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Strategies to strengthen European linguistic capital in a globalised world

Jai Mackenzie

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
UOC Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
universität freiburg
Oilthigh Ghlaschu
JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH
PH LUZERN PÄDAGOGISCHE HOCHSCHULE
UiO : Universitetet i Oslo
UNIVERSITÀ DI TORINO

MultiLX Working Papers

Paper 2

Language, culture and technology in EU Policy: Implications for MultiLX

Jai Mackenzie

A report examining European Union policy documentation as it relates to language, culture and technology.

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Executive summary

This report reviews European Union policy documents produced between 1992 and 2025, focusing on the treatment of language, culture, and digital technologies. The analysis finds that:

- **Language** is often framed in structural and instrumental terms, with linguistic diversity being both celebrated as a valuable asset for Europe's cohesion and competitiveness, but also a problem or barrier that requires regulation and management.

- **Culture** is presented as a collective and exportable resource that reinforces European identity and social inclusion, as well as contributing to the Union's economic power and global influence.

- **Digital technologies** are described as enablers of efficiency and inclusion, while also being recognised as potential threats to linguistic and cultural diversity.

Across the policy landscape, the relationship between language, culture, and technology is frequently constructed in transactional terms. Linguistic diversity and technological innovation are positioned as resources that have value for the strengthening of Europe's cultural capital, whilst all three domains are mobilised in service of European cohesion, progress, and competitiveness in a global market.

Such framings stand in contrast with scholarly insights that emphasise the fluid, situated, and multimodal ways in which people mobilise linguistic, cultural and technological resources in their everyday lives across Europe. This gap underlines the importance of developing more context-sensitive approaches to policy, which engage directly with European citizens' everyday multilingual and multimodal practices.

Overall, the following key implications can be drawn from the review:

- EU policy discourse tends to conceptualise language, culture, and technology (and the relationship between them) in instrumental, transactional terms;
- This framing contrasts with how European citizens actually mobilise these resources, in fluid and situated ways;
- To bridge this gap, we need research and policy strategies that include diverse European citizens and account for their everyday experiences;
- The MultiLX project exemplifies how such approaches can inform more inclusive and effective EU strategies for social cohesion, cultural vitality, and linguistic diversity.

1. Introduction

This review aims to contextualise the MultiLX project in relation to the European policy landscape it ultimately seeks to influence. More specifically, it offers a critical examination of how language, culture, and technology - three central domains in our work - are defined and mobilised in key European Union (EU) documentation over the past 30 years. In doing so, it explores the policy narratives, conceptual frameworks and strategic priorities that shape the EU's understanding of, and interventions in relation to, languages, cultures and digital technologies, with the aim of answering the following questions:

1. How are language, culture and technology defined in EU policy, and what values are attached to them?
2. What kinds of relationship between technology, language and culture are constructed in the documentation? and
3. What are the implications of these findings for MultiLX, as a project that explores cultural and digital practice within a sociolinguistic framework?

By engaging critically with EU policy documentation, the review seeks to clarify the conceptual terrain in which our work is situated, so that we might better engage with and communicate across relevant academic, governmental and community-based spaces. Further, the review will help us to identify some of the opportunities and constraints we might encounter as we seek to identify and implement creative and inclusive responses to linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe.

2. Policy context

The EU's policy landscape as it relates to language, culture and technology has undergone several shifts in recent decades. Documents from the late 1990s and early 2000s point to a sustained concern with linguistic diversity, particularly the protection and promotion of regional, minority and endangered languages. This emphasis can be seen in three key texts: the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992), the *European Strategy for Multilingualism* (2008), and the *Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* resolution (2013). These documents position linguistic heritage as an important part of European identity, and suggest that language diversity and multilingualism are vital resources for fostering social inclusion and mobility. These concerns are related to a broader focus on the protection of minority groups, which is the central aim of the 1995 *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.*

From 2018 onwards, issues relating to linguistic diversity and minority languages remain present as a policy concern, but they tend to be absorbed within the broader areas of culture, cultural relations and cultural heritage. This new emphasis is signalled most clearly in *A New European Agenda for Culture* (2018), which lays the groundwork for directed and expansive attention to cultural relations, cultural heritage, and creativity across the EU. Subsequently, the *Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026* (2022) established an extensive list of actions to support sustainable cultural exchange, access to cultural participation, artistic freedom and mobility. Attention to culture often intersects with discussions around creativity in these documents. Indeed, the *Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026* has

significant overlaps with the *Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027*, both in its time frame and its priorities. Several documents in the collection relate to the development, implementation and evaluation of these programmes, demonstrating the EU's significant organisational and financial investment in cultural and creative activities and initiatives.

Alongside the turn to culture and creativity, in the past two decades the EU has paid increased attention to the role of digital technologies for the future prosperity and security of the Union. This emphasis can be seen in documents that establish significant commitments to the harnessing of digital technologies, such as the *Digital Agenda for Europe* (2010), the regulation *Establishing the Digital Europe programme* (2021), and the resolution on *Language Equality in the Digital Age* (2018), which outline some of the perceived challenges and opportunities digital technologies present for linguistic diversity, cultural cohesion and economic prosperity. Across this documentation, digital technologies are framed as key drivers of innovation, access and participation. At the same time, they are seen to present new challenges, including risks of exclusion and the need for sustained investment to ensure everyone can benefit from technological developments.

