



# Skol Diwan in Paris: a step away from regionalism in the teaching of Breton

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**Abstract** *This paper presents some information about the opening of a bilingual (French–Breton) Diwan school in Paris, Diwan schools’ characteristics and their teaching methods and Breton teaching in general. It also proposes some considerations of the Diwan schools network’s policy, which draws its inspiration from a regionalist conception of the minority languages’ promotion and on the significance of the opening of a Diwan school in Paris. It claims to open new prospects for developing the teaching of regional languages in France, where this topic is very controversial.*

KEYWORDS: BRETON, MINORITY LANGUAGE PROMOTION, REGIONALIST APPROACH OF MINORITY LANGUAGES, DIWAN SCHOOLS, MULTILINGUALISM

## **1 Introduction**

Skol Diwan Paris, a bilingual French–Breton school, has operated in Paris since 2004, teaching kindergarten and primary school. Paris Diwan School is the 39th establishment of the Diwan school network (of a total of 41 in 2011); the others schools are located in five departments of Western France, including the historic region of Brittany.

I will discuss in this paper the context and the parameters that made the opening of the Paris Diwan School possible, despite the educational policies of the French State and Breton activists. I will begin by presenting some background on regional languages in France and the sociolinguistic situation of Breton as well as the conditions in which the Diwan schools developed (part 2). Part 3 gives some statistical data on Breton teaching in public and private schools (bilingual classes) and the position the Diwan network holds in this system. Part 4 is dedicated to Diwan schools’ characteristics and to their teaching methods. The part 5 presents the *modus operandi* and the specificities of the Diwan school of Paris. The part 6 mentions some elements of the Diwan schools network’s development policy, which draws its inspiration from a regionalist conception of the promotion of the minority languages. In part 7, I argue that the opening of a Diwan school in Paris is a symbol and an opportunity to give regional language teaching the status it deserves: one option among others in a vast offering of multilingual teaching.

Elements of the analysis presented in this paper result from broad experience in Breton linguistics, including the description of a local variety in the Finistère (Costaouec, 1998) and a sociolinguistic investigation on the practice of popular Breton (Costaouec, 2002). They are also based on long-standing activism within the Diwan network, in particular in the Paris school, where one of the author’s daughters is enrolled. Information concerning the school of Paris is thus firsthand material, collected according to a method that could be described as ethnological; the author did not carry out a scientific investigation, but rather collected information for activist work. Data concerning the families of pupils, to quote only those, result from extensive interviews and many informal discussions, spread out over a period of years. Above all, the proposals and analyses presented here aim to stimulate the debate by challenging little-discussed stances or beliefs that are taken for granted among sociolinguists and within circles of minority languages’ promoters. This is the case in particular for what I call the

‘regionalist approach to minority languages’, which cannot be regarded as the only way to deal with the promotion of regional languages in France. The suggestions made in the Conclusion and Perspectives section at the end of this article, starting from the limited experiment of the Diwan school of Paris and the history of Breton’s promotion, can only open up the way to new prospects for developing regional languages teaching in a country that maintains a very conservative policy.

## **2 Breton and others endangered regional languages in France**

France has a significant number of so-called ‘regional’ languages. This linguistic diversity results both from the slow and difficult formation of the kingdom under the *Ancien régime* and the country’s colonial past, part of which includes several overseas departments (Guyane, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, etc.) and territories with various legal statuses (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, etc.). According to Bernard Cerquiglini (1999), 75 regional languages can be identified in the entire French territory. On the French mainland alone, 21 regional languages have been identified,<sup>1</sup> namely German of Alsace and Moselle, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican, a Western dialect of Flemish, Franco-Provençal, Occitan (Gascon, Languedocien, Provençal, Auvergnat-Limousin, Alpin- Dauphinois), and the Languages of Oil Franc-Comtois, Walloon, Picard, Normand, Gallo, Poitevin-Saintongeais, Bourguignon-Morvandiau and Lorrain. The term ‘regional languages’ refers to languages that were spoken in areas progressively integrated into the territory of modern France, i.e. the regions of the mainland and the overseas territories. Besides regional languages are those languages spoken by French citizens living in the territory of the Republic for a significant period of time, recognized as the ‘other languages of France’.<sup>2</sup> Those languages are considered to be part of the national heritage, provided they are not any other State’s official language. This is the case of dialectal Arabic, Western Armenian, Berber, Judeo-Spanish, Romani and Yiddish.

All the regional languages spoken in the territory of the French mainland are endangered, at least in their vernacular form (the orally transmitted local varieties). Breton is one such highly endangered language, which has not been transmitted for at least the last 60 years. The generalized shift to French is not only due to the French monolingual educational and cultural policy but also to the impact capitalism had following World War II over the traditional structures of rural societies. Radical changes in economic structures had a strong effect on the transmission of Breton. Breton-speaking parents, according to a well-described mechanism, chose to speak French to their children. French was considered to be the most appropriate language for academic study, promising access to better jobs in industry, trade and administration. The shift was also the result of negative attitudes towards Breton, considered by its speakers as a socially devalued language.

