

# Teaching policies and minority languages in Sardinia. A discussion of the political interventions in the educational system\*

*ABSTRACT: Since last century, Sardinian and the other non-national languages of Italy have been suffering a significant decline in the number of speakers and the contexts of usage, in favour to Italian. Such recently acknowledged minority languages have been politically and financially supported by legislation at the national and regional levels. Focusing on the Sardinian situation, we will critically review the teaching policies and the adopted lines of intervention of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (ARS) within the educational context. In particular, we will analyse the Insulas and Frailes initiatives, by taking into account the economical engagement of ARS and the portion of population involved, with data relative to the 2024/2025 school year.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1997, the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (henceforth, ARS) has undertaken significant initiatives aimed at promoting and enhancing the Sardinian language within the educational context. This commitment has been realised through a series of legislative measures and targeted initiatives designed to integrate the Sardinian language into the regional education system.

The first key milestone in this process was the enactment of Regional Law No. 26 of October 15, 1997, entitled *Promozione e valorizzazione della cultura e della lingua della Sardegna*<sup>1</sup>. This law officially recognises the Sardinian language as a fundamental component of the island's cultural identity and promotes its teaching in schools. Article 1 of the law underscores the importance of preserving and valuing Sardinian culture and language as primary assets essential for both personal and social development.

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<sup>1</sup> «Promotion and enhancement of Sardinian Culture and Language» (my translation).

Two years later, the Italian Republic enacted Law No. 482/1999, which seeks to promote and safeguard the minority languages spoken within the national territory, along with their associated cultures. The languages recognised under this law are Albanian, Catalan, Germanic, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, and Sardinian.

To ensure the acquisition and preservation of these minority languages in their respective regions and areas, Article 4 of the law stipulates their integration into educational activities. Specifically, the law allows for instruction in the minority languages in school and for their adoption as vehicular languages, alongside Italian. In particular, Article 4 of this law outlines specific measures for integrating minority languages into the educational system, with different implementation methods depending on the level of schooling. In preschools and kindergartens, educators are required to use minority languages in their interactions with children. In primary and lower secondary schools, minority languages must serve as instructional tools, as specified in Clause 1 of Article 4. Clause 2 of the same article encourages educational institutions to autonomously incorporate the teaching of minority languages into their curricula, determining the number of hours allocated and the pedagogical approaches to be used. However, parental consent is required for children to participate in minority language courses, with parents typically informing schools of their preference during enrollment, which usually takes place in July, before the school year begins, in September (Clause 5).

Thus, the effective implementation of these initiatives depends primarily on two factors. First, it relies on the willingness of parents to actively request an education that includes instruction in the local minority language. Second, it necessitates the cooperation of educational institutions, which are encouraged to develop projects related to minority language teaching. Consequently, the integration of Sardinian into the school curriculum is not legally mandated but remains a voluntary option, financially supported by both the national and regional governments. This bottom-up approach, as opposed to a top-down model, where language policies are directly imposed by central educational authorities (such as the Ministry of Public Education or the Regional Education Authority), has been observed to weaken the authority and perceived legitimacy of such interventions (Iannàcaro – Fiorentini 2021, 50), not only in Sardinia but also in other minority language contexts. Despite the absence of legislative imposition, ARS remains the principal actor, as it provides both the funding and the legislative framework upon which all interventions are based.

More recently, a significant development occurred with the approval of ARS Law No. 22/2018, which established a comprehensive framework for the Sardinian language and other languages spoken on the island, including Algherese Catalan, Gallurese, Sassarese, and Tabarchin (cf., Lai 2017; 2018; 2019; Marra 2021; Pintore 2022). This legislation provided for both the teaching in and of the minority languages in Sardinia, fostering greater linguistic, cultural, and identity awareness, particularly among younger generations.

Although not addressed in this contribution, the issue of the linguistic standard (how many? Based on which variety?) represents a central concern for the proper implementation of teaching policies in a territory characterised by a relevant degree of dialectal variation (see §2). This issue concerns the didactic material to be produced (see § 4) and the vehicular language(s) to be adopted at school, among other aspects. In 2006, ARS presented a proposal for a standard Sardinian (i.e., *Limba Sarda Comuna*<sup>2</sup>, or LSC) to be used in ARS's official texts, which was poorly received for being highly based on northern Sardinian varieties, seldom incorporating southern Sardinian traits (see, e.g., Calaresu 2008; Tufi 2013; Lőrinczi 2013; Lai 2017; 2019). In Article 8, Clause 4 of RL 22/2018, it is provided that a standard proposal will be elaborated based on the historical and literary macro-varieties of Campidanese and Logudorese, village-sized local varieties, and LSC norms. Such updated version of LSC will be assigned to the *Consulta de su Sardu* (Council of Sardinian; henceforth, CoS), a new ARS department specifically employed in such a task, constituted of 34 members. As is claimed in the *Piano di Politica Linguistica Regionale 2020-2024* (ARS Language Policies Planning) attached to the ARS resolution 34/16/2020, such a revised version will be redesigned in order to try to account for the criticism initially received. However, until 2024 the announced CoS department does not seem to be set up, along with the announced revised LSC version (cf. Garau 2025<sup>3</sup>).

As an alternative, the *Comitau Scientìficu po su Sardu Standard* (CSSS) has proposed a double norm, which distinguishes between northern, i.e. Logudorese/Nuorese, and southern, i.e. Campidanese, varieties (CSSS 2019). Behind the reasoning of such a proposal lies the idea that southern and northern varieties are distinct enough to make impossible their condensation into a single standard, equally representing both macro-varieties. At present, this double-standard possesses no official recognition. Despite its centrality, an exhaustive discussion of the standard issue would go beyond the scope of this paper.

