

The economics of a working language

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From an economic point of view, English lowers the costs of doing business across borders. A company that can recruit staff worldwide without requiring knowledge of the local language has access to a larger labour market. A client who can deal with lawyers, banks and authorities in English faces lower transaction costs. A location in which English is widely used therefore has a competitive advantage in attracting international companies. The availability of English-speaking professionals is therefore an asset for any international financial centre.

Zug's advantage in this respect is relative. English is widely spoken in Zurich, Geneva, Basel and other Swiss cities as well, with which the canton competes for the same companies. Its advantage lies in the combination of English with low taxes, a small and responsive administration and a concentration of international companies that creates its own English-speaking environment. Compared with Singapore, Hong Kong, London or Dubai, where English is an official language or the dominant language of business, Zug has a disadvantage: its authorities, courts and public schools operate in German. Chapter II examines how far this disadvantage has been reduced.

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Online version: helveticaregister.com/zug-the-economics-of-a-working-language