

The OWRI *Cross-Language Dynamics* programme is supporting the development of a new city narrative in Manchester, one that promotes the benefits of embracing and harnessing language diversity, and other cities around the world are taking note

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M A P P I N G M U L T I L I N G U A L M A N C H E S T E R

Multilingual Manchester's interactive exhibition on language diversity



In Manchester over 50 per cent of young people speak a language other than English in their homes; more than 200 languages are spoken by the city's residents; and more than 50 languages appear on signs in the city's public spaces.

The city also boasts what is probably one of the world's most comprehensive models of interpreting and translation in the health sector, where Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT) responds annually to some 50,000 interpreting requests in over 100 different languages.

According to the Manchester Investment and Development Agency MIDAS, language skills are among the top five factors that attract investors



Activity from *Multilingual Manchester*'s interactive exhibition on language diversity, inviting members of the public to contribute their language skills to a 'Language Map' of the city

to the city. The city council pledges to protect and celebrate diversity and says in its mission statement: 'Our diverse population with its vast array of languages and cultures is increasingly attractive to those businesses seeking to operate in the global marketplace.'

Public service diversity planning

Yet, still, practitioners in areas such as education and speech and language therapy often struggle to convey the value of bilingualism to clients, especially parents, but also to colleagues. And managers in key public services such as the police and the NHS are searching for good practice models to plan provisions that reach out to populations of various backgrounds.

Multilingual Manchester (MLM), which was established in 2009 at the University of Manchester and now forms the core of the Multilingual Communities strand of the *Cross-Language Dynamics* programme, is drawing on the example of Manchester to evidence how important it is to appreciate and to engage with languages in a global city.

Supporting public service strategies

To do this, MLM has developed an innovative model of co-production that brings together researchers, students and local stakeholders to create impact-led reports for councils, community-engaging events, and other outputs

such as videos and digital resources that the city can use to meet its diversity goals.

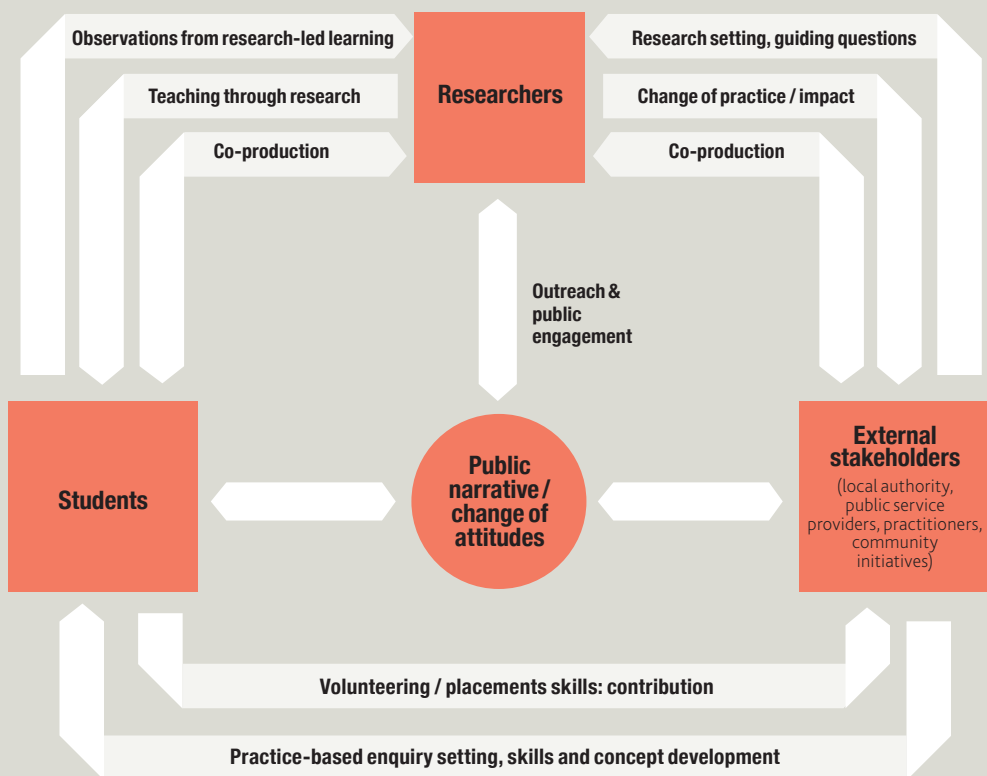
This includes the development of the world's largest online archive of reports on multilingualism in any city, and the largest online compilation of research authored by undergraduates. Students also engage directly with local stakeholders as part of a scheme that recruits over one hundred active volunteers every year for work in a variety of host institutions. Volunteers organise events and exhibitions, support English conversation sessions, run focus groups, and more.