According to Paul Sébillot (1878), at the end of the nineteenth century the number of Breton speakers was close to 1,230,000. The constant repressive and hostile policy of the French State towards regional languages forced Breton out of the public sphere and denied it any place within school education. This policy was founded on the unquestionable primacy of French.<sup>3</sup> It wasn’t until the 1950s that a law known as *Loi Deixonne*<sup>4</sup> authorized optional teaching of the regional languages in public and private schools. This license was limited to four regional languages of the French mainland, namely Basque, Breton, Catalan and Occitan. Despite this law, most native Breton speakers have received no formal schooling in Breton. In a recent survey, Broudic

(2009) indicates that nowadays the number of speakers is lower than 180,000. The loss of native speakers is increasing rapidly and Broudic notes that this number has been reduced by 30% in the last 10 years (compared with data from the survey carried out in 1997 under the same conditions). Only 30% of the speakers fall within the age bracket of 15-59. In a recent paper, Broudic also mentions that:

It is not only the number of speakers that decreased during the last period: the concrete use of the language by those who know it has not ceased to attenuate. The new survey provides clear indications on this subject: the number of those who claim to speak Breton every day was halved in ten years. The occasional practice is largely prevalent: today, half of Breton speakers use their language only from time to time. (Broudic, 2011b:209; author translation)

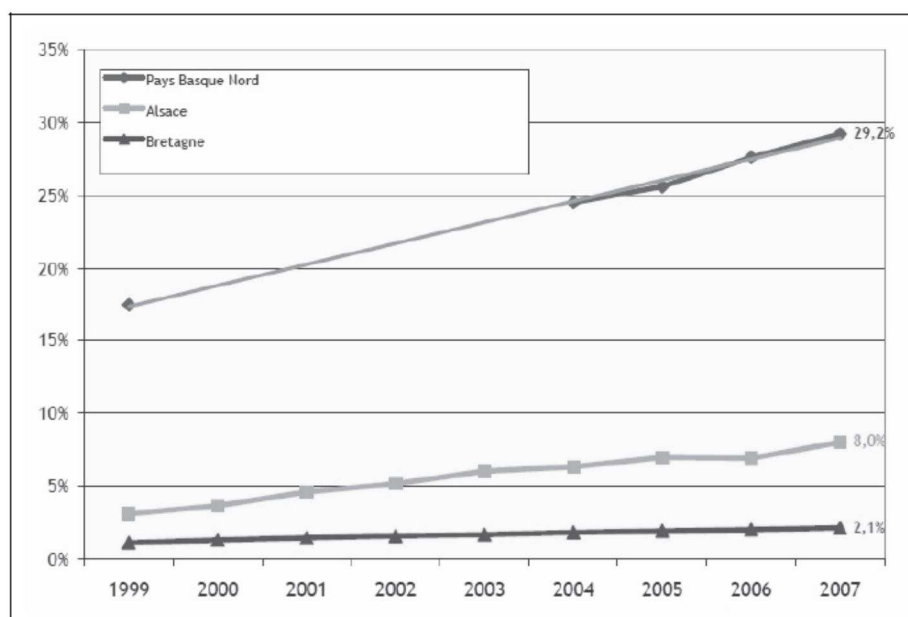
The economic and political conditions described above explain the contradictory attitudes of Breton speakers with regard to their native language. Although they did not transmit Breton to their children, the last native Breton speakers generally favor the idea of Breton's maintenance. Yet, they are quite skeptical about Breton's future in general, through teaching in particular. While they often regard the school variety as 'the genuine Breton', their attachment is primarily to their vernacular, associated with their past.

Indeed, the majority of the Breton population remains indifferent to the activists' program for the promotion of Breton. This attitude has its origins, at least in part, in the fact that during World War II a number of leading Breton nationalists openly collaborated with the Nazis. Given that those pro-fascist nationalists took over Breton's defense, it became difficult for the population to dissociate Breton's promotion from its nationalist promoters. The Breton population did not support all Breton educational projects – even those that came from the left wing in the post-war period and during the seventies – while, at the same time, it did not oppose the French State's policy towards the Breton language. In this context, the development of Breton teaching was slow and full of pitfalls in public and private schools, including the schools of the Diwan network.

### **3 Some figures about French–Breton teaching**

In 1979, two years after the opening of the first Diwan school, the first French– Breton classes in public education were created, that is to say, almost 30 years after the promulgation of the *Loi Deixonne*. French–Breton classes in Catholic private education opened much later, in 1990. SKOL DIWAN IN PARIS 171 One can note that, for varied reasons, supporting *inter alia* the wily policy of the French State, the progression of the number of pupils in the French–Breton bilingual classes was slow, and it remains so today. Compared to the figures concerning Basque and Alsatian languages, the progression of French–Breton bilingual teaching is remarkably slow and concerns a very small percentage of children at school (source: *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*, 2008).<sup>5</sup>

**Graph 1:** Evolution of the number of pupils in bilingual classes between 1999 and 2007 in Brittany, Alsace and Pays Basque: percentage of pupils in primary classes (source: *Ofiz ar Brezhonneg*, 2008).



### 3.1 More detailed data for the academic year 2011–2012

According to the *Ofiz ar Brezhonneg* and the educational authorities of Rennes, Nantes and Paris, at the beginning of the academic year 2011–2012, the number of pupils in bilingual (French–Breton) schools was the following:

**Table 1:** Number of pupils in bilingual classes (French–Breton) in Brittany and Paris: academic year 2011–2012 and comparison with academic year 2010–2011.

	September 2011	September 2010	Variation
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,174</b>	<b>13,487</b>	<b>+ 5.09%</b>
Public schools	6,000	5,995	+ 6.75%
Private Catholic schools	4,651	4,510	+ 3.13%
Diwan schools	3,528	3,361	+ 4.97%

In terms of the number of pupils, 2011 shows the strongest increase for three years: 687 new pupils joined one of the three networks of bilingual classes, which represents an increase of 5.09%, compared to 2010. In September 2009 and 2010, the increase of the number of pupils had, each time, been weaker than that of the previous year. These results, although tenuous, are going in the right direction. The Diwan network involves 3,500 pupils, with a progression of 4.97%, lower, however, than that of public schools. Catholic private schools, which lately adopted a very restrictive policy regarding Breton teaching, record the worst progression (see Dihun-Breizh, 2008). Unsurprisingly, in the three traditionally Breton-speaking departments (Finistère, Morbihan and Côtes d'Armor), the number of pupils is greater than in Ile-et-Vilaine (seat of the school district of Rennes) or in the school district of Nantes (Table 2 below). In terms of the number of pupils, the situation of Paris is of course anecdotic, but this is not the case from symbolic and political points of view.

