

Is there a future for regional languages?



Even if the number of speakers is in decline and average competence in the language is sinking: Low German (Niederdeutsch) has a future!

But these days, rather than learning Low German from their parents or grandparents, young people are learning it in school instead.

The relevant structures currently being put in place in schools in Lower Saxony, for example, are a result of favourable political frameworks such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which came into force in 1999.

In 2019, Lower Saxony issued a decree for the promotion of Low German in schools. Children come into contact with Low German speakers and learn Low German songs in class, and teachers also make a point of drawing their attention to Low German inscriptions on school outings.

The wonderful thing about this is that schoolchildren learn Low German in regions where the language is actually spoken.

Low German itself, which has always been spoken in a variety of dialects, will change of course. Not every local dialect can be taught in schools. More broadly spoken teaching varieties will probably emerge instead. This could have a negative impact on the dialect identification potential, but at the same time make the language easier to learn and comprehend.

Perhaps in the future the language will be spoken less at the marksmen's club, but there will be more opportunities to go to a play performed in Low German. However, Low German will remain a living, dynamic language: it will be spoken, it will be heard, it will be written, it will be read.

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Low German literature from a historical and cultural perspective