The MultiLX project was conceived in response to the 2024 Horizon Europe call *Strategies to Strengthen the European Linguistic Capital in a Globalised World.* This call set out an ambitious agenda for safeguarding Europe's linguistic diversity in a context of rapid digital, economic, and sociocultural transformation. Framed in relation to a broader vision of sustainability, democratic participation and digital innovation, the call positions language as a core component of cultural heritage, individual identity, and social cohesion. It articulates an acute awareness of, and anxiety around, the pressures exerted by globalisation and digitalisation, and suggests that these forces may threaten Europe's linguistic capital. Several key assumptions underpin the call: that language is a carrier of cultural value; that digital advancements have a direct effect upon language and linguistic capital; and that interventions intended to strengthen European linguistic capital must be both strategic and value driven. These assumptions reflect the EU's broader understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity as foundational to European identity, and its emphasis on equitable access to digital and educational infrastructures. However, MultiLX presents challenges to some of these assumptions, most notably in its conceptualisation of language as situated practice, and its acknowledgement of the complex and co-constitutive relationship between language, culture and digital technologies. The present review works to thoroughly document and understand such tensions.

Table 1. The *language, culture and technology* collection

	Name	**Format**	**Year**	**Author**
1	European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages	Charter	1992	Council of Europe
2	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities	Treaty	1995	Council of Europe
3	European Strategy for Multilingualism	Resolution	2008	European Council
4	A Digital Agenda for Europe	Communication	2010	European Commission

5	Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity	Resolution	2013	European Parliament
6	Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations	Communication	2016	European Commission
7	A New European Agenda for Culture	Communication	2018	European Commission
8	Language Equality in the Digital Age	Resolution	2018	European Parliament
9	Proposal for a Regulation Establishing the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027	Proposal	2018	European Commission
10	Fighting Discrimination of EU Citizens Belonging to Minorities in the EU Member States	Resolution	2018	European Parliament
11	European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage	Working document	2019	European Commission
12	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages	Framework	2020	Council of Europe
13	Establishing the Digital Europe programme	Regulation	2021	European Parliament & Council of the European Union
14	The Importance of Plurilingual and Intercultural Education for Democratic Culture	Recommendation	2022	Council of Europe
15	Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026	Resolution	2022	European Council
16	Report on the Implementation of the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027	Report	2023	European Parliament
17	European Parliament Fact Sheet on Culture	Factsheet	2024	European Parliament
18	Strategies to Strengthen the European Linguistic Capital in a Globalised World	Call for bids	2024	Horizon
19	Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027	Explainer	2025	European Council
20	Call for Evidence: A Culture Compass for Europe	Call for evidence	2025	European Commission
21	European Parliament Fact Sheet on Language Policy	Factsheet	2025	European Parliament

For the purposes of this review, twenty-one EU documents were selected for analysis, including texts that attend to one or more of the core domains MultiLX is concerned with:

- Language (including multilingualism, linguistic diversity and regional and minority languages);
- Culture (including cultural heritage, cultural relations and their intersection with creativity);
- Digital technologies (including artificial intelligence, digital and social media, language technologies and the internet).

This collection includes two recent calls for research and evidence that demonstrate the EU's ongoing interest and investment in these domains: the aforementioned 2024 Horizon call, and also the 2025 *Call for Evidence: A Culture Compass for Europe*. The full list of documents, which is labelled the *language, culture and technology* collection, is presented in Table 1. This is a selective set of key documentation, rather than an exhaustive list. Further reviews of EU language policy can be found elsewhere, for example in the work of Krzyżanowski and Wodak (2010), Bahadir (2022) and Modiano (2022). The language, culture and technology collection was coded using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, with a focus on (a) how language and culture are defined, and (b) how the relationships between language, culture and technology (alongside related themes) are conceptualised. This approach facilitated a detailed examination of the relationship between language, culture and technology within key EU policy in the past three decades.

3. Key concepts and definitions

This section considers how the concepts of language, culture and technology, alongside related terms, are defined and mobilised in the *language, culture and technology* collection. In doing so, it clarifies the terms of reference that underpin the EU's engagement with these domains, which in turn will inform MultiLX's engagement with EU institutions and related bodies. Through analysis of these conceptualisations, the section identifies the key narratives that shape the EU's strategic interventions, highlighting central themes, points of tension, and notable omissions in the documentation.

3.1. Defining language

The *language, culture and technology* collection tends to define language in concrete and structural terms: as, variously, an asset, resource or barrier, an object to be preserved, or a system to be managed. These framings point to a policy discourse that, perhaps unsurprisingly, views language through a technocratic lens. In other words, the documentation primarily conceptualises language as a functional tool that is subject to measurement, regulation and optimisation within the administrative, economic and technological systems of the EU.

The most dominant representation is that of language as asset - a valuable competency or form of capital to be developed, preserved, or deployed. For example, the *European Parliament Fact Sheet on Language Policy* (2025) positions language learning primarily in service of economic mobility and labour market competitiveness, defining (foreign) language competence as 'one of the basic skills that

all EU citizens need to acquire in order to improve their educational and employment opportunities'. The attainment of multilingual competencies by European individuals is cemented in the EU's directive for all citizens to acquire two languages in addition to their mother tongue, which is referenced throughout the collection. The resolution on *Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* (2013) emphasises the value of minority languages specifically, framing them as assets 'both for their own community and Europe' and underlining the contribution they make to a broader European value system. This evaluation is echoed in strategic policy documents such as *Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations* (2016), which describes the EU's 'experience of diversity and pluralism' (including linguistic diversity) as a 'considerable asset' for promoting peace and development globally. These framings of language learning and linguistic diversity as European assets are consistent with Jaffe's (2012) observation that contemporary EU discourse often frames multilingual competencies as valuable resources for citizenship and participation in a global economy.