**Table 2:** Number of pupils' distribution according to the department within the school districts of Rennes, Nantes and Paris (2011, 2012, 2013).

	2011	2012	2013
<i>District of Rennes</i>			
Finistère	6,356	6,658	7,085
Morbihan	3,893	4,035	4,129
Côtes d'Armor	2,259	2,292	2,324
Ille-et-Vilaine	1,041	1,107	1,172
<i>District of Nantes</i>			
Loire-Atlantique	554	614	628
<i>District of Paris</i>			
Paris	41	53	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,144</b>	<b>14,759</b>	<b>15,363</b>

The distribution of pupils between primary and secondary schools shows that even if the families reasonably trust the bilingual system for kindergarten and primary school, they do not conceive for their children a complete schooling in Breton. However, we have to take into account a dissuasive factor: the scarcity of bilingual secondary schools in the Breton territory, which generally obliges the pupils to become boarders and to have to move away from their families.

**Table 3:** Number of pupils' distribution according to educational level.

	September 2011	Percentage
Kindergartens and primary schools	11,854	83.63%
Secondary schools	2,320	16.38%

As we see in Table 4, it would be possible to provide education for many more pupils per bilingual class in public or private educational networks. The low occupancy rate in public schools is an argument for the Ministry of Education to affirm that efforts granted for French–Breton bilingual teaching are sufficient, and that supply is higher than demand. These figures must be handled with caution. The occupancy rate depends on the maximum number of pupils received in a class according to teaching policy. Classes in Diwan schools are limited to a reduced number of pupils (about fifteen to twenty, maximum); classes in public or Catholic schools (in general, not specifically in bilingual classes) can exceed thirty pupils. The differences in occupancy rates result largely from these different practices. In addition, good bilingual teaching doesn't fit with a high number of pupils per class, and for this reason, too, the ministry's argument lends itself to criticism.

**Table 4:** Occupancy rate of the bilingual classes according to educational level.

	September 2011
Kindergartens and primary schools	76 to 80%
Secondary schools	37.58%

According to the investigation carried out by Broudic (2011a) on teaching *of* and *in* Breton, in 2009 only half of the bilingual pupils reaching the end of the elementary school (public or private Catholic education) continued in bilingual classes in secondary schools. As Broudic recently pointed out,<sup>6</sup> this report remains mainly valid for the academic year 2011:



**Table 5:** Moving up from primary bilingual classes to secondary bilingual classes (rate by network): comparison 2009/2011.

	2011	2009	Variation
<b>Total</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>- 3%</b>
Public schools	56%	54%	+ 2%
Private Catholic schools	47%	51%	- 4%
Diwan schools	105%	109%	- 4%

The Diwan network continues to attract more pupils in its secondary schools than it does in the last level of its primary schools.

#### 4 The Diwan schools: an activist reply to French state policy

Breton language defenders have long since observed that the revitalization of the language relies heavily upon its being taught to children. From the beginning of public schooling in the nineteenth century, French State representatives totally rejected the presence of regional languages in schools. In response to this policy, alternative civil initiatives were developed, which gave birth to the first Diwan school in 1977 in the commune of Lampaul-Ploudalmézeau (Finistère). This initiative followed under a tradition of attempts – generally without success – to create Breton-speaking schools (Plestin-les-Grèves, during World War II; Plouézec, between 1957 and 1961). The Diwan schools (*Diwan* means ‘germ’ in Breton) were inspired by the model of the *ikastolak*, the not-for-profit schools applying an immersive pedagogy in Basque, first created at the end of the 1960s, near the city of Biarritz (on the creation of Diwan and its first twenty years of existence, see Perazzi, 1998). The *Charte des écoles Diwan* (‘Chart of Diwan schools’), adopted in 1977, clearly mentions in Clause 2 that the creation of Diwan schools comes as a reply to public authorities’ policy:

Diwan exists because of the deficiencies of a State education that gives no place to the Breton language, but [Diwan] claims the integration<sup>7</sup> of its schools in a democratic and renovated public teaching service in Brittany, allowing the use of Breton as a common language from the kindergarten to the university in all fields of the curriculum. (Diwan, 1977. Author translation)

This chart states a teaching and social program: Diwan schools teach in Breton, are secular and free of charge. The chart also aims to promote the recognition of the regional linguistic reality by the State and the creation of a public service of bilingual teaching at all levels. Moreover, it intends to promote a democratic practice in school organization, closely involving parents in the school’s everyday life and welcoming their co-operation with teachers. Though linguistic immersion is the cornerstone of Diwan’s teaching system, it does not appear in this chart. There is an important difference between the Diwan network, conceived as a coherent whole from kindergarten to high school, and the other networks. In public and Catholic educational systems, there are no bilingual *schools*, only bilingual *classes* in some schools, so the pupils of the French– Breton classes are a minority in primary schools, and even more so in secondary schools and high schools. Obviously, in these schools, Breton isn’t the everyday language of the pupils and the teachers, and, although knowledge of Breton is quite good among pupils, the use of the language is mainly restricted to academic activities. Diwan schools are currently the only schools that are capable of training new speakers of Breton who can use the language in all circumstances of modern life. Immersive teaching gives Breton a real role in all aspects of school life. In kindergarten, teaching takes place entirely in Breton; in the first year at primary school, children also

learn to read in Breton. French is introduced gradually during the second year (as a teaching language and subject of teaching) and from the third year of primary school on, teaching is done equally in French and Breton. Extracurricular activities take place in Breton, whenever Breton-speaking staff is in charge.

