

Rethinking Ethnolinguistic Vitality: A social dynamic approach to language sustainability

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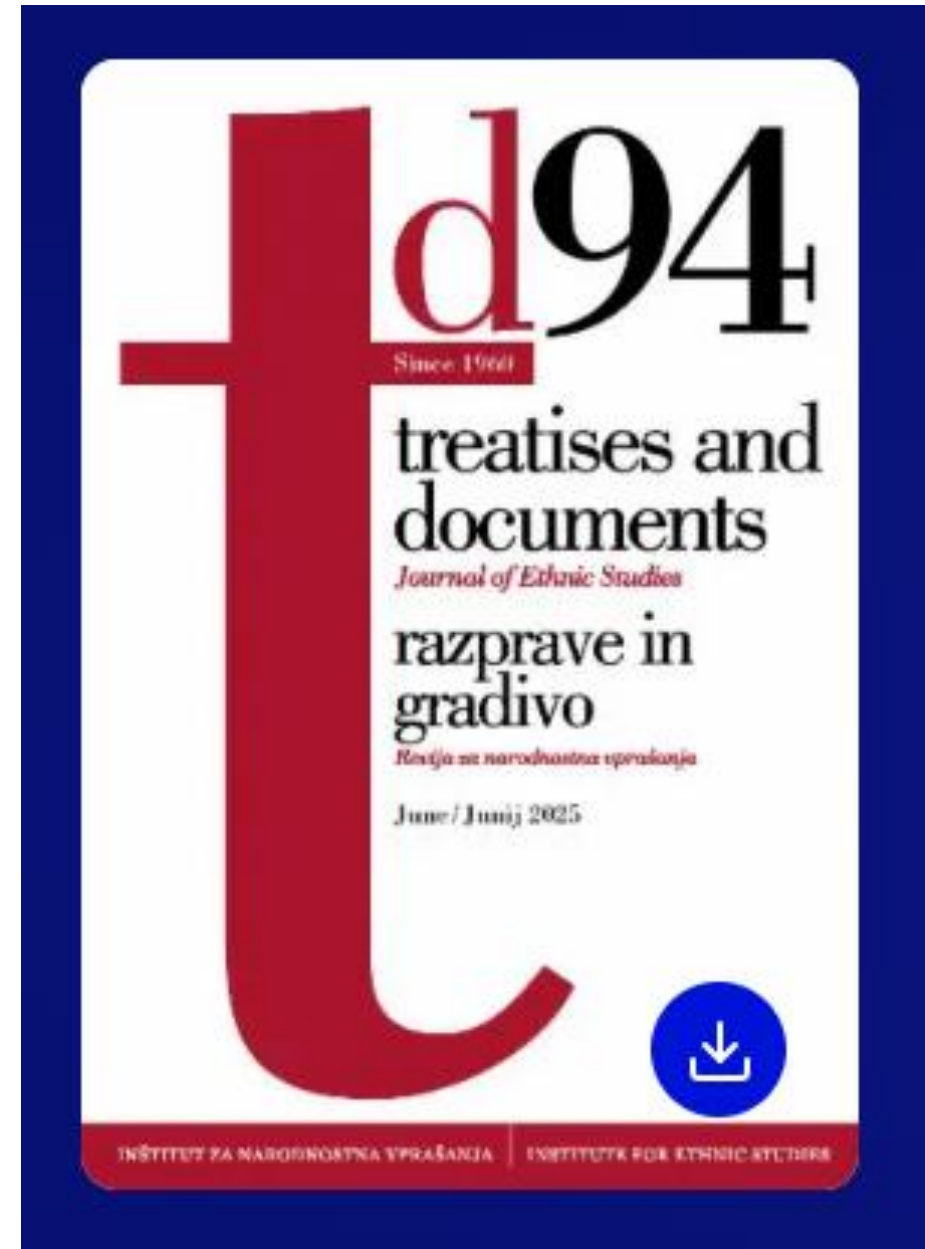
LanDS Team:

Conchúr Ó Giollagáin
Daniel Bourgeois
Brian Ó Curnáin
Iain Caimbeul
Gòrdan Camshron



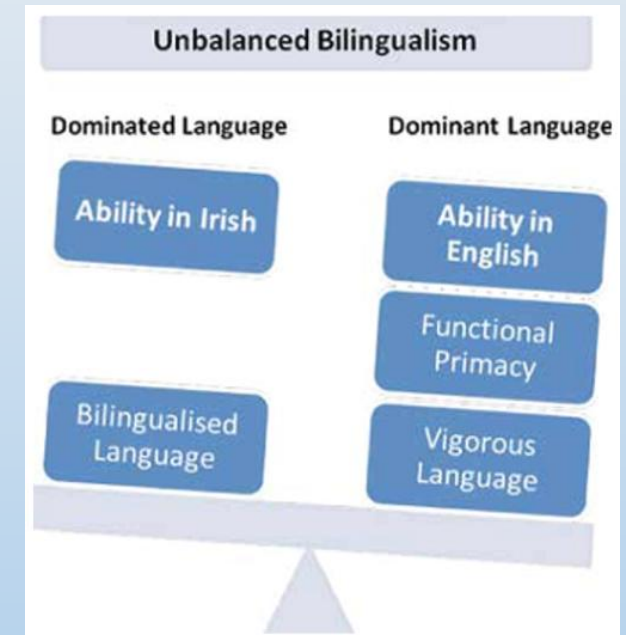
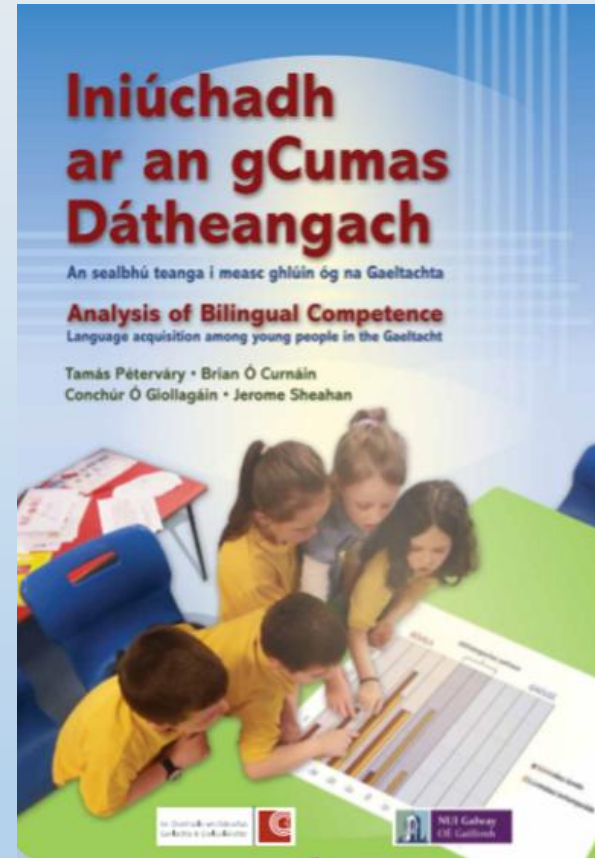
Minority vernacular
condition: L2 promotion
with vernacular L1
contraction

- **Language Dynamics in Society** (LanDS, Ó Giollagáin et al. 2025): our attempt to reset Min-LPP to focus on Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV)
- We present LanDS as a **successor to Reversing Language Shift** paradigm of Joshua Fishman (1991)
 - Need for a refocus on minority political and societal reality.



3 Questions for Minority Language Planning and Policy (Min-LPP)

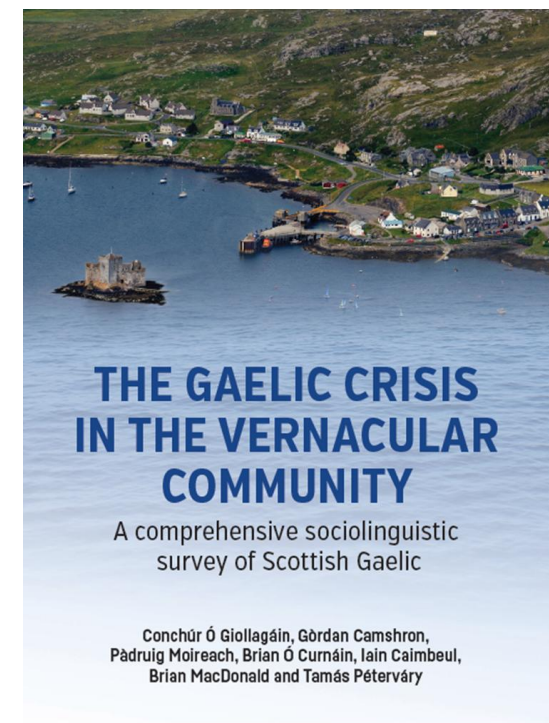
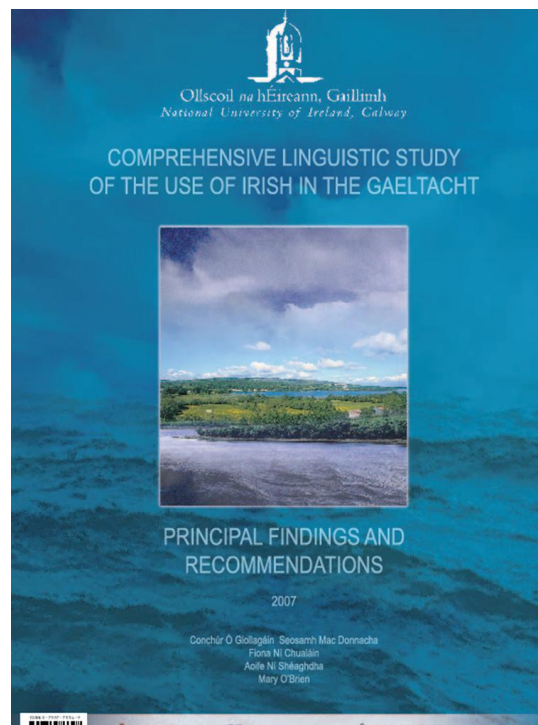
- Why is Min-L civic promotion not enhancing minority **ethnolinguistic sustainability**?
- Why has Min-LPP become so **inert**?
- Does symbolic Min-LPP align more with **majoritarian politics** than with minority-language societal reality?



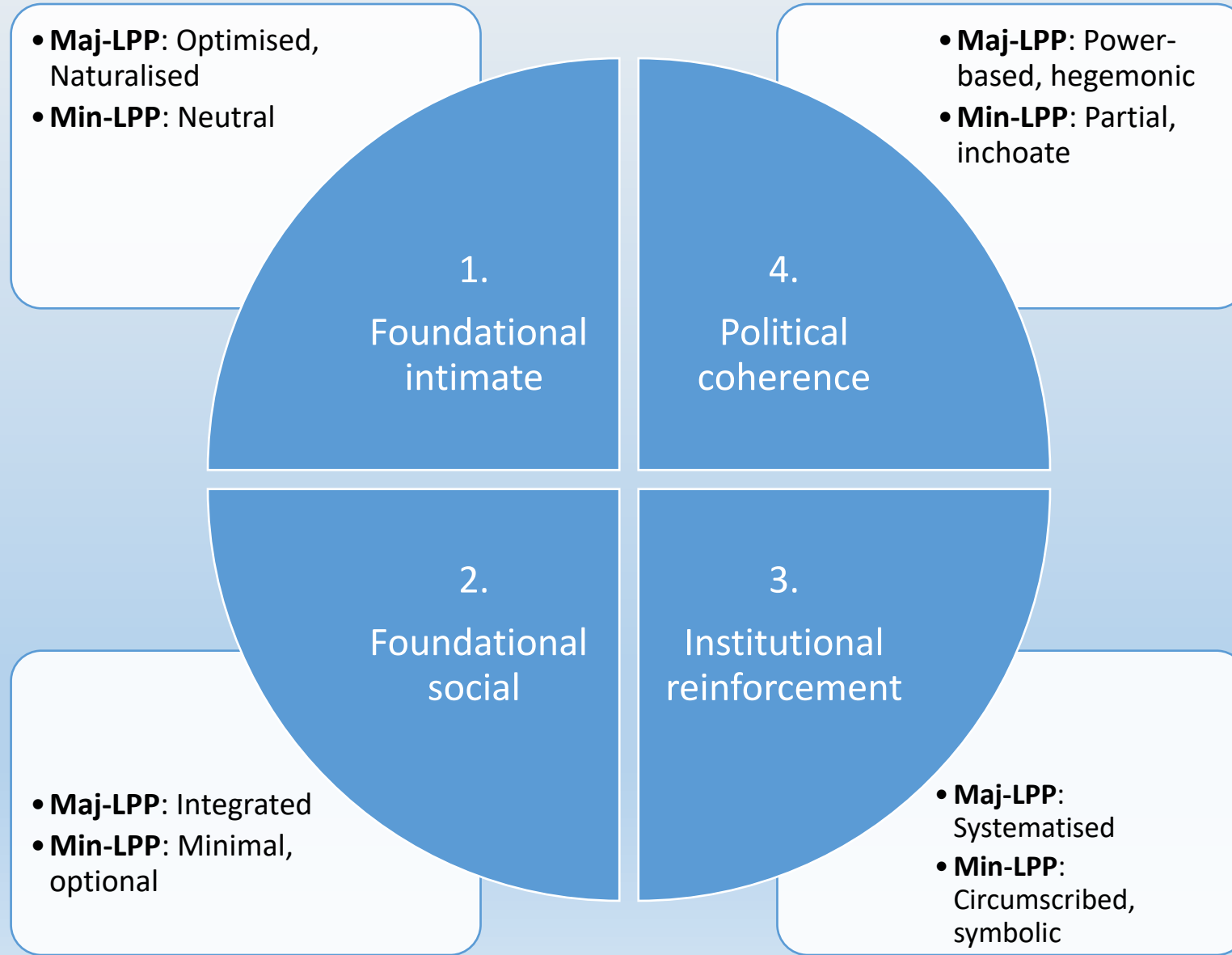
Sociolinguistic need for refocus on societal circumstances of minority vernacular communities

