



European Research Centre on
Multilingualism and Language Learning

EUROPEAN NETWORKS AND PROJECTS

The Mercator Research Centre participates in several European networks and projects in the field. Some run for a limited period of time, others indefinitely.

For example:

***The Mercator Network of Language Diversity Centres**, which aims to exchange information, experiences, and good practices in the field of language learning and linguistic diversity. Website: www.mercator-network.eu*

***The Added value or FRY-EUS project**, a comparative study of the Basque Autonomous Community and Fryslân. The 'FRY-EUS' project seeks to compare two regions on how they handle several languages in education. Both regions deal with a minority, a dominant and a popular third or foreign language. More information can be found on: www.mercator-research.eu*

***The European Universities Network on Multilingualism (EUNoM)**. One of the main objectives of the network is to develop a coherent framework around a handful of key issues that will allow universities to reconceive the relationship between higher education and linguistic diversity. More information can be found on: www.mercator-research.eu*

***The Multilingual Early Language Transmission (MELT) project**, which, among other things, aims to identify best practice in language acquisition and immersion methodology, increase the skills of early years practitioners, and provide information to parents on bilingualism. Website: www.meltproject.eu*

FUNDING

The provincial government of Fryslân and the municipality of Leeuwarden are the main funding bodies of the Mercator Research Centre. Furthermore, projects and activities are funded by the EU as well as by the authorities of other regions in Europe with an active policy to support their regional or minority language and its culture.

MERCATOR RESEARCH IN 7 BULLET POINTS:

Subjects

- regional and minority languages
- immigrant and smaller state languages

Fields

- language learning at school
- language learning at home
- language learning through cultural participation

Activities

- research and study
- knowledge acquisition, inventory, circulation, and application

HOW TO CONTACT US

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In the 21st century all European citizens live in a multilingual environment. In their daily lives they come across many different languages. Consequently there is a growing interest in multilingualism and an increasing need for language communities to exchange experiences and to cooperate. The Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning meets this need when it comes to language learning and use at school, at home, and through cultural participation.

ABOUT THE MERCATOR RESEARCH CENTRE

The Mercator Research Centre was founded in 1987 on an initiative of the European Commission. It is based in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, the capital of Fryslân/Friesland – a bilingual province of the Netherlands – and forms part of the Fryske Akademy (Frisian Academy), one of the institutes of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). The scientific research of the Fryske Akademy covers Fryslân and its people, its language, its history, and its culture – in the broadest sense.

MISSION

The mission of Mercator is the acquisition and inventory, research and study, dissemination, and application of knowledge in the field of language learning at school, at home, and through cultural participation. The starting point lies in the field of regional and minority languages in Europe. Yet, immigrant languages and smaller state languages are also a topic of study. What follows is an explanation of the mission statement.



ACQUISITION AND INVENTORY

When it comes to knowledge acquisition and inventory, the Mercator Research Centre focuses on existing research on multilingualism in Europe. It collects and stores findings, policies, and practices in the domain of regional and minority languages.

For example:

Database of Experts

The Database of Experts offers an overview of all expertise in the field of minority or regional languages, bilingualism and multilingualism at school and at home, education, language learning, and language policy.

Mercator Library

The Mercator Library contains more than 7000 titles on the above-mentioned subjects.

Regional Dossiers

The series of Regional dossiers presents an up-to-date description of the position of a minority language at all levels in the educational system of a state. The series meets the growing need for basic information on education in minority language settings. The Regional dossiers are written by experts according to a fixed structure. In this way the dossiers can also be used for comparative research. Over 40 languages of EU member states have been covered.

RESEARCH AND STUDY

The Mercator Research Centre conducts scientific research independently as well as in collaboration with universities and other academic research centres.

This research is conducted at the following three levels:

- Psycholinguistic: Language and multilingualism at the level of the individual.
- Sociolinguistic: The way in which language and multilingualism between individuals is realised, acquired, and experienced.
- Language education / language policy: Language and multilingualism at the level of society.

For example:

More languages more opportunities: A Papiamentu – Dutch language development project

Central research question: “In what way can the mother-child interaction, the bilingual language use, and the parental beliefs of the mother be characterised and can the application of “More languages more opportunities” positively change these three constructs?”

Minimum Standards of Minority Language Education

A comparative description of the various positions of several regional or minority languages, based on a comparison of 8 countries and 10 languages. The descriptions concern among others: the level of ratification within the European Charter, education goals and models, time investment (subject and medium of instruction), teaching materials, and teacher qualifications and training.

DISSEMINATION

Research results are disseminated through publications and meetings in collaboration with European partners. The Mercator Research Centre organises conferences, seminars, and expert meetings on a regular basis. The main target groups for the Mercator Research Centre are professionals, researchers, and policymakers from all member states of the Council of Europe and beyond.

For example:

Network of Schools

The Network of Schools consists of more than 90 schools in 20 European regions where a minority language is taught. The goal of the Network of Schools is to create a platform for bilingual and multilingual schools in minority language regions in Europe in order to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences. The Network of Schools is intended for schools at pre-primary, primary, and secondary level as well as for teacher training institutes. More information can be found on www.networkofschools.org

APPLICATION

The expertise of the Mercator Research Centre is applied by professionals in language education, in pedagogical concepts, in multilingual teaching, in language acquisition, and in overall language policy and planning. Mercator also gives advice on issues of multilingual education to schools, teacher training institutes, boards, and local and regional government agencies.

For example:

Assessment and consult advice

Mercator is actively participating in the assessment of trilingual schools in Fryslân and advises the municipality of Leeuwarden with regard to multilingual cultural affairs. In 2018, the Netherlands will be providing one of the two European Capitals of Culture. Mercator links European actors to develop the concept of Fryslân as the Cultural Capital.

EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Of all citizens of the European Union 50% speak at least one language other than their mother tongue and 10% have a minority language as their mother tongue. In Europe there is a growing awareness of the value of that linguistic diversity and the need to protect and promote it at all levels. The Council of Europe stimulates language teaching and learning by means of conferences, projects, and comparative studies, whereas the European Union has its own policy in the form of programmes such as the ‘Culture programme’; the ‘Future European Youth programme’; and the ‘Lifelong Learning programme’, which explicitly wants to promote language learning and supports linguistic diversity.