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DISMANTLING THE IGNALINA NUCLEAR POWER PLANT: COMMUNITIES
AND IMAGINARIES



Understanding the post-Soviet nuclear locality through language policy orientations

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on a unique case of Visaginas, a Lithuanian post-Soviet nuclear industry site both geographically and mentally marked by the Soviet mono-industrial past, as reflected in its ethnic composition and linguistic practices. This article examines the concept of nuclear exceptionalism in the domain of language policy and patterns applied to the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant case. It discusses exceptions in the state language legislation during the transition period from Soviet to independent Lithuania and nuclear to post-nuclear industry; moreover, it reflects on more recent developments in linguistic practices of locality.

KEYWORDS Russian speakers; mono-industrial cities; nuclear exceptionalism; language policy and practice; state language legislation

Introduction

Although extensive research has been conducted, especially in national language policies and Russian speakers' linguistic integration, the Baltic Russian-speaking communities and their language practices still stipulate the Baltic sociolinguistics. The region has accomplished its main policy objectives: the national languages have regained their official status, importance, and prestige while ethnic minorities, mainly Russian speakers, continue to demonstrate increased titular language knowledge and positive attitudes toward integration. Moreover, the English language has entered the region and was accepted rapidly and enthusiastically, especially by the younger generation. As many researchers refer to, the Baltic region was and continues to be multilingual; therefore, language policies on education, integration, and other diversity issues will continue to be of high relevance (Ehala and Zabrodskaja 2011; Hogan-Brun et al. 2007; Hogan-Brun, Mar-Molinero, and Stevenson 2009; Hogan-Brun, Ramonienė, and Grumadienė 2005; Lazdiņa and Marten 2019; Ramonienė 2010, 2013; Hogan-Brun et al. 2009; Verschik 2005, 2021; Vihalemm 2011; Zabrodskaja and Ehala 2015).

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Intense debates on diversity mark the millennium, and new questions are raised in multilingualism research (cf. Spolsky 2009), including post-Soviet multilingualism. We assume that new 'orientations' (cf. Ruiz 1984) are essential for the critical approach to the post-Soviet Baltic region, so the increased focus on linguistic diversity and speaker perspective is gaining momentum (Lazdiņa and Marten 2019; Verschik 2021; Vihalemm 2011). Spolsky (2009) claims that the language policy of any independent nation builds on four co-occurring conditions: national ideology, English in the globalized context, a nation's present sociolinguistic situation, and the internationally growing debates about the linguistic rights of minorities. After the reestablishing of independence, the majority perspective, representing national ideology, identified Russian as 'language as a problem' (Ruiz 1984), and an orientation toward linguistic homogeneity of the society took place. As a result, the idea to exploit the state language for nation-building was strongly supported. Moreover, the 'monolingual turn' (cf. Pavlenko 2013) and elimination of Russian at least from the public domains were reflected in the language planning strategies. The first decades of independence were marked by the ideology of purism and protectionism and the gradual transition to the monolingual public shift (Bulajeva and Hogan-Brun 2008; Vaicekauskienė and Šepetys 2016). The debates on 'language as a right' were not prominent although some discussions occurred during the pre-EU accession process, but were more relevant for Latvia and Estonia, not for Lithuania. The Lithuanian language until now is insured and protected in all spheres of public life. Other languages are allowed only in private domains or are considered to be foreign languages and the state language law regulates their use. The official institutions, such as the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language and the State Language Inspectorate, have the authority to arrange specific requirements for language practices in a top-down management mode (cf. Spolsky 2009). Even though English is penetrating the country's linguistic landscape and has high prestige, the titular language is strongly associated with national identity and has immense cultural importance across generations (Ramonienė 2010; Vaicekauskienė 2010).

The migration of Russian speakers from Soviet republics to Lithuania was not as extensive as to Estonia and Latvia; however, some Lithuanian cities became heavily inhabited by Soviet migrants due to economic and industrial reasons. The studies on post-Soviet mono-industrial planned city Visaginas in Lithuania have revealed exclusivity of its urbanistic planning, architectural solutions (Cinis, Drėmaitė, and Kalm 2008), history, and social conditions (Baločkaitė 2010, 2012; Kavaliauskas 1999, 2002, 2003; Šliavaitė 2003, 2010). The comparative analysis by Cinis, Drėmaitė, and Kalm (2008) of the Baltic post-Soviet mono-industrial towns provides insights into the flourishing period of their Soviet life and reveals social troubles experienced due to the collapsed regime and industries. The scholars examined three similar Soviet time localities, representatives of the different Soviet eras – Stalinism, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev – in the Baltics. The discussed localities, i.e., Sillamäe (Estonia), Aizkraukle (formerly Stučka, Latvia), and Visaginas (formerly Sniečkus, Lithuania), demonstrated different experiences and practices in the transition period. These towns were developed to build up the advanced Soviet industries and manifest the 'cult of the bright future' (Sultson 2016), loyalty, Soviet values, and ideology. The unifying factor of the multinational nature of mono-industrial towns was a common language, Russian, serving ideological and communicative functions. The industries, like nuclear power, were especially significant; therefore, they required special attention from the authorities (cf. Brown 2015). The exceptionality of atomic towns was based on secrecy, which resulted in social and economic privileges,

comfort, and well-being. Friendly neighbors; the absence of unemployment, indigence, and crime; higher salary rates; modern housing; good medical services; and educational and cultural facilities were elements of those communities' ordinary life (Baločkaitė 2010, 2012; Brown 2013; Cinis, Drémaitė, and Kalm 2008).