Across the *language, culture and technology* collection, the adoption of economic and financial discourse works to position linguistic diversity in terms of its utility and contribution - to social cohesion, to the European economy, and to Europe's political power. References to language or linguistic capital in the Horizon call *Strategies to Strengthen the European Linguistic Capital in a Globalised World* (2024) adopt an even more explicitly economic logic, positioning language as a form of human capital, with a value that is contingent upon measurable outputs such as job readiness, social cohesion, or digital participation.

Language is also described as a barrier, especially in discussions of social cohesion, digital transition and integration, where linguistic diversity is often presented as an obstacle to be surmounted. *Language Equality in the Digital Age* (2018), for example, warns that 'language barriers have a considerable impact on the construction of the European identity and the future of the European integration process'. This statement reveals anxieties around fragmentation and miscommunication, and implies that diversity, whilst ostensibly celebrated, may also pose challenges to unity. The framing of language (specifically, multilingualism) as something to be managed further positions linguistic diversity as a problem to be solved: a phenomenon requiring regulation, infrastructure and optimisation. This managerial orientation can be seen in the later claim, from the same document, that 'additional means and tools, especially those provided by language technologies, are key to managing European multilingualism properly'.

Relatedly, language is often treated as an object - something static, tangible and preservable. For example, the *European Parliament Fact Sheet on Language Policy* (2025), citing the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, describes the EU's responsibility to promote 'the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States'. Reference to the process of 'dissemination' suggests languages can be transported as fixed, discrete systems with defined boundaries. This view is also evident in *Language Equality in the Digital Age* (2018), where the call for member states to 'solidify their native languages' suggests languages can be fixed or contained, in this case as a response to perceived decline or threat. Similarly, the framing of language as finite resource, as seen in the same document's concern with the 'general depletion of language', implies that languages can be 'used up', echoing broader concerns around the 'extinction' of minority languages.

The *language, culture and technology* collection's framing of language as object contrasts sharply with the turn towards translanguaging in language and education studies, and subsequent emphasis on linguistic repertoires (Busch 2012; Creese and Blackledge 2010, 2015; García and Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al. 2015; Wei 2018). The concept of repertoires has facilitated exploration of the plural, flexible and context-specific nature of social and communicative practices both within and beyond Europe. Although there are occasions where the fluidity of individuals' languaging practices *are* acknowledged in the collection (for example in the 2020 *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*), the dominant conceptualisation of languages as discrete entities or static objects, together with strategic concerns with the 'management' of languages, signals the EU's concern with language as it exists in beliefs rather than in practice (cf. Spolsky 2022).

Alongside the instrumental framings of language as asset, barrier or object, documents in the collection also define language in terms of legal and civic rights, especially in relation to speakers of minority languages. Several texts, for example, emphasise the need to ensure that speakers of minority languages are not disadvantaged when accessing media, public services, or formal processes such as courts or government communication. Such protections have historical precedent in the peace treaties following the First World War, which established the principle of minority and linguistic rights across private and public domains (Sharoka 2012; Spolsky 2022). As a case in point, the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1995) states that minority language speakers should be able to 'receive and impart information and ideas in the minority language' without interference. It also stresses that people belonging to a national minority have the right to use their language 'freely and without interference… in private and in public, orally and in writing'.

The *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992), a key document in the area of language rights, outlines the nature of minority language speakers' rights in specific terms. For example, it requires that speakers be allowed to use their languages in court 'without thereby incurring additional expense', and that public services should accommodate regional or minority languages in their operations and communications. Such commitments are reiterated in resolutions such as *Endangered Languages and Linguistic Diversity* (2013) and *Fighting Discrimination of EU Citizens Belonging to Minorities in the EU Member States* (2018). Each of these resolutions underline member states' responsibility to uphold their citizens' linguistic rights, including the right to use minority languages, especially in multilingual regions. These rights-based approaches to conceptualising language and communication are underpinned by a broader framing of linguistic diversity as a collective good, which can be seen across the collection.

Despite their commitment to protecting speakers of minority languages, the EU's policies in this regard have significant limitations. For example, the 1992 charter's ambitions have been realised unevenly, with many scholars pointing out that clauses like 'as far as possible' allow states to choose the lowest level of obligation (Gorter and Cenoz 2012; Jánk 2025; Spolsky 2022). Further, in terms of EU governance, the emphasis on state official languages renders the concern with regional and minority languages superficial at times (Spolsky 2022). It has also been argued that, despite their strict emphasis on protecting and promoting both 'official' and 'regional' EU languages, English has continued to rise as the dominant second language and lingua franca of Europe, and the EU have continued to fund schemes that 'support English at the expense of all other indigenous European languages', such as

Erasmus+ (Modiano 2022: 249). Additionally, as Sharoka (2012) explains, there is a lack of a clear definition around the term 'minority', which complicates the implementation and enforcement of rights for minority groups. This ambiguity is further compounded by the ongoing debate on whether minority rights should be considered as collective or individual rights (see Sharoka 2012), with significant implications for how these rights are recognised and protected within the EU framework.

