

# Language Documentation and Description

ISSN 1740-6234

---

This article appears in: *Language Documentation and Description*, vol 9. Editor: Julia Sallabank

## **Social change and language revitalization in the Isle of Man: a post-materialist perspective**

GARY N. WILSON

Cite this article: Gary N. Wilson (2011). Social change and language revitalization in the Isle of Man: a post-materialist perspective. In Julia Sallabank (ed.) *Language Documentation and Description*, vol 9. London: SOAS. pp. 58-74

Link to this article: <http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/104>

This electronic version first published: July 2014



This article is published under a Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC (Attribution-NonCommercial). The licence permits users to use, reproduce, disseminate or display the article provided that the author is attributed as the original creator and that the reuse is restricted to non-commercial purposes i.e. research or educational use. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

---

## **EL Publishing**

For more EL Publishing articles and services:

Website:	<a href="http://www.elpublishing.org">http://www.elpublishing.org</a>
Terms of use:	<a href="http://www.elpublishing.org/terms">http://www.elpublishing.org/terms</a>
Submissions:	<a href="http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions">http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions</a>

# Social change and language revitalization in the Isle of Man: a post-materialist perspective

Gary N. Wilson<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The effects of social change or ‘the appearance of new social and cultural patterns of behaviour among specific groups within a society or within society as a whole’ have been noted by language scholars in their attempt to develop a more comprehensive theory of language shift (Cooper 1996:164). Political scientists and sociologists have also been following noticeable changes in the norms and values that underpin western societies in the post-war period. In their view, these changes have had far-reaching impacts on the political, economic and socio-cultural life of many countries. The so-called ‘Rights Revolution’, which ushered in sweeping social and political changes after the 1960s, is one example of this trend (Ignatieff 2001). Post-materialist interpretations of social change argue that relative economic stability and growth in the post-war period have provided a foundation for a shift from what Abraham Maslow (1943) identified as safety and physiological needs to so-called higher needs of love and belongingness, self-esteem and self-actualization (Inglehart 1977, 1990). Although scholars have critiqued particular aspects of post-materialism (Van Deth 1983, Haller 2002), it nevertheless remains a robust and quantifiable theory of social change.

In an effort to develop a deeper understanding of the impact that social changes such as those described by the literature on post-materialism are having on the process of language revitalization, this article will examine the changing fortunes of Manx Gaelic, the indigenous language of the Isle of Man, a small island located in north-western Europe. During the past four decades, the island has undergone a significant economic transition away from a traditional economy based on fishing, agriculture and tourism to a post-industrial economy centered on banking, financial services and niche manufacturing. This transition has brought unprecedented economic growth and prosperity to the island. At the same time, the island’s indigenous culture

---

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Adrian Cain, Julia Sallabank and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

and language have experienced a remarkable process of revitalization, following decades of decline and neglect.

Many specific reasons have been identified as to why and how this linguistic revitalization process has happened (Gawne 2002, Wilson 2008, 2009). Key among these has been the role played by grassroots language activists and enthusiasts and, more recently, the Isle of Man Government. While the author does not wish to discount or understate the critical importance of these actors, this article will take a broader perspective on this subject by exploring the effects that the changing economic fortunes of the Isle of Man have had on the revitalization of Manx Gaelic (Manx) and the socio-cultural context in which the language is embedded. In particular, it will consider how social change has influenced the process of language revitalization on the island by using the theory of post-materialism to explain the impact that economic growth and stability has had on attitudes toward language and culture.

This article is divided into three parts. Part one will provide an overview of the theoretical literature on social change and post-materialism. Part two will explore the socio-economic changes that have taken place in the Isle of Man since the 1970s and the impact that these changes have had on the process of linguistic and cultural revitalization. Part three will analyze the process of revitalization in the Isle of Man through the lens of post-materialism.

