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# Sorbian

## The Sorbian language in education in Germany



\* numerically small language communities

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## Foreword

### *background*

For several years now, Mercator-Education has made efforts to achieve one of its principal goals: to gather, store and distribute information on minority language education in European regions. Regional or minority languages are languages which differ from the official language of the state where they are spoken and which are traditionally used within a given territory by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the population.

To date, Mercator-Education has been successful in establishing a computerised data bank containing bibliographic data, information about people and organisations involved with minority language issues. It has published data collected during four inventory studies on pre-school education, primary education, learning materials and teacher training. In addition there is a need for documents which give a brief outline of the most essential features of the educational system of regions with an autochthonous lesser-used language. With the establishment of regional dossiers we intend to meet this need.

### *aim*

Regional dossiers aim at providing concise descriptive information and basic educational statistics about minority language education in a specific region of the European Union. This kind of information, such as features of the educational system, recent educational policies, division of responsibilities, main actors, legal arrangements, support structures and also quantitative information on the number of schools, teachers, pupils and financial investments, can serve several purposes.

### *target group*

Policy makers, researchers, teachers, students and journalists may use the information provided to assess developments in European minority language schooling. They can also use a regional dossier as a first orientation towards further research or as a source of ideas for improving educational provision in their own region.

*link with EURYDICE* In order to link these regional descriptions with those of national educational systems, it was decided to follow the format used by EURYDICE, the European education information network in the European Union. EURYDICE provides information on the administration and structure of education in member states of the European Union. The information provided in the regional dossiers is focussed on language use at the various levels of education.

*contents* The remainder of this dossier consists firstly of an introduction to the region being studied, followed by six sections which each deal with a specific level of the educational system. These brief descriptions contain factual information presented in a readily accessible way. Sections eight to ten cover research, prospects and summary statistics. For detailed information and political discussions about language use at the various levels of education, the reader is referred to other sources.

## 1 Introduction

*language* Sorbian, or *Serbska rěč/Serbska rěc*, is a Western Slavonic language, spoken in the region of Lower and Upper Lusatia. It is closely related to Czech, Slovak, Polish and Kashubian. Sorbian, next to Danish, Frisian and Niederdeutsch, is one of four recognized autochthonous regional languages in Germany. Lower Lusatia is a part of the *Land* of Brandenburg and Upper Lusatia is part of the *Freistaat Sachsen* (Saxony).

Sorbian is characterised by its dialectal differentiation. Standardisation failed to occur as a result of its permanent subordinated position and the lack of an official position. Nowadays Sorbian is spoken in two main and relatively different dialects: Lower Sorbian/Wendisch in Lower Lusatia (in the area of the former tribe of the *Lunsici*) and Upper Sorbian in Upper Lusatia (in the area of the former tribe of the *Milzane*). In the region of Slepe a transitional dialect is

spoken, sometimes referred to as East Central Sorbian. While in Upper Lusatia there are still families where all generations speak Upper Sorbian, in Lower Lusatia this is no longer the case. After 1945 Lower Sorbian/Wendisch was no longer passed on from generation to generation. Only the older generation of over sixty still speaks Lower Sorbian/*Wendisch*.

#### *history*

##### *Origin*<sup>1</sup>

In the sixth century the Sorbs, together with other West Slavonic groups of tribes, came from north of the Carpathian Mountains during the migration of the peoples and colonised an area which extended as far as the Saale in the west, covered the area between the Oder, Queis and Bober rivers in the East, stretched as far as the Erz and Fichtel Mountains in the south, in northern direction up to suburbs of Berlin. North of the Sorbs Slavic linguistics posits the Pomeranians. The first documentary evidence of the Sorbs is in a Franconian chronicle dating from 631 AD in which they are mentioned as the *Surbi*. The eastward extension of the settlement area of the Germanic peoples, which was associated with their Christianisation and which began in the ninth century, led to the establishment of marches which secured the areas which had been conquered and colonised. The Slavonic tribes were eventually subjugated and almost completely assimilated. Of the Slavonic tribes of that time, only the *Milzane* and *Lunsici* were able to defend themselves successfully and survive. The following Sorbs were able to retain their linguistic and cultural independence in what would later be the area of the German Empire, although they never succeeded in forming their own state and thus achieving political autonomy. The linguistic area colonised by the Slavs diminished in the following centuries due to economic discrimination, legal handicaps, social and national repression and not least by natural assimilation. From the thirteenth century onwards, bans on Sorbs becoming members of German guilds as well as restrictions on Sorbs moving into German cities were

recorded. Those who nonetheless succeeded in becoming members of guilds or the 'higher classes' usually renounced the Sorbian language. In the sixteenth century the language area ultimately only covered Upper and Lower Lusatia. Sorbian culture became increasingly a village folk culture.

*reformation*

Under the influence of the Reformation as well as in the course of the Counter Reformation the Sorbian language developed into a literary language – in 1548 the first translation of the New Testament was made. More than 90% of the Sorbs accepted the Protestant Faith. Only in the area around the Cistercian monastery of St. Marienstern (present-day Panschwitz-Kuckau) and on the estate belonging to the chapter of Bautzen Cathedral did the Sorbs remain Catholic after the Reformation. They still form up to 90% of the total population in some localities today.

It was only after the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), which caused a drastic shrinking of the Sorbian language area, that the publication of religious literature in the Sorbian language was continued with increased fervour. In 1815 a territorial restructuring of the Sorbian settlement area took place as a result of the Congress of Vienna. The subsequent administrative division led to a considerable reduction in the proportion of the population who spoke Sorbian in almost all districts.

