



Call for a Multilingual Cities Movement

1. We are academics and practitioners committed to multilingualism. Shared language is vital to social life, but linguistic diversity also plays a central role, and both the individual and society are enriched by language skills. We call on colleagues as well as students, activists and officials to pool our energies and expertise, to ensure that multilingualism and linguistic diversity are properly valued, developed and understood.

Why do we need a Multilingual Cities Movement?

2. Cities are usually places where languages meet, and linguistic plurality and difference are treated as normal – expected, addressed, accepted and enjoyed. Across a range of media, at work, at home and in community life, people switch, mix and blend languages, in both routine and creative ways. But many states now promote linguistic sameness in an exclusionary way, and regard linguistic diversity with hostility and fear. This suspicion inhibits the development of individuals and undermines community.
3. In a number of places, especially but not exclusively in cities, productive collaborations have developed between universities and local government, communities and organisations, committed to understanding linguistic diversity and developing multilingualism as an enhancement for society. Our movement seeks to extend these collaborations, both in- and outside cities, in a broad alliance between projects and organisations which aim to build stronger and better social relationships through openness to the opportunities and challenges that linguistic diversity involves.

Our ideas about language and multilingualism



4. Depending on how we approach it, linguistic diversity can be a source of connection and enrichment, or insecurity, division and conflict. Our uses of language, our linguistic repertoires and our communicative relationships are complicated. They are closely tied to the different situations where we find ourselves, as well as to who we are, what we do, and what we want to be.
5. Language policies and explicit beliefs about language play a very important part in society, but they sometimes take only a narrow view of what communication involves, speak of 'deficit', and emphasise formal standards more than persuasiveness and 'voice'.
6. The study of language can clarify and illuminate our communicative relationships and situations. Through engagement and dialogue with the people most closely involved, linguistic study can contribute to a socially productive understanding of linguistic diversity and language use.

Linking academics and practitioners



7. Researchers from universities and institutes participating in our movement are not tied to any one theoretical tradition, but they are united in the view that academic analyses based on empirically grounded and theoretically informed research can contribute to our understanding of multilingual realities, opportunities and challenges.
8. Practitioners in a variety of sectors – education, health care, arts and cultural institutions, community organisations, and local government – often have long and rich histories engaging with linguistic diversity, developing its potential and addressing its challenges. Their interaction with academics can be mutually beneficial, informing agendas and influencing approaches to intervention, research and teaching, producing a more accurate, up-to-date and socially relevant understanding of the linguistic consequences of cultural and demographic change, tackling inequalities and supporting creativity and participation.
9. Our movement seeks to build productive and sustainable collaborations into the core university activities of teaching, learning and research. In doing so, we also recognise the vital contemporary knowledge of diversity that students often bring from outside, and the powerful role that students themselves can play developing the partnerships with organisations and groups beyond the academy.

Why 'Movement'?



10. There is no single model of how universities and non-academic bodies should collaborate to build positive and productive approaches to linguistic diversity. Different environments present different constraints and opportunities. But coming together under a common umbrella that is pluralistic and dynamic, individual initiatives can show that they are not isolated or eccentric, but part of much more general developments which provide strength and inspiration. Comparative discussion can also foster the exchange of ideas and experiences of what works, of what's challenging, how to overcome obstacles, and how to support cooperation across locations.
11. For these reasons, we are calling for the formation of a movement – a bottom-up, organic process of networking and collaboration based around a commitment to the principles outlined in this document, connecting academics and actors from a variety of sectors, in a variety of locations.

Next steps



12. This call offers a networking platform for initiatives based in and around universities that are committed to the principles of enquiry and public engagement that we have outlined. We invite such initiatives to add their name to this document, along with a link to their web page, with contact details and a description of their activities. We also invite contributions to a discussion forum, hosted by the [Multilingual Manchester blog](#); the forum is open to academics, students, practitioners and officials. We encourage those signing the document to develop links and joint activities in a variety of areas, and to continue to promote the vision set out in the document, sharing with others the ways in which they intend to do so.

22 May 2019

This statement follows on from a conference on [University Public Engagement with Urban Multilingualism](#) held in Manchester (20-22/2/19), where participants agreed on the value of a broader initiative connecting practical and academic work around multilingualism.

For further information, and to add your signature to the call, please contact mlm@manchester.ac.uk