A particularly significant limitation of policies that relate to linguistic and other minorities, where the aims and scope of MultiLX are concerned, lies in the exclusion of migrants and non-historic minorities. The 1992 *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, for example, explicitly excludes 'dialects… or the languages of migrants' from its protections. Such policies reinforce the idea that only some languages are legitimate within the nation-state, thereby excluding the linguistic resources of transnational migrants and perpetuating social division and discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity and/or nationality (see Sung-Yul Park and Wee 2024). Such exclusions run counter to the EU's goals around social cohesion and equality.

Overall, it seems that EU discourse on language is caught in a tension: between celebrating multilingualism and linguistic diversity and managing it, between treating language as resource and a liability, and between protecting minorities versus fearing fragmentation or demise. These perspectives on language are not unique to the *language, culture and technology* collection. Similar tensions, for example, have been identified in Cooke and Simpson's (2012) exploration of UK discourses about linguistic diversity. Further, scholarly work with 'new speakers' of minority languages has pointed to some of the tensions speakers themselves can experience as they navigate large-scale social shifts, from assimilation and colonisation to reclamation and protection, alongside complex local and personal histories and group dynamics (e.g. Lane 2010, 2023; O'Rourke and Nandi 2019; O'Rourke and Walsh 2020). As MultiLX engages with young Europeans' linguistic, digital and creative practices, this work reminds us of the nuanced interplay between EU policy narratives at the macro-level, and the language policies and practices of individuals, families and communities at the micro-level. EU policies have the power to shape the terms through which linguistic diversity is made visible or invisible, valued or neglected in local contexts, but we are also mindful of individuals' agency as they enact, interpret and negotiate local language policies and practices.

3.2. Defining Culture

Culture, like language, is generally conceptualised in concrete, structural terms throughout the *language, culture and technology* collection. Like language, it is typically presented as a resource to be promoted, safeguarded or mobilised; as a symbol of European identity, and as an asset for economic growth, social cohesion, and global influence. Culture is often discussed in tandem with the related concepts of 'cultural heritage' and 'creativity', and these domains are often not sharply distinguished. The phrase 'culture and creativity', for example, is a frequent collocation, suggesting that these areas are treated as complementary and overlapping.

Precise definitions of culture, cultural heritage and creativity are rare across the collection. The *Proposal for a Regulation Establishing the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027* (2018) does define the 'cultural and creative sectors', however, suggesting that they include 'all sectors whose activities

are based on cultural values or artistic and other individual or collective creative expressions'. This definition encompasses both the production of cultural goods and services and associated functions such as education or management, with an emphasis on their potential for innovation and job creation. The Horizon call *Strategies to Strengthen the European Linguistic Capital in a Globalised World* (2024), further, lists some of the domains encompassed by European culture as 'monuments and sites, traditions, crafts, arts, architecture, literature, languages, theatre, films, games and music'. This list is consistent with reference across the collection to audiovisual media (e.g. film, television and video games), performing arts, music, architecture, literature, museums, libraries, archives, festivals, and design. Domains of 'high' or 'traditional' arts and culture, such as music, architecture, literature and museums, are prevalent in the collection. The inclusion of contemporary and commercial industries such as film, video games, fashion and sports indicates an openness to broader definitions of cultural and creative production, though primarily in areas with strong economic value or potential for the EU as a whole.

In parallel with language, culture is often framed as a resource or entity to be 'safeguarded, enhanced, and promoted' (*European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage*, 2019). Such orientations are related to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union, which states that the Union 'shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced'. Similarly, cultural diversity is often described as an asset. The *Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026* (2022), for example, identifies 'cultural and linguistic diversity' as 'fundamental assets of the EU', while the Horizon 2024 call refers to Europe's 'creative diversity of traditions…' as 'a unique asset'. Culture is also characterised in terms of its untapped potential, with calls to 'harnes[s] the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and well-being' appearing in both the *Proposal for a Regulation Establishing the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027* (2018) and *A New European Agenda for Culture* (2018). The *Call for Evidence: A Culture Compass for Europe* (2025), similarly, describes the need for an 'overarching strategic framework to guide and harness the multiple dimensions of culture'. These conceptualisations suggest that culture and cultural diversity are discrete entities to be manipulated and managed for the greater good of the EU and its strategic objectives.

Whilst references to culture often invoke terms such as 'diversity' and 'pluralism' across the collection, European culture is often, conversely, conceptualised as a singular, monolithic entity. This unifying discourse, which is closely tied to EU objectives around inclusion and social cohesion, is perhaps most evident through singular formulations such as 'European culture', 'European history' and 'European heritage'. The *European Parliament Fact Sheet on Culture* (2024), for example, references the EU's responsibility to contribute to 'the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and bringing *the common cultural heritage* to the fore' (my emphasis). Similarly, the *Report on the Implementation of the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027* (2023) describes the promotion of sites with symbolic significance 'in the history and culture of Europe'. Cultural symbols feature prominently as tangible representations of this shared European culture. The European Heritage Label, for example, is frequently cited as an emblematic initiative that enhances the visibility of cultural sites and achievements, symbolises the EU's investment in its cultural narrative, and reinforces cultural heritage as a pillar of European integration and identity.

