MINORITY LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN EUROPE

POLICY PAPERS 02/2026

ISBN 978-83-68760-15-6
Published and edited by
Instytut Europy Środkowej | Institute of Central Europe
ul. Niecała 5
20-080 Lublin, Poland
www.ies.lublin.pl
Cover design and typesetting Amadeusz Targoński
Print www.drukarniaakapit.pl

MINORITY LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN EUROPE

Edited by **Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik**

Instytut Europy Środkowej
Institute of Central Europe

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN PRACTICE: EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND MODELS FOR NATIONAL MINORITIES IN SLOVENIA

Lara Sorgo

Executive summary

- The effectiveness of minority language education depends on its integration into everyday social, institutional, and territorial contexts, supported by a stronger presence in the media, public services, and cultural life beyond formal schooling. While Slovenia's constitutional and legal framework for the protection of national minorities provides a strong normative foundation, educational outcomes increasingly depend on how minority languages function beyond formal schooling, how they are taught in majority-language environments, and how institutions respond to growing sociolinguistic diversity.
- Improving outcomes requires pedagogical reforms in majority-language schools, including more communicative and differentiated teaching approaches, enhanced focus on productive skills, and sustained investment in teacher training and adaptable learning materials.
- A strategic shift is needed from a rights-based to a practice-oriented policy model, supported by cross-border cooperation and systematic monitoring, thereby

positioning minority language education as a key investment in social cohesion and cultural diversity.

Introduction: Why minority language education matters

Slovenia is recognised internationally for its advanced constitutional protection of national minorities, particularly the Italian and Hungarian communities. Education in minority languages constitutes a core element of this protection and represents one of the most institutionalised bilingual education systems in Europe. Through two long-standing models – the so-called "Littoral" model on the Slovene coast and the bilingual model in the Prekmurje region – Slovenia has embedded the study of minority languages across all levels of compulsory schooling and ensured formal continuity of minority language instruction.

Despite this strong legal and institutional framework, empirical evidence demonstrates that minority language education faces significant challenges with implementation. These include persistent asymmetries in language competence between minority and majority pupils, declining motivation to use minority languages outside school, increasing linguistic heterogeneity in classrooms, and limited societal reinforcement of bilingualism. Italian, in particular, remains strong within minority schools but comparatively fragile in majority school settings, where it is often perceived primarily as an economic skill rather than as a language of social belonging and everyday interaction. At the same time, emerging trends – such as cross-border enrolment in bilingual schools and a growing recognition of multilingualism as a societal resource – clearly demonstrate the adaptability of Slovenia's education system. These developments indicate that minority language education has the potential to evolve beyond protection into a broader strategy of multilingual inclusion, social cohesion, and intercultural competence.

This policy paper argues that minority language education must be understood not only as a minority right but also

as a strategic public investment. It analyses the existing minority education models in Slovenia and identifies structural gaps between policy design and educational practice. Finally, it outlines policy directions aimed at strengthening implementation, improving learning outcomes, and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Legal and policy framework

Slovenia's minority protection system is grounded in two interrelated guiding principles: ethnic autochthony and territoriality. Together, these principles ensure that the Italian and Hungarian national communities enjoy special rights regardless of their numerical size, while at the same time anchoring those rights to historically established settlement areas. This normative framework has important implications for education because it frames minority language education not as a temporary or compensatory measure, nor as a form of cultural accommodation, but as a permanent component of the public education system.

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, in article 64 (*Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia*, 1991, Art. 64), guarantees members of both national communities the right to use their language in private and public life, to establish educational institutions, and to receive education in their mother tongue. This constitutional framework is elaborated through sectoral legislation regulating primary education[1], secondary education[2], and vocational education[3], as well as through a dedicated act defining the special rights of members of both the Italian and Hungarian communities in the

---

1 *Basic School Act*, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 81 (2006), 31 July 2006.

2 *Gimnazija Act*, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 1 (2007), 5 January 2007.

3 *Vocational Education Act*, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 79 (2006), 27 July 2006.

field of education[4]. Taken together, these legal instruments define the structure of bilingual education, mandate the inclusion of minority languages in the curricula, and establish mechanisms for curriculum adaptation and public funding.

From a policy perspective, bilingual education in ethnically mixed areas pursues three interconnected objectives. Firstly, it aims to protect linguistic rights by ensuring the continuity of minority languages across generations; secondly, it seeks to promote balanced bilingual competence, enabling pupils to function effectively in both the minority and the majority language; and, thirdly, it aspires to foster intercultural coexistence, mutual recognition, and social cohesion within shared educational spaces. The overarching objective is to promote mutual recognition and respect, while contributing to the gradual reduction of negative stereotypes and prejudices[5]. Within this model, pupils of both nationalities are expected to achieve high proficiency in their mother tongue alongside functional communicative competence in the second language. This approach creates the conditions for the promotion of bilingualism not only at the individual level but also at a broader societal level, where linguistic pluralism is recognised as a shared social resource[6].

While Slovenia has successfully institutionalised these objectives at the legal level, their realisation ultimately depends on effective implementation. Policy effectiveness

---

4 *Act Regulating Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education*, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 35 (2001), 11 May 2001.

5 V. Mikolič, *Politica culturale e linguistica slovena tra nazione e globalizzazione*, [in:] B.M. Da Rif (ed.), *Civiltà italiana e geografie d'Europa*, Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste 2009, pp. 117–123, https://www.openstarts.units.it/server/api/core/bitstreams/59e07560-686f-49d3-8e03-fd3cec4f1da9/content.

6 S. Novak Lukanovič, N. Zudič Antonič, Š.I. Varga, *Vzgoja in izobraževanje na narodno mešanih območjih v Sloveniji*, [in:] J. Krek, M. Metljak (eds.), *Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji*, Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo, Ljubljana 2011, pp. 347–367.

must, therefore, be assessed not only in terms of formal guarantees but also through learning outcomes, language use beyond school, and broader societal effects.

Bilingual education models and policy impact

The "Littoral" model

The so-called "Littoral" model[7] combines separate Slovene- and Italian-medium schools with compulsory second-language learning. Slovene majority schools teach Italian as a compulsory subject from the earliest years of education, while Italian minority schools provide full instruction in Italian[8]. This structure reflects an attempt to balance minority language maintenance with widespread second-language acquisition among the majority population.

From a policy perspective, the model has clear strengths; it ensures continuity of Italian language education from preschool to the secondary level and provides strong institutional support for minority schools, where Italian functions as the language of instruction, administration, and everyday communication[9]. These schools also serve as important sites of intercultural exchange and reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of contemporary society[10].

At the same time, empirical findings reveal persistent asymmetries between minority and majority school

---

7 L. Čok (ed.), *Izobraževanje za dvojezičnost v kontekstu evropskih integracijskih procesov. Učinkovitost dvojezičnih modelov izobraževanja v etnično mešanih okoljih Slovenije*, Založba Annales, Koper 2009.

8 N. Zudič Antonič, A. Zorman, *The Italian Language in Education in Slovenia*, Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, Leeuwarden 2023.

9 N. Zudič Antonič, *Italijanščina kot prvi jezik v manjšinskih šolah Slovenske Istre*, [in:] L. Čok (ed.), op. cit., pp. 75–88; N. Zudič Antonič, A. Zorman, op. cit.

10 S. Zorčič, L. Sorgo, *Multilingualism in Minority Schools: New Realities*, [in:] W. Wei, J. Schnell (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Endangered and Minority Languages*, Routledge, London 2025, pp. 243–258.

contexts. In Italian minority schools, Italian benefits from immersion and tends to emerge as the dominant language of competence, even among pupils for whom it is not the home language. In majority schools, however, Italian is acquired unevenly, with particularly weak outcomes in productive skills such as writing and speaking[11].

Motivation represents a central policy challenge. Majority-school pupils often perceive Italian primarily as an instrumental skill linked to future employment opportunities rather than as a language of social interaction or local belonging. Italian is rarely used outside school contexts, and exposure through media, leisure activities, and peer communication remains limited. As a result, long-term compulsory instruction does not translate into stable bilingual practices[12].

From a policy perspective, this creates a risk that Italian becomes symbolically protected yet socially marginalised, confined largely to institutional settings without sufficient reinforcement in everyday life.

The Prekmurje model

The bilingual education model in the Prekmurje region represents a fully integrated approach. Slovene and Hungarian function simultaneously as languages of instruction and as subjects at all levels of schooling, and all pupils participate in bilingual education regardless of their ethnic background. This model reflects a more symmetrical conception of bilingualism and aims to normalise the use of both languages across all domains of school life.

The model demonstrates strong potential for balanced bilingual competence. Pedagogical approaches such as

---

11 L. Sorgo, *Pregled raziskav Inštituta za narodnostna vprašanja v sklopu strokovno-razvojnih nalog na področju izobraževanja v slovenski Istri*, [in:] S. Novak Lukanovič, B. Riman (eds.), *Raznolikost v raziskovanju etničnosti: izbrani pogledi III*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2023, pp. 345–372, DOI: 10.69070/2024_12.

12 Ibid.

team teaching and planned language switching support parallel language acquisition, and both languages enjoy equal formal status in classroom interaction. A particularly significant recent development is the growing enrolment of pupils from neighbouring Hungary, which has strengthened Hungarian language use, enhanced intercultural exchange, and increased the attractiveness of bilingual education[13].

At the same time, the model is resource-intensive, requiring highly qualified bilingual teachers, adapted teaching materials, and continuous pedagogical support[14].

