment and economic life. Doing so not only helps to 'normalize' the language, bringing it into the mainstream and working to ensure its use in the full range of human activity, but it also tends to boost the overall prestige of the language and the demand for its

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acquisition, particularly among the parents of school-age children (Williams and Morris 2000, pp.113-14, 150; Grin 1993, pp.26-27). The economic dimension is thus a key aspect of language revitalization.

The development of the Gaelic economy in Scotland has proceeded on a rather different track. This growth has not taken place as part of a broad-based initiative to widen the role of Gaelic in the general economic life of the Gaelic-speaking areas, but rather as an adjunct to regional development strategies that see the market for Gaelic-related goods and services as a potential growth area or 'sector'. The question of actual Gaelic language use within this Gaelic 'sector', let alone in the mainstream of the regional economy, has received relatively little attention; only in the loosest sense can these efforts be considered to be any kind of language planning initiative. Gaelic remains highly peripheral to the world of work and economic life, which remains an overwhelmingly English-language domain even in the most strongly Gaelic-speaking areas (see e.g. Euromosaic 1995), and the recent growth of the Gaelic economy has done little to change this pattern.

The success of the Gaelic economy in more strictly economic terms must also be questioned. The overwhelming majority of jobs created in this sector are entirely dependent on public funding — funding, moreover, that is of an ongoing, rather than 'pump-priming', nature. While such subsidy-dependence is acceptable, indeed normal, for employment in the educational and cultural sectors, where the Gaelic economy is concentrated, it is highly significant that no means has yet been discovered by which the Gaelic language can make a major contribution to the regional economy on a self-sustaining, for-profit basis. Indeed, it is only in those areas of the Gaelic economy where the language is not actually used in a meaningful fashion — notably 'cultural tourism' — where such a contribution can be seen. This must be viewed as a serious shortcoming of the achievements up to now and a major challenge for future action.

At the same time, however, increased respect for the region's traditional language and culture can serve to boost levels of overall self-confidence and economic initiative within the Gaelic-speaking population and the Gaelic-speaking areas, thus serving to strengthen the regional economy more generally (HIE 1993, p.4; Sproull 1996, pp.100, 113). This effect, though often highlighted in the rhetoric of policy proponents, is at best intangible and difficult to measure. There certainly seems to be little linguistic payoff to date: that is, any possible increase in levels of economic initiative has not had

the effect of significantly altering the prevailing language-use patterns by which Gaelic is largely excluded from economic life, and steadily declining in overall community-level use.

This article reviews the progress of the Gaelic economy and the strategies by which its development has been conceptualized and steered. Although this initiative has not been without its successes in terms of regional economic development and influence on socio-linguistic attitudes, in many respects it must be seen as a missed opportunity. Work has scarcely begun on the normalization of Gaelic in economic life. If the development of the Gaelic economy is to serve as a successful initiative in terms of both language planning and regional development, the economic aspect must be integrated with a more broad-based language planning programme that seeks to expand the role of Gaelic in the economic sphere.

This article focuses largely on the regional economy of the Highlands and Hebrides, and especially the Western Isles, where the density of Gaelic speakers is highest.[1] This emphasis is by no means intended to overlook the reality that Gaelic is a national language and that Gaelic speakers are to be found throughout Scotland. However, it is in areas of highest density that the most important steps towards integrating Gaelic into economic life can be taken, although there may also be significant opportunities to provide goods and services to the numerically large communities of Gaelic speakers in the Scottish cities, even though the density of such speakers in the overall population is very low.

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[1] *The term 'Highlands and Hebrides' is used in this article instead of the more common 'Highlands and Islands'. The term 'Highlands and Islands' is itself a relatively recent coinage, created by central government, but is understood to take in the 'Northern Isles' of Orkney and Shetland, which were not traditionally Gaelic-speaking. The use of the 'Highlands and Islands' framework has led to various conceptual and political difficulties for Gaelic development. The Gaelic term* ***Gàidhealtachd****, which by definition conforms exactly to the traditional Gaelic region, is more precise, but its nuances are not generally appreciated by English speakers. The term 'Western Isles' with the meaning of the 'Outer Hebrides', is also a government-inspired neologism; this term traditionally referred to the Hebrides generally, in contradistinction to the 'Northern Isles'.*

