

A Geneva comparison

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Geneva offers a useful comparison. The official language of the canton of Geneva is French. The city has been a centre of international diplomacy since the founding of the League of Nations in 1920. English and French are the working languages of the United Nations Office at Geneva, where English has become the dominant language of many international organisations and non-governmental organisations based in the city.¹ The Geneva commodity traders, private banks and multinational companies also work in English. Geneva's international community is larger than that of Zug and more diverse, since it includes diplomats, officials of international organisations and staff of non-governmental organisations in addition to business people.

The Geneva book in this series describes the relationship between French and English in Geneva as a coexistence with tensions. French remains the language of the local society, the administration and the courts, while English is the language of the international community. The same pattern applies to Zug, with German in the place of French. Two differences stand out. Geneva's international community has a longer history and a stronger institutional anchoring in the international organisations. Zug's international community is almost entirely a business community whose presence depends more directly on the canton's economic attractiveness.

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (English), "Official languages of the United Nations", en.wikipedia.org (no primary source consulted): English and French are the only two working languages of the UN Secretariat, of which the United Nations Office at Geneva is part; English has become the dominant world language in the digital age. The dominance of English in the international organisations and NGOs based in Geneva is not specifically covered by this source. ↩

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