## **2. Social change and post-materialism**

The fate of many of the world's indigenous and minority languages is, to a large extent, dependent on the individual efforts of language enthusiasts and linguists. However, in order to fully appreciate the process of language revitalization, one must understand the broader social, political and economic changes taking place within any given society and the ways in which these changes are affecting the societal context in which languages exist.<sup>2</sup> In his

---

<sup>2</sup> The author recognizes that there is considerable debate among linguists and students of language revitalization over the terms used to describe this process. Fishman (1991) refers to the idea of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) to describe the process of changing the course of a threatened language. Spolsky (2003:555) uses the term revitalization to refer to 'the restoration of natural intergenerational transmission' of a threatened language. Spolsky (2003:555) also notes that the term regeneration has also been used 'to refer to the increase of salience and status that comes when a language becomes the focus for ethnic mobilization.' While the term revitalization is used in this article because of its focus on issues relating to generational change in attitudes towards language and culture, the other terms could apply to various aspects of the linguistic transition process in the Isle of Man.

work on social change and language planning, Robert Cooper has observed the connection over the last century between ‘the spread of values associated with self-realization and individual expression’ and language shift (Cooper 1996: 167). Although Cooper’s research in this area focused specifically on the effect that changing values and attitudes had on the feminist campaign to encourage gender-neutral language, the same idea can be applied to other instances of language shift, including language revitalization. For example, in many parts of the world, changing attitudes toward the cultural, political and economic value of indigenous languages have spurred a reaction against the seemingly inevitable process of language death.

Academics who study the sources and impacts of social and political change have observed that during the post-war period, changing attitudes, values and norms have had a transformative influence on the political and economic life of western societies. According to Ronald Inglehart (2008:130-131):

Survey evidence from six West European societies [since the 1970s] revealed large differences between the value priorities of older and younger generations. Among the older cohorts, ‘materialist’ values, emphasising economic and physical security, were overwhelmingly predominant – but as one moved from older to younger birth cohorts, ‘post-materialist’ values, emphasising autonomy and self-expression, became increasingly widespread...But it is only one aspect of a broader cultural shift from survival values to self-expression values, which is bringing new political issues to the centre of the stage and motivating new political movements.

Using quantitative data from industrial democracies gathered in the World Values Survey<sup>3</sup>, Inglehart’s theory of intergenerational value change argues that unprecedented economic stability and growth in the post-war period has encouraged the development of post-materialist values. The theory of post-materialism is based on two fundamental hypotheses. The first is the scarcity hypothesis which contends that people will place the greatest value on needs that are in short supply. Drawing on Maslow’s concept of a ‘hierarchy of needs’, Inglehart argues that if a person lacks basic, materialist needs such as foods, shelter and security, they will value those needs more than other post-materialist needs such as ‘belonging, esteem, and aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction’. (Inglehart 2008:131). This is not to say that economically insecure people cannot value or satisfy higher needs. It merely points out that when people are facing economic and other basic types of insecurity, they seek to prioritize and meet the needs most readily associated with those

---

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/> (20 May 2010)

insecurities. By contrast, if a person's basic needs are met, they are better able to focus on satisfying post-materialist needs.

The second hypothesis underpinning the theory of post-materialism is the socialization hypothesis. This contends that people's values and attitudes develop during their formative years<sup>4</sup> and remain with them throughout their life. Furthermore, these values and attitudes are profoundly influenced by a person's economic circumstances during that formative period. When the two hypotheses are considered together, the conclusion is that people who grow up in times of economic insecurity will be more materialist in their value orientations. Conversely, people who grow up during times of economic growth and security will be more post-materialist in their value orientations. For example, in the western, industrialized democracies, the generation that grew up in times of economic insecurity in the 1930s and 1940s developed materialist values and have held onto those values throughout their lives. By contrast, the subsequent generation that grew during the post-war period of relative economic growth and prosperity are largely post-materialist in their value orientations.<sup>5</sup>

Inglehart, among others (Nevitte 1996, Inglehart and Baker 2000, Inglehart and Norris 2003, Inglehart and Welzel 2005), argues that the public policy impacts of this intergenerational value change will be felt as the materialist generation ages and is replaced by the post-materialist generation. In short, as voters and decision-makers, the members of this post-materialist generation will have an increasingly profound influence over the political, economic and socio-cultural destinies of western societies. The following case study of linguistic revitalization in the Isle of Man will illustrate the connection between social changes caused by economic factors and shifting attitudes towards culture and language.

---

<sup>4</sup> The term formative years refers to a person's pre-adult years.