THE GROWTH OF THE GAELIC ECONOMY

The Gaelic economy has grown substantially in recent years as a result of the so-called Gaelic 'renaissance' and the accompanying increase in public funding for a range of activities relating to Gaelic language and culture (MacKinnon 1991). Research conducted in 1991-93 showed that almost one thousand full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs had been created, directly or indirectly, in this sector, with more than half of them in the Western Isles or Skye and Lochalsh, the areas with the highest density of Gaelic speakers. While no precise breakdown is available according to the sectors involved, the main fields are broadcast media, education, Gaelic promotion bodies, social and cultural development organizations, and the arts (including certain youth organizations and publishing bodies). Jobs tend to be concentrated in a few centres — Glasgow, Inverness, Sleat (the south end of the Isle of Skye), and Stornoway — rather than diffused throughout the Highlands and Hebrides. Total economic output from the Gaelic sector was some £41.1 million (including multipliers), of which some 32% was attributable to the Western Isles and Skye and Lochalsh (Sproull 1993, p.iii).

This research squared with an earlier investigation conducted in 1990, which revealed the existence of some 446 posts designated as 'Gaelic-essential' and a further 1422 designated as 'Gaelic desirable' (Galloway 1995, pp.31-34). However, well over a third of the 1422 'Gaelic desirable' posts were those of social work home helps in the Western Isles; and it was evident that, in practice, the supposed desirability of Gaelic skills 'could be disregarded for the sake of expediency or discarded altogether by personal whim' of those responsible for hiring decisions (Galloway 1995, p.54; Galloway 1994).

Although no more recent figures are available, the situation is broadly as it was in 1993, in that the later 1990s was generally a time of incremental rather than dramatic increases with regard to Gaelic development initiatives, except in the educational sector where numbers enrolled in Gaelic-medium education doubled from 1,080 in 1993/94 to over 2,100 in 2000/01, with a concomitant increase in the number of teachers employed. The picture may change considerably if recently submitted recommendations to create a dedicated Gaelic television channel bear fruit; preliminary estimates suggest that the number of jobs sustained by the Gaelic media would rise from 316 FTE to 802 FTE if such a channel were established (Gaelic Broadcasting Task Force 2000, Appendix C). However, experience up to now suggests that

many of these new media jobs would not actually involve the communicative use of the Gaelic language; and it is certainly questionable in terms of language policy whether diverting a large number of young, educated Gaelic speakers into such new media-related jobs would be a wise use of a very limited human resource.

Critically, Gaelic-related employment is almost entirely a creature of public funding. It would be difficult to identify a single job requiring the use of Gaelic that would exist in the absence of an ongoing government subsidy — usually a 100% subsidy. To date there is no significant evidence of Gaelic use expanding into the sector of genuine private enterprise, and there has been no significant initiative to bring about such diffusion and expansion into the economic mainstream. The apparent absence of any such expansion suggests that the existing Gaelic sector is fragile, unreliable, and confined to the peripheries of the economy — thus tending to undercut the argument that the emergence of this new sector has created powerful new incentives or given significant impetus towards changing language-use patterns. While Gaelic continues to be used to a substantial extent in certain community-level economic activities like crofting and the Harris tweed industry, the language still has only a very slight and marginal role in other kinds of workplaces (Euromosaic 1995).

The development of the Gaelic economy has generally been uncoordinated, for both structural and policy reasons. No one institution has effective control over the strategic development of the Gaelic economy. At the core are Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the regional development authority, together with its subsidiary local enterprise companies like Western Isles Enterprise and Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise, and Comunn na Gàidhlig, the central Gaelic development agency, which is funded by HIE. Yet these entities have no control over the largest employment sectors within the Gaelic economy: education, which is managed by local or central educational authorities, and broadcasting, which is controlled by public- and private-sector broadcasting companies and the government-funded Comataidh Craolaidh Gàidhlig//Gaelic Broadcasting Committee. This lack of central control is also apparent at the political level: pursuant to the recent devolution legislation, matters relating to local government, regional economic development, and education are now under the control of the Scottish Parliament, while broadcasting remains a matter reserved to Westminster. Recent proposals to subsume the existing Gaelic development

organizations under a single Gaelic Development Agency (Taskforce on Public Funding of Gaelic 2000) might allow for more coordinated development, but education and broadcasting will remain outside its control.

Economic development agencies continue to think in terms of the Gaelic economy as a sector in the broader regional economy of the Highlands and Islands, rather than a regional economy in which the use of the Gaelic language to carry out business and deliver services should become a normal and central feature. For example, it is striking that the local authorities and planning agencies have never endeavoured to put schemes in place to require local companies to use Gaelic in their operations — requirements that are common in other jurisdictions, like Québec or Catalonia, that are working to secure a threatened language. Nor have there been significant programmes to assist companies to do so on a voluntary or informal basis. There have never even been proposals to attach language-related conditions to grants of financial assistance — for example, that companies would agree to implement Gaelic-language schemes or meet appropriate language-related targets as a condition of a grant or loan.