This study focuses on the peculiar case of Visaginas,¹ a Lithuanian post-Soviet 'migrant island' (Baločkaitė 2010), and discusses the language policy orientations related to the specificity of the industry. The framework of analysis will provide an opportunity to rethink 'the place' from the perspective of global industry with its peculiar features co-existing with national legislation and local linguistic reality. Visaginas, with a high concentration of Russian speakers, mainly Soviet period immigrants, arrived in the 1970s to boost the most advanced industry and build for those times the exceptional nuclear power plant (the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, INPP). The traumatic experience of double displacement (first as citizens of the Soviet Union and later, as workers of the power plant) (Baločkaitė 2010, 76), inability to adapt to the changing economy, to participate in a consumer society, and to comply with the dominant ideology however, created distance from the mainstream society (Klumbytė 2010, 298). Although significant transformations took place, Visaginas remains a geographically, culturally, linguistically, and ideologically isolated place in Lithuania (Baločkaitė 2010) and continues to negotiate its new identity (Dabašinskienė 2021; Mažeikienė and Gerulaitienė 2018).

The Ignalina nuclear power plant and Visaginas

The city built a power plant, and the power plant created the city. One could not exist without the other (an INPP employee)

The Ignalina nuclear power plant has always played a crucial role in the city's employment and identity. It had a distant but respectable status in the country and was a prominent factor in its technological, economic, and political arena. The changed political realities and the shutdown of the INPP created economic decline, social instability, and uncertainty for the future (Šliavaitė 2003, 2010). These phenomena were followed by feelings of resistance, reconciliation, and the period of nostalgia that occurred when the plant was closed (Baločkaitė 2012). The significant political and economic changes have resulted in continuous 'emptying' (cf. Dzenovska 2020) of the city and the INPP; thus, the drastic decrease of employees was registered. The dynamics of the INPP staff at different stages of its life are presented in Table 1.

Nuclearity since World War II has always been associated with global technological advancement, but also with geopolitical power. The global political race, especially during the Cold war, has motivated the Soviet leadership to compete in the nuclear sector and expand the development of nuclear power plants (cf. Brown 2013). In 1973 the decision to lay the foundations for the INPP, the most powerful nuclear power plant in the world, was announced. The grand project had its flourishing years of life.

Visaginas as a satellite city was built for the needs of INPP workers. It was a specially designed ideal location, a modernist utopia for almost 60,000 people, the best engineers and scientists in the USSR with their families, to live in a paradise with all the necessary amenities of human habitat. Young, experienced, and ambitious professionals came to build the most progressive future. Tragic phases however, have followed due to environmental and political developments, not favorable for the existence of the INPP. An unprecedented catastrophe in Chernobyl in 1986 caused the termination of construction

Table 1. The number of INPP employees, 1978–2020.

Year	Employees
1978	5,067
1982	11,286
1999	5,108
2002	4,611
2004	3,517
2009	2,354
2011	2,000
2012	2,050
2013	2,100
2014	2,140
2015	2,106
2016	1,991
2017	1,983
2018	1,901
2019	1,837
2020	1,800

Sources: The data for 1978–2002 are taken from Kavaliauskas (1999, 2002, 2003), while the information for 2009–20 has been derived from annual reports of the INPP (www.iae.lt): for 2004 and 2009 – <https://www.iae.lt/en/about-us/history/137>; 2011 – https://www.iae.lt/data/public/uploads/2019/04/genp-2018_11_organizacija.pdf (p. 8); 2012–16 – <https://www.iae.lt/data/public/uploads/2020/09/2016-vi-iae-veiklos-ataskaita.pdf> (p. 19); 2017–18 – <https://www.iae.lt/data/public/uploads/2020/09/2018-vi-iae-veiklos-ataskaita.pdf> (p. 49); and 2019–20 – <https://www.iae.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/03/2020-vi-iae-veiklos-ataskaita.pdf> (p.66)

works, followed by the announcement of Lithuanian independence. The chain of political and social events, including the negotiations with the EU, was crucial for the INPP and resulted in demolition processes. Lithuania had to fulfill the requirements to close the atomic plant gradually: the first reactor was stopped in 2004, the second in 2009. The two reactors are currently undergoing a decommissioning process, and by 2030 the site should be ready for re-use.