Despite these challenges, the Prekmurje model illustrates how bilingual education can evolve into a regional multilingual ecosystem with broader cross-border relevance.

Evidence from schools: Policy-relevant findings

Empirical research conducted in minority and majority schools in the Littoral region of Slovenia reveals several patterns with direct policy relevance[15]. Immersive minority-school environments are effective in developing receptive and oral competencies in the minority language, in this case Italian, even among pupils who do not use the language at

---

13 S. Novak Lukanovič, N. Zudič Antonič, Š.I. Varga, op. cit., pp. 353–354.

14 A. NecakLük, *Iz preteklosti za prihodnost: Pol stoletja dvojezicnega solstva v Prekmurju*, [in:] J. Herman et al. (eds.), *With Each Other: On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Bilingual Education in the Ethnically Mixed Area in Prekmurje*, Dvojezični vzgojno-izobrazevalni zavodi na narodno mesanem obmocju v Prekmurju, Lendava 2010, pp. 15–24; J. Rudaš, A. Kolláth, *Model dvojezičnega pouka v Prekmurju in slovar kot didaktični pripomoček*, "Slovenščina 2.0" 2017, vol. 2, pp. 67–70.

15 L. Sorgo, S. Novak Lukanovič, *Considerazioni sull'italiano come lingua seconda*, [in:] M. Cerkvenik, N. Zudič Antonič (eds.), *Educazione linguistica e interculturale in ambienti con appartenenze multiple*, Unione Italiana, Università Popolare, Capodistria–Trieste 2023, pp. 111–131; L. Sorgo, op. cit.; L. Sorgo, N. Novak Lukanovič, N. Zudič Antonič, *Pupils' and Parents' Opinions on Schools with Italian as the Language of Instruction*, "Treatises and Documents. Journal for Ethnic Studies" 2022, vol. 89, pp. 73–90, https://reference-global.com/article/10.36144/rig89.dec22.73-90.

home. At the same time, productive skills, particularly writing, remain a persistent weakness across contexts, indicating the need for targeted pedagogical attention. In Italian minority schools, where Italian serves as the main language of instruction, teachers generally report satisfactory overall levels of pupils' linguistic competence. At the same time, the student body is markedly heterogeneous. Alongside pupils from Italian-speaking households, classrooms include children who use Slovene as their home language as well as others for whom neither Italian nor Slovene is a first language[16]. Nowadays, only a limited share of pupils enter school with Italian as their first language, and some newly arrived pupils have no prior exposure to either of the two official languages – Slovene or Italian. This diversity substantially increases pedagogical demands, particularly in the early years, when a number of pupils acquire Italian entirely within the school setting. Classrooms are also increasingly multicultural, comprising pupils of Albanian, Macedonian, Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian, Russian, and other backgrounds. For these learners, the lack of opportunities to encounter Italian outside school constitutes a major constraint on language development. To ensure basic comprehension, teachers frequently reduce lexical and syntactic complexity; however, such strategies may unintentionally limit progress among more proficient pupils, who often lack targeted enrichment. Consequently, Italian rarely attains the level of full mother-tongue instruction envisaged in curricular documents[17]. Instructional practices further reflect structural constraints: while teachers primarily draw on didactic materials from Italy, they often rely on translations of approved Slovene textbooks, or on self-developed resources in subjects such as science, technology, and history in order to meet national curricular requirements. In

---

16 L. Sorgo, N. Novak Lukanovič, N. Zudič Antonič, op. cit.
17 L. Sorgo, op. cit.; S. Zorčič, L. Sorgo, op. cit.

this context, continuous professional development is widely regarded as essential for responding to curricular change and methodological innovation.

In majority schools, pupils display limited confidence and motivation in the minority language, despite long-term exposure. Italian is rarely used in everyday communication, media consumption, or peer interaction. Instruction is further complicated by wide disparities in pupils' competence. While some learners progress with relative ease, others – particularly those from Slovene-speaking or linguistically diverse households – encounter persistent difficulties across both receptive and productive skills. Writing is consistently identified as the most problematic area. In the final triad of primary education, when pupils are expected to produce short written texts on familiar topics, weaknesses in sentence formation and textual coherence become especially pronounced. Although vocabulary acquisition and basic text comprehension are often achievable, the development of coherent written expression remains a significant challenge[18].

Attitudes toward minority languages also differ significantly between settings: minority-school pupils tend to emphasise both cultural and economic value, whereas majority-school pupils focus primarily on instrumental benefits. These findings suggest that school-based instruction alone is insufficient to ensure minority language vitality. Without reinforcement in the broader sociolinguistic environment, educational gains remain fragile and uneven.

Strategic opportunities and policy directions

Alongside these challenges, recent developments point to important policy opportunities. In recent years,

---

[18] L. Sorgo et al., *Narodnostna vprašanja – koordinacija in evalvacija projektnih aktivnosti (italijanska narodna skupnost): strokovno-razvojna naloga*, Report, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2024.

cross-border enrolment has emerged as a significant development in Slovene–Hungarian bilingual primary education in the Prekmurje region. Since its introduction in the 2015/2016 school year, when only seven pupils from Hungary were enrolled, participation has increased steadily, reaching 79 pupils in 2023/2024. The phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the smaller schools of Prosenjakovci and Genterovci, where pupils from Hungary now account for approximately one third of total enrolment[19]. Hungarian parents' decisions to enrol their children in bilingual schools in Prekmurje are primarily motivated by two factors: (1) the Slovene education system is perceived as more child-centred and pedagogically flexible than its Hungarian counterpart, which parents often characterise as rigid, discipline-oriented, and less responsive to children's developmental needs; and (2) bilingual schools in Prekmurje offer a distinctly multilingual learning environment. Instruction in both Slovene and Hungarian is mandatory; pupils are required to study at least one foreign language – most commonly English – and may acquire an additional language, typically German, through elective courses. This multilingual profile is widely regarded as a key advantage for future educational trajectories and labour market competitiveness. The presence of pupils from Hungary has also generated broader benefits for the school communities. Teachers have strengthened their active use of Hungarian, Slovene pupils have been increasingly exposed to the language in everyday school interactions, and intercultural exchange has become a routine feature of school life. From this perspective, cross-border enrolment not only enhances transnational ties but also supports the

---

[19] A. Kovács, *Šola onkraj meje: učenci iz Madžarske, ki se šolajo na dvojezičnih osnovnih šolah v Sloveniji*, [in:] B. Riman, S. Novak Lukanovič (eds.), *Raznolikostv v raziskovanju etničnosti: izbrani pogledi III*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2023, pp. 169–192, DOI: 10.69070/2024_7.

maintenance and revitalisation of the Hungarian language and culture in Prekmurje. At the same time, however, several challenges and limitations remain; pupils residing in Hungary are not entitled to the same financial and infrastructural support as Slovene citizens: school transport and subsidised meals are unavailable to them, and they are excluded from certain forms of financial assistance offered by Hungary that are conditional on permanent residence in Slovenia. Their schooling was further disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic when border closures severely constrained cross-border mobility[20]. Finally, although these pupils have generally been well received by teachers and classmates, isolated concerns have occasionally been expressed by Slovene parents regarding the increasing number of cross-border enrolments.

More recently, another development is the expansion of supplementary instruction in their mother tongue and culture for pupils from diverse linguistic backgrounds, which reflects a broader shift towards recognising multilingualism as a societal resource. Institutionalised by the Ministry of Education, this form of provision is anchored in the fundamental right to education in one's mother tongue, and draws on long-standing models implemented in several Western European countries, where similar programmes for minority and immigrant pupils, including those of Slovene origin, have yielded positive results. These measures extend the rationale of bilingual education beyond the protection of recognised minorities, embedding it within a more comprehensive approach to multilingual inclusion. In this way, minority language education can be repositioned within a wider strategy of multilingual inclusion, linking minority protection with contemporary diversity management,

---

[20] Ibid.

to remain consistent with European principles and national strategic frameworks[21].

From a policy viewpoint, long-term sustainability requires moving beyond formal guarantees toward socially embedded bilingualism. This entails reinforcing the presence of minority languages beyond schools, supporting teachers in increasingly heterogeneous classrooms, and treating bilingual education as a shared societal asset rather than as a sectoral concern.

Policy recommendations

Building on the empirical findings and structural analysis presented above, this chapter outlines targeted policy recommendations designed to address implementation gaps and enhance the effectiveness of bilingual education:

- Improve minority language teaching in majority schools.
- Promote communicative and learner-centred teaching approaches, differentiated instruction, and systematic development of productive skills, particularly writing competence.
- Invest in teacher training for multilingual classrooms.
- Invest in teacher training through scholarship schemes and professional development.
- Support the development and dissemination of teaching materials adapted to linguistically heterogeneous classrooms.
- Establish longitudinal monitoring systems.

---

[21] M. Medvešek, *Uresničevanje dopolnilnega pouka maternih jezikov in kultur: sistemski izzivi in perspektive staršev*, [in:] J. Pirc, L. Sorgo (eds.), *Raznolikost v raziskovanju etničnosti: izbrani pogledi IV*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2025, pp. 185–212, DOI: 10.69070/2026_8; ReNPJP21–25; *Resolution on the national programme for language policy 2021–2025*, Official Gazette RS, 94/21, https://pisrs.si/api/datoteke/integracije/352404440.