#### 4.1 Some data on number of pupils in Diwan schools and their results

In 2011, the Diwan schools network numbered 41 educational establishments, from kindergarten to high school (only one high school, located in Carhaix- Plouger, Finistère). The number of pupils increases slightly every year: in 2011 the Diwan staff (*Rouedad Diwan*, 2011) noted a 4.97% general increase compared to the previous year (the best result since 2002), and the Diwan sites had a total of 3,528 pupils.

**Table 6:** Number of pupils in the Diwan schools in 2011, by department. Comparison with 2010.

	2011	2010	Variation 2011/10
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,528</b>	<b>3,361</b>	<b>+ 4.97%</b>
Finistère	1,866	1,813	+ 2.92%
Côte d'Armor	670	639	+ 4.85%
Morbihan	500	473	+ 5.71%
Ille-et-Vilaine	141	130	+ 8.46%
Paris	47	43	+ 9.30%

As far as curricula and schedules are concerned, Diwan schools rigorously follow the Ministry of Education's instructions. Since its inception, the Diwan network has chosen to follow the Ministry's program. It was used as a major argument in negotiations with various governments in favor of the integration of the Diwan schools in the State educational network.

The good academic results of the Diwan network can be illustrated by the following data regarding the *baccalauréat*, the final secondary school examination, qualifying for university entrance in France. The figures presented below come from the Ministry of Education's official website and relate to the results of the *baccalauréat* 2010. The three indicators used allow evaluation of the results of the Diwan high school compared with similar establishments, both in the school district and at a national level. They take account of the school and social characteristics of the pupils: profession of the parents, school course, school results at entry into tenth grade, sex, etc. These indicators measure the capacity of a high school to improve the results of its pupils. The Diwan high school's results place it among those establishments whose pedagogy, objectives and methods produce the best outcome for pupils throughout their schooling. The 'addedvalue' of Diwan is thus undeniable, which consolidates the accuracy of its teaching choices and its democratic options, and confirms that Diwan is not a school that practices social distinction but that, on the contrary, it works to reduce the impact of social differences on the school course of the pupils, which supports their success.



**Table 7:** Rate of success to the *baccalauréat* 2010 for the Diwan high school: graduates among the pupils having passed the examination (source: French Ministry of Education's website, 2011).

	School District		France		
Noted rate for Diwan high school	Expected rate	Added-value	Expected rate	Added-value	Number of pupils
97%	92%	+ 5	93%	+ 4	73

In the Diwan high school, 97% of the 73 pupils taking the exam obtained their diploma. The expected rate of success was 92%, compared to similar establishments in the school district, and 93% at national level. The rate of success of the establishment is 5 points higher than the expected rate for the school district, and 4 points higher than the expected national rate (added-value).

Diwan schools, therefore, made a name for themselves in the educational system and gradually took up a central place in bilingual education in Brittany. Following Tove Skutnabb-Kangas's categories (2010), and taking only the medium of teaching into account, we can categorize Diwan schools' action as a 'Strong MLE Model'. Actually, the minority language is used as the main teaching language during the first years at school and to a large degree (50% and up) until university. One result of this teaching is a very good command, in general, of the standardized variety by pupils. For some of them, an additional reasonable command of a vernacular variety can be achieved in a favorable home environment, if the pupils have a personal interest in local varieties.

## 4.2 About the Breton taught in Diwan schools

Diwan has adopted a standardized variety of Breton, based on a literary form, in the tradition of *Gwalarn* ('Northwest wind'), the literary school which accompanied the eponymous journal created in 1925 by Louis Nemo – better known under his pseudonym Ropars Hemon – and Olivier Mordrelle. Authors such as Abeozen, Youenn Drezen and Jakez Riou worked for the review, whose declared objective was to be:

a literary review intended for the elite of the Breton-speaking public, of which the ambition is nothing less than to engage Breton literature following the long-established traditions of the literature of many other small nations: Bohemia, Flanders, Catalonia *inter alia*. (Author translation. Published in the Breton nationalist journal *Breiz Atao* 74:524.)

The importance of this journal goes well beyond its readership, which was very small and essentially limited to nationalist circles. Thanks to this journal, the Breton literary movement saw a notable projection considering that, previously, texts in Breton were mainly religious. The noticeable fact is that the writings presented by the journal could be used as a model for a literary standard in their construction. At the same time, the elitist option claimed by Nemo and Mordrelle coincided with the state of the Breton nationalist movement at the time, mainly dominated by right-wing theses. These two aspects strongly impacted on the history of school and literary Breton, and their effects are still felt today.

The effort required to adapt the Breton language to the needs of a modern society and for teaching was considerable, and work is ongoing. The Diwan network played a very important role in this domain. When the Diwan association was created, no school books were available in Breton. The first Breton handbooks were written or translated

from French by committees created by parents and teachers from Diwan schools. A ‘center for vocabulary’, *Kreizenn ar Geriaouiñ*, was created in 1985, having since produced specialized lexicons on various matters. Later, in 1993, *Ti embann ar skolioù* (TES), ‘The schools’ publisher’, was created by the local educational authority of Rennes and the Brittany District. Today, TES publishes school books in Breton for public and private schools, including Diwan schools. The TES committee of production includes a representative from each of these three channels of teaching.

