

## Multilingualism and language learning: The Rome city report

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This article illustrates the findings on multilingualism related to the educational sphere in the city of Rome, within the scope and theoretical framework of the international project LUCIDE (Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe). Particularly, it describes the type of linguistic and cultural support offered to plurilingual citizens and the language teaching practices that have emerged from the study of the University of Rome 'Foro Italico' Unit, as presented in the Rome city report (Evangelisti, *et al.*, 2014; Menghini, 2015). The symbolic and pragmatic uses of languages, their status, and their visibility in educational practices are particularly highlighted, as part of the challenges related to the city authorities' approach to multilingualism, particularly for the educational field. The role of public and private institutions, and their interaction in language learning practices and in the educational support for plurilinguals and foreigners in Rome are investigated and considered in light of the national language and education policies and guidelines. The article's conclusions indicate some possible steps for improvement in educational practices at city level, to better support plurilingual citizens and to effectively face the challenges of multilingualism.

**Keywords:** multilingualism; plurilingualism; diversity; language learning; intercultural communication

### Introduction

The international project LUCIDE (Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe) investigated the realities of language use and communication processes in several European Union (and a few non-EU) cities, with the aim of developing pragmatic information and recommendation toolkits on multilingualism, as experienced in the cities, for stakeholders, authorities, and the general public (see the editorial for full details on the general project). The research, carried out from 2011 to 2014, was organized according to five main, often overlapping, aspects of city life: education, the public sphere, the economic sphere, the private lives of citizens, and the urban space. The 16 partners that contributed to the project were universities and civic institutions, each focusing on the analysis of a different city (or cities). This article aims to illustrate the findings of LUCIDE research related to education, and linguistic and cultural support for integration, concerning the city of Rome, which have emerged from the study of the University of Rome 'Foro Italico' and which are presented in the LUCIDE Rome city report (Evangelisti, *et al.*, 2014; Menghini, 2015).

Within the project, the terms 'multilingualism' and 'plurilingualism' refer to societal and individual multilingualism, respectively, according to the distinction drawn in the work of the Council of Europe (Beacco and Byram, 2005; Beacco and Byram, 2007). Societal multilingualism is the co-existence of many languages, in this case within a city. Plurilingualism indicates an individual's repertoire of languages. Moreover, for the purposes of this article, the term

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'intercultural' is employed in reference to the dynamic encounter and interaction of people from different cultures, and to indicate the places, activities, services, and so on, in which such interaction occurs (Trevisani, 2005; Huber and Reynolds, 2014).

The theoretical framework for the Rome research, as for the LUCIDE project in general, investigated communicative processes and practices within a typology of language use:

- symbolic/representational use of language (realities of everyday life – how language is used to send messages, acknowledge communities, etc.)
- transactional/communicative use (e.g. pragmatic use and unofficial acceptance of multilingualism by authorities, for communicative efficiency)
- authoritative/directive use (official, uni-directional, tending towards monolingualism).

Thus, the analysis concerned citizens' and authorities' practices, decisions, attitudes, and choices in language use, rather than focusing on figures and quantitative aspects. Differences in language visibility and status were investigated and our research clearly identified a perceived dichotomy between socioeconomically desirable, useful, and thus valued languages, and less desirable (and even somehow negatively connoted) languages of little use and value. The most widespread European languages, and especially English, manifest a 'prestigious' status and easily receive support, recognition, and respect. Less widespread European or non-European languages, such as most migrants' origin languages, are often attributed a non-prestigious status and are easily neglected and unrecognized (see Stoicheva, 2016: 101–5).

The type of data that were collected comprised, first of all, publicly available (mostly online) information concerning national and minority language use and language learning, such as regulations, policies, reports, projects, celebrations, best practices, school programmes, dedicated city spaces, websites, and so on. At the same time, a list of the possible stakeholders working in multilingual contexts (both in the public and private sectors) or who were otherwise interested in multilingualism was compiled. Such stakeholders were consequently contacted for informal semi-structured interviews, to gather some insights on opinions, experiences, and attitudes regarding language practices and multilingualism in Rome. Visual photographic evidence of language use in urban spaces was also personally gathered by researchers, to integrate the general picture of languages in the city.

All the data were organized and analysed according to the above mentioned five spheres of city life and contributed to the Rome LUCIDE workshop in March 2013, as well as to the other project workshops and seminars. The ensuing further evidence of practices and language use, along with the previously collected data, were included in one of the final products of the projects – the Rome city report.

Focusing on the city report data related to education, this article presents Italian national laws and policies on languages, along with general observations on the approach to linguistic diversity in the national educational system, as an introduction to the authoritative, official position on language use and language learning for Italy and, consequently, Rome.

The role of public and private institutions, and their interaction in language learning practices and in the educational support for plurilinguals and foreigners in Rome, are then analysed in the following two sections according to the LUCIDE findings. The symbolic and pragmatic uses of languages, and their status and visibility in educational practices, are particularly highlighted. The main challenges related to the city authorities' approach to multilingualism, particularly for the educational field and also in light of comments of the interviewed stakeholders, are subsequently pointed out in the following section.

Finally, a further, recent step in the research on multilingualism and education is preliminarily presented. In order to gather additional insight about the way Rome's young citizens perceive

multilingualism and language practices in education, adapted versions of the LUCIDE interview questions (see Appendices A and B) were submitted to a small group of 'Foro Italico' university students. A qualitative analysis of their responses illustrates further elements contributing to the general conclusions of this article, on the measures taken in the city of Rome in the educational field, and the further steps necessary to face the challenges of multilingualism.

