

# The monolingual habitus of German society challenging the interests of an autochthonous minority language: Linguistic landscapes in the Sorbian “capital” of Bautzen / Budyšin

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*This paper analyzes the LL in the city of Bautzen / Budyšin in Germany, a town which is frequently considered the “capital” of the Slavonic minority of the Sorbs. It focuses on the societal role of Sorbian in relation to practices and ideologies of mainstream German society. The vast majority of signs in Bautzen / Budyšin are in German only. Sorbian is essentially restricted to explicitly Sorbian institutions and to local and regional administration. Interviews conducted in shops and on the streets reveal that paternalistic attitudes common to perceptions of language policies and minority languages in Germany dominate; practices maintain the common monolingual habitus in German society. Members of the majority population show little awareness of Sorbian issues, and Sorbian signage is seen as a generous gesture but considered essentially unnecessary. Only in most recent times, a reaction by the Sorbian community has challenged these practices and attitudes.*

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, minority languages, language attitudes, Sorbian, German

## 1 Aims of the paper

This paper discusses language policies and ideologies in the Linguistic Landscape (LL) of the city of Budyšin / Bautzen with regard to the presence and functions of the Upper Sorbian language, a small Slavonic language spoken by an autochthonous minority in the area. Bautzen lies in the region of Upper Lusatia in the Federal State of Saxony in South-Eastern Germany and is one of the two main centres of Sorbian culture. The paper enquires how Sorbian is used for both symbolic and functional purposes (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009, p. 1) in the city’s LL and aims at understanding the relative status of Upper Sorbian in local society, in particular vis-à-vis German as the majority language, and at investigating dominant German attitudes towards the Sorbian language. The paper in this sense contextualizes the role of Sorbian and tries to contribute to understanding language ideologies and language policies in Germany at large, in particular with

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regard to the monolingual habitus assigned to large parts of German society (cf. Ellis, Gogolin, & Clyne, 2010; Gogolin, 2008). It thereby adds to existing studies which investigate the prevalent monolingual norm in German society, for instance with regard to immigrant languages (e.g. Scarvaglieri & Zech, 2013), and provides further evidence to Davies' (2012, p. 59) observations on languages in Germany that "multilingualism remains at the periphery of many people's awareness". Davies culminates his notes on Germany in the quotation of German linguist Gauger, who claimed in an online discussion that "we [Germans] are very lucky compared to our neighbours because we don't have any old minorities", adding to his comment "(yes, I know, the Sorbs...)" (Gauger, 2008, as cited in Davies, 2012, p. 59). Even if his argument was meant to stress the fact that there is one language shared by all members of the German society, he was thereby explicitly disregarding the importance of the Sorbs and the Sorbian language for German society.

Even though the proportion of Sorbian speakers is much higher in a number of surrounding villages, Budyšin was chosen as the area of research because of its symbolic function as the 'unofficial capital' of the Upper Sorbian area, the highest concentration of Sorbian institutions, and the largest total number of public signage. The paper provides data from a region and a minority language which have until the present day not been examined from an LL perspective. Thereby it wishes to shed light on a specific aspect of Sorbian language policies and their consequences for the status of the language in society seen in the context of research on minority languages in the LL all over the world. The paper also complements research conducted by Giese (2013) on Lower Sorbian in the city of Cottbus / Chóšebuz in the neighbouring Federal State of Brandenburg.

In terms of methodology, our research draws upon the tradition of qualitative rather than quantitative (or distributive) LL research (cf. Gorter, 2013, also Barni & Bagna, 2015, on the development of research under the umbrella of the LL approach), i.e. it does not operate with statistics but provides a picture of the contexts and functions in which Sorbian can be found on signs in public. It thereby follows the tradition of LL research as discussed e.g. by Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) who argue that

the degree of prominence of a language in a particular site is not necessarily the most accurate indicator of the ethnolinguistic vitality of its speakers. Rather, the presence or absence of a language on public signage, in combination with the type (or genre) of signs, their contents and style, are indicative of public and private language ideologies. (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, pp. 10–11)

The paper analyzes the behaviour, motivation and perceptions of authors and recipients of Sorbian signs in the LL or the lack thereof identified through observations and interviews on the streets of Bautzen as well as semi-structured interviews with representatives of Sorbian institutions. In this sense, the paper takes up notions discussed in LL research in other contexts, e.g. what the presence of Sorbian in the LL implies for ownership of public space, for the contestation of this space, how ideologies about languages are performed and negotiated in minority contexts (cf. Moriarty, 2012; Szabó Gilinger, Sloboda, Simičić, & Vigers, 2012), and the implications of (overt and covert) language policies for the position of a minority language in the LL (e.g. Puzey, 2012, on Italy, Norway and Scotland; Blackwood & Tufi, 2012, on France and Italy; or Marten, 2012, on Latvia).

In addition, the paper relates research in the physical space of Bautzen to findings in the Web LL (cf. Yanaprasart, Choremi, & Gander, 2013, on the importance of institutional web sites for language diversity). Our research includes an analysis of the presence and functions of languages on web sites connected to institutions where we identified Sorbian signs. These web sites have a clear communicative direction rather than an interactive purpose (cf. Ivković & Lotherington, 2009, on both functional and symbolic aspects of language use in virtual space).

In total, our study thereby incorporates many of the elements labelled “ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis” or “ELLA” (Blommaert & Maly, 2014) and offers a connection between different levels of data collection, observations and interviews from both physical and virtual space which provides a thorough picture of symbolic and practical functions of Sorbian as well as policies and ideologies underlying them.

## 2 Theoretical and methodological framework

### 2.1 LL studies, language policies and ideologies

Central for this paper is the visibility of language policies and ideologies in the LL. Shohamy (2015, p. 156) reflects on the relation between language policies and LL studies and the importance of the latter for understanding language policies which are in place in a specific area. LL is, beside laws, educational policies, language tests and others, one of the “specific devices through which language policies are made and introduced, implicitly and/or explicitly” (ibid., p. 156). In the contemporary understanding of language policies, both top-down policies, e.g. by national and local governments, and bottom-up policies and practices by local communities are included. The existing language use – of which the LL is an important part – is, in this sense, the result of “negotiations among top-down and bottom-up agents to determine LPs which are appropriate for specific contexts” (ibid., p. 156). Language in public space is one mechanism of language policies which shapes language practices and is fed by ideologies. Shohamy (2015, p. 160) summarizes a study on language policy and the LL by arguing that LL research can point “to the de facto LP in public spaces; (...) these patterns are not the same as language practices”. She further argues (Shohamy, 2015, p. 168) that “LL research can contribute to the field of LP, given that LL is considered one mechanism of LP.” At the same time, the LL also reflects policies – there is a reciprocal relationship in that LL reflects LP from other domains/mechanisms and at the same time shapes LP. This can be seen less on the (national) macro level, but in smaller units including cities, where LP research “is moving in the same direction of negotiating LP in smaller units, in negotiations of contestations about LP and about involvement of the people in formulating policies” (Shohamy, 2015, p. 169). The interplay of top-down and bottom-up policies is reflected in the “rich repertoire of LL which exist both by authoritative groups and by the communities: the first have the legitimacy to transform the city as they wish; while local communities and individuals have limited legitimacy but nevertheless there are multiple unconventional types of devices to manifest their protests” (Shohamy, 2015, p. 162).

In the context of language policies and ideologies with regard to minority languages, the paper stands in the tradition of minority language LL studies as collected in Gorter, Marten and Van Mensel (2012), in particular with the notion that “the visibility of a minority language in this view signals ownership or at least co-existence in a place” (Marten, Van Mensel, & Gorter, 2012, p. 7). Minority languages and their speakers are of particular interest for LL research since they are “more often than not less valued compared to languages, and their speakers who enjoy more powerful and prestigious positions. Such a dynamic will predictably lead to contestation” (Blackwood, Lanza, & Woldemariam, 2016, p. xviii).

Blackwood and Tufi (2012) argue in their contrastive analysis of regional and minority languages in Italy and France that both the presence of explicit policies which favour a national language (as in France) as well as “non-policies”, i.e. the lack of such may have similar detrimental influences on the presence of small languages. In the German context, there is a lack of overt language policies (with the exception of some provision for minority languages) – yet, society is largely dominated by a monolingual habitus (see below). It has been part of our research interest to understand what implications this has for the presence of Sorbian in the LL and how it interacts with ideologies of monolingualism.

