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Language associations and collaborative support: language teacher associations as empowering spaces for professional networks

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Abstract

The LACS project (Language Associations and Collaborative Support) marked the first major cooperation between the ECML and the Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes/International Federation of Language Teacher Associations (FIPLV). This article focuses on one aspect of the project, namely an exploration of issues affecting language teacher associations worldwide. It describes the research carried out into the associations' perceptions of their functions, the challenges they face, and the strategies they are employing to address these challenges. Following an exploration of related literature, which provided a framework for analysis, the article describes the research methodology employed and then presents and discusses the data. In response to the challenges of sustaining membership and influencing policy, language teacher associations are seen to be developing new spaces, in which multidimensional networks can develop, and which can be of continuing relevance both internally to members and to external bodies. The article concludes by drawing on theories of space, arguing that it is through the shift from normative structures to more dynamic and flexible networks and spaces that associations are learning to cope with changes in the nature of professionalism associated with postmodernity.

Key words

Teacher associations; Professional associations; Language teacher associations; Membership organisations; Policymaking; Spaces; Networks

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Terry Lamb

Introduction

The LACS project (Language Associations and Collaborative Support) was launched in 2008 under the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML)'s second medium-term programme, *Empowering Language Professionals* (2008-2011). It marked the first major cooperation between the ECML and the Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes/International Federation of Language Teacher Associations (FIPLV).

This cooperation was significant as the two organisations shared certain features: not only are they both committed to multilingualism, but they are both also membership organisations, which need to provide clear support to members in order to justify membership fees. ECML is a Council of Europe institution based in Graz, Austria, which cooperates with the Language Policy Unit of the Council to support member states in putting the Council's language education policies into practice. Its members consist only of those Council of Europe member states willing to pay additional fees from their national budgets. FIPLV is the only global multilingual association of language teachers. An NGO of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, it is a federation of language teacher associations, both national and international, and has existed since 1931 to promote multilingualism and to support its member organisations. As with its member associations and ECML, funding comes entirely from membership fees.

One aim of the LACS project was to explore issues affecting language teacher associations, and to encourage them to share ideas on how membership organisations support their members more effectively. This was carried out by means of research into their functions, the challenges they face, and the strategies they are employing to address these challenges. Following an exploration of related literature, which provided a framework for analysis, this article describes the research methodology employed and then presents and discusses the data. Language teacher associations are seen to be developing new spaces, in which multidimensional networks can develop, and which can be of continuing relevance both to members and to external bodies. The article therefore concludes by drawing on theories of space, arguing that it is through the shift from normative structures to more dynamic and flexible networks and spaces that associations are learning to cope with changes in the nature of professionalism associated with postmodernity.

Exploring the field of study

The initial challenge in conducting this research was to identify which fields of study might inform it. Although many LTAs are themselves involved in publishing, a comprehensive search of the literature found no research carried out into their nature and practices, apart

from a comprehensive history of FIPLV produced for its 75th anniversary (Freudenstein 2009).

A slight broadening of the search revealed some literature on subject associations generally. This research largely focuses on two dimensions of their work, which can be defined as external (their role as expert advocates of their subjects, influencing external audiences such as policy makers and the general public) and internal (focusing on enhancing professional knowledge and expertise). Examples include Goodson's (1983) early study in England, which claimed that subject associations were the gatekeepers of their subjects, defining the curriculum in the days before the introduction of a centrally-directed National Curriculum in the 1990s. A historical perspective could be found in McCullough's (1992) work on the New Zealand Geographical Society 1930-c1950 and its role in defending the curriculum, and in Helsby and McCullough's (1996) exploration of major curricular initiatives led by subject associations (such as the Science Masters' Association and the Association of Women Science Teachers) in the 1950s and 1960s. Knight's (1996) study of two British subject associations (the Geographical Association and the National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology) argued that their influence was sustained even in the face of increasing central control of the curriculum, mainly because of their history and reputation and their capacity to present their subjects to policy makers and public in such a way 'as to attract attention in the beauty parade that has been curriculum making' (Knight 1996, 271).

Teacher control over the curriculum is, according to Helsby and McCulloch (1996), closely related to the concept of teachers' professionalism, defined as 'teachers' rights and obligations to determine their own tasks in the classroom, that is, to the way in which teachers develop, negotiate, use and control their own knowledge' (Helsby and McCulloch 1996, 56), and erosion of such control has led to debates about loss of teacher professionalism. The ability of subject associations to influence curriculum can thus be seen as an important aspect of teachers' professionalism. However, this ability appears not only to be related to the external political landscape, but also to the internal robustness of the association. Knight's (1996) research pointed out that there are many perspectives on curriculum, and that it can be difficult to champion a clear direction externally without consensus from members. This can lead to a shift from involvement in *curriculum making* to a focus on *curriculum delivery*, i.e. disseminating policy to members through in-service training. Ingvarsson (1998) as well as Mullins and Ingvarsson's (1999) study of five associations in Victoria, Australia, highlighted this, focusing on control of professional development rather than curriculum, though Ingvarsson (1998) argued that achieving consensus over *teaching standards* is also an important aspect of professionalism.

Research into subject associations is nevertheless very limited. We know little more than we did in 1993 when Little (1993, 135) stated not only that 'the place of teachers' professional associations remains nearly invisible in the mainstream professional development literature', but also that 'we have virtually no record of the specific nature or extent of discussion and debate over subject matter reform'. Furthermore, there is little theorisation of the concept of a

subject association. For this, it is useful to turn to broader research into professional associations.

Research into professional associations in disciplines such as nursing, law, librarianship and business (including human relations and marketing) provides useful insights into the features of member associations. Kloss (1999) provided a useful definition of professional associations, which allows a comparison with subject associations:

> The professional association exists to advance the standing of the members of the occupation or profession by setting educational and other standards governing the profession, advocating for favourable public and private policies, aiding members in their professional development, and advancing professional practice through research and information dissemination (Kloss 1999, 71).

