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Ó Giollagáin, Conchúr; Caimbeul, Iain

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MOVING BEYOND ASOCIAL MINORITY-LANGUAGE POLICY

Conchúr Ó Giollaigáin and Iain Caimbeul

Abstract

This paper exams how asocial symbolic minority-language policy contributes to the social processes of language shift from the perspective of highly threatened languages, such as Scottish Gaelic. In introducing the concept of language shift through Asocial Minority-Language Policy, we argue that symbolic minority-language policy is detrimental to threatened language minorities in that it is ideologically implicated in language shift when it neglects the societal circumstances of minority-language decline. The prioritisation of the symbolic aspect of language policy also hinders a value-for-money approach to official provision for the minority group. This paper calls for a materialist/functionalist approach to minority-language societal regeneration to counter the social irrelevance of symbolic policy. We suggest policy options for moving beyond the symbolic focus on the minority-language condition.

Keywords: Gaelic; ideology; language minoritisation; language policy; language shift; sociolinguistics

Introduction

A language is not just words. It is a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It is all embodied in a language.

Noam Chomsky¹

Conchúr Ó Giollaigáin is the Gaelic Research Professor in the University of the Highlands and Islands, where he directs the UHI Language Sciences Institute.

Iain Caimbeul is a research fellow of the institute. Conchúr is also the academic director of the Soillse inter-institutional sociolinguistic partnership.

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This paper builds on the analysis emerging from the recently published multi-modular sociolinguistic survey of Scottish Gaelic, *The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community: A comprehensive sociolinguistic survey of Scottish Gaelic* (Ó Giollagáin *et al.*, 2020) and examines the Gaelic Language Policy (GLP) challenges identified in it. We are primarily concerned with an analysis of the relevance of GLP to the sociolinguistic situation of Gaelic in Scotland, rather than an examination of the sociolinguistic problems of Gaelic speakers. A detailed examination of the contemporary challenges of sustaining the societal transmission and acquisition of Gaelic can be found in Ó Giollagáin *et al.* (2020), which also sets out a language planning model to systematically address the societal vulnerability of Gaelic vernacular communities. The discussion here will focus on examining the incongruity of GLP in the sociolinguistic crisis facing the Gaelic group. Our primary aim is to indicate the need for a materialist/functionalist approach to minority-language societal regeneration. We aim to identify priorities for language policy reformulation and to encourage an analytical refocus on the social-policy requirements of sustaining a highly threatened minority language, such as Scottish Gaelic. We argue that the over-prioritisation of the symbolic aspect of language policy (LP) is an enabling factor in language shift and this type of LP is a hindrance to a value-for-money approach to helping minority speakers and communities address their societal challenges. This paper introduces the concept of language shift (LS) through Asocial Minority-Language Policy. We predict that GLP, under the *status quo*, will soon entail post-LS language promotion without communal or societal context.

Contextualising Minority-Language Policy Reform: the *Gaelic Crisis* study

To set the context for our policy discussion, we first present an overview of the Gaelic crisis, as depicted by data analysed from recent fieldwork in Ó Giollagáin *et al.* (2020). This study indicates that the remaining vernacular communities in the Western Isles, north-east Skye and on the Isle of Tiree are in advanced-stage LS to English. Among the characteristics of this LS to English in these islands are:

- a) the growing prevalence of English monolingualisation in the language practices of the young and young-adult age cohorts resident in the islands
- b) low levels of intergenerational transfer and communal use of Gaelic

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- c) the loss in appreciable social densities of Gaelic speakers among those younger than 50 years old
- d) the contrast in the social use of Gaelic among older social networks of Gaelic speakers with the performed or institutional use of Gaelic among limited networks of school learners/users of the language
- e) the weak levels of fluency in Gaelic among the teenager cohort, of whom 20% report a fluent competence in Gaelic (Ó Giollagáin *et al.*, 2020: 231)
- f) a widespread awareness of the competitive societal disadvantage of the Gaelic group in respect of the official and institutional provision to island communities
- g) the general disregard of ethnolinguistic concerns in how socio-economic and development strategies are pursued in these communities
- h) a widely held perception that official aspiration for the civic promotion of Gaelic in the national context is of weak relevance to the challenging socio-economic context of receding networks of Gaelic speakers in the islands.

In short, despite the presence of comparably significant numbers of Gaelic speakers in these island communities (cf. the residual bilingual nexus in Ó Giollagáin *et al.*, 2020: 6, 64), very few and numerically small Gaelic-dominant communities survive in the remaining social geography of the Gaelic vernacular group (see also McLeod, 2020: 26; Rothach *et al.*, 2016) and the remaining Gaelic vernacular networks therein face daunting socio-economic challenges to sustain their societal presence.

The Materialist/Functionalist Approach to Minority-Language Provision

In our analysis below of the 2005 Gaelic Act – the legislative basis to current GLP – we indicate the weak societal added value which the Act’s language plan process has brought to bear on the difficult social challenges of sustaining the threatened Gaelic group. Similar to Grin (2003), we advise on the need for the judicious allocation of scarce LP resources to achieve the optimal social benefit for the minority. The efficacy of GLP should be assessed according to the level of productive societal outcomes from minority-language LP expenditure, among which language revitalisation in the context of language community

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regeneration should be central. We argue for a resetting of LP goals which are transparent, measurable and accountable to the Gaelic community, for both the indigenous Gaelic group and the Gaelic learner networks. This is critically important if GLP is to be a plausible aspect of public policy in Scotland. Re-establishing the link between Gaelic cultural resources and the societal context of the Gaelic community is urgently required if GLP is to avoid being generally perceived as a vacuous policy response to a language minority in crisis.²

Currently, policy aspiration and social outcomes do not sufficiently coincide to substantially reverse the process of decline in the Gaelic group or to encourage a process of revitalisation. Up to the present, GLP has been experienced as language promotion in the context of the Gaelic group's societal demise. In our analysis below, we contend that the post-2005 focus on the status-building agenda, not being sufficiently focused on the social reality of the speaker group, has engendered a Pyrrhic victory for Gaelic visibility in civil administration and in sectoral institutional provision, but it has achieved this by diverting attention away from the ongoing process towards vernacular erasure. We also recognise the challenges involved in re-assessing and refocusing LP, especially in the context of the embedded client-based system of current GLP. It is not uncommon for those with beneficial interests in publicly funded initiatives, emanating from minority language policy, to justify official LP despite the lack of evidence of successful LP uptake in actual communities.

As we discuss below, GLP currently prioritises the programmed acquisition of Gaelic (e.g., in schools or other formal planned situations) over the spontaneous acquisition (e.g., in families and communities) of the language. A materialist/functionalist approach to GLP reform should be relevant to varying social networks of speakers and learners and should ensure the equitable distribution of LP resource to support their acquisitional and functional requirements, whether spontaneous or programmed. Supporting the social requirements of the minority-language group in their various social geographies is required (cf. Ó Giollagáin *et al.*, 2020: 362). Credible minority LP should be primarily focused on the societal reality of minority-language speakers and learners rather than on superficial aspirations for an imagined future.

In calling for a root-and-branch reappraisal of GLP and for the implementation of a socio-economically relevant process of minority community development, we acknowledge that the regeneration of Gaelic group from the current vulnerable situation is going to be very challenging, but a language-in-society approach, suggested here and in Ó Giollagáin *et al.* (2020)

(henceforth as GCVC), is much more likely to yield productive outcomes than the GLP *status quo*.