At least two explanations can be posited for the failure to adopt such approaches. These explanations are distinctly different in nature and it is difficult to determine which has had the stronger actual influence. First, economic development agencies have functioned, and continue to function, within an overwhelmingly monolingual mindset and ethos — the mainstream mindset of Scotland and the wider UK. To a considerable extent, proposals to strengthen the place of Gaelic in economic life have not been formulated or implemented because the idea simply has not occurred to most development agency personnel. With few exceptions, they have not seen language development as relevant to their goal of regional economic development, and the question of Gaelic-language maintenance is a topic that rarely registers on the radar screen. Indeed, the strength of the monolingual mindset is such that some economic development personnel might well view as essentially illegitimate the notion that development strategies should work to change the basic language-use patterns of the region.

Second, there has been a persistent, albeit usually implicit, tendency to view Gaelic as an actual or potential brake on regional economic development. In a less enlightened era — one that probably lasted into the 1980s — the continuing use of the Gaelic language was generally considered to be one of the factors that had held the Highlands and Hebrides back and kept the region

out of the economic mainstream. Bringing the Highlands and Hebrides into that mainstream — what was then understood as 'modernization' — required, among other things, emphasis on the English language (Sproull 1996, p.98). In more recent years, such crude interpretations have fallen out of favour, and economic development agencies might be more inclined to highlight the persistent difficulties of attracting inward investment into the region, given its peripherality and other disadvantages, and to view potential language-related conditions to financial aid as something that might deter inward investment. Such attitudes have also been evident in Wales and in Fryslân (Aitchison & Carter 2000, p.138; Williams 2000, p.362; van Langevelde 1999, pp.125-26).

THE GAELIC ECONOMY: CONCEPTUAL PROBLEMS

Analysis of the Gaelic economy and the strategies by which it has been developed raises a number of crucial conceptual difficulties. The same basic problem arises repeatedly, however: existing strategies have given inadequate attention to the linguistic dimension and have instead privileged interpretations and approaches that emphasize linguistic appearances over linguistic substance.

A crucial initial question is the definition of the term 'Gaelic economy'. From the standpoint of language policy and planning, many of the difficulties that have arisen with the growth of the Gaelic economy can be traced to the adoption of a definition or working understanding that gives limited attention to linguistic matters, or treats the question of language use as secondary or even coincidental. This has led to the 'sectoral' approach, where what counts is the production or provision of 'Gaelic' goods and services, and the use of the Gaelic language in general economic life receives little or no attention.

The leading scholar in the field — co-author of the key reports (Sproull and Ashcroft 1993; Sproull and Chalmers 1998) upon which Gaelic organizations and development bodies rely heavily in seeking to demonstrate the success of the Gaelic economy — explains the prevailing approach as follows:

> The phrase 'Gaelic economy' has occasionally been used, without definition, in the debate on factors shaping rural development in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. From the standpoint of macroeconomics, it makes little sense to define such an economy in

> terms of the acts of production and exchange that are conducted through the medium of Gaelic … Taken to its extreme, the adoption of this approach would imply that if someone made a purchase in a local store and the transaction was conducted in Gaelic it would count as part of the 'Gaelic economy', yet if the next customer purchased the same item through the medium of English it would be part of the 'English' economy. The Gaelic economy cannot, therefore, be meaningfully defined in terms of the language of transaction.
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> The same problems emerge in any macroeconomic definition of the 'Gaelic economy' that focuses on the linguistic competence of the producers of goods and services. Examining only jobs in which Gaelic competence is required or desirable will fail to pick up some activities that are totally concerned with the production of Gaelic products or services, yet some or all employees of which may have no Gaelic. In the same way, it will include activities that could not be described as the provision of Gaelic-related goods and services, yet the employees of which may speak Gaelic and the language be useful in the conduct of business.
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> If the extent of the Gaelic economy is defined in terms of the provision of Gaelic goods and services then the 'economy' becomes analogous to a Gaelic 'industry' and would encompass
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> 1. the consumers of Gaelic services;
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> 2. the providers of Gaelic services.
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> …
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> In general terms, the supply-side of the Gaelic economy could be defined as 'all those activities (and jobs) whose principal purpose is the provision of Gaelic-related goods and services, including the promotion of the Gaelic culture and language'. It is likely that for persons holding jobs associated with these activities, Gaelic proficiency will be either essential or desirable, although it need not be so.
> (Sproull 1996, p.99; see also Sproull & Ashcroft 1993, pp.4-6))

If the matter is considered from the standpoint of language planning, in which the key goal is community language maintenance and the key task is

the expansion of Gaelic use in employment and other areas of economic activity, then what is required is an approach almost diametrically opposite to that proposed by Sproull. From this standpoint, the central question — indeed the only question — is the language used by economic actors. Activities and transactions carried out through the medium of Gaelic, even when their substance has nothing to do with 'Gaelic culture', are part of the solution. Activities and transactions carried out through the medium of English, even when closely connected to 'Gaelic culture', are part of the problem.