The aim of this study is to examine the implementation of the minority languages teaching policies of ARS within the educational domain, in terms of degree of financial engagement and population involvement. The work will deal with the Sardinian language, although aspects related to the alloglot varieties mentioned above – likewise affected by the linguistic policies of ARS – will also be discussed.

The structure of this study is as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the main proposals for the internal classification of the Sardinian dialect group, since some of these appear to indirectly influence ARS language policies. Section 3 examines the vitality of the

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<sup>2</sup> The proposal was preceded, in 2001, by LSU (*Limba Sarda Unificada*), which was soon abandoned due to the harsh criticism it received (see CALARESU 2002).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cagliaritoday.it/blog/qual-e-lo-stato-di-salute-della-lingua-sarda-a-sette-anni-dalla-legge-regionale-numero-22-del-2018.html>.

Sardinian language and its legal status within the Italian legislation, i.e. the social and political background in which ARS policies operate. Section 4 analyzes the linguistic policies implemented by ARS, focusing on the educational context. Section 5 presents the two main policy initiatives of the ARS, critically discussing their impact, particularly in relation to the 2024/2025 academic year. Section 6 provides with a general comment and Section 7 concludes the contribution.

## 2. INTERNAL PARTITION OF THE SARDINIAN LANGUAGE

Sardinian is a Romance dialectal group spoken on the island of Sardinia, one of the twenty regions of the Italian Republic, commonly referred to as Sardo-Romance. The Sardo-Romance group is widely considered an autonomous branch within the Romance language family (Meyer-Lübke 1901, 17; Campbell – Poser 2008, 84; Barbato 2017). This classification is supported, among other factors, by the (almost) unique development of the Latin vowel system in Sardinian, where Latin short and long vowels have merged into a single vowel with an identical timbre. This process has resulted in a five-vowel system, consisting of the low vowel /a/, the mid-low vowels /ɛ ɔ/, and the high vowels /i u/, shared also by dialects of the Lausberg area (Wagner 1941; Maiden 1995; Loporcaro 2011a; Lai 2022a).

However, Sardinian may be divided in at least two macro-varieties: Logudorese in the north and Campidanese in the south (Wagner 1941; Blasco Ferrer 1984). Such bipartition is mainly supported by three isoglosses. Northern varieties are characterised by the preservation of velar stops before front vowels, plural determiners selected based on gender (*sos/sas*), and the preservation of a word-final five-vowel system. Differently, southern varieties have fronted velar stops before /ɛ i/, show one only plural determiner for both genders (*is*), and have raised final mid vowels to high vowels, producing a word-final three-vowel system /i a u/. See, e.g., North Sard. CENA > /'kɛna/ 'dinner'; MEDICINA > /mei'gina/ 'medicine' vs South Sard. /'tʃɛna/ 'dinner'; /mei'zina/ 'medicine'; North Sard. *sos òmines* 'the men' and *sas feminas* 'the women' vs South Sard. *is òminis/is feminas*; North Sard. ['kanɛ] 'dog', South Sard. ['kani] (see, among others, Wagner 1941; Viridis 1978; Bolognesi 1998; Loporcaro 2002; 2011b; Lai 2022a; Mensching – Remberger 2017).

Based on the lack of intervocalic stop lenition in a group of northern Sardinian dialects, some scholars recognise Nuorese as the third macro-variety (e.g. Viridis 1978; 1988; Bolognesi 1998). Viridis (1988) also presents arguments in favour of Arborese, spoken in the center-western area of Sardinia, as the fourth macro-variety, while Hajek – Goebel (2021) argue in favour of the Barbagia-Barigadu-Ogliastra area to represent a distinct macro-variety. A more exhaustive review of studies and proposals concerning the internal classification of the Sardinian

linguistic domain can be found in Molinu – Floričić (2017).

As for our opinion, it seems reasonable, at least for political and social aims, to adopt Virdis's (1988) ultimate observation, who claims that the fundamental partition is the one considering just two macro-dialects: Logudorese and Campidanese.

Note that each of the aforementioned macro-varieties may be internally divided in sub-varieties. Virdis (2021) identifies seven sub-dialects within Campidanese, whereas Logudorese and Nuorese - the latter considered an independent variety in the classification in Virdis (2021) - are each divided into three subgroups.

In contrast, Contini (1987) argues that the dense internal variation within the Sardinian linguistic domain cannot be captured by the rigid bipartition between Campidanese and Logudorese-Nuorese. Due to the high degree of linguistic variation, Contini (1987) proposes an alternative classification based on multiple parallel Sardinian subsystems, rather than recognizing macro and sub-varieties. However, even in Contini (1987; see also Blasco Ferrer – Contini 1988), Campidanese constitutes a relatively homogeneous group, whereas northern varieties can be further divided into seven distinct subsystems, which recall the internal partition proposed for the Logudorese-Nuorese group in Virdis (1988). Eventually, Bolognesi – Heeringa (2005) align with Contini's (1987) view, stressing that Sardinian's internal variation constitutes a continuum, for which any effort to distinguish sub-dialects is merely artificial. Strong oppositions to this view are represented by Lai (2022b, 39), who underscores that recognizing Sardinian as an individual dialectal group should not prevent the identification of macro and sub-varieties, and that the "continuum" view is not exclusive to Sardinian, rather it represents the normal situation among the languages of the world.

In brief, the long-standing debate involve two main points of view: on one side, those who classify Sardinian along two layers, i.e. "language" and "local varieties"; on the other, those who include an intermediate layer, i.e. "macro-varieties".