<sup>5</sup> This, of course, does not mean that all people who grew during the 1930s and 1940s are materialists and all people who grew up in the post-war period are post-materialists. However, the survey data over four decades indicate that this dichotomy generally holds true. The survey data have also revealed that people who grew up during the period economic downturn following the decline of the Keynesian post-war consensus (late 1970s and early 1980s) are less post-materialist than the age cohort before them (Inglehart 2008:136)

### 3. Socio-economic change and language revitalization in the Isle of Man

Located in the Irish Sea, equidistant from Wales, England, Scotland and Ireland, the Isle of Man is considered part of the British Isles, a geographically-defined group of islands in north-western Europe.<sup>6</sup> Politically speaking, the Isle of Man is a semi-autonomous Dependency of the British Crown. As such, the British monarch is the island's Head of State. The Isle of Man, however, is not part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK), nor is it a member of the European Union.<sup>7</sup> It has its own political traditions and domestic government, including a tricameral parliament (Tynwald)<sup>8</sup> and various administrative departments. Nevertheless, for reasons of political expediency, the island does have close relations with the UK Government in London and relies on the UK for defence and diplomatic services (Wilson 2005, McKercher 2000).

For much of its history, the Isle of Man has been controlled politically by outsiders. It became a Crown Dependency in 1765 following the adoption of the UK Revestment Act, by which John Murray, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Atholl, sold the island to the British Crown (Gawne 2002). In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Isle of Man underwent its first modern economic transformation when it became a regular holiday destination for mostly working class tourists from growing industrial centers throughout the British Isles. This period of growth in the island's tourism industry coincided with the decline in traditional industries such as fishing and agriculture. In the period between 1945 and the 1970s, the Isle of Man's economy was based primarily on tourism and small scale manufacturing, with fishing and agriculture playing an even more diminished role (Winterbottom 2000:207). Following the decline of tourism after the 1970s, however, 'the island used its unique constitutional position to develop as an international offshore financial centre whose vigorous growth in the 1980s and 1990s replaced the ailing tourist

---

<sup>6</sup> In this article, the term British Isles refers to a geographical region. The author recognizes that the term carries a certain ethno-centric bias in that it is British term that is used to refer to an entire geographic region, including England, Wales Scotland, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, and that it is not used in some of these jurisdictions (namely in the Republic of Ireland). In this article, the term is used to emphasize the fact that while the Isle of Man considers itself to be part of the geographical region known as the British Isles, it is not part of the political entity of United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

<sup>7</sup> The island has a protocol arrangement with the EU, which was negotiated when the UK became a member of the European Economic Community in 1973 (Wilson 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Tynwald dates back to the Norse era and is the oldest continuous parliament in the world.

trade as the main source of economic prosperity.’ (Winterbottom 2000: 207).<sup>9</sup> As a result, during the past 30 years, the Isle of Man has undergone a profound economic transformation, one which has had important impacts on the political, social and cultural development of the island.

A cursory examination of basic financial indicators reveals the extent of this economic transformation. Data comparing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in the Isle of Man and Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita in the UK indicate that in 1982, the Isle of Man’s figure was a mere 58% of the comparable UK level.<sup>10</sup> In the ensuing 25 year period, however, the island experienced a steady increase in its per capita GDP, relative to that of the UK. In 2007, it stood at 122% of the comparable UK figure and 129% of the comparable European Union (EU) figure (Isle of Man Treasury 2010). The current unemployment rate in the Isle of Man is 2%, which is very low compared to other regions in the UK and Europe. During the last 13 years it has very rarely risen above that level and for long periods has been less than 1%. For much of the 1980s and 1990s, unemployment was in the 4-8% range (Isle of Man Treasury 2010). A further indication of the expansion of island’s economy over the last several decades is the fact that central government spending in the period between 1982 and 2000 (in 2000 prices) more than doubled from £129,834,320 to £291,804,095 (Kermode 2001:360).<sup>11</sup>

In many respects, the fate of Manx, the indigenous language of the Isle of Man, has mirrored that of the island’s economy. Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the language was spoken widely throughout the island. In the late 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, though, a number of factors associated with the political and economic changes discussed above had a detrimental impact on the use of Manx as a language of everyday discourse by islanders. According to Gawne (2002:174), the passage of the Revestment Act ‘led to the collapse of the Manx economy and significant emigration requiring the previously relatively isolated Manx people to use English at the expense of their native tongue.’

---

<sup>9</sup> Winterbottom refers to the island’s ‘unique’ constitutional position, but it is important to note that other jurisdictions in the British Isles have comparable levels autonomy, as do other small jurisdictions in other parts of Europe.