Under Sproull's interpretation, the Gaelic economy benefits when a record shop situated in an entirely English-speaking town and staffed entirely by English monoglots sells a CD of Gaelic songs to a foreign tourist who speaks no Gaelic. Conversely, it is entirely irrelevant to the Gaelic economy if the only shop in a Gaelic-speaking crofting township is sold by an owner whose first and preferred language is Gaelic to an incomer who speaks no Gaelic, thereby ensuring that English will become dominant in an important setting where it was previously marginal. Sales of 'Gaelic' books and CDs over the Internet to customers on the other side of the world are quantified as contributions to the Gaelic economy; the use of Gaelic in routine retail transactions within the Gaelic-speaking areas is not quantified in economic terms, and its linguistic importance is not considered at all.

As discussed above, HIE and other development agencies conceptualize Gaelic as a sector, a realm of economic activity comparable to other sectors in the regional economy like fish-farming or agriculture. Like other sectors of the regional economy, the Gaelic sector is seen as a field fertilized by public subsidy that yields or sustains a certain number of jobs in the region. And just as other sectors of the regional economy are expected to emphasize external markets, so too should Gaelic reach out to a wider audience or customer base. This outward orientation is surely problematic if the key task as understood as that of community language maintenance.

There is, however, a vague assumption, rarely worked through or stated explicitly, that selling Gaelic books over the Internet to customers in distant non-Gaelic-speaking areas, or indeed setting up Gaelic Internet sites in the first place and thereby increasing the Gaelic content on the Internet as a whole, somehow works to strengthen the language by 'raising its profile'. While it is certainly true that such activities should marginally increase the revenues of Gaelic publishers and web-page designers, and with it boost their ability to employ staff, it is difficult to accept that such small steps can make

a significant contribution to altering powerful and long-established language-use patterns.

The Gaelic aspect of 'cultural tourism' has often been identified as a particularly important growth area within the Gaelic economy (e.g. Pedersen 2000, pp.159-66), but the problem of the outward orientation is very clear here, for the great majority of the 'cultural tourists', i.e. the customers, do not speak or understand Gaelic. To be successful in financial terms, events or services in the 'Gaelic' cultural tourist sector must therefore be conducted in English for the benefit of the customer. Significantly, the economic planning officer Roy Pedersen differentiates between 'internal Gaelic tourism', in which the Gaelic language may actually be used as the medium for the delivery of tourist services, and the more significant 'volume market', in which the role of Gaelic will be minimal (Pedersen 2000, p.161).

For example, the prevailing arrangement for musical performances is that Gaelic songs are sung in Gaelic, but all introductions and presentations, indeed everything but the songs themselves, are given in English for the benefit of the customers, to whom the Gaelic lyrics remain opaque. Similarly, research suggests that tourists show a slight preference for accommodation where Gaelic is spoken by the owners or staff (Comunn na Gàidhlig 1999, p.19), but if the tourists do not understand Gaelic themselves, any use of Gaelic by staff will tend to be in the nature of performance.[1] In short, it is difficult to see how the expansion of Gaelic 'cultural tourism' can lead to an increased use of Gaelic at community level.

This problem leads to another important difficulty with the prevailing understanding of the Gaelic economy. Gaelic-related goods and services do not necessarily involve the communicative use of the Gaelic language by anybody. The standard phrase used to elide this difficulty is 'Gaelic language and culture', with the second term serving to bring in a wide range of activities where the Gaelic language is not actually used. For example, all but one of the Fèisean, youth festivals of Gaelic music that have proliferated in

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[1]*The attractiveness of such Gaelic-as-performance may be linked to romantic stereotypes of Gaelic as a 'soft' or 'beautiful' language. While playing to such stereotypes may conceivably build a base of mild support for Gaelic among the wider population, it is unlikely to be helpful in advancing concrete policies to increase actual Gaelic language use.*

recent years, are conducted through the medium of English, while the one Fèis that operates through Gaelic has struggled to attract enough participants (Galloway 1995, pp.305-08; Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul 2000). Again, the commercialization of 'Gaelic culture', delivered through the medium of English, is unlikely to lead to increased actual use of the Gaelic language.