Across the *language, culture and technology* collection, culture is conceptualised as a source of identity, economic strength, social cohesion, and international influence. References to a common European cultural heritage, to symbolic sites and awards, and to the need to harness cultural power, point to an ongoing tension between celebrating plurality and consolidating a shared European cultural narrative. Above all, the documentation positions culture as a key resource to be harnessed in the construction of a united yet richly diverse European Union.

3.3. Defining digital technologies

Digitalisation is framed as a fundamental and strategic dimension of Europe's social, cultural and economic future across the collection. Digitalisation, in this context, refers to the increasing integration of digital technologies in all areas of life, including the transition from paper to online services in public administration, the use of the internet and mobile apps for commerce and communication, and the automation of industrial processes through use of digital tools. It encompasses both digital infrastructures (such as broadband networks) and digital systems, platforms and applications that support everyday activities across sectors (such as eHealth systems and digital learning environments). Whilst the EU's priorities, alongside technological advancements, are seen to shift across the period covered by the collection, some goals remain consistent. For example, digital interoperability is positioned as central to effective operations across Europe, the aim being that different digital systems and devices will work together seamlessly across platforms and national borders. Only when we have interoperable products and services that function effectively across member states, it is suggested in *A Digital Agenda for Europe* (2010), can we 'build a truly digital society'.

Two documents are particularly valuable for understanding the EU's conceptualisation of digital technologies and their potential applications. First, the 2010 communication *A Digital Agenda for Europe* sought greater commitment to and investment in digital technologies, networks and solutions at a pivotal moment in their global development and uptake. In the years leading up to 2010, personal computers, mobile phones and broadband internet had become widely accessible, and many public and private services, from banking to education, were increasingly moving online. In response, the *Digital Agenda* identified a pressing need for Europe to modernise its single market and digital infrastructure in order to compete globally and deliver better outcomes for its citizens. It also underlined the importance of universal access to the internet - through broadband infrastructure, mobile connectivity, and digital devices such as smartphones, tablets and personal computers. Over a decade later, the 2021 regulation *Establishing the Digital Europe Programme* committed more concrete actions and substantial funding to support ambitious EU digital transformation projects. This document also responds to recent technological trends, focusing on the development of digital capacity in areas such as high-performance computing (HPC), artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, big data, and cybersecurity.

Despite the shift in focus from infrastructure and access (2010) to capacity-building and frontier technologies (2021), some concerns cut across both periods. These include upskilling Europe's population, promoting digital access and inclusion, and protecting citizens' privacy, security and rights in the digital realm. *A Digital Agenda for Europe* (2010), for example, notes that 'people's enjoyment of digital technologies… is marred by privacy and security concerns' and emphasises the need to

address cybercrime, improve consumer protection in digital markets, and make digital rights more accessible and comprehensible. Similarly, the 2021 regulation states that 'Europe's cybersecurity capacity should be reinforced' to protect citizens and institutions, and that AI-based products and services should 'comply with the law by default', ensure consumer choice, and uphold 'data protection… digital rights, fundamental rights and ethical standards'. Both documents tend to focus on systems and frameworks rather than specific hardware, emphasising the infrastructural, organisational and regulatory components of the contemporary digital landscape. These include Europe-wide broadband policies, cross-border data governance mechanisms, digital skills training programmes, and harmonised rules for AI and cybersecurity, all of which are presented as supporting the operationalisation of a digitally integrated Europe.

A core ambition across EU digital policy is the development of a 'digital single market' grounded in fast and reliable internet connectivity, open-source and interoperable technologies, and a digitally skilled population. *A Digital Agenda for Europe* (2010), for example, sets out the aim 'to deliver sustainable economic and social benefits from a digital single market based on fast and ultra-fast internet and interoperable applications'. The text presents digital transformation as essential for Europe's ability to 'work smarter' in response to demographic change and global competition. It calls for urgent action to 'get Europe on track for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' and to prepare for 'longer-term transformations that the increasingly digital economy and society will bring about'. *Establishing the Digital Europe Programme* (2021), similarly, conveys a sense of urgency around 'improv[ing] the competitiveness of Europe' in a global digital economy. A sense of anxiety that Europe is lagging behind its global competitors pervades both documents.

In summary, in the *language, culture and technology* collection digital technologies are presented as systems and structures that will enable cooperation, growth, inclusion and innovation across Europe. Their development and deployment are framed as critical to Europe's future competitiveness, sustainability and cohesion. Key 2010 and 2021 documents, in particular, articulate a vision of a digitally empowered society—one in which high-speed infrastructure, advanced computing capacities, skilled citizens and robust rights frameworks underpin economic growth, inclusive participation and productivity.

4. Intersections of language, culture and technology in EU policy

The *language, culture and technology* collection conceptualises its three domains as interrelated, with cross-cutting social, economic and symbolic implications for the Union. Over thirty years of strategic documentation, these domains are connected in various ways: language is conceptualised a vehicle for culture; culture is framed as an economic and diplomatic asset; and technology is imagined as both a conduit for and a disruptor of these connections. Overall, the relationship between language, culture and technology is conceptually dynamic, and different emphases are mobilised for a range of (sometimes conflicting) political and strategic ends.