<sup>10</sup> For national income per capita data, the Isle of Man produces Gross Domestic Product figures at factor cost adjustment, which removes the effect of indirect taxes and subsidies. The nearest equivalent data for the UK is Gross Value Added per capita. Zahed, Miah, Treasury Department, Isle of Man Government. Personal communication (24 May 2010)

<sup>11</sup> The author does not have access to specific data on language-related spending, but the growth of Manx language initiatives on the island during this period suggests that spending on language-related activities, both in the field of education and in the broader society, has also increased significantly.

The subsequent opening up of the island's economy and society, coupled with the influx of English-speaking tourists and the emigration of many islanders, led to the decline of Manx as a working, community language (Wilson 2008). This decline was reinforced by UK government policies that neglected and even discouraged the teaching of Manx in the school system. As noted by Hinton Bird (1995:165) in his comprehensive history of education in the Isle of Man, in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Whitehall [the UK Government] saw little point in spending time on a subject 'of very limited practical utility', when there were enough subjects of the curriculum already... The Anglicization in language of the rural districts which had continued steadily during the Nineteenth Century was now total.

Such policies of neglect were continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even as the Isle of Man Government gained greater autonomy. General perceptions of the utility of Manx at this time, among many native and non-native residents of the island, were that the language had little value. Indeed, the situation facing the language became so dire that by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, less than 200 people spoke Manx fluently and the last native speaker died in 1974 (Gawne 2002: 174).

At about the same time that the Isle of Man was making the transition from a traditional economy to a post-industrial economy based on banking, financial services and electronic media industries, the Manx language was also starting its slow climb away from the brink of extinction. The initial foundation for language revitalization was built by language activists, a number of whom had learned the language from the last native speakers. These activists continued the longer tradition of resistance to linguistic decline that had begun with the creation of *Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh* (Manx Gaelic Society), which was founded in 1899 (Abley 2004:104-105; Tanner 2004: 135-136). They were instrumental in keeping the language alive and eventually introducing grassroots initiatives, such as a Manx medium nursery school program (*Mooinjor Veggey*)<sup>12</sup>, that were designed to grow the language among a younger generation of speakers. Government support for language programming was slower to materialize but in the period following the creation of the Select Committee on the Greater Use of Manx Gaelic and the approval of its recommendations by Tynwald in 1985, it has been observed that the Government 'has shown increasing willingness to support Manx Gaelic with the late 1990s seeing a reluctant recruit converted to an unreserved enthusiast'. (Gawne 2002:1982). Subsequent developments such

---

<sup>12</sup> The *Mooinjor Veggey* program started in 1996.



as the appointment of a Manx Language Officer (*Yn Greinneyder*) in 1991, the development of Manx language programming and a peripatetic teaching unit (*Yn Unnid Gaelgagh*) by the Department of Education in 2005 and the creation of the a Manx-medium primary school (*Bunscoill Ghaelgagh*) in 2001 have expanded the Government's involvement in language planning and improved the position of the language within the broader society (Wilson 2009).

While the objective of this article is to draw a direct causal link between economic and linguistic/cultural revitalization on the island, using the theory of post-materialism as an explanation of the impact that economic growth and stability has on changing attitudes toward language and culture, it is important to note that the growth and reorientation of the island's economy over the past several decades has had both positive and negative effects on the development of the Manx language and culture. On the positive side, economic growth has strengthened the finances of the island's government, thereby giving it more resources to spend on linguistic and cultural programs (Wilson 2008). Whereas in the past, a combination of limited resources and a negative attitude about the value of the Manx language and culture (both in general and as an economic asset) would have precluded any such investment, the favourable economic position of the island in the 1990s and 2000s was one of the key factors that allowed the government to fund linguistic and cultural revitalization programs. Furthermore, many in government now realize the economic value of language and culture to the autonomy that underpins the Isle of Man's prosperity. In the recently launched island branding exercise, *Freedom to Flourish*, the Manx language and cultural idioms feature quite prominently in video advertisements and brochures (Freedom to Flourish, 2008).<sup>13</sup> The island's unique indigenous heritage is seen as a way of distinguishing it from the UK and from other economic competitors in the global marketplace for financial services and economic development.

