

About economic value and visibility.

Pier Bergsma (Chair of the Council of the Frisian movement)

At the moment there are about 7000 languages. It's estimated that half of those languages will disappear in the next century. Human rights, legislation and education are important, but they will not save every endangered or minority language.

We've got our principles and identity, I'm a Frisian, but humans have also their interests. An example: about half of the master courses in Dutch universities are given in English. Why? Because students from China, Japan and all over the world wouldn't be there if the curriculum was in Dutch. The Frisian language is a compulsory subject in the schools of Fryslân in the northern part of the Netherlands. It's the first language spoken by about 300.000 Frisians. We have materials enough and the Frisian regional government spends a lot of money on Frisian education.

We've got about a hundred trilingual primary schools: Dutch for the nation, Frisian for the region and English to communicate with the world. A practical and successful approach. Strange enough, most parents and schools don't think Frisian very important, because the language has no economic value at all. You can get any job in the region without speaking a word of Frisian.

Why do plants and animal disappear in spite of legislation and animal rights? Yes, because of economic reasons, perhaps because of human greed. In our covered swimming pool, we've got few Frisian words, for example on the toilet doors: "froulju" for "woman" and "manlju" or "man". Those are the only Frisian words in the building in a Frisian speaking village, where almost everybody has Frisian as the first language. Every information is in Dutch. That's not very helpful, to say it friendly. The visibility of Frisian in the region is poor. Our linguistic landscape is failing.

Legislation, human rights and education are important, but to survive minority languages are also strongly in need of economic value and visibility in daily life.

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