The connection between language policies, ideologies and the LL in a minority context are further exemplified by Hornsby and Vigers (2012). In the context of language policies towards Welsh in Wales and Gaelic in Scotland and drawing on Myhill (1999), they establish a list of categories of ideologies which can be reflected in the LL. First, in the ideology of language and identity paradigm, the use of a variety in the LL signals the connection between the language and their users which may gain an increase in confidence when their variety is used in the LL. Second, the ideology of language and territory establishes a link between a variety and a region, similar to notions of claiming or contesting space (cf. Gorter on LL in the Basque Country) or of negotiating power relations between different languages and their speakers coexisting in the same space. The concept of language and economy, third, relates in the minority LL context in particular to the commodification of a language and its touristic value. Finally, an “ideology of contempt” may be seen when a language is used in a less dominant way – in the context of Welsh, Hornsby and Vigers (2012, pp. 69–71) provide examples of the non-standard use of Welsh in the LL which points at a lack of care. In addition, one might argue, also the absence of a variety in the LL may demonstrate a high level of contempt towards that variety. We will get back to the ideologies of language and identity, language and territory, language and economy, and ideology of contempt when discussing the findings from our research on Sorbian.

## *2.2 Discourses and ideologies on languages and the LL in Germany*

Germany is a classical nation state in the sense that language and culture have been considered the foundation of the state. In 1871, when the modern German Empire was founded, it was based on the attempt to unite all German-speaking territories with the exception of Austria and German-speaking Switzerland – a demand that nationalist movements had fought for throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In line with nationalist revivals in many other parts of Europe, the new state considered a homogenous language situation as the norm. This ideology survived the abdication of the monarchy and the terror of the Nazi regime, and even if the short-lived Weimar Republic (1919–1933) and, since 1949, the Federal

Republic of Germany have defined themselves as liberal, pluricentric democracies, the hegemony of the German language has never been seriously questioned. This ideology has been challenged only recently when the arrival of larger numbers of ethnic non-German migrants since the 1960s – with a delay of several decades – has led to political demands towards more respect of multilingualism as one of the means in increasing societal integration of ethnic non-Germans. Yet, even today, monolingual ideologies which prevent other languages from gaining space in society continue to prevail.

The linguistic composition of German society today is dominated by (Standard High) German as the unchallenged main language. There is no system of holistic language planning, there is neither a reference to a national language in the German constitution, nor an overarching language law. Germany has several autochthonous minority languages with official support on a regional basis. Interestingly, these have only gained attention on a national level since the 1990s, not least because of international obligations (e.g. through the ratification of the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities). The underlying factor for a large part of the policies, as admitted in a lecture on minorities by the previous German Federal Appointee for National Minorities, has for a long time been the political will to ensure support by other countries for German minorities abroad, starting with a 1955 agreement with Denmark. This policy continues to the present day, and this would have been difficult without guaranteeing certain rights to autochthonous minorities in Germany (cf. Saagpakk & Marten, 2013).

With regard to other languages, there is a striking difference between the prestige of major international languages with a long-standing tradition as foreign languages in education, relating either to practical purposes (today mostly English) or cultural values (Latin, French), and migrant languages. Discourses on migrant languages show that languages such as Turkish, Arabic, Russian and Polish are not valued in Germany, and are largely underrepresented in education. There is a plentitude of both academic studies and literary and essayistic reflections on the values assigned to migrant languages and migration. Migrant organisations share an understanding that sufficient knowledge of German is the key to integration into German society; yet, many migrant organisations report that they see a large discrepancy between the willingness to integrate and to acquire German by the migrants, and the recognition of other languages as additional resources by the Germans. This discrepancy between the existing multilingualism and reinforced practices, ideologies and discourses by the majority of society is often referred to as monolingual habitus. Gogolin's (2008, p. 3) seminal work on language ideologies in Germany argues that it has in particular been in the educational system where societal perceptions on languages and multilingualism are visible and have been reproduced since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This monolingual habitus is directly related to the nation state ideology as Gogolin and Kroon (2000) argue:

Jenseits aller Berücksichtigung von Differenz in einer offenen, pluralen Gesellschaft – etwa im Hinblick auf soziale Lage oder Geschlecht – ist die stillschweigende Annahme der Üblichkeit des Aufwachsens 'in einer Sprache und Kultur' in unseren Gesellschaften und Schulen nach wie vor weitgehend ungebrochen. (...) Der 'monolinguale Habitus' ist ein intrinsisches Merkmal des klassischen Nationalstaats, also derjenigen Nationalstaaten, die sich im Europa des ausgehenden 18. und des 19. Jahrhunderts herausbildeten.

[Beyond all recognition of differences in an open, pluralistic society – for instance with regard to social situations or gender – the tacit assumption remains largely unchanged that it is normal to grow up ‘in one language and culture’ in our societies and schools. (...) The ‘monolingual habitus’ is an intrinsic feature of the classic nation state, i.e. of those national states that evolved in Europe at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.]  
(Gogolin & Kroon, 2000, pp. 8–9)

Ellis et al. (2010) take the notion of monolingual habitus further, arguing that Germany as a whole displays a largely monolingual mindset – “although multilingualism is a traditional feature of their language spheres” (p. 455). Yet, there is a strong bias between perceptions of prestigious languages which are taught in formal education (e.g. English, French) and the waste of resources associated with other languages. This applies in particular to migrant languages, but also to autochthonous minority languages. Autochthonous minority languages have certain rights in their core areas, in particular in education, but speaker numbers are small and steadily declining. As the authors summarize, the

German concept of nation, which is traditionally closely connected to the German language, shimmers through all these imaginary contradictions. Analysed through Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, it becomes clear that the contradictions on the surface level indicate a consistent mindset at a deeper level, in that language policies are strongly connected to power relations. (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 455).

This power relationship is displayed in public discourse on multilingualism and persons with a non-German background and is somewhat ironically summarized by the paper titled “Entirely normal youngsters, but with migration background” (Scarvaglieri & Zech, 2013). Yet, Ellis et al. (2010, p. 448) conclude that “although marginalised, autochthonous minority languages are more privileged than the languages of immigrants in Germany.” It will further be shown in our study on Sorbian how these policies and attitudes are visible in the LL. Yet, Ellis et al. (2010: 456) also see that “some indicators show that, from an economic perspective, the door may be a little more open to the development of a multilingual habitus today than it was in the past. Research shows that employers today take ‘bilingualism’ of applicants for jobs for granted – everybody has to be able to communicate in German and English.” At the same time, this is not restricted to English: “Employers seem to pay attention not only to the ‘classical’ foreign languages, but also to minority languages because they are needed in contact with customers in Germany as well as in international contacts” (ibid., p. 456). It is one of the aims of this paper to understand whether this slow change of the monolingual mindset and habitus is also reflected in the Sorbian area.

Regarding LL research in Germany, it is noteworthy that there have so far been – considering the size of Germany and the large number of linguists at academic institutions in Germany – rather few LL studies. Some of the few existing studies focus on multilingualism, in particular with regard to migration, e.g. the large-scale research on the Ruhr area which identified an overwhelming dominance of German, followed by a relatively strong presence of English, with some, but in total rather low presence of migrant languages such as Turkish in typical migrant neighbourhoods (e.g. Cindark & Ziegler, 2016). Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael (2015, p. 29) conclude about Berlin that German as the “national language is ubiquitous”, even though English, international company names and migrant languages are regularly present, depending on the neighbourhood. Papen (2012) discusses the LL of the Prenzlauer Berg district in Berlin and highlights the negotiation of

ownership, e.g. in the context of bottom-up reactions to on-going gentrification, but makes almost no reference to the use of varieties other than German and English (which is widely used in advertising, for brand names and similar). Marten & Lazdiņa (2016, p. 88) conclude that the LL reflects how much German society has internalised functional monolingualism in German as a societal norm.

### 3 Sorbian and the Sorbs

After this general introduction to languages and discourses on languages in Germany, we now turn to the Sorbian language and the Sorbs. What is commonly referred to as the Sorbian language are two closely related Slavonic varieties in the East / South-East of Germany, Lower Sorbian in the Federal State of Brandenburg and Upper Sorbian in the Federal State of Saxony. The dialectal continuum between these is today interrupted, language shift towards German throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries turned the Sorbian-speaking region into two non-adjacent areas. Both varieties have their own standardization, yet, because of the largely common culture and history, it can generally be said that the two speech communities have a sense of belonging to one common ethnic group and of speaking two varieties of the same language, similar to other autochthonous minorities with more than one dominant variety. The Sorbian language is the strongest every-day marker of Sorbian identity, even though a number of traditions (e.g. painted Easter eggs or costumes) also carry high symbolic value (cf. Elle, 2010; Šatava, 2005). Upper Sorbian has a by far more vivid speech community than Lower Sorbian and continues to be used as an everyday language, whereas for Lower Sorbian only few societal functions remain (Toivanen, 2001, p. 44). The number of Sorbs and of speakers of Sorbian is somewhat difficult to estimate, not least because of the lack of questions on ethnic affiliation or language competence in the German census, but most likely there are today approximately 60,000 Sorbs (40,000 Upper Sorbs, 20,000 Lower Sorbs). Speaker numbers are much lower, with an estimated number of active 25,000 users of both varieties (Elle, 2010, p. 314).