This illustrates the external advocacy function and the internal professional development function identified above, though further exploration reveals the complex interrelationships between the two, and ways in which associations are attempting to find an appropriate and acceptable balance between them in shifting times.

The role of associations in the development of a professional identity, which can unify the profession and enhance its ability to have an external impact, has been explored in a number of ways. Shelander (1998), for example, stated that they foster professionalism by developing a sense of pride and reinforcing the values, beliefs, and identity of the profession, and further research into how this develops over time has been proposed by Adams, Hean, Sturgis and Clark (2006) and Cohen (1981). In his study of library professionals, Hovekamp (1997) drew on functionalism, and particularly Parsons (1969), to suggest that associations 'have the ability to bring order by providing a consensual normative structure – i.e. agreed-upon values – which direct the behaviour of individuals according to what is defined as proper, legal or acceptable by the rest of the community' (Hovekamp 1997, 233). Professional associations accordingly can establish 'a unified culture for the profession, the institutionalisation of professional codes of conduct, establishment of educational and performance standards, and the diffusion and incorporation of change and innovation within the profession' (p. 234). Rusaw (1995, 223) suggested that their role in 'socialising members to the skills, competencies, and roles needed to perform effectively in bureaucratic organisations', has been fulfilled since their origins as medieval craft guilds through both formal and informal learning activities, making clear connections between professional development activity and socialisation.

In some cases, professional associations take on even more explicit regulatory functions. These can involve not only definition and negotiation of the domain and appropriate behaviours, or theorisation and legitimation of change and the endorsement and diffusion of local innovations (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings 2002), but also monitoring of compliance with professional and institutional norms (Ruef and Scott 1998).

Another approach to the study of professional associations engages with the concept of professional knowledge. In an examination of the discourses of knowledge of four professional associations in Norway (teachers, nurses, engineers and accountants) (Karseth and Nerland 2007), the common denominator of all 'associations' was that they 'engage in knowledge work' (p. 337), revealing a range of knowledge discourses which position them towards practitioners, working fields and the public community. Echoing Knight's (1996) recognition that, for associations, there is a shift from curriculum-making, as discussed above, Karseth and Nerland offer an alternative proposition to that of increasing centralisation by noting that the position of associations as expert communities is being transformed by changes in post-modern society, which reflect a more diverse, complex and shifting knowledge-base and a de-hierarchisation, which, in turn, questions forms of professional regulation. This shift, accompanied by an increased emphasis on abstract, ambiguous and mediated forms of knowledge in a knowledge society (Chisholm 2000), as well as, paradoxically, a demand for accountability and standardisation, enhances the role of associations as 'critical agents of knowledge...requested to rethink their role as managers of knowledge and learning', focusing increasingly on 'providing practitioners with profound support, both where continuous learning and professional standards are concerned' (Karseth and Nerland 2007, 336). The Norwegian research highlights the challenge of balancing knowledge work internal to the profession, with the external demands from state, the markets and society as a whole, and, in conclusion, suggests that they 'need to build their knowledge strategies and actions on critical deliberation and institutional reflexivity' (p. 352).

Professional associations in many parts of the world are facing the challenge of increased uncertainty and change, and this is impacting on them in a number of ways. Echoing the postmodern shifts referred to above, Imber and Horowitz (1999, 5) referred to the 'ferment in professional associations', when they fail to acknowledge changes in their disciplines, and argued that they need to remain close to their members' developing involvements in sub-disciplines by embracing them in special interest groups. Professional associations mostly have to persuade potential members to join, as in most disciplines membership is not a condition of practice. Hovekamp (1997), however, argued that the emphasis of such associations in the past tended to be on public goods (in the teaching profession this would include providing access to education for all, including an appropriate curriculum and sufficient resources etc), as opposed to private (largely economic) benefits, which have been tended to be the territory of unions. Referring to Canadian research (Anderson, D'Amicantonio and Dubois 1992), he highlighted the fact that private benefits, such as access to journals, networks and professional development activities, which in turn may enhance their promotion chances, are increasingly being demanded by association members, as the public good is not always enough incentive to become members. Nevertheless, at the same time, external engagement with policy is still expected as a form of legitimation of such associations. However, the demands which relate to provision of private benefits and public goods require increasing levels of resource, which primarily comes from members, so associations need to re-think the ways in which they operate. The need to balance internal and external considerations also becomes a need to balance local member needs (the private) with national strategic policy action (the public).

There is, however, a shortage of systematic research and theoretical frameworks on which associations might draw in the face of these shifts. Some useful contributions have been made by research informed by the field of marketing into the reasons why professional associations worldwide have been losing members (Wilson 1997). According to Wilson (1997, 49), many professional associations have tended to eschew marketing activities, believing that they had no need to market their services, which means that not only have they failed to respond to members' changing needs, but also that there is little in depth research into members' views. One exception was research carried out by ASPAN (the American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses), to investigate why fewer and fewer nurses are joining the professional associations that represent them (DeLeskey 2003). A survey of the factors which influenced the membership decisions of both members and former members of ASPAN revealed similar reasons for membership: self-improvement, education, new ideas, programmes, professionalism, validation of ideas, improvement of the profession, and maintenance of professional standards. Reasons for not renewing membership were cost and lack of time. The study adopted Olson's 'exchange theory' (DeLeskey 2003, 10), according to which 'individuals join organizations because they believe that the benefits gained through membership surpass the costs', with benefits including not only tangible items but also 'socialization, respect, and other esteemed advantages' (p. 11) and costs including time, effort, and commitment. The particular challenge for membership associations, however, is that external, public benefits, such as influence over policy, are enjoyed by non-members as much as members. The implication is that associations need to develop benefits which are available only to members, such as professional development opportunities, whilst acknowledging the deterrents to membership, in particular time. The study concluded with a recommendation to embrace e-learning technologies to provide access to on-line conferences as well as discussion groups and other emerging learning opportunities. These would also fulfil the additional desire for networking opportunities identified as a reason for membership of nursing associations by White and Olson (2004). Given the self-improvement values identified by non-members as well as members, associations need to find ways of identifying themselves as the source of accessible opportunities for professional growth.