- Systematically monitor language competence, language use, and attitudes across educational levels to support evidence-based policymaking.
- Introduce regular review mechanisms to assess educational plans and adjust pedagogical objectives and implementation strategies accordingly.
- Strengthen minority language presence beyond schools
- Expand minority-language media, cultural production, and public-service bilingualism to promote everyday language use.
- Align educational provision with community and cultural activities in order to create sustained opportunities for language practice beyond school settings.
- Develop coordinated governance frameworks for minority language sustainability (for policymakers).
- Establish structured cooperation mechanisms among educational institutions, researchers, policymakers, and minority communities.
- Integrate minority language objectives across cultural, media, and education policies to ensure coherent implementation, stable funding, and long-term social transmission.

Conclusions

The policy recommendations outlined in this paper converge on a shared premise: the long-term sustainability of minority language education depends on its integration into the broader social, institutional, and territorial fabric in which learners live. While Slovenia's constitutional and legal framework for the protection of national minorities provides a strong normative foundation, educational outcomes increasingly depend on how minority languages function beyond formal schooling, how they are taught in majority-language environments, and how institutions respond to growing sociolinguistic diversity.

Strengthening the presence of minority languages in media, cultural life, and public services is essential to ensure that schooling is reinforced by meaningful opportunities for use in everyday contexts. At the same time, improving learning outcomes in majority schools requires an adjustment of minority language curricula towards communicative relevance, differentiated instruction, and the systematic development of productive skills, particularly writing. These pedagogical shifts must be accompanied by sustained investment in teacher training and the provision of flexible teaching materials capable of addressing heterogeneous and superdiverse classrooms.

Cross-border education emerges as a strategic dimension rather than a marginal phenomenon. Institutionalising cross-border frameworks – through harmonised funding, transport, and welfare arrangements – would transform mobility from an administrative challenge into a policy asset that supports linguistic continuity and regional cohesion. Finally, the introduction of regular, longitudinal monitoring of language competence, use, and attitudes across educational levels is crucial to moving from declarative commitments to evidence-based policy adjustment.

A strategic shift in minority language policy is, therefore, required from a predominantly rights-based model towards a practice-oriented approach that embeds bilingualism in everyday social life. Minority language education should be understood not as a specialised provision for specific communities but as a public investment in social cohesion, cultural pluralism, and future-oriented education systems capable of responding to demographic change, mobility, and linguistic diversity.

Bibliography

Act Regulating Special Rights of Members of the Italian and Hungarian Ethnic Communities in the Field of Education, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 35 (2001), 11 May 2001.

Basic School Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 81 (2006), 31 July 2006.

Čok L. (ed.), *Izobraževanje za dvojezičnost v kontekstu evropskih integracijskih procesov. Učinkovitost dvojezičnih modelov izobraževanja v etnično mešanih okoljih Slovenije*, Založba Annales, Koper 2009.

Gimnazija Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 1 (2007), 5 January 2007.

Kovács A., *Madžarska narodna skupnost in epidemija bolezni covid-19 v letu 2020 in 2021*, [in:] K. Munda Hirnök, S. Novak-Lukanovič (eds.), *Svet je postal drugačen: vpliv covida-19 na etnične manjšine in obmejni prostor v Sloveniji in sosednjih državah*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2021, pp. 173–212.

Kovács A., *Šola onkraj meje: učenci iz Madžarske, ki se šolajo na dvojezičnih osnovnih šolah v Sloveniji*, [in:] B. Riman, S. Novak Lukanovič (eds.), *Raznolikostv v raziskovanju etničnosti: izbrani pogledi III*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2023, pp. 169–192, DOI: 10.69070/2024_7.

Medvešek M., *Uresničevanje dopolnilnega pouka maternih jezikov in kultur: sistemski izzivi in perspektive staršev*, [in:] J. Pirc, L. Sorgo (eds.), *Raznolikost v raziskovanju etničnosti: izbrani pogledi IV*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2025, pp. 185–212, DOI: 10.69070/2026_8.

Mikolič V., *Politica culturale e linguistica slovena tra nazione e globalizzazione*, [in:] B.M. Da Rif (ed.), *Civiltà italiana e geografie d'Europa*, Edizioni Università di Trieste, Trieste 2009, pp. 117–123, https://www.openstarts.units.it/server/api/core/bitstreams/59e07560-686f-49d3-8e03-fd3cec4f1da9/content.

NecakLük A., *Iz preteklosti za prihodnost: Pol stoletja dvojezicnega solstva v Prekmurju*, [in:] J. Herman et al. (eds.), *With Each Other: On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary*

of Bilingual Education in the Ethnically Mixed Area in Prekmurje, Dvojezični vzgojno-izobrazevalni zavodi na narodno mesanem obmocju v Prekmurju, Lendava 2010, pp. 15–27.

Novak Lukanovič S., Zudič Antonič N., Varga Š.I., *Vzgoja in izobraževanje na narodno mešanih območjih v Sloveniji*, [in:] J. Krek, M. Metljak (eds.), *Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji*, Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo, Ljubljana 2011, pp. 347–367.

ReNPJP21–25 – *Resolution on the national programme for language policy 2021–2025*, Official Gazette RS, 94/21, https://pisrs.si/api/datoteke/integracije/352404440.

Rudaš J., Kolláth A., *Model dvojezičnega pouka v Prekmurju in slovar kot didaktični pripomoček*, "Slovenščina 2.0" 2017, vol. 2, pp. 64–84.

Sorgo L., *Pregled raziskav Inštituta za narodnostna vprašanja v sklopu strokovno-razvojnih nalog na področju izobraževanja v slovenski Istri*, [in:] S. Novak Lukanovič, B. Riman (eds.), *Raznolikostv v raziskovanju etničnosti: izbrani pogledi III*, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2023, pp. 345–372, DOI: 10.69070/2024_12.

Sorgo L., Novak Lukanovič S., *Considerazioni sull'italiano come lingua seconda*, [in:] M. Cerkvenik, N. Zudič Antonič (eds.), *Educazione linguistica e interculturale in ambienti con appartenenze multiple*, Unione Italiana, Università Popolare, Capodistria–Trieste 2023, pp. 111–131.

Sorgo L., Novak Lukanovič N., Zudič Antonič N., *Pupils' and Parents' Opinions on Schools with Italian as the Language of Instruction*, "Treatises and Documents. Journal for Ethnic Studies" 2022, vol. 89, pp. 73–90, https://reference-global.com/article/10.36144/rig89.dec22.73-90.

Sorgo L., Novak Lukanovič S., Malnar A., Fon Jager P., *Narodnostna vprašanja – koordinacija in evalvacija projektnih aktivnosti (italijanska narodna skupnost): strokovno-razvojna naloga*, Report, Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana 2024.

Vocational Education Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 79 (2006), 27 July 2006.

Zorčič S., Sorgo L., *Multilingualism in Minority Schools: New Realities*, [in:] W. Wei, J. Schnell (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Endangered and Minority Languages*, Routledge, London 2025, pp. 243–258.

Zudič Antonič N., *Italijanščina kot prvi jezik v manjšinskih šolah Slovenske Istre*, [in:] L. Čok (ed.), *Izobraževanje za dvojezičnost v kontekstu evropskih integracijskih procesov. Učinkovitost dvojezičnih modelov izobraževanja v etnično mešanih okoljih Slovenije*, Založba Annales, Koper 2009, pp. 75–88.

Zudič Antonič N., Zorman A., *The Italian Language in Education in Slovenia*, Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, Leeuwarden 2023.

MINORITY LANGUAGE MEDIA, EDUCATION, AND CULTURE AS A MEANS OF INCLUSION - THE WELSH CASE

Cinzia Colaiuda

Executive summary

- In recent decades, Wales has developed comprehensive language policies aimed at safeguarding and promoting Welsh as a key element of national identity. These efforts have focused on strengthening Welsh-medium education and expanding the presence of the language in media and public life, despite it only being spoken by a minority of the population.
- At the local level, particularly in Cardiff through the Bilingual Cardiff Strategy (2022–2027), targeted initiatives support bilingual education from early childhood to secondary school. These policies aim to foster bilingual and multilingual competences, enabling learners to use both Welsh and English in everyday contexts.
- Increasing attention is also given to the role of children's first languages, recognising them as a foundation for further language development. This includes calls for integrating mother-tongue education into formal curricula, alongside the use of effective, research-based teaching

methods and the provision of multilingual learning resources and media.

- Overall, Welsh language policy reflects a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, linking national frameworks with local needs. This holistic model promotes not only the revitalisation of Welsh but also broader multilingualism, positioning language education as a lifelong process supported by schools, communities, and public institutions.

Introduction

The language policies developed in Wales are characterised by the use of a mixed method for their determination, based on the intersection between a top-down approach by central government and a bottom-up approach at the micro level that mirrors the needs of local communities. This article aims to reflect on the language education policies (LEPs) developed in Wales through the critical lens of discourse analysis (DA), which involves examining policy documents published over the last decade by the Welsh Government and Cardiff City Council in order to increase the number of people who speak Welsh, including through the use of Welsh-language media. It also proposes to analyse how the local level can play a key role not only in revitalising Welsh as a minority language but also in improving LEPs through a holistic approach to language education that also includes international languages, community languages, and children's mother tongues. Furthermore, it takes into account the important role that local communities, organisations, and civil society can play in improving language learning at all stages of education: from nursery school to secondary school, from post-secondary education to adult education. Also examined are the municipal LEPs developed by the city of Cardiff, the capital of Wales, which is playing a key role in increasing the number of people who speak Welsh, while at the same time improving speakers' consideration

for international languages. As the early years of schooling play a crucial role in language learning, this contribution analyses the language education initiatives undertaken in primary schools to increase the number of future bilingual speakers.