### **National laws and policies on languages and education**

According to the law, Italy (and, consequently, the city of Rome) only has one official language, although some regions have special provisions for other languages and some linguistic minorities are catered for under the law. As specified in the Rome city report (Evangelisti *et al.*, 2014: 11–12, 48), while Act 482/99 – 'Norms on the protection of historical linguistic minorities' (Italian Parliament, 1999) – states that Italian is the official national language, it also recognizes and protects 12 so-called 'historical' minority cultures and languages in Italy, mostly of bordering countries (Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan, Sardinian). Furthermore, it regulates their use in public acts and institutions, and their teaching in schools and universities, especially in special regions at the borders, such as Trentino Alto Adige and Valle d'Aosta. At the same time, in the field of education, the Italian law provides for the total equality of foreign and Italian children (regardless of stay permits and/or the legal or illegal position of their parents), and specifically mentions that cultural and language diversity is welcome in Italian schools, and that courses in heritage languages and cultures are to be organized for immigrant children (Act 286/98, Article 38: 'Instruction of foreign subjects. Intercultural Education'). The same equality principle applies to access to university courses (Article 39), as the right to instruction is the same for foreign citizens as for Italian citizens.

'Foreign citizens' in official acts generally refer to foreign adults who already have (or are entitled to obtain) a residence permit. One of the conditions for non-EU foreigners to acquire a residence permit is to have a basic knowledge of the Italian language (Act 94/2009); and in a 2010 Act (*Decreto Ministeriale* [Ministerial Decree] no. 134), the Home Office and the Ministry of Education (2010a) established the procedures for taking the necessary Italian language test (unless a recognized certification has already been acquired). The Home Office and the Ministry of Education (2010b) also signed a framework agreement (*accordo quadro*) in 2010 for the organization and delivery of free courses to teach basic reading and writing skills in Italian, as well as in socio-legal culture, to be offered in 19 languages. Such pilot courses in 'language and socio-legal integration', organized by local schools in each region, count towards the obtaining of a residence permit for migrants.

However, no adult education projects in the languages and cultures of the foreigners' countries of origin have so far been implemented on such a national scale. Only in the sector of children's education have many schools organized extracurricular language courses (both for foreign and Italian students) in the (non-EU) languages and cultures of origin of the specific school population, as reported in the Ministry of Education's (2014) *Guidelines for the Integration of Foreign Students*, the new and updated version of a 2006 document. The new version was necessary, as stated in the short online introductory article, because of the great changes in Italian schools relating to the number of foreign students, which grew from 430,000 (in 2006) to 830,000 (in 2014). The 2014 guidelines actually include a sub-section on plurilingualism and quote statements and principles from the Council of Europe's *Guide for the Development and Implementation of Curricula for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education* (Beacco *et al.*, 2010). They also offer brief examples of activities and good practices to promote linguistic diversity in schools, including multilingual welcome signs, entry tests, stories, and fairy tales, and, as mentioned, extracurricular courses

in the languages and cultures of origin. Interestingly, these are similar to the good practices mentioned in the (much more detailed) LUCIDE Toolkits on 'Learning new languages' (LUCIDE, 2014a) and on 'Multilingualism in education – bilingual and multilingual learners' (LUCIDE, 2014b), as well as in the LUCIDE Rome city report. Thus, while plurilingualism and linguistic diversity are welcomed and promoted according to official documents and regulations, actual resources have so far only been granted on a vast scale for projects regarding Italian. Schools are mostly left on their own to provide for education on heritage languages and cultures, on a local scale, with no overarching coordination and thus little funding and resources.

From the educational point of view, both on a local and on a national scale, the Romany population constitutes a special case with peculiar characteristics, also as demonstrated in our LUCIDE research. They have been in Rome, and in Italy, for a long time, but are not recognized as a linguistic minority by the Italian law. They mostly live in camps in the city outskirts, some in legal 'equipped' camps and some in illegal camps in miserable life conditions. A specific project of Rome City Council, co-funded by the Lazio region and which has been ongoing since 1991, grants education to minors who live in so-called 'Rom equipped camps', or in a few help centres/shelters, or in 'Rom non-equipped camps'. A small number of social cooperatives participate in the project, which, according to recent data, involves approximately 2,100 students from 13 camps/centres and almost 300 (lower and higher level) schools all over the city outskirts (Rome City Council, 2014). The volunteers and social cooperative workers, among other responsibilities, also offer linguistic support for the Romany students in dedicated Italian language lessons.

However, according to recent reports (De Acutis, 2011; Arrighi *et al.*, 2011), most Romany students rarely achieve the minimum learning objectives, owing to several reasons, including some teachers' lingering prejudices and their attitude of lower expectations and lower engagement in the school programme for Romany students. Therefore, access to higher education and to university for them seems mostly a utopian objective in the present situation (in 2009/10 only 80 Romany students attended high schools in Rome, according to De Acutis, 2011). Finally, it is important to note that the existing projects unfortunately do not include the minors who live in illegal camps. This practice seems to actually clash with the general norms that grant education to all young people, regardless of the legal or illegal situation of their families. The unrecognized status of the Romany language as a minority language confirms the peculiar situation of the Romany people in a city and a country whose practices seem partly at odds with official policies that nominally support intercultural and plurilingual education.