The completed work is thus very important and remarkable from many points of view. The school variety of Breton is now adapted to the varied needs of teaching on all levels. One can thus consider that the choice of a literary standard of the ‘Gwalarn type’ was justified. The main problem resulting from this strategic choice is perhaps the gap between elder native speakers’ vernacular forms and this standardized variety (taught in Diwan schools as well as in other bilingual networks). Reading the Diwan’s official publications (for example on the official website of the network, but also on internal documents), such as those by the *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*, does not leave any doubt: what is taught, what the *Ofis* promotes, is ‘The’ Breton, that is, strictly, standardized Breton. This is a well-known problem, not specific to Breton, which cannot be eliminated by arguing that this is common among minority languages that have recently started a process of revitalization. To think that this is an inherent characteristic of the early stages of a policy of revitalization is an optimistic point of view, which would imply that, in the long term, the contradiction would be solved by a convergence of uses. The teaching of Breton is not really at its beginning: almost forty years of Diwan schooling is enough time to appreciate in which direction things go. After all these years, there is still no indication of convergence between the taught variety and popular varieties. The contradiction remains, and this explains why the General council of Finistère launched an action named *Quêteurs de mémoire*, ‘Memory’s collectors’, which aims at weaving links between native Breton-speakers and the schoolchildren or the high-school pupils of bilingual classes. To inspire young people to become ‘memory’s collectors’ displays a will to solve a contradiction that durably marks the Breton sociolinguistic landscape.

What occurs in education is only one aspect of a more important contradiction between the daily reality of Breton-speaking natives and the policy of linguistic planning followed by the regional authority and defenders of ‘The’ Breton.

It must be quite clear that this is not a matter of distinction between oral and literary varieties of Breton, but a matter of social division. On the one hand, there are native Breton-speakers whose numbers decrease every day, but who continue to use Breton within a restricted sociolinguistic sphere in an informal way between peers and who actually do not have any spokesperson or organization. On the other hand, there is a nebula of associations or official organizations (including the *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*) that are the permanent and partly selfproclaimed interlocutors of the regional (and national) authorities for all topics related to linguistic policy. In between, there is the group of Breton-speaking young people who learned the language at school and who are supposed to represent the future of Breton. As noted by Ronan Calvez in a recent issue of *Languages et Cité*:

This irrefutable fact can seem paradoxical: the institutions disseminate a form of Breton that is not comprehensible to the vast majority of the speakers. However, this apparent contradiction is not astonishing – whether this is fortunate or unfortunate is another problem – and it is even logical. (Calvez 2010. Author translation)

Actually, the situation ensues from a linguistic policy whose origins go back to the leaders of the *Mouvement breton* (‘Breton cultural and political movement’8), in the

1920–1930s. At that time, local Breton varieties were still intensely used. Breton Movement chose not to promote teaching based on these vernaculars, but to create a neo-Breton inspired from the newborn literary expression. This variety relied upon an idealistic and elitist project that aimed to form a Breton-speaking elite that would set an example and inspire the masses. This Breton faction wanted to create a new Breton language that would one day become the official language of a Breton State. This choice can be understood if one looks at the social and political background of the *Mouvement breton* in the early twentieth century. Most Breton activists were born within the urban lower middle class and were, practically speaking, cut off from Breton-speaking farmers and workers. This also meant that they couldn't influence the farmers, who were controlled by the conservative parties, or the working class, which was organized by trade unions and leftist parties. An alliance with the Breton industrial and commercial bourgeoisie seemed to be one way to reach their goals. Part of this bourgeoisie would indeed be favorable to the regionalist theses that seemed to offer protection from French and international trade competition. In this context, Breton economic leaders were ready to support the promotion of a Breton language and culture (see Nicolas, 2007).

This is undoubtedly one of the reasons why Diwan suffers from a lack of real support within the population, including in Brittany, which goes beyond the rejection of the school standard by the native Breton speakers. This lack of support is rather the result of the type of language revitalization policy, which chose to exclude, decades ago, native Breton-speakers. It is often claimed that the Breton people abandoned their native language and cultural identity, and turned to France and French, despite activists' pleas and oburgations. As a result of this 'betrayal', the only solution to 'save' Breton is said to have been the development of Breton schools away from traditional speakers. An alternative policy would have been possible based on a different analysis of the economic and social situation of Brittany, on a different political project and on a different conception of the role of traditional languages in language revitalization. Politically, that would have meant creating a close link with the Breton-speakers, peasants and workmen, firmly defending the claims of these groups against forms of capitalism at the time and linking the social claim with the defense of the right to the language as a democratic right and not as an argument for a nationalist policy. Within a progressive framework, one could conceive a promotion of popular Breton, supported on local standardizations, corresponding to areas of mutual comprehension, more or less wide; a use of Breton within a program of popular education; a reasoned use of the *de facto* standards the Catholic Church had established for its pastoral activity (Le Dû and Le Berre, 1996). The stake at the time was not to *revitalize* Breton, but to *promote*, develop, defend the, then, quite active language of the people. The nationalists were quite incapable of such a policy and the political parties that had real influence on the popular level hardly worried about promoting Breton. The issue largely exceeds the responsibility of the Diwan network, which behaves in fact as a continuator and a promoter of policy options carried out a long time ago.

### 4.3 Some other considerations

Another set of problems is the persistent financial difficulties of the Diwan school network. These difficulties result from the precarious situation of the schools, even when a contract with the State exists. Expenses are, in general, higher than the income of the network, frequently putting school administration in difficulty. A significant part of staff expenditures results from the strict application of the texts governing private

schools: as long as a Diwan school isn't recognized by the State, the network has to pay its teachers itself. The possibility of having a contract with the State, thus benefitting from payment of teachers' wages by the Ministry of Education, is determined school by school, after they have been in operation for a period of five years. If this system is justified for profit-making initiatives, it does not suit the Diwan schools, which proved a long time ago their capacity to respect the requirements of State education. One could imagine for this particular case some dispensatory initiatives that would make it possible to obtain the public service contract more quickly, without the mandatory five-year waiting period. The State would thus quickly take charge of the wages of certain teachers (and satisfy its obligations of public service). That would decrease by this given amount the expenditure of the Diwan network, would improve its treasury and would facilitate the opening of new schools.