*national movement*

Especially during the 1840s, in the context of the general political and intellectual trends in Europe, a national Sorbian movement emerged, which made a decisive contribution to the preservation and growth of an independent Sorbian culture. A lively national club and association life came into existence.

After the establishment of the German Empire by Bismarck, the Sorbs again came under strong pressure from Germanisation. The industrialisation following 1871 also led to the decay of traditional agrarian structures. The fact that practically all school lessons were conducted in German forced most Sorbs to change from being Sorbian monoglots



to bilingual speakers, and soon only German was spoken. The Weimar Constitution, following the Constitution of 1848, granted the non-German sections of the population the possibility of developing unhindered. However, there was a subsequent lack of laws to support this.

*years of national  
socialism*

After a short period of tolerance during the Weimar Republic, the coming into power of the national-socialists signified a period of heavy suppression. The Sorbs, as a Slavonic people, were subjected to repressive measures under the fascist dictatorship. Sorbian institutions, language and culture were forbidden and many Sorbs were imprisoned in concentration camps. The Sorbian language and Sorbian club and association life were banned in 1937; Sorbian teachers and intellectuals were expelled from Lusatia. Seen as an inferior people, the Sorbs just managed to escape being deported. The final resettlement of the Sorbs had already been planned by Himmler. A systematic Germanisation meant that especially the younger generation in most of Lusatia could only speak their mother tongue inadequately as the language was not passed on to the next generation so that the younger generation did not have any choice. Therefore most Sorbs considered the collapse of the Third Reich to be a liberation. An understanding existed with the Soviet occupying forces due to the language affinity. They backed the efforts to save and support the Sorbian people. The *Domowina*, which was established as the umbrella organisation of Sorbian clubs and associations in 1912 and banned in 1937, was permitted to resume its activities officially by May 1945.

*after 1945*

After World War II the Sorbs occupied a rather strong position, especially in Saxony, due to their deprived position in the Nazi era. They were supported by the Czech government and able to come to a prompt expression of demands on the position of Sorbian. As a result in 1948 the State Parliament of Saxony passed a law concerning the protection of the rights of the Sorbian population, which gave Sorbian a place in public life and made Sorbian

schools possible. A year earlier a Sorbian training college for teachers could open its gates in Radibor. In 1947 Bautzen got a Sorbian *Oberschule*. The building of the Sorbian House/*Serbski Dom* in Bautzen could be started.

In 1949 the German Democratic Republic (GDR) came into being. The new constitution paid attention to the Sorbs in the form of an article on their right to maintain their native language and culture. The state was required to ensure that this right was exercised and therefore pursued a constructive policy on Sorbian.

Despite financial aid, the number of Sorbs has constantly decreased causing the number of people who publicly profess to be Sorbian to diminish considerably faster than the number of active speakers. Following the example of the Soviet Union's ethnic policy, it was not possible, for instance, to establish an independent Sorbian youth organisation outside of the *FDJ (Free German Youth)*. But at the same time the GDR pursued a large hearted cultural policy with regard to the Sorbs. This meant increasing institutionalisation of Sorbian culture through generous state support. Organisations such as the Sorbian Folk Theatre, the State Ensemble for Sorbian Folk Culture, the Sorbian Museum, the Domowina Publishers and the Sorbian Film Group were in fact state organisations, administrated, censored and completely financed by the state. The generous state support for the Sorbs led to a widely held opinion that the Sorbs were a show minority pampered by the state.

At the same time Sorbian language and culture were seriously threatened by the German Democratic Republic's policy on industrialisation and energy. The industrialization of Lusatia, especially through brown coal opencast mining and the resettlement of many citizens from Silesia, Sudetenland and Hungary after the Second World War led to the further assimilation of the Sorbian population. Lusatia became the centre of energy provision in the GDR. Next to the immigration of hundreds of thousands of non-Sorbian speakers, at the same time many Sorbian speaking people had to move, because of the enforced demolishing of villages. Their enforced departure can be described as an

invasive change in the demographic language structure of the German-Sorbian area.

*after 1990*

After the German reunification in 1990 and in spite of proposals of the *Gemeinsamen Verfassungskommission*, the new German Constitution of 1994 has no section devoted to minorities. Proposals from Sorbian organisations for an undivided Lusatia in the new polity of the former GDR were likewise not fulfilled. In the Federal Republic of Germany, which has sixteen *Länder*, Lower Lusatia became a part of the new land of Brandenburg and Upper Lusatia was included under Saxony. But just as in the early days after World War II, the Sorbs succeeded in convincing the new authorities to support the Sorbian language and culture.<sup>2</sup> In *Protokollnotiz* number 14, which refers to article 35 of the Unification Treaty, the new authorities guarantee among other things protection and development of Sorbian culture and traditions.

After the reunification both *Länder*, Brandenburg and Saxony, passed an article on the Sorbs in their respective Constitutions as well as a Law on the Sorbs. Moreover the Federal State of Germany and the both *Länder*, Brandenburg and Saxony, founded jointly the *Foundation for the Sorbian People* in order to solve the acute financial needs of the Sorbian infrastructure and to continue the financial support for nearly every Sorbian activity and organisation. Especially the support by the federal government is remarkable, considering its lack of competence in the field of culture. The federal support is guaranteed until 2008, although in the course of the coming years the federal effort will be decreasing.