In the field of marketing itself, increasing research attention is being paid to the area of membership relationships, focusing on 'collective behaviours of members, such as membership retention rates, the degree the membership participates in and uses the membership benefits, and coproduction or volunteering behaviour' (Gruen, Summers and Acito 2000, 34). However, little research has been carried out into the management of memberships through marketing actions. One exception, which drew on the field of relationship marketing in the context of customer relationships, was Gruen, Summers and Acito's (2000) large-scale quantitative survey of members of the National Association of Life Underwriters in the USA. This aimed at understanding the impact of the association's 'relationship management activities' (such as providing core services, recognising members' contributions, encouraging members to network, keeping members informed about the association's goals and values, and working with intermediaries, such as employers or universities, to encourage membership) on 'membership commitment', as reflected in the

'membership behaviours' of retention, participation and coproduction (volunteering). The results showed that individually the relationship marketing activities only achieved partial success, but that in combination they encouraged not only retention of members but also greater participation in association activities and higher levels of active volunteering. It is also useful for associations to be aware of commitment as a multidimensional construct, and to aim at enhancing not only commitment through self-interest, but also a moral and emotional commitment to the goals and values of the association.

Some literature on professional associations provides insights into how associations are facing their challenges. Friedman and Phillips (2004), for example, focus on the governance of professional associations, and ways in which structures are changing to enable them to balance their need for accountability to and representation of their members and their need to become more strategic and proactive externally. Others highlight their dissemination role: Balla (2001), for example, examines their role as diffusers of innovation and policy from the state to their communities, whereas Newell and Swan (1995) highlight their role as mediators of innovation, diffusing knowledge and practices both internally amongst informal networks of members as well as through communications with the external world.

Some associations are enhancing their involvement in the education of their professionals by introducing accredited schemes with their own qualifications. The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in the UK is one such association, though this is the result of a desire of its members for respectability in a discipline which is endeavouring to promote a professional rather than a technicist identity (Rawel 2002). Other shifts in professional development activities are discernible in some associations in line with the broader social changes highlighted above, namely away from a broad disciplinary focus to a more specialised one, and from national to local development opportunities. Continuing professional development is a term which covers a range of opportunities but, allied to the concept of lifelong learning, it implies a shift from education in institutional structures to individual responsibility for learning as a means of coping with unpredictability and change (Friedman and Phillips 2002). Research carried out by the Professional Associations Research Network (PARN) (Friedman, Durkin, & Hurran 1999) in the UK identified that even where organisations' CPD policies demanded structured, formal learning, there was an increasing shift to a requirement on individuals to reflect on the outcomes of their learning. In a further survey of 101 UK Professional Associations, Friedman and Phillips (2002) focused on the potential of including mentoring in associations' CPD activities, as these facilitate highly localised opportunities to reflect on the relationship between learning experiences and practice (Schön 1991). Mentoring in this sense marks a shift from more structured institutional induction programmes, offered to employees either as a socialisation strategy (to instil existing cultural values) or as a way of supporting cultural change (e.g. mentoring programmes aimed at supporting minority ethnic groups). Professional associations are more likely to engage in informal 'facilitated mentoring', which guide rather than determine mentoring processes, and in varied forms of mentoring (individual, peer, and group) (Ritchie and Genoni 1999).

As has already been suggested, however, there has been a general tendency for professional associations to rest on their laurels, declaiming the value of membership in the same terms as they always have done (Fisher 1997; Frank 1997). Yet the marketing literature recommends crucial marketing activities which need to be considered by professional associations just as much as by any organisations offering goods or services in return for payment: development of a vision or mission statement; identification of priority targets for a membership drive or membership retention; articulation of the unique advantage of membership of this particular association rather than another; constant monitoring of members' needs and perceptions; careful selection from the wide range of marketing tools available, including involvement of the membership in marketing; careful planning to include resources needed and available (Wilson 1997). In professional associations, however, such activities need to be informed by a reflexive consideration of the relationship between internal ethical responsibility to members and external moral responsibility to the professional field. Of course, each professional field is different, and brings with it its own ethical and moral dimensions and therefore its own options for action. To return to the field of teacher associations in education, Gaskell and Rowell (1993) contrasted the perspectives of subject specialist and generalist teacher organisations, coming to the conclusion that subject associations may emphasise 'collective control by teachers over the content and methods of the curriculum' whereas generalist teacher associations may favour 'control of the curriculum by individual teachers making judgements in the context of a particular community and students' (Gaskell and Rowell 1993, 70, in Helsby and McCulloch 1996, 71). In response, Helsby and McCulloch (1996) recommend the need to develop a more detailed awareness of the position of teacher associations, including drawing on the views of teachers themselves.

The research reported in this article lays claim to concerning itself with the needs of one particular community, namely LTAs. Furthermore, though it may not draw on teachers' voices directly, it does draw on the voices of LTAs and thus, indirectly, on teachers' voices. The data have been analysed in the light of the above literature review, focusing specifically on the internal and external functions of LTAs, as well as challenges and strategies. Other themes which have emerged in this review, such as the need to enhance networking opportunities through opportunities offered by technology, will be revisited in the discussion which follows the analysis.

The LACS research: purpose and methodology

Research was central to the LACS project, its position in the project reflecting a number of purposes, including:

- gathering information concerning language teacher associations (LTAs) in order to share that information amongst the participating associations and beyond;
- raising awareness amongst participants (representatives of LTAs) of the value of collaborating with each other through information-sharing.