Historical background

Welsh (PGmc. **Walhaz*; Wel. *Cymraeg* or *y Gymraeg*) belongs to the Celtic language group (CEL), which is a branch of the Indo-European family descended from a hypothetical Proto-Celtic language. It developed over a long period of time and is very close to Breton and Cornish in its linguistic structures. Four main stages of its development have been identified, but without clear boundaries between them: Proto-Welsh, Old Welsh, Middle Welsh, and Modern Welsh, which is divided into Early Modern Welsh and Late Modern Welsh. Welsh literature, which today consists of a large corpus of prose and verse, represents the rich cultural heritage of Wales, which also includes a wide repertoire of traditional music and artistic production. Certainly, the Welsh language remains the main identifying feature of the Welsh population.

In the 19th century, the use of Welsh was restricted and even prohibited in many schools in Wales, with punitive measures such as the Welsh Not, a wooden token given to children caught speaking Welsh. Its use was often accompanied by corporal punishment, and it is widely believed to have been responsible for the decline of the Welsh language and the consequences this had on Welsh communities and the linguistic future of Wales. The Victorian era was characterised by the widespread use of English as the main language of instruction in school curricula. This language policy, aimed at establishing monolingualism in the country, had a strong influence on the Anglicisation of Wales.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Welsh had become a minority language due to the increasingly dominant

use of English in schools and everyday life. The decline of Welsh accelerated during the first part of the 20th century, which was marked by the devastating effects of the First and Second World Wars. During this period of dramatic change, Welsh literature was no longer simply a celebration of Welsh-speaking culture, as it had been in the past, but became a means of protecting the language itself. Although the use of Welsh continued to decline during the first half of the 20th century, Welsh-medium schools began to appear in the 1940s thanks to the interest of local universities and new political directions for the protection of the Welsh language and identity. By the end of the century, around one-fifth of Welsh schoolchildren were attending Welsh-medium schools, where they could learn or improve their knowledge of Welsh. This led to a stabilisation in the decline in the official number of Welsh speakers and a strengthening of the use of Welsh in local communities, thanks also to the codification of their linguistic rights in the two *Welsh Language Acts* passed in 1967 and 1993, respectively.

In 2011, the *Welsh Language (Welsh) Measure* gave Welsh official status alongside English and stipulated that Welsh must not be treated less favourably than English. It introduced several provisions relating to Welsh as the official language of Wales, enabling citizens to use Welsh in their daily lives. On 6 December 2019, *Welsh Language Rights Day* was launched for the first time and is now celebrated annually. The purpose of this event is to enable organisations to promote Welsh language services by informing speakers of their rights to receive services in Welsh. Thanks to all these initiatives, Wales is now officially a bilingual country where English and Welsh have equal status. Nevertheless, Welsh remains a minority language, spoken by only 18% of the population according to the latest census in 2021. Although numerically a minority language, its community of speakers is very representative thanks to its rich culture and heritage, supported by Welsh-medium schools whose fundamental role in promoting the use of the language is

facilitated by the development of specific language education policies. These policies are proposed by the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language through the approval of the *Welsh in Education Strategic Plan* developed by each of the 22 Councils of the country, which perform local government functions and are responsible for the provision of public services, including education. Education is certainly the main sector through which language policies aimed at increasing the number of Welsh speakers by 2050 are implemented, as indicated in the document *Cymraeg 2050. A million Welsh speakers*, published in 2017, which contains the long-term national strategy proposed by the Welsh Government to achieve one million Welsh speakers by 2050, with the aim of using Welsh in all areas of daily life in order to create a truly bilingual country with strong links to its language communities. In the field of education, this document aims to promote early language learning, intergenerational transmission, and Welsh language skills for all citizens, including new speakers. This means that the Welsh Government considers the national education system to be of fundamental importance in its strategy to revitalise the Welsh language.

Welsh-medium immersion education

In Welsh-medium immersion education, students receive formal education in all school subjects through the medium of the main language of instruction (Welsh), which is different from their home language, which is also usually their mother tongue (see also "home language", "community language", "heritage language" in international literature). Therefore, the term "immersion" normally refers to children or students who are not Welsh speakers but learners of Welsh as a second language in formal education learning environments, where the language is acquired through full immersion in the new language that is employed both in the classroom during the lessons and in common school

spaces (library, corridors, etc.). For the future of Welsh education, the government intends to better promote and develop students' language skills by integrating immersion models into the education system and expanding the late immersion programme for learners who are about to finish secondary school, in order to prepare them for their future working life and improve the number of speakers who can use Welsh in everyday situations, mainly by creating bilingual citizens. The government also aims to achieve this goal through English-medium education, where English is the main language of instruction, by increasing the number of students who succeed in learning Welsh. This goal can be reached not only at school but also in the Welsh for adults sector.

In the long-term national strategy for 2050, which aims to create one million speakers, immersive Welsh-language education is considered the main method of ensuring that children can develop their Welsh language skills, as well as increasing the use of the language in everyday life. Not only Welsh-medium education but also Welsh in English-medium education is now considered the main instrument through which the 2050 target can be achieved.

The recent introduction of a new *Welsh language curriculum* aims to gradually improve students' language skills, covering early childhood up to the age of 16, a crucial period for language development. In this new curriculum, Welsh language learning is included in all school subjects, with a focus on developing bilingual speakers who progress from basic communication skills to language proficiency by the age of 16, with the aid of updated resources for English and Welsh-medium schools aimed at achieving the objectives of the national strategy for 2050. Moreover, the new school curriculum devolves power to the local level in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, and key decisions are now made by individual schools or school clusters.

The new curriculum also offers an opportunity to rethink the way languages are taught and assessed, with the aim

of improving language teaching in Wales, to the benefit of both Welsh and English. One of the main changes is the shift from the old curriculum term "modern foreign languages", which mainly referred to French, German, and Spanish, to the new term "international languages", which also includes classical languages, British Sign Language (BSL), and home and community languages. Therefore, it presupposes a holistic approach to language learning, which gives equal importance to all languages that constitute the language repertoire of each student. It is worth noting that the deep connection between languages is also highlighted in the national strategy *Languages Unite Us*, which emphasises the need for action at the secondary school level and beyond, as there has been a decline in foreign language learning among secondary school students and adults.

As already proposed in the language education policies developed by the European Union and the Council of Europe since the 1990s, today, the Welsh government also aims to promote the learning of international languages in order to train bilingual/plurilingual people who are able to communicate in at least two languages other than their mother tongue, thus making the country increasingly competitive globally. For this reason, the CEFR (*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, 2001; 2020), a language policy tool developed by the Council of Europe, has been used in conjunction with CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*) to develop the new language curriculum in Wales. The CEFR and CLIL – a methodology widely used in Europe to promote bilingualism through the use of a foreign language for teaching non-language subjects – have become two key reference points in European school systems for improving language teaching. In Wales, they have been used to promote a holistic approach to language education thanks to the growing interest in international languages.

Today, not only bilingualism but also plurilingualism – i.e., the speaker's language repertoire in which all languages are closely linked – are considered fundamental

resources in the Welsh education system, as these two terms presuppose the learning of at least three languages: the dominant language of the country, English, its main minority language, Welsh, and the students' mother tongue which normally coincides with the language of origin spoken by each of the new local language communities. Nevertheless, Welsh remains the main priority of the national government for the affirmation of its national identity.

Municipal language policy: Cardiff

Cardiff, the capital of Wales, belongs to the Central South Consortium (CSC), which consists of Cardiff plus four other local authorities: Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf, and Vale of Glamorgan. The aim of the CSC, which operates on behalf of the five local authorities mentioned above, is to monitor and support the improvement of educational standards and learning outcomes in schools located in south-east Wales, where primary education has taken on an important role in recent years thanks to the introduction of international languages (Spanish, German, and French) into the school curriculum, with interdisciplinary links to other school subjects. This has been made possible by adopting a plurilingual approach to language teaching, as well as new teaching resources developed independently in primary schools located in this area. It is worth noting that Cardiff has played a key role in the growth of the number of Welsh-speaking people in the country over the last 30 years. It is also the second local authority with the highest number of Welsh speakers, since it promotes municipal language policies aimed at strengthening the role of Welsh national bilingualism and specific language teaching policies to emphasise the role of the Welsh-medium education. This implies children can learn Welsh not only in Welsh-medium schools but also in English-medium schools. Cardiff City Council is the governing body that oversees pre-school, primary and secondary schools, and adult education, while

Welsh education policy is set by the Welsh Government at the national level. The current *Bilingual Cardiff Strategy*, which runs from 2022 to 2027, includes the goal of increasing the number and percentage of people who speak and study Welsh in Cardiff, in order to ensure that the city plays a significant role in supporting the language policies of the Welsh Government. It is also worth emphasising that Cardiff is home to the largest Welsh-speaking community in the country and is a multilingual city where over 118 languages are spoken, and diversity is valued and respected. As highlighted in the document *Cardiff 2030. A ten-year vision for a capital of learning and opportunity*, education is at the heart of the new vision of Cardiff City Council for 2030, based on the visible changes that are transforming its social environment. The main objective of this new path is to make Cardiff a city of learning opportunities, so that it can play an important role in national education reform as a global and multilingual city that protects the rights of children and young people, particularly those living in poverty or from disadvantaged social backgrounds. According to the 2021 census, the percentage of people who speak Welsh in the city has increased from 11.1% in 2011 to 12.2% in 2021. This means that the percentage of people who do not speak Welsh has decreased from 88.9% in 2011 to 87.8% in 2021. At the school level, part of the student population speaks neither Welsh nor English, as the first language spoken at home or within their linguistic community is different from the two official languages of Wales. This is not perceived as a problem, but as an asset, as the city of Cardiff promotes a culture of tolerance and respect for all cultures and languages, including for children who speak English as an additional language (EAL) when they start school. In the 2021 census, the most common countries of birth were Wales (64.8%), England (17.7%), India (1.4%), the Middle East (1.1%) and Pakistan (0.9%). It is, therefore, no coincidence that in the 2021 census, 9.7% of Cardiff residents

identified their ethnic group as “Asian, British Asian, or Welsh Asian”.