- **Ireland:** *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht* (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007), updated in 2015 (Ó Giollagáin and Charlton 2015)
- **Scotland:** *Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community* survey in Scotland (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2020)
- **Wales:** BRO collaboration: A Comprehensive Sociolinguistic Survey of Contemporary Welsh-speaking Communities (Uof Wales, UHI, Oxford)
- **The Basque Country:** Arnasguneak initiative

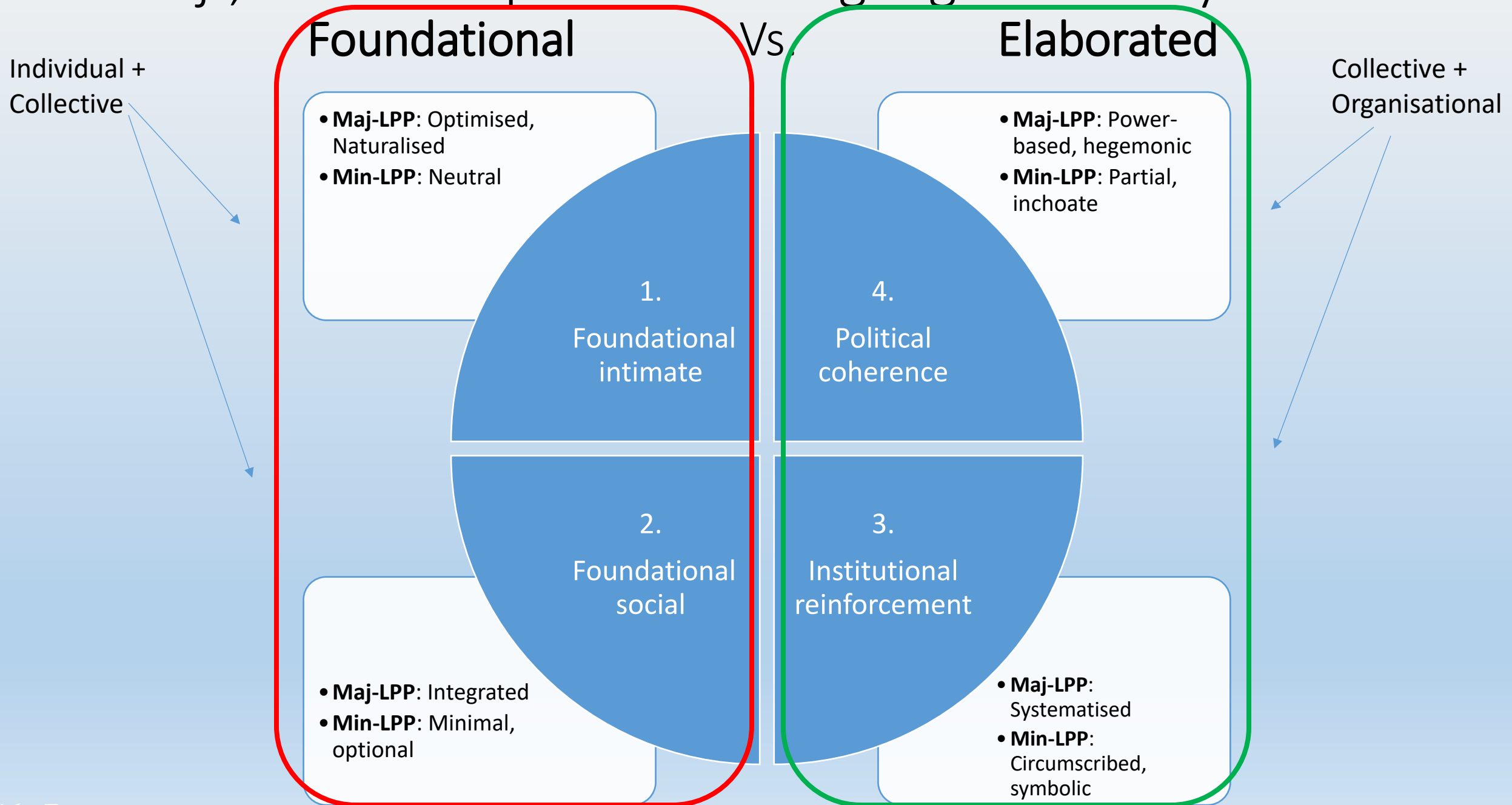
Why is this refocus required: all these jurisdictions/polities have elaborate provisions for Min-LPP? What went wrong?



Maj-, Min-LPP Spheres of Language Social Dynamics: Foundational Vs. Elaborated



Maj-, Min-LPP Spheres of Language Social Dynamics:



Fishman's Language Maintenance with Language Revitalisation – Socio-political LPP

Transmission with Language Group Maintenance	Revitalisation – Resisting / Reversing Language Shift
Emphasis on transmission and intergenerational continuity	Parallel focus on L2 acquisition and networks
Social planning and political developments	Acquisition planning – schools + minority-medium education
Regional Min-L politics with vernacular socio-economic development	Institutional and symbolic Min-L politics
	Min-L technological innovations

Institutional politics and the neo-liberal focus

Maintenance	L2 Revitalisation
Difficulties in maintaining transmission in high social densities	LPP focus on status and corpus planning , i.e. resource planning rather than community LPP
Language politics not adapting to socio-economic and societal transformations	Language promotion bodies increase symbolic profile of Min-Lang
Neo-liberal, laissez-faire response to difficult social issues	Sectoral expansion and financing in Education, Media, Arts, Academia and Technological innovation

Downgrading of Societal LPP Vs. Prioritising of Symbolic LPP

Post-structuralist LPP (individualised, sectoralist) **misaligned from the societal challenges** of supporting EV
– largely symbolic, sectoral promotion in education, media, arts, academia, public administration and technological innovation

Neo-liberal focus on L2 numbers game → Pseudo-LPP

Disregard of L1 Maintenance

- **Ignoring strategic** priority of maintenance
- **Weak** sociological and political **thinking** about crisis situation
- Strategic **vacuum**
- **Irrelevant** language politics



L2 Revitalisation → L2 Promotion

- Dominance of L2 language politics as **obfuscation** for L1 social decline:
- L2 politics becomes **discursivism**, similar to a set of religious tropes
- State-sponsored activism → **embedded** activism
- Universities → **Academicism**

End product: Pseudo-LPP

Why has this happened, despite LPP policies?

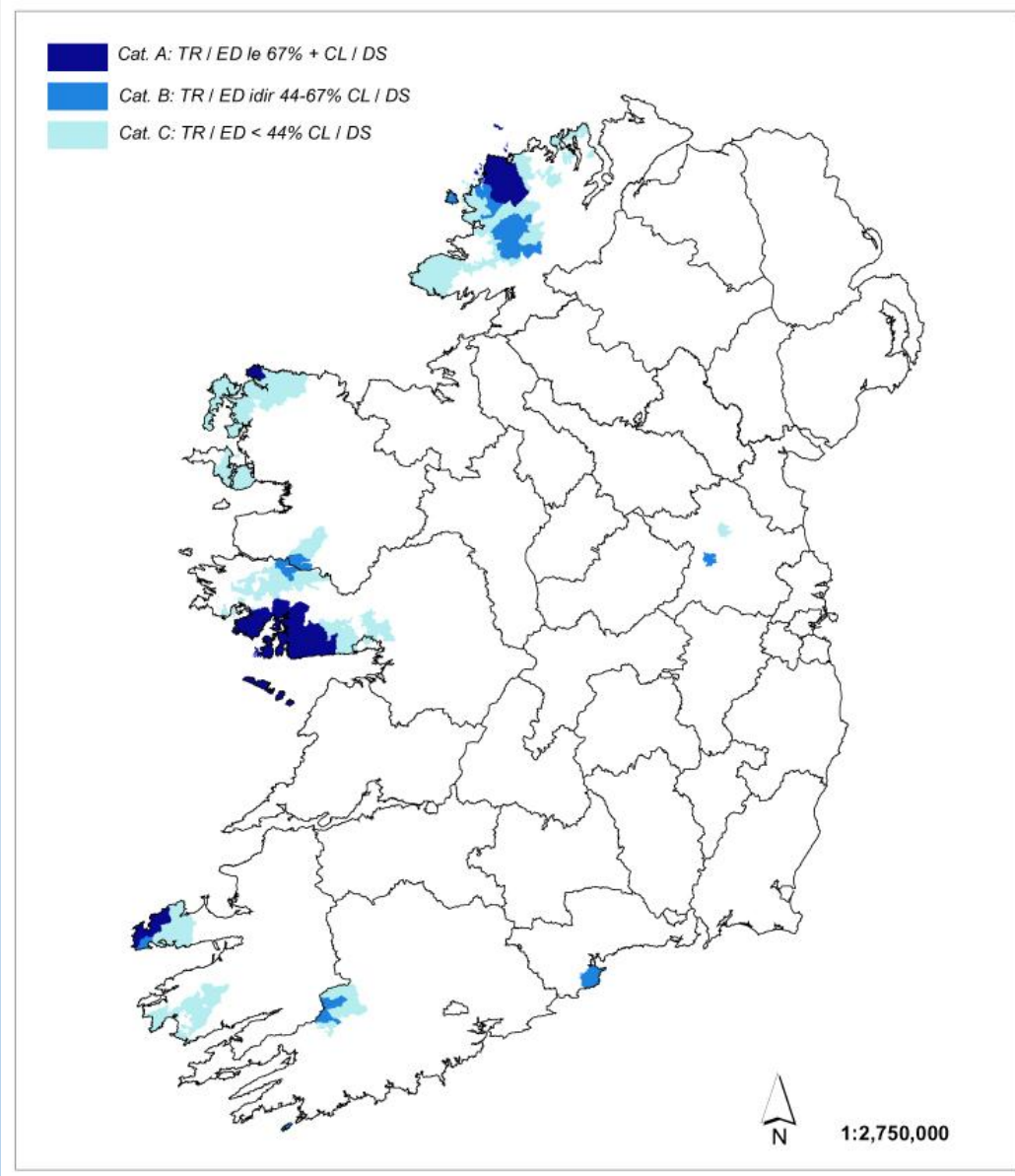
- **Obscuring embarrassing L1 demise** by focussing on concerns of a coalition of L2-focused activists, academics, state officials
- **Conceptual narrowness** of minority politics – institutional politics not social politics
- **Min-Lang power class** does not live in the social context of decline
- **Path dependency** in institutions
- **Evasiveness** in academia
- **Confused** political leadership



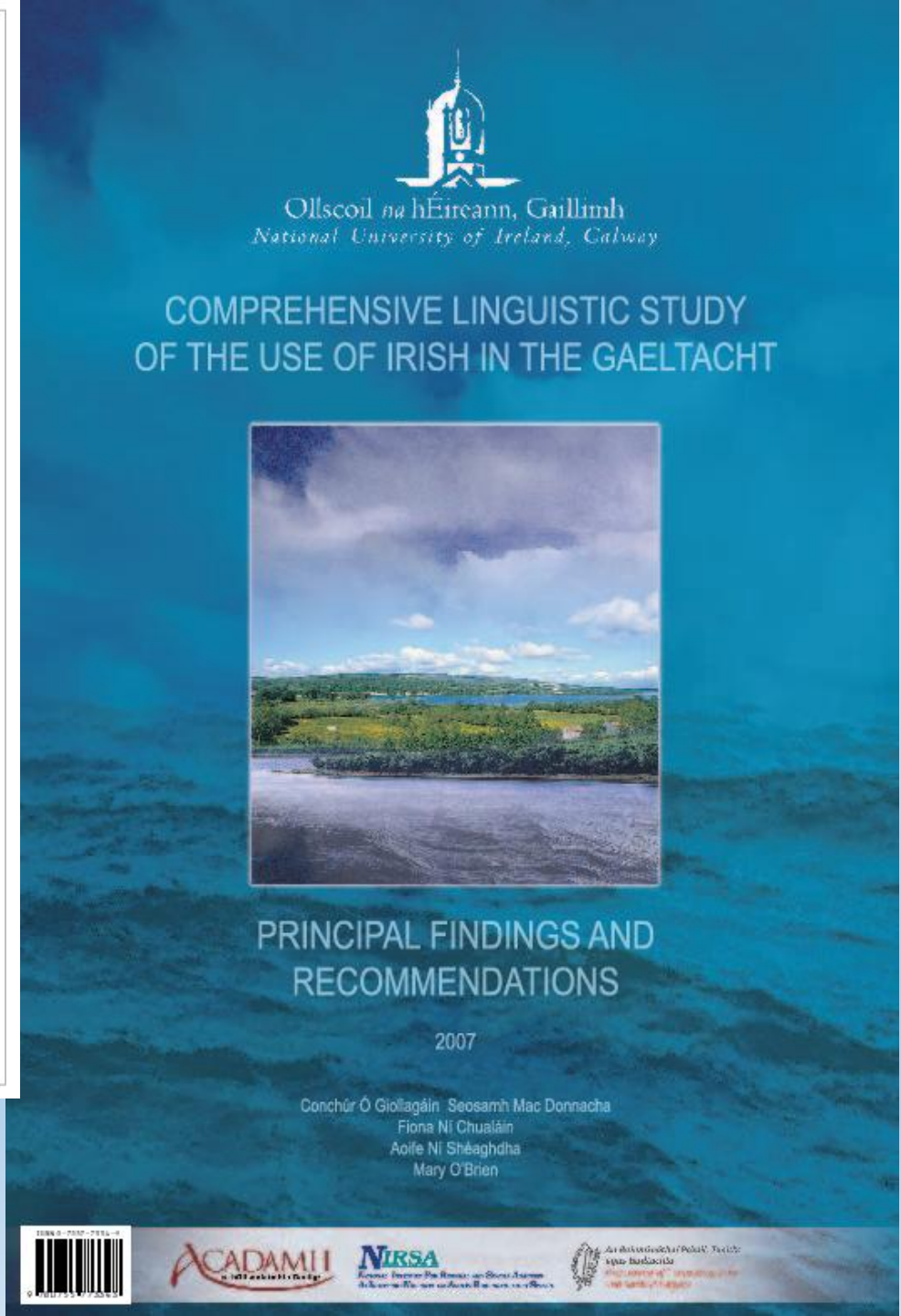
Gaelic Sociolinguistic Evidence (2007 – 2020s)