Differentiating Gaelic Language Policy from Minority-Language Policy and Planning

Given the level of threat to the social continuity of the Gaelic vernacular group, as depicted in GCVC, this paper will examine whether the vernacular group in these island communities has been subject to a process of LS through Asocial Minority-Language Policy (ALP) (cf. GCVC: 386). LS via ALP refers to a societal process in which a subordinated language minority undergoes LS and cultural assimilation into the majority language of the socio-politically dominant group, despite the official status which has been offered to the minority. ALP refers to the ideologically asocial aspects of LP which prioritise the civic symbolic capital, rather than the social capital, of the minority-language group. In opting for minority-language symbolism, ALP is not sufficiently focused on creating a realistic pragmatic by which the minority can improve their social capacity to withstand the pressures threatening their societal continuity. This ‘societal circumvention’ in ALP ideology obscures or minimises the social reality of LS. The resulting ideological obfuscation, rather than clarification, in LP serves to enable LS to the detriment of those in the minority community wishing to reverse the process. In ALP, LS occurs within the context of circumscribed ethnolinguistic rights extended to the minority and in conjunction with the provision of limited state resources and institutional support to promote issues of cultural and linguistic diversity. LS via ALP is, therefore, a societal process that occurs within the framework of official recognition which has been sanctioned by majority political culture, but where the dynamic of ethnolinguistic erasure continues unabated in contradiction to well-meaning official aspirations - a case of social outcomes not corresponding with stated policy. This contradictory aspect of language demise despite official recognition will be discussed further below.

In addition to delineating the features of ALP, this paper will identify the core elements of GLP, as an example of ALP. GLP’s primary feature is that it prioritises language promotion without being sufficiently focused on issues of language protection (see the discussion in Ó Giollagáin and Ó Curnáin (forthcoming) on Language Protection). We will discuss how GLP relates to the international discourse of minority-language rights and how it interacts with the societal issue of language loss or death.

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We do not employ the concept of Gaelic language planning, as distinct from policy, in this article because it does not pertain to much of the current official dispensation for Gaelic affairs in Scotland. Language planning from the minority-language perspective is in essence rooted in:

- a. a pragmatic dynamic between language communities, official bodies and mechanisms of local and civic political leadership based on a collective understanding and desire to implement the required interdependent strategies to improve the societal condition of a minoritised or disfavoured language group; and
- b. mutually reinforcing institutional collaboration and cross-community cooperation to enhance the communal agency and capacity of minority-language speakers to sustain themselves as a differentiated socio-cultural group.

Given the obvious limitations in current GLP in mitigating the assimilative trends and dominance of English in the remaining social geography of vernacular Gaelic, the language plans and procedures emerging from *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* 'Gaelic Usage' initiatives fall short of what could be considered effective language planning. (See also Spolsky's (2009: 5) discussion on the 'ambiguity' of the term 'policy' in relation to language management.) Certain constituencies of Gaelic speakers can, of course, benefit individually and sectorally from GLP provisions, but equating current GLP with relevant language planning for Gaelic communities is not credible as GLP does not engender a cooperative systematic engagement with the societal reality of Gaelic in Scotland.

The implementation of GLP has not led to a productive dynamic between communities and public bodies. Much of the cultural logic of Gaelic sectoral provision arising from the 2005 Gaelic Act is not rooted in a systematic overview of Gaelic societal priorities. For this reason, the Act's mechanisms emphasise the symbolic appeal and civic aspirations for Gaelic, as opposed to more targeted socio-cultural and socio-economic planning mechanisms which could be advantageous to a threatened language group. The Act mostly provides for the individual participation in Gaelic institutional promotion while neglecting to specify social structures and supportive collective initiatives which could prolong the lifecycle of a fragile language community. Similar to Scott's (2020) contention about aspects of 'high-modernist' social planning, GLP is impeded sociolinguistically by a social policy misjudgement whereby the human subject is abstracted out of context: '[t]he power and precision of high-modernist schemes depended not only on bracketing contingency but also on standardizing the subjects of development' (Scott, 2020: 343–346). Standardisation in

GLP is primarily focused on the dominant culture's interest in the civic appeal of Gaelic cultural capital, rather than on the social capital or the societal salience of the Gaelic group.

Derivative Thinking in the Legislative Framework for Gaelic Language Policy

The primary legislative instrument in Scotland guiding the implementation of GLP and the disbursement of public funds for Gaelic affairs is the 2005 Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act. As Dunbar (2011: 69) has pointed out, the act may have raised the public profile of Gaelic issues in Scotland, but there is still considerable public debate as to the effectiveness of this legislation for minority language societal engagement (cf. Allan and Crouse, 2020). The 2005 Act established *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* as the statutory (LP) agency and a semi-state Gaelic promotion body. The provisions of the Act set out the framework for the creation of Gaelic language plans in Scottish public bodies.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig's language plan framework borrowed from the process previously implemented by the Welsh Language Board across the public sector in Wales and from legislative provisions in the 2003 Irish Official Languages Act (Dunbar 2006: 17), which in turn were modelled to a considerable extent on the 1988 Canadian Language Act.³ Gaelic language plans were to be the formal policy instruments to increase the profile and visibility of the language by providing for the use of Gaelic in the delivery of certain public services with the expectation that this would help raise the status of Gaelic in the public domain. However, the limitations of the 2005 Gaelic Act are evidenced in the weak societal added value which the language plan process has brought to bear on the more difficult social tasks of encouraging language revitalisation in the context of language community regeneration. The limitations of the provider-focused emphasis on the language plan process can be linked back to three fundamental analytical omissions in how the Act was conceived and devised. These conceptual weaknesses relate to issues of context, diagnostics and strategic feasibility:

Context: The underlying thinking informing the aims and provisions of the Act was derived from frameworks developed for other sociolinguistic contexts (Canadian, Welsh and Irish). This derivative aspect of the Act's sociolinguistic foundation meant that it lacked sufficient context-specific originality for a highly threatened language. Additionally, the Act lacked specificity regarding remedial measures to

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protect the vulnerable societal state of the vernacular group. This contributed to an ambiguity in the strategic vision of the Act as an instrument of societal engagement. It offered little more than the largely symbolic civic promotion of a non-dominant minority language. This is one of the generic features common to much of the language-planning framework entailed in these forms of language legislation.

Diagnostics: The operational framework emanating from the Act presumes the existence of a speaker group that is more stable and demographically robust than is the case of Gaelic in Scotland. There is an obvious element of political and administrative expediency involved in not addressing difficult social issues of minority language regeneration. For example, symbolic LP in Ireland since the 1970s has been sufficient to placate those with a professional or heritage/culturist interest in Irish. The Irish-language referent class (see the discussion on the minority-language referent class below) has been recruited to this asocial LP framework by the distribution of public resources focused on the programmed and civic use of Irish. Managing the symbolic-focused demise of the language group has been the core aspect of Irish LP from the 1970s onwards (see Ó Giollagáin 2014a, 2014b). The superficial assumption that LS dynamics could be arrested by the circumscribed practice of Scottish Gaelic in public bodies and the growth in the numbers of Gaelic learners as a result of school provision for Gaelic has not been borne out by reality. This weakness poses a credibility issue for the continued reliance on the Act, as it is currently formulated, as the primary policy instrument supporting Gaelic in Scotland.

Strategic Feasibility: Given the combined effects of the lack of specific context in the Act and the misapplication of sociolinguistic diagnostics to the contemporary condition of the Gaelic group, the level of innovation that would be required to protect existing Gaelic vernacular communities and promote new networks of Gaelic speakers was always going to be impossibly constrained, as was initially predicted (see Dunbar (2000: 69, 74; subsequently 2011: 63) on aspects of community engagement in GLP). The formulaic civic promotion of a disadvantaged minority language is proving to be too ineffective in arresting the legacy of previous unsympathetic policies which have shaped the decline of Gaelic, and in reversing the dominant social position of English in Gaelic's social geography.