From a pedagogical and educational point of view, it is worth noting that local schools are linked to the language communities to which they belong. For this reason, schools respond directly to local social needs, seeking to meet the educational and linguistic requirements of students who come from situations of poverty, social deviance, or economic and social disadvantage thanks to an integrated approach to education, which protects them from isolation, marginalisation, exclusion, or even discrimination. This integrated model aims to reduce educational inequalities and guarantee the same rights for all students, in order to reduce the number of exclusions and dropouts. Certainly, students who are fluent in Welsh and English at the end of secondary school have a better chance of educational success at the university level and better working conditions as they can interact in both languages.

Starting in 2022, schools in Cardiff introduced the new Welsh curriculum, which involves contextualising learning in the real world through immersion in a meaningful learning environment that goes beyond formal educational settings. To implement this curriculum, schools have to collaborate with local partners and community organisations to deliver its content, engaging students in new and authentic extracurricular experiences related to the real world. Therefore, learning outcomes extend beyond formal education as the aim of the new programme is to build a sense of belonging through strong links between local schools and local communities, adapting it to the educational needs of all students. It is also worth noting the strong emphasis on plurilingualism and the development of Welsh language skills, as well as the link to local heritage and culture, which reflects the ethos of the new experience-oriented school programme.

Furthermore, Cardiff supports a vibrant, bilingual media landscape that includes the main Welsh-language

broadcasters, S4C (Llanishen) and BBC Cymru Wales, as well as websites, magazines, and local radio stations (BBC Radio Cymru and Cymru 2), thereby promoting a unique urban culture in the Welsh language.

Cardiff bilingual strategy

The main objective of the *Strategic Plan for Welsh Language Education in Cardiff 2022–2031*, approved in 2022 by the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, is to propose a city-wide plan developed by Cardiff City Council to increase the number of Welsh speakers through education, public services, and community engagement. At the school level, it aims to ensure that children and young people can speak both Welsh and English confidently in everyday life, are proud of their identity, and can access services in both languages. Emphasising the importance of a speaker's bilingual repertoire, the *Strategic Plan* highlights the fundamental role that Welsh language education can play in all sectors, from early language acquisition to secondary education, and from post-secondary education to adult education. It is also worth noting that the new *Strategic Plan* gives importance, albeit indirectly, not only to the country's official bilingualism but also to the community languages spoken by new Welsh speakers, thanks to the richness of their plurilingual repertoire: over 70% of the school population attending Welsh-medium schools in Cardiff do not come from Welsh-speaking families. Since many children in the capital do not speak Welsh or English as their mother tongue, they prefer to attend a Welsh-language school because they are already plurilingual. The importance given by the *Strategic Plan* to plurilingualism means that in a multilingual city such as Cardiff, the language repertoire of all citizens is fully recognised. It is also worth highlighting the role of spontaneous civil society initiatives aimed at improving language learning. For example, the aim of the "Cardiff Language Exchange project" is to organise

weekly international language exchanges that enable participants to learn other languages while sharing their own mother tongue.

All this confirms that municipal language policies tend to promote rather than devalue the presence of local language communities, whose language of origin is fully appreciated and valued in the urban landscape. It also confirms the holistic approach to language education through which all languages belonging to students' plurilingual repertoire are fully recognised. According to the *Strategic Plan*, the goal of promoting the use of Welsh in education from nursery school through to the end of secondary school will be achieved through the continuous improvement of Welsh language skills, with particular attention to the transition stages from one level of education to another. Therefore, in the coming years, it will be necessary to improve the number of teachers who speak Welsh fluently, as they play a key role in the intergenerational transmission of the language among the younger generations.

Welsh-medium education in primary schools

The main objective of Welsh-medium education is to produce bilingual Welsh and English speakers who are fluent in both languages in everyday life. Given the importance of early language learning for raising bilingual/plurilingual children, there are fifteen Welsh-medium primary schools in Cardiff, all of which are part of a growing network across the country offering bilingual education. Many of these have Welsh-medium nurseries, so that children can start speaking Welsh from an early age and then be fully immersed in the Welsh language at primary school.

In so doing, children with a different language at home or in their community can learn Welsh, which is essential for living, studying, and working in Wales, while English-speaking children from non-Welsh-speaking families can become bilingual by learning a new language, Welsh,

with undoubted social, economic, and employment benefits for their future. In 2023, the first bilingual primary school – Ysgol Gynradd Groes-wen – opened its doors in the expanding residential area of Plasdŵr in the northern part of the city. This initiative in bilingual education is unique and the first of its kind in Wales and Cardiff, as it offers a dual language pathway of 50% Welsh and 50% English – known as a 50/50 split – and a Welsh language pathway with the aim of ensuring that more children become proficient in both languages. The aim of the school, which also has 96 nursery places, is to propose an innovative approach by integrating traditional immersive education with a balanced bilingual curriculum, in order to support municipal language policies and to increase the number of Welsh speakers by promoting bilingualism from an early age.

The importance of foreign language learning was also highlighted by the launch of the "Multilingual Mentoring in Primary Schools project", an initiative funded by the Welsh Government to tackle the decline of foreign languages in schools by encouraging pupils taking GCSE exams to study them from primary school onwards. This initiative has helped to promote teacher training by providing information on plurilingual teaching practices and to develop a network between higher education institutions and primary schools.

Conclusions

This analysis, based on the premise that language policies are public policies, proposes a multiple-level analysis concerning national language policies, municipal LEPs, and school cluster initiatives. It reflects on how the different levels of analysis are closely interconnected, but also on how the application of the principle of subsidiarity contained in the new *Welsh language curriculum* is giving greater responsibility and power to the local level.

Certainly, it is important to further improve the vitality of the Welsh language by promoting its active use in all

areas of daily life. As research findings from other European countries (for example, the Republic of Ireland) show, the implementation of family language policy (FLP) at the social level can play a key role in improving the intergenerational transmission of parents' first language by involving speakers from local communities in key policy decisions made by local policy makers.

It is also essential to enrich children's plurilingual repertoire by setting up multilingual school libraries and bookshops, so that they can read books written not only in Welsh and English but also in their mother tongues. An example of this good practice is Cardiff Central Library, which has recently updated its community languages section to provide books and resources in a variety of languages to meet the language needs of all its citizens. It is also important to strengthen the impact of Welsh-language media on the learning of the main minority language of the country, further extending their use to other minority languages.

The use of specific teaching methodologies, supported by the results of reliable international studies and research, is particularly important with pre-school children. As demonstrated by the positive results of curricular choices made by other European countries, such as Austria, the transition phase from nursery school to primary school plays a key role in strengthening children's language skills not only in Welsh and English but also in their mother tongue before they enter formal education.

It is worth emphasising that international research has highlighted the fundamental role of children's first language, as it provides a solid foundation on which to further develop their language skills, including learning other languages. It is, therefore, necessary to include the teaching of their mother tongue in school curricula from early childhood onwards, so that this delicate task is no longer delegated to supplementary schools, often run by volunteers from the same language community as the children, who do not have adequate pedagogical and didactic training.

Appendix

BSL: British Sign Language
DA: Discourse analysis
CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CEL: Celtic language
CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning
CSC: Central South Consortium
EAL: English as an additional language
FLP: Family Language Policy
GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education
LEPs: Language Education Policies
PGmc.: Proto-Germanic
Wel.: Welsh

Bibliography

Bache I., Flinders M., *Multi-Level Governance and the Study of the British State*, [in:] I. Bache, M. Flinders (eds.), *Multi-Level Governance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, pp. 93–106.

Backhaus P., *Language policy at the municipal level*, [in:] B. Spolsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012.

Blommaert J., Collins J., Slembrouck S., *Spaces of multilingualism*, "Language & Communication" 2005, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 197–216.

Cardinal L., *Language Policy Instruments*, [in:] M. Gazzola et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Policy and Planning*, Routledge, London 2023.

Census 2021, https://www.ons.gov.uk/census.

Colaiuda C., *Autobiography and narration in multilingual learning environments*, [in:] G. Agresti, F. Torrent (eds.), *Penser et évaluer les politiques linguistiques. Terrains, critères, indicateurs*, Aracne, Roma 2021, pp. 209–222.

Colaiuda C., *Urban Peripheries in Europe and the Construction of New Semantic Spaces*, "Mediterranean and European Linguistic Anthropology" 2021, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 1–16.

Cruickshank K., Lo Bianco J. (eds.), *Community and Heritage Languages Schools Transforming Education: Research, Challenges, and Teaching Practices*, Routledge, London 2023.

Cummins J., *Putting the Evidence Back into Evidence-based Policies for Underachieving Students*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg 2011.

Cummins J., *Rethinking the Education of Multilingual Learners*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol 2021.

Gogolin I., McMonagle S., *Multilingual cities*, [in:] M. Gazzola et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Policy and Planning*, Routledge, London 2024, pp. 444–456.

