



INTERNATIONAL  
PROJECT

*CITY WORDS*

MANAGEMENT  
OF SOCIAL  
TRANSFORMATIONS  
(MOST)  
PROGRAMME



UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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### **WHY CITY WORDS?**

In practice and, a fortiori, in the international exchanges made in the field of urbanism and land management, the importance of "city words" appears every day through the misunderstandings with which social stake-holders, operators and users are confronted.

Such misunderstandings, which the project endeavours to dissipate, rest on two premises or illusions, usually linked together: firstly, the language of engineers or urban planners should be equally able to translate, for each person, the same practical and cultural values; secondly, we could content ourselves with the use of one unique international language as a universal medium in the relationships between linguistic areas or countries.

A plurality of language types exist, even within the same language, not only according to the era (a language changes with time), but within a same historical period – for example the vocabulary of urban planners and vernacular, popular or learned speech... Furthermore, in actual practice, the meaning of words is a stake which is negotiated when the words are pronounced.

Between these various languages, we can note relationships of imposition or domination, openness, possible tensions and resistances, diversions or reversals. In some cases, languages tend to be homogenized or standardized on a national or international level; in other cases, practises go against this trend.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

One of its major objectives is to understand the evolution and adaptation mechanisms of vocabulary, and the modes of transfer from one register to another within a same language, or from one language to another. Then, in the light of the successes and failures it analyses, the aim is to bring to the fore the processes according to which nomenclatures and classifications are elaborated and adapted. More widely, it tries to better understand the way language delimits, encompasses and brings into contact urban spaces.

Strictly scientific concerns bring with them concrete applications: the researchers of the project are associated to the assessment and finalization of new tools intended for the technicians working abroad in cooperation.

### **THE MAIN ISSUE**

The project concerns the registers used in various linguistic areas to denominate the city and its territories. It favours comparatism, within a same language and from one language to another. It also takes into account a long period of time.

The study of the classificatory system of languages enables us to tackle the social dynamics constituting the realities of the city in an original way; we can, in particular, identify the conflicting interests induced by the elaboration of new administrative nomenclatures.



The researchers taking part in this project have undertaken to note the differences – signs and markers of social gaps – as well as the tensions and complex interactions existing between the various registers. Homogeneous sets of sources, comparable from one linguistic area to another, correspond to these registers.

The project more specifically tackles transformation processes by studying language reform situations, translation phenomena or lexical transfers.

### **CONCEPTION AND METHODOLOGY**

Because of its angle of approach – the city through its words – which is neither that of the most common urban analyses nor that of a strictly linguistic study, the project mobilizes researchers belonging to different disciplines, from the history of architecture to language sociology.

Two complementary research logics are linked : on the one hand, a logic more interested in the specific features of each linguistic area, and, on the other hand, the logic which tackles cross-disciplinarity and comparatism, privileging themes, methods and types of corpuses common to the various languages studied.

From homogeneous sets of sources (legal and journalistic in particular) and sociolinguistic surveys, analyses are undertaken from two types of approach:

- Firstly, *word adventures* recount the emergence of a word, how it may change its meaning and usage, the competitors it meets, transforms, eliminates or, conversely, which provoke its disappearance.
- The other approach is the synchronic analysis of systems in a given lexical field, which then opens onto the comparison between contemporary or successive systems.

We favour two scales, notably because they are a problem for both urban planning and the daily apprehension of space: on the one hand, the scale of the territories forming the city (particularly the units taking place between the domestic sphere and the city as a whole), and on the other hand the scale of the city considered as an entity.

### **AWAITED SCIENTIFIC RESULTS**

Generally speaking, the works led within the framework of the “City words” project aim at producing new knowledge and communicating it in the form of documents intended for various audiences. These documents must contain precise information, retained for their exemplary nature; for example, the elements of a glossary, conceived not as a word-for-word equivalence, but as the presentation of terms replaced in their context, with comments on the possible difficulties met in passing from one language to the other. At the same time, it is a matter for developing an issue and proposing comparisons, possibly from common themes.



### **CALENDAR OF THE PROJECT**

The life of this project, launched in 1995 for a four-year period, is punctuated by several types of meetings aiming at favouring the circulation of scientific information, confronting issues, exchanging experiences, and developing comparatist practices between disciplines and specialists of different areas (choice of sources, surveys and comparable situations).

International seminars, the first of which was held in Paris in October 1995, are important but exceptional highlights of the project. A second seminar is planned for the end of 1997.

"Regional" seminars are organized on the basis of linguistic or geographic areas (Shanghai, June 1996; Rome, December 1996; Tunis, March 1997; Milano, October 1997, ...), preparing the international seminars, and, in the same way, leading to publications.

Multilingual thematic meetings aim at arousing a collective reflection on a common theme.

### **RESULTS' TRANSFER AND CIRCULATION**

The transfer and circulation of the project's results are mainly ensured in the four following forms:

- articles published in different specialized reviews; works of reference in the process of being published (in particular, historical dictionaries of the city and urban planning, as well as glossaries);
- *working papers on city words* circulating even partial results, as well as articles dealing with methodological questions, word lists and critical inventories;
- seminars which associate education and research and conferences addressing an audience of researchers and people working in land management and planning; an annual seminar at the EHESS (École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris) which has been taking place since 1995, followed by students and researchers; it is a place where an external "expertise" is brought in for methodological questions; it also enables researchers of the project to expose some of their results;
- the assessment and finalization of glossaries in the field of land management and planning is made, intended for the technicians sent abroad by the French ministries of Equipment and Foreign Affairs.



**BUDGET**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total (US \$)
<b>ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATION</b>					
Permanent scientific secretariat	60 000	60 000	60 000	60 000	240 000
Functioning expenses and equipment	15 000	15 000	30 000	15 000	75 000
Missions	20 000	20 000	20 000	20 000	80 000
<b>sub-total A</b>	<b>95 000</b>	<b>95 000</b>	<b>110 000</b>	<b>95 000</b>	<b>395 000</b>
<b>NETWORK'S FINANCIAL SUPPORT</b>					
Africa		10 000	25 000	25 000	60 000
Germany		10 000	25 000	25 000	60 000
Latin America	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
Northern America	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
China	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
Spain	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
France					
India	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
Italy	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
Japan	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
Arab world	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
Czech Republic		10 000	25 000	25 000	60 000
Russia	25 000		25 000	25 000	75 000
<b>sub-total B</b>	<b>225 000</b>	<b>30 000</b>	<b>300 000</b>	<b>300 000</b>	<b>855 000</b>
<b>SEMINARS</b>					
International seminars	180 000	20 000	250 000	250 000	700 000
Regional seminars		20 000	30 000	50 000	100 000
<b>sub-total C</b>	<b>180 000</b>	<b>40 000</b>	<b>280 000</b>	<b>300 000</b>	<b>800 000</b>
<b>PUBLICATIONS</b>					
Leaflet presenting the project		20 000	20 000		40 000
'Appeal for proposals'		15 000			15 000
Glossaries		180 000	200 000	200 000	580 000
Working papers		120 000	100 000	100 000	320 000
<b>sub-total D</b>		<b>335 000</b>	<b>320 000</b>	<b>300 000</b>	<b>955 000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>500 000</b>	<b>500 000</b>	<b>1 010 000</b>	<b>995 000</b>	<b>3 005 000</b>



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The project systematically cooperates with the universities and research structures of the countries corresponding to the thirteen linguistic and geographical areas it studies.

It also works in cooperation with various organs of the French Ministry of Equipment. Finally, it collaborates with French research centres abroad, dependent on the sub-direction of Human Sciences and Archaeology of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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