As for general language policies concerning education for all citizens, foreign (mostly European) languages are an obligatory part of the curriculum in Italian schools, both state and private, at all levels of instruction (Act 53/2003). At least one foreign language course is included and compulsory in all kinds of schools from primary (in which English is the only obligatory language) to higher education (including university). Courses for two languages are usually offered from the first grade at secondary school, with a choice among English, French, German, and Spanish. English tends to be the first and the most widespread option, as special emphasis and a higher status is usually attributed to English by parents and society at large. However, there are high schools (such as Liceo Linguistico) as well as a number of university degree courses (e.g. in Eastern languages) specializing in, and offering a wider range of, other foreign languages.

As a further attempt to widen the scope and strengthen the effectiveness of language teaching and learning through a plurilingual approach, according to the 2010 national law reform of secondary schools at second grade (particularly Presidential Decrees no. 87, 88, 89), courses adopting the Content and Language Integrated Learning methodology were obligatorily introduced in a number of classes in all types of high schools in the country. However, such courses are offered mostly in English or, less frequently, in French.

Therefore, a gap seems to exist between official documents and regulations supporting linguistic diversity and plurilingualism in education, and the actual practices – which mainly focus on Italian for foreigners and on a few widespread, prestigious European languages, and which tend to neglect less widespread origin languages. There seems to be a tension in national authorities between the need to teach Italian to non-EU foreigners, and the parallel need to preserve their origin languages and provide for services in such languages. The tension is both at symbolic and practical levels. In line with the country policy of the national language, the authorities established Italian as the necessary language to officially enter Italian society and the work market, thus attributing huge symbolic value to it, besides recognizing its pragmatic use. As in other EU countries and LUCIDE cities (see Skrandies, 2016), proficiency in the official language in Italy is (simplistically and nationalistically) equated with the first step towards integration and the right and ability to live and work in Italy for non-EU foreigners. Conversely, in compliance with EU mobility laws, no obligatory courses and tests are required for EU citizens. At the same time, following EU guidelines and according to recent official documents, the authorities also favour support for plurilinguals and linguistic diversity in schools, granting some recognition and, thus, symbolic value to origin languages, and encouraging a positive linguistic identity. However, on a pragmatic level, the public education system assigns few resources to, and enacts very limited provisions for, less prestigious origin languages. In Rome, other public and private entities take on the challenge of catering for the needs of such neglected language speakers, as shown in the following two sections.

### **The role of public authorities in language teaching and learning**

The provisions of the national law, framework agreements, and guidelines on language teaching also apply, as mentioned, to the city of Rome and its schools. Particularly, according to LUCIDE research, there are a number of measures taken in the city's state schools and universities to support education in Italian culture and language, plurilingualism, intercultural exchange, and sociocultural integration (Evangelisti, *et al.*, 2014: 10–13). This section presents the most relevant examples of such educational measures.

As in most Italian universities, Italian as a foreign language courses are offered in the four state universities of the city, aimed at the numerous exchange students spending one or more terms in Rome universities as part of European and non-EU exchange programmes. For example, the University of Rome 'Foro Italico' offers Tempus postgraduate programmes in cooperation with Egypt, Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia, as well as an international master's degree and an international PhD programme, therefore providing for such students' linguistic and cultural needs.

As part of the national framework agreement, free courses in the Italian language and culture for migrants and refugees are organized in the Lazio region and in Rome, both through the public (i.e. state) education system and through private schools and voluntary associations. The public education system is primarily in charge of preparing and administering the exams and issuing certificates for the work and residence permits. Permanent Local Centres (*Centri Territoriali Permanenti*; 12 in Rome, 37 in the Lazio region) were set up to host and offer free Italian language courses in preparation of these exams. However, such centres and courses are hardly enough to meet the migrants' requests. Thus, voluntary and private associations are also usually involved, in cooperation with Rome City Council and the Lazio region (see the next section for further details).

Besides such educational programmes provided on a national level, our research identified a number of city-level projects organized and supported by local authorities, focusing on language

learning and services for plurilinguals and migrants. First of all, with the aim of facilitating intercultural exchange and integration between migrant and Italian communities, the Education and School Office of the City Council has been funding the Polo Intermundia project since 2003. The project is open to all citizens, schools, and associations of the first municipality of the city, which is the central city area. Its headquarters are located at the Manin School, in the multicultural Esquilino quarter, and it functions as an intercultural educational centre for minors and adults. Its programme is established by representatives of Rome City Council, the municipality, the Manin School, and the Di Donato School Parents' Association (*Associazione Genitori Scuola 'Di Donato'*, 2010), and its activities comprise courses in Italian as a foreign language and culture; courses in origin languages and cultures; and intercultural seminars and workshops. Moreover, within the project, cultural-linguistic mediation services in several languages are provided, on demand, at the Manin School, to facilitate communication between teachers and students' families as well as within the local communities (*Scuola Manin*, n.d.).