Grin F., Marácz L., Pokorn K.N., *Advances in Interdisciplinary Language Policy*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam 2022.

Habermas J., *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article*, [in:] E. Fraenkel, K.D. Brachel (eds.), *Staat und Politik*, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1964.

Heugh K., *Language policy, planning and mobilisation in post-colonial civil societies'*, [in:] M. Gazzola et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Language Policy and Planning*, Routledge, London 2024.

Hymes D., *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an Understanding of Voice*, Taylor & Francis, London 1996.

Hymes D., *Language in Education: Ethnolinguistic Essays*, Centre for Applied Linguistics, Washington (DC) 1980.

Matras Y., *Speech and the City: Multilingualism, Decoloniality and the Civic University*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2024.

Pennycook A., Otsuji E., *Metrolingualism: Language in the city*, Routledge, London 2015.

Skrandies P., *Language Policies and the Politics of Urban Multilingualism*, [in:] L. King, L. Carson (eds.), *The Multilingual City: Vitality, Conflict and Change*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol 2016, pp. 115–146.

THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik

Executive summary

- The Russian military aggression, which began in 2014 and escalated into a full-scale war in 2022, has led to the widespread destruction of cultural heritage sites associated with various national minorities and indigenous peoples of Ukraine, which were of particular significance to their identity, historical memory, and cultural continuity.
- Russia's attacks on cultural heritage are aimed at undermining the very foundations of Ukraine's identity. This constitutes not only an attempt to erase the country's affiliation with Western culture but also an assault on the values of minorities and an undermining of Ukraine's multi-ethnic identity.
- Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, Ukraine's Minister of Culture addressed a series of appeals to international organisations and to UNESCO headquarters, specifically concerning the Russian Federation's

violations of international law and Ukrainian legislation in Crimea. Members of UNESCO, the UN agency specialising in international cultural, educational, and scientific cooperation, also opposed the Russian Federation's violation of its obligations under international law. Furthermore, European states have established international funds and organisations dedicated to the restoration of Ukraine's most valuable architectural monuments.

Introduction

The heritage of ethnic minorities forms an integral part of cultural heritage as a component of social security and the socio-economic and cultural development of the state. Minority heritage is multifaceted, encompassing both physical remains and living practices. Firstly, it is tangible heritage, which includes architecture, monuments, historical sites, artefacts, and cultural spaces. For example, in Ukraine, the heritage of communities that lived there for centuries is embodied in their unique architecture and urban structures. Secondly, it is intangible heritage, often considered the "essence" of a minority group, and includes language, oral traditions, religious practices, traditional knowledge, skills, and living memory. For ethnic minorities, heritage is a fundamental source for national consciousness and spiritual development. It serves several functions; (1) identification: it provides a "civilizational identification" for the community; (2) collective memory: it is a key site for the production of collective memory, allowing groups to "imagine" their relationships with each other and the state; and (3) social cohesion: UNESCO argues that recognising cultural diversity as a "common heritage of humanity" is a guarantee of social cohesion and peace in plural societies[1].

---

[1] O. Salata, *Ludobójstwo dziedzictwa kulturowego narodu rozpoczyna się od zniszczenia miast i architektury*, "Wiedza Obronna" 2026, vol. 294, no. 5, pp. 59–68, DOI: 10.34752/26h1ww23.

During war or conflict, the heritage of ethnic minorities faces specific risks that range from accidental "collateral damage" to the intentional, systematic erasure of their existence as a people. Minorities are often more vulnerable than the majority because their very identity is frequently perceived as a threat to the aggressor's or the state's national goals. Minority cultural heritage is particularly vulnerable in periods of instability, as it becomes more exposed to acts of plundering and destruction. Aggressors often target cultural monuments deliberately to inflict maximum psychological pain and strip a community of its history. This includes the bombing of religious structures, theatres, and libraries that serve as unique identifiers of a people. This vulnerability is further exacerbated by processes of forced displacement, which sever the physical and symbolic ties between communities and their historical environments. The removal of minority populations from their ancestral spaces contributes to what may be described as a "history of absence", whereby their presence is systematically erased from both the material and mnemonic landscape.

The heightened risk faced by minority heritage can be understood through a range of psychological and structural mechanisms. Periods of rapid political change and conflict often give rise to what has been termed "predatory identities", wherein dominant groups come to perceive themselves as threatened majorities. In such contexts, minorities are constructed as "others", whose cultural presence must be eliminated in order to safeguard the perceived purity and continuity of the national identity. Closely related to this dynamic is the tendency to frame minorities as symbolic representations of failed sovereignty. Their continued presence may be interpreted as evidence of the state's inability to achieve full national cohesion, thereby prompting efforts to marginalise or expel these groups, particularly in times of war. At the structural level, minorities frequently occupy positions of compounded vulnerability, characterised by limited access to resources, political influence, and

international representation. This structural weakness significantly constrains their capacity to secure effective protection for their cultural heritage, especially in comparison to dominant groups. Furthermore, when minority communities maintain transnational cultural ties, their heritage may be perceived by the state as a potential security threat. In such cases, cultural sites and practices associated with these communities become targets of deliberate destruction aimed at severing cross-border connections and reinforcing state-centred narratives of identity and sovereignty.

The Russian military aggression started in 2014, continued in 2022 as a full-scale war and resulted in the large-scale destruction of cultural heritage sites associated with various national minorities and indigenous peoples, which were of particular significance for their identity, historical memory, and cultural continuity. Illegal excavation work, the destruction and damage of sites, the removal and sale of artefacts on the black market, and reinterpretation in line with Russian ideology are further examples of the erasure of the cultural identity of Ukrainian citizens, all of which accompany Russia's ongoing pressure and military aggression against Ukraine. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Russian Federation has actively exploited cultural heritage as a tool for the political legitimisation of its presence in the occupied territories[2]. Under the pretext of scientific research, Russian archaeologists have carried out systematic "excavations" at Ukrainian cultural heritage sites, reconstructing and plundering heritage sites belonging to ethnic minorities, in effect appropriating or destroying them. These actions constituted a serious violation of international humanitarian law. Among the physically destroyed, damaged, and stolen cultural heritage objects are significant monuments of architecture, art, and literature,

---

[2] M. Maksymiuk, *„Ludobójstwo kulturowe" a wojna na Ukrainie*, "Wiedza Obronna" 2026, vol. 294, no. 5, pp. 21–34.

created by representatives of Ukraine's national minorities. Currently, the most ethnically diverse regions of the country are under occupation, where a significant number of cultural artefacts from different periods are located.

Damage to cultural heritage sites

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has led to an intensification of illegal archaeological activities by Russian researchers in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Russian scientists not only carried out excavations without the necessary permits but also systematically destroyed cultural layers and transported artefacts to state and private museums within the Russian Federation. The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation began issuing permits for excavations in parts of the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and Donetsk regions, which significantly facilitated this practice. Work of this kind in Crimea, Sevastopol, Kerch, and also in the Seversky Donets River valley was carried out by Russian archaeologists under the auspices of leading scientific institutions, including universities and research institutes. Ukrainian authorities report that as a result of these activities, over five hundred cultural heritage sites in Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed, and thousands of movable cultural artefacts have been excavated from archaeological layers or removed from Ukrainian museums. Some of these have ended up on the black market. In March 2025, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence confirmed the theft of 164 archaeological artefacts from the territory of the temporarily occupied Crimea and published a list of 14 Russian museum curators accused of appropriating artefacts from illegal excavations and denying their connection to Ukraine's heritage. Collections were expropriated and taken to Russia, whilst in other cases, artefacts were looted by Russian soldiers to keep or sell. Exhibitions organised by Russian researchers, as well as the lectures and educational programmes they conducted, served to justify the occupation and incorporate the

artefacts into the Russian cultural sphere. Illegal treasure hunts were also carried out without the required permits, using metal detectors, which is punishable under the national Law "On the Protection of Archaeological Heritage" and the Criminal Code of Ukraine.

Several reports mentioned that as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine, hundreds of religious buildings, theological educational institutions, and sacred sites have been destroyed, damaged, or looted by the Russian military[3]. Among them were significant monuments of architecture, art, and literature created by representatives of Ukraine's national minorities. Numerous instances have been documented involving the confiscation of premises belonging to national and cultural associations, as well as the seizure of their property. Costumes of artistic collectives representing national minorities were being used, without the consent of their owners, to disseminate Russian propaganda narratives. Unique museum exhibits have been looted and transported to unknown locations, while extensive collections of archival materials and household artefacts from private collections have been irretrievably lost.

Examples of the destroyed sites included the architectural monuments of the Crimean Tatars, such as the Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai and the Akmejitsarai Palace of Kalga Sultan (in the ancient city of Akmejit) – sites of profound historical and religious significance. The Bakhchisarai Khan's Palace, as the only surviving example of Crimean Tatar palace architecture and a central symbol of their political, cultural, and spiritual life from the 15th to the 18th century, is of exceptional historical importance. Moreover, in 2016, Russian authorities approved "anti-emergency" works on

---

[3] Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, *Росіяни пошкодили 1723 пам'ятки культурної спадщини та 2524 об'єкти культурної інфраструктури постраждали в Україні*, 9 April 2026, https://mincult.gov.ua/news/rosiyany-poshkodyly-1723-pamyatky-kulturnoyi-spadshhyny-ta-2524-obyekty-kulturnoyi-infrastruktury-postrazhdaly-v-ukrayini/ [9.04.2026].

the Great Khan Mosque. Instead of careful restoration, large portions of the structure were dismantled, despite being largely intact[4]. The works were carried out by unqualified builders using heavy machinery, causing structural damage, cracks, and erosion. Traditional materials were replaced with modern imitations, and historical artworks were damaged, undermining the site's originality and integrity[5]. The serious violations of the aesthetic integrity of the object, its originality, authenticity, original appearance, and even the historical decontextualization of the cultural heritage of the Crimean Tatars, are all examples of the destruction of the cultural heritage of the ethnic minorities of Crimea. Archaeological sites were also devastated during the construction of the Taurida Highway – one of Russia's key infrastructure projects on the peninsula. The looting of artefacts and the destruction of sites were part of a systematic plundering of Ukrainian heritage and historical memory, and an element of a plan aimed at erasing Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar identities from the peninsula[6].