In historic terms, the Sorbs look back at approximately 1400 years in the region of the contemporary German states of Saxony and Brandenburg. Germanic tribes expanded eastwards into Sorbian territory and introduced Christianity to the area, but the Sorbian area has throughout its history also belonged to the Polish and Czech Crowns. The historical division of the Sorbian-speaking area led both to a religious separation of Catholic Sorbs in the South and Lutherans in the North and to the development of distinct Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian varieties and identities. In spite of these distinctions, however, a common Sorbian identity evolved under the influence of German romanticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Sorbs were heavily discriminated against during the Nazi regime. After that, the relationship between the German majority and the Sorbian minority became highly complex. When the Soviet army reached Sorbian areas shortly before the end of World War II, the Sorbs were treated as privileged because of the common Slavonic roots. The Soviets supported the Sorbian minority in their claims for stronger political influence. In Saxony, Sorbian became an official language and gained a stronger presence in the local press as well as in cinema and theatre. Practical publications such as address books were also printed in Sorbian at this time. The official number of Sorbs increased from

25,000 in 1928 to about half a million shortly after the war, most probably because of opportunistic motifs by many who now claimed a Sorbian identity (Spiegel, 1974). At the same time, Sorbian culture was instrumentalized and politicized by the East German regime (Meškank, 2014), to which many Sorbs remained sceptical. For instance, when the regime started a resettlement programme to create monocultural areas – ethnic Germans from the Upper Sorbian area near Bautzen had to move to the Lower Sorbian area near Cottbus, and the Sorbs from Lower Sorbian region to the Upper Sorbian area – heavy protests led to the programme being stopped. The “popular belief” of the Sorbs having been favoured by the Soviets (Igel, 2014) had harmful implications also on the long-term relationship between ethnic Sorbs and the German mainstream population in the area.

Today, in the federal structure in Germany, Sorbian is legally recognized in both Brandenburg and Saxony. In addition, Germany has included Sorbian in its ratification of both the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, even though the German state has repeatedly been criticized in the official monitoring reports for not taking care sufficiently of the Sorbian language, in particular with regard to Lower Sorbian. In Brandenburg, the Law of the Sorbs (*Gesetz zur Ausgestaltung der Rechte der Sorben (Wenden) im Land Brandenburg*) was introduced in 1994 and extended in 2014; the newest amendments guarantee the right to use Sorbian in public bodies in the traditional Lower Sorbian area – a possibly important step towards a stronger public presence of Sorbian. In Saxony, a similar regulation regarding Upper Sorbian had already been introduced in 1999 (*Gesetz über die Rechte der Sorben im Freistaat Sachsen*) and reinforced in 2014 (*Maßnahmenplan*). In this sense, official Sorbian policies have for the past decades been rather favourable towards Sorbian, both during the times of the East German regime and since German reunification in 1990.

Official state-support of Sorbian today takes place mostly through financial support of Sorbian organizations. The umbrella organization “Domowina” acts as a political spokes organ and unites Sorbian institutions of all kinds. Sorbian education is state-financed and both Sorbian primary and secondary schools are guaranteed by law, but it has been criticized that there are no specific rules which would allow to open classes with Sorbian as language of instruction also in cases of smaller number of students as normally required. There is a plentitude of small organizations, activist groups etc., with one of the prestige projects that Sorbs like to refer to being the “Witaj” (“Welcome”) kindergarten project with Sorbian-medium pre-school education all over the Sorbian area. There is a state-funded Sorbian museum as well as a theatre which partly operates in Sorbian, the German-Sorbian People’s Theatre in Budyšin, and traditional dance and music groups which receive support for their activities (Vogt & Kreck, 2009). In terms of academic institutions, the Sorbian Institute with its headquarters in the Upper Sorbian area and a branch in the Lower Sorbian area conducts research and publishes on all kinds of Sorbian issues, and there is also an Institute of Sorabistics at Leipzig University (notably outside the Sorbian area).

In total, it may therefore be claimed that the institutional support in mere terms of existing measures and organizations is rather favourable for the well-being of the Sorbian language. However, as Vogt and Kreck (2009, pp. 69, 185) argue, the system of Sorbian institutions and funding is highly dysfunctional. One of the important questions from a perspective of on-going revitalization efforts such as the support of Sorbian education from kindergarten to the tertiary level, is



therefore why, in spite of the relative plenitude of measures in support of Sorbian, the language is still in decline. One reason may lie in the discrepancy between the, in terms of number and financial support by the State, relatively favourable situation of institutions on the one hand and attitudes by society at large on the other (Toivanen, 2015, p. 86). One significant aspect hereby has historically been the unwillingness to accept multiple identities – the Sorbs as well as the Germans have tended to defining ‘Sorbianness’ as something which is tightly connected to origin and cannot be seen as dependant on personal choices (Neumann, 2008, p. 61). However, the current version of the Domowina programme states that a free choice of using the Sorbian language by anybody and unconditional identification as Sorbian are supported by the organization (Programm Domowina – 2025, 2015). This can be interpreted as a turn to hybridity yet it should be kept in mind that hybridized lives can be celebrated as a positive choice only in situations of genuine equality (Walde, 2010). Vogt and Kreck (2009, p. 191) identify equality of the Sorbian minority and the German majority as one of the central issues and list among the key recommendations for changes in Sorbian policy a need for a change of attitudes among the German mainstream population as well as a culture of equality in negotiation between Sorbian representatives and the State.

Another analysis of societal views towards Sorbian is provided by the studies by Šatava (2005) and Ratajczak (2011) who both conducted questionnaire surveys in schools in the Sorbian area. Their research shows that many monolingual German locals generally agree that the Sorbian language should be maintained; yet, Ratajczak (2011) reports that there is only limited support of specific maintenance efforts. In contrast, there is high support of statements such as “when Germans are present, Sorbs should not speak Sorbian” or “it is impolite to speak Sorbian when people are present who do not understand Sorbian”, even in conversations which involves only Sorbs. In this sense, using the Sorbian language in public is seen as a deviation from societal norms or even as offensive, as highlighted by the support of the statement that “when Sorbs speak Sorbian they don’t want other people to understand them”. Ratajczak’s (2011) survey also shows that there is little support of compulsory Sorbian education in the region and only a limited wish to know Sorbian among the German-speaking mainstream population. Compared to e.g. the public use of English, people feel on average, according to Ratajczak’s (2011) data, to a much higher level annoyed when Sorbian is spoken, they perceive the use of a variety which they don’t understand as an attempt to exclude them and thereby as inappropriate. In total, this indicates that even in the Sorbian core region there is no societal consensus on the public use of Sorbian as an understandable wish by an ethnically and linguistically distinct population. In other words, speakers of Sorbian are not experiencing a sense of linguistic “normalization” in society along the lines of what minority activists and language policy makers in other European minority contexts such as Catalonia or Wales have achieved in recent years.

It was in this spirit of societal attitudes to minority languages that we investigated the LL in Bautzen. Our aim was to find out to which degree Sorbian is present in public space, and to understand people’s perceptions of that. As stated above, there is no law in Germany which regulates the general use of languages such as in other countries or regions like France, the Baltic states, or Catalonia. The only legal restriction is that German is the *Amtssprache* (language of public bodies), and there are regulations on the use of German on e.g. product labels. With regard to the LL this means that, with the exception of public bodies

where German must be present, any individual and any private institution is free to use any language on signs in public space. In the Sorbian area, however, there are laws for the protection of Sorbian which explicitly prescribe the use of Sorbian. §10 of the 1999 Law on the rights of the Sorbians in the Free State of Saxony and §11 of the 1994 Law on the rights of the Sorbs in the State of Brandenburg declare that signage in the region inhabited by Sorbs should be bilingual on all government-related buildings.