Remarkably, a key role in plurilingual education is played in Rome by the libraries network of the City Council (*Biblioteche di Roma*) and their Intercultural Office (*Servizio Intercultura*). As gathered from our research and further illustrated by Gabriella Sanna, head of the office, during the LUCIDE Rome workshop in 2013 (Sanna, 2013; Evangelisti *et al.*, 2013), since 1994 the libraries Intercultural Office has offered services and developed projects aimed at social inclusion of new citizens in local communities. Recently, a number of multilingual and multicultural services and projects have been started in many city libraries. For instance, the 'Biblioteche in lingua' project (Libraries in foreign languages) aims to promote bilingualism/plurilingualism as a source of valuable and cultural richness for migrants, and to preserve origin languages and cultures for both the adults and the new generations. Within this project, according to recent Rome City Council data on the presence of migrants and with the help of cultural mediators, at least 18 libraries in different areas of Rome have added special sections of books in the languages of the largest local foreign communities (including Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Polish, Rumanian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Urdu). Access to all books and libraries is free of charge for anyone, with the only condition of subscribing to the libraries (also free of charge). In 2008, in order to support social integration and an active citizenship, the libraries network started another project, one of the first of this kind in Italy, called 'L'italiano in biblioteca' (Italian language in libraries). This is an ongoing educational project, offering free Italian language courses for foreigners within the spaces of public libraries, to facilitate orientation in the city services and society, as well as the acquisition of the language. Such courses, organized with the cooperation of several different associations and volunteer bodies, are particularly aimed at vulnerable groups – for example, refugees and Muslim women.

As highlighted by Sanna (2013), the important difference between the courses organized by libraries and those by the Permanent Local Centres, public schools, and private associations, is that libraries are unaligned, open, and neutral places from a religious, educational, political, and social point of view, where everyone can enter, families can bring their children, and where they can take part in all the library activities together with other library users. The end-of-course parties organized at the libraries, featuring typical food, dances, and music, have been particularly successful in bringing together the students, their families, local language experts, and the interested and curious members of the local (both Italian and foreign) communities. Such good intercultural and multilingual practices have also led to a 10 to 30 per cent increase in new registered library users who are foreign in recent years (i.e. 2010 to 2012), compared with the total of new registered users, according to 2012 data of the libraries network (*ibid.*). All the libraries' activities and events are regularly promoted by and illustrated in the Roma Multi-etnica website ([www.romamulti-etnica.it](http://www.romamulti-etnica.it)) and newsletter, run by the Intercultural Office.

The website includes a list of the libraries participating in the various projects and the foreign languages sections they offer, as well as information about all the city's intercultural events and the foreign communities in Rome, their literatures and cultures, with the aim of welcoming migrants, encouraging diversity, and promoting everyone's participation in library and city life.

Thus, such specific projects organized at a city level by local authorities seem to cater, at least in part, to plurilingual citizens' and migrants' linguistic needs more effectively, and through a wider number of good practices than the national level ones. Though hardly enough compared to the number and variety of linguistic communities in the city, these projects contribute to give both pragmatic and symbolic support and visibility to less widespread languages. They provide resources as well as education and mediation services in several origin languages, while national level projects seem to focus exclusively on Italian language and culture courses, as mentioned previously. Moreover, the outcomes of local projects with citizens' involvement show that, when resources are dedicated to facilitating intercultural encounters and to visibly supporting multilingualism in city spaces, such spaces appeal to a wider number of citizens, and the fabric of social cooperation within them is strengthened. A considerable amount of similar measures and activities for the support of multilingualism is also undertaken by the private sector, whose key role in language educational programmes in Rome is illustrated in the next section.

### **The role of private associations and institutions in language teaching and learning**

According to our LUCIDE research, a recurring characteristic of most of the educational projects regarding multilingualism in Rome is that private local organizations are actively involved and often crucial to the success and completion of the activities, even when the public authorities and national and city institutions fund them and organize them. In the city report (Evangelisti, *et al.*, 2014: 22–9), the Rome team identified a large number of private, non-profit, and voluntary associations working in the city in the fields of intercultural services and plurilingual education. This section presents some of the most interesting language learning and intercultural projects such associations contribute to, and some of the most relevant private linguistic educational programmes.

ScuoleMigranti is a prominent network created in 2009 and connecting approximately 100 private associations and schools, offering Italian language courses to migrants in the city and province of Rome. They cooperate with the authorities in the organization of Italian language and culture courses, and in facilitating cultural-linguistic integration, social inclusion, and civic and legal education for migrants and refugees in Rome and Lazio. The courses of this network are free of charge, with a low beginner's threshold so as to allow access to citizens with educational shortcomings and to disadvantaged groups. The most recent data of the network (ScuoleMigranti, n.d.) show that the number of adults who took part in the free Italian language courses in its schools was larger than the number of those in the Permanent Local Centres of the city council and Lazio region. In 2014–15, approximately 12,000 foreign citizens attended courses offered by the network, while about 8,000 attended Permanent Local Centre courses, according to a report in PiùCulture's magazine (Agostini, 2015).

PiùCulture ([associazione.piuculture.it](http://associazione.piuculture.it)) is one of the voluntary associations of the ScuoleMigranti Network and it has been active since 2010 in the second municipality of Rome. It primarily cooperates with state schools in order to support and integrate foreign and migrant children, and it runs its own online weekly magazine, covering all aspects of intercultural life, news, and activities for foreigners in Rome. Its volunteers act as intercultural mediators in public schools (particularly in Tagalog and Mandarin Chinese) and offer migrants' children free Italian

language lessons, to facilitate their admission and inclusion at school. Such important practices in public educational contexts with children are not part of nationally funded projects, and mostly rely on the work of private voluntary associations and social cooperatives.