Fifteen years of the Act's implementation has resulted in an unbalanced focus on formal education and the adult learner community while the critical sociolinguistic state of the vernacular Gaelic group has not been afforded adequate official attention and resource to deal with the level of challenge involved.

The Individualisation of Gaelic Affairs

The implementation of the Gaelic Act since 2005 has occurred in tandem with a growing sense of the individualisation of Gaelic affairs, whereby socially adroit and talented individuals avail proactively of the opportunities which the sectoral promotion of Gaelic has provided. Gaelic affairs in Scotland are now characterised by an incongruous juxtaposition of the language's challenging societal situation and the civic aspirations for Gaelic. A dwindling vernacular-speaking community has been largely disregarded in the official promotion of opportunities in Gaelic-medium broadcasting, in the promotion of Gaelic performance and the arts, and in facilitating participation in GME innovation and in scholarship on Gaelic heritage and culture. The promotion of the civic appeal and of the cultural assets of the indigenous Gaelic group in various minority-language sectors is now clearly at odds with the societal requirements of protecting the Gaelic group's sociolinguistic viability and continuity. In selecting for individualised engagement with Gaelic culture, GLP signifies rather than addresses the growing social atomisation of the remnants of the Gaelic indigenous community as it is terminally assimilated into English-language dominant society. In this asocial context, the mechanisms arising from the Act became a source of middle-class advantage for those associated with the sectoral provision of Gaelic officialdom. The incongruity of individualised opportunity in the context of collective sociolinguistic demise has contributed significantly to the sense of estrangement of the Gaelic vernacular group from GLP officialdom.

Neo-liberal Gaelic Policy

In the official disregard of issues of Gaelic societal decline, GLP has been developed as a state-backed neo-liberal endeavour, combining the asocial civic promotion of Gaelic with the over-prioritisation of aspirations for GME to reverse the societal shift to English (see the discussion on GME in GCVC: Chaps 4 and 8). (Re)establishing the link between GLP, on the one hand and Gaelic

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cultural resources (episteme) and the societal context of the Gaelic community (demos), on the other, will be required if GLP is to avoid being generally perceived as an empty official gesture. Surely, if there is no provision to help sustain the Gaelic collective then the process of acquiring Gaelic and participating in secondary affinity networks of learners becomes more challenging. Socially avoidant GLP risks becoming untenable in a post-collective future. If GLP cannot engage with actual communities of Gaelic speakers now, how can its underlying thinking expect to produce social outcomes for a putative Gaelic future? It has been the reluctance and unwillingness to envisage a future emerging out of pragmatic and productive interactions with the Gaelic community's current social condition which demonstrates the symbolic future-oriented aspect of much of GLP aspirations. This is a common feature of prescribed sociolinguistic approaches to language minorities undergoing LS. The ideological discourses informing much of official LP are more of a constraint on formal processes to alleviate the social pressures towards LS than a benefit to the language minority. In the case of minority languages in general, the limited sociological relevance of the civic promotion of minority-language revivalism is detrimental to the language minority. This form of detrimental LP evades the vernacular demise of the language group by focusing on vague ideological aspirations for minority civic promotion, rather than on socio-economic capacity-building measures which could enhance the societal position of the minority.

Gaelic Sectoral Expenditure

Overseeing the creation of Gaelic Language Plans among largely English-medium public bodies is the primary statutory duty the Act assigns to the *Bòrd* (Government of Scotland, 2005: §3(2)(a)). *Bòrd na Gàidhlig's* GLAIF budget (Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund) has allocated in the period from 2006–07 to 2018–19 some £16 million of funding to assist public bodies in the implementation of their language plans. An ongoing systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of this significant allocation of public funds should be conducted to ascertain what positive language outcomes have been achieved as a result of this expenditure. The *Bòrd* allocated £632,360 to GLAIF projects for 2020–21 representing 33% of the 'Gaelic Usage' development budget. Overall, £1,063,660 was allocated to GLAIF related projects for 2020–21 representing 27.6% of the *Bòrd's* development budget of £3,855,000 (Source: BnaG Board Meeting 2 December 2020 – Financial Report to September 2020).

Bòrd na Gàidhlig set aside £112,110 out of its 2020/21 'Gaelic Usage' budget of £1,895,100 to support the *Taic Freumhan Coimhearsnachd* scheme (Community Roots Support), 6% of this 10-item budget line (cf. *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* 2020) and 2% of the *Bòrd's* overall budget for 2020/21. This national scheme represents *Bòrd na Gàidhlig's* main community initiative funding. This relatively small sum is not sufficient to support any credible, coordinated community effort to prevent language loss in the Gaelic vernacular group, even if it were all targeted on the vernacular context.

Table 1. indicates governmental spending on various sectors of Gaelic development from 2005 to 2019. Public subventions to support Gaelic broadcasting have absorbed 46% of the Gaelic development funding over this period, with support for Gaelic-medium education accounting for 26% of the spending, while 19% of the spending was allocated to support the civic promotion remit of *Bòrd na Gàidhlig*. Evidence of the positive political commitment to Gaelic affairs in Scotland can be found in particular in the expenditure on centrally funded Gaelic media. From the perspective of the demographic size of the speaker group, the governmental financial assistance for Gaelic in traditional and new media can be ranked proportionately among the most generous minority-language media budgetary allocations in the world.

Other positive aspects of GLP expenditure should, of course, be acknowledged. These include the growing access to GME and other curricular innovation for Gaelic language and culture. The civic focus on the importance of Gaelic to Scotland has increased the public visibility of Gaelic and has encouraged a sense of inclusiveness for those involved in Gaelic initiatives and for those wishing to participate in the activities of Gaelic organisations. GLP has contributed significantly to an awareness of the inclusive advantages of cultural diversity in Scotland. GLP resources support cultural creativity, technological and educational innovation which have been of interest to many people beyond those directly associated with Gaelic organisations. The recent significant engagement with Gaelic Duolingo reflects a desire to learn Gaelic by people living in Scotland, and abroad, and indicates one of the positive cumulative effects of the continued implementation of GLP.

Defining and Categorising Participation in Gaelic Language Policy

Table 2 sets out a schema of social categorisation of participants in Gaelic social and official networks which have arisen from the existing Gaelic policy framework and the distribution of its related funding. The columns indicate the

**Table 1:
Scottish Government Expenditure Allocations to Primary Development Areas for Scottish Gaelic 2005 to 2019 (£Million)**

Category	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Total	As% of Total
Gaelic Broadcasting	8.5	11.9	11.9	12.4	12.4	12.4	11.8	11.8	11.8	12.8	12.8	12.8	12.8	12.8	168.9	46%
Gaelic Education	3.9	5.2	6.1	6.6	8.9	8.2	7.6	7.9	6.6	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	93.8	26%
Bòrd na Gàidhlig	2.9	4.7	4.4	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	69.5	19%
Capital expenditure	0	0.3	0.4	0.4	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.4	6	4	4	4	4	4	32.0	9%
Totals	15.3	22.0	22.8	24.9	28.0	27.1	25.9	26.3	29.6	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	364.2	100%

Source: Scottish Government - [https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-18-01112/Bord na Gaidhlig Annual Accounts 2006-07 to 2018-19](https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-18-01112/Bord%20na%20Gaidhlig%20Annual%20Accounts%202006-07%20to%202018-19)