The past, illustrating the nuclear ‘deal’ for privileges (Brown 2013), as well as the challenging present, have marked the INPP and Visaginas by many exceptional arrangements for the economy, social life, and linguistic practices. This study examines the language policy orientations in the dominant Russian speakers’ neighborhood while looking more closely into the situation of the INPP and its formal language regulations and practices. The construction of the arguments will be mainly built on the concept of ‘nuclear exceptionality,’ coined by Hecht (2012). We will extend this idea to languages and contrast the notions of exceptional vs. ordinary. As we know from the scientific discourse, ‘nuclear’ is a highly complex category embracing scientific, technical, environmental, and social elements and could be perceived differently due to historical and political context, individual and institutional experiences:

Nuclearity is a technopolitical phenomenon that emerges from political and cultural configurations of technical and scientific things, from the social relations where knowledge is produced. Nuclearity is not the same everywhere . . . Nuclearity is not the same for everyone . . . Nuclearity is not the same at all moments in time . . . (Hecht 2012, 15).

As for the state language legislation, it will be argued that linguistic exceptionality is closely related to technological, social, and ethnic issues. The main questions to be examined are: how do the state and other social actors operating the INPP produce, interpret, and implement the legislation on the languages? Which arguments do they provide to support the 'exceptionality' of the site? This discussion is presented further in two main parts of the analysis: the first will debate language policy issues, examine the state language laws with their amendments, draft laws, and additional documents necessary for a closer inspection of details and arguments. The second part discusses the policy implementation practices and is based on relevant reports of the state language regulating institutions and the annual reports of the INPP. Also analyzed are five interviews (in Lithuanian) with the representatives of 'language domain' of Visaginas municipality (two female respondents from the Culture, education, sport, and the state language control division); the female respondents from the INPP include two persons from the Communication section and one respondent from the Administrative section. The interviews were mainly conducted in 2021 using the Microsoft Teams platform. Many other interviews however, have been carried out in a contact mode and analyzed earlier during the project life (since 2018) and served as a solid contextual background to follow the story of the INPP.

Exceptionality in language legislation

The diversity management models should always be critically evaluated and situated in a context-sensitive mode while considering majority/minority relations in language-related issues. The dimensions playing an essential role in social cohesion processes include historical developments, political intervention, the changes in language regimes, and authority in the formation of language ideologies (Blommaert 1999, 7; Hogan-Brun 2010, 4–5). Since nuclear locality reflects an exceptional context, politicians are suggested to use sensitive approaches to language policy and management (cf. Hogan-Brun 2010).

Changes in language regimes have challenged the ethnically diverse but mainly Russian speaking INPP community. The Lithuanian *Law on the State Language* (Republic of Lithuania 1995a) was enacted on 31 January 1995 and enshrined Lithuanian as a state language of the Republic of Lithuania. Moreover, it explicitly proclaimed the roles, responsibilities, communication modes, and functions of all institutions, establishments, enterprises, and organizations regarding the state language (Articles 4, 5, 6). The language question was of immense importance to the country and particularly Russian speakers, but the social instability called for mitigation of the political decisions in Visaginas and the INPP. Thus, on 7 February 1995 the *Law on the Implementation of the Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania* (Republic of Lithuania 1995b) was passed. Article 3 was created mainly for the INPP and had a very remarkable statement: 'The languages established by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are permitted in the Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant documents.' This article implicitly indicated that the Russian language, as one of the official IAEA languages, is now formally allowed to be used at the INPP. Indeed, this exception was *linguistic*, but it also meant *technological*, as a very close connection of Russian and the nuclear technology at the INPP required accurate solutions. The risk of technical errors or miscommunication due to the shift to Lithuanian was of great potential. All the documents at the INPP site, from regular daily reports on diverse issues to the highest scientific and

technological texts, safety standards, processes, emergency rules, were all developed, written, and implemented in the Russian language. Russian was and remains vital for nuclear technology and the whole technological culture on which the plant was developed (Stsiapanau 2021). Even though Russian was not mentioned explicitly, it was evident that this exception was made for the daily nuclear routines and communication of most Russian speaking employees.

For Lithuania, the years after joining the EU in 2004 were vital for developing new energy projects. Due to the demands of the nuclear energy sector, the discussions to keep Lithuania as a nuclear country continued. The negotiations with potential investors in the region (Latvia and Estonia) about the future perspectives of the nuclear plant caused the need to develop necessary legislation. Moreover, the urgency arose when the Japanese company Hitachi was selected as a strategic investor in the nuclear power plant project in the summer of 2011. In this context, it was necessary to amend the legislation regarding language provision established in 1995. The remarks on linguistic issues were already elevated in the State Atomic Energy Safety Inspectorate (SAESI) report of 1997. They had reported that progress was made in improving the nuclear system of energy regulatory and normative technical documents; however, the significant shortcomings of the documentation were noticed because of the lack of special terminology. The nuclear energy terms and overall nuclear scientific discourse in Lithuanian were absent and had to be created almost from zero. The SAESI mentioned the urgent need to prepare a Lithuanian-English-Russian dictionary of Nuclear Energy terms to avoid the existing linguistic norm in Russian monolingualism and enter into trilingual communication. With the implementation of the state language law, the gradual use of Lithuanian, mainly in written official document mode, appeared.