4.1. Language and culture in EU policy discourse

Throughout the collection, language and culture are often written about as inseparable components of a shared European identity. The collocation ‘cultural and linguistic diversity’ (sometimes ‘linguistic and cultural diversity’), for example, is frequently used in formulaic terms as an indicator of the EU’s rich and distinctive identity. As a case in point, the 2022 *Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026* defines its purpose as respecting and enhancing ‘cultural and linguistic diversity’ while also promoting ‘cohesion and a sense of belonging’. The *Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* (2013) resolution, similarly, refers to Europe’s ‘linguistic and cultural richness’ and ‘linguistic and cultural heritage’, whilst the *European Strategy for Multilingualism* (2008) and *The Importance of Plurilingual and Intercultural Education for Democratic Culture* (2022) refer to ‘language and culture education options’ and ‘linguistic cultural resources’, respectively. This persistent collocation implies that language and culture are unified domains that are particularly relevant to the protection of minority communities, the promotion of democratic values, and the shaping of European identity.

A key expression of this relationship imagines language as a vessel or vehicle for cultural knowledges, practices, and identities. These metaphors are frequently applied to regional, minority, or endangered languages, which are presented as carriers of Europe’s intangible heritage. For example, the 2013 resolution on *Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* suggests that ‘language [is] a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage’. This metaphor resurfaces in the Horizon 2024 call, which claims that ‘European languages are vehicles of our identity, behaviour and cultural perception’. A second metaphor is the bridge, which conceptualises language as a conduit for cultural connection, access and understanding. For example, the 2025 *European Parliament Fact Sheet on Language Policy* describes multilingualism as ‘a bridge to other cultures’. Beyond the imagery of vehicles and bridges, language is also frequently described as a mirror or record of cultural traditions, ways of life, and histories. This conceptualisation is evident in the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992), which commits Parties to making provision for ‘regional or minority languages and the cultures they reflect’. The 2013 resolution on *Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity*, similarly, asserts that ‘all languages, including those which are endangered, reflect historical, social and cultural knowledge and skills’. Relatedly, languages are often conceptualised as a vehicle for, or reflection of, identity, as in the Horizon 2024 statement that ‘research should address tensions between globalisation and the preservation of European identities as expressed by languages’.

The notion that identities, cultures and communities are expressed, reflected or contained in language is often used to cement arguments for safeguarding languages. The logic follows that, in order to preserve and protect cultures and identities, Europe must preserve and protect the languages that contain or reflect them. For example, the statement ‘the survival of an endangered language is tantamount to the survival and development of the community’, from *Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* (2013), equates the loss of language with the loss of the people and practices associated with it. The Horizon 2024 call makes a similar argument when it warns that culture may become less strong or pure - that is, ‘diluted’, if Europe’s languages are not protected: ‘protecting Europe’s linguistic capital is essential to avoid cultural dilution, to strengthen European identity, culture and creativity and to promote mutual understanding and social inclusion’. Similar

arguments can be found in academic discourse, especially that which is concerned with language endangerment. For example, many linguists have explained their alarm around the loss of languages 'with an appeal to the value of linguistic diversity, either as related to biodiversity or to the world's cultural heritage' (Spolsky 2022: 109).

In recent years, however, many scholars have questioned the tendency to assume a straightforward connection between language and culture, and in turn to equate language loss with cultural loss. Mufwene (2005: 41), for example, cautions against simplistic or romanticised assumptions around the interdependence of the two domains, invoking Sapir's claim that 'language and culture are not wedded like two sides of a coin'. Relatedly, O'Rourke et al. (2015: 11) have cautioned against a 'salvage linguistics' that seeks to 'preserve indigenous cultures and languages and… reconstruct an earlier moment in history (Bucholz 2003: 400)'. Such a perspective, as O'Rourke et al. (2015) explain, does not account for the complex realities of language revival and preservation, whereby members of emerging language communities may have mixed and plural identities that do not directly correlate with indigenous or traditional cultures and communities.

Alongside metaphors of containment and reflection, documents in the EU *language, culture and technology* collection often suggest that knowledge of languages directly correlates with understanding and respect for cultures, thereby linking the EU's goals around multilingualism and language preservation with the aims of promoting social cohesion, integration and the protection of minority groups. For example, *The Importance of Plurilingual and Intercultural Education for Democratic Culture* (2022) asserts that 'quality language education plays a crucial role in developing the will and ability of individuals and societies to understand those whose backgrounds and views are different from their own'. The *European Strategy for Multilingualism* (2008), similarly, argues that 'foreign language skills… help to foster mutual understanding between peoples', whilst the 2013 resolution on *Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* asserts that 'respect for linguistic diversity makes a positive contribution to social cohesion by boosting mutual understanding, self-esteem and open-mindedness'. This argument points to a chain of association whereby learning or respecting languages is seen to instil open-mindedness, improve understanding about associated cultures, and by extension, lead to more harmonious and integrated societies.

Such connections between language, culture, understanding and respect are also invoked in discourse around 'intercultural dialogue'. This phrase is well established in EU discourse that focuses on peaceful relations between different groups; the 1995 *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities,* for example, asked Parties to 'encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation'. The EU's ambitions for intercultural dialogue have only grown in the intervening years. The 2016 communication *Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*, for example, states that 'Culture, and in particular inter-cultural dialogue, can contribute to addressing major global challenges - such as conflict prevention and resolution, integrating refugees, countering violent extremism, and protecting cultural heritage'. The same document claims that 'inter-cultural dialogue… can help promote the building of fair, peaceful and inclusive societies that value cultural diversity and respect for human rights'. These sentiments around mutual understanding, international peace and human rights are echoed in the *Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2027* (2022). The benefits

of linguistic diversity and language learning are also presented in terms of enabling citizens to understand and express themselves as individuals. For example, *Language Equality in the Digital Age* (2018) states that 'speakers of lesser-spoken European languages need to be able to express themselves in culturally meaningful ways and to create their own cultural content in local languages'. Taken together, statements around culturally meaningful dialogue and self-expression present language as both a medium of peaceful and equitable interpersonal connection and a tool for personal expression, reinforcing the broader argument that languages, linguistic diversity and multilingualism are central to social cohesion, identity, and democratic life in Europe.