Researchers also follow up on questions raised by external stakeholders, and contribute to shaping practice. 'This integrated agenda is part of an over-arching ethos of participatory research that is rooted in local action,' says Professor Yaron Matras, founder of *Multilingual Manchester* and leader of the *Cross-Language Dynamics'* Multilingual Communities strand. 'It's a virtuous circle for new research projects, where impact avenues are already in place and there are low-cost pathways to run pilot studies and to test ideas with potential partners.'

Creating city cohesion

By opening up collaboration opportunities with other partner institutions across OWRI and beyond, MLM is able to drive community initiatives that explore ways to motivate families to maintain

‘MLM has developed an innovative model of co-production that brings together stakeholders to create resources that the city can use to meet its diversity goals’



The *Multilingual Manchester* initiative has created a unique model combining cutting-edge research, innovative teaching and extensive engagement with external stakeholders and the general public. Other cities are now starting to replicate this model.

Pupils from Huaxia School, a Chinese supplementary school, performing at Levenshulme Language Day. Levenshulme Language Day is a family-friendly, community event to celebrate language diversity, organised by *Multilingual Manchester* in 2015 and again in 2017



‘In Manchester we have developed a city narrative that sees languages as a way of ensuring access to services, as the foundation of cultural heritage, and as a key resource of skills’

their heritage languages and support schools, cultural institutions such as museums, and the local authority to find ways to celebrate the city’s diversity and turn it into a proud emblem of the city’s cohesion.

One of MLM’s areas of activity is the development of new digital tools to capture language diversity. LinguaSnapp, the University of Manchester’s very first teaching and research app, was developed in 2015 as a way of engaging students and the general public in documenting images of multilingual signs and uploading them to an interactive map. Versions of the app have since been released for Melbourne, Jerusalem, St Petersburg and Hamburg, linking multilingual cities on an international scale.

‘MLM is setting an international standard on how to manage cultural and linguistic diversity, whilst simultaneously celebrating it’, says Professor Stephen Hutchings, Principal Investigator on

the *Cross-Language Dynamics* programme. ‘The vital UK-Russia collaboration is rebuilding trust between our peoples just as diplomatic relations have reached crisis point. It also reminds us that information technology is a force for good as well as a tool of warfare.’ Other aspects of the MLM research and public engagement model are being adopted in Singapore, Moscow, Graz, and Oxford.

Digital data tools for tracking diversity

Accompanying LinguaSnapp are several digital resources on community languages including Arabic, Kurdish and Romani, a repository of interactive educational tools and exhibits on the theme of language diversity, and a data archiving tool that brings together statistical information on languages from a variety of sources covering different sectors of the city such as the languages of school pupils, library holdings in different languages and their uptake, interpreting requests,

Activity from an arts project in a primary school delivered by Multilingual Manchester encouraged pupils to explore the city’s language diversity and learn more about the languages spoken by their classmates



and census data. The tool, still under development, was recently presented to the Office for National Statistics as a way of improving information on languages and is now being considered as a possible method to triangulate data on languages under the new Digital Economy Act.

'Our approach to language highlights its value for everyday activities in the context of local communities', says Professor Matras. 'We have

developed a city narrative that sees languages as a way of ensuring access to services, as the foundation of cultural heritage, and as a key resource of skills; it emphasises that everyone benefits from embracing and harnessing language diversity'.

Keep up to date on MLM projects at:
<http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk>

Stall run by a Polish supplementary school at Levenshulme Language Day, sharing simple phrases in Polish with visitors





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