Programma Integra ([www.programmaintegra.it](http://www.programmaintegra.it)) is a very active social cooperative, organizing activities for the integration of migrants and refugees in Rome since 2005 (Evangelisti, *et al.*, 2014: 15). For most of its projects, this cooperative works in agreement with the City Council Immigration Office, the City Council Social Services, and the Healthcare Services Office. It also actively contributed to the LUCIDE project, presenting its work and experiences at the LUCIDE workshops in Rome and Madrid. Among its projects, Programma Integra periodically runs courses in Italian language and socio-legal orientation, and provides professional training for migrants and refugees. As part of its cooperation with the Public Register of Cultural-Linguistic Mediators of Rome City, it also offers educational support through the organization of multilingual training courses for the registered intercultural mediators. However, as illustrated by Valentina Fabbri, president of Programma Integra, at the LUCIDE Rome workshop (Fabbri, 2013; Evangelisti *et al.*, 2013), one of the greatest challenges encountered by the association in its everyday activities is that the Rome City Council staff and procedures often put up obstacles rather than provide support. Social workers in city council offices seem to obstinately cling to their methods and techniques, rejecting new technologies and new systems of communication and mediation. These observations particularly applied to the association work for the SITI project ('*Servizi integrati e tecnologie dell'incontro*' [Integrated systems and technologies for the intercultural encounter]; Programma Integra, 2016), which consisted of multilingual mediation services through video calls over the internet. The unwillingness to shift to new methods might partly constitute the reason for the termination of such an interesting and promising project, after only two years of activity. In the Rome team's experience, none of the city council office workers or managers replied to invitations to take part in or to be interviewed for the LUCIDE project (with the exception of the Intercultural Office of the city's library network), which seems to also indicate a lack of interest in projects on multilingualism in the city.

As a final example: since 2011, through the 'Futuro prossimo: Percorsi di apprendimento linguistico per cittadini stranieri' project, the religious organization CARITAS (Roman Catholic relief, development, and social service organization) and the charity and social service organization, Fondazione di Roma, have run free Italian language courses for foreigners and migrants. Such courses take place in the central city area, where the CARITAS Centro di Ascolto Stranieri (Counselling Centre for Foreign Citizens) is located, and where the educational opportunities offered by other institutions barely provide for half of the actual needs, in the CARITAS centre's experience.

According to our research, several other private cultural organizations and language institutes carry out a large number of smaller-scale activities in Rome for the support of linguistic diversity and plurilingual education, especially courses (with admission fees) in foreign languages and cultures. Moreover, out of the several bilingual and multilingual schools in Rome, at all levels of education, most are indeed private. The most prominent ones are those attended by a large number of Italian children, whose parents are either bi-national or of a multicultural and plurilingual European/North American background. The majority of such schools are bilingual Italian/British or American English, though renowned bilingual schools are available for other languages too (particularly German, Spanish, French, Polish, and Japanese). A notable exception is the Liceo Scientifico Internazionale con opzione Lingua Cinese, at Rome's Convitto Nazionale 'Vittorio Emanuele II', a public institute hosting a high school with optional Chinese language classes, in addition to the usual English language classes.



The examples in this section seem to show that, in Rome, private institutes, voluntary associations, and social cooperatives strive to compensate for the shortcomings of public institutions in linguistic services and courses – which are inadequate both in number and in variety. The role of the private sector in educational programmes seems particularly crucial for the support of less ‘prestigious languages’. In fact, the work of private organizations positively contributes to the status and visibility of origin languages in the urban spaces more consistently than that of the public sector. However, most of the activities and projects undertaken by private associations are of narrow scope, limited to specific areas of the city and to specific spheres of interest. Inevitably, they often depend on short-term funding and on the time, work, and resources of volunteers. A more general approach to facing the challenges of multilingualism could be more effective to cater for citizens’ needs and to take advantage of the linguistic richness of a multicultural city, as further discussed in the next section.

### **Interviews with stakeholders: Challenges for the city’s multilingual approach**

The main challenges regarding multilingualism from the educational point of view, as revealed by our study, also emerge from the qualitative analysis of the stakeholders’ interviews for the LUCIDE project (Evangelisti, *et al.*, 2014: 22–9, 44–7; Menghini 2015: 10–11). The aim of the interview process was to collect stakeholders’ opinions and first-hand information on language practices and challenges for plurilingual citizens. A list of interested parties was compiled during our initial desk research when projects, documents, best practices, and institutions related to multilingualism in Rome were identified, along with the people involved in them. The list included volunteers or workers in associations, unions, cooperatives, civil servants, and managers in public offices. An adapted questionnaire (in Italian; see Appendix A) was submitted to such stakeholders, together with an invitation to participate in the project. Only a small number of them replied, resulting in ten collected interviews, from respondents of both Italian and foreign nationalities. Such a small sample cannot of course lead to generalizations, but it nonetheless provides valuable insights into the experiences and points of view of interested parties.

The questionnaire was administered through different methods, according to the availability and preferences of the various interviewees: through face-to-face interviews, which were audio-recorded where possible (granted the interviewees’ informed consent), or via email or telephone. All data were used and presented as anonymous. According to their own self-definition, two interviewees are monolingual and the rest, bilingual/plurilingual. All of them are actively engaged in multilingual/multicultural activities and contexts, for their work and/or personal lives. As already mentioned, we could not fail to notice that most city council offices did not reply to our invitation and thus did not take part in the interview process.