However, not all aspects of economic change have had a positive impact on the process of linguistic and cultural revitalization in the Isle of Man. Although the changes taking place in the island's economy have indeed produced significant growth and stability, this post-industrial transition has also altered its demography in ways that may not necessarily be supportive of linguistic and cultural revitalization. For example, the development of the new economy has increased immigration to the island, mostly from the United Kingdom. As noted above, increased immigration was one of the factors that

---

<sup>13</sup> See the following website for additional information on the Freedom to Flourish initiative: <http://www.gov.im/cso/flourish/> (9 June 2010)

led to the decline of the language in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Wilson 2008, Gawne 2002). Although some of the most recent newcomers have embraced the language and culture of the island (Wilson 2009), as did earlier immigrants to the island (Kewley Draskau 2006), there is a general sense that the majority of this latest wave of immigrants are at best indifferent and at worst unsympathetic to the idea of using public funds to support linguistic and cultural revitalization.

Immigration is not a new phenomenon on the Isle of Man, by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, the island's culture has been positively influenced by successive waves of immigration throughout history. It could also be argued that immigration has stimulated a sense of identity and belongingness among the indigenous population. Writing about an earlier wave of demographic change on the island in the 1960s and 1970s, Gawne (2002:174) observed that:

Following the initial shock caused by the arrival of so many new residents, many Manx people were searching for a sense of identity and purpose. Urged on by the common perception that Government and new residents alike were treating the Manx as second-class citizens, a number of Manx people and some incomers looked to the Manx language and its associated culture to re-establish a strong Manx identity.

A similar, yet more poignant, watershed moment occurred in 2001, when the census results revealed that slightly less than 50% of the population was born on the island (Wilson 2005). This was an important, albeit ominous, milestone that motivated many on the island to pay more attention to linguistic and cultural issues. The reality that '[f]or a growing number of people, the common Manx identity is based more on civic criteria or loyalty to the political institutions of the state rather than on ethnic factors', has encouraged them to learn more about their indigenous culture (Wilson 2005: 134).

#### **4. A post-materialist interpretation of language revitalization in the Isle of Man**

Is the Isle of Man experiencing the same type of socio-economic change that Inglehart and other proponents of post-materialism have observed in western, industrialized democracies? If so, can a link be made between these changes and the broader process of linguistic and cultural revitalization on the island? At first glance, it seems that the convergence of economic, political and demographic changes since the 1970s has provided the appropriate conditions for the development of a post-materialist cohort. In order to substantiate this

claim, this section will conduct a more detailed examination of the connection between post-materialist change and language revitalization on the island.

Certainly, this particular case is consistent with two important aspects of the post-materialist thesis. First, the Isle of Man is located geographically in Western Europe, in the same part of the world that students of post-materialism have been tracking changes in value orientations for the last four decades. Second, the island has experienced significant economic growth during that same period. As noted in the previous section, economic growth in the Isle of Man over the last 3 decades has outstripped that of the UK and the EU. While the statistical data provided are by no means exhaustive in scope and detail, they do suggest that the economic conditions for the development of a post-materialist cohort in the Isle of Man have been in place for some time.

One key question that needs to be resolved is whether language revitalization *per se* is an expression of post-materialist values. The literature on post-materialism does not specifically mention language or language revitalization in its examples of value change. Instead, it tends to focus on changes in the nature of political participation, the expansion of rights and freedoms, and the rise of new political parties and social movements as outcomes of economic growth and stability. Nevertheless, this article argues that language revitalization and, in particular, the cultural imperatives that drive the process of revitalization are consistent with many of the general value characteristics associated with post-materialism; namely: belongingness; autonomy; self-expression; self-actualization; self-fulfillment; quality of life; and intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction. Earlier research on language revitalization in the Isle of Man (Wilson 2009, Richardson 2008, Clague 2007) reveals that proponents of revitalization view the task of preserving and promoting Manx as a way to connect with one's heritage (belongingness), an expression of political and cultural sovereignty (autonomy), a means of building one's sense of self-esteem (self-actualization, self-expression) and as an intellectual exercise for them and their children (intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction).