Despite ARS's declared intentions (see §1), the former view appears to more importantly influence ARS's approach to the standard language issue, as many of the LSC detractors have observed. The last ones are not only represented by linguists, whose professional observations rely on technical arguments and statistical analyses. Language activists and common speakers, especially from the Campidanese-speaking area, have often highlighted the elevated linguistic effort and perceived artificiality as consequences of the adoption of a standard variety which is largely distant from the regularly spoken ones. On the contrary, a Logudorese speaker might not encounter the same obstacles, being the ARS proposal highly based on a northern variety. Note that even the lexicon reflects the speakers' perception relative to the existence of two main Sardinian varieties: see, e.g. the Campidanese glottonyms *sardu de bàsciu/giossu* 'southern Sardinian' and (*sardu*) *cabesusesu* 'northern Sardinian'.

The lack of consensus from a large portion of Sardinian speakers (considered that Campidanese speakers outnumber northern Sardinian speakers) towards the officially proposed

unifying language, evidently, does not contribute to the success of any intervention by ARS aimed at promoting, supporting, and guaranteeing education in and of the Sardinian language if any initiative in this sense implies the use of LSC as the vehicular language. Eventually, a wide portion of Sardinian speakers might claim – as many have done – to be politically unrepresented, and likely reject any institutional attempts of revitalizing the language. This would cause the declining trend (presented in §1 and more exhaustively discussed in §3) either to accelerate or, at best, to not slow down.

In general, the “heuristics” adopted in the ARS language policies is susceptible to have an impact on the ARS teaching policies effectiveness, the main focus of this study. In the next section, we illustrate the sociolinguistic context in which such policies operate, by discussing the effects of the decreased number of fluent native speakers and of usage contexts.

### 3. THE VITALITY OF THE SARDINIAN LANGUAGE

Between the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a trend similar to that observed for other minority languages of Italy have been affecting Sardinian, which is experiencing a progressive decline in both the number of native speakers and domains of use, in favour of Italian, the dominant language (Salminen 2007; Oppo 2007; Marra 2012). This phenomenon, although still in its early stages in the 1980s, already exhibited some of the fundamental characteristics observed today (Rindler Schjerve 1993; 2017). Even at that time, lexical interference from Italian was evident, with the substitution of native Sardinian lexemes by Italian loanwords (e.g., *giugnu* < Italian *giugno* ‘June’, replacing the Sardinian *làmpadas*, and *stràcciu* < Italian *straccio* ‘mop’, instead of the native *tzàpulu*). However, beyond the lexical level, which is usually more rapidly affected by the influence of a more prestigious language, even more abstract linguistic domains, such as morphosyntax and, to a lesser extent, phonology, have also been affected by the Italian influence (cf. Putzu 2012; Lai 2009; 2022a).

From a morphosyntactic perspective, examples of Italian interference include the position of possessive adjectives before the noun, contrary to the native Sardinian post-nominal placement (e.g., *miu/meu babbu* vs. the native form *babbu miu/meu* ‘my father’), as well as the use of the infinitive in negative constructions instead of the subjunctive (e.g., *non annare a incue* vs. *non annes a incue* ‘do not go there’); see Rindler Schjerve (1993, 280-281) for an overview and discussion. In terms of phonological changes, a notable example is the replacement of the retroflex geminate voiced plosive /d:/, derived from the Latin geminate lateral -LL-, with the alveolar plosive /d:/ (e.g., PULLA > /'puḍ:a/ vs. /'puḍ:a/ ‘hen’), as well as the loss of external sandhi phonological rules, such as voiced stop deletion (see Lai 2020) and voiceless stop spirantization, at least among young speakers of urban varieties as, e.g., Cagliari.

In all the aforementioned cases - lexical, morphosyntactic, and phonological - the substitutions can be explained in terms of the influence of Italian, the national language, on Sardinian, a minority language. The overall trend appears to operate by replacing the linguistic features that are markedly different from Italian with structures that align more closely with it. This process of “Italianisation” may be described as the result of the increasing dominance of the prestigious national language over the sociolinguistically stigmatised minority language.

Furthermore, especially among younger generations, the Italianisation of Sardinian originally ignited by the stigma associated with it<sup>4</sup> is enhanced due to the partially acquired competence in Sardinian. The breakdown of intergenerational language transmission, another by-product of stigma, which began to manifest significantly during the 1980s (Oppo 2007) in favour of the increasing use of Italian, has led to a shift from stable to unstable diglossia (Viridis 2012; Lai 2022b, 40; Pintore 2022). This disruption in transmission has resulted in the emergence of so-called «semi-speakers» (cf. Dorian 1973), who possess a relatively strong passive but weak or non-existent active competence in Sardinian (Lai 2022b; 2025). Such individuals can understand Sardinian to some degree, albeit with difficulty, but are unable to express themselves fluently in the language. Although recent research indicates that, among younger generations, Sardinian appears to enjoy higher prestige than in the past (cf. Mura 2024), the consequences of the disruption in intergenerational linguistic transmission, we argue, are unlikely to be mitigated solely by this emerging trend. In other words, a favourable sociolinguistic climate may prove insufficient to halt the ongoing decline of Sardinian if speakers do not possess fully developed competence in the language.

More recently, the term «heritage speakers» (Montrul 2016) has been adopted to describe this typology of Sardinian speakers (see, e.g., Lai 2025). Coined within the context of multilingualism in the United States - where numerous minority languages coexist in an Anglophone society (see Fishman 1991; 2001) - the term initially referred to second and third-generation immigrants who had partial knowledge of their family’s ancestral, original language, while maintaining near-native proficiency in the dominant language. This concept has since been applied to the European context (e.g., Håkansson 1995), where various immigrant communities exhibit similar linguistic patterns. Moreover, the label, or similar terminology, has long been used to describe the linguistic situation of Native American communities, whose speakers progressively lost full competence in their ancestral languages in favour of English, particularly throughout the Twentieth century but also as early as the Nineteenth (Van Deusen-Scholl 2003). Analogously, the label “heritage” have been attributed to the indigenous languages and speakers of Australia (Clyne 1991).