Objective reasons indicated that using Lithuanian immediately was unrealistic due to the already mentioned deficiency of Lithuanian terms and language skills. The identified demand for the English language was triggered by the global nature of the sector and the intensified communication with the international institutions, like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and others. Thus, official languages of the IAEA were again implicitly mentioned in the new draft of the law. The draft law amending Article 3 of the *Law on the Implementation of the Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania* was included in the version of the law in 2011 (Republic of Lithuania 2011b). The new amendment was prepared considering the developed strategies and needs of the nuclear energy sector (Republic of Lithuania 2007c), the objectives for the planned decommissioning of the existing nuclear power facilities, and the construction of a new nuclear power plant. The logic of the new legislation was described in detail in the *Explanatory Statement* on the draft Amending Article 3 of the *Law on the Implementation of the Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania* signed by the Minister of Energy A. Sekmokas (Republic of Lithuania 2011a). The Explanatory Statement tries to rationalize the need for foreign language use and protection of Lithuanian:

It should be noted that the aim of the draft law is *not to restrict the official use of the state language but to create legal preconditions for the official use of foreign languages in nuclear matters* [emphasis mine], energy project documents, taking into account their international nature and regulatory integrity. The use of foreign languages in this case does not replace the use of the state language but complements it to the extent necessary for the implementation of projects. Article 1 of the *Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania* (Official Gazette, 1995, No. 15-344) states that this law inter alia “establishes the use of the state language in public life of

Lithuania, protection and control of the state language.” Attention should be paid to the fact that the submitted draft law does not change the legal status of the state language of the Republic of Lithuania, the legal bases for its use or protection (Republic of Lithuania 2011a).

The particular focus on facilitating the implementation of a new nuclear power plant project was strengthened.² Therefore, a part of the documents for the construction and operation licensing and assessment of the new nuclear power plant processes had to be provided in a foreign language. Translations into and from the state language were foreseen; however, this procedure was said to raise certain risks:

The submission of documents in the official languages of the IAEA should be justified in practice, as it will be possible to avoid delays in the implementation of construction projects for nuclear facilities, which *would be affected by the translation and harmonization of these documents*. It should be noted that possible multiple translations of a large-scale project and safety documents and comments from Lithuanian into the original and from the original into Lithuanian *increase the probability of errors and at the same time may affect the planned nuclear facilities and, at the same time, public safety*. In addition, this practice has been used in the operation of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant and has proved its worth [emphasis mine] (Republic of Lithuania 2011a).

The provided statements demonstrate that foreign languages are necessary for the new power plant to operate in a harmonized mode; moreover, the arguments were attributed to public safety as a significant objective. The text itself does not provide information on the concrete language in question. Still, it is evident that English is the target, as in the following excerpt the mentioned phrase ‘a foreign language’ is used in a singular form. In contrast, the often-used phrase ‘languages of the IAEA’ refers to the plural of nouns. The effort to avoid naming languages is part of political diplomacy; nevertheless, it is clear that English as a foreign language becomes of significant importance to be ‘legalized’ in order to consult international experts, avoid delays, and arrange the process:

At the same time, taking into account the lack of experience in the implementation of new nuclear power plant construction projects, it is not excluded that the authorized institutions of the Republic of Lithuania will be consulted by foreign consultants. In order to perform the expert assessment, it will be necessary to submit design and construction and activity licensing documents in a foreign language. In this way, the aim will be to avoid delays in the implementation of nuclear power plant construction projects and other related disruptions due to the large-scale review documents and multi-stage translations (Republic of Lithuania 2011a).

The Executive summary of the Committee on Education, Science, and Culture of the Seimas (Seimas 2011) in its conclusion has also provided the argument, based on international practice, in support of the use of foreign languages. English was mentioned explicitly, and that was the only case when a specific language was mentioned in the leading documents regulating the formulation of the law, as the excerpt indicates: ‘transactions are concluded in accordance with the law of foreign countries and in a foreign (English) language [emphasis mine]; due to objective reasons, it is not always possible to promptly prepare translations of draft agreements and other documents into Lithuanian ... (Seimas 2011).’

The intensive cooperation with international organizations and donors from many countries requires efficient communication forms, and the English language was essential for international discussions and reporting. The demand for English increased relatively fast (it was mentioned already in the SAESI 1997 report) because the state had to discover ways to transfer from the Soviet to the Western regime to navigate the nuclear plant. The global nature of the industry and safety standards and regulations

were prioritized, and languages were considered to serve and ease the process instead of creating barriers. It has to be stressed that Russian was not erased from the landscape of this discourse even covertly; however, even in the implicit mode of expression, English has always been prioritized, at least from the point of view of future developments. Thus, the linguistic exceptionality was allowed and supported by the state with the necessary legislation to ensure stable nuclear activities.

Even though the new amendment to Article 3 was produced for the needs of a new Visaginas NPP project, the legislation remained after the failure of this project – it was still needed for the demolition process of the Ignalina NPP. The INPP site has been entirely functioning in Russian, even though Lithuanian has been introduced as an obligation to conform to the state language law. The exception for Russian was logical, as there were neither specialists nor terminology developed in Lithuanian. Still, until now, Lithuanian mainly functions as the language for administrative needs and mostly in written form. The internal information for the employees is given also in Russian (for instance, the internal newsletter is produced in two languages, Lithuanian and Russian). Thus, the arguments for expanding the linguistic repertoire at the nuclear energy sector were clear and based on efficiency, quality, and technology:

Failure to adopt the draft law will extend the time for submitting documents to state institutions, as translations into Lithuanian will be required. Thus, there is an increased risk that translations into Lithuanian may distort information because some technical processes may not have Lithuanian equivalents. (Seimas 2011).