The federal support meant a solution for the acute Sorbian financial problems after unification, but at the same time it can be stated that since then the Sorbian situation has been marked by a struggle to keep things just as they are. For new initiatives it is quite difficult to obtain financial support because the decreasing budget is fully used by the existing organisations with their relatively large staffs. Obviously a Sorbian future needs much more than financial and official

support, in the first place requiring the massive support of the Sorbs themselves. This is even more necessary considering that the relative isolation in the GDR era has been replaced by an immense economical and cultural impact from the German and Western world.

population

source:

[www.uni-leipzig.de](http://www.uni-leipzig.de)

The present Sorbian language area includes: in Lower Lusatia the Spree-Neiße district, the town of Cottbus, the regions Märkische Heide, Lieberose and Streipitz of the Dahme-Spreewald country district, and the regions Lübbenau, Vetschau, Altdöbern, Großräschen and Am Senftenberger See of the Oberspreewald-Lausitz country district, and in Upper Lusatia the country districts Bautzen, Kamenz and Hoyerswerda, as well as the Niederschlesischer Oberlausitzkreis.

The total number of people with active knowledge of Sorbian is estimated at 20,000<sup>3</sup>. In Lower Lusatia the number of people with Sorbian can be estimated at most at 7,000<sup>4</sup>. These figures are really shocking, compared with former figures from the era of the German Democratic Republic.

Still in the Eighties the number of Sorbian speakers was estimated at about 67,000<sup>5</sup> and just after World War II the number of Sorbian speakers was estimated at 140,000<sup>6</sup>. In the Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education (1998) the number of Sorbian speakers is still rated at 80,000. Notwithstanding the impressive official position and legal ordering of Sorbian in daily life, these figures make clear that its existence is really threatened.



*endangered  
languages*

The two variants of Sorbian, Lower Sorbian or *Wendisch* and Upper Sorbian now belong both to the category of endangered languages, as stated by Tapani Salminen in his contribution on European languages in the *Unesco Red Book on endangered languages*.

In 1997 the FRG signed the European Framework Convention on National Minorities of the *Council of Europe*, applicable to the Danes, Frisians, Sorbians, the Sinti and Roma in Germany. In 1999, Germany signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, applicable to Danish, Frisian, Lower German and Sorbian. As far as Sorbian is concerned, 38 policy measures have been signed for Lower Sorbian/Wendisch and 44 policy measures have been declared applicable to Upper Sorbian.<sup>7</sup> But this official recognition and protection do not prevent a policy of shrinking state support for Sorbian provisions. In 2000 Sorbian organisations demonstrated in favour of maintaining the Sorbian *Mittelschule* in Crostwitz, which is threatened with being closed down by the Saxon Minister of Culture due to spending cuts.

*education between  
1945 and 1990*

Before 1945 the Sorb minority had only very limited opportunities for education and development. But after World War II an equal rights approach has established bilingual programmes from nursery school to university. *Domowina*'s demands concerning Sorbian education received a ready hearing from Saxony's prime minister and in 1946 a Sorbian training college for teachers opened its gates in Radibor. In 1947 Bautzen was given a Sorbian *Oberschule*. Sorbian books could be published again and the building of a new Sorbian House in Bautzen was able to be started. In Saxony, the 1948 law concerning the protection of the rights of the Sorb gave Sorbian a place in public life and made Sorbian schools possible. In 1952 there were 78 Sorbian elementary schools and 4 Sorbian secondary schools. Nine of these bilingual schools were the so-called A type schools with Sorbian as a medium of instruction. Unfortunately, circumstances soon deteriorated. The directive from the

*minister für Volksbildung* of the GDR of 2nd October 1962, prescribed the use of the German language in the case of chemistry, mathematics, physics and citizenship education. Because of this, Sorbian obtained an inferior position in education. The following directive of 30th April 1964 made this position even worse. From then on Sorbian education became dependent on the decision of the parents, that is to say, it became voluntary. A substantial decline in numbers of pupils was the result. In 1963 11,600 pupils took part in Sorbian education, a year later only 3,300 pupils received Sorbian education.<sup>8</sup> After 1965 only courses on history and culture of the Sorbs were included in the curriculum and made compulsory for all educational institutions. In 1968 the directive of 1964 was changed again. Schools were now allowed to advise the parents about the education programme. In the latter days of the GDR the education of Sorbian was equated with the education of foreign languages. This was another attack on the number of Sorbian pupils, because from then on Sorbian had to compete with English. A relative advantage was the recognition of Sorbian as a full equal language.<sup>9</sup> In fact, only one third of the pupils met the educational aims. Half of the pupils left school with an insufficient language knowledge. Notwithstanding these bad results, the quality of Sorbian education was not permitted to be criticised during the GDR-regime.

Up until 1990, there existed seven Sorbian polytechnical schools of the A type: schools that had a Sorbian-German bilingual programme and Sorbian as a medium of instruction, and 85 polytechnical B type schools: schools where Sorbian was taught as a second language and German was the medium of instruction. There were two extended secondary schools, one in Cottbus/Chošebuz in Lower Lusatia, and the other one in Kleinwelk/Maly Wjelkow in Upper Lusatia. By 1990 over 500 bilingual teachers were employed in Lusatia.

*general education in  
Germany today*

The actual German school system is governed by the federal principles of the state. That is to say, the legal competence

in the domain of education and culture exists on the level of the *Länder*. Since the *Hamburger Abkommen* of 1964 the *Länder* have an univocal education structure, although the design of this structure can differ per *Land*.<sup>10</sup> General education in Germany is taught in the *Grund-*, *Haupt-* and *Realschule*, as well as in the *Gymnasium*.

Compulsory school attendance begins at the age of six and generally takes nine years, but in some *länder*, like Brandenburg and Berlin, it takes ten years. Generally the *Grundschule* or primary education lasts four years and at the beginning of the 5th school year the eleven year old children go to the *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* or the *Gymnasium*.

Generally the *Hauptschule* or general secondary school takes five years. Its completion permits access to vocational training in particular, as organized in a dual approach divided over schools and an apprentice system.