Overall, the *language, culture and technology* collection presents a strong link between language and culture. Persistent depictions of language as a vessel for, bridge to, mirror or expression of culture contribute to an overarching ideology in which linguistic diversity is seen as synonymous with cultural vitality. While these representations serve important political and social functions, particularly in the promotion of cohesion, identity and rights, the documentation fails to account for the complex and nuanced relationship between language and culture, and the ways in which they change and shift over time. The transactional framings of this relationship have significant implications for the EU's policy and interventions around language, cultural diversity, identity and social inclusion, which is in danger of flattening nuanced social realities, overlooking the complexity and multimodality of everyday languaging practices, and over-simplifying the connections between language, culture and identity.

4.2. Technologies and translations as mediators of language and culture

Technology is frequently framed in the *language, culture and technology* collection as a solution to the 'problems' posed by linguistic and cultural diversity. In *Language Equality in the Digital Age* (2018), for example, Human Language Technologies (HLTs) are heralded as vital tools for resolving issues of linguistic fragmentation in the digital single market, with the claim that 'deep-learning neural networks and large language models make language technologies a real solution to the problem of language barriers'. The same document highlights the potential of HLTs for promoting inclusivity, particularly for linguistic minorities and people with disabilities, and supporting the preservation of endangered languages. The Horizon 2024 call extends this claim further, suggesting that language technologies can 'strengthen European identity', foster 'mutual understanding', and facilitate 'access to culture'. Such technological solutionism tends to position digital technologies as inherently progressive, efficient and neutral tools that are essential for facilitating social cohesion and addressing the 'challenges' associated with linguistic and cultural diversity.

Despite the optimism surrounding technological innovation, an undercurrent of anxiety pervades the collection. For example, several documents voice concerns about the cultural and linguistic effects of digitalisation. *Language Equality in the Digital Age* (2018) laments perceived effects on youth literacy, claiming that 'digital communication is eroding young adults' literacy skills', leading to 'grammar and literacy barriers between generations'. This anxiety is reiterated in the Horizon 2024 call, which warns that the rapid pace of digital development is 'disregarding language's rules and underestimating humanistic education'. Such concerns echo long-standing moral panics around linguistic decline (Cameron 1995), which rest on assumptions around a normative linguistic standard (presumably linked

to national or European heritage) that is being undermined by new, informal digital modes of communication (also see Tagg 2015, Thurlow 2006).

More recently, EU policy documents relating to culture and digital technology have expressed concern around the nature of artistic production in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), often pointing to the duality of AI as both a driver of and a threat to human creativity. The *Call for Evidence: A Culture Compass for Europe* (2025), for example, calls for a 'human-centric and transparent use of AI in the artistic and creative process', reflecting unease about the potential automation of cultural labour. Such tensions between innovation and authenticity suggest deeper anxieties about what counts as 'real' cultural expression - and whether technological mediation diminishes the distinctly human qualities of language and creative production. These concerns about the authenticity of AI-mediated creativity reflect a broader tendency in EU cultural policy to frame culture in relation to its capacity for circulation, exchange and economic return.

Within the *language, culture and technology* collection, access to 'culture' is framed as desirable, but often only insofar as it can be efficiently translated, transacted, and monetised. These ambitions are clearest in the focus on translation, which is consistently framed as a central mechanism for the circulation of cultural goods and linguistic content. As the *European Strategy for Multilingualism* (2008) puts it, translation 'plays a special role… on account of the links it establishes between languages and cultures and the broad access it provides to work and ideas'. The same document praises key Creative Europe initiatives for 'promoting authors across borders and contributing to a more culturally and linguistically diverse Europe'. This emphasis on the translation of creative content makes tangible the links between language, culture and diversity. In this sense, translation is framed as a key mechanism through which linguistic diversity is rendered visible, functional, and marketable within the EU. Culture, in turn, is positioned as a portable good – something that can be extracted, translated, and delivered across borders.

Examinations of translation and digital technologies also intersect in significant ways across the collection. Machine translation tools, for example, are described as essential for the functionality, accessibility and competitiveness of the multilingual internet. As part of these discussions, some documents acknowledge that machine translation is not ideologically neutral: many systems are trained on dominant language corpora and risk reinforcing existing linguistic hierarchies, biases and inequalities. *Language Equality in the Digital Age* (2018), for example, stresses that the lack of data and resources for lesser-used languages may lead to further marginalisation in the digital sphere. Despite the ambition to use AI and HLTs as a way of democratising access to language and culture, then, key documents do acknowledge some of the nuances around their production and use, including the ways in which they can reproduce structural inequalities. Nevertheless, the documents tend not to elaborate the full scope of potential digital inequalities; for example, there is no reference to the well-documented production of hate discourses and xenophobia on digital platforms, which includes the spread of panic, anxiety, and insecurity around multilingualism and multiculturalism (see Leppänen and Sultana 2024).