Regarding the specificities of the Diwan school network, we can also point out the different standpoints within the management committee of Diwan on how to lead the general policy towards the State, and the Ministry of Education in particular. For most of the people in charge, it is impossible to consider a true integration into the public service of education, since the State's official position is hostile to the immersive method. Such integration would not guarantee the 'parity' between Breton and French, as ruled by the *Conseil constitutionnel*<sup>9</sup> in 1992. For this wing, the role of the State must be limited to taking on the expenditure of the Diwan schools. Another faction argues for complete integration into the public system, once the right to practice an immersive pedagogy is guaranteed. For the moment, taking into account the position of successive governments, the first option seems more realistic, even if it does not achieve directly the announced goal: a true public service of bilingual teaching in Breton and French.

## **5 The Diwan school of Paris**

The Paris Diwan school opened in 2004. In 2011, 47 pupils were enrolled. During its first years, the school changed site several times, renting more or less suitable premises. Since September 2010, Diwan has used an adequate school building in the 15th district of Paris. The school functions with 3 classes: 1 for kindergarten, and 2 for primary school. It attracts families from Paris and various communes of its suburbs. Parents are happy to spend time commuting in order to take their children to the school. The families' social background is diverse, and, contrary to frequent claims, Diwan is not a 'school for the rich'.

It should be noted that only some parents of pupils are Breton-speakers: in 2011, only 5 parents out of forty or so families whose children are registered. In this way, the school of Paris does not differ from the other Diwan schools in which Breton, if it is not the children's first language, is neither that of their parents, nor even sometimes that of their grandparents. Even if, by choosing Diwan schools, parents wish to contribute to the revitalization of Breton, Breton will not be a language of interaction between parents and children in most cases, and will remain a school language. This is a well-known phenomenon, similar to the situation of Irish teaching in Ireland. A striking fact for the Diwan school of Paris is that many parents are first-generation immigrants and form mixed couples, with one parent of Breton origin. Many children are already bilingual and speak English, Italian, Spanish or Greek, in addition to French. This is an interesting melting pot in a Breton school that also reflects the Parisian melting pot. It

seems that bicultural families, already experiencing linguistic diversity, find it easier to choose a bilingual school for their children. This choice doesn't seem to be related to the second language itself: Breton is not the family's second language, nor is it an international language. It is rather a minority language that has no expected exchange value in the social-economic sphere. Nevertheless, French– Breton bilingualism is often seen as the first step to multilingualism or as a support in an existing bilingual family setting.

For a long time, conditions were not ripe for the opening of a Diwan school in Paris. Some individuals or activist groups had already made various proposals in the past, but these remained without outcomes, mainly because social conditions were not met. The public wasn't aware of regional languages issues, the Breton 'community' itself wasn't mobilized for Breton teaching and the immersive option of Diwan was the subject of debate. But perhaps the most decisive element was that distrust of the organization of public schools had not reached a sufficient level to prompt many parents to seek an alternative solution for their children's education. During the last twenty years, however, policies followed by successive governments have led to cuts in the number of teachers in public schools and to a reduction in the number of classes. Facing overloaded classes, the problems of school organization and the lack of teachers, some families reacted by seeking a solution in private schools. Private schools do not have a more innovative pedagogy than public schools and the parents most concerned with their children's schooling are looking for alternative solutions. Within this framework, Diwan schools offer certain advantages. Indeed, teaching considerations are at the forefront of families' motivations. When interviewed, parents – who generally are familiar with public or private schooling – declare that they chose Diwan schools in order to provide their children with a friendly school structure. Among other reasons for choosing Diwan, parents also mention the advantage of bilingualism, teachers' motivation and the possibility for parents to participate in school life. The choice of Breton as such is not a significant motivation, though for most families it has a strong symbolic value, related to at least one of the parents' personal history. Lastly, the activist motivation seems secondary for most families.

## **6 The challenge for Diwan school in Paris**

### **6.1 'Paris, the 6th Breton department'**

One should stress the significant presence of a Breton origin population in Paris. Bretons migrated en masse to Paris and its suburbs in the late nineteenth and during the twentieth century. In terms of sociolinguistic impact, this ancient emigration led to the abandonment of Breton language transmission within families and Breton-speaking migrants shifted quickly to French. Recent migration concerns young people, with higher education than the first immigrants and who have never learned Breton. In 2005, the District Council of Brittany entrusted the journal *Paris Breton* with a study mission on the Bretons of Paris and Île-de- France.<sup>10</sup> The survey (*Paris Breton*, 2006) was conducted between March and September 2005, in collaboration with the *Institut d'Études politiques* of Paris and the *École supérieure de commerce de Bretagne* in Brest. The survey's methodology doesn't give very reliable statistics, as it wasn't based on a representative sample of the target population and because the questionnaire was passed without rigorous methodology,<sup>11</sup> but it provides an evaluation of the Breton



population of Île-de-France and it gives some data on its profile and its expectations. As an indication, we can consult the following figures: 297,000 people living in the Paris area were born in Brittany; Paris *intra-muros* has the higher number of Bretons (70,000), the 15th district constituting the first Breton district of the capital with 4.5% of its inhabitants born in Brittany. According to the same survey, the Breton language is perceived as a strong symbol of Breton identity and as a heritage to be preserved. However, it was ranked only fifth among Brittany's main specificities (the principal characteristics attributed to Brittany in the 2005 survey were sea, landscapes and architectural and cultural heritage). If a deep attachment to Brittany exists within this Breton origin population, it comes with no support for Breton language teaching in Brittany or in the Paris area. Thus, the opening of the Diwan school has been the result of an activist initiative and this experiment concerns only a tiny minority of Bretons in the area. Although Skol Diwan Paris's committee supports the school, arguing Bretons' massive presence in the capital, the leaders of *Diwan Breizh* (lit. 'Diwan Brittany': the head of the Diwan schools' network) consider that the opening of an immersive school in Paris did not correspond to the Parisian 'context'. On the contrary, the 'context' seemed favorable in Loire-Atlantique even though Breton had not been spoken in the area since the tenth century and Gallo (Romance) was the regional language (Loyer, 2002). This brings us to the interesting debate on the territoriality of regional languages, an issue of multiple facets and stakes (see on this topic Jean-Baptiste Coyos's article, section 4.2, in which he writes about the issue of regional language debate).