The gathered responses on the city’s approach to multilingualism seem in line with other evidence of our research: they mostly agree that more support from the city authorities is necessary to properly support linguistic diversity and to cater for the needs of the multicultural population of the city. A coordinated approach and a general city policy on languages and multilingualism are deemed possible important steps to take for the city’s public authorities, as explicitly suggested by two interviewees. Such steps would contribute to promoting the good practices and the many language teaching activities, currently carried out by the private and voluntary associations, as mentioned in the responses and as illustrated in the previous section. One interviewee suggested that a structural, citywide approach should substitute the numberless, always renewing projects, to satisfy the needs connected to multilingualism. An insufficient interaction between the city authorities and the associations working with migrants

was explicitly pointed out, by another interviewee, as an obstacle to best practices. Thus, these stakeholders' opinions seem to confirm our findings that services and provisions enacted by state and local authorities are barely adequate for the plurilingual communities in the city. To be effective, public support for projects of local organizations on multilingualism needs more consistency and a long-term vision. The impression of numberless disjointed activities carried out with limited (if any) public funds in specific areas of the city, or for specific groups of citizens, is also confirmed in these respondents' experiences. Indeed, on a similar note, a coordinated, inclusive approach, with general provisions aimed at all children in need of language support – regardless of their origins – could also favour the school progress of the Romany children, as gathered from Arrighi *et al.*'s report (2011).

Furthermore, interviewees claimed that more support and attention to languages in general are necessary in the city of Rome, both for foreign languages (in school teaching, signposting, information sheets, websites, etc.) and for Italian as a foreign language (with a demand for more courses for migrants and foreigners, and for more mediation/translation services). Responses on language visibility mention English and French as the most visible languages in Rome, though a few other languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish, are also acknowledged. Italian seems to be tacitly implied and is only indicated as most visible by one respondent. Concerning the need for more visibility, interviewees list a variety of neglected languages, especially Chinese, Bengali, and African languages. However, English is considered by two of the interviewees as a useful language that should be more widespread. The gathered responses clearly reflect the everyday experience of working and interacting mostly with migrants and plurilinguals from non-EU countries, and so express the difficulties and needs of such citizens. Our (mostly plurilingual) stakeholders manifest an acute awareness of the symbolic and pragmatic role of languages, especially origin languages, in city life, and lament the dearth of resources and consideration devoted to them. For a different perspective, the next section shows the points of view on multilingualism of a small group of university students who replied to a similar questionnaire.

### **Preliminary analysis of University of Rome 'Foro Italico' students' responses**

As a further step in the research on multilingualism in Rome, a slightly different version of the adapted questionnaire was administered to a number of 'Foro Italico' students, in order to gather their opinions, as students and as language learners/speakers, on multilingualism and language learning in the city. The questionnaire was adapted to the university context (see Appendix B) and distributed in classes in written form, either on paper or through an online form, depending on practical reasons (such as number of students in class and number of available computers). Participating students attend the second year of the bachelor's degree course in Physical Education and Sport, and include a small number of Erasmus students and one so-called 'foreign student' (from Venezuela, studying in Rome for the entire BA degree course). They responded to the questions anonymously and on a voluntary basis in December 2015/January 2016, before or after their English or Italian as a foreign language classes, to a total of 85 collected responses. This is far from a representative sample, but their answers and the opinions expressed by several of them help to cast an interesting light on the way multilingualism can be perceived in Rome by young citizens, especially in comparison with the LUCIDE respondents. Of the 12 participating Erasmus students (five from Portugal, four from Spain, and one each from Germany, Hungary, and Poland), only four asked for the questionnaire in English, rather than in Italian. Unlike the stakeholders in the LUCIDE interviews, most of these students claimed to be monolingual (Italian), while 30 of them identify themselves as bilingual, and only ten as plurilingual. However,

the vast majority (79) said that they consider multilingualism important for the city of Rome. Interestingly, the students' opinions differ from those of the LUCIDE stakeholders on the themes of multilingualism, the city's approach to it, and the desirable changes.

First of all, almost half of the students chose not to answer the question about the general city approach, or replied that they did not know about it. They evidently feel less directly affected and are less personally interested in, or aware of, the issues and initiatives relating to multilingualism in Rome than the LUCIDE interviewees. However, more than half of the students replied affirmatively to the question on whether they would like to make any changes to the city approach. Many affirmative replies include the students' desiderata, which are mostly related to language learning. Indeed, most of the desirable changes mentioned are specifically related to English language courses. Respondents wish there were more courses at school, that the courses were more effective, and that English classes started at an earlier age for children. These are clearly general changes that refer to the Italian school system, not just to the capital city.

Moreover, and more specifically, English is considered the most important language for Rome according to 54 responses to the question on language visibility (the second most important language according to the responses is Chinese, mentioned by ten students). English is also considered one of the most visible languages in Rome by 54 students, while 14 students consider Spanish as very visible, and only 11 students (most of them from the Erasmus group) mention Italian as the most visible language. All these students' attention seems quite focused on the key role of English as a global, useful language, and on the shortcomings of their school experiences as English language learners. Most of the Erasmus students, instead, specified Italian as the most visible language and reported a scarcity of competence and the rare use of any foreign language in the city. However, Erasmus respondents seem to agree with Italian respondents that the language most in need of support in its use and visibility in Rome is English.