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<sup>4</sup> To some extent, the process is comparable to what is presently occurring in Italian, a language that is undergoing substantial influence from English, particularly with respect to lexical borrowing (see LOMBARDI VALLAURI 2024).

In this sense, a wide portion of Sardinian speakers can also be classified as heritage speakers (cf. Lai 2022b; 2025). Sardinian, as well as the alloglot languages spoken on the island, functions as a heritage language for many of its speakers: while it may still be heard and spoken within the family, particularly from and with grandparents, its use outside this context has become increasingly rare, especially in densely populated areas, such as Cagliari (Oppo 2007).

It may be predicted that such a kind of speakers, increasing in number, may not even be able to guarantee language transmission, differently from previous generations that, sometimes deliberately, tried to forbid or boycott transmission, while being in most cases fluent native speakers.

Based on the discussed factors, Sardinian is currently classified as a «definitely endangered» language by UNESCO (Moseley 2012). Indeed, if the trend ought to maintain the current pace, Sardinian will be probably lacking fluent native speakers in the turn of two or three generations. In the absence of native speakers with whom it is possible to use the language outside of the didactic dimension of the classroom/course, any language safeguarding policy would be likely ineffective.

As mentioned in §1 (see also §4), in order to attempt to decelerate and hopefully arrest the trend towards the linguistic extinction, both the Italian Republic and ARS have promulgated laws (482/1999 the former, and 26/1997 and 22/2018 the latter) which crucially involve the educational system as the primary source of linguistic revitalization. However, after more than 25 years from the official acknowledgement of the minority language status towards Sardinian, no significant counter-trend has been observed. Indeed, recent research, as argued in §3, reported about the incompletely acquired competence in Sardinian among young speakers, at least as far as the phonological level is concerned (see Lai 2022), showing recently emerged patterns interpretable as the substitution of native rules with Italian ones. On the other hand, it is worth noting that a relative revitalization is taking place within formal domains. Cultural television programs, such as those broadcast by the EJATV channel, radio shows and podcasts - for instance *A Limba Isorta*<sup>5</sup> aired in 2025 on the regional Rai Radio 1 station - as well as conferences, including the annually held *Cunferèntzia Aberta* organised by ARS, and gatherings of private citizens for cultural and current-affairs discussions, such as the events promoted by various cultural associations (e.g., the series of *Ciaciarradas*<sup>6</sup>, 'light conversations', literally), all of which adopting Sardinian as the primary or sole language, constitute some of the most salient examples of this ongoing revitalization. Nevertheless, the number of speakers actively involved in such Sardinian-language initiatives remains limited, whereas the majority of speakers participate only passively in the contexts mentioned above. Consequently, we are still far from witnessing a genuine and widespread revitalization of the language in everyday communication contexts. Since the majority of heritage speakers appear to be concentrated among younger

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<sup>5</sup> Authored by Simone Pisano and Manuela Ennas.

<sup>6</sup> Promoted by the associations ANS *Casteddu*, *Su Tzirculu*, and *Spaciada sa Bregùngia*.

generations, schools likely constitute one of the primary contexts towards which institutional interventions should be targeted.

In this regard, it should be mentioned that a systematic financial support by ARS to the teaching policies implementation occurred not before 2020. Therefore, it might be too soon to adequately assess the efficacy of regional language policies at school. The programmed lines of intervention in this sector will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

#### 4. ARS LANGUAGE POLICIES IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

As observed in Section 1, in contrast to the national Law No. 482/1999, the regional laws No. 26/1997 and, subsequently, Law No. 22/2018, through which most of the LR26/1997 articles have been abrogated, also encompass alloglot varieties spoken in Sardinia, in addition to the Sardinian language. With regard to education, this issue is addressed in Articles 15-21 (Chapter III) of Law No. 22/2018, which are briefly examined in the following discussion.

After formulating, in Article 15, the objectives of the law relative to the educational system - such as, promoting Sardinian culture and territory, and ensuring a plurilingual education - Article 16 outlines the principles and measures to be implemented for the introduction of Sardinia's minority languages into the educational system. As an initial step, an interinstitutional standing committee for the education of minority languages, officially referred to as *Obreria* (the Sardinian term for 'committee'), is established. This committee will be composed of five members (Clause 2, Article 16, RL 22/2018): (i) the relevant regional Assessor, who also serves as the president of the *Obreria*, (ii) the president of the Regional School Office, (iii) the president of the ARS Education Department, (iv) the president of the Regional Department of Sardinian Languages and Cultures, and (v) a representative appointed by the rectors of the Universities of Cagliari and Sassari.

The *Obreria* elaborates the guidelines for the implementation of minority language teaching in schools (Clause 3). These guidelines define the methods by which Sardinian and alloglot languages are to be incorporated into the school curriculum, particularly in relation to scheduling, the organization of classrooms, and teacher involvement (Letter *a*, Clause 3). Additionally, the *Obreria* determines the allocation of regional financial resources (Letter *b*) and, crucially, the production and adoption of pedagogical tools and materials (Letter *c*). The committee will also establish the criteria for the recruitment of personnel (Letters *f*, *n*, *o*, *p*; see further discussion below) and will promote initiatives aimed at fostering awareness among families to encourage their active participation in the intergenerational transmission of minority languages (Letters *i*, *j*).