## 6.2 The regionalist approach to minority languages

During the debates about the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (Council of Europe, 1999), the topic of regional languages' territoriality appears regularly. For commentators or politicians who are rather hostile to the Charter, it is important to deny any 'natural' or historical bond between a regional language and a territory, as well as between a regional language and a particular fraction of the population. The constitutionalist lawyer Guy Carcassonne (1998:6), though being favorable to the Charter, clearly expresses this opinion in the following terms:

Actually, the only true localization of a language is the brain of whoever knows it, and it thus travels as much as he does. However, the French people moved much in France, and will undoubtedly do it still. (Author translation)

This argument is strongly fought by regional languages' defenders, who remark that the Basque language, for example, is spoken more in the Pyrenees than in Lyon or Paris. That is also the case for several other languages, in particular those spoken overseas (New Caledonia, the Antilles, Guyana, in the Pacific Ocean) and this irrefutable fact has to be taken into account to define a policy in favor of regional languages in France.

Carcassonne's view corresponds to the 'republican' stance, as opposed to what is sometimes described as the 'communitarian' stance. The minority approach is considered to be radically incompatible with the French constitutional notion of equality between citizens. According to this principle, no citizen can be discriminated against on the basis of his philosophical, religious, political, ethnic or regional membership. At the same time, he cannot claim specific rights on the basis of such a membership. Minority languages cannot be protected as collective rights since their use is a free choice at the level of the individual. Regional languages can be used in the private sphere but not in the public sphere, in administration, public services, etc. In the French context, it is impossible to link the Diwan educational project, or any other of the same type, to a



broad policy in favor of 'minority rights'. The concept of minority doesn't belong to the official understanding of the French Republic, and the French Constitution doesn't recognize any minority in the national territory (be it ethnic, religious or linguistic). Furthermore, one cannot even evoke any 'human right' to an education in a minority language; such a notion is immediately rejected and various courts of justice have ruled this way in many lawsuits. It has been argued that no infringement upon human rights could be identified insofar as any French citizen has the right to use the language he wants in the private sphere, the only constraint being in the use of French in the public sphere.

Successive French governments of all political parties have avoided any significant support of regional languages. The claims on minority languages are increasingly strong and European authorities periodically stigmatize the French State's intransigent attitude. Under this pressure, the French State seems to have chosen the 'regionalization' of the 'regional' languages. The main idea behind this approach is that regional languages are regional issues with no impact on the State's general policy.<sup>12</sup> This regionalization is favored by administrative decentralization. This gave local authorities the resources and the power to carry out, to some extent, a local policy promoting these languages. Funding is available at the regional level; politicians make declarations of principle and in many cases really help the teaching of 'their' regional languages. The French State's negative attitude makes the euro-regionalist options more attractive, and we have to consider the possibilities offered to regionalism within the European Community. For example, the European Groups for Territorial Co-operation (EGTC) promoted by the European Union (*Official Journal of the European Union*, 2006) have widened the concept of the regions' scope by recognizing their cross-border character, and equip them with significant economic and political means. For example, an EGTC between North Catalonia (the French department of Pyrénées- Orientales) and South Catalonia (Spain) has more economic power than several European countries. Such economic exchange areas (but also of necessary political co-operation) offer enticing prospects for the development of regional languages teaching. This kind of cross-border co-operation is not really possible in Brittany, thus the constitution of an economically powerful area implies the integration of Loire-Atlantique, the 'fifth Breton department', into the district (Nicolas, 2001). This is an old claim, which brings together businessmen as well as local politicians and nationalist activists. Each group has its own interests in this campaign: businessmen hope to benefit from the reinforced capacities of a local political power that they already strongly influence, and also to relax 'constraints' on national labor laws and adapt them to a 'Breton way' in conceiving relations between employers and employees.<sup>13</sup> Politicians expect a reinforcement of their local power and dream of playing an international part, at least in the field of economic and cultural relations. As noted by Loyer (2002), regionalists and nationalists look for a historical argument to loosen or break off the links between the French State-nation and Brittany, and the promoters of Breton language need a culturally and politically definite regional framework to reinforce its social uses. These various interests join in a common claim: a Brittany district whose limits would be those of the old duchy, including Nantes, currently the capital of the Pays de Loire district. One understands then why the creation of Diwan schools in the department of Loire-Atlantique is regarded as paramount: it reinforces a certain representation of Brittany's territory and history, and serves a broader cultural and political project. And, for the same reason, one sees why the opening of a Diwan school in Paris was not considered desirable. Paris being located outside Brittany's historic territory, a Diwan school in Paris would confirm the claim that languages are not territorial but exist where their speakers live. In that sense, while

arguing in favor of a Diwan school in Paris in the name of the Breton presence in the area, the Parisian activists – quite innocently – shook a pillar of the Diwan network's political and linguistic system.

## 7 Conclusion and perspectives

It is presumptuous to draw general conclusions from the isolated case I studied here. The regional situations for Basque, Corsican, Catalan, etc. are different and the history of the promotion of these languages is perhaps less problematic than in Brittany. Nevertheless, even if they would to be faced with various situations, the following proposals, inspired if not justified by the situation I have described, could perhaps interest the reader.