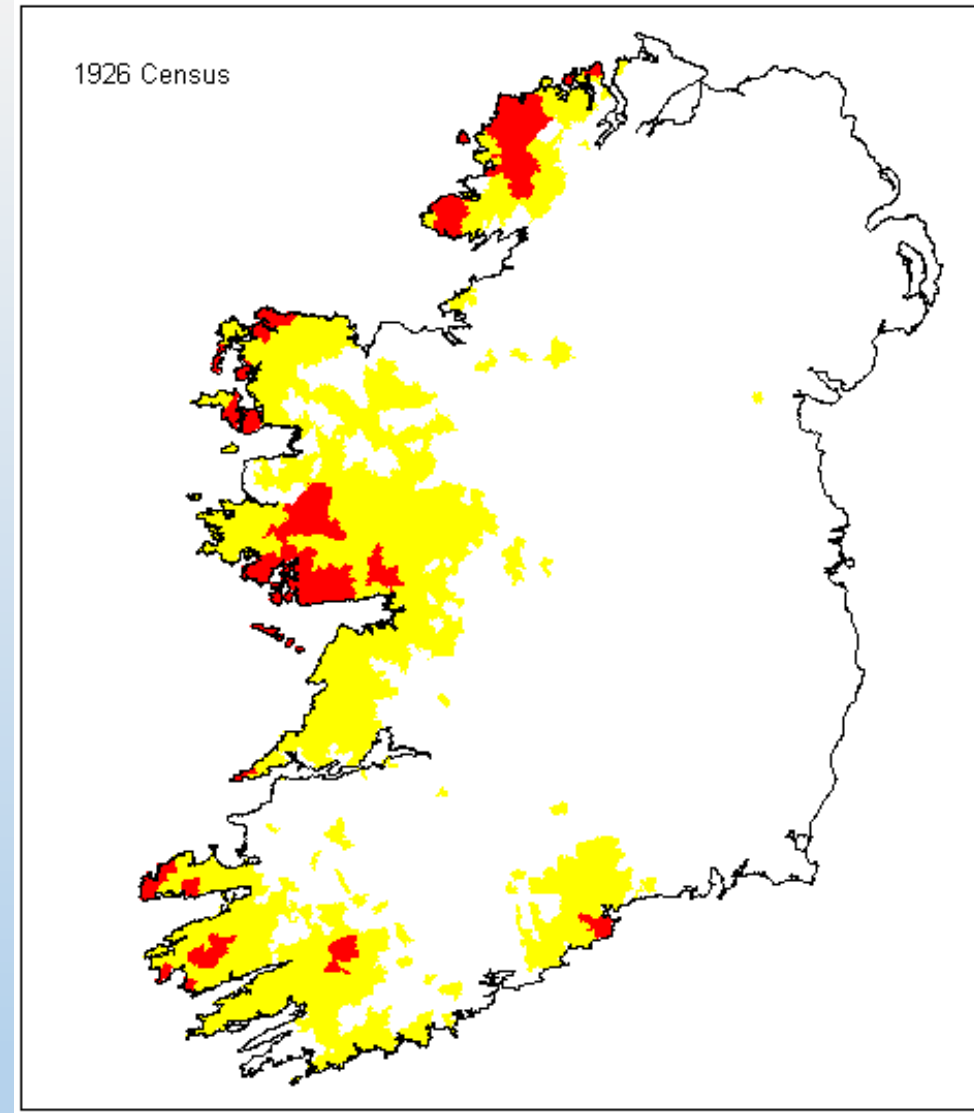
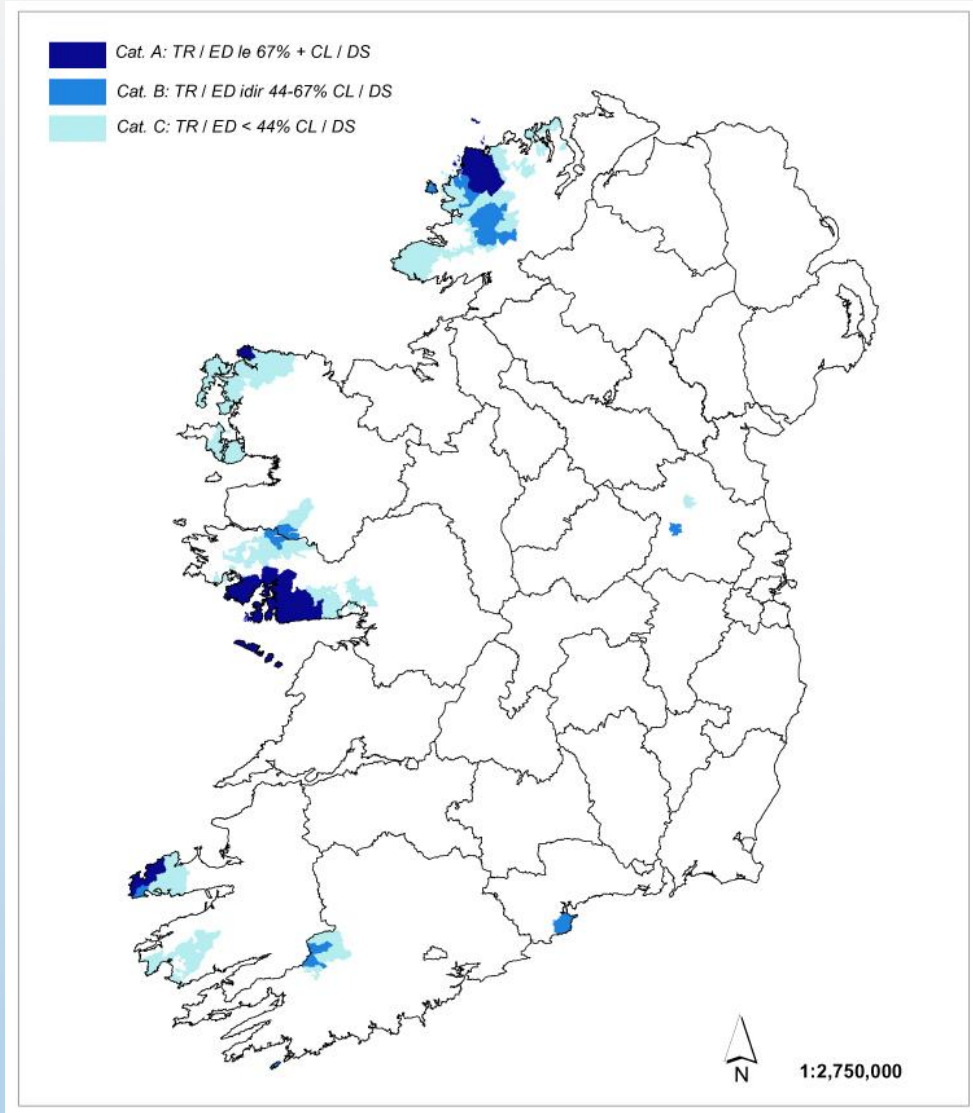
- Civic promotion of Irish and Scottish Gaelic with native-speaking vernacular group decline

CLS 2007



A, B, C Gaeltacht Categories in Ó Giollagáin, Mac Donnacha et al. 2007. *Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht*. Prepared by NIRSA. Copyright # MP 8252 , © OSI / Government of Ireland.





Source: Irish language Census Data, CLS 2007 - NIRSA a réitigh. Ceadúnas Uimhir MP 8252 / Prepared by NIRSA. Copyright permit number MP 8252
 © Suirbhéireacht Ordanáis Éireann agus Rialtas na hÉireann /

Counties with Gaeltacht Status	Irish Census Data 2016, 2022 for Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas	Daily Speakers 2016	Daily Speakers 2022	% change 2016 to 2022
Gaillimh/Galway	Cois Fharraige	3104	3186	3%
Gaillimh	An Cheathrú Rua	1558	1542	-1%
Gaillimh	Conamara Láir	1603	1529	-5%
Gaillimh	Ceantar na nOileán	1474	1363	-8%
Gaillimh	Oileáin Árann	681	768	13%
Gaillimh	Bearna agus Cnoc na Cathrach	660	686	4%
Gaillimh	Maigh Cuilinn	299	290	-3%
Gaillimh	Oirthear Chathair na Gaillimhe	215	221	3%
Gaillimh	An tEachréidh	223	200	-10%
Gaillimh/Maigh Eo/Galway/Mayo	Dúiche Sheoigheach agus Tuar Mhic Éadaigh	426	363	-15%
Maigh Eo/Mayo	Maigh Eo Thuaidh	563	447	-21%
Maigh Eo	Maigh Eo Thiar	180	151	-16%
Dún na nGall/Donagall	Gaoth Dobhair, Rann na Feirste, Anagaire, Loch an Iúir	2900	2866	-1%
Dún na nGall	Cloich Chionnaola, Gort an Choirce, An Fál Carrach, Machaire Rabhartaigh	1546	1466	-5%
Dún na nGall	Na Rosa	274	300	9%
Dún na nGall	An Ghaeltacht Láir	337	298	-12%
Dún na nGall	Dún na nGall Theas	322	298	-7%
Dún na nGall	Tuaisceart Dhún na nGall	246	258	5%
Dún na nGall	Árainn Mhór	219	174	-21%
Dún na nGall	Toraigh	85	93	9%
Ciarraí/Kerry	Ciarraí Thiar	1928	1998	4%
Ciarraí	Ciarraí Theas	121	133	10%
Corcaigh/Cork	Múscraí	836	816	-2%
Corcaigh	Cléire	36	31	-14%
Port Láirge	Na Déise	467	508	9%
An Mhí	Ráth Chairn agus Baile Ghíb	283	276	-2%
Totals		20586	20261	