In order to implement the legislative provisions outlined above, it has been necessary to

develop (i) the professional profile of the minority language teacher, (ii) the teaching materials to be used in the classroom, and (iii) the concrete strategies for integrating minority languages into the educational system.

Regarding the role of the teacher (i), the required competencies largely align with those of a foreign language instructor. Following Luise (2021; 2023) such competences concern at least three macro-aspects, identifiable as (a) linguistic knowledge, (b) language teaching skills and (c) extralinguistic competence. Evidently, (a) represents the *sine qua non* condition required for any minority language educator (as well as language educators in general). More in detail, by linguistic knowledge it is not only meant a high or native linguistic competence, but also a metalinguistic one, based on the knowledge of the linguistics of the language, its grammar, the possibly available standardised version as well as the orthography, in relation with the dialectal variation (see also Pintore 2022 for the Sardinian context). Such a competence is usually attested by a linguistic certificate achievable both by general speakers and teachers in particular.

In this respect, ARS establishes two kinds of certifications, the *Nara·mi* and the «provisional and experimental C<sub>I</sub>-level» (henceforth, C<sub>I</sub>) certificates. The two documents allow access to different educational interventions promoted by ARS, analyzed in §5.

The *Nara·mi* certificate attests the oral competence in one of the Sardinia's minority languages: Sardinian varieties, Alguerese Catalan, Sassarese, Gallurese and Tabarchin. In particular it concerns oral production and comprehension, assessing the candidates' fluency in different diaphasic contexts, such as colloquial conversations, news, and academic or scientific presentations. However, neither a standardised evaluation protocol nor well-defined guidelines concerning level-specific competences have not been elaborated yet. Candidates are allowed to undergo the oral exam in their own or best known variety (e.g. in Campidanese Sardinian, Logudorese Sardinian, and so on). *Nara·mi* is required to access selections for the extra-curricular laboratories as a linguistic expert or as a collaborator.

First established in 2022, the C<sub>I</sub> certificate is elaborated according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and is aimed at obtaining an official certification of linguistic competence, level C<sub>I</sub>, in a Sardinian variety<sup>7</sup>, Alguerese Catalan, and, since November 2025, Gallurese<sup>8</sup>. The exam consists in various tests: three listening and three written comprehension tasks, four quizzes concerning the communicative structures, two writing and two oral production exercises. Exams for the C<sub>I</sub>-level Sardinian

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<sup>7</sup> Relative to Sardinian, a B2 certificate is also available, issued by University of Sassari.

<sup>8</sup> For both languages, University of Sassari has produced the respective syllabus and test simulations (visit <https://www.uniss.it/it/notizie/certificazione-provvisoria-sperimentale-della-conoscenza-del-catalano-di-alghero> for Alguerese and <https://dumas.uniss.it/it/notizie/avviso-pubblico-e-della-relativa-modulistica-volti-alla-certificazione-provvisoria> for Gallurese).

language are evaluated by a commission of experts from the University of Cagliari, while for Catalan and Gallurese the evaluation is provided by a commission of experts from the University of Sassari. Focusing on Sardinian, similarly to the *Nara-mi* exam, candidates may choose their own or best known variety, although, differently from it, tests are also administered in another Sardinian variety, in order to assess a comprehensive competence of the language. The C1 certificate is needed for candidates who aim at enrolling in designated teachers lists (RL22/2018, art. 20, Clause 5), from which schools select external teachers of curricular courses.

Moreover, in 2024, a second-level master in Sardinian language didactics has been instituted through the cooperation of the University of Cagliari and ARS, which co-financed the course. The master, which may host a maximum of 50 students, is aimed at developing qualified figures apt for the Sardinian language teaching at school (from kindergartens to upper secondary schools). The first edition is still in progress: results will be assessable in the next future.

Turning back to the legal text, Article 17, Clause 1, of regional law 22/2018 enacts that [my translation]:

[...] educational institutions incorporate the teaching of historical minority languages into the linguistic education curriculum during regular school hours. Additionally, they provide instruction in all curricular subjects through historical minority languages, in accordance with specific modalities appropriate to each educational level and grade<sup>9</sup>.

According to the law under discussion, ARS will grant full autonomy to schools in determining the modalities for delivering courses of/in minority languages, including aspects such as duration, assessment criteria, and teaching methodologies (Article 17, Clause 3). Meanwhile, the decision to enroll children in such courses is left to families, who must indicate their choice during the registration process via the designated form (Article 17, Clause 4). Additionally, Article 17, Clause 6, establishes the financial commitment of ARS, allocating funds for the remuneration of both internal and external teaching staff (Letter a), administrative and accounting management (Letter b), and didactic materials (Letter c). Article 18 concerns the inclusion of subjects related to Sardinia within the school curriculum (e.g., Sardinian history, Sardinian geography, etc.), while Article 19 establishes the criteria for the implementation of extracurricular educational workshops conducted in the Sardinian language.

Based on this legislative text, ARS has developed two intervention programs: *Insulas* and *Frailles*. These are the focus of the next section.

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<sup>9</sup> The original version of the cited text: «[...] le istituzioni scolastiche inseriscono nel percorso educativo linguistico, in orario curriculare, l'insegnamento delle lingue delle minoranze storiche e quello nelle lingue delle minoranze storiche di tutte le materie del curriculum, secondo modalità specifiche corrispondenti a ciascun ordine e grado scolastico».