This post-materialistic support for linguistic and cultural revitalization can be contrasted with what might be construed as a materialist-based denigration of the Manx language and culture throughout most of its recent history. For many years, the language and culture were viewed as useless and lacking in intrinsic value. Children were discouraged from speaking the language because 'it wouldn't help them get on in life'. In his study of threatened languages, Mark Abley (2004:100) recounts a conversation with an elderly Manx woman who grew up in a rural part of the island in the 1920s:

...our mother used to say there was no point in learning Manx, because other folk weren't talking it. We grew up with the idea that there wasn't much point in keeping it up... 'Don't be speaking the roughness!' was still remembered on Man. English felt smooth. English felt suave. The psychological impact of that linguistic shift, its emotional gravity, has perhaps never been measured.

In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the few remaining native speakers of the language were generally viewed as parochial remnants of a bygone era. Such materialistic attitudes regarding the value of the language are still common on the island, especially among the older generation of islanders (Wilson 2009). A post-materialist would argue that this is the generation who grew up during times of economic decline and insecurity and, as result, they do not see the immediate economic value of learning a language that was, for all intents and purposes, dead a couple of decades ago.

If Manx is considered a component of the traditional indigenous culture of the Isle of Man, it is curious and perhaps somewhat contradictory that the language revitalization process has been supported by individuals with post-materialist value orientations. After all, as a theory of value change, post-materialism is generally consistent with modernization theory in that both would support the notion that 'economic development has systematic and, to some extent, predictable cultural and political consequences (Inglehart and Baker 2000:20). Accordingly, the processes associated with modernization, such as industrialization and urbanization, are supposed to hasten the replacement of traditional values with so-called 'modern' values (Inglehart and Baker 2000:20). Thinking about this in the context of the Isle of Man, however, one could interpret post-materialist support for language revitalization as a reaction against traditionally negative attitudes towards Manx. If one accepts that traditional attitudes regarding Manx (at least those within living memory) were decidedly hostile towards the language, then the subsequent rejection of such attitudes is consistent with the ideas of value change that are embedded within the theory of post-materialism.

As noted above, one of the most important drivers of language revitalization in the Isle of Man has been grassroots activists and language enthusiasts. Their role in keeping the language alive in the dark days following the death of the last native speaker should not be underestimated. To a large extent, it is their continued persistence and hard work, in conjunction now with the government's renewed interest in linguistic and cultural issues that accounts for the success that the language has enjoyed in recent years. Indeed, several of these language activists are now employed by the government to oversee Manx language programming or have been elected to public office and occupy prominent positions in the Isle of Man Government. Manx is by no means safe from extinction; but it is in a much

better and more optimistic position now than it was when the revitalization process started in the 1970s and this is largely the result of the efforts of language activists.

If grassroots activists and language enthusiasts have played a critical role in the revitalization process, does this contribution fit into a post-materialist interpretation of language revitalization? Initially, this group constituted a very small minority of islanders who stood against the prevailing attitude of negativity towards the language. Very little research has been done on the motivations that drove the grassroots activists, but there is some documentary evidence and information on many of the individual activists that can be used to paint a general socio-economic picture of this group of people (Wilson 2008, Abley 2004, Gawne 2002).

Many of the current generation of activists grew up after the Second World War. While their personal economic and social circumstances obviously differed, they experienced the general sense of economic security that prevailed in post-war Europe; although it is important to note that this was somewhat tempered by the overall decline of the Isle of Man's economy in the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. Many members of this cohort are educated and have accessed higher education opportunities that were available through the Welfare State. Overall, this experience has influenced their attitudes towards language and cultural issues in general, and about the role of education in linguistic revitalization in particular.

Language activist and now elected representative and government minister, Philip Gawne, has characterized the revitalization process as response to 'the social and cultural turmoil which affected the Isle of Man for much of the 1970s and 1980s' (Gawne 2002:182). In his opinion, '[n]ationalist direct action and electoral success [of nationalist politicians] during these decades represented a distillation of wide felt misgivings over the decline in the traditional life and the loss of Manx identity'. (Gawne 2002:182). While nationalist and pro-independence parties have not fared well in island elections, nationalist sentiments have been common among elected representatives. As Kermodé (2001:229) has observed in his extensive political history of the Isle of Man in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

The failure of *Mec Vannin* and the [Manx Nationalist Party] was only partly as a result of divisions in the nationalist movement. Far more important was the fact that their policies were not radically different from those advocated by other candidates save in respect of their demands for full independence. Even on the independence issue other candidates were united in seeking to maximize the Island's autonomy and welfare; in their own way, many were as nationalist as their *Mec Vannin* challengers.