The focus of the research on information sharing and collaboration meant that the research methods and research outcomes were closely integrated in an iterative way through a series of processes and products. LTAs were encouraged to share ideas through face-to-face meetings as well as questionnaires, and these ideas were brought together in an on-line handbook for LTAs, which could in turn form the basis for ongoing discussion, sharing and collaboration. The research could therefore be seen as interventionist (Miner and Mezias 1996), in that it was intended not only to produce data but also to encourage a developing commitment to ongoing development through collaboration.

In order to explore the key functions of LTAs, as well as the challenges they face and how they are addressing them, a number of research activities were conducted, including structured and semi-structured questionnaires, group discussions in meetings and workshops, and written case studies provided by volunteer LTAs. Questionnaires were sent in two stages to approximately 310 member associations of FIPLV, FIPF and IDV in over 140 countries, the majority being unilingual French or German Teachers' Associations, with national multilingual associations and international unilingual associations also being circulated. The questionnaires were circulated in two ways: as email attachments for electronic completion and return, and as an on-line survey. The accompanying email, explaining the purpose of the research and the benefits to all LTAs, and the questionnaires themselves, were written in three languages (English, French and German, the official languages of the LACS project) in order to increase accessibility and to demonstrate a commitment to multilingualism. Each of the three federations sent these to the link persons in their own member associations, in order to encourage completion.

The staged nature of the research was intended to facilitate higher levels of contribution and to produce rich data which would reflect the diversity of associations' practices. The first questionnaire (Appendix 1) consisted of a number of multiple-choice questions relating to the functions and activities of the LTAs as well as the main challenges they face. This questionnaire also included space for LTAs to provide additional information if they wished to. An initial analysis of this research was presented at a range of meetings and workshops attended by LTA representatives as part of the LACS project, and participants were invited to comment and to contribute additional information, as well as to participate in activities which used ECML projects as a stimulus to discussion about dissemination issues. The intention here was mainly to stimulate deeper, more detailed levels of contribution, though the meetings were also an opportunity for ongoing validation of the data. Participants were in addition asked to propose key areas of activity which they would like to develop further, and to volunteer case studies of activities which they thought would benefit other LTAs. Based on the results of the first questionnaire and the discussions, the second questionnaire (Appendix 2) was distributed a year after the first one, with LTAs requested to respond to a series of open-ended questions and share information for dissemination in the on-line publication.

The outcome was a rich corpus of mainly qualitative data consisting of questionnaire responses, notes made in group discussions, and case studies. It is, however, not the purpose of this article to present this data in its entirety, though the online handbook is easily

accessible on the LACS website (Lamb et al. 2012). The aim here is to re-interrogate the data on the basis of the literature review, addressing the following questions:

1. In which ways do LTAs conceptualise their internal- and external-facing functions?
2. In which ways do they conceptualise the challenges they are facing?
3. Which strategies are they employing to address these challenges?

The following sections will present the main findings of the research, though there is limited space for presentation of supporting evidence. This is, nevertheless, available for scrutiny in Lamb et al (2012). As the LTAs often have long names in a range of languages, the quotations will simply refer to 'international' or to the country where they operate, and whether they represent one taught language ('uni') or all ('multi'). I have also translated original quotations into English.

Functions of language teacher associations

Not surprisingly, there was consensus on the key functions of a LTA. These include internal-facing functions such as disseminating information about new policy developments, acting as a forum for teachers to share and develop effective practice, and providing in-service training by experts; as well as external-facing functions such as the representation of teachers' views on policy-making bodies. This is summarised by one association:

> Place to gather and exchange experiences, knowledge, materials, contacts etc.
> Platform for language political issues. (Spain, uni)

LTAs are thus conceptualised as networks of professionals, run by and for professionals, focused mainly on support for members, with knowledge exchange and development as well as representation of members' views as their defining functions. Support for collaborative activity is seen as a significant aspect of an LTA's identity, and a distinguishing feature compared with other types of organisation, such as those which are publicly financed, either locally or nationally. Many language teachers in fact risk isolation, particularly those teaching languages other than English, as they may be the only teacher in the school teaching that language, so there is a particular demand from them for building communities with others, both in their own country and abroad. There is therefore an appreciation of both face-to-face meetings locally and nationally, as well as virtual spaces such as discussion fora and databases where they are able to access shared resources as well as disseminate their own ideas and materials.

Professional development activity is viewed as crucial to professionalization of teaching as well as to the status of languages as a subject:

> Our association aims to contribute to the professionalisation of the profession and further development of the subject, by offering opportunities for professional development. (Switzerland, uni)

There is a place for external input into this, but essentially the LTA is conceptualised as a forum or space which belongs to its members and in which they can meet, share their knowledge (including of current policy initiatives), produce resources, and improve their own expertise, reinforcing their own sense of professional identity.

Such a space offers opportunities to contribute articles on practice to LTA publications and to become actively involved in the association, simultaneously fulfilling the desire for networking and enhanced professional status and profile, which may bring career benefits and higher salaries.

Professional development activity and networking also converge in opportunities to take part in national and international projects, or in other enrichment activities such as competitions for learners or teachers. For language teachers, the development of international connections is particularly apposite, both for personal and professional purposes.