The *Realschule* or grammar school takes six years. The educational content is of a higher level than the *hauptschule*. The *Gymnasium*, a grammar school offering pre-university education, is the only type of school which combines secondary education in phase I and II. The *Gymnasium* takes nine years and in some *Länder* eight years. The three or two last years provide access to the *Abitur* or final examination (phase II), which permit admission to universities or colleges of higher or polytechnic education.

The *Gesamtschule* or comprehensive school unites the *Hauptschule* and the *Realschule* as well as the *Gymnasium*. After completing their *Haupt* or *Realschule* pupils can participate in phase II of the *Gymnasium*. In some *Länder* the comprehensive school is institutionalised, in other *Länder* this form of education is still in an experimental phase.

**Table 1: Structure of the school system<sup>11</sup>**

Land	school type	grades
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Saxony	Grundschule	1-4
	Mittelschule:	
	Hauptschule	5-9
	Realschule	5-10
Brandenburg	Gymnasium	5-12
	Grundschule	1-6
	Mittelschule:	
	Hauptschule	7-10
	Realschule	7-10
	Gymnasium	7-13

Source: Spieß (1996:69)

*vocational education* Most young people start their vocational education directly after *Hauptschule* or *Realschule* or *Gymnasium*. Other students start with their apprenticeship after attending a full time vocational school. This form of education is characterised by the dual approach, in which private companies and public vocational schools cooperate. This combined education takes three to three and a half years. The following are examples of vocational schools types: *Berufsaufbauschule* (vocational college), *Berufsfachschule* and *Fachoberschule*.

*higher education* Higher education is organised in universities and colleges of higher education. To attend these types of education students need their *Abitur* (qualification on advanced levels), which can be attained after 13 school years. Most academic curriculums last four years, but in fact students need six years to get their degree. The curriculum of colleges for higher education are more practically and vocationally oriented as academic courses and are of shorter duration: between three and four years. Sorbian can be studied at the Universities of Potsdam and Leipzig. In addition Sorbian can be studied outside of Brandenburg and Saxony at the universities of Hamburg, Lwow, Prague, Warsaw, Saarbrücken and Regensburg, generally within the framework of Slavonic studies.



- private and public* In Germany, and also in Brandenburg and Saxony, schools can be run by the state, the district and the municipality, or by private organisations. Since 1991 the *Sorbische Schulverein* has been the representative of the Sorbian interests in the field of education, including pre-schools. Twelve communities in the Sorbian area of Saxony are in charge of one nursery each, while the *Christlich-Sozialen-Bildungswerkes Ostsachsen* is in charge of ten nurseries. Other private organisations in charge of nurseries and schools are the Roman Catholic Church, the *Arbeiterwohlfahrt*, the Christian-Social Educational Services of Ostsachsen, the *German Red Cross* and the *Sorbische Schulverein*. And to give an example of public schools: the *Niedersorbische Gymnasium* in Cottbus is an establishment of the *Land Brandenburg*, but the Bautzen District is in charge of the *Sorbische Gymnasium* in Bautzen.
- inspection* The *Minister für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg* is responsible for general and vocational education, including the education and further education of pedagogical and social-pedagogical workers. The minister has a *Schulamts* in every district of the *Land* to coordinate education in general, the pedagogical goals and main points of the educational program.
- The Saxon *Kultusminister* is the highest authority in the domain of general and vocational education. The minister decrees the curriculum and approves teaching and learning materials. The minister cooperates with the *Landesbildungsrat*, the *Landeselternrat* and the *Landesschülerrat*. Saxony has *Regionalschulämter* in Bautzen, Dresden, Chemnitz, Leipzig and Zwickau. These regional inspections form intermediaries between the schools and the ministry.
- further infrastructure* Bautzen, the district capital of Upper Lusatia is the centre of Sorbian life. In Bautzen a number of typical Sorbian organisations can be found: among them the *Domowina*, the *Foundation for the Sorbian People*, the *Sorbian Schools Association*, the *Domowina Publishing House*, the *Sorbian*

*Folk Ensemble*, the *Sorbian Institute* and the *Sorbian Museum*. Most of these organisations can be found in the *Serbski Dom*: the Sorbian House at the Postplatz in Bautzen. Some of these organisations have branches in Cottbus, the centre of Lower Lusatia. Next to these urban and organisational centres of Sorbian life, a concentration of Upper Sorbs can be found in the territory strongly influenced by the Marienstern convent in Panschwitz-Kuckau. As a matter of fact this region has built up a Roman Catholic and Sorbian island in a German and Protestant sea.

## 2 Brandenburg Lower Sorbian/Wendisch

### 2.1 Pre-school education

#### *KITA's*

From two years until school entrance children can be taken to *Kindertagesstätten (KITA's)* or day nurseries. The normal stay is six hours a day, but it is possible to stay a complete day. These day nurseries do not have any educational aim, but permit working parents to accommodate their children during working hours. Since 2000 the care of babies and children up to two years old has also been carried out by childminders. In Lower Lusatia, German is the common language, although Sorbian traditions like the *Vogelhochzeit* (the wedding of the birds) are practised in the nurseries.

#### *WITAJ*

*WITAJ* is the Sorbian word for 'welcome'. The *WITAJ* project stands for a bilingual approach for children in the nursery with immersion in German and Sorbian. In 1998 the nursery *Mato Rizo* in Cottbus-Sielow started as a bilingual nursery with 54 children. Two years later two *WITAJ* nurseries were established in Dörghenhausen and Rohne. A total of 105 children attend those *WITAJ* nurseries in Brandenburg. The childcare workers in these nurseries use one language in sequence after the other with the aim of the complete bilinguality of the children. One of the many problems is the lack of native *Wendisch*-speaking childcare workers. Intensive language courses of half a year are organised to qualify these childcare workers for their jobs in the nursery.