The dynamics of cultural tourism may be emblematic of more wide-ranging strategic problems. As discussed above, the existing Gaelic economy is almost entirely dependent on public subsidy; in the case of Gaelic cultural tourism, expansion to the mainstream, subsidy-free sector requires diluting or eliminating the Gaelic-language content. Yet one vision for the future of the 'Gaelic economy' foresees an imminent spread to the for-profit, subsidy-free sector over time through the normal operation of the market:

> There will be increasing marketing advantage and scope for a wide spectrum of normal commercial operators to adopt a Gaelic face … By thus reflecting Gaelic's growing status, such firms stand in time to gain market advantage, and in the process, other aspects of Gaelic development will be reinforced.
> (Pedersen 1995, p.6; Pedersen 2000, p.159)

To date there appears to be very little evidence of such a spread, however, unless one includes examples like whisky distillers using the occasional Gaelic word in their advertising. The key problems are the nature of this purported marketing advantage and the nature of this 'Gaelic face'. To whom is this marketing to be targeted? If to Gaelic speakers, the size of the customer base is problematically small: some 65,000 individuals in total, representing just 1.35% of the Scottish population, of whom just 40,000 reside in the Highlands and Hebrides (representing some 13.5% of the regional population). Perhaps equally important, Gaelic speakers are generally unaccustomed to doing business through the medium of Gaelic and there may thus be a significant degree of customer resistance even within this small potential base.

The dominant view, one that reflects the dominant 'outward orientation', is that the target audience for Gaelic marketing is the general population — which has little or no knowledge of Gaelic. A Gaelic face may therefore be nothing more than an external image projected for public display, and it may well be that Gaelic is not actually used within the enterprise (Cox 1998). The frustratingly vague concept of 'raising the profile' of Gaelic has become a

leitmotif in the rhetoric of Gaelic development strategy, but it is very difficult to see how the sporadic use of Gaelic words or phrases in advertisements can lead to significant changes in language-use patterns when the target audience of these advertisements does not understand the language.

Finally, the pervasive inattention to the central question of language use patterns is also apparent in the methodology used to calculate the number of 'Gaelic' jobs created. Researchers have taken a zero-sum view and endeavoured to avoid what they perceive as double-counting of jobs. Thus the number of Gaelic jobs identified does not include jobs 'which have a Gaelic dimension but would still exist in the absence of the Gaelic dimension, e.g. teaching in the medium of Gaelic would be replaced by teaching in the medium of English' (Sproull & Ashcroft 1993, p.11). While this approach may be understandable in economic terms, it makes little sense from the standpoint of language development. If a primary school with a steady pupil roll goes from 100% English-medium to 60% Gaelic-medium, with a concomitant change in the proportion of Gaelic-medium teachers, the linguistic change is highly significant, especially in a small community served by this one school. It is also important that the absolute increase in the number of Gaelic-medium jobs in such a situation will tend to create incentives for the acquisition of Gaelic. Yet a change of this kind would not be counted under the prevailing methodology as the number of teaching posts in the school would remain unaltered.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT STRATEGY

This conceptualization of the Gaelic economy has had a significant impact upon perceptions of the language. Gaelic is understood as sustaining a certain number of jobs, indeed 'career opportunities', and the ability to speak Gaelic is seen, to that extent, as a marketable skill. The decision to expend public funds on projects and organizations that create these jobs can be seen as a language policy of an indirect kind, helping to change established attitudes in which Gaelic is perceived as having little or no practical value, and creating incentives for young people to learn Gaelic or improve their level of competence. This strategy is rarely articulated or developed in a more integrated or systematic way, however; analysis does not proceed beyond superficial, summary statements. Still less have planners considered the risk that an overly instrumental attitude towards Gaelic may not create secure conditions for language maintenance; a range of sociolinguistic evidence

suggests that revitalization efforts tend to be less successful when a language is viewed as 'a series of characters for communication, rather than as the matrix of a culture' (Aitchison and Carter 2000, p.87). As the Gaelic journalist Tormod Caimbeul writes, 'what was a family culture may soon become only a career option or a marketing tool' (Caimbeul 2000, p.65). There is also a risk of breeding cynicism towards the language within the Gaelic community, which has long been a problem in the Irish Gaeltacht (officially designated Irish-speaking area), where various financial incentives have been attached to purported language ability and the system has suffered from perceptions of manipulation and abuse (Hindley 1990; Hindley 1991).