#### **4 Results of multilayered LL research in Budyšin**

In the following section, we turn to our case study. The town of Budyšin (Sorbian) or Bautzen (German) lies in the Upper Sorbian area in Saxony and is the capital of a county of the same name. It has approximately 40,000 inhabitants and is known beyond the borders of the region for its political prison operated by the East German State Security (“they will send you to Bautzen”; today the prison has been turned into an important place of commemoration and research on East German history), mustard (“Bautzener Senf”) and more recently also as a tourist destination because of its beautiful medieval old town. Sorbs and speakers of Sorbian in the city amount to less than 5% (in contrast to several villages in the area with higher proportions of Sorbian-speakers). Yet, Budyšin is frequently considered the “capital” of the Sorbs because it is home to the most important Sorbian institutions of administration, education and culture. Our area of investigation was the entire town, i.e. we recorded signs which contained Sorbian elements wherever we found them within the city limits, concentrating on a systematic investigation of the streets of the old town and the adjacent modern centre. Every sign which contained a Sorbian element was photographed. In addition, we also recorded Sorbian-related signs in other parts of the town wherever we spotted them. This provided us with a holistic picture of the (old and modern) town centre; in the other parts of the town, where the frequency of public signage was generally much lower, we gained a representative sample of streets and quarters, even though we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that we did not notice some individual Sorbian signs which might have been of interest. Our analysis of the functions and contexts of the signs was then carried out with the following interests in mind: Who are the authors of Sorbian signs and the institutions where these signs could be identified; which are the functions of the signs; what is the relationship of Sorbian and German (and, in a few situations, of other varieties) on the signs; how does the relation between German and Sorbian reflect the ideologies, language policies and perceptions of a minority language in German society.

In addition to the observations of the LL in public space, we also analyzed the languages on a number of web sites which were related to the institutions we visited or where we spotted signs in Sorbian, as well as web sites related to Sorbian issues in general (cf. Dołowy-Rybińska, 2013; Gruffydd Jones, 2013, on the relevance of the presence of autochthonous minority languages on web sites). As a third element of data collection, we observed the situations where we spotted signs in Sorbian (or where we noticed a remarkable lack of Sorbian signs) and, wherever possible, got engaged into conversations with different groups of individuals in Bautzen. These consisted of extensive scheduled meetings with Sorbian representatives (at the “Domowina”, in the Sorbian Institute, in the

department for Sorabistics at the University of Leipzig, in the “Witaj” administration, in the local radio and TV station, in the Sorbian Museum and in the German-Sorbian People’s Theatre) and of loosely pre-structured spontaneous interviews on the streets, in shops and at similar locations, as well as in public institutions such as in touristic locations. The focus of the spontaneous interviews lay on the perception of (the lack of) Sorbian signs (discussed with passers-by) and the policies of why (not) to have Sorbian signage (in conversations with shop-keepers and other persons working in different institutions). The conversations with Sorbian representatives tried to put the LL observations into a broader frame of Sorbian policies and the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Sorbs. In this, we concentrated on the question of how individual signs are interpreted and on how the presence of Sorbian in the LL is interrelated to both official policies and public attitudes.

## 5 Sorbian in the LL of Budyšin

When conducting our research, the first overwhelming impression was that the vast majority of signs in Bautzen are in German only. Upon arrival in the town, the visitors are greeted by bilingual place name signs at both the train station and when entering the town by road (in both cases with the Sorbian name being smaller than the German). Yet, this image of a bilingual town is not confirmed in the town itself: Searching for Sorbian on signs means trying to spot the occasional exception to the monolingual German rule. Some signs are in international languages such as English and aimed at tourists, and English is also regularly present in advertisements. Sorbian, however, is present only on a low proportion of the signs and generally its visibility is extremely limited. Our findings thereby correspond to similar results from Cottbus / Chóšebuz (Giese, 2013) where, in the inner-city areas where research was carried out, Sorbian was only found on 5.1% of the signs, always together on a bilingual sign with German. This fundamental lack of a broadly multilingual LL in Budyšin reassured us in our decision to refrain from carrying out a quantitative analysis of the signs and instead to concentrate on a more in-depth observation of the few exceptional situations where Sorbian was present. In the following, we discuss exemplary findings of our combined research of the LL in physical public space, the web LL and the interviews in three categories – government signage, Sorbian institutions and others.

### 5.1 Government signage: How the state assigns niches to a minority

In contrast to the low general presence of Sorbian in the LL, there are two contexts in which Sorbian regularly appears: government-regulated signage including traffic signs and, not surprisingly, Sorbian institutions. The presence of Sorbian on official signs by the city and the county reflects the official bilingual policy and the legal position of Sorbian as a language to be taken care of. This includes highly symbolic instances of Sorbian presence such as the *Krajnoradny zarjad Budyšin – Jobowy center* in smaller letters underneath *Landratsamt Bautzen Jobcenter* (a sign denoting the County’s employment centre) or the Sorbian *Policajski rewér* underneath the German *Polizeirevier* (“police station”) on a sign which is dominated by the coat of arms of Saxony. An example of particular symbolic magnificence is the aureate *Krajno Radowy Zarjad Budyšin* underneath *Landratsamt Bautzen*, the sign at the entrance of the County Council marked by a golden coat

of arms with a crown and two lions (Figure 1). However, even if such highly symbolic use of Sorbian in high-level domains helps speakers of Sorbian to claim their share of societal ownership, there is usually no use of Sorbian in more functional contexts: the names of institutions at the entrance of municipal institutions are bilingual German-Sorbian, but more precise information, e.g. on opening hours, is only in German (cf. Figure 2). Similarly, the town of Budyšin welcomes its guests on two boards with the texts *Herzlich willkommen* and *Vitajće k nam*, but instead of a longer explication in Sorbian on the second board only three words in Sorbian can be found – the names of traditional Sorbian festivities, which are added to the German texts. Also, there is a clear hierarchy: German always appears first and frequently also in a larger font than Sorbian. Such examples may be seen in the light of discussions on purely tokenistic use of signs in minority languages, as a kind of alibi for politicians which allows them to show that they care about the minority language, even though it does not help to generate more acceptance and societal functions of the language (cf. Cox, 1998, for a similar debate on Scottish Gaelic). On traffic signs, Sorbian appears regularly on local street name signs, but also here the application of systematic bilingualism soon comes to an end, e.g. information signs pointing towards sports grounds or libraries, as well as the names and directions e.g. on bus stops are again only monolingual German.



**Figure 1.** Highly symbolic presence of Sorbian at the office of Bautzen / Budyšin County.



**Figure 2.** Symbolic and at the same time tokenistic presence of Sorbian at a municipal office.

The findings from the analysis of government signs in public space are confirmed when investigating web sites of state institutions in Budyšin. For instance, Sorbian features on the official sites of both the city of Bautzen ([www.bautzen.de](http://www.bautzen.de), Figures 3 and 4) and of Bautzen County ([www.landkreis-bautzen.de](http://www.landkreis-bautzen.de)). Yet, the presence of Sorbian on the County web site is limited to a symbolic greeting and a bilingual name of the County (notably, also the web domains themselves have only German names). On the city web site, there is – in addition to the symbolic bilingual name of the city – more content in Sorbian, which is offered as one language alongside German, English, Polish and Czech. Yet, in contrast to the German page which features extensive categories on citizen services, information on the city’s history, information for businesses and tourists, the Sorbian version contains only a small proportion of the information given in German. Even with this limited presence of Sorbian, however, the city web site of Budyšin is one of the rare instances in the Web LL of mainstream institutions where Sorbian content is more than just symbolic.

In conclusion, it is therefore possible to state that official institutions of the German state fulfil their duties towards Sorbian in the LL. The underlying ideology of monolingualism and German as the language of the nation state is, however, revealed in examples which show Sorbian in a mostly tokenistic way which is far away from turning Bautzen into an actively multilingual environment.



Figure 3. The official Web Site of the City of Bautzen in Sorbian.