In the school year 2000/2001 the first six children who had attended a *WITAJ-Gruppe* went to primary school. These *WITAJ*-children have been integrated in the German classes, but have seven hours a week of separate Sorbian instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic. The Sorbian textbooks are similar to the German textbooks (see next section). The German-speaking children in the same class have Sorbian instruction one hour a week.

## 2.2 Primary education

### *legislation*

The Brandenburg school law of 1996 provides pupils in the Sorbian area with the right to learn Sorbian and be taught in Sorbian in subjects and grades which are yet to be arranged. Sorbian can have the position of a mother tongue, second language and foreign language in education. Schools in the Sorbian area have to pay attention to the history and culture of the Sorbs. Schools which particularly teach Sorbian are considered a Sorbian school, although Sorbian education ranges from language of instruction to second or foreign language.

### *grundschule*

In Brandenburg, and so in Lower Lusatia, the language at primary schools is monolingual German. Sorbian is taught as a subject: one hour a week in grade 1, three hours a week in grade 2-6, but only as an additional supply to the regular programme. A school's participation in teaching the Sorbian language depends on the wish of the parents.

After 1989 the number of pupils with Sorbian education decreased dramatically. In the school year 1990/1991 only 14 schools offered Sorbian as a school subject, which was attended by 373 pupils. But after 1991 the number of schools and pupils have continuously increased, notwithstanding the decrease in the total number of school pupils in Brandenburg due to a rapidly decreasing birthrate and the emigration of young people to the western part of the GDR. In 2000/2001 the number of pupils who attended primary education in Brandenburg was again lower than the previous year and decreased with 16,000. In 1999/2000, 1036 children attended Lower Sorbian/ instruction at 23 primary schools.

### *learning materials*

Since 1992 the Brandenburg Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has had a small office in Cottbus to work on the further education of Sorbian teachers and development of education programmes as well as on Sorbian studybooks and learning materials, the ABC: *Arbeitsstelle Bildungsentwicklung Cottbus*. One of the projects is the writing of a

German-Lower Sorbian/Wendisch school dictionary. The *Domowina-Verlag* in Bautzen is responsible for the readership. Methodological support is a task of the research assistant of the *Sorbische Schulverein*.

*teachers*

Only two of the current active 36 Sorbian teachers have a native knowledge of Lower Sorbian/Wendisch. This means that Sorbian teachers themselves had to learn Sorbian at school. The number of qualified Sorbian teachers is higher than 36, but the small number of lessons means that the language skills of these Sorbian teachers are not used.

### 2.3

#### Secondary and vocational education

Brandenburg has three school types: the comprehensive school, the grammar school and the pre-university grammar school. Students are offered Sorbian as an optional subject at the first two types of school for three hours a week: at *Leonardo da Vinci*, Cottbus, one of the two comprehensive schools in Lower Lusatia, and at the *Realschule*, Sielow. Generally, the demand for these classes is very small. Pupils who attend Sorbian lessons often continue their school career at the pre-university grammar school. Next to Sorbian as an optional subject, Sorbian can be taught as a compulsory second foreign language, as offered by the *Niedersorbisches Gymnasium* in Cottbus.

*Niedersorbische  
Gymnasium*

The *Niedersorbische Gymnasium* in Cottbus is the only grammar school in Lower Lusatia with Sorbian as a second foreign language in its programme. In 1952 the *Gymnasium* had even begun as a bilingual school with the final examination in *Wendisch*. Schools were forced to become monolingual, as parents did not pass the language on to their children any longer and caused the disappearance of *Wendisch* classes at primary schools. Since 1992 the school has offered *Wendisch* as an obligatory second foreign language. In the school year 1998/1999 488 pupils attended the *Niedersorbische Gymnasium* and one year later 513 pupils. The school has a Lower Sorbian choir and a dance

group. Music and arts lessons also pay attention to Lower Sorbian themes. These classes may be taught in Sorbian in the future. The attraction of the *Niedersorbische Gymnasium* in Cottbus is not in the last place its modern accommodation and facilities. Since 2001 the *Niedersorbische Gymnasium* in Cottbus is one of the 44 grammar schools in Brandenburg which offer an *excellent* class, in which the most talented pupils can finish off their studies within five instead of the usual six years.

*vocational*

Since September 2000 the *Fachschule für Sozialwesen*, the social college of Cottbus, has offered Lower Sorbian/Wendisch as an option for three hours a week. The college trains people for jobs like childcare worker and old-age help.

## 2.4

### Higher education

*Potsdam*

Since 1998 the *University of Potsdam* has offered an additional course in Sorbian, among other reasons, to qualify teachers with an official qualification for teaching Sorbian in the lower classes and other people interested in teaching Sorbian in the first and second level. Six students a year, on average, make use of this possibility. The current number (2001) of Lower Sorbian/*Wendisch* teachers stands at 45. Traditionally, students study Sorbian at the Leipzig University in Saxony (see 3.4. for Leipzig University). Some universities in other parts of the FRG also pay attention to Sorbian.

**2.5****Adult education***Volkshochschule*

In addition to general education the *Volkshochschulen*, adult education centres, offer courses on different themes. The *Volkshochschule Cottbus* offers courses on Lower Sorbian language and culture in its department of the Sorbian Language School. Besides the language students can learn about Sorbian history and literature and they learn how to make a Sorbian costume.