The responses to the question about the university's approach to translation and interpretation of foreign languages are mixed, but mostly point in the same direction. Only 19 respondents explicitly said they find the approach appropriate, while 12 students (including a few of the foreign ones) said the approach is not appropriate at all or not satisfyingly so. The stated difficulties, for those who considered the approach unsatisfying, are mainly a perceived insufficient competence in English and a lack of related linguistic support. Such difficulties were reported both by the majority of the Italian students and by the few Erasmus students. The former group feel they do not speak/understand English well enough, while the latter group said they do not speak/understand Italian well enough and added that not enough people speak English at university. Interestingly, the dissatisfied foreign students did not explicitly mention a lack of support for their own Italian language learning or understanding. They only mentioned the low proficiency in English of the Italians that they encountered. Unequivocally, English is the focus of attention, and the lack of proficiency in English (one's own or other people's) is the main source of perceived linguistic problems from these respondents' point of view. Other languages, including Italian and especially non-EU languages, seem quite marginal in comparison. In these students' responses, the city's multilingualism is mostly narrowed down to a pragmatic and economically valuable bilingualism, as determined by globalization and expectations for the work market. Although a few students wish for an open-minded attitude of citizens towards foreign languages in general, and for multilingualism in signposting and information points around the city (unexpectedly, two Italian students mentioned that), most of the participating students failed to notice non-EU languages around the city. Accordingly, they also did not mention such languages among those in need of support and recognition in the city. The prestigious status of English and its perceived high communicative and symbolic value as the main language for work and tourism

is at the centre of these respondents' view of life in the city, and of the linguistic priorities in educational programmes.

As a future development, besides involving a larger number of students, including from the master's degrees, it might be interesting to administer the same questionnaire to the (usually less numerous) students who chose French or Spanish as a foreign language in the same bachelor's degree course.

### **Concluding remarks**

The findings of our LUCIDE research in general show that multilingualism is of course a reality in Rome. Several different languages and multicultural communities are heard and seen around the city, which is also visited daily by thousands of international tourists and hosts a large number of international students. Quite a lot of projects, initiatives, and activities are in place to provide for the needs of plurilingual speakers in the city, organized both by public institutions and by private and voluntary associations. However, according to our study, the vital role of multilingualism is not always entirely perceived and emphasized, either by citizens or at a citywide coordinated level.

Particularly, the many provisions in the educational sphere set up by Rome City Council and by other authorities for plurilinguals and foreigners, reflecting the national frameworks and legislation, focus mainly on courses of Italian as a foreign language and on school courses in the most common European languages, especially English. Only to a lesser extent do they provide for courses and support for the migrants' origin languages, despite the statements in national official documents. Among the few good practices in the public sector, the city library network emerges as most active on a wide variety of language courses, multilingual support, and multicultural integration. The libraries network partly also takes on the role of coordinating structure for many plurilingual educational activities in the city, with an unaligned, non-political, and non-religious stance. It consistently offers free open spaces for such activities to take place, as well as giving them visibility and publicity through its website and newsletter. In cooperation with libraries and other state institutions, a large number of private and volunteer associations focus on assistance to migrants and to plurilinguals in general, through a variety of language-related educational projects and activities. At least in part, libraries and such private organizations seem to contribute to a positive linguistic identity for foreign citizens, and to balance out the status and visibility of neglected origin languages.

However, according to our study, a structured city-level approach seems necessary, to tackle the different aspects of multilingualism with consistent, effective strategies. City council and/or regional policies specifically addressing multilingualism and the city's linguistic needs, as suggested by an interviewee, could be a first step towards a wider acknowledgement and support of the many languages in Rome. Consistent public support for educational programmes for origin languages may favour the sociocultural integration of migrants and more fruitful intercultural exchanges, as the experiences of libraries and small-scale projects have shown. Increased visibility and a rise in status for less widespread languages could also have a positive backwash on language learning and teaching in general. Particularly, this could contribute to raising young citizens' awareness of the reality and advantages of multilingualism, beyond a mere focus on Italian–English bilingualism, as in our students' responses. A wider scope of attention to a number of languages both in courses and services for plurilinguals and in state schools, not limited to prestigious European languages, seems appropriate to take full advantage of the linguistic resources and to provide for the needs of the multicultural and multilingual society already characterizing the city of Rome.

### Notes on the contributor

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### Appendix A

Interview questions: Italian version/adaptation

Questionario – Multilinguismo a Roma – Progetto 'LUCIDE'

1. Qual è il suo ruolo/la sua posizione e che tipo di lavoro svolge? Per che tipo di agenzia/istituzione lavora?
2. Qual è la sua etnia d'origine?
3. Si considera monolingue/bilingue/plurilingue?
4. Pensa che il problema del multilinguismo sia una questione delicata a Roma?
5. Nel nostro studio preliminare di esempi diversi di multilinguismo, ci siamo resi conto che nelle città multilingui alcune lingue sono più visibili di altre. Nella sua sfera d'azione ci sono lingue particolarmente importanti o visibili, o lingue (neglette? e) meno visibili?
6. C'è una lingua che pensa dovrebbe essere sostenuta di più nell'uso o nella visibilità?
7. La coesistenza di più lingue in una città pone delle sfide e delle scelte per il governo locale e per le aziende, per esempio in termini di decisioni politiche. È d'accordo col modo in cui la città di Roma affronta il problema del multilinguismo? Può fornire un esempio di una scelta che condivide oppure che non condivide?
8. Sembrano esserci due modi principali di gestire le barriere linguistiche quando incontriamo una lingua che non conosciamo: usare la traduzione o interpretazione, oppure usare la tecnologia (per esempio con sistemi di traduzione automatica online). Nella sua esperienza, come viene gestita la traduzione/interpretazione nel suo settore d'azione? Pensa sia gestita in modo appropriato?
9. Ha avuto esperienze recenti di difficoltà incontrate da singoli individui o da gruppi a causa della loro non adeguata conoscenza dell'italiano?
10. Cambierebbe qualcosa nell'approccio al multilinguismo in questa città?
11. Quali lingue parla o usa nella sfera privata e in quella professionale?
12. Pensa di apprendere facilmente le lingue? Le piace?
13. Se ha appreso altre lingue, qual è stata l'esperienza di apprendimento più significativa per lei?
14. Vuole aggiungere altro?