When asked what the most important function of a LTA was, however, 'influencing policy' is mentioned more frequently than others. The LTAs provide a number of reasons for this, but a common factor was 'to safeguard and to try to improve the rights and well-being of our members' (multi, Finland) within a political field perceived by many LTAs, e.g. in Bulgaria, Denmark, Slovenia and the UK, as problematic and ever-changing. In particular, LTAs representing teachers of languages other than English are concerned that English is being promoted to their detriment:

> It's thanks to associations that French has been maintained or reintroduced into schools. [....] It's incredible how much influence English has in all Government decisions. Despite our protests, language policies are only interested in one language in Argentina: English. (Argentina, uni)

In one case, the position of the LTA seems to be suggesting a movement towards more of a union role focusing on job security:

> Teachers expect that their jobs are secured, through teaching not only English but also other languages. (Poland, uni)

The private, or personal, interest of members is here seen as interrelated to the public interest, namely the promotion of multilingualism. Indeed most unilingual associations promote multilingualism, not just their own language, thereby acknowledging the benefits for society of linguistic diversity generally, as in the following example:

In order to avoid French being taken over by English, especially in international projects, those in charge of languages and education should develop and/or support programmes aimed at promoting multi- and plurilingualism in the spirit of European language policy. Through these we can replace the predominant attitude of 'instead of' with 'as well as' when choosing the languages of education and research. (Russia, uni)

This is echoed in the conceptualisation of LTAs as the voice of teachers of all languages, as in the example of the multilingual association in Australia:

the nature of policy making in Australia, being both centralised and decentralised makes it important for a solid voice to represent the trends and practices. (Australia, multi)

As a voice, it is considered crucial that they bring the unique perspective of their members to the attention of the authorities, which entails the necessity of establishing consultation processes acceptable and accessible to the membership. Some LTAs are making use of new technologies to hold weekly polls on their websites on issues of interest, or to organise major consultations. The need to be able to say with confidence both to the members and to the policymakers that they are representing current views accurately is consistently emphasised by LTAs. It is also considered to be an opportunity to raise members' awareness of the LTAs' activity; according to a unilingual association in the USA, 'communication always needs to be improved and despite many 'blasts', we often learn that members still do not know all that we do for them!'

Policy influence can occur in different sites, dependent on opportunities afforded. Some LTAs represent members on national government steering groups, others contribute to examination authorities, curriculum authorities, inspectorates, local education authorities, or local school boards. Policy influence can therefore be through direct representation, but it may also involve campaigning or lobbying activities. These two activities make different demands on the LTA: the first requires raising its profile in order to be able to negotiate a place on such bodies, and an individual representative who is informed about the issues under discussion and the membership's position, and with the authority from the members to represent their views (which often implies that the person is in an elected position, e.g. President); the second activity requires strategic campaigning skills, a capacity to mobilise members to write letters, sign petitions, attend meetings etc, and an understanding of the role of different communications media to influence public opinion. The relationship between these two policy roles is complex and dynamic, particularly in a context such as the USA where one unilingual association pointed out the existence of two large umbrella organisations, each with similar membership (over sixty associations concerned with languages or international studies): the Joint National Committee for Languages (JNCL), which provides a forum for associations to discuss, plan and address language policies that affect international education; and its sister organisation, the National Council for Languages

and International Studies (NCLIS), which is the advocacy or lobbying organisation that attempts to create and influence these policies and their funding. The division of focus between the two is necessary because of US tax code that requires any lobbying group to register under a different tax law, but the LTAs require high levels of skill in negotiating a path through this.

Other LTA functions referred to in the research include working collaboratively with other national and international bodies, including cultural organisations such as the Goethe Institut, as well as public relations aimed at promoting language learning nationally:

> We have for decades regularly produced material (brochures, booklets, series of transparencies etc.) with the purpose of inspiring children and youth to start studying equally the various languages offered in Finnish schools. (Finland, multi)

Finally, LTAs report a mixed picture in terms of engagement with research, with some going beyond a dissemination role. There is evidence that LTAs are increasingly applying for funded research projects, either alone or in consortia. Many LTAs, however, believe this to be beyond their capacity, as they feel the need to concentrate their activity on activities which recruit and retain members. On the other hand, some LTAs are looking to funded research projects as a way of bringing in income, of raising their profile, and of involving their members in research activity, either through direct involvement or in a consultative capacity. LTAs are in fact well placed to attract funding to carry out research projects. Through them, funding bodies are able to claim to be supporting the teaching profession as a whole, and are also more confident that the developments will have an impact if there is ongoing involvement and consultation. Furthermore, LTAs are able to draw on a wide range of expertise, as they tend to have members from all sectors of education, from primary schools to universities and, in some cases, from other language-related sectors such as publishing and translating.

Challenges

Most striking in this research was the strong degree of consensus regarding the challenges the LTAs were facing. By far the most common challenge is that of falling membership, experienced by associations around the world. As membership fees are identified without exception as the main source of LTA funding, this presents a real challenge to the continuing existence of the association. In some cases, where associations employ staff to support their management, redundancies are being made and offices are being changed for smaller premises. The concern is that this means less support for volunteers and members, particularly in the organisation of national conferences or publications, which could lead to a downward spiral: having fewer members means fewer services and lower visibility, and this leads to even fewer members.

Recruitment of new entrants to the profession seems to be a particular challenge, with many LTAs complaining that their membership is aging. As older members also tend to be in posts

with higher levels of responsibility, this presents a problem in terms of access to volunteers willing to organise activities, particularly at a local level. Nationally there tends to be more candidates for high profile elected positions, but some LTAs expressed a desire to have younger recruits in such positions in order to promote a more modern image and appeal to younger teachers. It is difficult to understand why, at a global level, there is some reluctance from young professionals to become involved in such associations, though it was suggested that promotion in some contexts is gained more easily when teachers devote themselves to their own development, rather than taking a collegial approach. Clearly further research is needed to explore this further.

Falling membership represents a particular threat to the associations' capacity to influence policy. Firstly, it is difficult to claim representation of the language teaching profession unless they cn convince policymakers that a good proportion of the profession are members. Secondly, representation and campaigning is time-consuming, and requires sufficient numbers of volunteers, able to be released from work:

> [Challenges are] time and resources, especially human resources. [...] Lobbying and keeping abreast of what is happening in the law as well as sitting in endless representational meetings all takes a lot of time and commitment. (Latvia, uni)

> Active members are less representative – with not many teachers; university colleagues are more active. (Costa Rica, uni)

The tension between direct, internal support for members and external participation in committees and other organisations is clearly felt by many LTAs, which reported that they are now prioritising more tangible forms of teacher support because these have more immediate impact on teachers than lobbying, which does not always have any impact at all.