I have argued in this paper that the Diwan school's opening in Paris has challenged the debate on regional language teaching. The presence of a Diwan school in Paris has marked the non-territoriality of Breton. Although territoriality of regional languages is a political stake, from a linguistic point of view any language can be both historically and symbolically linked to a geographic area and broadly used in different parts of the world. The bond between promotion of regional languages and regionalist or nationalist claims is an historical fact, but it shouldn't be mistaken for an inherent condition. The association of minority language revitalization and regional political projects is a confusing factor, which blocks rather than facilitates language emancipation. One can understand that the leaders of *Diwan Breizh*, weary of successive governments' policies, have turned to the local authorities, who appear more open to this issue. Still, one shouldn't overlook the fact that the regionalist solution for minority languages is a convenient way for the State to avoid full responsibility with respect to the country's history. Criticism of the regional approach does not minimize the importance of the work carried out by the regional languages' promoters. It rather suggests that the regionalist framework is doomed: by confining the minority languages to specific geographical areas, one confines them to the fate of limited political projects. The future and emancipation of regional languages lies in a more balanced sharing of the communication space, in the affirmation of their universality.

Breton teaching in Paris also challenges the existing projects based on socioeconomically valued languages such as English or German. Multilingual projects in Paris could be broadened to other regional languages, such as Basque, Occitan, Alsatian, Corsican, Catalan, Flemish, Creole, etc. This is a form of combat for equality between languages, which doesn't necessarily imply their use in all social contexts, but implies the recognition of their linguistic value, and their recognition as languages of culture. Languages should be valued not only because they were 'fitted', 'modernized' for teaching, not because they have a written literary tradition, not because of their glorious past, but because they represent something of the history of human beings, transmitted generation after generation through the millennia.

It is probably time to reconsider minority languages' emancipation within the framework of a renovated multilingualism. Regional languages must still gain their place within their own territories, but regional and minority languages have to play an important part in the multilingual world. Today the only available option seems to be turning themselves into 'State languages' or 'official languages' (this is what Catalonia continually claims, for example). This solution reproduces on the regional scale what State-nations have done on a larger scale during the last centuries: they have built and

imposed a controversial identity between nation and language, people and language. We can perhaps introduce into the debate the idea that people's emancipation and languages' emancipation would benefit from internationalism and the obliteration of borders, be it regional or national, rather than from the multiplication of barriers.

## Notes

1 This number may be reduced if one considers Occitan as a unified language.

2 According to the definition given by the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France* (the Ministry of Culture's department in charge of the French Government's linguistic policy).

3 In 1992, for the first time, a reference to French language entered the Constitution, on the occasion of a constitutional modification primarily centered on measures concerning the European Union. While specifying in Article 2 of Title I ('On Sovereignty') that 'the language of the Republic is French', the lawmaker clearly distinguished French from other languages spoken in the territory and created an original situation in which any proposal regarding these other languages must necessarily be compatible with the terms, or the interpretation, of this Article 2. That had a lot of important consequences, both for the promotion of French (what was the declared objective of this modification) and for the promotion of the regional languages (which are to some extent the collateral victims of this constitutional change).

4 Known as law 'Deixonne' (the deputy Maurice Deixonne was then the spokesman of the parliamentary committee on State education and had presented the bill), the Law 51-46 of January 11, 1951 relating to the teaching of '*local dialects and languages*' was the first French law authorizing the teaching of regional languages. It authorized the optional teaching of certain regional languages of the French mainland: Basque, Breton, Catalan and Occitan (but not Corse), and was restricted to 2 hours a week.

5 *Ofis ar brezhoneg*: The Public Agency for the Breton Language is a service created by the State, the District council of Brittany and the councils of the departments of Loire-Atlantique, Morbihan, Ille-et-Vilaine, Côtes d'Armor and Finistère. Its mission is to promote the development of the Breton language. The office has various services to this end: an observatory of linguistic practices, a department for terminology, a translation office. It carries out also some projects for local authorities and firms.

6 Retrieved on 8 September 2011 from <<http://languebretonne.canalblog.com/>>

7 The text uses the locution *prise en charge*, which can be translated by 'to take on the expenditures'.

8 The term *Mouvement breton* indicates in a rather fuzzy way a set of cultural or political organizations which have worked or work nowadays for the promotion of Breton language, of Breton culture, or even nationalist, regionalist or federalist political projects involving Brittany.

9 The *Conseil constitutionnel* is a French government body ensuring that laws, elections and referenda are constitutional. In a much-discussed ruling, this court rejected a ministerial project planning to incorporate Diwan schools into the State service of education; this decision considered that the immersive method was against the article 2 of the Constitution which stipulates that the language of the Republic is French:

consequently (at least for the *Conseil*), its use is essential (understand obligatory) in the public sphere, and must prevail in education.

10 This is the official name of the district of Paris.

11 Apart from the figures provided by the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), the survey's report results from the exploitation of approximately 3,000 completed questionnaires. The consultation was launched on the Internet by *Paris Breton* on its website and on some others. The questionnaire had been distributed also in Montparnasse train station (which serves Brittany).

12 Since 2008 a new article (n° 75-1) added to the French Constitution specifies that 'regional languages belong to France's heritage'. Interestingly enough, this article has been inserted in Title 12, being about the local authorities.

13 Numerous Breton employers have always been active in the Breton movement, within the *Comité d'étude et de liaisons des intérêts bretons* (CELIB) created in 1950 or more recently within the *Institut de Locarn: Cultures et Stratégies internationales*, or within the *Club des Trente*. The CELIB and the *Club des Trente* continue the groups of influence tradition, weighing on government decisions; the Institute of *Locarn* functions more as a 'Breton' think tank within a euro-regional scope and which aims at pushing further the principle of subsidiarity introduced into the EC functioning by the treaty of Maastricht.

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