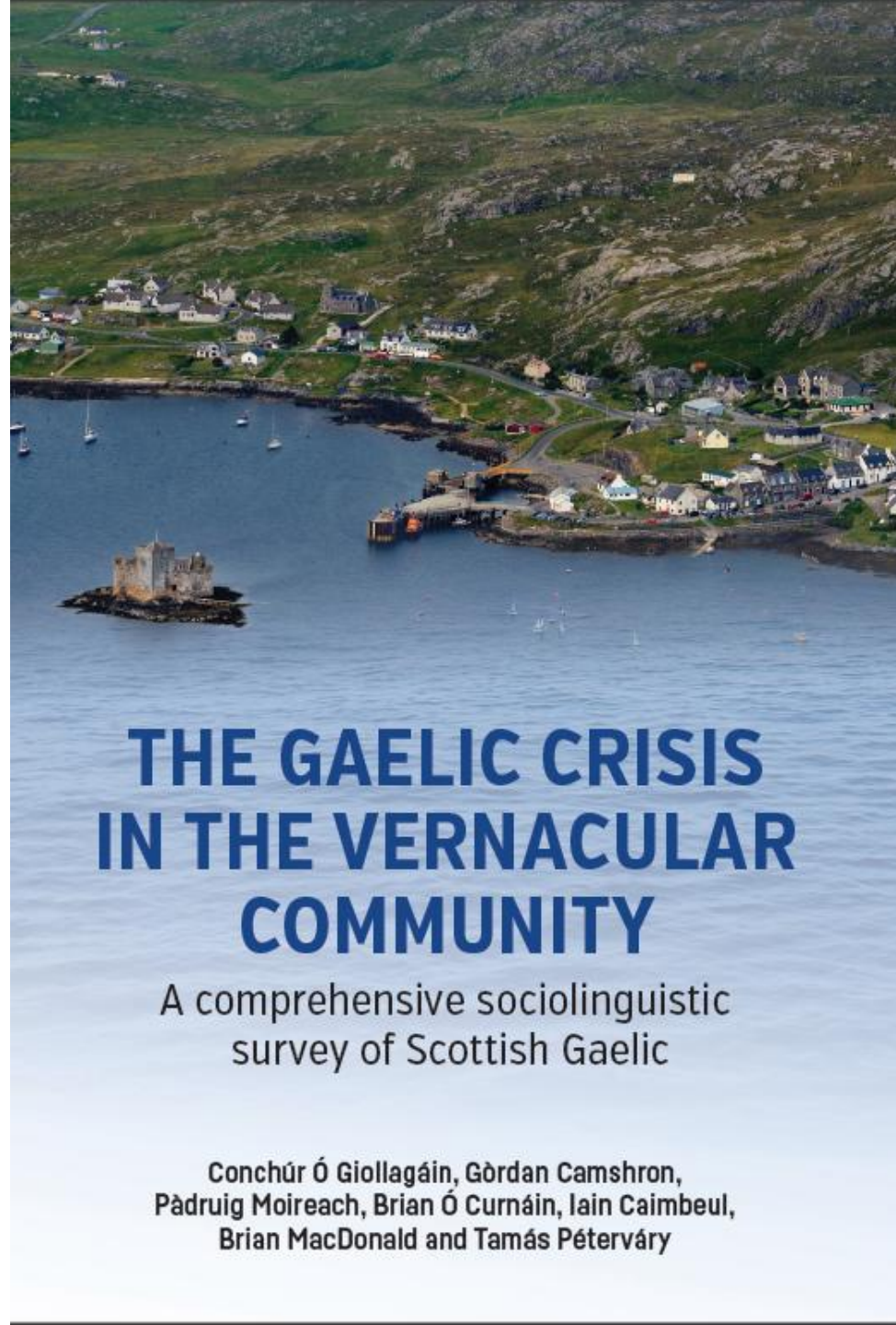
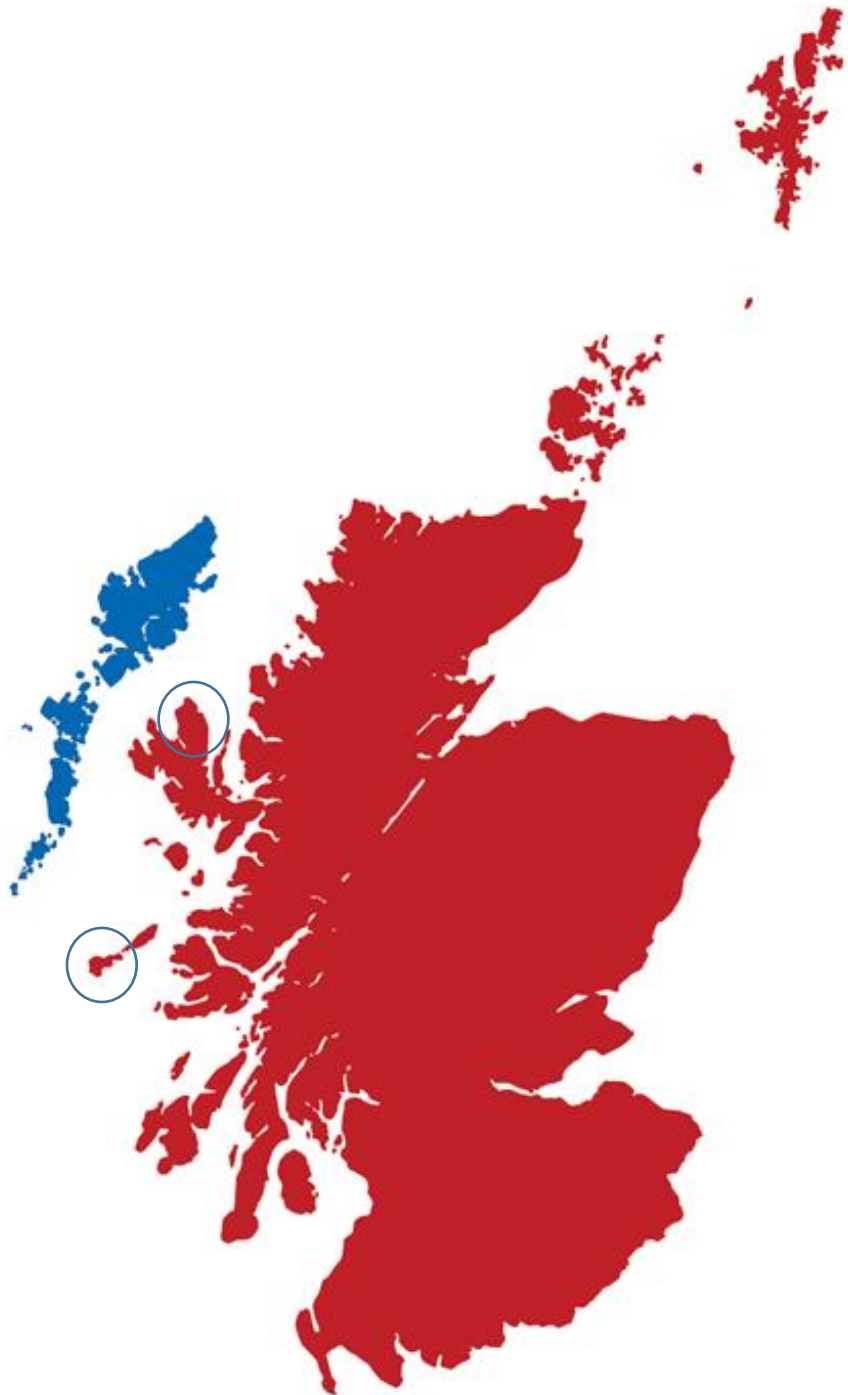
Irish Census Data on Daily Speakers of Irish in official Gaeltacht Areas (speakers outside of the education system) for 2016 and 2022 Censuses

Source: Irish Census – Central Statistics Office, Dublin (Profile 8)
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/cpp8/censusofpopulation2022profile8-theirishlanguageandeducation/data/>

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THE GAELIC CRISIS IN THE VERNACULAR COMMUNITY

A comprehensive sociolinguistic
survey of Scottish Gaelic

Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, Gòrdan Camshron,
Pàdruig Moireach, Brian Ó Curnáin, Iain Caimbeul,
Brian MacDonald and Tamás Péterváry

**Geographic
areas of the
remaining
Gaelic
vernacular
communities:**
Western Isles;
Staffin, north
Skye; Isle of
Tiree.

Projected % ability in Gaelic for the Islands Research Area based on existing trends for Census 2021

Figure 1 illustrates the projected future levels of Gaelic ability based on previous intercensal rates of decline. It shows a progressive and substantial reduction in Gaelic speaking ability in the Western Isles with the projected Gaelic-speaker population approaching the 45% threshold of non-viability by 2021.

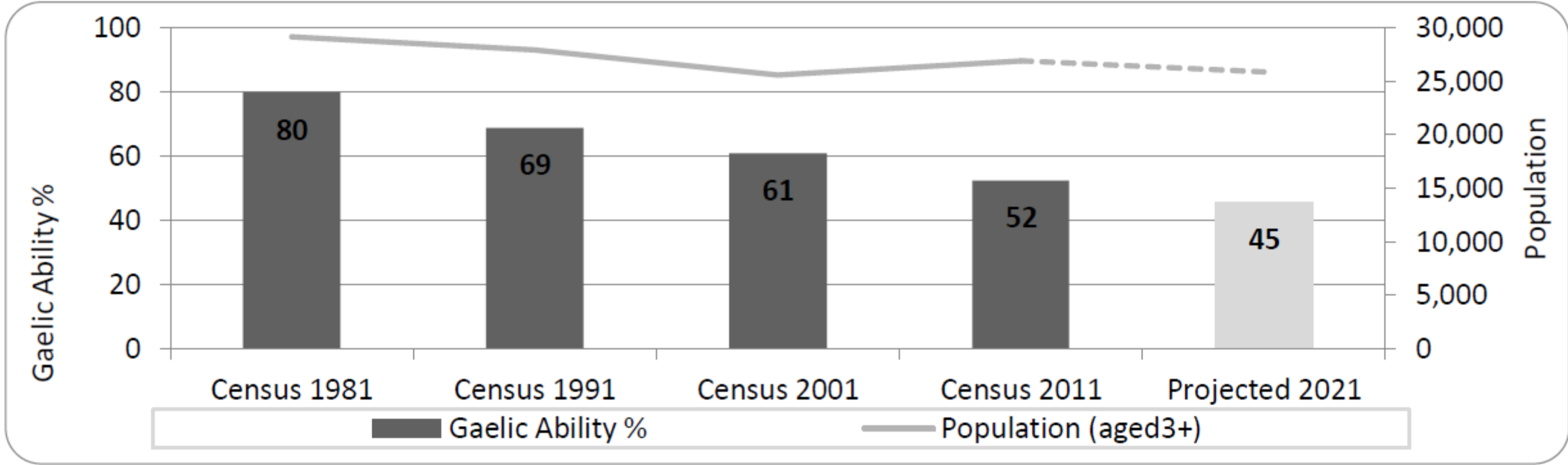
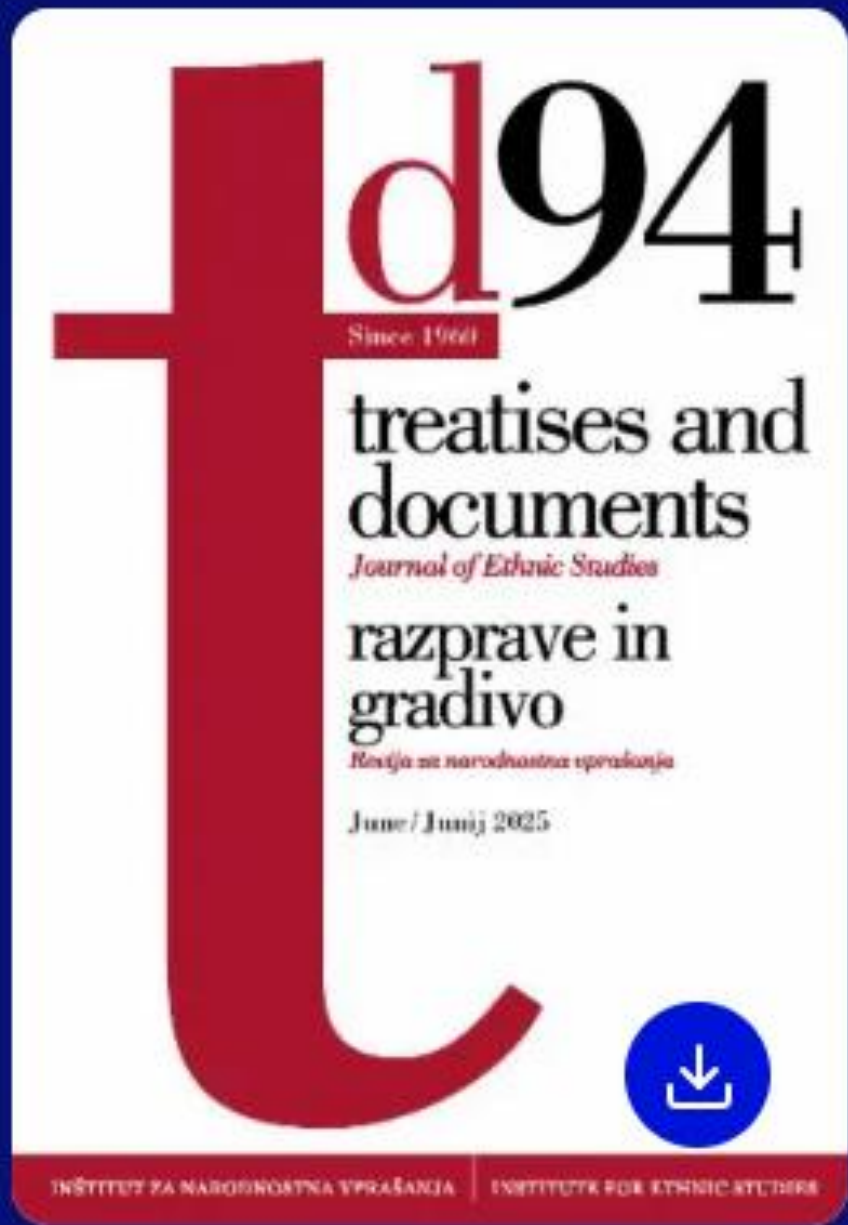


Figure 1: Trend in actual (solid data line) and projected (broken line) population (3+yrs) and actual and projected (2021) percentage Gaelic ability, Western Isles

Source: Gaelic Language Data in Scottish Census 2022

Area 2022 Census	1991	2001	2011	2022	% Change 2011-2022	
Aberdeen City	1134	1420	1628	2219	36.30	
Aberdeenshire	887	875	1397	2985	113.67	
Angus	485	488	417	703	68.59	
Argyll & Bute	4877	4168	3451	3159	-8.46	3.80%
City of Edinburgh	3088	3132	3157	4628	46.59	
Clackmannanshire	268	303	278	403	44.96	
Dumfries & Galloway	515	450	468	879	87.82	
Dundee City	591	645	470	990	110.64	
East Ayrshire	378	369	576	836	45.14	
East Dunbartonshire	966	893	910	1039	14.18	
East Lothian	322	337	397	634	59.70	
East Renfrewshire	543	590	549	740	34.79	
Falkirk	518	527	636	1210	90.25	
Fife	1477	1108	1272	2111	65.96	
Glasgow City	6018	5731	5891	8962	52.13	
Highland	14713	12669	12039	12040	0.01	5.20%
Inverclyde	461	413	424	531	25.24	
Midlothian	228	246	307	554	80.46	
Moray	470	460	623	823	32.10	
Na h-Eilean Siar	19546	15723	14066	11426	-18.77	44.70%
North Ayrshire	596	559	683	874	27.96	
North Lanarkshire	1070	1018	1326	2469	86.20	
Orkney Islands	92	92	126	143	13.49	
Perth & Kinross	1403	1453	1275	1571	23.22	
Renfrewshire	1007	989	957	1433	49.74	
Scottish Borders	460	377	375	679	81.07	
Shetland Islands	105	96	97	113	16.49	
South Ayrshire	483	423	387	712	83.98	
South Lanarkshire	1216	1079	1232	2109	71.19	
Stirling	826	948	789	903	14.45	
West Dunbartonshire	668	498	510	684	34.12	
West Lothian	567	573	662	1148	73.41	
TOTAL AREAS	65978	58652	57375	69710	21.50	1.30%



Language Dynamics in Society: LanDS Ethnolinguistic Vitality Model: Ó Giollagáin et al. (2025):

Four Key Concepts or General Tenets of EV dynamics:

1. Direction
2. Process
3. Participation
4. Competition.

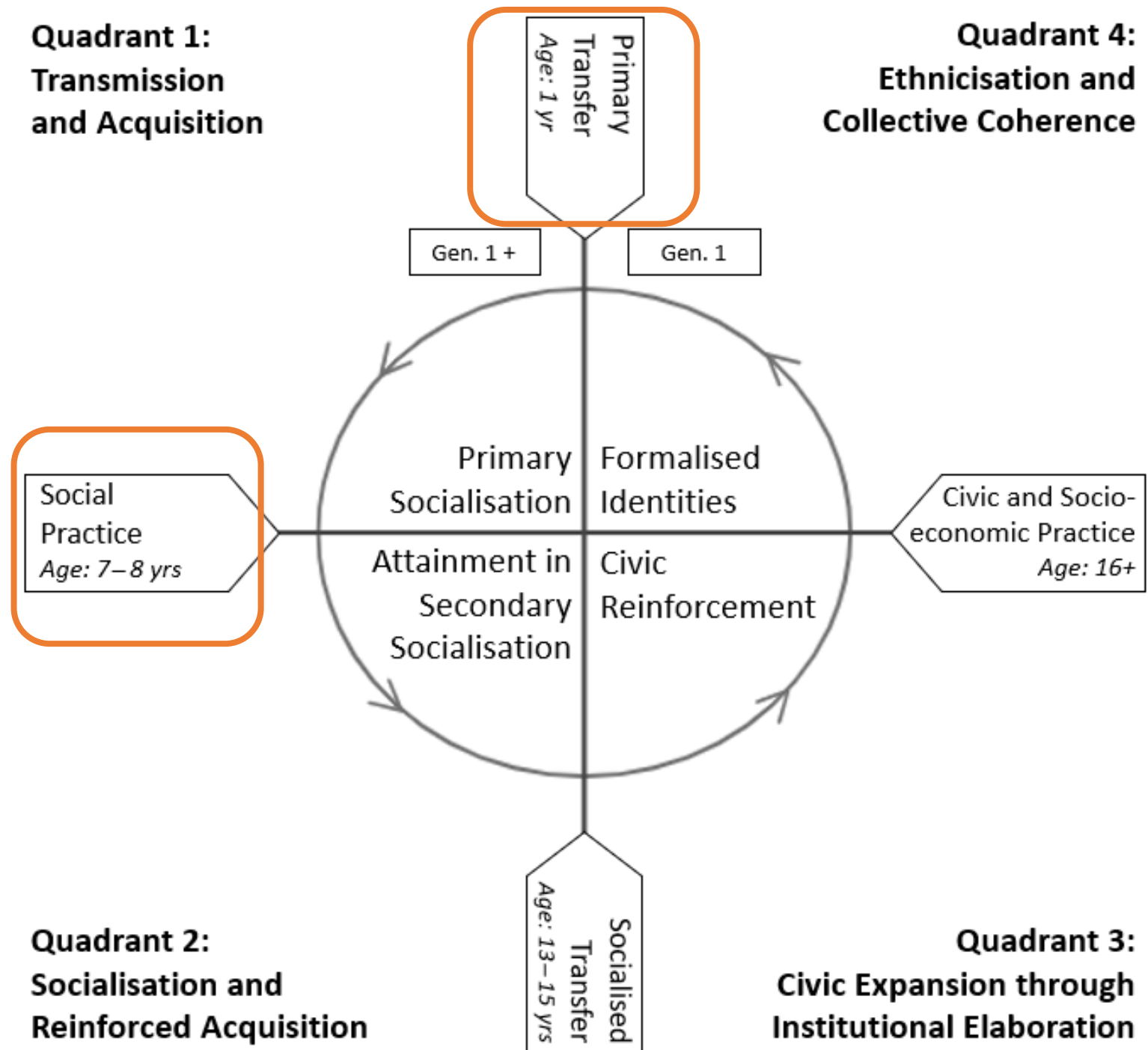
Operating in Four EV Developmental Stages:

1. Language Transmission and Acquisition
2. Socialisation and Reinforced Acquisition
3. Civic Expansion
4. Coherent Ethnicisation.

Key Concepts in Language Dynamics:

Direction Transfer + Practice

*Ó Giollagáin et al. (2025):
Figures in Language
Dynamics in Society (LanDS)*



Key Concepts in Language Dynamics:

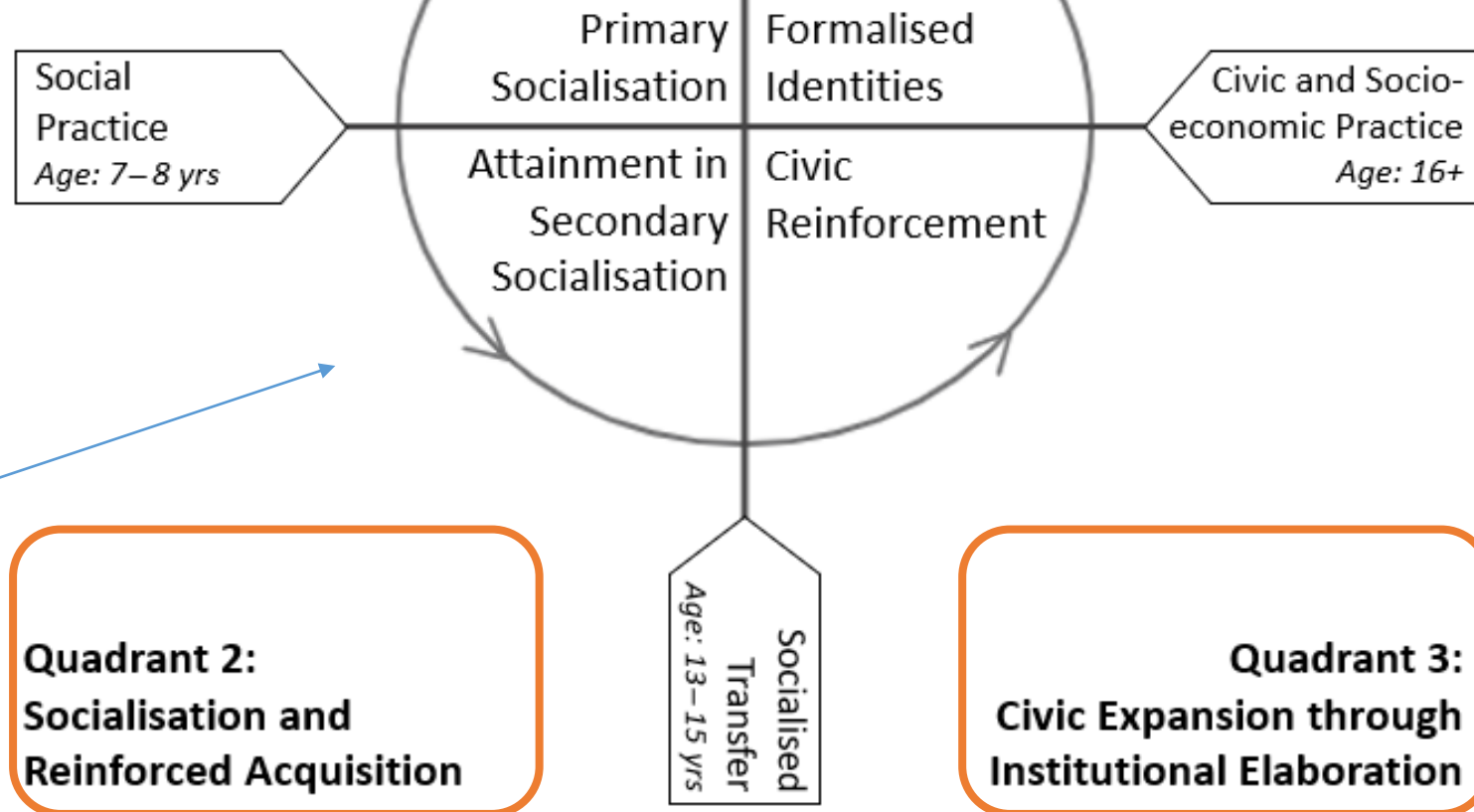
Process

1. Transmission + Acquisition
2. Social reinforcement
3. Civic reinforcement
4. Coherent Ethnicisation

General Societal Process of Functional Culture

Quadrant 1:
Transmission and Acquisition

Quadrant 4:
Ethnicisation and Collective Coherence



Key Concepts in Language Dynamics: Participants + Social Competition

Social players:

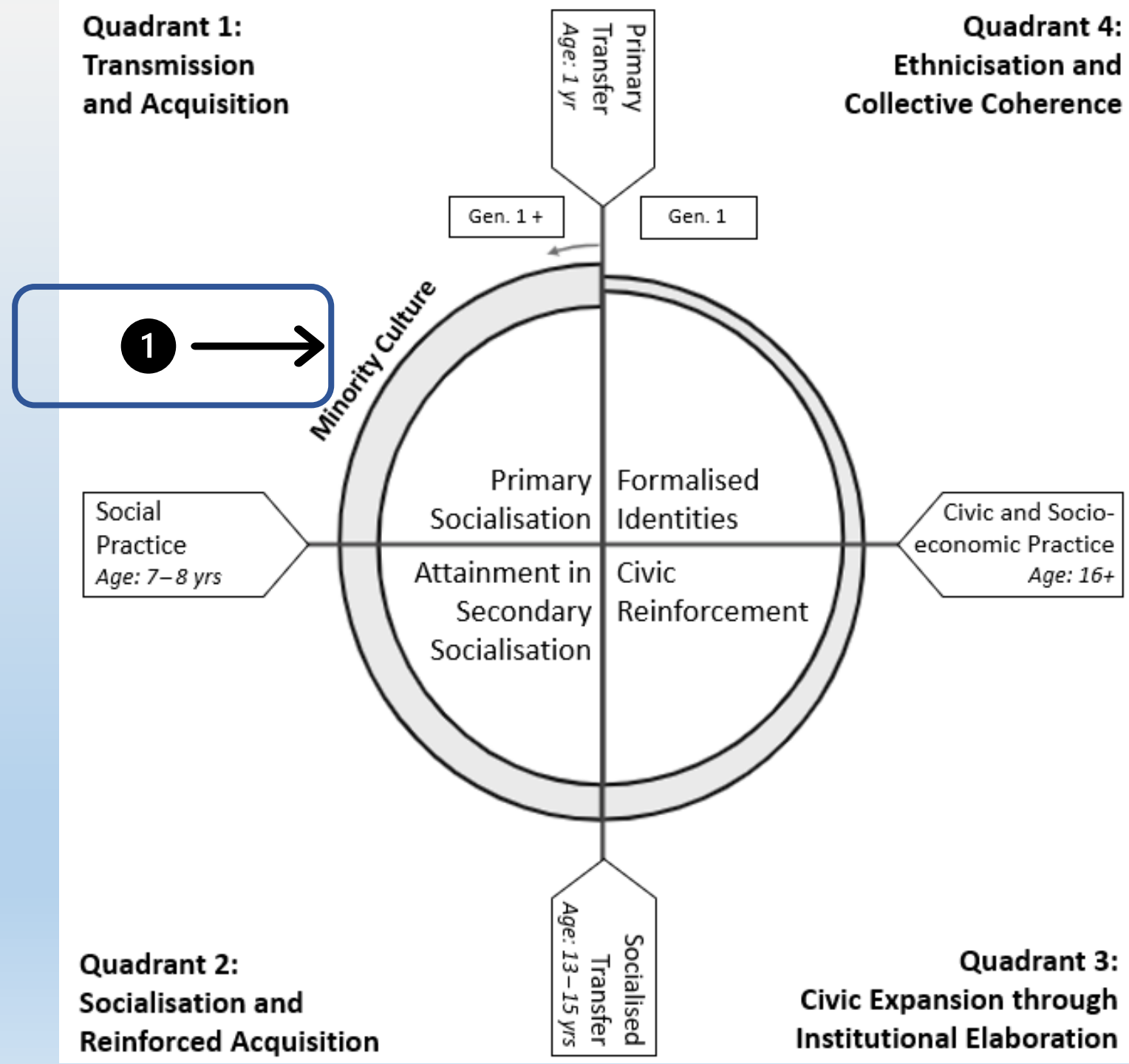
- Participants in 1st Language Minority Culture ①
- Participants in Majority Culture ②
- Participants in Minority Tangential Culture ③
- Participants in Minority Neo-culture ④

Social Competition

- Dynamic trajectory that builds minority confidence and capacity (from positive distribution of power)
- Anti-dynamic trajectory that undermines the minority (from negative distribution of power): majoritarian power towards monolingualisation