The study also revealed external challenges to LTAs and in particular to their national status and their ability to have an impact on policy. In some cases, language learning policy is not considered a government priority or it is considered to be too challenging a topic:

> Willingness on the part of the authorities to discuss Language Policies. It's too complex an issue! (Chile, uni)

Many other LTAs reported challenges which arose from the declining status of language learning (other than English), leading to increasing exclusion from decision-making processes. This is exacerbated by a reduction in representation of languages other than English amongst influential education officials:

> Most language inspectors are neither French speakers nor French teachers. (Zambia, uni)

In English-speaking countries, there is even less interest in languages on the part of Government:

> The lack of interest until recently by our legislators on the national, state and local levels to consider the study of languages important. Even now the security and defense interests are the major support centers for the increase in the study of languages (usually less commonly taught) presently taking place. (USA, uni)

In some countries, political structures constrain the opportunities for LTAs to have a representative function. In Argentina, Australia and Finland, for example, political devolution to states, provinces or even individual schools make it difficult to organise a campaign, especially given the LTAs' limited resources. In other countries, LTAs stated that there is no historical tradition of consultation in the country, though this seems to be changing in some contexts:

> Mechanisms to enable associations like ours to influence decisions making at a high level is developing in Russia thanks to the new law relating to organisations and non-commercial groups which was introduced in 2006. (Russia, uni)

Even when invited, there was a sense from some responses that 'reforms have been decided in advance and we are only consulted once the general framework has been established' (Bulgaria, uni). There is often a sense that consultation is tokenistic or that the role is advisory only:

> We cannot influence any financial or management decisions (job losses or German groups). We can only advise. (France, uni)

Responding to the challenges

The LTAs reveal high levels of imagination and resilience in their responses to the challenges they are facing. The problem of membership recruitment and retention is being addressed through a wide range of activity, both internal to the LTA, and externally (Lamb et al 2012).

LTAs understand that they must not only provide services to their members, but also communicate their provision in a highly visible way. In addition to publicising their support for members through fliers, brochures and posters, they are increasingly using their website as a dynamic and informative tool for members and prospective members. Conferences are also seen as opportunities to recruit new members, and many LTAs have pricing strategies which make it more economical for non-members to join than to attend as a non-member.

Externally, LTAs continue to find strategies to have a voice in policy: inviting policy makers to speak at their conferences, using their networks to cultivate personal contacts, producing high quality briefing documents for ministers, and developing strategic plans which address policy issues:

> We have gathered statistics to show the policymakers that the number of children and youth studying other languages than English has been declining drastically during the

past ten years. We also organized a three-year-long national campaign called KISU - Multilingual Finland 2005-2007 in order to promote the teaching and learning of languages. The target groups of the campaign were as much policymakers as citizens. (Finland, multi)

Collaboration with other associations and organisations is also a way of making economies of scale with regard to attending consultation meetings, whilst at the same time strengthening their influence. Partners might include universities, schools, embassies, cultural institutes, and the media. Some unilingual associations collaborate with other language associations in order to demonstrate a united front wherever this is possible: the Zambian Association of French Teachers, for example, stated that they influence policy through collaborating with teachers of English and local languages in LATAZ (Language Teachers' Association of Zambia). Similarly, in Iceland, it is recognised that 'the individual associations must collaborate; together we are stronger and can help each other' (Iceland, multi).

Some LTAs are clarifying what their own unique role is and can be. This is aimed internally at members, so they understand the benefits of membership, and externally at prospective members and policymakers:

> We need to show the government that we offer a service to our teachers that can't be found elsewhere. When we do that we can convince them to contribute funds to various activities. Our latest had to do with having a conference for teaching assistants coming from America, Britain and Australia who are here for one or two years to assist English language teachers. (Austria, uni)

Once recruited, the challenge to retain members is being addressed by increasingly consulting them, not only on language policy issues but also on the associations themselves, their structures, mission statements and future directions as well as their services. The purpose is to address the 'ferment' in professional associations (Imber and Horowitz 1999): how to ensure members' immediate personal and professional needs are met whilst maintaining a public profile and representing members' voices, with limited resources.

Associations are finding that new technologies and social networks provide valuable opportunities to address their challenges. Many LTAs are investing in the development of multimedia websites, which are regularly updated, in Facebook pages, which provide opportunities for interaction between professionals and are constantly a fresh source of information because of updates from 'friends', and in Twitter as an opportunity to draw a wide range of people's attention to association activity and to involve members themselves in marketing the association without significant investment in time or funding.

Strategies to address the internal-external functionality of LTAs are, however, most clearly exemplified in the introduction of member-only spaces on LTA websites. Many of the comments from LTAs in this study addressed the dilemma (identified by Deleskey 2003) of presenting themselves publicly in a way which would provide sufficient information to

encourage membership, without simultaneously removing the exclusive benefits of membership by providing the services to non-members. The external facing website can therefore address members, non-members, policymakers and the general public, with the internal facing members' area offering exclusive services, such as resources for teaching, news, pedagogical information, exercises for teachers and students, or even podcasts and webinars. Many associations are reducing costs also by publishing their newsletters and journals electronically on member-only web spaces.

Opportunities afforded by the internet are also enabling some associations to address another specific need of language teachers: contact with language teachers in other countries. For example, a case study (*Acting locally and globally*), provided by the Lithuanian Association of Language Teachers, argues the case for enriching the internal and external promotion of the association by extending networks beyond national boundaries to a European level. Many associations hope that, by collaborating with associations in other countries, they can not only provide opportunities for members but also additional justification for their existence to members, non-members and policymakers. A further example of the latter was provided by ANILS (Italy), which cites its membership of FIPLV as significant when negotiating with policymakers.