Table 2:
Schema of Social Categories arising from Gaelic Language Policy

1. Category/ Group Status	2. Referent Class	3. Professional Category	4. Social Group
A. Power	<i>Devising & Resourcing decisions</i>	<i>Operational Recipients responsible for implementing policy</i>	<i>Social Recipients</i>
B. Roles/Position	Cultural and Philological Scholars	Junior/Middle-ranking media professionals	Autochthonous middle class
	Creative/Aesthetic Practitioners	Middle-ranking LP professionals	Middle class L2 Acquirers
	Senior Media Professionals	Language-specialists professionals*	Non-professional L2 Acquirers
	Senior LP Professionals LP and Language Status Academics	Local language officials	Non-professional vernacular speakers of Gaelic
C. Influence	Devise LP policy Decide on LP priorities and context for resource allocation Frame public perception Expectation management	Institutional, sectoral and local influence. *Teachers; translators; publishers/editors; corpus planners and other language professionals	Influence of participating in non-specialist minority-speaker social interactions. General L1 and L2 members of communities/networks

groups and categories operating within these networks/social contexts and the rows indicate the power, roles and influence of the various participants. This categorisation identifies three groupings of which two have power and influence over decision making processes which determine the distribution of socio-economic advantage entailed in GLP and shape the social interactions of those engaging with the Gaelic official bodies. The most important determinant in the distribution of advantage from public policy initiatives is the nature of the Referent Class (Column 2). The Referent Class denotes those individuals with whom the political or power class consults when decisions on policies and official priorities are required. Reading the columns from the top and from left to right indicates the current hierarchy of influence in Gaelic affairs. The Referent Class is normally drawn from those having significant institutional power and professional expertise. Row B in Column 2

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shows the set of professionals which constitutes the Gaelic Referent Class, and Row C in Column 2 indicates their influence over GLP. The Professional Category in Column 3 is made up of those with the professional skills to implement the policy decisions of the Referent Class. They are the operational recipients of the GLP which the Gaelic Referent Class devises. The Gaelic Social Group in Column 4 are the social recipients of GLP which the Professional Category has operationalised for them. The breadth of policy concerns devised by the Referent Class and put into operation by the Professional Category determines the scope of GLP as experienced by the Social Group. The public policy question arising from this categorisation centres on the scope of the civic and professional supports available to the Gaelic Social Group resulting from GLP priorities. The Social Group experiences GLP as a series of institutional projects in which cultural promotion is backed by educational and media initiatives which are reliant on the skills of language and technical professionals. In the practice of GLP arising from the Act, the socio-political dimension of public strategy for the Gaelic Social Group has remained inchoate.

One of the strategic weaknesses of the language-board approach (e.g., *Bòrd na Gàidhlig*) for a societally fragile language group is that state-backed processes of socio-economic development are not necessarily integrated into language-community supports. *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* is a relatively small state entity with no specific responsibility or budget for community development. The current language-focused sectoral priorities of Gaelic promotion imply in essence that socio-economic development is undertaken by English-medium state bodies which serve a geographic rather than a specific cultural population. In this context, socio-economic modernisation and language promotion are strategically bifurcated.

Socially Dissociated Minority-Language Promotion

The socially dissociated promotion of Gaelic official status is evidenced in the language-sector development approach of the 2005 Act's GLP aims. This dissociation is seen in the insufficient strategic focus on efforts to reverse generations of ethnolinguistic decline among the Gaelic group. The promotion of Gaelic mainly in schools, media and status-building language plans in public administration has been beneficial for the civic profile of Gaelic in Scotland, but GLP has been ineffectual as a social policy instrument because it does not address the societal decline of the existing Gaelic group. If the 2005 Act had been framed to contend with the societal vulnerability of the

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Gaelic group in Scotland, the potential for aligning status-building measures with communal engagement would have been significantly enhanced. There is a stark divergence between the civic assertion of 'equal' status of Gaelic with English in Scotland and the reality of the communal struggles of the remaining Gaelic vernacular communities to resist their end-game assimilation into English monolingualisation. This reality gap poses a severe credibility issue for continuing with the existing GLP processes which have emerged from the Act.

Unlike the proportional dominance of L2 acquirers of Irish in Ireland (Ó Riagáin, 1997, 2008), most fluent speakers of Gaelic in Scotland have acquired their proficiency through the spontaneous processes of familial or communal transfer (see the discussion below on Calvet's (2006) spontaneous acquisition). Despite the official promotion of GLP for over a generation, no coherent policy or set of initiatives has been devised or implemented to date to sustain and develop this cohort of speakers in their various community and networked contexts in the islands, or in Gaelic migrant networks in urban Scotland. While the focus on the societally less complex issues of school provision and institutional supports for Gaelic learners may be laudable as LP aspiration, it is questionable on equitable and demographic grounds, especially when dissociated from the broader social context of Gaelic vitality. The unbalanced attention on these formal supports has constrained the capacity of GLP to address the multidimensional social and institutional requirements of various categories of Gaelic speakers and learners. Due to the lack of focus on the social aspects of Gaelic promotion, the appropriate interdependence among various speaker categories has not evolved as a mutually reinforcing social dynamic to improve the overall societal position of Gaelic in Scotland. In other words, the basic problem is that existing GLP has concentrated on the emergence of context-neutral future Gaelic speakers without paying sufficient attention to serving the requirements of the threatened Gaelic group. This neglect of the present and prioritisation of aspirations for the future has created two inter-related difficulties: a) the future-oriented institutional focus in established GLP has created a democratic deficit for the Gaelic present, and b) due to the neglect of social circumstances, GLP, as it currently exists, can only aspire to have a post-communal future.

This in-built strategic lack of relevance is addressed in the recommendations of the GCVC study. The core suggestion is that the Language Protection remit of LP in Scotland should be delegated to a Participatory Community Cooperative Trust (*Urras na Gàidhlig*, cf. Chap. 9 GCVC) which would come under the direct control of representatives of the various vernacular communities participating

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in the activities of the Trust. In practical terms, this would mean that Gaelic promotion (civic revitalisation) would remain in the hands of *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* and that *Urras na Gàidhlig* would take responsibility for Gaelic protection measures (societal maintenance and regeneration) among the vernacular communities in the islands. In bringing balance to these complementary dimensions of language development, governmental oversight of these two aspects of more effective GLP could ensure the necessary interdependence and interaction between them. Asking *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* to assume a language protection role in relation to the documented Gaelic vernacular crisis is problematic on several levels:

- a. During its 15-year existence, the *Bòrd* has not demonstrated sufficient aptitude or ambition in relation to language protection measures, as evinced in the various iterations of their National Gaelic Language Plans (see for example *Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2018*).
- b. The *Bòrd* is not viewed as an official entity which is particularly close to the concerns of vernacular Gaelic speakers (cf. GVCV: 279).
- c. The performance of the *Bòrd* in relation to its more-established language promotion measures has attracted public criticism arising from findings of an Audit Scotland investigation (cf. Auditor General of Scotland 2019) and from subsequent scrutiny in a parliamentary committee investigation (cf. Scottish Parliament Public Audit & Post-Legislative Scrutiny Committee, 2019).
- d. The project-based approach of the *Bòrd* (cf. *Bòrd na Gàidhlig, 2020*) has generated a clientelist dynamic (cf. McLeod, 2020: 52–53 and Jones *et al.*, 2016) in various Gaelic communities, networks and public entities which is often dissociated from the societal reality of speakers in communities.
- e. The defensive approach of *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* to the findings and recommendations of the GVCV in the months following the publication of the study in July 2020 suggests so far that the *Bòrd's* inclination and resolve to reassess its strategic position and operations are limited.