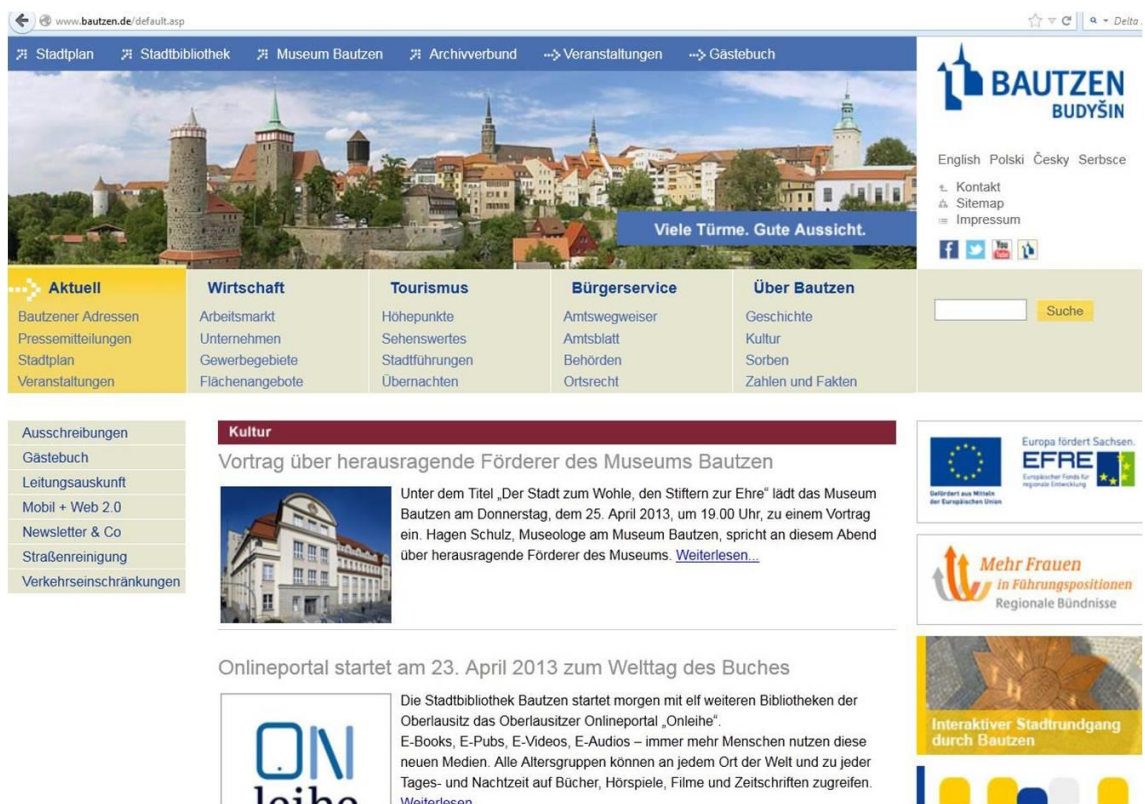


Figure 4. The official Web Site of the City of Bautzen in German.

## 5.2 Sorbian institutions: Are they challenging dominating monolingual ideologies?

Signs on or referring to Sorbian institutions are generally bilingual – some of them (but not all) display Sorbian as the first or the more dominant language (Figure 5), and as exceptions we even found monolingual Sorbian signs at the Sorbian museum or in the office of the Domowina. In the Sorbian institutions, it was noteworthy that the speakers of Sorbian seemed to pay attention to the question of whether the German or the Sorbian language is presented first on the signs. Sorbian institutions mostly use first Sorbian and then German, with the size of the fonts overwhelmingly remaining equal in both languages – in contrast to signs by German institutions with Sorbian elements where full translations are rare and the Sorbian parts are often printed in smaller letters. However, during our conversations with representatives of Sorbian institutions demands which might substantially challenge the existing LL patterns were uttered rarely, and in total there was only little awareness of a possible rights-based approach to the use of Sorbian in the public sphere or to more active promotion policies. During our visit to the Domowina we were told, for instance, that it was seen as important not to provoke hostility among the majority. There was a remarkable contradiction in that we were informed that the existing revitalization measures were not considered to be sufficient to change the situation substantially and that the Sorbs felt insecure about their future. Yet, no new ideas or plans for increasing the presence of Sorbian on signs were presented.

Another example of non-equal bilingualism could be seen in the German-Sorbian People's Theatre: The wall along the major staircase in the theatre displays the titles of and quotes from its productions throughout its history – but the vast majority of these are in German. At the time of our research, information on Sorbian kindergartens was provided in the theatre which included long texts in Sorbian, but on other signs such as on safety regulations, the same pattern appeared as in many municipal buildings: Sorbian is rather symbolic with far more information given in German. Even though there are usually logical explanations for this (e.g. the low proportion of Sorbian theatre quotes was caused by the number of drama productions in German outnumbering the Sorbian performances by far) these patterns reflect again that dominance of German is the norm.

The attitude that the dominance of German was normal was also reflected by a representative of the Sorbian Museum. She generally displayed a very modest attitude to the presence of Sorbian issues and addressed the topic that Sorbs should be more self-confident. She reported that the few existing symbolic signs were perceived highly positive by the Sorbian community. With regard to a bilingual greeting in a major shopping centre (see below), however, she said that there had been voices among ethnic Germans who had been opposed to it, in spite of its small scope. Similarly, Sorbian-dominant signs at her own museum had also been met with criticism by some ethnic Germans. According to her, the most important use of Sorbian was the official recognition of Sorbian place names through bilingual place name signs – a highly symbolic rather than a practical step which would directly increase the range of public functions of Sorbian (see for the outstanding importance of bilingual place name signs e.g. the debate on Slovene signs in the Austrian State of Carinthia and the decade-long heavy dispute around it, Rasinger, 2014). The decision on whether to set up bilingual signs depends essentially on the respective municipality council. In total, she

explained (and her own argumentation also suggested this) that most Sorbs are very careful in their demands and least of all want to be perceived as provocative.

As exceptions to the usual dominance of the German language we found relatively many signs in the offices of the Sorbian radio and TV services (which are part of the regional state media) and in the WITAJ kindergarten project administration. These were bilingual on a regular basis, and inside these institutions there were even some few instances of monolingual Sorbian signs. These were found, for instance, in the staircases of the Sorbian media offices, where the symbolic aspect of this measure was also stressed in the conversation with a local employee. It was also here where, in situations which may be labeled as semi-public such as on office notice boards, we encountered some of the rare situations where we saw Sorbian not just for symbolic purposes, but where the Sorbian texts contained more content, e.g. for exchanging information between employees or on internal work plans.



**Figure 5.** A rare example of a Sorbian-first bilingual sign.

The web sites of Sorbian institutions are, not surprisingly, among those web sites which feature the highest amount of text in Sorbian, with the default welcome pages of Sorbian institutions displaying the texts in either German or Sorbian or both languages. The quantity of the content on most web sites is similar in both languages, even though it is often not completely identical (cf. for example the Sorbian Museum's web site, <http://www.museum.sorben.com>). There are also websites of institutions which are completely in three languages, e.g. "Założba za serbski lud. Stiftung für das sorbische Volk", [http://stiftung.sorben.com/wobsah\\_dsb\\_58.htm](http://stiftung.sorben.com/wobsah_dsb_58.htm), which is in Upper Sorbian, Lower Sorbian, and German.



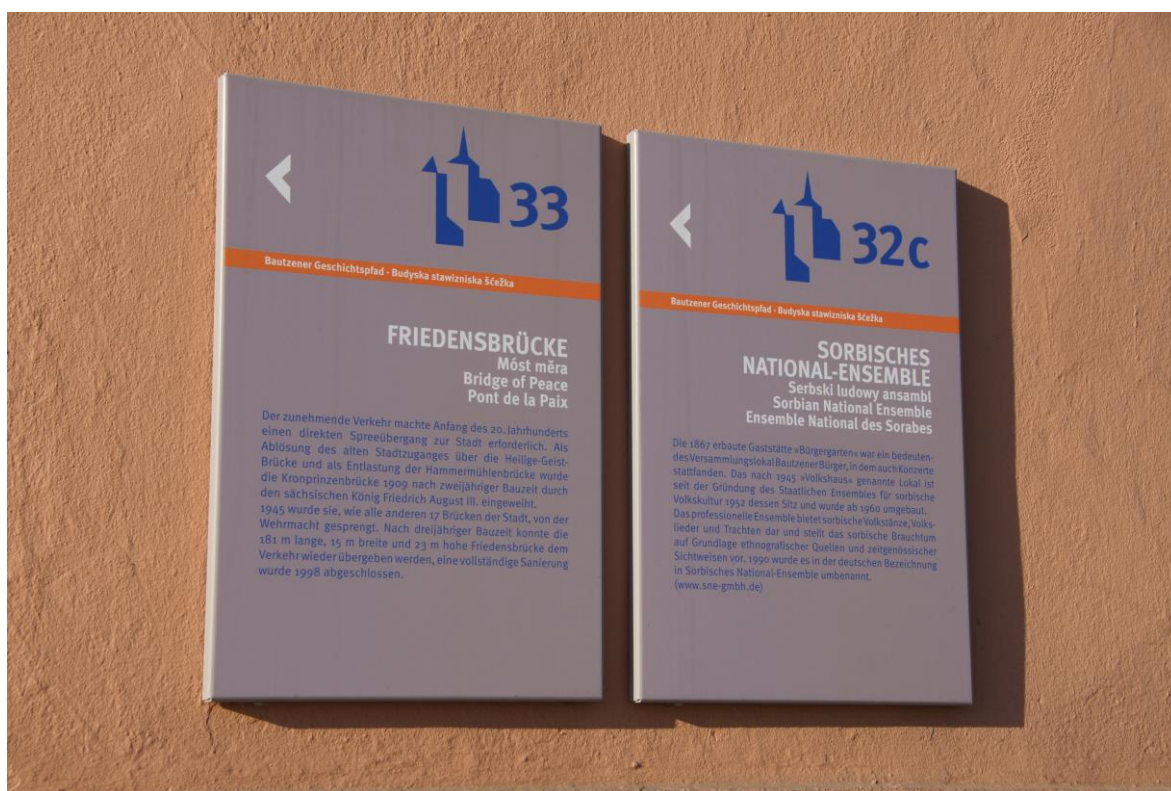
Turning to web sites whose main purpose is to inform about Sorbian culture and activities, the most prominent is Sorbenland Info (<http://sorbenland.info/>). Interestingly, both its design and the individual articles are in German only, but the Facebook site with the same name has many posts in Sorbian. Similarly, the layout of the site [www.sorben.org](http://www.sorben.org) (<http://www.sorben.org>) is in German only, but many articles are in Sorbian. The Sorbian Cultural Information LODKA (<http://www.lodka.sorben.com>) has a trilingual web site. In total, this short overview of the web LL confirms the findings from public space – Sorbian exists largely in spheres separate from mainstream society and, where used by institutions which are not dedicated explicitly to Sorbian issues, Sorbian features mostly for symbolic purposes without informative functions.