Discussion

The heavy focus in the data on membership services and policy influence as essential functions of LTAs echoes the challenge of professional associations identified earlier, namely finding a balance between internal and external functions and orientations.

However, in contrast to Knight's (1996) observation that subject associations were shifting from 'curriculum making' to 'curriculum delivery', many LTAs appear to be attempting to maintain a balance between the two. Of course Knight was referring only to two subject associations in the UK, and the research was carried out in 1996, so it is impossible to draw any conclusions about why the associations in this study appear to be different. Nevertheless, it raises interesting questions which relate to the context in which associations exist, including the status of the subject being represented by the association, the position of teaching as a profession, and the nature of policymaking. Given such potential variations, the degree of consensus amongst the LTAs in this research is surprising. It may, of course, be that other subject associations have also shifted, or that languages are particularly politicised because of the intimate relationships between language and phenomena such as individual and group identity, communities, social inclusion, and the economy (King et al. 2011). However, this would require further research. What was evident in this study was that there is competition between languages and that this threatens teachers' professional (and personal) lives, and that LTAs need to show that they are challenging such threats from policymakers in order to remain relevant to their members. Many LTAs are therefore finding new ways of campaigning, through forging collaborations between languages, promoting multilingualism and working with other bodies.

In fact, the LTAs which contributed to this study suggest that the internal-external, curriculum making-curriculum delivery divides are being blurred altogether. Two of their key strategies demonstrate further this internal-external dynamic. The first is the development of new ways of communicating through new technologies, combining a public face with provision for the much demanded local, individual, networking opportunities (White and Olson 2004), which are simultaneously flexible, innovative, interactive, easily accessible, and time-efficient. Through social networks, LTAs can retain (or, where necessary, restore) their identity as members' associations, serving as fora for peer support and member consultation, whilst identifying themselves as national (or international) bodies supporting policy development from the perspective of their members. Social networks are particularly suited to postmodern interpretations of the role of associations in knowledge development (Karseth and Nerland 2007): they allow individual and specialised interests and 'knowledges' to flourish within the community and are therefore capable of responding to change and unpredictability (Friedman and Phillips 2002; Imber and Horowitz 1999).

The other key strategy is LTAs' increasing involvement with research, again through collaboration. This brings additional revenue which can be used to support members, but, more significantly, it also helps to sustain the association's role in maintaining 'professional standing' (Kloss 1999) for language teachers, whilst enhancing its own internal and external credibility. Furthermore it benefits members, not only through providing access to the latest 'knowledge' as mediated by the association, but also through facilitating teacher research through sponsorship of local projects. In this way, the position of the association as expert is broadening in ways which are commensurate with postmodern shifts, with the whole community producing expert knowledges, capable of being validated within and beyond the membership through ongoing engagement with the new methods of communication. Through such work, the LTA's identity as innovator at the forefront of development of the subject is protected, whilst it also responds to new demands in CPD for more personalised opportunities to reflect and learn (Ritchie and Genoni 1999).

These two examples suggest that, rather than being irreparably damaged by the 'ferment' in professional associations, LTAs are negotiating new ways of operating which enhance the historically strong links between themselves and teachers' professionalism as defined earlier by Helsby and McCulloch (1996). They appear to be catering for a notion of professionalism which embraces the individual and the community, supporting individual and collective needs, and which extends expertise from the organisation itself to the network of professionals who make up its membership. Mediation between this expertise and policymakers could be influencing policymakers more than is recognisable at first glance, as language professionals are offered a forum to influence policy in new ways, as proposed in Elmore's (1989) 'backward mapping' theory of curriculum policy making and implementation:

> ...it is not the policy or the policymaker that solves the problem, but someone with immediate proximity. Problem solving requires skill and discretion; policy can direct

individuals' attention toward a problem and provide them an occasion for the application of skill and judgement, but policy itself cannot solve problems. (p. 254)

It may be that LTAs are finding new more dynamic, responsive, and inclusive ways of being the 'gatekeepers' of their subject (Goodson 1983).

The LACS research has its limitations of course. The questionnaires were all completed by LTA officials who, albeit members in honorary positions rather than employees, were deeply committed to their association and actively thinking about its status and survival. The conceptualisations of function therefore come from a particular perspective, which is accustomed to finding justifications for the continued existence of LTAs. On the other hand, it could be argued that this was precisely the focus intended in the research which, after all, was designed with the purpose of supporting LTAs through collaboration with other LTAs and understanding in depth their rationale, functions and challenges; probably only those who have devoted time in engaging with LTAs so actively would have an understanding of such issues. Nevertheless, further research is needed to complement this study, which would explore 'ordinary' language teacher perspectives on LTAs and the role that they play, or could play, in their professional lives. LTAs need to listen to their members (Helsby and McCulloch 1996) as a central part of their marketing strategies, if they are to avoid complacency and miscommunication.

Conclusion

This article has described a study carried out as part of the LACS project, which formed part of the ECML's programme *Empowering Language Professionals*. It explored areas of literature which could inform it theoretically, and reported on ways in which LTAs conceptualised their functions and the challenges they are facing, as well as their responses to these challenges. The need for LTAs to survive in the face of changes in society led to an exploration of the ways in which they are fighting to recruit and retain members, perceived as the main challenge for member associations. This led to a reconsideration of internally and externally oriented functions, which are seen as interrelated and mutually significant. Internal robustness means having members whose immediate individual professional development needs are being met, but whose personal situations, which can be affected by changes in policy, are also being defended. Externally, impact on curriculum development and policy is affected by the strength of the LTA's claim to represent the profession, both in terms of numbers and opinions. This demands innovation not only in providing a forum for new forms of CPD, but also in providing a forum for debate.