This section has highlighted the EU's often ambivalent positioning of the relationship between language, culture and technology as domains that can at once contain, reflect, limit and damage one another. Such tensions are perhaps not surprising in the context of competing policy imperatives: to

preserve linguistic and cultural diversity while promoting integration; to foster innovation while safeguarding heritage; and to expand access while advancing economic competitiveness. The *language, culture and technology* collection often seeks to address such tensions through new initiatives and interventions, such as the Horizon 2024 call that underpins the MultiLX project. The final section will consider our place within this policy landscape, discussing how MultiLX might engage with, challenge and reimagine the EU's conceptualisations of language, culture and technology, as well as outlining some of the challenges we might face in engaging with the political domain alongside other institutional and community-based contexts.

5. Summary and Implications for MultiLX

Through exploration of the ways in which language, culture and technology are defined and mobilised in EU documentation over the past 30 years, this review has revealed a dynamic and, at times, disjointed set of relationships. Language is often framed in structural and instrumental terms, culture as both a value system and exportable good, and technology as a driver of efficiency and inclusion, but also a threat to linguistic and cultural diversity. The relationships between these domains are often constructed in transactional terms, with linguistic diversity and technological innovation positioned in service of Europe's cultural capital, and all three in service of European cohesion, progress and competitiveness in a global market. For the MultiLX project, the implications of these findings are both affirming and provocative. We have taken seriously the complexity of contemporary linguistic life in Europe, responding with a collaborative, interdisciplinary framework that is rooted in ethnographic, creative, and participatory methodologies. This review highlights some of the political, methodological, and epistemological tensions that we are navigating as we progress with these ambitious plans.

One of the most significant challenges for MultiLX lies in the translation of ethnographic and creative findings into outputs and communications that are relevant and accessible to EU officials. Currently dominant conceptualisations of language, culture and technology (and the relationship between them) offer both opportunities and constraints in this respect. The EU's multilingual agenda, whilst rhetorically inclusive, remains tethered to national and institutional languages, and often reduces linguistic and cultural diversity to questions of integration and economic prosperity. MultiLX offers an alternative vision, conceptualising multilingualism and linguistic diversity not as discrete issues to be managed, but as complex and contextually situated social practices whose nuances are best understood at the local level. From this perspective, issues of integration and social cohesion must be understood as multi-directional, transformative process rather than unidirectional routes to assimilation. As we move forward, we are mindful of the challenges around communicating such complexities in policy spaces that prioritise quantifiable outcomes and standardised categories.

Documents in the *language, culture and technology* collection tend to adopt a top-down perspective, compartmentalising and instrumentalising linguistic, cultural and technological resources in relation to the EU's key priorities. By contrast, MultiLX works from the bottom up, seeking rich understanding of the complexity, nuance and range of young people's linguistic, creative and multimodal practices, and in turn, how *they* can be better served by the EU. This disparity presents both risks and a space for progress. Our findings may not easily map onto policy categories that assume fixed identities, discrete languages, or instrumental rationales. Yet by resisting such simplifications, there are opportunities for MultiLX to join conversations and make meaningful interventions in relation to EU policy, expanding discussions around what counts as linguistic capital, whose capital is valued, and how that capital intersects with a wide range of semiotic and cultural resources. Such interventions are particularly urgent for minoritised communities, including speakers of regional, endangered, and migrant languages. As this review has shown, these communities are often sidelined in official discourse, or instrumentalised as objects of preservation rather than valued for their unique experiences, knowledge, and cultural agency.

MultiLX's methodological emphasis on co-production and creativity repositions young members of minority groups as expert producers of knowledge and cultural practice. Whilst creativity in the *language, culture and technology* collection is primarily conceptualised as a service to Europe's economic and cultural capital, we suggest it will likely serve very different purposes in young Europeans' everyday lives, for example as an opportunity for play, a site of community engagement or a mode of resistance and reclamation. By investing in arts-based research, collaborations and outputs, MultiLX acknowledges the multimodal and affective dimensions of communication that are often invisible within the instrumentalist discourses of EU policy. The ethnographic, participatory and arts-based methods we favour will not only document the diversity of young Europeans' practices, but actively facilitate them as part of a collaborative, distributed process. Our collaborators and partners, many of whom are embedded in their communities, are understood as co-creators, who will play a key role in shaping the ways in which their practices are interpreted and mobilised. The project's ethnographic orientation ensures that the young people at the heart of our investigations are not abstracted to limiting categories but treated as individuals who are embedded in complex and specific social, cultural, and linguistic contexts.

This review confirms that the MultiLX team's approach is both timely and necessary. By producing evidence grounded in collaborative exploration of young people's creative, digital and linguistic practices, we can contribute to the development of realistic, inclusive and culturally responsive policies around multilingualism, digital culture, and youth engagement in Europe. Of course, as well as targeting institutional change, we are also mindful of our own internal policies and practices around language use, digital communication and cultural engagement, grappling with questions such as 'are we providing equitable opportunities for collaboration across all project languages and contexts?' 'Are our digital infrastructures accessible and inclusive?' And 'are we creating space for full analyses and acknowledgements of multilingual and artistic contributions?' Such questions draw attention to the alignment between our methodological commitments, epistemological orientations and operational practices. As we move forward, our commitment to reflection and reflexivity will support us as we resist pressures to simplify or generalise at the expense of lived complexity, and remain steadfast in our commitment to research that is collaborative, contextually grounded, and transformative.

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