Similar or worse destruction has occurred in other occupied regions, including Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, Donetsk, and Luhansk. In areas such as Mariupol, Lysychansk, Severodonetsk, and Rubizhne, up to 90% of historical buildings have been destroyed, including the destruction of historical buildings of the Greek minorities in the Azov region. The cultural heritage of the Azov Greeks (Mariupol Greeks), the third largest ethnic community in the Donetsk region, suffered severe and disproportionate damage. Mariupol,

---

4 H. Coynash, *'Closed for Destruction': Russia is digging up 16th Century Crimean Tatar Khan's Palace*, Human Rights in Ukraine, 15 March 2019, https://archive.khpg.org/en/1552331073 [10.04.2026].

5 Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, *Russia destroys irreplaceable fresco in ongoing destruction of 16th-century Crimean Tatar Khan's Palace*, 7 March 2025, https://khpg.org/en/1608814471 [10.04.2026].

6 N.A. Munawar, J. Symonds, *Empires of Lies? The Political Uses of Cultural Heritage in War*, "The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice" 2023, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 308–325, DOI: 10.1080/17567505.2023.2205193.

regarded as the centre of Hellenism in Ukraine, served as a major cultural hub for the Greek diaspora. It hosted the Cultural Centre of the Federation of Greek Societies of Ukraine, which united 96 Greek organisations across the country. The city was also home to the only modern Greek language department in Ukraine, at Mariupol State University, as well as the editorial office of "Ellina Ukrainy", the only Greek-language newspaper in Ukraine. Almost all major Greek cultural institutions in Mariupol were destroyed or looted by the Russian army during the siege of the city. The exact number of museum exhibits lost remains unknown, as many were likely burned, while a portion of the surviving artefacts was transferred to occupied Donetsk. Among the removed items were highly valuable cultural and religious objects, including the 1811 Gospel printed in Venice for the Mariupol Greeks, a century-old Torah scroll from the local Jewish community, and original paintings by prominent artists such as Arkhip Kuindzhi, Ivan Aivazovsky, and Mykola Dubovsky. Additional losses included rare icons, sculptures, and objects of decorative and applied art. The cultural heritage of other national minorities was also severely affected. In Mariupol, an Armenian khachkar (stone cross), dedicated to the innocent victims of both Ukrainian and Armenian peoples, was partially destroyed. Khachkars hold profound spiritual significance in the Armenian Apostolic tradition, serving as sacred monuments associated with key religious and communal events. In Lysychansk, rocket attacks damaged a unique Belgian architectural complex, including a historic gymnasium and hospital, resulting in significant and irreversible cultural losses. Finally, among the German cultural monuments damaged during the Russian invasion is the estate of Henryk Jantsen in the city of Orihiv, Zaporizhzhia region, an example of late 19th-century architecture. Henry Jantsen, a representative of the German Mennonite community, played a significant role in the local development of the region.

International protection of cultural heritage during wartime

National and international law is increasingly important for safeguarding the elements of ethnic minorities' heritage; they are vital for maintaining communities' identities. The protection of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in Ukraine is guaranteed by the Constitution, wherein Article 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine contains guarantees concerning the protection of languages, linguistic and educational rights, of national minorities in Ukraine. Article 24 prohibits "privileges or restrictions based on ethnic origin, language, or other characteristics". Article 11 guarantees the protection of languages as part of the identity of peoples within the framework of the state's obligation "to promote the consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation, its historical consciousness, traditions, and culture, as well as the development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity of all indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine". Moreover, in Ukraine, there are about 130,000 objects of cultural heritage registered in the state register. Among them are 9,562 monuments entered into the State Register of Immovable Monuments of Ukraine (914 monuments of national significance and 8,648 of local significance) and 8 unique cultural objects included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, which have exceptional universal value[7].

The Russian occupation army has been causing great damage to objects of national-cultural and ethnic-historical heritage throughout the territory of Ukraine. The specified actions constitute a crime not only under Art. 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (violation of the laws and customs

---

[7] Ombudsman of Ukraine, *National minorities and indigenous people under occupation: The struggle for survival*, Kyiv 2023, https://ombudsman.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/doslidzhennyanatsionalnimenshinispilnotiikorinninarodivokupatsii-1.pdf [7.04.2026].

of war) but also [numerous] international violations. The primary international document regulating the principles of heritage protection during wartime is the 1954 Hague Convention, supplemented by the 1977 Additional Protocols. According to this, every state must take measures to protect its own cultural heritage from armed attack. The parties to the conflict must not conduct military operations against cultural property and must avoid its accidental destruction. The use of cultural property for military purposes is prohibited. In the context of archaeological heritage, the Convention prohibits an occupying power from conducting archaeological research or excavations without the consent of the sovereign state. If cultural property is removed from occupied territory for the purpose of safeguarding it, it must be returned once hostilities have ceased. Both Russia and Ukraine are parties to the Convention (1957).

UNESCO remains an important platform for cooperation on the protection and return of cultural property, as well as the recovery and restoration of cultural assets destroyed or damaged in connection with an armed conflict. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, several appeals had been addressed to the international organisations and to UNESCO headquarters by the Minister of Culture of Ukraine, in particular about the violation of norms of international law and Ukrainian legislation by the Russian Federation in Crimea[8]. Then, shortly after the outbreak of full-scale war, members of UNESCO, the UN agency specialising in international cultural, educational, and scientific cooperation, opposed the Russian Federation's violation of its obligations under international law. This decision was initiated by 64 member states, and in the vote during the session of the UNESCO Executive Board, only Russia voted against

---

[8] Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, *Destruction of Khan's Palace as irreparable loss for global culture*, 7 March 2018, https://ppu.gov.ua/en/press-center/destruction-of-khan-s-palace-as-irreparable-loss-for-global-culture/ [10.04.2026].

it. This, therefore, sent a strong signal of solidarity with Ukraine and unequivocal opposition to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Significantly, in November 2023, the Russian Federation was also removed from the UNESCO Executive Board, which weakened Russia's institutional agency – its actual ability to initiate processes and shape the agenda within the Board.

However, Russia remains a member of UNESCO, and its delegation to the organisation publicly emphasises that the organisation's actions and reports concerning Ukraine are "biased" and "politicised". Russia can, therefore, continue to lobby, slow down proceedings, water down the language of statements, and build coalitions in its own favour. In November 2025, Russia submitted official documents confirming its candidacy for the UNESCO Executive Board for the period 2025–2029, but was unsuccessful against the winning applications from Ukraine, Romania, and Moldova.

Based on the provisions of the Hague Convention, UNESCO, together with partner organisations, is assessing the damage to cultural property in Ukraine during the war. Data from the organisation as of March 2026 indicate the destruction of 525 cultural sites that have been verified as damaged, including three archaeological sites in the Kharkiv and Mykolaiv regions (the Historical and Archaeological Museum-Reserve "Verkhnii Saltiv", the Stara Bohdanivka 2 site, and the Chortuvate 7 site). To date, eight Ukrainian sites have been included on the UNESCO World Heritage List, including the archaeological site of Tauric Chersonese (Sevastopol) and its economic macroregion (Chora)[9].

Since February 2025, Ukraine, alongside Albania, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, and Mexico, has also been a party to the Council of Europe Convention on Offences

---

[9] UNESCO, *Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO*, 25 March 2026, https://www.unesco.org/en/ukraine-war/damaged-cultural-sites [11.04.2026].

against Cultural Property (2017)[10]. The Convention lists the main types of activity associated with illicit trafficking in cultural property: theft and robbery, looting (the unlawful removal of ancient relics from archaeological sites, buildings, or monuments) and the forgery of cultural property. The Convention imposes an obligation on states to implement legal provisions and take practical measures at a national and international level to prevent illicit trafficking in cultural property and its intentional destruction or damage.

Several states have argued that, since 2014, Russian actions in Crimea include illegally exporting artefacts from Crimea for display in Russia, conducting unauthorised archaeological expeditions, demolishing Muslim burial sites, and damaging cultural heritage sites of Crimean Tatars during "restoration". The US embassy in Georgia cited the UNESCO report revealing Russia's aggressive campaign against Ukraine's cultural heritage with an aim to establish control over Ukraine and rewrite history[11].

Furthermore, important progress in protecting cultural heritage has been made thanks to the support of European countries, which have established international funds and organisations dedicated to restoring the most valuable architectural landmarks. One example is the international fund of the "Lublin Triangle", involving EU member states such as Lithuania and Poland. The fund plays an active role in supporting Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression by collaborating with Ukrainian researchers, cultural professionals, and art historians. Together, they work on digitising both movable and immovable cultural heritage and on developing digital platforms aimed at preserving, safeguarding, and promoting these assets. In doing so, the

---

10 Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, 26 March 2025, https://mcsc.gov.ua/en/news/the-president-signed-the-law-ratifying-the-council-of-europe-convention-on-offences-relating-to-cultural-property/ [22.12.2025].