Regarding the Sorbian contexts, we can therefore conclude that there is a certain presence of the Sorbian language in the LL; yet, these are moderate and kept separate. Monolingual ideologies are reinforced by the separation of specifically assigned space for Sorbian.

### 5.3 Other contexts: Monolingual habitus and ideologies in practice

Outside the two contexts of government signage and Sorbian institutions, instances of Sorbian were rare. The main Church of Bautzen had a bilingual sign and the offices of political parties displayed the names of the parties in both Sorbian and German on their windows – e.g. *Die Linke Kontaktbüro / Lěwica Wobydlerški Berow* (“Left Party Contact Office”) or *FDP Sachsen Oberlausitzbüro / Hornjotučiski Běrow* (“Liberal Party Saxony Upper Lusatia Office”) – while all advertisements and other pieces of information were given in German only. In tourism – both on objects of interest to tourists and in the local tourist information centre – Sorbian did not feature prominently. Plaques with short explanations of historical buildings and other objects of interest read *Bautzener Geschichtspfad – Budyska stawizniska šćežka* (“Budyšin History Path”), the name of the individual historical object is given in – from top to bottom – German, Sorbian, English and French, but the explanations are again in German only (Figure 6). Many traditional restaurants show only German (e.g. *Bautzener Senfstube – 1. Bautzener Senfrestaurant*, “Bautzen Mustard Parlour – 1<sup>st</sup> Bautzen Mustard Restaurant”) which takes up the fame that Bautzen has for its mustard. For instance, there is no Sorbian used – neither in real space nor on the web site – at a restaurant located close to the Sorbian Museum ([burghof-bautzen.de](http://burghof-bautzen.de)). Even the one explicitly Sorbian restaurant in town has the greeting *Witajće k nam* on its web site, but no information in Sorbian (<http://www.wjelbik.de/sorbisches-restaurant-lausitz/wjelbik>). In the restaurant, an employee of approx. 50 years connected language use with the identity of the region. She said that she did not think that there should be more signs in Sorbian if the majority was not in favour of it. She added that such wishes should come from the hearts of the people and be connected to a feeling of a common bilingual identity of the region rather than being just a formality. Also the tourist information centre (TIC) showed only tokenistic instances of Sorbian, both in the display of its name on the outside façade and when announcing the Easter tradition of rolling eggs, an event which is often advertised as a traditional Sorbian activity, but no information of any kind in Sorbian was available. In our interview, the TIC’s employee (approx. 35 years) explained that Sorbian is considered as one aspect in Budyšin tourism marketing among many, yet not as a very important one. He reported that tourists sometimes ask about Sorbian, but

not in detail. He added that Sorbian symbols are used by the city of Bautzen in touristic contexts, but that these were more important when representing the city outside the region, e.g. on tourism fairs in other parts of Germany. Our informant did not see any potential for tourism – or for economic development of the town in total – in the Sorbian language as such, only in its occasional symbolic use. In comparison to practices and perceptions in other linguistic minority regions (cf. e.g. Lazdiņa, 2013, on Latgalian in Latvia or Kelly-Holmes, Pietikäinen, & Moriarty, 2011, on Sámi and Irish in the Web LL), there was thereby a remarkable lack of using Sorbian for constructing local authenticity for touristic purposes, as well as a very limited level of commodification of the language or other Sorbian symbols (as reflected also in the products available and the attitudes expressed by employees in gift shops, book shops and other places which we visited during our research, see below). In the Bautzen Stasi Prison Museum / Memorial Site, an employee of approx. 35 years explained that he was not from the city and that the idea to address Sorbian issues in the context of his work had never occurred to him. Moreover, he interpreted our interest in Sorbian as an interest in historical projects on the Sorbs in the GDR or similar.



**Figure 6.** A quadrilingual sign for tourists, the main text being only in German.

On signs belonging to private businesses, Sorbian was a big exception, even though the few existing examples show that awareness for the language-issue among the locals depends largely on individual decisions. One of the rare examples where the two languages are being used by private companies in an almost equal way was a real estate office owned by a Sorb which had all practical information on the window both in Sorbian and in German, in the same size. Another exception was a bilingual German-Sorbian advertisement by a bank, a large-scale poster with the slogan *Zwei Sprachen können, das ist cool. Dvě řeči můžou být cool* (“To know two languages – that’s cool”; the main slogan of the bank,

however, is again only in German, Figure 7). The poster shows a small girl who is looking into a mirror – in front of the mirror, she is wearing contemporary everyday clothes, in the mirror she is wearing a traditional Sorbian dress, blouse and headscarf. Even though this was a rare example where bilingualism and the advantages of learning Sorbian were promoted by a non-Sorbian institution, this picture shows also the clear connection of Sorbianness with tradition, whereas contemporary life takes place in German. When we inquired about the sign, however, an employee (ca. 60 years) in the bank did not even seem to understand our question and recommended to address the tourist information about Sorbian issues. Remarkably, this situation showed that even one of the few business institutions with a Sorbian sign did not seem to have a conscious policy on Sorbian which its employees would have been aware of. If possibly a speaker of Sorbian had been attracted by the advertisement and entered the bank, s/he would also be disappointed that there was no information and no signs in Sorbian inside the bank.



**Figure 7.** One of the few examples of a bilingual business advertisement (for a bank) – Sorbian being connected to tradition, German to contemporary life.

Almost all other commercial institutions were essentially monolingual German. Bautzen’s major shopping centre had a small greeting in Sorbian in its entrance

hall (even though this is the only instance of Sorbian in the centre, and there is also no Sorbian in the external advertisements), but it has no Sorbian greeting on its web site ([www.kornmarkt-center.de](http://www.kornmarkt-center.de)).

In a gift shop, we interviewed the shop-assistant, a woman of approx. 40 years. In the shop, they were no products on offer containing Sorbian – in contrast to the economic value that may be assigned to a minority language as a unique selling point of an area (e.g. Lazdiņa, 2013), and in line with the lack of commodification of Sorbian displayed by the tourism information centre. On our question why there were no such objects for sale her answer was “You have funny ideas, no-one has ever asked me that”. She also reported that Sorbs sometimes come to the shop and talk Sorbian to each other, but German with her. She felt inclined to add that “they all know German, you know”, thereby emphasizing her purely instrumental perception of the use of Sorbian. A similar answer was given by an employee in a bank where Sorbian did not appear at all. She explained that posters and similar information material were printed by the bank’s headquarters outside the Sorbian area. She also stressed that “in order to prepare something in Sorbian we would need someone who knows Sorbian”, thereby negating the possibility that it might be an option to conduct a dedicated Sorbian policy and possibly employ a person with such language skills. In total, the employee was friendly, but also showed that she considered our interest in Sorbian issues to be very unusual. Her strongest argument for not using Sorbian was – as in many other cases – that all Sorbs were bilingual and that it were therefore not necessary to provide information in both languages.

As in the physical business LL, also in the Web LL Sorbian was practically non-existent. None of the companies listed on the website of Bautzen County (<http://www.bautzen.de/wirtschaft>) has information in Sorbian on their web sites. The site [bautzen.de](http://www.bautzen.de) itself offers only some general information in Sorbian. In many cases the use of the German language only can be explained by the target area of the companies which extends beyond the Sorbian-speaking region. Yet, the same features can be observed also on the web sites of smaller local companies (housing, chimney sweepers) which probably have mostly local customers.