1. Minority Culture

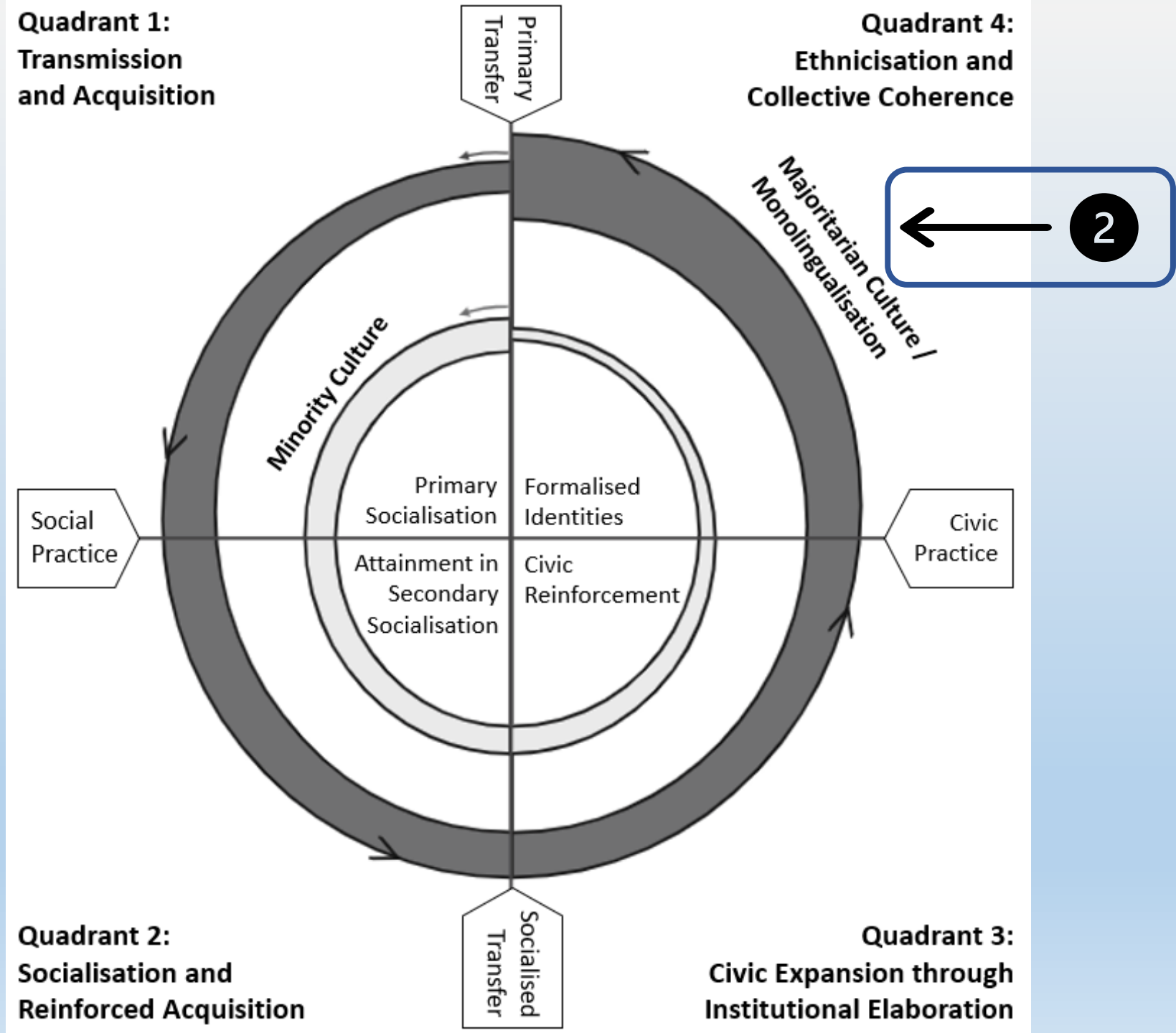
Transfer →
Practice →
Process →
Reinforcement →
Coherence



+
2. Majority Culture

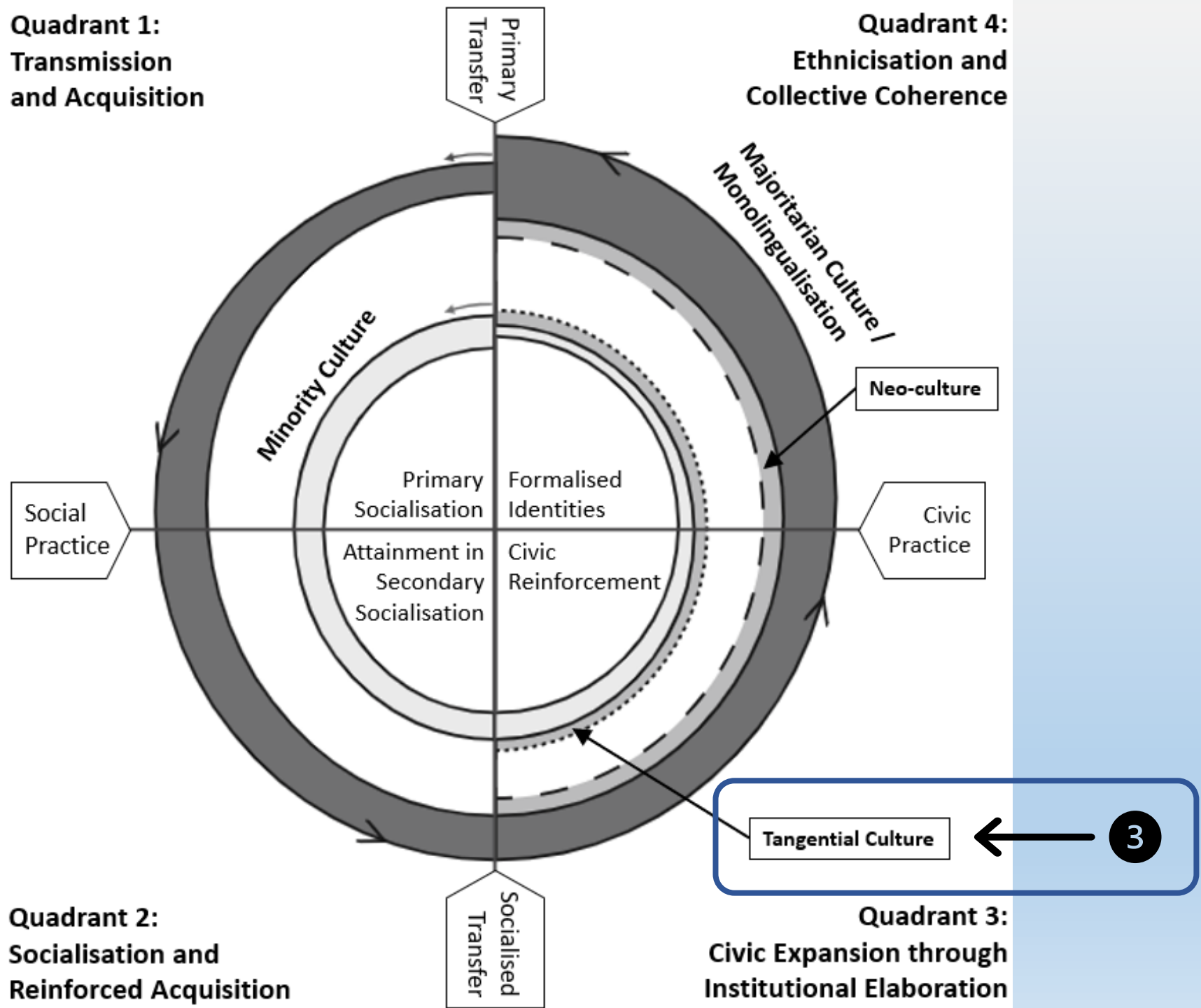
*Competing Social
Participants →*

Anti-dynamic



+
3. Tangential Culture

*Non L1 Social
Participants →
In supportive
dynamic to Min-Lang
culture*

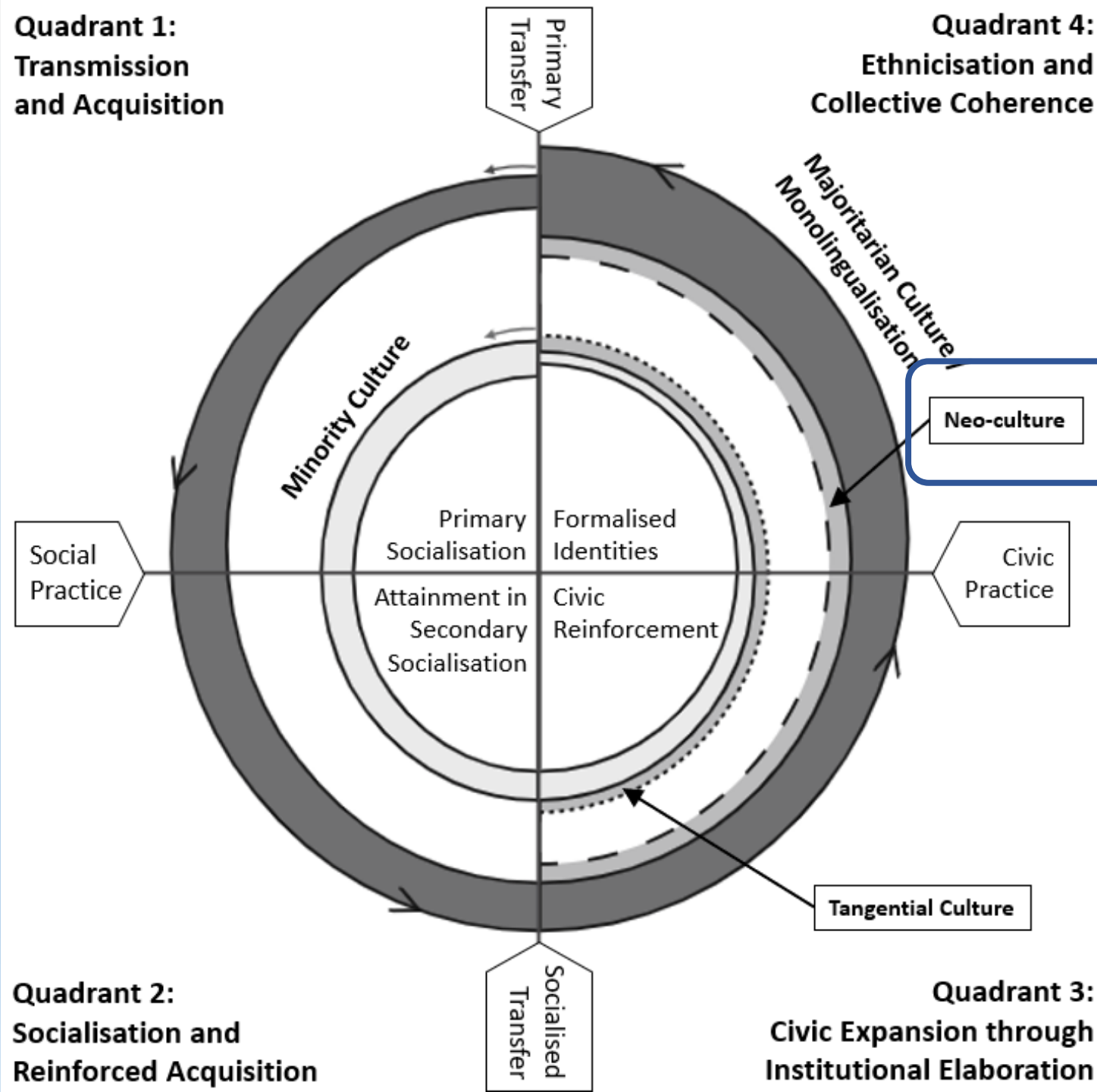


+ Neo-identity

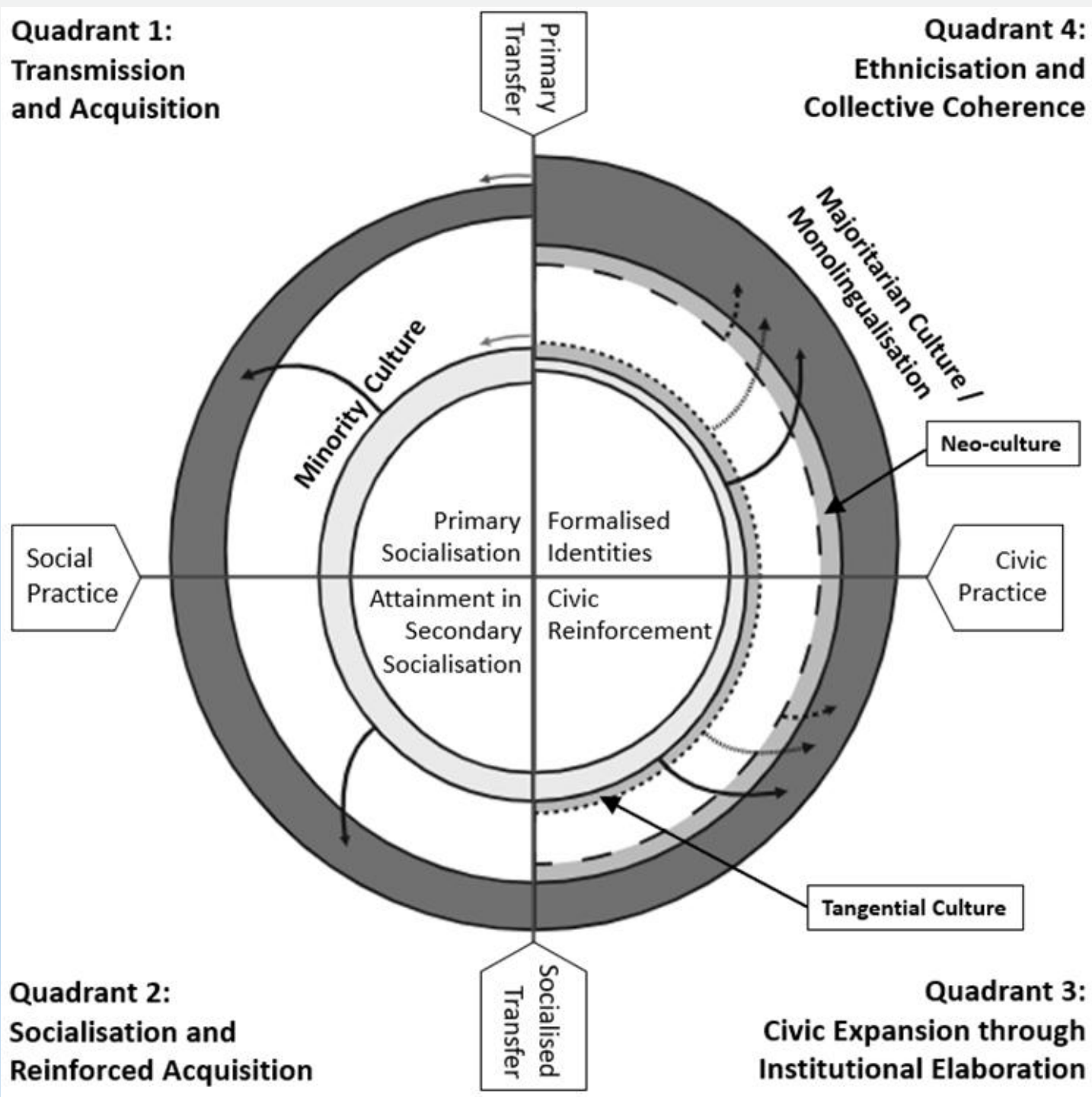
L2 Min-Lang learners/speakers in complementary dynamic with minority, tangential cultures