Theoretical Frameworks for Analysing Language Group Decline

Hermann Batibo (2005), specialising in African languages, emphasises the hierarchical dynamic in language-group relations with stronger or weaker

languages – see also de Swaan's (2000, 2010: 56) 'global language system'; and Dorian's (1981) critical mass perspective):

However, in the final analysis one should remember that all languages of the world are part of a food chain in which, at one end, there is English, the super-international language that dominates all the languages of the world, and, at the other end, there are the weakest languages. Every language except English is under some form of pressure. This means that, apart from English, the maintenance of the world's languages is a relative matter. Some languages are able to sustain themselves better than others. (Batibo, 2005: 107)

From this perspective, the capacity of a language group to maintain its societal position is contingent on its collective ability to control or manage its sociolinguistic relationship with the group's socio-geographically relevant competitor(s).

Louis-Jean Calvet (2006) has produced a societal diagnostic for language vitality which is particularly compelling for recessive minority-language communities. His analysis of language group vitality rests on three aspects: the Ecological Position, Mode of Acquisition and Direction of Acquisition pertaining to the societal situation of the language (Calvet, 2006: 60–61):

The Ecological Position refers to the relative position of languages in interlingual power dynamics between stronger Central Languages (cf. de Swaan, 2001) and weaker Peripheral Languages.

The Mode of Acquisition contrasts the Spontaneous Acquisition (e.g., in families and communities) with the Programmed Acquisition (e.g., in schools or other formal planned situations) of a language.

The Direction of Acquisition contrasts the societal context of Vertical Bilingualism (e.g., the processes by which languages of asymmetrical status are acquired) with that of Horizontal Bilingualism (e.g., the acquisition of language with similar societal power).

Applying this three-component diagnostic to Scottish Gaelic, based on the statistical data of the GCVC, we can define the societal situation of Scottish Gaelic in its:

Ecological Position as a peripheral endangered language with small vernacular group (c. 11,000, GCVC: 343) in advanced LS, which benefits from institutionally circumscribed formal supports.

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Mode of Acquisition as an increasingly programmed language, with dwindling spontaneous capacities for familial and communal acquisition.

Direction of Acquisition as conforming to the compulsory Vertical upward Acquisition of English for remaining Gaelic vernacular speakers, alongside the optional downward acquisition for non-vernacular acquirers who are in a position to benefit from the programmed opportunities for Gaelic acquisition.

In the context of the symbolic civic promotion of Scottish Gaelic without sufficient measures for vernacular protection, the following three-component prognosis for Scottish Gaelic, under existing circumstances, will emerge as indicated in its:

Ecological Position as a peripheral non-vernacular secondary language.

Mode of Acquisition as being reliant on programmed acquisition.

Direction of Acquisition as vertical downward acquisition of a low-status language by speakers of a high-status language, i.e., minority language bilinguals who are almost exclusively L1 speakers of English.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Gaelic's existence in Scottish society is limited to four dimensions: societal, institutional, ideological and cultural. In the societal sphere it exists as a vestigial vernacular language of about 11,000 people in the islands, in which a majority belong to the 50-year plus age cohort, as demonstrated in the GVCV, and in small, private social networks of migrant speakers and L2 affinity networks in other parts of Scotland. In the institutional dimension, Gaelic is mainly experienced as an L2-acquired language in marginal educational provision from which little discernible socially productive use emerges, outside of its institutional context. As a result of the ideological activism underpinning its official status (cf. McLeod, 2020: 245–273), Gaelic is a focus for symbolic assertions in civic politics and in identitarian discourses. Gaelic is also widely accepted as a source of aesthetic inspiration for cultural production in the arts and media. However, in all these dimensions the social and cultural capital of the Gaelic group exists in a subordinated relationship to the societal, institutional and cultural power of English-language pre-eminence.

In a post-vernacular situation, aspiring to acquire or display a minority identity is a commendable option. However, in the minority-language context where both ascribed (communally acquired) and achieved identities are possible (see Goodhart, 2020: 31) on 'achieved identities'), LP should focus sufficiently on the various social geographies, and on relevant social and formal

supports for vernacular and programmed minority-language practice and identity. The problem with prioritising achieved over ascribed identity is that this form of LP is disempowering for the vernacular group without providing for the integration of minority L2 learners and vernacular speakers in cohesive language protection and promotion measures, i.e., it is dually negative. Armstrong (2020) discusses the issues involved in opting for minority-Gaelic identity and performance, particularly in programmed, culturist contexts. He discusses performed identity and minority-language competence which circumvents societal processes of acquisition and functionality.

Language Shift in Asocial Minority-Language Policy

This section considers the implications of implementing language policies which avoid or are in denial of the process of language loss among the minority-language speaker group. As stated above, Language Shift (LS) in Asocial Minority-Language Policy (ALP) is defined as a societal process by which a language minority undergoes socio-cultural erasure as a result of succumbing to the asymmetrical socio-political pressures of a subordinating majority group, despite the majority's formalised stated aspiration to symbolically promote the minority as a distinct social entity. In other words, the official relationship between the majority and minority language culture is depicted as ostensibly positive and non-hostile in relation to the ethnolinguistic interactions between the small bilingual minority and the stronger monolingual majority. LS in ALP occurs, therefore, in contravention of publicly professed ideals of state bodies.

LS via ALP differs from more hostile versions of majoritarian LS, whereby the majority overtly disregard the socio-political requirements and cultural context of the disadvantaged minority (cf. Wee, 2011). LS via ALP can proceed according to similar socio-political processes found in hostile majoritarian LS, but the version of LS in ALP has added dimensions: a) the minority is being assimilated into an ostensibly sympathetic dominant culture; and b) they operate in accordance with the ideological and administrative constraints entailed in being granted official status and associated limited institutional provision. In other words, LS via ALP refers to the social process of minority language loss in the context of official minority-language promotion.

Besides the obvious trend towards societal language loss, the primary characteristic of LS in ALP is the neglect of the strategic implementation of coordinated social initiatives aimed at protecting and enhancing the social position of the language minority in the symbolic focus on LP. This disjuncture

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between the symbolic engagement with the minority language issues and the challenging social reality of being a speaker of the subordinated language is experienced more profoundly in the districts where higher social densities of minority speakers are found, as they witness the reduction in generational minority-language transfer and the associated contraction in domain use. On the other hand, in districts with no or marginal speaker densities, some formal recognition or institutional practice of a formerly disfavoured minority language may appear as positive progress. In this regard, symbolic LP is more focused on the majority's interest in the minority culture than on the social stability of minority-speaking communities.

Ideally, of course, increasing the symbolic value of the minority language among majority language speakers should be advantageous to the minority language communities, if this form of language promotion is conducted alongside a broader programme of socio-economic and cultural supports for the *in situ* minority-speaking group. However, it is more typical for minority LP to be focused on the individual optional take-up of minority-language opportunity, made available via limited institutional (mainly educational) provision. If the ultimate aim of minority-LP is not made sufficiently explicit in recognisable, mandated, social strategies which protect and develop the social use of the minority language in existing communities and putative new networks, language promotion bodies will struggle to transcend the symbolic aspects of their engagement with the language. This neoliberal constraint on policy development precludes the adoption of the required systematic approach to the language minority's social challenges. Though laudable in their own contexts, the prioritisation of the following commonly adopted minority-language promotional efforts represents an evasive and asocietal aspect of minority-LP, if implemented independent of social context:

- Promoting minority-language curricular initiatives and educational programmes
- Increasing the aesthetic appeal of the minority culture among majority speakers
- Increasing the visibility of the minority language in the administrative and civic sphere
- Interpreting the cultural assets of and developing identitarian discourses for the minority in a multitude of electronic media platforms.