This supports Gawne's contention that the 1970s and 1980s were a period of social and cultural turmoil on the island and that the political elite were responsive to broader demands to preserve and strengthen the Manx identity. Such nationalist ferment is also consistent with the types of changes noted by the literature on post-materialism. In fact, it is argued that the rise of new social movements and political parties, based around rights discourse and identity politics, has been one of the outcomes of post-materialist value change in the post-war period (Inglehart 1990).

If the language activists of the 1970s and 1980s were the advance guard of post-materialism, swimming against the current of negative popular opinion towards the language, but influenced by the socio-economic changes that were taking place on the island and in other western, industrialized democracies, then the people that grew up in the 1980s and 1990s could very well be the island's first post-materialist cohort. This is the generation who matured during the period of economic growth in the Isle of Man. This is also the generation whose children are currently enrolled in Manx language educational institutions such as the *Mooinjer Veggey* and the *Bunscuill Ghaelgagh*, both of which have experienced significant enrolment increases in recent years (Wilson 2009).

Two important pieces of statistical evidence that demonstrate increased support for Manx during the last two decades are the 1991 Gallup Survey on Quality of Life in the Isle of Man and the 2001 Isle of Man Census. One of the questions in the Gallup Survey asked respondents if they wanted Manx to be taught in the school system. Thirty-six percent responded in the affirmative, setting the stage for the introduction of the first official language classes in September 1992.<sup>14</sup> The 2001 census showed an almost threefold rise in the number of self-identified Manx speakers from 683 in 1991 to 1689 in 2001. Although this was not an objective assessment, given that the respondents were asked to evaluate their own linguistic abilities, it did indicate an increased awareness and appreciation of the language among the general population of the island.

More recently, there has been some debate about the future of the island's economy, in the wake of the recent global economic recession and changes to the international regulations on off-shore banking and financial services, and to the island's tax sharing arrangements with the United Kingdom. While it is too early to come to any conclusions about the longer term impact that these external variables could have on the island's economy and society, the literature on post-materialism suggests that people who grew up during

---

<sup>14</sup> Adrian Cain, Manx Language Officer. Personal communication (27 May 2010)

previous economic recessions (for example, during the late 1970s and early 1980s) were less post-materialist than the age cohorts before them (Inglehart 2008). So, it is possible that a prolonged economic recession could affect the social outlook of young people who are growing up on the island. This, in turn, could lead to a decline in support for linguistic and cultural programs among future generations.

In the short to medium term, an economic downturn could also mean less government spending in the area of language programming, especially if language programs are pitted against other social programs such as healthcare and social welfare in the battle for increasingly scarce government resources. On a positive note, however, the language has stronger support within government and a broader cohort of grassroots activists and speakers than it did when the revitalization process started in the 1980s. Nevertheless, given the vagaries of the global economy, it is important to be realistic about the future of the language and, most importantly, the ability of government to fund language programming.

Determining the extent to which the Isle of Man has experienced a post-materialist transition over the last several decades will require further research, including both qualitative research and quantitative studies along the lines of those performed by Inglehart and others since the 1970s. Preliminary evidence, however, coupled with general socio-economic patterns on the island, suggest that a post-materialist generation has emerged on the island and, more importantly from the perspective of this article, that this generation is and will be supportive of linguistic and cultural revitalization programs in the years to come.

## **5. Conclusions**

During the last three decades, the Isle of Man has undergone a remarkable series of economic and social transitions. For the most part, these transitions have been positive in nature. Economic growth has secured a higher standard of living for people living on the island. Moreover, the island's indigenous culture and language have begun the long process of revival following centuries of decline. While a great deal of credit for this cultural and linguistic revitalization rests with individuals and grassroots organizations, this article has sought a broader explanation of the revival that connects it to the concomitant changes that were taking place in the island's economy. Using the theory of post-materialism, it has argued that general economic stability throughout the post-war period and, in particular, significant growth since the start of the island's economic transformation in the 1980s, have created the conditions for the emergence of a post-materialist generation of islanders who value language and culture. It is the support of these individuals that will be

one of the critical factors in sustaining the linguistic revitalization process in the future.