### 3 Saxony *Upper Sorbian*

#### 3.1 **Pre-school-education**

##### *nurseries*

The Saxon Law of 1993 requires day care institutions in the German-Sorbian area to teach the Sorbian language and culture and to cultivate Sorbian traditions. In 1997 about 700 children attended 8 Sorbian day nurseries in the districts of Bautzen and Kamenz, where the development of their Sorbian mother tongue is encouraged. Moreover, 20 bilingual nurseries can be found in the districts of Bautzen, Kamenz and the Niederschlesier Oberlausitzkreis and the town of Hoyerswerda, aimed at cultivating the Sorbian and German language. Five of these establishments have also founded Sorbian groups. In 1997 about 1,000 children, among them 685 children in Sorbian groups, attended these nurseries. 74 childcare workers are able to speak Sorbian.<sup>12</sup> Next to the *WITAJ*-nurseries in Brandenburg, the *Sorbischer Schulverein* took the initiative to establish four *WITAJ-KITA*'s or groups in Saxony. In the year 2000, 78 children took part in these groups. Although the *WITAJ* initiative is generally seen as the hope and perspective for the future of the language by Sorbian officials, the current number of participating nurseries and children is too small to expect a real renaissance of the Sorbian language from this new development.

#### 3.2 **Primary education**

##### *rules*

Paragraph 2 of the Saxon Law on Education (1991) basically sets out the legal right of the Sorbs to have Sorbian as a subject and as a medium of instruction. Furthermore, for the first time in history, all schools in Saxony have to teach a basic knowledge of Sorbian history and culture. The administrative act on Sorbian and other schools (1992) defines Sorbian schools as schools where Sorbian is the medium of instruction. 'Other' schools are defined as schools where German is the medium of instruction and



Sorbian is just one of the subjects. 43 schools in Saxony taught Sorbian in 2000/2001, attended by about 7,473 pupils, of which 957 with Sorbian as their mother tongue.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Grundschule*

The former A-type schools have been re-established as Sorbian schools. These schools, situated in the Sorbian language area of Saxony, have included Sorbian in the curriculum as a subject and as medium of instruction, with exception of the subject German, which is taught in German. According to the Saxon School Law Sorbian schools have to foster and develop the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Sorbs. Sorbian schools are established in places with a sufficient number of pupils to form Sorbian classes. Class division takes place at 25 pupils. In 2000 there were five Sorbian primary schools in Saxony: One in the Bautzen district and four in the Kamenz district. They were attended by a total of 575 pupils. Of these, 229 pupils studied Sorbian as their mothertongue language, 191 pupils studied Sorbian as a foreign language and 155 pupils had Sorbian as a second language on their curriculum.

In addition to these Sorbian primary schools the school inspectorates Hoyerswerda, Kamenz and Görlitz have 24 German primary schools, which offer Sorbian as a second language, either as a foreign language or as a language for basic communication. In 2000/2001 a total of 2,607 pupils attended these schools, of which 408 studied Sorbian as a second language; 153 pupils attended Sorbian classes as a foreign language and 166 pupils studied Sorbian as a language for basic communication<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 2: Position of Sorbian at schools in German-Sorbian area**

		<b>Sorbian Schools</b>		<b>Other Schools</b>	
		A-Variant	B-Variant	B-Variant	C-Variant
<b>Saxon y</b>	Grundschule	Mother-tongue	Second language <i>obligatory</i>	Foreign	Colloquial language
	Mittelschule			language	
	Gymnasium			<i>optionally</i>	
<b>Brand en- burg</b>	Grundschule			Foreign	
	Mittelschule			language	
	Gymnasium			<i>optionally</i>	
				Foreign	
				language	
				<i>obligatory</i>	

Source: Spieß (1996), 70.

### 3.3

### Secondary and vocational education

#### *Sorbian schools*

Upper Lusatia, covering the districts of Bautzen and Kamenz, has six Sorbian secondary schools: four secondary schools in the Sorbian Catholic district of Kamenz and two in the district of Bautzen. Four schools offer classes with Sorbian as mother tongue and as a second language. Six schools in the school inspectorate of Hoyerswerda teach Sorbian as a foreign language. In 1993/1994 Sorbian secondary schools were attended by about 1,000 pupils. Three hundred pupils attended secondary schools with Sorbian language lessons.<sup>15</sup> Besides these *Haupt* and *Realschulen*, Bautzen has a Sorbian grammar school. In 2000/2001 the only Sorbian pre-university grammar school in Bautzen was attended by 516 pupils, of which 215 pupils attended Sorbian as a mothertongue and 186 pupils attended Sorbian classes as a second language.

Since the recognition of Sorbian as a state-specific school final examination subject, higher level courses have been introduced. Pupils are also allowed to choose examination in Sorbian as their mother tongue, which is now on a par with German as a fully-fledged examination subject.

#### *learning materials*

The Domowina-Verlag in Bautzen has a school textbook section, which offers over 155 titles for Sorbian lessons and

Sorbian instruction. Until 1992 the publishing group also had a section for schools in the bilingual region but this has been closed down. This has prejudiced the syllabus and teaching materials development and calls for the necessity to develop scientific research in the domain of the Sorbian education system.