This wording indicates that the status of Lithuanian is secondary, as the main languages of external reporting and communication are English and, to some extent, Russian. At the same time, the necessary documents will be translated into Lithuanian.

The envisioned 'threat' to the Lithuanian language functions due to the domination of other languages fostered to reconsider the draft of Article 3 and to prevent the marginalization of Lithuanian. Therefore, a clear division between the nuclear energy and the public administration (managerial) domains was introduced in the amendment of Article 3 of the *Law on the Implementation of the Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania*. It is evident that the exception here is Lithuanian:

The use of official languages of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) shall be permitted in the documentation of activities in the field of nuclear energy and other activities related to the use of nuclear and/or nuclear fuel cycle materials, *except for administrative decisions taken by public administrations*. When such documents are submitted to the institutions performing state regulation and supervision, the correspondence *shall be in the state language – Lithuanian*. The attached documents may be submitted in one of the official languages of the IAEA. At the request of the institution implementing state regulation and supervision, translations of the attached documents into the state language – Lithuanian – must be submitted [emphasis mine] (Republic of Lithuania 2011b).

It is also essential to mention the public administration domain at the INPP, as this area has changed significantly. The yearly reports of the INPP administrative activities, policy documents, and other information provided in Lithuanian online demonstrate the extensive transformation in linguistic policy and practices. Moreover, it demonstrates compliance with the *Public Administration Law* (enacted in 1999, No. 60–1945, with multiple amendments), which, among other regulations, sets provision for the state language use. Even though the implementation of the state language law was strictly obligatory for ordinary institutions and people, the transition course of the INPP site

disclosed the performance of linguistic exceptions determined by the complexity of the technology, human and environmental safety measures. The aim was not to construct an argument highlighting the contradiction of the state vs. IAES languages but rather to demonstrate the series of significant decisions in the time of uncertainty and instability of social life and the future of the Lithuanian nuclear industry.

Exceptional and ordinary language practices at the INPP

The separation or alienation of the INPP from the rest of the city has been and still is a characteristic feature of present times, as was observed by a respondent of Visaginas municipality:

Workers of the nuclear plant live like, well, like they belong to a different republic within a republic. And they live in the city ... isolated from all social processes, from activities, from cultural life. In my opinion, this is still happening ... that distancing continues. (Interview 1, Visaginas municipality)

We assume that distancing from the others correlates with the special status of the profession. The closed group of nuclear specialists, the '*atomshiki*,' called 'the last bastion of Soviet times' (Šliavaitė 2003), used to be highly respected. Therefore, the distinguished expertise as a major factor of the INPP landscape has played a significant role in laying the foundation for exceptionalism and creating privileges.

In addition to the favorable principles of language legislation (as well as of citizenship) that have been met very positively by the INPP community, the gradual process toward acquiring Lithuanian also took place. The state language law required the staff of certain positions, especially the leading ones, to possess a certain level of Lithuanian language knowledge, a particular category of language competence. The highest-level state institutions, the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language (SCLL) and the State Language Inspectorate (SLI), as supervising and controlling organizations were established in 1990 and started to control the implementation of the state language status strictly. The number of people wishing to study Lithuanian increased significantly already in 1992 with the adoption of the government resolution, *On Qualification Categories for Knowledge of the State Language*. That legislation specified which employees were required to pass an examination in one of the three categories. In 1995 the personnel of leading positions had to pass the Lithuanian language exam not according to the lowest category, but according to the second and third. Although such a requirement was introduced by a resolution of the Supreme Council back in 1990, it frightened many and caused panic in Visaginas (see the SLI report: *Valstybinė kalbos inspekcija* 2021). Language supervision had to cover the whole of Lithuania; therefore, in 1990, the SCLL requested municipalities to establish positions of language managers in cities and districts.

The first decades of implementing and controlling the state language provision demonstrated a 'monopoly of power:' thus, strict and protective measures of supervision, observing, and controlling became a regular practice. The communities of ethnic minorities, including Russian speakers, often became 'violators' of the norm and were subjected to sanctions (Vaicekauskienė and Šepetyš 2016). The symptom toward a more moderate regime was observed in the last decade, as the SLI and Visaginas municipality demonstrated modest expressions describing the local situation. A few recent reports (available from Visaginas municipality and the SLI website, e.g.: *Valstybinė kalbos*

inspekcija 2016, 2017) announcing the results of the monitoring visits, mainly summarizes major tendencies and providing recommendations. The dominant problems identified in the city and the INPP are not changing much. The known 'old' issue is related to the requirements of the knowledge of the state language in the performance of official duties (all five respondents mentioned this issue). Language managers of Visaginas and the INPP (two respondents) reported cases when employees have passed the required exam according to the established category and have a relevant certificate, but do not speak Lithuanian. The current established practice to discuss, support, and suggest, but not to punish individuals or institutions living in areas dominated by non-titular nationals shows a remarkable transformation in a management pattern of the controlling institutions, as they refer not just to the 'problem' but offer an explanation for it: 'A person passes a language exam and receives a certificate, but while living in another language environment, the language is forgotten, and *de facto* [he/ she] does not use the language at the level indicated in the qualification document' (SLI Report, 2021). The tendency to apply a less critical attitude by the controlling national and local institutions was observed in the INPP. Some cases of the strict implementation of the state language law however, were also reported. According to the legal acts, heads of municipal institutions, establishments, services, and other civil servants have to speak the state language according to the established language proficiency categories. The situation however, is not straightforward at the INPP:

A few years ago, we visited the INPP to monitor how the state language requirements are implemented, and this was in the course of my duties. Because of the languages of the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], the non-use of Lithuanian was allowed. We do monitor the nuclear workers' ability to use the language, well, it's not relevant now, but in the past, it was. There was a period when the requirements were significantly tighter, no matter what exceptions for the language use there were. A requirement to know Lithuanian was introduced for people in certain positions. I know that some employees who failed to learn the language and pass the exam had to resign. Well, it wasn't some kind of strategic position, but still, they weren't ordinary workers. These were some leading people. (Interview 2, Visaginas municipality)

The Lithuanian language support programs have been introduced to target the problem. Moreover, such courses were arranged according to the schedules of the employees of the INPP. The Lithuanian language classes, however, did not produce the expected results: many attendees participated in these training programs because of the 'requirement' and guarantees to safeguard their working positions, but not because they were motivated or willing to learn Lithuanian, as it was of no practical value.

The nuclear plant workers got really involved in the courses and exams, and the state language training groups were formed. Let's say this was because there were no employees of other institutions – only nuclear workers, those courses were organized at a time and place convenient for them, and they took exams. It happened maybe ten years ago, or fifteen. (Interview 1, Visaginas municipality)

It is necessary to mention that the INPP annual reports have provided very little data on the state language or languages in general (from 2011 to 2020); language issues appeared alongside other social issues. This fact demonstrates that language matters were viewed as secondary, following the prioritized areas of demolition works, safety regulations, and social programs:

The company provides its employees with the maximum social guarantees provided for in the laws of the Republic of Lithuania. Some benefits and social guarantees are also provided for in the Collective Agreement. Considering the region's specifics and trying to reduce exclusion and social risks in case of termination of the employment contract with the INPP, *the learning of the state Lithuanian language and integration into Lithuanian social, cultural, and social life is promoted* [emphasis mine] (INPP Report 2011).

Many workers of the INPP have attended state language programs. As it was reported during the interviews with the INPP staff, the overall competence of Lithuanian depends on the professional area of the specialist, as the staff from finances, training, communication, personnel, and other administrative departments usually know Lithuanian and often communicate in Lithuanian during the meetings. Moreover, these departments also hire more native Lithuanian speakers. In total, only 15% of the INPP employees, including those working in Vilnius and other off-Visaginas offices, are of Lithuanian ethnicity and native speakers of the titular language. Thus, as an INPP respondent claims, the basic skills of Lithuanian are already an achievement, especially for the employees of more technical domains:

Here, it [the Lithuanian language] corresponds to the basic level; it seems to me that realistically there is a possibility to talk and improve and continue to learn more new Lithuanian words. In previous times, it was not even that . . . Everything was in Russian . . . now a few more Lithuanians live here, and they speak Lithuanian. (Interview 3, INPP)

Interview data revealed a lack of the necessary competencies in the titular language and sustainable motivation for learning it. The issue of the state language, at least for the older generation, still exists, and Lithuanian has always been referred to as 'a problem.' The lack of time, quality of language programs, motivation (like 'no one to talk to in Lithuanian'), and similar obstacles were mentioned, although 'most of the staff admitted that it would be useful to know the state language' (Interview 5, INPP).

Russian maintains a strong position and is used actively among the staff in the domains of technologies, dismantling, and engineering. More 'private' areas also prefer Russian: 'If you go to the canteen, then everything around you will be in Russian, just Russian, and the cooks and cashiers speak only in Russian' (Interview 5, INPP). The Russian language is perceived as a natural reality and implements its function of communication for diverse ethnicities and languages, as noted by the respondent:

Lithuanians currently make up about 15% of all employees at the power plant. All others are representatives of other nationalities. Due to this exceptional feature, the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant allowed using the Russian language. The technical documentation is written in Russian. The description of technical devices here is in Russian because there is no point in changing them: you can change something, but if a person speaks Russian, he will not be able to work with the device after that . . . the Russian language really dominates here. (Interview 4, INPP)

As was pointed out by all respondents, in the past and today, Russian is dominating the inner life of the INPP. Lithuanian however, is added when necessary due to the state regulations, mainly to perform the informative function. In such cases, either Russian or Lithuanian-Russian is used to update the workers on the news in the region of Lithuania:

The newspaper, *INPP Žinios*, is published in Lithuanian-Russian to target the company's employees. It presents the news on reforms, activities, economic and cultural issues implemented in the company. The notice boards installed at the bus stops located in the INPP territory contain weekly reviews of the Lithuanian press and other information relevant to INPP employees. Republican and regional media reviews on energy topics are published daily on the INPP internal website (INPP Report 2013).