In many respects, the political and socio-economic circumstances facing the Isle of Man are such that it enjoys a degree of political autonomy that does not exist in many other small islands and regions throughout world. This autonomy has allowed the Isle of Man Government to make economic and political decisions that may not be possible in other jurisdictions. Moreover, the unprecedented economic growth experienced by the island over the last three decades has set in motion a series of societal changes that provided a foundation for linguistic and cultural revitalization.

Whereas many other minority and indigenous cultures may not face the same political and economic circumstances, there are other examples of small islands and regions in Europe and other western democracies that could be compared with the Isle of Man. For instance, the Channel Islands, which are also Crown Dependencies in the British Isles, and the Faeroe Islands, located in the North Atlantic Ocean, are examples of autonomous small island jurisdictions that are trying to preserve their unique languages and cultures in an increasingly homogenized and globalized world. Comparative research involving these jurisdictions will hopefully yield more evidence of the positive impact that social change and post-materialist attitudes can have on the process of linguistic revitalization.

## References

- Abley, Mark. 2004. *Spoken Here. Travels Among Threatened Languages*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.
- Bird, Hinton. 1995. *An Island That Led – The History of Manx Education (Volume 2)*. Port St. Mary, Isle of Man: Manx Heritage Foundation.
- Clague, Marie. 2007. *The Developing Manx of Immersion Educated Children*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Liverpool.
- Cooper, Robert L. 1996. *Language Planning and Social Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fishman, Joshua A. 1991. *Reversing language shift. Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Gawne, Philip. 2002. *Securing the Future for Manx Gaelic*. In Peter Davey & David Finlayson (eds.), *Mannin Revisited. Twelve Essays on Manx Culture and Environment*, 173-183. Edinburgh: Scottish Society for Northern Studies.
- Haller, Max. 2002. *Theory and Method in the Comparative Study of Values. Critique and Alternative to Inglehart*. *European Sociological Review* 18(2), 139-158.



- Ignatieff, Michael. 2000. *The Rights Revolution*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 2008. Changing Values among Western Publics from 1970 to 2006. *West European Politics* 31(1-2), 130-146.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1990. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1977. *The Silent Revolution. Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald & C. Welzel. 2005. *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald & Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality in Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald & Wayne E. Baker. 2000. Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values. *American Sociological Review* 65, 19-51.
- Isle of Man Government. *Freedom to Flourish*. The Isle of Man Brand Book. 2008. Isle of Man Government.
- Isle of Man Government. The Treasury Department. Key Statistical Data. <http://www.gov.im/treasury/economic/data/>. (24 May 2010)
- Kermode, David G. 2001. *Offshore Island Politics. The Constitutional and Political Development of the Isle of Man in the Twentieth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Kewley-Draskau, Jennifer. 2006. Ethnocultural Linkage in Language Revitalization. The Role of Joshua Fishman's Yians in Xish Revitalization: The Case of Manx Gaelic. *Celtic Cultural Studies* 5.
- Maslow, Abraham. 1943. A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review* 50(4), 370-396.
- McKercher, William R. 2000. The Isle of Man: Jurisdictional Catapult to Development. In Godfrey Baldacchino & David Milne (eds.), *Lessons from the Political Economy of Small Islands*, 91-106. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Nevitte, Neil. 1996. *The Decline of Deference: Canadian Value Change in Cross-national Perspective*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press.
- Richardson, Hayley. 2008. *A Study of Immersion Education and Parental Motivation in the Isle of Man*. Unpublished paper, University of Cambridge.
- Spolsky, Bernard. 2003. Reassessing Māori regeneration. *Language in Society* 32 (4), 553-578.
- Tanner, Marcus. 2004. *The Last of the Celts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Van Deth, Jan W. 1983. The Persistence of Materialist and Post-Materialist Value Orientations. *European Journal of Political Research* 11, 63-79.

- Wilson, Gary N. 2005. Between Independence and Integration: The Isle of Man's Path to Self-Determination. *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 32, 133-144.
- Wilson, Gary N. 2008. The Revitalization of the Manx Language and Culture in an Era of Global Change. Refereed Papers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Small Island Cultures Conference. Charlottetown, PEI: Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, 74-81.
- Wilson, Gary N. 2009. But the Language Has Got Children Now. Language Revitalisation and Education Planning in the Isle of Man. *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 3(2), 15-31.
- Winterbottom, Derek. 2000. Economic History, 1830-1996. In John Belchem (ed.), *A New History of the Isle of Man: The Modern Period (1830-1999)*, 207-278. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.