## 5. *INSULAS* AND *FRAILES*

*Insulas* and *Frailes* represent the two main intervention strategies implemented by the language policies of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (ARS) within the educational sector. The former, *Insulas*, is the acronym for *INSegnamento Unico Lingue A Scuola* («Unified Language Teaching at School», my translation), referring to the integration of minority languages into the formal school curriculum. *Insulas* courses are structured as projects or modules that must take place during curricular hours, between January and the end of the school year (i.e., within June). The latter, *Frailes* (also known as «Smithies of Sardinian Languages», my translation), encompasses extracurricular workshops and activities, defined as well through structured projects presented by cultural associations, designed to intertwine the vehicular use of minority languages with the development of artistic, anthropological, historical, and linguistic skills and knowledge.

As discussed in §4, once schools obtain parental consent, they may formally submit a request to ARS for financial support to implement these projects. Applications must be submitted using the form made available by ARS.

Regarding the *Insulas* program, schools are required to specify the vehicular language to be adopted in the classroom (i.e., a variety of Sardinian, Algherese Catalan, Sassarese, Gallurese, or Tabarchin) and the number of participants, which must not be fewer than 12 per class. The program's duration must range from a minimum of 30 hours in kindergartens and 25 hours at higher educational levels to a maximum of 60 hours across all school levels. Within the *Insulas* program, educators responsible for these courses must be teachers listed in provincial rankings<sup>10</sup> or already employed at the institution, provided they hold the C1 certification (see §4). In contrast, operators conducting *Frailes* projects are only required to possess the oral certification *Nara-mi* and are not obligated to be listed in provincial rankings.

In what follows we discuss data relative to the school year 2024/2025, concerning both *Insulas* and *Frailes*; a comparison with previous school years is briefly presented. In the school year 2024/2025, for these two intervention programs, ARS allocated a total budget of €900,000, with €614,400 designated for *Insulas* and €285,600 for *Frailes*. Each educational institution had the possibility to request funding for multiple projects, with a maximum of five projects for kindergartens, ten for primary schools, five for lower secondary schools, and three for upper secondary schools.

The financial support provided by ARS for *Insulas* projects varied based on the number of instructional hours and the teacher's employment status (internal or external). For internal teachers, funding ranged from a minimum of €234 for kindergarten courses and €195 for other educational levels (for courses of 30 and 25 hours, respectively) to a maximum of €468

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<sup>10</sup> In the Italian education system, such lists represent the main source from which schools may retrieve temporary substitute teachers.

for 60-hour courses. In the case of external teachers, higher funding is allocated, ranging from a minimum of €1,795 for kindergarten courses and €1,495 for other educational levels to a maximum of €3,588 for 60-hour courses. Conversely, each *Frailles* course received a fixed funding amount of €4,200.

In what follows, we will examine key aspects of these initiatives concerning the 2024/2025 academic year.

### 5.1 *Insulas*

Beginning with *Insulas*, in the specified year a total of 124 projects have been implemented across an equal number of classrooms in 30 educational institutions, both public and private. The duration of the approved projects frequently falls below the maximum permitted threshold of 60 hours. See Table 1 below.

HOURS/ COURSE	KINDERGARTENS		PRIMARY SCHOOLS		MIDDLE SCHOOLS		HIGH SCHOOLS	
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUB.	PRIV.	PUB.	PRIV.	PUB.	PRIV.
60h	2	8	4	5	0	0	0	0
50h	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
45h	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
40h	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
35-33h	0	0	7	0	1	0	0	0
30h	23	4	16	3	4	1	0	0
25h	/	/	23	3	6	0	4	0
Total courses (124)	28	14	51	13	13	1	4	0

**Table 1. Number of *Insulas* courses activated in 2024/25 according to number of hours and school order and grade, distinguishing between public and private schools.**

As shown in Table 1, approximately half of the projects ( $n = 64/124$ ) were implemented in primary school classrooms. Preschools hosted 43 projects, followed by lower secondary

schools with 14 projects and upper secondary schools with only 4. The number of projects is notably low when considered in relation to the total number of schools and classes in Sardinia.

According to data published by the Statistical Office of the Ministry of Education and Merit (henceforth, SOMEM), in the 2024/2025 school year in Sardinia were present 1,425 public and 242 private school sites, totalling 1,667 educational institutions. Therefore, only 1.8% of Sardinian schools applied for regional funding to implement a minority language project. Furthermore, given the total of 10,776 classes (SOMEM 2024), only 1.1% benefited from an *Insulas* course.

Based on these proportions, this policy measure appears to have been largely ineffective, as evidenced by the low number of implemented projects. The official *Public Notice* outlining the objectives of the two intervention measures<sup>11</sup> emphasises the need to «protect, enhance», and, above all, «disseminate» minority languages in Sardinia. However, these objectives appear far from being achieved, at least for the school year under review.

This outcome may be attributed, in large part, to the lack of effective collaboration from educational institutions, which failed to complete the bureaucratic process required to access funding. Additionally, it is likely that families have shown limited interest in enrolling their children in Sardinian and alloglot language courses. In fact, only €253,726, equivalent to 41% of the total allocated funds (€614,400), was effectively spent, suggesting that the 124 approved projects were likely the only ones submitted for consideration.

Despite these low numbers for the 2024/2025 school year, a slight increase is observed compared to previous years. Mereu (2024, 78) highlights a trend in which *Insulas* projects declined from approximately 150 activations in 2020/2021 to fewer than 100 in 2022/2023. However, starting from 2023/2024, as indicated in the ranking of approved *Insulas* projects<sup>12</sup>, the number of active courses has increased, reaching a total of 103 and further rising to 124 in the 2024/2025 school year, as seen above.

This initial decline, followed by the observed recovery from 2023/2024 onwards, is most likely linked to disruptions in the education system caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While schools and families may be partly responsible for the limited success of ARS's educational guidelines, the funding allocated to these initiatives - €614,400 - must also be acknowledged. This amount appears inadequate to promote minority-language teaching in schools in an effective and comprehensive manner.