When symbolic assertion obscures societal reality the minority group is left in the unappealing position of having to acquiesce in a policy process

which fundamentally ignores the primary socio-cultural issue threatening their social continuity and sustainability – namely, the social pressures which cause language group decline. This is especially true for the communities in which the greatest levels of intergenerational language transmission had traditionally occurred. Officially sanctioned minority-language promotion which evades this core issue is the central feature of ALP.

LS in ALP is recognisable in the supposedly socially neutral civic promotion of minority language cultures where LS is clearly evident. ALP, of course, can only be superficially neutral as LS is the result of the well-established ideological and structural dominance of the stronger socio-cultural competitor. This tension between the civic expectation of official policy and the troubling reality of the speaker group creates an ethnolinguistic dissonance: speakers are left to invest hope in a LP which is not sufficiently grounded in how receding minority languages exist in society. This dissonance is further exacerbated by status-planning measures which overly identify (Fishman, 1991: 382) with the aspirations of centrally devised LP, especially the formal provision for schools and other institutional supports. The limitations of foisting aspirational expectations on schools in the absence of more productive LP outcomes in society has been highlighted in the Irish context (Ó Riagáin, 1997). Fishman (1991: 130) frames the limitations of the symbolic approach as follows:

Clearly, no matter how important they may be, courses, concerts and reading or listening matter whether for the old or for the young do not themselves create a speech community. Neither goodwill nor competence nor even leisure-time language use translates automatically into the basic building-blocks of home-family-neighborhood-community life that alone can lead to inter-generational language transmission.

On one level, deference or adherence to utopian thinking in GLP is understandable. This can often come from a sense of respect for, or a fear of losing favour among, the official hierarchies promoting the policies. On the other hand, the detriment involved in prioritising measures rooted in utopian aspiration is that:

- a) the language minority can be desensitised to the social processes undermining their socio-cultural viability.
- b) they can often be recruited or enticed to support the symbolic assertions in LP despite the marginal impact that they have on the more pressing social reality of the threats to their sustainability.

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- c) they absolve the language majority of their culpability in the assimilation of the minority.

GLP is more focused on maintaining obeisance to the sectoral framework for Gaelic promotion than sustaining Gaelic as a community language. This is the critical obfuscating aspect of GLP in relation to LS. Stressing the symbolic importance of the minority language in contexts where the social dimension of language planning is underdeveloped can encourage identitarian reassurance about the importance of diversity, without being of sufficient benefit to the minority undergoing decline (see Brooks and Roberts 2013). However, those who attach some socio-political value to the utopian aspects of the LP are more likely to be in a client-based relationship with the officials administering the budgets emanating from LP (cf. McLeod, 2020: 53 on Gaelic clientelism). For this reason, it is not uncommon for those interested in minority language issues to justify official LP despite the lack of evidence of successful LP uptake in actual communities.

Fishman (1991: 382) explains the lack of natural affinity among officialdom with the day-to-day social concerns of a low-status language group as follows:

The most general reason for the neglect of RLS (Reversing Language Shift) is probably the fact that RLS is an activity of minorities, frequently powerless, unpopular with outsiders and querulous among themselves; it is an activity that is very often unsuccessful and that strikes many intelligent laymen and otherwise intelligent social scientists as 'unnatural' ... It is hard for self-serving mainstream intellectual spokesmen and institutions to be sympathetic to the lingering, cantankerous, neither fully alive nor fully dead quality of many (perhaps most) efforts on behalf of receding minority languages (and the majority of sidestream scholars too are ultimately dependent on the mainstream for their perspectives, if not for their very livelihoods).

Limitations in Societal Engagement in ALP

Aspects of Gaelic LS via ALP can also be observed in the lack of acknowledgement – despite previous warnings – of the parlous societal reality and the marginal level of social engagement at the heart of GLP. The weak relationship between GLP and Gaelic community development has had a soporific effect on Gaelic communities. The official neglect of Gaelic community development in the context of Gaelic societal decline meant that the civic promotion approach was unlikely to animate participation in GLP efforts. GLP may have encouraged

a public deference to the authority of those who have been charged with responsibility for less-than-optimal official policies, but it is erroneous to interpret this deference as community support among the Gaelic group for Gaelic officialdom. If policies cannot be reformulated relatively quickly, GLP risks becoming part of the problem and an obstacle to finding official mechanisms by which the Gaelic minority can protect their societal situation against language loss.

We summarise below the various components in which LS via ALP occurs according to four criteria: 1) process; 2) structure; 3) mentality; and 4) societal trend:

Process: On the one hand, the societally dissociated focus on the status-building agenda in minority LP allows for the full institutional agency and social integration of majority speakers in the social geography of bilingual minority speakers. And on the other, this focus does not enhance the agency or cooperative capacity of the language minority to intervene collectively against the social process driving their assimilation into the dominant culture. The continuation of the social process towards LS, despite the implementation of LP, gives rise to a credibility issue for minority-language promotion in that LP aspiration does not result in the expected strategic advantage for the existing community of minority bilinguals. In ALP, policy aspiration and social outcomes do not sufficiently coincide to substantially reverse the process of social demise or to encourage a process of revitalisation among the minority.

Structure: Minority LP is backed by well-meaning official rhetoric about the importance of social and institutional respect for linguistic diversity, but it is generally restricted to supports which are provided by specialists in technocratic language sectors. As many of the minority-language specialists are often recruited from among out-group individuals who have acquired a proficiency in the minority language through formal educational supports, there is a tendency in LP to enable this outgroup agency and to promote their high-achieving perspective in minority LP formal provision. In other words, minority LP reflects more the concerns of the LP service ascendancy charged with implementing LP than the expected target recipients of LP, particularly in the vernacular context (see the discussion above on the Gaelic Referent Class and the Professional Category). To this extent, ALP represents an institutionalised assignment system rather than a communal support arrangement. While the establishment and

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development of minority language sectoral provision may require ideological justification against majoritarian prejudice, ALP generally eschews a materialist/functionalist analysis of the social requirements of the minority, especially in the non-specialist, day-to-day social sphere relating to the orality⁴ of the minority culture. This weak focus on socio-economic and societal contexts brings about a provision-led system in LP, rather than giving rise to a dynamic which builds communal capacity to address collective challenges.

Mentality: As minority LP is sanctioned by mainstream political mechanisms, the sectoral supports tend to evolve in accordance with how the minority is perceived or valued in majority political culture. The cultural assets of the minority are often more attractive and comprehensible to the majority than the complexities of reinforcing the vernacular group's social capital. For this reason, LS in ALP occurs within an intellectual and discursive framework which is primarily 'culturalist' and can be reinforced by a 'perspectivist' approach in postmodernist sociolinguistic discourses.⁵

Societal trend: Contrary to official and ideological assertions of minority-language support, ALP appears to adopt a neutral aspect in relation to majority-language practice as it becomes detrimental to core domains for minority language sustainability. This superficial neutrality in ALP has three primary negative effects: a) LP acquiesces in the social processes of LS; b) the language minority group is not afforded socio-economic resources and strategic supports to counter the established societal trends towards its erasure; and c) it prevents the development of overarching minority-focused Language Policy and Planning (LPP), i.e., it obstructs a comprehensive approach to minority social policy. Therefore, in the societal trend towards minority language erasure in Scotland, we observe the successful outcome for LPP focused on English (more normalised than specified) and the redundancy of the LP focused on Gaelic.