*German schools*

In *bilingual* or *German* schools Sorbian is taught exclusively as a foreign language in small groups (of at least five pupils) in addition to the curriculum of the whole class. Lessons are aimed at acquiring an active command of a small range of vocabulary of about 2,100 words by the end of the 10th class and a passive knowledge of the grammatical rules and their use. These groups are usually very heterogenous in their linguistic composition. Pupils without any knowledge of Sorbian are often taught in the same group as pupils who have an almost perfect command of Sorbian. The school environment is German speaking. School principals are often not in favour of Sorbian, because Sorbian is seen as a matter for the Sorbs themselves. In the school year 2000/2001 six German secondary schools teach Sorbian as second language. Of the 2,143 pupils only 159 pupils attend these Sorbian lessons. One German grammar schools in Hoyerswerda offers Sorbian lessons as a foreign language, in 2000/2001 attended by 3 pupils (out of 484 pupils).<sup>16</sup>

*vocational education*

Until 1991 the training of bilingual primary school teachers and nursery childcare workers took place at the Sorbian Institute of Teacher Training in Bautzen. Nowadays nursery workers are trained at the Technical Institute of Social Education in Bautzen. It is the only establishment for vocational education, not being a school for higher education, with a special Sorbian department. Primary school teachers and subject teachers of Sorbian receive their training at the University of Leipzig. All other higher studies lack special Sorbian courses. This means that actors, journalists, priests, or staff members of Sorbian establishments, for example, have to learn Sorbian by way

of self-study or fall back on their knowledge learned at the *Sorbische Gymnasium*.

### **3.4 Higher education**

#### *Leipzig*

The teaching of Sorbian at the University of Leipzig has a long history stretching back to the early 18th century with the foundation of the Wendisch Theological College in 1716 as one of the University's first student colleges.

The Institute of Sorbian Studies was established in 1951 as the first and only university establishment in Germany to offer the discipline of Sorbian studies – the language and culture of the Lausitz Sorbs, the smallest of the Slavic peoples. Initially meant mainly for the training of Sorbian teachers and those willing to work at Sorbian institutions, the Institute of Sorbian Studies later broadened its scope. It took into account other professional fields in response to the growing significance and recognition of minorities and small peoples within Europe.

Upper and Lower Sorbian studies at the University of Leipzig has traditionally been regarded as a course for native speakers of Sorbian. However, it is also incorporated into German and international Slavonic studies, as well as into European minority research. In addition to the existing Chair of Sorbian Studies/Linguistics, the other options are Sorbian literature and history; Sorbian teaching and methodology and Sorbian ethnology. In the academic year 2000/2001 Sorbian studies were attended by sixteen full-time students, six of whom studied Sorbian as a main subject, three as an additional subject and seven as a teacher training course.

The University Library and the German Library (Deutsche Bücherei), both located in Leipzig, maintain extensive stocks of Sorbian literature, newspapers and magazines, as well as specialist journals on Sorbian studies. Finally, the “Sorabija” student group comprises students of Sorbian nationality studying in various faculties. It organises lectures, discussions and traditional festivals.

### **3.5 Adult education**

The Bautzen and Bisschofswerda *Kreisvolkshochschule* (adult education centres) offer courses on Sorbian language, conversation courses and courses on Sorbian as a foreign language. Interest in these courses is only small. The number of participants is only twenty to thirty people a year.<sup>17</sup>

## 4 Educational research

The *Sorbische Institut* in Bautzen and its branch office in Cottbus are the successors of the former *Institut für sorbische Volksforschung der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR*. The *Sorbische Institut*, supported by Brandenburg and Saxony, has 36 staff members, including 22 researchers. Social and cultural history, ethnology, linguistics and Lower Sorbian research are the main points of scientific attention. In addition to its research the *Sorbische Institut* is in charge of the *Sorbische Zentralbibliothek* (about 75,000 volumes) and the *Sorbische Zentralarchiv* (about 325 yards of acts). Two researchers from the *Sorbische Schulverein* are responsible for the research in the field of Lower and Upper Sorbian pedagogy and methodology respectively. Unfortunately there is a lack of manpower to meet demand. Possibly the *Sächsische Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung* and the *Comenius-Institut* may be able to do this research in the future.<sup>18</sup>

Since January 2001 the newly set up WITAJ-Sprachzentrum in Bautzen has been responsible for the research in the field of Lower and Upper Sorbian pedagogy and methodology. The centre also supports Sorbian schools and produces Sorbian learning material. At last, the WITAJ-Sprachzentrum is in charge of the realisation of various projects, among which the Sorbian Olympiad and the exchange of Sorbian schoolgroups. The WITAJ-Sprachzentrum came into being after a reshuffle of, among others, the Domowina-Verlag and the Sorbische Schulverein.

## 5 Prospects

Notwithstanding the intensive support by the state and the extensive legal position, as well as the presence of a number of typical Sorbian organisations, the future of Sorbian and especially that of Lower Sorbian/Wendisch are seriously endangered. The small number of pupils at Sorbian schools and the noticeably decreasing number of Sorbian speakers

since German reunification illustrate this endangered position. Moreover, there is a serious lack of native Sorbian-speaking teachers. The threatening collapse of the complete Sorbian infrastructure after the reunification may be prevented by the founding of the *Foundation for the Sorbian People*. Sorbian officials have now placed all hope on the WITAJ project, but the small number of children attending these day nurseries do not confirm the official expectations. The future of the Sorbian language is also endangered by serious individual and social discrimination<sup>19</sup>. All in all, it seems very likely that without a strong improvement of the status of Sorbian within the German culture this century will see a continuation of the diminishing process of Lower and Upper Sorbian since the forties.