According to Dahrendorf's (1959) theory of conflict, clashes of interest are caused by authority relations between decision makers and those who are subjected to it. Professional associations have traditionally been perceived as a buffer between these two groups, but this has depended on them positioning themselves as a valid voice for the whole community. Both the research explored in the literature review and the data provided by the LTAs in this study provide some evidence that this is increasingly a challenge, and could indeed shift the clashes of interest internally within the association itself. However, the LTAs also offer

evidence that they are responding to this challenge by minimising their identity as a professional institution, whilst enhancing their identity as a professional network.

Research in a number of disciplines such as telecommunications and cyberspace have conceptualised networks as spaces rather than conduits, which implies that, like physical spaces, they are 'sites of communicative action structured by a range of social relations, including those embedded in the design of the setting' (Samarajiva and Shields 1997, 536), rather than a means of transmitting information. Giddens (1979) highlights the significance of space, criticising most social theory for neglecting it and seeing it merely as a backdrop to social action. Although Giddens himself focuses more on physical space, his work raises its status as a significant component of social interactions, defining it as

> ...a *setting* for interaction. A setting [which] is not just a spatial parameter, and physical environment, in which interaction occurs: it is these elements mobilised as part of the interaction. Features of the setting of interaction, including its spatial and physical aspects...are routinely drawn upon by social actors in the sustaining of communication. (pp. 206-7)

Recent work in the fields of education (e.g. Leander and Sheehy 2004) and anthropology (e,g. Vergunst 2010) has similarly examined how physical space and social relationships are interrelated, looking at space as 'a product and process of socially dynamic relations' (Leander and Sheehy 2004, 1). Spaces are inhabited and experienced by individuals, and used as a resource, but can also be defined as multidimensional (Bourdieu 1985, 723), both physical and non-physical, as in virtual spaces. These theories can be combined in the process of 'socio-spatial dialectic' (Soja 1989, 79-83), in which space is both a social product and a force which reflects back on social processes.

This brief consideration of space provides support for conceptualising LTAs as 'spaces'. Such spaces need to serve many functions: accommodate diverse languages, educational sectors, interests and priorities; satisfy personal ambitions and professional development needs at the level of the individual and the group; be both flexible enough to cope with constant change and elastic enough to be able to expand to include newly emerging interest groups; offer both physical and virtual opportunities for interaction locally, nationally and internationally, connecting all levels; mediate both internally as well as internally and externally in order to reflect and represent members' voices and to have an impact externally; yet provide a sense of shared space, inclusive and common to all. As such, LTAs are multidimensional, both physical and non-physical, and dynamic both in the sense of creating opportunities for social interaction and in responding to the social interactions which occur within them. They are no longer the consensual normative structures of functionalism, directing individuals' behaviour to arrive at a set of shared values. As spaces, the power of LTAs is in their flexibility, as they can accommodate any number of individuals in varying spatial contexts (virtual, physical, personal, local, global), promote multiple levels of communication, and present themselves as rich and active networks characterised by diversity. In short, theories of space can thus enable us to understand the new ways in which

LTAs as socio-spatial phenomena can, to echo the title of the ECML programme of which this project formed a part, *empower language professionals*.

Acknowledgements

Appendix 1: Questions from Questionnaire 1

1a.   Click on which of the following functions are fulfilled by your association:

Representing teachers' views on policy making bodies
Providing in-service training by experts
Disseminating information about new developments in policy
Carrying out research
Acting as a forum for teachers to disseminate good practice
Enabling teachers to collaborate in development activities
Other (please specify)

1b.   Which of these is, in your opinion, the most important function of your association to members?

Why is this the case in your context?

2a.   Tick any of the strategies you use to support teacher development:

National conferences (2 days or more)
National conferences (1 day)
Local/regional meetings
Newsletters
Journals
Books published by your associations
Websites
Other (please specify)

2b.   Which of these is, in your opinion, the most effective strategy and why?

3a.   Click on the strategies you use in order to attempt to influence policy:

Letters to policymakers
Membership of policymaking bodies
Meetings with policymakers
Surveys of members
Letters to the press
Other (please specify)

3b.   List any policymaking bodies your association has been represented on in the last 3 years:

3c.   What do you consider to be the main barriers to your association influencing policy?

4. **Click on which of the following are sources of funding to your association:**

Member subscriptions
Conferences
Other in-service events
Publications
Projects
Government funding
Sponsorship
Other (please specify)

5a. **If your association has been involved in any funded projects in recent years, please specify:**

EC funded projects
Council of Europe projects
Nationally funded projects
Locally/regionally funded projects
Research projects funded from other sources
Other (please specify)

5b. **If you have ticked any of the above, please specify which projects have been funded**

6. **What do you consider to be the main challenges for your association currently?**

Appendix 2: Questions from Questionnaire 2

1. How do you define a language teacher association?
2. What are the biggest issues facing your association? What trends could have been monitored to anticipate the issues arising?
3. What activities and materials do you use to recruit and retain members? If possible, please point us towards any resources you use, or provide case studies of activities.
4. How do you encourage your members to organise activities, given that this usually done on a voluntary basis? Do you have any tips for other associations?
5. What criteria do you use to evaluate the success of your association's events?
6. Do you have a website? What makes a good association website? Does yours have any innovative features which you would recommend to others?
7. How do you disseminate information, outcomes of workshops and conferences etc to a wider audience? Do you focus mainly on your members or do you try to reach other groups?
8. What are some key trends and issues impacting on publications and information services for your association?
9. What advocacy practices do you find to be very effective in having your association's position seriously considered by government or key stakeholders?
10. In what ways does your association use member research to better understand member needs and wants? What needs to be improved and why? Are you involved in any other research activity?
11. What current events are impacting on your association's ability to fundraise and what strategies have been effective to overcome the barriers?
12. What financial policies and accounting / budgeting process does your association have in place and what can be improved?
13. What are the key factors essential to successful joint activities undertaken through alliances and partnerships?
14. What does your association do to encourage innovation and creativity? Has it been successful and what more can be done?
15. What impact will technology have on the development and delivery of future education programs for your association?
16. What are your plans for the future?

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