11 US Embassy in Georgia, *Russia's 'barbaric treatment' of Ukrainian cultural sites*, 16 February 2022, https://ge.usembassy.gov/russias-barbaric-treatment-of-ukrainian-cultural-sites/ [10.04.2026].

initiative also helps Ukrainian society adopt and implement European standards of heritage protection[12].

Whilst Ukrainian NGOs working in the field of human rights have also become involved in the protection of heritage in Crimea, ethnic minority organisations in Ukraine have so far shown very little activity in this regard. This may be due to the limited resources available to minorities (organisational, human, and financial), as well as a low level of awareness regarding the possibilities for practising their rights. The relatively recently adopted document of the State Target National and Cultural Programme "Unity in Diversity" for the period up to 2034 ("Про затвердження Державної цільової національно-культурної програми 'Єдність у розмаїтті' на період до 2034 року") forms part of the process of Ukraine's Europeanisation and the alignment of its legislation with the European system, in which minority rights occupy a significant place. Its aim is to shape and develop stable, efficient, and transparent state institutions, public associations of national minorities (communities), and representative bodies of the indigenous population; to ensure the realisation of the rights and the fulfilment of the needs of persons belonging to national minorities (communities) and the indigenous peoples of Ukraine; and to ensure sustained support for the processes of social integration and the protection of the rights of national minorities (communities) and the indigenous peoples of Ukraine, based on the principles of respect for diversity, the prevention and combating of discrimination, and social integration in accordance with international standards[13]. It appears, there-

---

12 Посольство України в Республіці Польща, *Культурно-гуманітарне співробітництво між Україною та Польщею*, 19 June 2023, https://poland.mfa.gov.ua/spivrobitnictvo/231-kulyturno-gumanitarne-spivrobitnictvo-mizh-ukrajinoju-ta-polyshheju [10.04.2026].

13 Державна служба України з етнополітики та свободи совісті, *Затверджено Державну цільову національно-культурну програму «Єдність у розмаїтті» на період до 2034 року*, 26 September 2023, https://dess.gov.ua/zatverdzheno-derzhavnu-tsilovu-natsionalno

fore, that the next step will be to empower minorities and provide them with real opportunities and practical mechanisms to take effective action in their own interests.

Conclusions

During armed conflict or war, the heritage of ethnic minorities faces severe risks ranging from physical destruction to the intentional eradication of cultural identity. Heritage property such as archaeological sites, churches, museums, and libraries objectify the values identified by minorities and local communities.

In the case of Ukraine, Russia's attacks on its cultural heritage target two dimensions of national identity. Firstly, they are designed to undermine the very foundations of Ukraine's national identity. For example, archaeological sites on the northern coast of the Black Sea, and above all in Crimea, constitute a significant part of the heritage of the ancient Greek world, which forms the foundation of European civilisation. Thus, their plundering and destruction amount to the erasure not only of elements of Ukraine's cultural heritage[14] but also of that country's affiliation with Western culture. Given that, for centuries, the Russian state and its elites have disregarded the unique characteristics of the Ukrainian people, systematically and demonstratively eradicating Ukraine's cultural heritage, the current situation is nothing new. Secondly, Russia's acts against ethnic minority heritage constitute aggression against the values of those minorities and call into question Ukraine's multi-ethnic identity.

Currently, national and international institutions are responsible for ensuring the enforcement of the law, including during times of war, and there are relevant international legal instruments governing the field of cultural heritage. In

---

-kulturnu-prohramu-yednist-u-rozmaitti-na-period-do-2034-roku/ [10.04.2026].

14 O. Salata, op. cit., pp. 59–68.

conflict, international institutions monitor acts of destruction and plunder of cultural objects, whilst supporting the process of reconstructing heritage based on social justice and a rights-based approach, with the full participation of local communities and indigenous peoples. Not only UNESCO but also other international initiatives are worth mentioning, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which stands alongside internally displaced people, including representatives of ethnic minorities, recognising the importance of preserving cultural heritage and fostering inclusive communities. Through collaboration and support, domestic and international organisations strive to empower minorities by helping them cherish and celebrate their cultural heritage.

Bibliography

Coynash H., *'Closed for Destruction': Russia is digging up 16th Century Crimean Tatar Khan's Palace*, Human Rights in Ukraine, 15 March 2019, https://archive.khpg.org/en/1552331073.

Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, *Russia destroys irreplaceable fresco in ongoing destruction of 16th-century Crimean Tatar Khan's Palace*, 7 March 2025, https://khpg.org/en/1608814471.

Maksymiuk M., *„Ludobójstwo kulturowe" a wojna na Ukrainie*, "Wiedza Obronna" 2026, vol. 294, no. 5, pp. 21–34.

Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, 26 March 2025, https://mcsc.gov.ua/en/news/the-president-signed-the-law-ratifying-the-council-of-europe-convention-on-offences-relating-to-cultural-property/.

Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, *Росіяни пошкодили 1723 пам'ятки культурної спадщини та 2524 об'єкти культурної інфраструктури постраждали в Україні*, 9 June 2026, https://mincult.gov.ua/news/rosiyany-poshkodyly-1723-pamyatky-kulturnoyi-spadshhyny-ta-2524-obyekty-kulturnoyi-infrastruktury-postrazhdaly-v-ukrayini/.

Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, *Destruction of Khan's Palace as irreparable loss for global culture*, 7 March 2018, https://ppu.gov.ua/en/press-center/destruction-of-khan-s-palace-as-irreparable-loss-for-global-culture/.

Munawar N.A., Symonds J., *Empires of Lies? The Political Uses of Cultural Heritage in War*, "The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice" 2023, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 308–325, DOI: 10.1080/17567505.2023.2205193.

Ombudsman of Ukraine, *National minorities and indigenous people under occupation: The struggle for survival*, Kyiv 2023, https://ombudsman.gov.ua/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/doslidzhennyanatsionalnimenshinispilnotiikorinninarodivokupatsii-1.pdf.

Salata O., *Ludobójstwo dziedzictwa kulturowego narodu rozpoczyna się od zniszczenia miast i architektury*, "Wiedza Obronna" 2026, vol. 294, no. 5, pp. 59–68, DOI: 10.34752/26h1ww23.

UNESCO, *Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO*, 25 March 2026, https://www.unesco.org/en/ukraine-war/damaged-cultural-sites.

US Embassy in Georgia, *Russia's 'barbaric treatment' of Ukrainian cultural sites*, 16 February 2022, https://ge.usembassy.gov/russias-barbaric-treatment-of-ukrainian-cultural-sites/.

Державна служба України з етнополітики та свободи совісті, *Затверджено Державну цільову національно-культурну програму «Єдність у розмаїтті» на період до 2034 року*, 26 September 2023, https://dess.gov.ua/zatverdzheno-derzhavnu-tsilovu-natsionalno-kulturnu-prohramu-yednist-u-rozmaitti-na-period-do-2034-roku/.

Посольство України в Республіці Польща, *Культурно-гуманітарне співробітництво між Україною та Польщею*, 19 June 2023, https://poland.mfa.gov.ua/spivrobitnictvo/231-kulyturno-gumanitarne-spivrobitnictvo-mizh-ukrajinoju-ta-polyshheju.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lara Sorgo has a PhD in Language and Interculturality and is a researcher at the Institute for Ethnic Studies in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Since 2025, she has also been an assistant professor at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska in Koper, Slovenia. Her research focuses on language policy, minority education, and intercultural relations, with particular attention given to the Italian national community in Slovenia and the use of Italian in bilingual contexts. She is actively involved in academic work, including serving on conference scientific committees, performing editorial activities, and contributes to teaching and supervision at the master's and doctoral levels. She has participated in several research projects, especially those examining language use, attitudes, and educational practices in multilingual settings, and has published her results in Slovene, Italian, and English. She is also Vice-Chair of COST Action CA23105 *Language Plurality in Europe's Changing Media Sphere* (PLURILINGMEDIA), which addresses language plurality in Europe's media sphere.

Cinzia Colaiuda holds a PhD in International Comparative Education from the University of Rome II – Tor Vergata in Italy and is a postdoctoral researcher at the European Scientific Institute (Budapest Metropolitan University). Her research interests include language education policies, linguistic ethnography, and urban policies. Her main publications are C. Colaiuda, *Autobiography and narration in multilingual learning environments*, [in:] G. Agresti, F. Torrent (eds.), *Penser et Évaluer les politiques linguistiques*, Aracne, Roma 2022; and C. Colaiuda, *Language education policies: The role of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, [in:] M. Gazzola, F. Grin, L. Cardinal, K. Heugh, *The Routledge Handbook of Language Policy and Planning*, Routledge, 2024.

Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik is a political scientist and archaeologist. She holds a PhD (habilitated doctor) in social sciences, specialising in political and administrative sciences, as well as a PhD in humanities in the discipline of archaeology. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Systems and International Communication at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. As a laureate of NCN programs ("Miniatura", "Sonata") and a recipient of grants from the Minister of Science and Higher Education ("own projects", "Mobilność Plus"), she has conducted researches focused on culture, art, and ethnic minorities in the Baltic states and Central Europe. She has also completed a one-year internship at Vilnius University (Lithuania), as well as a three-month internship at the European Centre for Minority Issues (Flensburg, Germany). Her research interests include the socio-political situation in Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet area, Baltic states, political anthropology, ethnic minorities, and Soviet heritage.