Relatively little effort has been made to assess or quantify the putative connection between creating Gaelic employment and desired changes in attitudes towards Gaelic and, more important, in actual language-use patterns based on institutional change (but see Sproull and Ashcroft, 1993; Sproull and Chambers, 1998). Research conducted in the Western Isles, Skye, and Tiree in 1992 showed that 82% of surveyed secondary school pupils and 78% of surveyed small business-people answered affirmatively to the question 'do you feel that Gaelic language proficiency offers individuals any economic advantages?' (Sproull and Ashcroft 1993, pp.61-63; Sproull 1996, pp.114-15). Unfortunately, there is no evidence to indicate the magnitude and intensity of these perceived advantages, or to show that young people are basing personal decisions on the existence of Gaelic-related career opportunities (by, for example, opting to study Gaelic rather than a Continental European language).

At the same time, other research suggests that Gaelic speakers continue to view Gaelic as having limited economic utility. In the Euromosaic survey of 1994/95, only 27.5% of the surveyed Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles agreed that 'speaking Gaelic helps people get promotion in their jobs', and only 24% disagreed with the proposition that 'to get on there are more valuable languages than Gaelic' (MacKinnon 2000b, pp.3-4). These views can be taken as evidence of the tenacity of old attitudes despite a changing employment situation; but they can also be understood as a realistic assessment of Gaelic's continuing exclusion from the economic mainstream.

Perhaps the most fundamental problem with the rhetoric of the Gaelic economy is that it has created an expectation within the Highlands and Hebrides that Gaelic can provide direct payoffs in the form of employment opportunities, and that language development initiatives should be assessed

primarily in terms of their economic impact and only secondarily in terms of their linguistic impact. It has now become normal in media and political discussions of Gaelic initiatives to emphasize their value in economic and employment terms to the exclusion of almost all else. This is a dangerous approach, for many of the necessary projects for language development cannot and will not produce direct economic benefits. More important, initiatives to move from using English to using Gaelic in particular areas of economic life will inevitably involve increased expenditure, at least in the short term — a consequence that should be justified and explained, not sidestepped or papered over. Even more dangerous is the idea that Gaelic development should serve as a kind of job-creation scheme — an approach that will inevitably breed cynicism and tokenism. Some local politicians seem to have taken this view to an extreme, treating Gaelic as a sort of North Sea oil in reverse: a resource that will not last forever, given existing use patterns, but can be used to justify pumping in development money until it does.

Connecting language development to economic development is an important but sensitive task, for the two objectives are by no means identical. In accordance with the familiar Irish formula 'no jobs, no people; no people, no Gaeltacht' (Williams 1988, p.279), it is often suggested that strengthening the economy in the Western Isles and, in particular, reversing population decline is a necessary precondition for the revitalization of Gaelic. Yet the possibility exists that such changes may not serve to slow down the process of language shift, and may indeed accelerate it. The economy of the Western Isles can be developed in such a way that Gaelic does not benefit at all, indeed in ways that do actual harm to the position of the language. For example, the 'industrialization' of the Irish Gaeltacht in the 1970s appears to have accelerated the process of shift from Irish to English as some new enterprises imported key non-Irish speaking personnel and promoted the use of English in the workplace (Ó Cinnéide, Keane & Cawley 1985). The economic growth of the 1970s and the nationwide boom in Ireland in the late 1990s also served to bring about an influx of return migrants into Gaeltacht communities, often accompanied by English-monoglot spouses and children — another factor tending to promote language shift in the communities affected (Ó Cinnéide, Keane & Cawley 1985; Hindley 1991; Hijmans 2000). Unless economic development programmes and strategies are designed with an explicit language-planning component, there is a real risk of undermining the language traditionally marginalized from economic activity.

This risk is especially strong when the weaker language is in manifest decline at a more general level, as is clearly the case with Gaelic even in the strongest areas of the Western Isles. The existing dynamic in the Western Isles is one in which Gaelic has been traditionally marginalized in economic life and intergenerational transmission of the language is rapidly breaking down. Unless economic development endeavours to reverse both aspects of this dynamic, it will do nothing to stop them. Conversely, 'ordinary' economic development that maintains the existing language dynamic means that language shift will continue. Without an explicit language-planning dimension, then, economic development will do nothing to alter existing patterns by which Gaelic continues to decline, and indeed may give added strength to the forces causing that decline.[1]

None of this is to say that development programmes that strengthen the local economy should not be adopted. Such programmes may well be justified by other criteria and may well command strong political support within the community. The point is that trade-offs may have to be made, and that economic development may come at a linguistic price. That may be the democratic choice of the affected community, and the argument that language shift may involve an element of free choice cannot be simply dismissed out of hand (Constantinidou 1994). What is clear is that a simplistic equation of economic and linguistic development is unacceptable and unworkable. The Western Isles is not a securely Gaelic-speaking area and the Gaelic language is not secure within its economic life. 'Mainstream' economic development — that is, economic development that is not accompanied by explicit language planning — will not, in and of itself, secure the position of Gaelic, and it may well add to its insecurity. If language development and economic development are to be successfully combined, increased sensitivity to the linguistic dimension is required.