Such funding constraints hinder the ability to achieve the objective, stated in Article 15, Clause 2, Letter b of Regional Law 22/2018 (see also Marra 2021), to [my translation]:

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<sup>11</sup> See Section 2 of the document, available at <https://www.regione.sardegna.it/atti-bandi-archivi/atti-amministrativi/bandi/172836993939492>.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.regione.sardegna.it/atti-bandi-archivi/atti-amministrativi/bandi/169755123487931>.

ensure Sardinian students a multilingual educational path that, alongside the Italian language, incorporates the concurrent presence of Sardinian, Catalan of Alghero, Sassarese, Gallurese, Tabarchin, and foreign languages<sup>13</sup>.

Let us consider an ideal scenario in which each educational institution intends to implement an *Insulas* project for the maximum number of classes permitted, according to the respective school level. Under these conditions, the total number of projects would amount to 9,086.

Assuming that each project lasts for 60 hours (the maximum allowable duration) and involves only internal teachers - whereby the allocated compensation for a single project is €468 - the required investment would total €4,252,248, a fund significantly higher than the annual budget allocated by ARS for this initiative (i.e., €614,000).

If all projects were to be implemented under these ideal conditions, the available funding of €614,400 would be sufficient to finance only 1,312 projects. This implies that, at most, only 12.6% of classes in Sardinia could access a curricular course in a minority language. However, these values represent an optimistic estimate and should be considered as an upper limit. In practice, the actual number of projects that may receive funding is likely to be lower, particularly because, in most cases, external instructors are required, given that teachers already employed within schools often do not hold the C1 certification. The remuneration for an external instructor is significantly higher, with a 60-hour course receiving €3,588, thereby further reducing the number of projects that can be financed.

An additional finding emerging from the *Insulas* rankings published by ARS is the complete absence of projects related to Algherese, Gallurese and Tabarchin. Apart from Sardinian, only Sassarese appears as a vehicular language in the projects, accounting for 9 out of 124 initiatives.

This indicates a lack of interest among alloglot communities in participating in this regional initiative within the educational sector. Such an outcome should draw the attention of the regional authorities and, ideally, prompt ARS to implement more effective measures to encourage the participation of schools and families in this program, as indeed established by LR 22/2018, Article 16, Clause 3, letters *i, j* (see §4).

## 5.2 *Frailes*

*Frailes* projects encompass extracurricular laboratories and activities and a wide

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<sup>13</sup> The original version of the cited text: «assicurare agli studenti sardi un percorso formativo plurilingue che preveda, accanto alla lingua italiana, la compresenza della lingua sarda o del catalano di Alghero, o del sassarese, gallurese, tabarchino e di lingue straniere».

range of topics and disciplines, including arts and craftsmanship, theater, films, music, civics and health education, territorial identity, culture and traditions, as well as science and technology. Associations and organizations submitting a project proposal are required to designate two facilitators: a subject-matter expert and a collaborator, both of whom will serve as educators during the extracurricular courses. The structure of the project, as well as the materials adopted, must be described in the application form. The quality of the projects is one of the criteria by which proposals are selected. Beside this, previous experiences by the proponents with similar didactic interventions contribute to the score attributed to each project.

Concerning *Frailes*, the project selection process follows a distinct procedure as compared to *Insulas*. First, cultural associations and organizations submit their project proposals using the application form issued annually by ARS. In the application form, project proposers must specify the minority language to be used (e.g., Sardinian, Gallurese, etc.) and the geographical area in which they are available to operate, which generally corresponds to the Sardinian provinces (such as Cagliari, Nuoro, Oristano, Olbia-Tempio, and others). Additionally, they must indicate the educational level for which their project is intended, specifying whether it is designed for kindergartens, primary schools, or secondary schools.

Based on predefined criteria, a selection of proposals is then made available for two years. Subsequently, these selected projects are presented to schools. Educational institutions that meet the eligibility requirements and wish to implement a *Frailes* course are invited to apply and to select up to six extracurricular courses from the list, indicating their preferences in order of priority.

Unlike *Insulas*, *Frailes* projects are published on the ARS official website, allowing schools to select up to six projects for implementation within their institutions. The projects are categorised, as said above, according to thematic areas, including arts and craftsmanship, theater, film, music, civics and health, territorial identity, culture and traditions, and, finally, science and technology. Furthermore, they are classified based on the alloglot language used in each project.

As outlined in Attachment 8 of the *Frailes* documentation<sup>14</sup> Sardinian is the only language consistently represented across all thematic fields. The language is employed in 6 projects within the «arts and craftsmanship» category, 15 in «theater, film, and music», 4 in «civics», 26 in «territorial identity», and 2 in «science and technology».

In total, considering all linguistic varieties involved, the number of projects

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<sup>14</sup> The document is available at <https://www.regione.sardegna.it/atti-bandi-archivi/atti-amministrativi/bandi/172836993939492>.

amounts to 68. See Table 2 below.

	SARDINIAN	GALLURESE	SASSARESE	ALGUERESE	TABARCHIN
arts	6	0	0	3	0
theater/ cinema/music	15	0	1	1	0
civics	4	0	1	0	0
identity	26	2	3	2	0
Science/ technology	2	2	0	0	0

**Table 2. Number of Frailes courses activated in the school year 2024/25 according to the variety adopted and the field of pertinence.**

It is unsurprising that Sardinian is the most represented language in these projects, given that it is the variety with the highest number of speakers. However, it is notable that Tabarchin does not appear in any of the available projects.