This lack of awareness of the Sorbian element in Budyšin was also the dominant attitude among the passers-by on the streets whom we asked. In the opinion of a young woman with a child on a bench who first explained that her mother spoke Sorbian but that she did not know the language, the lack of Sorbian signs was caused by the small number of Sorbs. In total, she showed that she had made her decision to adapt a monolingual German identity and did not seem to bother about the existing Sorbian-speaking community. Similarly, two other young women explained that they did not care about Sorbian issues, on the grounds that they were not from Bautzen. The latter conversation was also interesting with regard to the fact to which degree people were aware of existing signs in Sorbian in the LL. When asked whether they perceived Budyšin as a Sorbian town, they claimed that “there is no Sorbian here”, and they also had not noticed the existing Sorbian street signs. In contrast, a young shop-keeper argued that “there are a lot of signs in Sorbian”, thereby explicitly referring to street signs. On our question whether more signs in Sorbian should be added we received again the – by then – well-known rejection on the grounds that “they all know German”.

As exceptions, however, we encountered also a few more reflected and differentiated answers on the role of Sorbian in Bautzen. An elderly employee of a travel agency first explained that she didn’t mind that there was not a lot of

Sorbian on the grounds that she did not understand Sorbian herself. In line with many other respondents, she at first expressed that she didn't think that there was any need for more Sorbian signs. However, when enquiring further whether this might not be of possible advantage for attracting Sorbian customers, she remembered: "A few years ago we had some advertisement in Sorbian, and that went well, there were many Sorbian customers who appreciated that". When asked whether she knew of any Sorbian customers herself, she argued that she had had "customers who spoke German with me but Sorbian to each other. I didn't like that". The use of Sorbian by bilingual people was in her case perceived as the wish to exclude her from conversation, whereas she expressed understanding in cases of foreign customers who would speak a language other than German among themselves. Similarly, an elderly man in a jewellery shop contemplated that in his times "we had to learn Sorbian at school, therefore it is not so popular today". He said that Sorbian issues had only started to be discussed openly since the fall of the East German regime, and that he had actually thought about having a Sorbian sign at his door, but had decided against it because it would require additional costs. He also said that in his view Sorbian was not important for regional identity: "I have also been living here for 50 years". Finally, one of the rare examples of a more positive attitude to Sorbian was given by two approx. 40-year old women in a handicraft shop. They said that they sometimes heard Sorbian being spoken and that, in their opinion, Sorbian is important for identity because "it is a bilingual area. You shouldn't neglect it." By saying so they commented on the opinion they believed to be dominant. They also agreed that there was little awareness of Sorbian both among locals and among people from outside the region: They "know little about it and may think that Sorbian signs are in Polish". There were several other interviews in which the similarity between Sorbian and Polish was mentioned, so that people from outside the area may think in Budyšin "that they are already in Poland" – a link which was portrayed as negative or even offending. Such reactions were not perceived as a lack of knowledge by Germans from other regions on the area, but as a negative effect of the signs in Sorbian which should be avoided.

With regard to the local print media a clear segregation could be identified: There are a few periodicals in Sorbian, but journalistic texts in Sorbian usually appear in separate newspapers rather than that they would be included in mainstream media. In addition, the Sorbs have a separate book shop, whereas there was very little in Sorbian or on the Sorbs in a mainstream bookshop. Notably, the major German-language newspaper in its window display was explicitly playing with the local dialect of German, but it did not include anything on Sorbian.

In total, we can therefore claim that the presence of Sorbian on public signs is limited and – with a few exceptions – restricted to specific contexts. Even though there is an abundance of important Sorbian institutions in Bautzen, the monolingual habitus prevails in most situations outside the Sorbian core institutions.

At the same time, it was noteworthy that the signs were overwhelmingly not manipulated by graffiti or similar. When doing our research in 2012, we hardly identified any signs which displayed open resistance against the patterns of the linguistic landscape. We found no case where German was crossed out, and only very few examples in which the Sorbian text was commented on. This, however, changed in 2013 when activists launched a campaign in which *A serbsce?* ("And Sorbian?") stickers were used to raise awareness for the dominantly monolingual German signage.

## 6 The “A serbsce?” campaign

When conducting our field research we could not know that shortly after our excursion to Budyšin, Sorbian activists launched a campaign which somewhat contradicted our findings regarding the modesty of attitudes within the Sorbian community. In order to challenge the lack of visibility of Sorbian in public space, anonymous activists covered road signs, advertisements and other German-only texts in the region with a sticker which read „A SERBSCE? UND AUF SORBISCH?“ (“And (in) Sorbian?”). This campaign stands alongside efforts by other minorities to claim space for their languages in the public sphere, e.g. demands by Rhaeto-Romance youth in summer 2013, by Bretons in 2016 and by speakers of Scottish Gaelic in 2018. The campaign can be considered partly successful: on the one hand, the town of Bautzen in 2014 announced to replace more than 200 monolingual German with bilingual German-Sorbian signs, even if implementation of this decision will take place throughout a longer period (Kositz, 2014). The implementation process, on the other hand, continues to be followed critically by activists: in 2016, by far not all additional signs had been erected because of administrative and financial reasons, which led once again to criticism (e.g. on the blog <http://aserbsce.blogspot.de/>).

The public attention which the campaign received was mirrored on the facebook site of A SERBSCE?. On the one hand, many comments expressed a clear pride in the campaign. On the other hand, the Facebook discussions once more displayed clearly traditional negative attitudes to Sorbian issues (the site is closed now but a collection of posts is available at <http://aserbsce.blogspot.de/2012/09/01/>). The main arguments against Sorbian signs were – once again – that the Sorbs understand German and that there is no need for bilingualism. Opponents to Sorbian also argued that the stickers damaged public property and there were high costs involved in order to remove the stickers or even to replace the signs. Some commentators even made considerable efforts in quoting paragraphs from relevant laws to support their arguments. In addition, some comments openly addressed issues of ownership of the region by asking “whose land it really is”. The blog author summarizes anti-Sorbian statements by calling them “the entirely normal German nationalism. By entirely normal people. Again it becomes obvious that the problem is not the signs; it is wide-spread prejudices, ignorance and yes: also simple hostility towards the Sorbs” (translation from German by HFM and MS). Similarly, also the online comments to the report on the 2014 decision to change a few place name signs (Kositz, 2014) again provoked the traditional opinions which ridiculed Sorbian demands or which argued along the lines of “the Sorbians all speak German, why do they need it?”), even though there were other comments which argued in favour of bilingual signs. In 2014, some anti-Sorbian activities were reported in which the Sorbian language on different kinds of public signage was covered with black spray.

In total, the events around the “A Serbsce” campaign again show how difficult it is for parts of the majority population to accept the idea of linguistically shared public spaces. At the same time, the online discussions underlined once more opinions which we had heard in our meetings with Sorbian representatives of public bodies that the minority strategy was to move forward in small steps in order to give the majority time to adapt to the main arguments of the minority – and that too much provocation could even damage minority-majority relationships.

## 7 Discussion and conclusions

### 7.1 *The LL in Budyšin*

Our investigation of the presence of and attitudes towards Sorbian in the LL in Bautzen revealed that there is a certain presence of Sorbian, but on a very modest level and with clearly limited functionality. There is symbolic bilingualism on signs established by local authorities, including place name signs and road signs, but this goes hardly ever beyond the level of symbolism and almost never provides any real information in Sorbian. The same applies to political parties. Regular presence of Sorbian with a higher level of content exists only on signs of Sorbian institutions – sometimes (though rarely) these are even Sorbian-dominant or monolingual. On private signs of any kind including private businesses Sorbian is extremely rare. This applies also to tourism, where Sorbian is not used except for some symbolic presence. When contrasting the roles of Sorbian in the physical and the virtual LL, we find a similar picture. Also on web sites, information in Sorbian is rare and essentially limited to government sites and the pages of dedicated Sorbian institutions. Where Sorbian exists, there is often less information than in German. From the analysis of the signs we can therefore conclude that the visibility of speakers of Sorbian in public space is largely limited to specific niches: Sorbian institutions form a separate semiotic space and are kept apart as a parallel system. They provide information also in German and thereby show that they do not intend to exclude majority society, but majority society does not provide speakers of Sorbian voice in their own institutions. The only exception to this is the highly standardized role of Sorbian on signs of local government where the Sorbian element of the town is recognized, albeit in a way which again clearly establishes a difference between the normality of mainstream German and the rather tokenistic additional use of Sorbian. Our results in this respect largely correspond to the findings by Giese (2013) on the presence of Lower Sorbian in Chóšebuz / Cottbus.