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[1]*The 'industrialization' of the Isle of Lewis in the 1970s as a result of the opening of the Arnish oil fabrication yard appears not to have had such a negative linguistic impact, largely because the bulk of the workforce lived in rural communities where Gaelic use remained very high, and because workers returning to the island to take jobs at the yard showed unusually strong Gaelic language loyalty (Prattis 1990). However, the last 25 years have seen a marked advance in the English-Gaelic language shift in Lewis, including the western villages where Gaelic maintenance was previously solid: the need for proactive language policy is now significantly greater.*

A FUTURE COURSE

Development strategies up to now have failed to give sufficient attention to the use of Gaelic within the mainstream of the economy in the Highlands and Hebrides. The Gaelic 'sector' has been marginal, and even within this sector the prevailing conceptual approaches have meant that insufficient attention has been paid to the question of actual Gaelic language use in economic life. To change this situation, a range of basic policy changes is required (cf. James 1991).

One crucial first step would be to introduce meaningful schemes to bring about the use of Gaelic as a working language within local authorities and other public agencies, including the economic development agencies. Such action is important not only because these entities can send a political signal to other economic actors and to the community more generally, or because coordinated initiatives are more viable in the public sector than in the more disparate private sector, but also because of the sheer economic importance of these entities within the overall regional economy. For example, the local authority for the Western Isles, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, is by far the largest employer in the Western Isles and its direct and indirect economic role in the economic life of the islands is central.

It is disturbing that such basic steps have not yet been taken, and it is particularly striking that despite the rhetoric of the 'Gaelic economy', the economic development agencies have up to now failed to take significant steps to use Gaelic within their own operations. Indeed, in some cases, the most minimal measures have not been taken: for example, Western Isles Enterprise, which serves an area that was 66% Gaelic-speaking at the last census, has never even published its annual report in bilingual format.

Equally striking has been the failure of the local authorities, most notably Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Comhairle nan Eilean from 1974-97) and Highland Council, to design and implement policies to introduce Gaelic as the language of work within council operations. The position of Comhairle nan Eilean (Siar) is particularly remarkable, especially when compared to local authorities in west Wales where the Welsh language is strongest. At the time of local government reorganization in 1974, the proportion of Gaelic speakers in the Comhairle nan Eilean area (i.e. the Western Isles) was higher

than the proportion of Welsh speakers in any local authority area in Wales. The same was true in 1991, at the time of the last census.[1] Since 1974, however, the strongly Welsh-speaking areas have taken very significant steps towards institutionalising bilingualism, while Comhairle nan Eilean (Siar) has done very little by comparison. The council did adopt a bilingual policy in 1975 (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar 1996), but this might be described as 'non-operational' or 'partly operational' (cf. Williams and Morris 2000, p.146); no targets have been set or met, no programmes have been brought in to implement the policy into effect at a micro-level (see Galloway 1995, pp.194-96). It has been suggested that the policy was agreed to by the council at a particularly favourable moment of goodwill towards Gaelic and that the failure meaningfully to implement the policy in subsequent years has resulted from a lack of support within the council that reflects the more normal political situation. Similarly, Highland Council/Highland Regional Council had no Gaelic policy at all between 1974 and 1998, and the Development Strategy adopted in 1998 (Comhairle na Gaidhealtachd 1998), although a significant improvement on nothing at all, contains no meaningful provisions whatsoever about introducing Gaelic as a working language within council operations or ensuring that constituents can receive services through the medium of Gaelic.

It must be understood that implementing such proactive language policies might involve significant political controversy. For example, it is absolutely inevitable that more and more jobs would have to be designated as 'Gaelic-essential', which would mean excluding a non-negligible proportion of the local labour pool, including people born and bred in the area. Even policies requiring existing employees to learn Gaelic or upgrade their Gaelic skills might not be popular with each and every affected individual. Yet it must be accepted that the process of reversing language shift requires changes,

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[1] *In 1971 the Western Isles was 76.82% Gaelic-speaking and the highest figure for any Welsh county was 73.5% (in Merioneth). In 1991 the Western Isles was 66.03% Gaelic-speaking and the highest figure for any Welsh local authority was 61% (in Gwynedd) (General Register Office Scotland/Àrd Oifis Clàraidh Alba 1994; Aitchison and Carter 2000: 51, 90). The Welsh authorities cover considerably larger absolute populations, but this factor is of limited significance.*

perhaps even wrenching changes, and this reality should be dealt with honestly.