In the context of the lack of strategic resistance to the monolingualising dynamic of English-language normativity, language promotion without language protection would inevitably conclude in LS in vulnerable Gaelic vernacular communities, despite GLP's aspirations. There are two processes at play here: a) the long-term assimilation of the Gaelic group into English-language socio-cultural dominance; and b) the incongruity of GLP collapsing in on its own contradictions. The occurrence of advanced-stage

LS within the remaining social geography of vernacular Gaelic after over a generation of GLP initiatives has exposed the social irrelevance of promoting a minority language without communal protection.

LS in ALP can, therefore, be depicted sociolinguistically as:

LS in ALP = socially disengaged LP + loss of societal salience
+ contraction of social geography + remotely controlled modernisation
+ sectoralisation of language use; ALP ≠ RLS.

Up to the present, GLP has been experienced as language promotion in the context of societal demise of the Gaelic group. Following LS, GLP, given the *status quo*, will entail language promotion without communal or societal context, and could be depicted as follows:

Post-LS = GLP + language bodies + programmed secondary acquisition;
Post-LS = Post-societal Gaelic.

In short, GLP, following the conclusion of the LS process under the *status quo*, would be restricted to Gaelic promotion in the absence of Gaelic society.

Options for GLP in the context of LS via ALP

In this section, we examine the LP options which could be adopted in current LS circumstances. The following discussion builds on the analysis and recommendations of Chaps. 8 and 9 in GVCV.

Option 1

Continuing with the *status quo* is an option, meaning that no new initiatives or strategy would be considered to tackle LS in ALP. From the perspective of those living with LS, this would entail continuing with the bureaucratised box-ticking of *Bòrd na Gàidhlig's* language-plan processes (cf. Williams (2013: 104) on the 'over-bureaucratized process' in Irish LP). Those supporting current GLP could continue to emphasise the importance of Gaelic identity to civil society in Scotland by accentuating the expected outcomes of institutional provision for Gaelic. This would require coordinated official efforts to deflect attention away from the decline of the day-to-day use of Gaelic in communities. This *status quo* option would essentially prioritise the programmed acquisition and institutional practice of Gaelic as a compensation for its vernacular loss. This would amount to the easy option, but for reasons discussed above, it would lack credibility because the Language Board approach has not prospered in either L1

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or L2 Gaelic contexts. It would also demonstrate to the public that *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* is incapable of deviating from a path dependency which is primarily focused on the status-building provisions of the 2005 Act, despite the weak relevance of GLP to current circumstances and underproductive outcomes deriving from its underlying thinking.

Option 2

Abolishing *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* and transferring responsibility for Gaelic affairs to the Scottish Government could also be considered. In a post-LS situation, the rationale for Gaelic-language promotion will become more questionable, as GLP will be promoting a language for which no native-speaking, vernacular community survives. Post-LS GLP could be considered as an empty civic gesture after the sociolinguistic horse has bolted. In addition to jettisoning some of the pretence of current aspects of GLP, this approach would entail an admission among relevant public bodies in Scotland that reversing LS is too difficult as a societal initiative and too onerous as a collective task for exhausted, peripheral communities who had previously endured pressures of ethnolinguistic erasure or who had been disillusioned by ineffectual GLP. In the post-LS situation, a refocus of policy on educational and cultural identity issues might adequately satisfy the aspirations of those interested in Gaelic heritage following vernacular decline. In this approach, the Scottish Government could oversee a council-led series of curricular and educational initiatives to support the learning of Gaelic in schools and colleges. This educational promotion could be reinforced by grant aid to support the establishment of Gaelic affinity networks or Gaelic social clubs for those who have learned the language to practise it and to develop their interest in Gaelic culture and heritage with like-minded individuals. The political drawback of this approach is that it abandons the vernacular Gaels to their fate. But, on the other hand, it would represent a more honest version of the prevailing trend of the GLP *status quo*.

This option would represent the line of least resistance for English-speaking Scotland for two reasons: a) it consigns to history the seemingly intractable socio-cultural challenges of having to contend with the social policy responsibility for a subordinated minority culture; and b) it confines publicly backed Gaelic affairs to complementary domains of educational innovation and to opportunities associated with cultural heritage. It is predicated on a relatively banal, post-societal version of Gaelic culture which might be sufficient to maintain civic perceptions of how Gaelic contributes to versions of national

identity in Scotland, but which is not ambitious enough to burden policy makers with the socio-political concerns of a minority-language group. Although this could be considered a severe option in official circles, it would at least dispense with the notional aspect of support for Gaelic communities inherent in much of recent GLP.

Option 3

Amending current GLP to include language protection measures alongside existing language promotion could be feasible. This would entail establishing *Urras na Gàidhlig*, a Gaelic Community Cooperative Trust, as suggested in Chapter 9 of GCVC, to implement revitalisation measures in the remaining vernacular context of Scottish Gaelic in the islands. *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* would continue with its language promotion remit in the national context and would attempt to coordinate its activities in a complementary way with the language protection remit of the newly established *Urras na Gàidhlig*. The benefit of this option is that it would allow for the continuation of existing official activity of language bodies while broadening the societal remit of GLP to include relevant social supports for Gaelic-speaking communities in crisis.

Option 4

Abolishing *Bòrd na Gàidhlig* and establishing *Urras na Gàidhlig* as a language protection agency for Gaelic vernacular regeneration could also be considered. This option could be combined with elements of Option 2 above, especially with regards to transferring language promotion responsibilities to the Scottish Government. In this case, *Urras na Gàidhlig* would take responsibility for supporting and developing the use of Gaelic in communities, with a primary focus on its vernacular context (as discussed in more detail in Chap. 9 of GCVC), and the Scottish Government would focus on the national context. In collaboration with the councils, the Scottish Government would concentrate on developing curricular provision for Gaelic and give practical support to those who wish to establish networks of Gaelic speakers. A version of the Irish *Glór na nGael* community-support model could be advantageous to emerging L2 networks of Gaelic speakers. Option 4, therefore, combines a strategy for L1 regeneration (protection and maintenance) with a networked L2 heritage model for Gaelic. Subventions to organisations and grant aid to Gaelic projects in the arts, media and academia would continue under this option. Among the

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advantages of adopting this option are: a) the priority it gives to a community focus in Gaelic development; b) existing Gaelic communities would be liberated from the utopian illusions of symbolic GLP by providing for dynamic, practical community supports; c) it would allow for the emergence of community-based minority-language civic culture or ideologies which are rooted in their own specific situations and which are capable of being inclusive and empathetic towards the various requirements of participants in the different social geographies, networks and formal supports associated with Gaelic identity and practice. This would facilitate a much-needed horses-for-courses approach to Gaelic affairs at a time of obvious existential crisis for the Gaelic group. It would also encourage ideological plurality in Gaelic affairs and would be a check on the unhelpful discursive influence and priority claims of L2-focused language-policy ideologues in the socio-geographic context of the L1 Gaelic crisis.