The years of transformation were significant for the language practices at the INPP: from the entirely Russian background, gradually turning to Lithuanian and English. Thus, the outcome of the nuclear exception is trilingual practice, officially manifested at the INPP. The emerged need to add English to the linguistic landscape of the INPP is related to the submission of reports, assessments, and other documents to external international organizations and donors. English has become important for the staff to be learned and used because international meetings, conferences, visits, and training have often been organized in English. The very instrumental approach to English has motivated even older staff to learn basic English, which enabled them to participate in international activities and follow the developments at the INPP. The unexpected outcome revealed that almost everyone in the personnel (not necessarily in leading positions) working in the technological and dismantling sites spoke basic English, as international communication, training programs on security standards, and technological processes were held in English. Moreover, English was preferred over Lithuanian; it was referred to as a language necessary to implement the task essential for the job.

[But] I would say that all of them [workers] may not be very good at expressing themselves in Lithuanian. It is easier for them to speak English ... Sometimes people [from outside Visaginas] are dissatisfied with this situation here, keeping in mind that workers have lived in Lithuania for so many years. But they never had an obligation to learn the state language; this happened because the whole social environment in Visaginas is Russian speaking. They were more committed to using English at work, as they need to communicate, simply because the job task is obligatory. (Interview 3, INPP)

A similar observation has been made about Russian speakers in the Baltic countries that they prefer another foreign (e.g., Finnish in Estonia) or regional (e.g., Latgalian in Latvia) language (Lazdiņa and Marten 2012; Verschik 2005). The pattern might not always be the same; however, the instrumental and pragmatic motivation seems to be the most relevant. The exceptionality of the nuclear domain clearly conditions the demonstrated preference to use Russian and English as the languages of the IAEA. Lithuanian is perceived as an optional but not obligatory language without clearly expressed motivation.

The strictly regulated and controlled working environment, the mode of communication and knowledge transfer within the closed group of high experts, and linguistic patterns of professional and daily routines have formed the exceptional INPP community, which substantially impacts the city's and the country's life. The majority of the staff who has long working experience in the INPP (an average of 10 to 40 years) find difficulties or even neglect to shift from the inherited Soviet-type nuclear identity and linguistic habits. The question is whether objective factors exist to motivate them for a change, as the future of this nuclear site has its limits, the year 2030. The Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant case is not a straightforward story of transition from Soviet to Lithuanian rule, from nuclear to post-nuclear, from exceptional to ordinary. After the collapse of the USSR, the exceptional condition of nuclear energy has been reconsidered; nevertheless, 'nuclear exceptionality' mainly remains at the INPP as a solid basis to continue its traditional practices.

Conclusion and discussion

This article examines the concept of nuclear exceptionalism in the domain of language policy and practices applied to the case of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant in the Visaginas area. The location is far from the 'center' of Lithuania and both geographically

and mentally is marked by the Soviet past. This past is reflected in the design of planned Soviet mono-industrial cities, ethnic composition, and linguistic practices of Visaginas. The study offers its arguments based on the concept of 'nuclear exceptionalism' globally manifested in the nuclear industry due to technological, safety, security, and social reasons (cf. Brown 2013; Hecht 2012). It explicitly discusses exceptionalities in the state language legislation during the transition period from Soviet to independent Lithuania, from nuclear to post-nuclear industry.

After the announcement of independence, three Baltic states adopted strict and protective state language regimes, focusing on titular monolingualism and protectionism. A postmodernist perspective, however, calls for a context-sensitive approach toward peripheral locations. In this regard, Albury's (2016) claim is significant: 'any theory that constitutes a grand narrative should be rejected because it naively seeks to explain language in society universally without regard to local policy contexts' (Albury 2016, 358). In a similar vein, Blommaert (2010) supports this idea by stressing the importance of a local standard: 'The sociolinguistic life of the community is dominated by its local normativity' (Blommaert 2010, 95). The growing interest in moving from global to local, from societal to communal or individual needs, is noticed in sociolinguistics and many other domains of our life.

We have argued that the national legislation on the state language use in 1995 and 2011 was a precondition necessary to gradually reconstruct the processes of management and technology from Soviet to Western in a moderate mode. This top-down decision to acknowledge the official use of the IAEA languages in the nuclear sector has assured the stable processes of the plant functions and mitigated the social tensions of the INPP community. The nuclear exceptionality principles implemented at the INPP site demonstrated 'sensitivity' toward this sector of industry. Moreover, the fact that Russian was officially allowed, although hiding under the 'languages of IAEA' title, has been a great 'nuclear deal' (cf. Brown 2013) positively accepted by the INPP community. The years of transformation were significant for language practices at the INPP: from an entirely Russian environment to gradually adding Lithuanian and English. Thus, the outcome of the nuclear exception is a trilingual practice officially manifested at the INPP. The English language became necessary to carry out international obligations. This crucial duty has motivated even older staff to learn the basics of the language and enabled them to participate in the international activities of the INPP. The permanent observation and control of the use of the state language had some impact on the skills of the staff, as they have tried to learn Lithuanian, however, not always successfully. The linguistic environment at the INPP and the city did not support motivation to learn the state language, but the younger generation, born in the independent state, demonstrates better Lithuanian language skills (Lichačiova 2013; Lichačiova and Markova 2014; Labanauskas 2014). Ultimately, the last decade demonstrated a less strict and more supportive approach from the state institutions toward linguistic practices of Russian speakers; thus, the pressure for the state language has diminished.