From an economic perspective, ARS allocates a total of €285,600 annually for *Frailes*, providing €4,200 for each of the 68 projects. However, for the 2024/2025 school year, ARS has spent only €117,200, with only 28 out of 68 projects being activated.

Probably, the low number of projects might depend on the lack of interest from schools and families, already observed in relation to *Insulas*. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the funding for *Frailes* may still be insufficient. In fact, with the allocated amount, which is adequate for the 68 projects mentioned above, only 0.76% of all the classes in Sardinia would be able to benefit from extracurricular activities such as those offered by *Frailes*.

## 6. GENERAL COMMENT

In light of the data presented, it is clear that the introduction of Sardinian in schools is facing significant challenges. According to the observed trend, one may suppose that even in the coming years, the number of activated projects will remain low, thereby hindering the effectiveness of ARS's intervention strategies in the school system. One might argue that the

limited participation from schools and families could stem from the nature of the intervention designed by ARS, which aims at introducing minority languages into schools through specific educational projects, rather than integrating them into structured curricula. As observed, such projects involve a relatively complex bureaucratic process that engages multiple stakeholders, including students, families, schools, teachers, and the institutions responsible for certifying the qualifications necessary to work as educators of minority languages in Sardinia (see §4).

Starting from the grassroots level, that is, from students and families, we believe that in order for the attendance to courses in or of Sardinian during regular school hours to be deemed appropriate, students and their families must be thoroughly informed about the course delivery methods, content, teaching materials, and all other relevant aspects. To our knowledge, such promotional efforts have not been implemented by ARS or other institutions. Instead, individual schools are responsible for collecting parental consent to activate a minority language course. Once the necessary consent is obtained, schools are tasked with initiating the bureaucratic process required to establish these courses. This is likely the main bottleneck that prevents a broader implementation of the regional intervention strategies across Sardinia.

Furthermore, there is the often-overlooked issue of integrating minority language courses (in the form of *Insulas* projects) into the curriculum, as indicated by law 482/1999. This presents particular challenges for individual teachers, who are required to sacrifice numerous hours dedicated to the official curriculum to accommodate a minority language course, even in contexts where it is difficult to cover the entire prescribed program with the full allocation of hours for a given subject. Additionally, it is important to note the challenges associated with teaching subjects in a minority language, which would require specifically trained educators capable of teaching, for example, mathematics, history, etc. in Sardinian, Gallurese, or any other language and subject, for which a certain degree of technical language is required, a (set of) component(s) of the lexicon that minority languages usually have not developed. Despite not being the focus of the present research, the standard language issue is highly relevant in this respect. Indeed, a standard language should be used for the didactic material, and it should have developed a technical lexicon for each school subject. Moreover, it should be known by the students in order for them to make use of such material. Teachers should also master the standard variety in order to use it as the vehicular language (see §4) in school (and, *ça va sans dire*, during language classes). This represents a major obstacle for the successful implementation of any language teaching policy. Considering also the criticism towards the ARS standard proposal based on an assumed Logudorese-centric bias characterizing the proposal, briefly addressed in §1, which certainly does not contribute to the favourable acceptance by speakers, especially from the south (which represent the widest portion among all Sardinian varieties), the obstacle might eventually be insurmountable.

Putting aside the issue related to the standard variety, in our view, the introduction of

minority languages in schools should have proceeded gradually. First, a significant number of qualified teachers in and of minority languages in Sardinia should be trained (cf. Pintore 2022). Second, didactic material, such as grammar and text books should be produced for all school levels. Third, systematic minority language courses should be developed and structured according to the age of learners. It would have been prudent to begin with the first grade of primary school, if not with preschool education, and guaranteeing a continuative education in subsequent upper classes. This approach would have ensured, year after year, the formation of an entire cohort of students, who - at the completion of their schooling - would have continually attended Sardinian or alloglot varieties courses and hopefully developed an actual competence in such minority languages. The current situation, on the contrary, resembles a patchwork pattern, where scattered classes are engaged in courses lacking well-defined and common objectives, leaving the vast majority of students excluded.

It is also evident that all of these steps should be preceded by the establishment of a standard language model, as argued in §2 and §3, to be adopted in educational materials and as the language of instruction during minority language courses, in classroom assignments, and, more generally, in interactions between teachers and students.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The language policies implemented by the Autonomous Region of Sardinia have been analyzed with specific reference to the education sector. The introduction of minority language instruction in Sardinia, as established by various national and regional regulations (LR 26/1997, L482/1999, LR 22/2018; cf. §§3, 4), undoubtedly represents the most significant measure for the preservation and protection of these languages. However, as highlighted in §5, this initiative appears to suffer from limited collaboration between the involved parties, particularly educational institutions and families.

Furthermore, it has been observed that the funds allocated by ARS for the teaching of the Sardinian language and its alloglot varieties may be insufficient. The financial resources provided allow access to both curricular and extracurricular courses (i.e., *Insulas* and *Frailles*, respectively) in and about the minority language for only a limited percentage of classes and students on the island.

The adoption of a unified linguistic standard or a dual-standard model (cf. §1), however, constitutes a crucial element for the planning and implementation of systematic intervention strategies. These strategies, among other aspects, require the development of appropriate educational materials and the specialised training of teaching staff (cf. Luise 2023), as well as enhancing the use and the revitalization of the Sardinian language beyond micro-local contexts.

For the linguistic revitalization process to be successful, greater public engagement and broader efforts from institutions aimed at raising awareness are essential, as the population represents the key actor in this dynamic. There remains much to be done in this regard. It is therefore desirable for ARS to take a more decisive role - in the near future - in promoting increased awareness about the relevance of any language policy.

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