Second, the economic development agencies should introduce appropriate schemes to attach meaningful linguistic conditions to their awards of financial assistance. This may require formal changes, perhaps even at a statutory level, to ensure that initiatives of this kind are recognized as falling within the legitimate scope of the agencies' remit and authority. Such schemes need not be inherently coercive, however, and ways should be sought find steps that are appropriate and realistic for particular enterprises and particular areas. The relative vigour of such measures should be tailored to reflect the density of Gaelic speakers in the local community (so that, for example, more would be expected in Skye than in Inverness). The goal should be to increase both the use of Gaelic by employees in their ordinary work tasks and the use of Gaelic with customers. Sooner or later, however, increased numbers of jobs would have to be designated as 'Gaelic-essential', with the attendant political difficulties noted above. Again, such economic and political costs cannot be avoided if a reversal of language shift is to be achieved.[1]

Third, increasing the use of Gaelic in general economic life must become a central task of the Gaelic development agencies, and explicit targets should be put in place to bring this about. For example, the Welsh Language Board's recently published **Vision and Mission for 2000-2005** specifies that, by 2005, the Board intends to ensure that 100 national companies and 100 local companies have a member of staff responsible for increasing the company's use of Welsh (Welsh Language Board 2000, Target 3). The numbers might have to be different in Scotland, given the weaker demographic situation, as might the degree to which increased Gaelic use is feasible, but the principle is a sound one. Also eminently appropriate for Scotland is the Board's more immediate proposal to conduct a comprehensive survey of the use of Welsh in the workplace 'to assess the most effective modes of stimulating activity in this field, and to have produced an actionable set of targets for an increase in such use' (Welsh Language Board 2000, Target 5). Little is known about the

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[1]*Note that these costs do not include potential legal difficulties. While the Race Relations Act 1976 is often mentioned – by non-lawyers – as an obstacle to Gaelic-language requirements in employment, employers in fact retain very broad leeway in such matters and the legal difficulties are insubstantial (McLeod 1998).*

actual situation in Scotland, and no programmatic strategy of this kind has ever been put in place.

Finally, much closer attention must be paid to the question of Gaelic use within the Gaelic 'sector' itself. It can by no means be assumed that Gaelic is used as the working language within entities or projects that receive public funding for the purpose of Gaelic development. For example, Gaelic television production has become notorious as a sort of 'Potemkin village' in which most behind-the-scenes personnel operate entirely through the medium of English. Such a linguistic dynamic is not only unacceptable on its face when public funding is dedicated to the purpose of Gaelic development, but also risks breeding cynicism towards the language.

CONCLUSION

Assessment of Gaelic development in recent years is to some extent a matter of perspective. The rate of improvement has been rapid, but only because the starting point was so low – to all intents and purposes zero. On the other hand, the level of policy provision and success remains palpably insufficient. Thus, for example, the number of children enrolled in Gaelic-medium education has risen impressively, from zero to over 2,000 in the last fifteen years; but this 2,000 level remains less than one-fifth of what is needed simply to maintain the Gaelic-speaking population at its present, dangerously low level (MacKinnon 2000a, p.146).

The same dynamic is apparent with regard to the development of the Gaelic economy. Significant successes have been achieved, and the role of Gaelic is now recognized as a small but important factor in the regional economy. Yet Gaelic remains confined to the peripheries, excluded from the higher-level functions of the mainstream economy. The most problematic aspect of this situation is that it constitutes the intended outcome of existing policies, not the failure of these policies. The Gaelic economy has been conceptualized and developed in such a way as to minimize the linguistic dimension — the actual use of the Gaelic language — which is a most unsatisfactory approach to language development.

In the future, a targeted strategy for the development of Gaelic in economic life is required. Much can be learned from the Welsh experience, including the success of the Menter a Busnes (Business and Enterprise) scheme

(Williams 2000, pp.364-65). In light of international experience and the brutal reality of ongoing language shift, however, the simplistic view that economic development of the traditional Gaelic areas necessarily leads to the strengthening of the Gaelic language must be transcended. Economic development policy and language development policy must be integrated in such a way as to ensure that both economic and linguistic outcomes are achieved.

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