With regard to the three main interests of our analysis of Sorbian signage, we therefore came to the following conclusions:

- Signs in Sorbian are rare; existing signs in Sorbian are overwhelmingly created by public bodies or dedicated Sorbian institutions;
- existing signs in Sorbian are mostly symbolic, with only very few exceptions, mostly in Sorbian institutions,
- both the physical and the virtual LL reflect the relationship between the Sorbian minority and the monolingual German mainstream – both in terms of size and content of the signs and relating to attitudes showing that German is considered the norm; this relates also to a possible use of Sorbian as a means of touristic commodification.

Our interviews showed that monolingual Germans are largely unaware of Sorbian issues, needs and demands. Knowledge and use of Sorbian are seen as marked, its use in non-Sorbian-only contexts seen as deviating from monolingual norms. In spite of the low presence of Sorbian, among ethnic Germans paternalistic awareness, indifference and sometimes even hostility dominate. From the German perspective there is hardly any need to negotiate a space which is so obviously German. Germans are used to being linguistically dominant, any other languages

may claim part of public space in specifically defined contexts and under consent of the German majority. In this sense, the challenge for Sorbian is similar to examples of other minorities in states with a “monolingual” nation-state tradition; our findings thereby also support statements such as the remarks by Davies (2012) quoted in the introduction of the paper.

From the Sorbian perspective, there was rather little willingness to actively engage in a contestation of space. The clearly separate information and communication spaces are largely accepted. Sorbian features only in Sorbian-related contexts with clearly Sorbian symbols (media, Sorbian institutions, bank advertisement). It is also interesting that – along the lines of official minority policies in Germany – there is no notion of language rights in the discourse. Practical perceptions dominate which seem to be either uninformed of language rights debates in other European countries, or which fear that more provocative steps would be detrimental to the existing presence of Sorbian and the tolerance among the mainstream population towards the few existing Sorbian signs and support of Sorbian issues in a larger context. It has only been more recently that the “A serbsce?” campaign has shown that there is a small but vivid group of activists who are ready to take moderately more provocative actions in support of more awareness of Sorbian in public space. Reactions to the campaign, however, also confirmed the traditional societal split. It remains to be seen in which way activists, politicians and society at large will use the most recent changes as a point of departure for a better recognition of Sorbian in public space, and to what level the space accepted for minority languages to take in Germany is truly increasing.

## *7.2 Sorbian in the LL in relation to language policies and ideologies*

The LL reflects the dominant ideology and main policies of the German state and German society. In the sense of Shohamy (2015), top-down and bottom-up policies interact in shaping the LL of Budyšin – signage in official contexts includes Sorbian, whereas practices by the mainstream population provide clear limits to the use of Sorbian. Ideologies in place make it difficult to add Sorbian to a sign on a shop or other in bottom-up situations which are not part of either the official regulations or the network of specific Sorbian institutions. The views expressed in the interviews with non-Sorbs confirm the acceptance of these practices among the majority population – Sorbian is a “goodie” for which state institutions are responsible and which Sorbs may use when among themselves, but there is no need for ethnic Germans to get engaged. In this regard, the presence of Sorbian in the LL of Bautzen resembles the presence of other minority languages in the LLs: Tufi (2016), for instance, summarizes her study on Slovene in rural areas close to Trieste in Italy that the LL “articulates the awareness that Slovenian is not the dominant language in the local linguistic market (i.e. in terms of prestige), but at the same time it is over-represented in institutionally-controlled public space.” As in Budyšin, the LL in Tufi’s study “shows an imbalance between achieved equality in the legal status” and “perceived power relations between different ethnic groups” (Tufi, 2016, p. 114). Sorbian, in this sense, does not challenge the monolingual habitus of ethnic Germans and underlying ideologies.

In addition, there is little resistance to these practices. What is remarkable is the lack of transgression – i.e. the use of Sorbian on graffiti or similar and – with very few exceptions – the lack of painting over or crossing out German-only language (and at the same time a possible transgressive reaction to the few



existing Sorbian signs; on transgressive signs in other contexts in Germany cf. Cindark & Ziegler, 2016; in other minority contexts e.g. Puzey, 2012). Only the “A Serbsce?” campaign started a bottom-up reaction which aimed at a renegotiation of these practices and ideologies. In this sense, the LL of Bautzen is hardly shaped by a negotiation of top-down and bottom-up practices as in the examples given by Shohamy, it is rather an example of how the LL looks when it is NOT a ground for discussions which would challenge the majority’s ideological stances.

Regarding the four categories of ideology discussed by Hornsby and Vigers (2012), the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Language and identity: the Sorbs identify very strongly with their language, as can be seen through the use of Sorbian in Sorbian institutions; they take pride in language programmes like WITAJ. Many members of the linguistic majority, however, are sceptical; therefore, the identity-related use of Sorbian in the LL is not expanded to Budyšin as a whole beyond specific Sorbian institutions.
- Language and territory: Sorbian is recognized by the German state on a symbolic level, but hardly by the mainstream population for whom the existence of the Sorbs does not challenge German dominance in the region; there is little contestation of these practices by the Sorbian-speaking population.
- Language and economy: a commodification of Sorbian hardly takes place; the economic potential is rarely used, even in tourism.
- Ideology of contempt: The LL in Bautzen displays a high level of contempt towards Sorbian in the sense that its absence in many situations where it could theoretically be used points at a lack of willingness by the majority to include Sorbian, and at a lack of strength by the minority to challenge these practices.

In total, Sorbian thereby fulfils almost no functional and only a limited symbolic purpose in the LL of Budyšin: Except for very few occasions in specifically Sorbian institutions, there is no function of Sorbian which German would not also fulfil. The symbolic purpose exists only within clear limits and clearly defined spaces, with few exceptions where Sorbian might be a marker to recognise Sorbian ownership of a shop. These practices reflect existing ideologies by both minority and majority as well as the language policies which are characterized by symbolic official support, bottom-up practices which set clear limits, and Sorbian practices which accept to remain within certain niches.

### *7.3 Implications for understanding multilingualism in Germany*

In the context of language policies and ideologies in Germany, our study thereby confirms the dominance of the monolingual habitus. The mindset of large parts of German society and the connection between language practices to power relations, as argued by e.g. Gogolin (2008) and Ellis et al. (2010), are displayed in the largely monolingual habitus of agents in the LL of Bautzen. In spite of the bilingual LL in top-down signage (which has partly been forced upon the authorities by international relations of the German state) which reflects a certain relation between language, speakers and territory, the general rule is that everything is avoided which goes beyond this official, sometimes tokenistic, presence of Sorbian. The hypothesis that the monolingual mindset and habitus in Germany may be slowly changing is therefore only partly reflected in the LL of

Budyšin: whereas official signage reflects changing state attitudes, such a change is hardly reflected in reactions from below both by the mainstream population as well as by speakers of Sorbian.

In this sense, the LL of Bautzen is reminiscent of Blackwood and Tufi's (2012) observations from Italy regarding non-policies: The lack of an official prohibition or marginalization, even with the exception of some institutional support of Sorbian, does not impede the lack of Sorbian in the LL. In spite of official regulations which would inhibit the use of languages other than the main language(s) of society (in this case: German), ideologies and the monolingual norm are reflected in the LL and confirmed by our interviewees.

The marginalized presence of Sorbian in the LL is in contrast to findings on immigrant languages in the LL in some quarters of big cities in Germany. Ben Rafael and Ben Rafael (2015) report a regular presence of e.g. Turkish or Arabic on bottom-up signs in Berlin. In this, there is a remarkable contrast between the roles of migrant languages and of Sorbian as a traditional minority in the LL – whereas Sorbian is, where at all, mostly visible on top-down signs, immigrant languages could be found mostly on bottom-up signs. These examples reflect quite different facets of the monolingual ideology: Whereas the official societal ideology towards immigrant languages is negotiated in the LL in the sense of a bottom-up reaction in line with Shohamy (2015), the ideology towards Sorbian is not challenged and is largely characterized by contempt. In the case of Budyšin, the generalizing statement by Blackwood, Lanza and Woldemariam (2016) referred to at the beginning, that the presence of a minority language will lead to contestation in the LL, hardly applies to the case of Budyšin / Bautzen. The contestation of space has in the case of Sorbian, if at all, only started.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> In order not to take sides regarding the question of which version of the name of the town should be dominant, the Sorbian name *Budyšin* and the German name *Bautzen* are used in turn throughout this paper.

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