### Appendix B I

Interview questions: Italian version/adaptation for university students

Questionario – Multilinguismo a Roma – Progetto 'LUCIDE'

1. Che corso universitario frequenti? Svolgi anche un qualche tipo di attività lavorativa? Se sì, quale attività e in che ruolo?
2. Qual è la tua etnia d'origine/nazionalità?
3. Ti consideri monolingue/bilingue/plurilingue?

4. Pensi che il multilinguismo sia una questione importante/delicata a Roma?
5. Nel nostro studio di esempi di multilinguismo, ci siamo resi conto che nelle città multilingui alcune lingue sono più visibili di altre. Secondo la tua esperienza, ci sono lingue particolarmente importanti o visibili, o lingue trascurate e meno visibili a Roma?
6. C'è una lingua che pensi dovrebbe essere sostenuta di più nell'uso o nella visibilità?
7. La coesistenza di più lingue in una città pone delle sfide e delle scelte per il governo locale e per le aziende, per esempio in termini di decisioni politiche. Sei d'accordo col modo in cui la città di Roma affronta il problema del multilinguismo? Puoi fornire un esempio di una scelta che condividi oppure che non condividi?
8. Sembrano esserci due modi principali di gestire le barriere linguistiche quando incontriamo una lingua che non conosciamo: usare la traduzione o interpretazione, oppure usare la tecnologia (per esempio con sistemi di traduzione automatica online). Nella tua esperienza, come viene gestita la traduzione/interpretazione nell'ambito universitario? E in quello lavorativo (se lavori)? Pensi sia gestita in modo appropriato?
9. Per lo studio e/o il lavoro, tu personalmente utilizzi strumenti tecnologici per tradurre o per studiare lingue straniere? Se sì, puoi darci qualche esempio?
10. Hai avuto esperienze recenti di difficoltà incontrate da singoli individui o da gruppi a causa della loro non adeguata conoscenza dell'italiano?
11. Cambieresti qualcosa nell'approccio al multilinguismo in questa città?
12. Quali lingue parli o usi nella sfera privata e in quella universitaria/professionale?
13. Pensi di apprendere facilmente le lingue? Ti piace?
14. Se hai appreso altre lingue, qual è stata l'esperienza di apprendimento più significativa per te?
15. Vuoi aggiungere altro?

## **Appendix B2**

Interview questions: English version/adaptation for university students

Questionnaire – Multilingualism in Rome – 'LUCIDE' Project

1. Which university course do you attend? Do you also work? If you work, what type of work do you do?
2. What is your ethnic origin/nationality?
3. Do you consider yourself to be monolingual/bilingual/plurilingual?
4. Do you think that the issue of multilingualism is an important/sensitive matter in Rome?
5. In our study of different examples of multilingualism we've noticed that in multilingual cities some languages are more visible than others. In your experience, are there any particularly important or visible languages in Rome? Any neglected or less visible languages?
6. Is there any language you think should have more support in use or in visibility?
7. The co-existence of multiple languages in a city brings with it some challenges and choices for local government and companies, for example in terms of policy decisions. Do you agree with the way that Rome approaches the issue of multilingualism? Can you give an example of an approach that you agree or disagree with?
8. There seem to be two main ways of handling language barriers when we encounter a language we don't understand, by either using human translation/interpretation, or with language technology (for example, with online translation for instance). In your

- experience, how are translation/interpretation handled at university? What about at work (if you work)? Do you think it is handled appropriately?
9. For study and/or work, do you use technology to translate or study foreign languages? If you do, can you give us some examples?
  10. Have you recently witnessed difficulties experienced by an individual or group because of a lack of proficiency in Italian, in Rome?
  11. Would you change anything in the approach to multilingualism in Rome?
  12. Which languages do you speak or interact with in your personal and university/work life?
  13. Would you say that you easily learn foreign languages? Do you like learning foreign languages?
  14. If you have learned other languages, what has been the most significant language learning experience for you?
  15. Anything we haven't asked and you would like to add?

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### ***In this issue***

This paper was published in a special feature on Multilingualism in education in cosmopolitan cities, edited by Dina Mehmedbegovic. The other articles in the feature are as follows (links unavailable at time of publication):

- Caporal-Ebersold, E., and Young, A. (2016) 'Negotiating and appropriating the "one person, one language" policy within the complex reality of a multilingual creche in Strasbourg'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 122–33.
- Ellyson, C., Andrew, C., and Clément, R. (2016) 'Language planning and education of adult immigrants in Canada: Contrasting the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia, and the cities of Montreal and Vancouver'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 134–56.
- Mehmedbegovic, D. (2016) Editorial: 'Multilingualism in education in cosmopolitan cities: Insights into LUCIDE network research'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 119–21.
- Nicolaou, A., Parmaxi, A., Papadima-Sophocleous, S., and Boglou, D. (2016) 'Language education in a multilingual city: The case of Limassol'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 174–85.

### ***Elsewhere in the journal***

- Jin, T. (2014) 'Getting to know you: The development of intercultural competence as an essential element in learning Mandarin'. *London Review of Education*, 12 (1), 20–33.
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