The research on post-Soviet mono-industrial cities (Cinis, Drėmaitė, and Kalm 2008; Baločkaitė 2010) pointed out similar tendencies. Some observations however, are in order here while briefly contrasting the case of the INPP and the situation of Russian speakers in the Estonian mono-industrial site. We claim that the INPP community has its distant but respectable image, connected to high technologies and science, areas that required profound expertise and education. The article does not refer to other, we may assume, fundamental issues related to 'nuclearity,' like citizenship, ethnicity, education, or class, because of space limits. The INPP case however, shows results that contrast

with the Estonian case of the mining mono-industry (in Ida-Virumaa, northeast Estonia). There, former heroes, glorified for their class and ethnicity, appeared as a racialized underclass in neoliberal Estonia, excluded from the nation based on ethnicity (Kesküla 2015). The Estonian case highlights the fact that the group of Russian speakers is considered outsiders, not only for their 'cultural and linguistic otherness,' their Russianness, but also as an untrustworthy and backward industrial working class. Again, differently from our case, the new language regime in Estonia for a working group of Russian speakers caused deeper enslaving in the position of being workers in heavy industry because of a lack of Estonian language skills (Kesküla 2015, 104). We believe that Lithuanian exceptionalism is firmly based on education and high and complex technologies: the community considered in our case is mainly Russian or another Slav ethnicity (around 85%), although with Lithuanian citizenship (96%). Many of the INPP personnel, particularly managers and specialists, hold degrees in high education (75%) and are considered upper-class employees with exceptional expertise. As argued in the study, the language practices did not change much at the nuclear site, as this unique community was granted special language legislation.

Thus, the complex technology and careful management of the process and people have been highly considered since 1991. The privileges of the Soviet times were transferred to some extent to the post-Soviet period due to the safety of the country and the region. Obviously, the language issues were secondary, but still very important to ensure peaceful activities at the INPP. The language orientation demonstrates a tendency toward a trilingual mode. The Russian language in this exceptional site, together with English, functions as an ordinary standard practice because of the globality of the sector and the exceptionality provided by the IAEA. The efforts to use the state language were observed, indicating that the language law and other regulations are respected. Many scholars agree that language should be perceived as a resource rather than a problem (Ruiz 1984). Thus, developing multilingual practice at the INPP seems to be successful due to 'nuclear deal and exceptionality' and the embedded practice motivated by an instrumental approach.

According to Albury, 'The growing interest in community-level perspectives of language policy does not erase the need to understand what drives governments to create the language policies they do' (Albury 2016, 359). Indeed, this question inspired us to perform the study and find answers to the research questions. Although this case is an exception, especially if we consider the first decades or even the first years of independence, it suggests that timely and more liberal, not hierarchical type of multilingualism (cf. Hult 2010) could be instrumental in avoiding conflicts and tragedies.

We believe that this study will contribute not only to language policy debates, but will also complement other studies of the region or globally on the exceptionality of the nuclear industry.

Notes

1. In 1975, the city of Sniečkus (named after the first secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party) was constructed on the shores of lake Visaginas to provide housing for the workers at the nearby the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant. In 1992 the city was renamed Visaginas.
2. The Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant (VNPP) and the related infrastructure were a new project to be built near Visaginas. It was intended to replace the Ignalina Nuclear Power with a more recent and safer electricity generation technology. The new NPP was supposed to start producing electricity in 2018–20. After the referendum of 14 October 2012, when Lithuanian citizens

rejected construction of the new NPP, the project was abandoned. It should be noted that in Article 3 of the *Law on the Implementation of the Law on the State Language of the Republic of Lithuania* (1995), the wrong name was used in the text: no Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant existed, only the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant. This mistake was noticed and corrected only in the Law of 2011. In order to ensure a uniform treatment of nuclear facilities in the legal sense, it was proposed to abandon specific names of nuclear facilities, such as Ignalina or Visaginas, and use generic nouns instead, thus avoiding potential misunderstandings.

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Interviews

- (1) Female, 55 years old, Visaginas Municipality Culture, Education, Sport, and the State Language Control Division. Interview by author via Teams, 1 April 2021.
- (2) Female, 45 years old, Visaginas Municipality Culture, Education, Sport, and the State Language Control Division. Interview by author via Teams, 1 April 2021.
- (3) Female, ca. 30 years-old, INPP Communication section. Interview by author via Teams, 14 April 2021.
- (4) Female, 54 years-old, INPP Administration section. Interview by author via Teams, 29 April 2021.
- (5) Female, ca. 50 years-old, INPP Communication section. Interview by L. Dovydaitytė and N. Mažeikienė on-site, 16 September 2020.

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