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Language policy and language education in Switzerland

Switzerland has long been regarded as a successful model of a multilingual society. Ever since Switzerland stabilized within its current borders in 1815, language management has contributed to how the Swiss communicate across four national languages (German, French, Italian, Romansch) and how the education systems of the 23 cantons contribute to the political dimensions of language management. Globalisation has introduced an additional dimension to Swiss language management making it often difficult for authorities, and for society as a whole, to arrive at both pragmatic and socially responsible choices regarding the acquisition and maintenance of national languages. The rising popularity of English as a lingua franca threatens to marginalise the acquisition and subsequent use of Swiss national languages across the major language communities. It is as of yet unclear, how increased emphasis on acquiring English as a first or second foreign language will impact the linguistic landscape of Switzerland and the social relations among the different language communities.