Option 5

The Scottish Government may wish to consider an entirely new departure for Gaelic policy that would be based on a review and reorientation of the 2005 Gaelic Language Act towards a community-development model for Gaelic language planning and policy. The rationale for this new approach is rooted: a) in the obvious need to move beyond the limitations of symbolic LP, as discussed above and in GVCV (Chaps 1, 8 and 9); and b) in the strategic obligation of societally focussed LP to increase the language-revitalisation capacity of the minority by enhancing their competitive socio-economic advantage. In this option the existing act would be superseded by a Gaelic Language and Community Act which would establish two new official components to replace *Bòrd na Gàidhlig*: **Urras na Gàidhlig** with a vernacular-regeneration remit (cf. GVCV), and the **Gaelic Language Commission** as the national language body for Gaelic development in Scotland. The Commission would set the strategic agenda for key aspects of Gaelic revitalisation:

Acquisition and status planning: Language Planning and Policy to enhance educational provision and opportunities for Gaelic acquisition, and to increase the civic status of Gaelic in general, also entailing research and evaluation of LPP efficacy.

Language practice: Development of Gaelic social networks.

Cultural elaboration: Gaelic in the arts, media, literature and heritage.

Relevant formal structures and mechanisms of the Scottish Land Commission and Community Land Scotland could be similarly adapted to inform the operational procedures of the Gaelic Language Commission. The establishment of this commission would entail the appointment of a board of three commissioners with responsibility for the three policy domains above.

Urras na Gàidhlig, as set out in GVCV, would be the independent development body to support community regeneration initiatives in the vernacular context, and to provide advice and funding to the Gaelic Language Action Groups operating under the auspices of the *Urras* in the Highlands and Islands. The Commission and the *Urras* are envisaged as complementary bodies which would be expected to support the use of Gaelic in society, in existing Gaelic communities and in new networks of speakers. The Commission would have a national focus while the *Urras* would serve the specific regional context of Gaelic in the Highlands and Islands. However, the community-development approach of the *Urras* could be extended to other regions of the country as the Gaelic speaker networks expand. These bodies would receive core funding directly from the Scottish Government to finance a small executive staff and to support their development activities.

Concluding Remarks: Societal Virtues in Gaelic Policy

The next phase of the public debate on Gaelic affairs should focus on the societal situation of the language and on developing an evaluative framework which can maximise value for money in the allocation of scarce public resources. This would help in moving GLP beyond the ineffectual aspects of the circumscribed language-rights discourse. The post-2005 focus on the status-building agenda, having been divorced from the social reality of the speaker group, may have improved Gaelic's civic profile but it has achieved this by deflecting attention away from vernacular decline. Its institutional dynamic will eventually burn itself out when the various status holders in Gaelic officialdom appear to be the most relevant recipients of Gaelic policy provision. This will become more apparent as their set of policy assumptions bear even less relevance to the expected target group with which they seek to interact. It remains to be seen how the dwindling and ethnolinguistically threatened and under-resourced speaker group will engage with the final stages of LS in ALP and whether this will entail acquiescence or resistance to the GLP *status quo*. It is already abundantly clear that, under the *status quo*, Gaelic policy will outlive the vernacular speaker group. In the *status quo*, Gaelic may have a future through institutionally backed heritage, but without communal salience in

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society. In this post-Gaelic future, a vicarious life for Gaelic through English-mediated language networks appears to be the only option on the horizon if radical change cannot be effected. A post-vernacular outcome for the GLP *status quo* will, of course, obviate the need for the complicated formal processes of that *status quo*. In this sense, GLP's avoidance of the Gaelic group's difficult societal challenges could soon transition into the corporate demise of Gaelic officialdom.

The contradiction of promoting Gaelic-themed projects and initiatives with the simultaneous acquiescence to the growing social prevalence of English in island life is an obvious factor in how the credibility of official Gaelic policy has been undermined in these communities. This superficially neutral aspect of Gaelic policy in relation to key domains for language vitality – families, local neighbourhoods, youth socialisation, communal cultural practice, comprehensive educational provision, and socio-economic advantage for speakers – has more or less voided the well-meaning aspiration in overall Gaelic policy from the perspective of the vernacular group. A false sense of progress and renewal in Gaelic officialdom has masked the malaise in the Gaelic community. Formal Gaelic policy is only tangentially relevant to the Gaelic crisis and deepens the sense of malaise among the Gaels.

Due to the asymmetrical power dynamics between the residual Gaelic group and the more dominant English-speaking community (stemming from ethnolinguistic subordination), the Gaelic bodies have been spared from more vocal public criticism of their less-than-optimal engagement with the reality of Gaelic demise in these communities. The dissipation of energy on short-term Gaelic promotion projects, along with the understandable inclination of existing clients and budget holders to protect their own interests, has not led to an open and honest official appraisal of what is happening to the Gaelic group and of how effective Gaelic bodies have been in supporting them. Crystal (2000: 108–109) has identified a shoot-the-messenger response to research indicating language endangerment among those who 'refuse to accept that their language is "endangered" ... they may object most strongly to having such labels used about them'. However, the lack of sustained focus on the strategic needs of Gaelic native speakers has undoubtedly undermined the authority of Gaelic officialdom in these communities. More of the same non-systematic approach of short-term projects is unlikely to increase the confidence of the Gaelic group in official Gaelic bodies. GCVC indicates that the vernacular recipients of Gaelic policy have little confidence in the prescription which has been devised for them.

The language planning model set out in Chap. 9 of GCVC is anchored in the concepts of minority-language social protection and capacity building to

address societal challenges. GCVC advocates the prioritisation of strategic initiatives to protect and regenerate Gaelic orality in the remaining vernacular context of Gaelic's social geography, as the core aspect of future language planning and policy for Gaelic. This would entail emphasising a language-in-society approach to Gaelic affairs in Scotland. This community-oriented language development would aim to integrate institutional provision for fluent speakers and learners in a way which is consistent with the symbolic value of Gaelic to the national sense of cultural diversity and tolerance, while embarking on a socio-economically relevant LPP agenda in the vernacular context (see GCVC, 2020: 362–363).

Focusing on sustainable orality in Gaelic development will require a strategic repositioning of GLP, in line with a materialist/functionalist approach to minority-language societal strategy. This new strategy would require coordinated support schemes and resources to be focused on the use of Gaelic in families, local neighbourhoods, youth peer-group social activity and in more ethnolinguistically ambitious minority-language education. These initiatives will only succeed if they can be given relevance in the importance community-development activity attaches to Gaelic revitalisation and in the socio-economic opportunity accruing to Gaelic speakers from these collective activities. As pointed out in GCVC, it has to be acknowledged initially that the regeneration of the Gaelic group from the current challenging situation is going to be very difficult, but a language-in-society approach is much more likely to yield productive outcomes and to make participation in the Gaelic collective more dynamic, interesting and beneficial for all involved.

Notes

1. This quotation is from Noam Chomsky speaking in the documentary film, *We Still Live Here: ÂS Nutayuneân* (2010); directed by Anne Makepeace: www.dailymotion.com/video/x3h1my. [Accessed 4 February 2021]
2. We use the term Gaelic group to refer to the vernacular context. Gaelic communities mostly refers to the more general social context of Gaelic, comprising its vernacular, migrant community, learner and L2 networks.
3. See texts for similar clauses and responsibilities in the other international contexts: Canada: <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/o-3.01/fulltext.html>. [Accessed 4 February 2021] Wales: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/38/section/5>. [Accessed 4 February 2021] Ireland: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2003/act/32/section/13/enacted/en/html#sec13>. [Accessed 4 February 2021]
4. Orality refers to the communicative function and the cultural practice of a language in spontaneous social interactions; see Lewis and Simons (2016: 118–119) on the concept of sustainable orality.

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5. Culturism refers to a focus on the cultural resources of an ethnolinguistic group independent of how those resources emerged or exist in society (cf. Crystal 2000: 125). Comparable to culturism, perspectivism refers to a focus on identitarian language ideologies independent of the salience or the practice of language in society.

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