... with no or little experience of L1 Min-Lang society and culture

... but can work as a *counter dynamic to Min-Lang also*



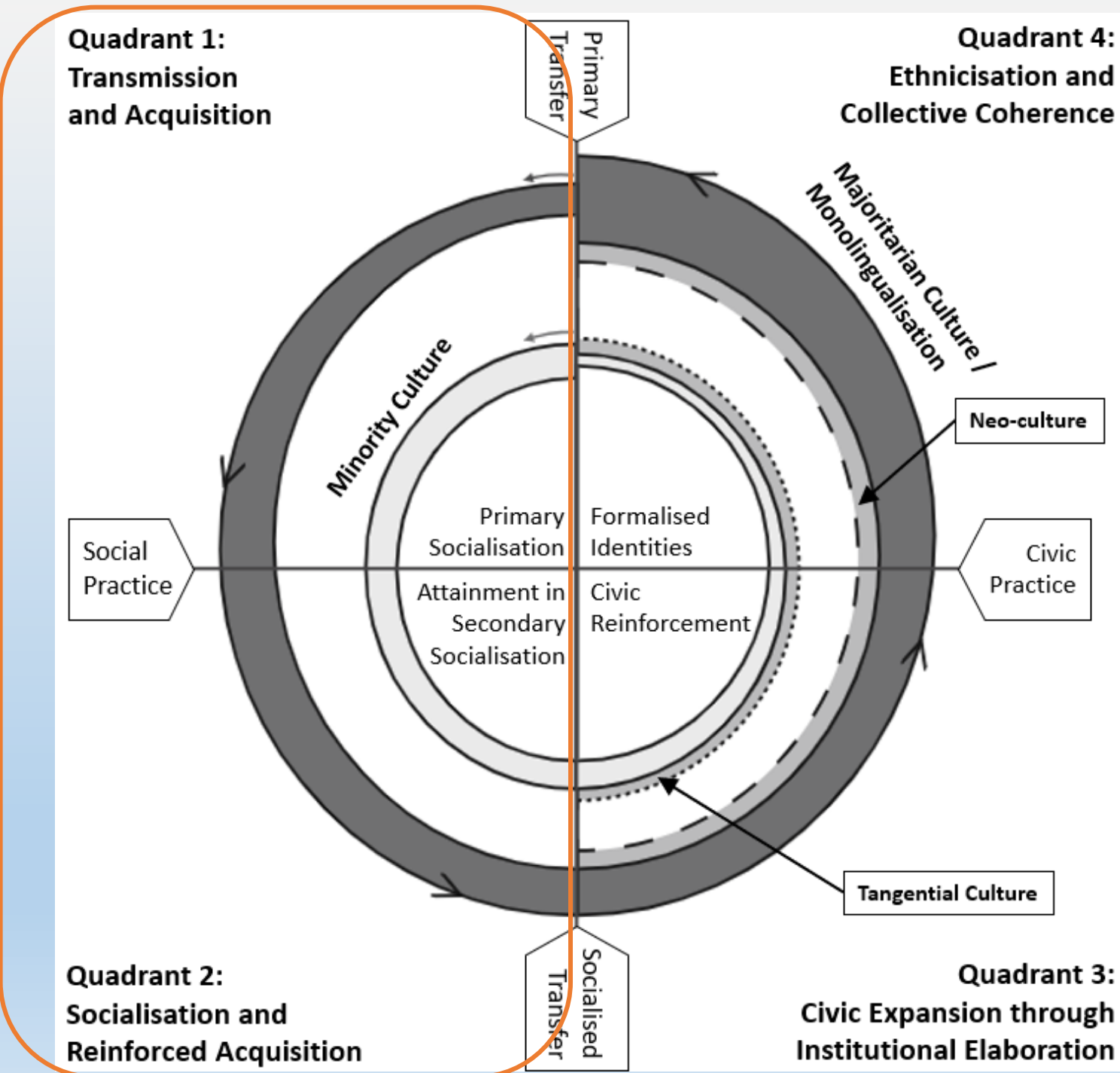
Assimilatory pull of
3 Minority
categories to
majority culture



Emic / Ingroup concerns →

→ Emic versus
Etic perspectives

Implications for
Language Protection
versus
Language Promotion

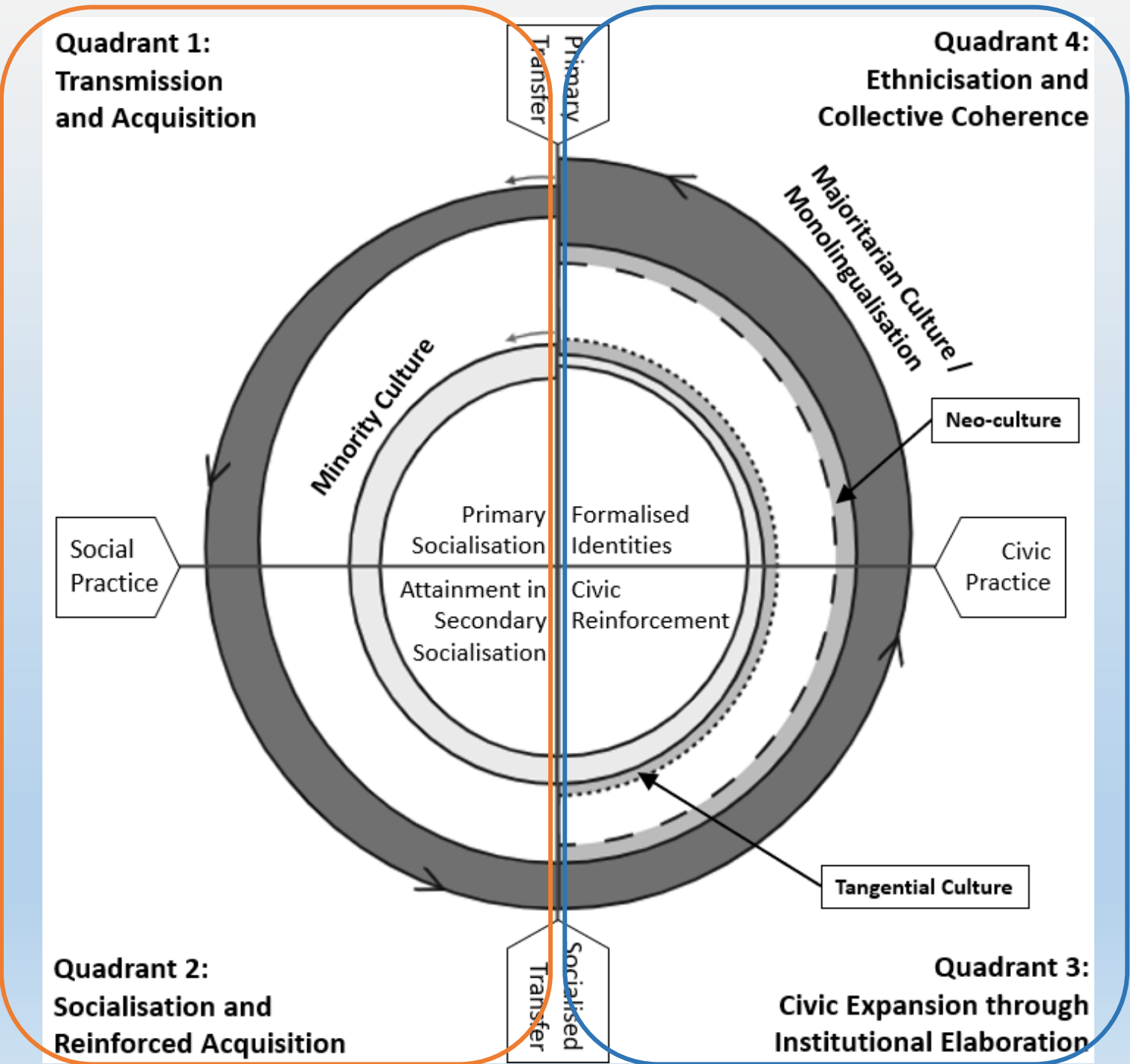


Emic / Ingroup concerns →

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Language Protection
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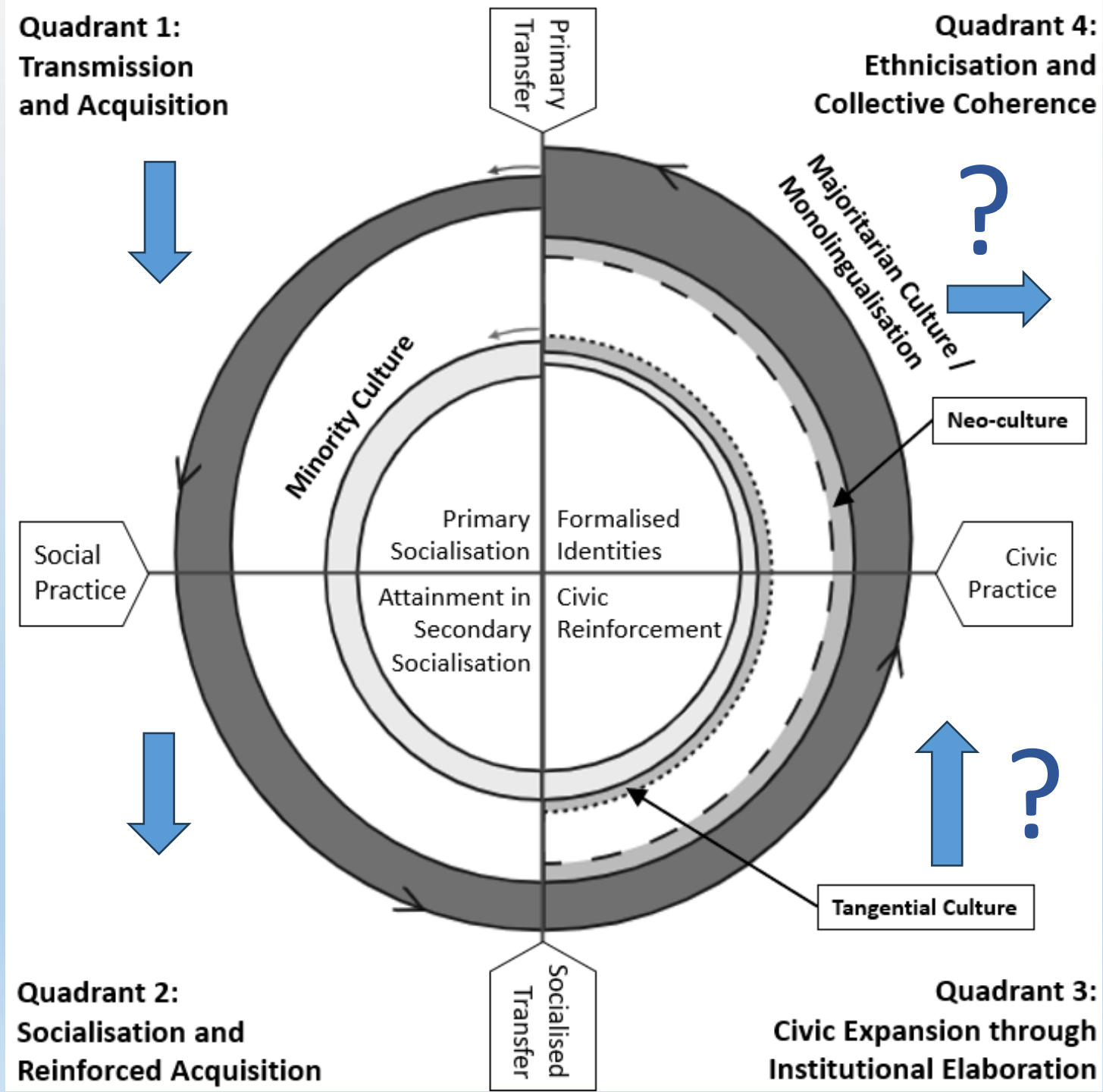
← Etic /
Civic concerns



→
**Full dynamic for Irish
in Quads 1 – 4**

LPP legacy of Official
Gaelic Promotion:

Ireland: After 100
years of LPP →
Vernacular group now
c. **20,000** people
Scotland: After two
generations of civic LPP
→ Vernacular group
now c. **11,000** people



Bringing together:

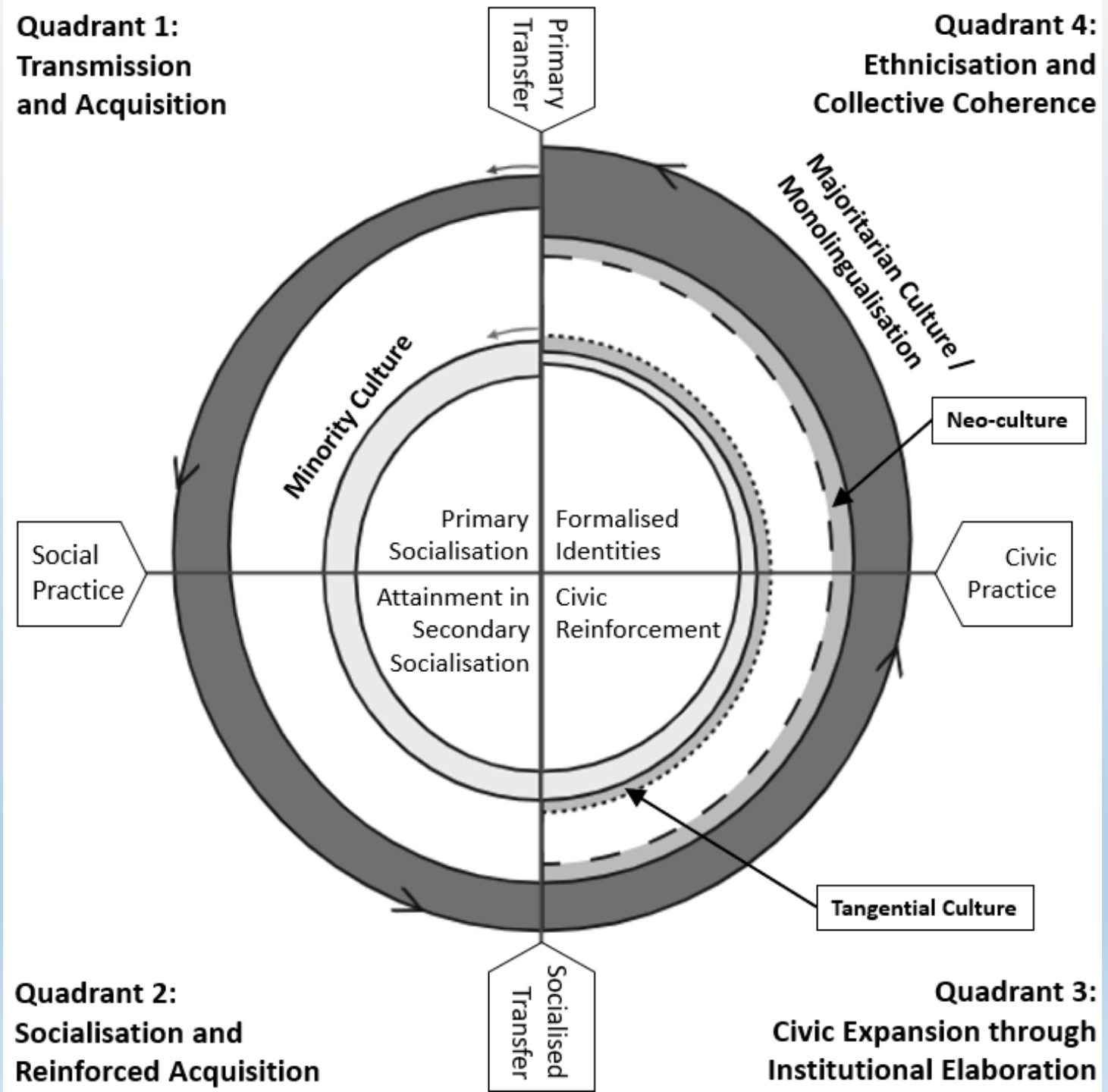
1. Comprehending Social Dynamics of Min-Lang EV in Sociolinguistic Ecosystem

+

2. Addressing Limitations of the Language Rights Approach and Post-Structuralist Deficiencies

+

3. Integrating Strategy for Language Promotion with Language Protection





Defining Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) from a societal dynamic perspective (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2025: 26)

- EV ensues from the collective and organisational capacity of a language group to protect and regenerate key intergenerational, communal/social, institutional and civic processes which are critical to the societal stability and continuity of the ethnolinguistic group.



Next Steps

“Socio-functional” aspect of vernacular language protection to achieve Ethnolinguistic Vitality outcomes

Aligning LPP with societal challenges

Misalignment of LPP with Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV): Lessons from the Gaelic World – 1

- Focus on Symbolic Min-LPP prepared the ground for a **post-vernacular future** - only **L2 future**
 - **Rejection** of sociolinguistic evidence and irresponsible obfuscation of real-world recommendations
 - **Censorious** academic and official perspective on vernacular crisis evidence
 - **Civic denialism** of the L1 vernacular sociolinguistic crisis was to become the **Lowest Common Denominator** between the sectoral Min-L power class, state-sponsored (mainly) L2 activists and discursivist academics – **post-scientific**
- **Societal collapse of the Gaeltacht/Gàidhealtachd a non-issue**

Misalignment of LPP with Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV): Lessons from the Gaelic World – 2

- Questions for larger, mid-sized language minorities:
 - LPP provision rooted in **post-structuralist LPP**?
 - LPP thinking enabled a **neo-liberal *laissez-faire*** perspective?
 - Is there an imbalance between **Symbolic Vs. Societal LPP**?
 - Problem of language promotion without sufficient **language community protection** (cf. Ó Giollagáin + Caimbeul 2021)?
- Emphasising size of the group, rather than strategies for “socio-functionality” of speakers:
 - Similar **non-optimal LPP thinking** leading to similar non-optimal outcomes in society – a **post-functional, non-lived Min-L**?

1. Why does Symbolic/Post-structuralist LPP not work for endangered ethnolinguistic groups?

- Insufficiently targeted on minority group societal sustainability, i.e. Ethnolinguistic Vitality:
 - Collective **socio-political structure(s)** to advance the societal requirements
 - Organisational mechanisms to extend **individual and collective social agency**
 - Strategic resources to devise cooperative initiatives to support the **socio-economic competitiveness** of Min-L speakers
 - Astute **group leadership** fostering group loyalty for ethnolinguistic sustainability.
- Min-L group capacity to survive the transformations of (post-)modernity.



2. Why does Symbolic/Post-structuralist LPP not work?

- No strategic link between between Min-L provision and expected **social outcomes**
- Does not require a **socio-functional collective** language group to sustain language promotion agencies
- Can thrive as **civic aspiration** while being politically naïve
- Dissociated (optimistic!) language activism can be sufficient to give an **illusion of public effervescence**, sparkle

Political and Sociological Incoherence of Symbolic Min-LPP



Why does
Symbolic/Post-
structuralist LPP not
work 2?

- No strategic link between between Min-L provision and expected **social outcomes**
- Does not require a **socio-functional collective** language group to operate language promotion agencies
- Lives by **civic aspiration** while being politically evasive
- Happy-clappy language activism is sufficient to give an **illusion of public effervescence**, sparkle

Where do we go from here if we decide that...?

- Societal LPP is more optimal than Symbolic LPP – need for viable alternative to the LPP status quo
 - LanDS offers analytical progress on Fishman's GIDS and Reversing Language Shift
 - LanDS provides the sociolinguistic basis for holistic scientific analyses of the overall minority-language complexities
 - LanDS suggests that significant aspects of current LPP approaches to Min-Ls require substantial revision
- Credible Min-LPP starts with protecting the social habitat of vernacular, Min-L speaking communities

Mutual benefit of Societal (Vernacular) LPP and LanDS

Applying the LanDS framework entails:

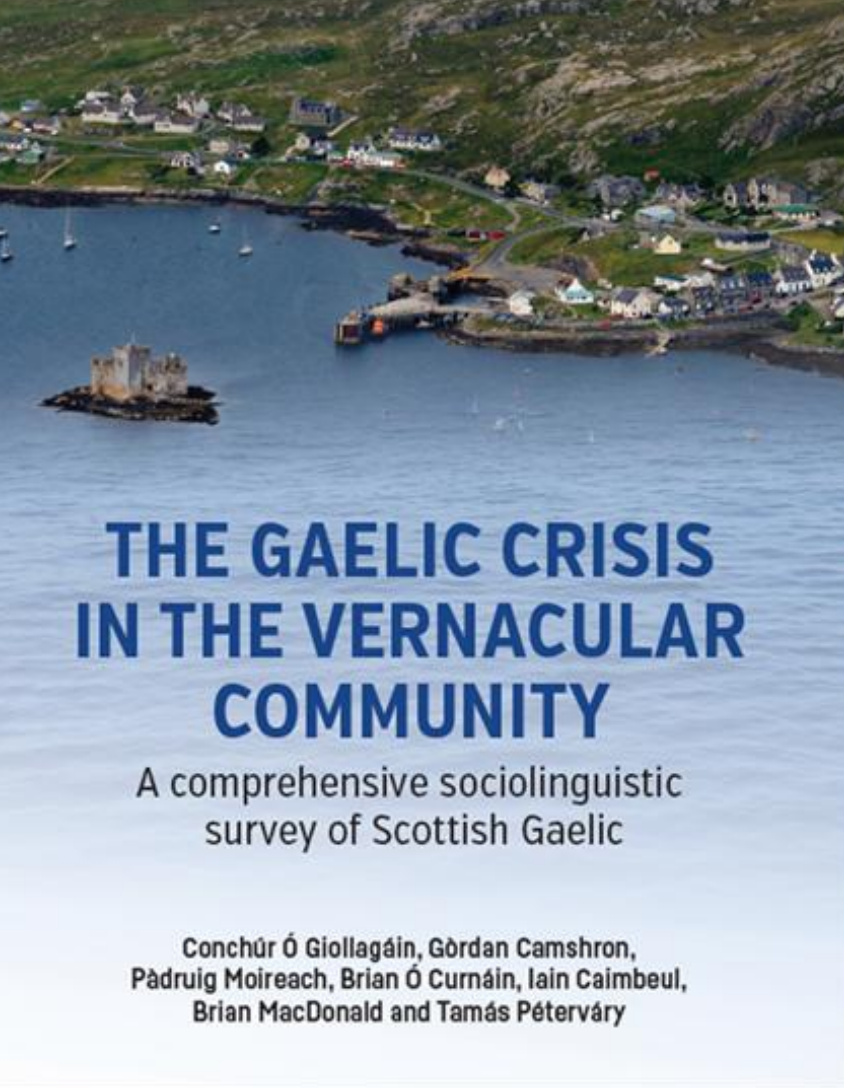
- a) Examining the existing levels of focus in current Min-LPP regarding LanDS
- b) Devising Min-LPP approaches that are more relevant to Developmental Quadrant (DQ) social dynamics and to more optimal EV outcomes
- c) Quantitative and qualitative assessments through demolinguistic and sociolinguistic surveys of the actual, meaningful (rather than purely or predominantly symbolic) engagement with the social dynamics entailed in the four DQs of LanDS and their EV outcomes
- d) Adjusting and amending the ongoing Min-LPP based on the ongoing EV research.

Cross-cultural Rethinking Minority Vernacular Crisis:

What is Symbolic Vs. Societal in Catalan LPP?

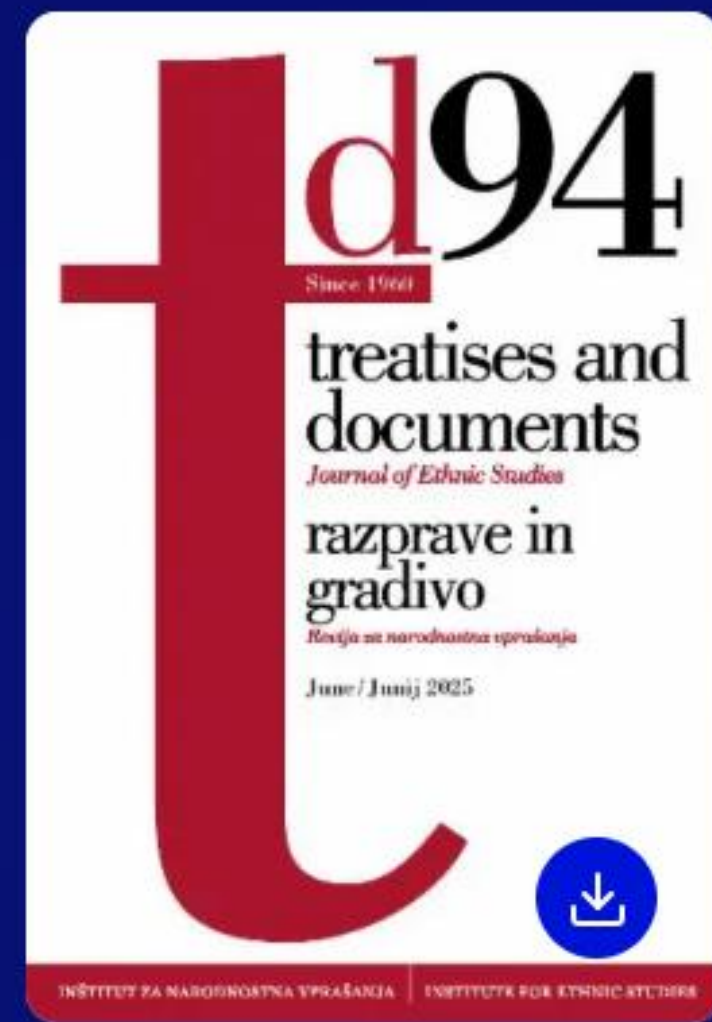
- Multimodular Sociolinguistic Survey of higher density Catalan vernacular areas (cf. Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007, 2015, 2020, BRO)
- Internationally:
 - Formal mechanisms for academic collaboration between linguistic minorities that are going/have gone through this research and language policy process: Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Basque, Catalan contexts
 - Major European sociolinguistic research project on the minority vernacular crisis
 - Global forum for focusing on Minority Ethnolinguistic Vitality similar to focus on protecting ecological diversity

→ **Need for new Societal LPP, prioritising vernacular concerns, complementary L1, L2 and learner perspective**



Gràcies!
Go raibh maith agaibh!
Tapadh leibh!
Diolch!

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Language Dynamics in Society: LanDS
Ethnolinguistic Vitality Model: Ó Giollagáin
et al. (2025):