## 6 Summary of statistics

**Table 3: Pupils enrolled in Lower Sorbian/Wendisch and Upper Sorbian education**

Type of education	Enrolment	Sorbian as medium of instruction	Sorbian as a second or foreign language
Day nursery	95*	685***	337***
Witaj nursery	54**	78**	
Grundschule	1,112**	229*	1073*
Realschule	7**	296*	634*
Gymnasium	513**	215*	377*
University	6**	16**	

\* = 2000/2001

\*\* = 1999/2000

\*\*\* = 1997/1998

## Endnotes

1. The information in sections ‘origin’, ‘reformation’ and ‘national movement’ has been taken over from the article “*The Sorbs – a People Indigenous to Germany*” by Ludmila Budar. Educational Research Workshop on “Minority Education”, Bautzen (Saxony), 11-14 October 1994.
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11. See also the Eurydice scheme of the education system in this dossier.
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13. Data provided by the Statistisches Landesamt des Freistaates Sachsen, by letter of April 10, 2001.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Budar, Ludmilla (1996) Sorbischunterricht in der sächsischen und brandenburgischen Lausitz - integraler Bestandteil deutscher Bildungspolitik, in: Günter Rudolph, Jürgen Schäfer (Hrsg.) *Deutschunterricht in den neuen Bundesländern seit 1990*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 153.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Bericht der Sächsischen Staatsregierung zur Lage des sorbischen Volkes (1997) [Dresden], 42.



18. Bericht der Sächsischen Staatsregierung zur Lage des sorbischen Volkes (1997) [Dresden], 40.
19. Hemminga, Piet (2000:382)



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- Einigungsvertrag - Protokollnotiz zum Artikel 35
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[www.mdr.de](http://www.mdr.de)  
[Webmaster@mdr.de](mailto:Webmaster@mdr.de)

**Domowina-Verlag GmbH,**  
Tuchmacherstr.27, 02625 Bautzen, 03591-5770  
[www.domowina-verlag.de](http://www.domowina-verlag.de)  
[DomowinaVerlag@t-online.de](mailto:DomowinaVerlag@t-online.de)

**Katolski Posol,**  
Postplatz 2, 02625 Bautzen, 03591-82277

**Serbsky Nowiny,**  
Tuchmacherstraße 27, 02625 Bautzen, 03591-577231

*internet sources*

[www.brandenburg.de](http://www.brandenburg.de)  
[www.dipf.de](http://www.dipf.de)  
[www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)  
[www.fa.knaw.nl](http://www.fa.knaw.nl)  
[www.fa.knaw.nl/site/mercator/](http://www.fa.knaw.nl/site/mercator/)  
[www.helsinki.fi/~tasalmin/endangered.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/~tasalmin/endangered.html)  
[www.sachsen.de](http://www.sachsen.de)  
[www.sn.schule.de](http://www.sn.schule.de)  
[www.sorben-wenden.de](http://www.sorben-wenden.de)  
[www.sorbischer-schulverein.de](http://www.sorbischer-schulverein.de)  
[www.uni-leipzig.de/~sorb](http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~sorb)  
[www.uni-potsdam.de/u/slavistik/sorbisch.htm](http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/slavistik/sorbisch.htm)

## Other websites on minority languages

- Mercator*                    **[www.troc.es/mercator](http://www.troc.es/mercator)**  
General site of the Mercator-project. It will lead you to the three specialized centres:
- Mercator-Education      **[www.mercator-education.org](http://www.mercator-education.org)**  
Homepage of Mercator-Education: European Network for regional or minority languages and education. The site contains the series of regional dossiers, a database with organisations and bibliography and links to minority languages.
- Mercator-Media*            **[www.aber.ac.uk/~merc/](http://www.aber.ac.uk/~merc/)**  
Homepage of Mercator-Media. It provides information on media and minority languages in the EU.
- Mercator-Legislation*      **[www.troc.es/ciemen/mercator](http://www.troc.es/ciemen/mercator)**  
Homepage of Mercator-Legislation. It provides information on minority languages and legislation in the EU.
- European Union*            **<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/langmin.html>**  
At the website of the European Union an explanation is given of its support for regional or minority languages.
- Council of Europe*        **<http://conventions.coe.int/>**  
*European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. (1992) and *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1995) European Treaty Series/Série des traités européens 148+157, Strasbourg.
- Eurydice*                    **[www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)**  
Eurydice is the information network on education in Europe. The site provides information on all European education systems and education policies.
- EBLUL*                        **[www.eblul.org/](http://www.eblul.org/)**  
Homepage of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. This site provides general information on lesser used languages as well as on projects, publications and events.





## What can Mercator-Education offer you?

*website*

[www.mercator-education.org](http://www.mercator-education.org)

*network*

Mercator-Education is part of an information service and research network of three centres. They provide reliable and in-depth information on regional or minority languages in co-operation with many experts throughout Europe. *Mercator-Education* is hosted at the Fryske Akademy, Leeuwarden. *Mercator-Media* resides at the University of Wales (Aberystwyth) and *Mercator-Legislation* at Ciemen (Barcelona).

*newsletter*

An electronic or printed newsletter with current developments concerning regional or minority languages in education is distributed to individuals and organisations.

*Q&A*

Through the Question and Answer Service we can inform you about any subject related to education in minority or regional languages in the European Union.

*publications*

Regional dossiers are published on a regular base to provide basic information on schooling in minority language regions in the European Union.

The latest *Mercator Guide to Organisations* (MGO) was published in 1998. It contains some 500 relevant addresses of institutes and services.

During the years we have published our extended studies on pre-primary education, primary education, teacher training and learning materials. Topical case studies and a selective bibliography have also been published. A list of all our publications is available.

*Available in this series:*

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Basque; the Basque Language in Education in Spain  
Breton; the Breton Language in Education in France  
Catalan; the Catalan Language in Education in Spain  
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Croatian; the Croatian Language in Education in Austria  
Frisian; the Frisian Language in Education in The Netherlands  
German; the German Language in Education in Alsace, France  
Irish; the Irish Language in Education in Northern Ireland  
Irish; the Irish Language in Education in the Republic of Ireland  
Ladin, the Ladin Language in Education in Italy  
Meänkili and Sweden Finish, the Finnic Languages in Education in Sweden  
North-Frisian; the North Frisian Language in Education in Germany  
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