



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



RICHERS
RENEWAL, INNOVATION AND CHANGE:
HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN SOCIETY

RICHERS “RENEWAL, INNOVATION AND CHANGE: HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN SOCIETY”

**European Minorities and Identity: strengthening relationships
for a sense of belonging in the digital era**

April 2016

INTRODUCTION

RICHERS is a research project funded by the European Commission within the 7th Framework Programme in the domain of Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities. Its main objective is to reduce the distance between people and culture, recalibrating the relationship between heritage professionals and heritage users in order to maximise cultural creativity and ensure that the whole European community can benefit from the social and economic potential of cultural heritage (CH).

RICHERS is about change; about the decentring of culture and CH away from institutional structures towards the individual; about the questions which the advent of digital technologies are demanding that we ask and answer in relation to how we understand, collect and make available Europe’s CH.

The Council of Europe’s Framework Convention on the Value of CH for Society¹ (Faro Convention) emphasises CH related to human rights, and several projects and media platforms, analogue and digital, have been developed to research, disseminate and raise awareness and understanding of Europe’s complex history and culture.² European identity is ever changing, and different groups face different challenges and have varying needs. As RICHERS deliverable D4.1 – *European identity, belonging and the role for digital CH*³ – states, shared values and CH can provide a sense of belonging⁴ amongst and between European citizens.

An aspect of RICHERS research is concerned with digital CH websites and their contributions towards the development of a European identity that encapsulates the diversity of communities

¹This Convention is based on the idea that knowledge and use of heritage form part of the citizen’s right to participate in cultural life as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(<http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/199>)

² See - <http://resources.riches-project.eu>.

³ See - <http://resources.riches-project.eu/d4-1-european-identity-belonging-and-the-role-for-digital-ch/>.

⁴ For a detailed definition of the term ‘belonging’ see the RICHERS Taxonomy - <http://resources.riches-project.eu/glossary/belonging-2/>.

across the continent. In this context, identity is a plural entity that connotes a sense of belonging to a group or community or engagement in cultural activities, aesthetic judgment and freedom of expression.⁵

This policy brief discusses the main findings of the study and offers a series of recommendations,⁶ which can contribute to the understanding of a European identity and strengthen already existing relationships. The proposals are based on case studies involving the:

- Romani people of Coventry, United Kingdom
- Protestant community in Italy
- Jewish community in Rostock, Germany
- virtual community of Marrokko.nl in the Netherlands
- Dutch-Surinamese communities in the Netherlands
- Spanish-speaking community in Berlin, Germany.

For these groups, their identities are maintained in their CH, which is manifested in languages, traditions, historical knowledge, everyday behaviour, and meanings and symbols attached to the intangible and tangible aspects of their CH. Therefore, making commonalities (such as common values, similar traditions, meals, stories) between communities visible, is a positive way to foster European identity and digital technologies provide easy and flexible access to these commonalities. Although such technologies have facilitated and enabled the construction and maintenance of identity, it should also be recognised that they have still to permeate all sections of society and that there is a risk that some communities might be left behind.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

European identity

As an intricate mosaic, cultures and identities contribute to a more heterogeneous European landscape. Europe finds itself in a tense situation where nations are clinging to traditions and values that are in direct conflict with welcoming those of the complex patchwork of non-European and/or minority communities. As more people arrive, the question of identity surfaces and European identity becomes challenged and forced to reinvent itself and adapt to a changing environment. Europe's identity has always been manifold; hence (additional) minority groups should not pose a threat to its social and cultural cohesion. This is however not necessarily the case in a contemporary cultural climate increasingly ruled by fear and blame. CH could be a first step towards the undoing of the marginalisation of ethnic minorities and to enhance mutual understanding of differences. This policy brief is contextualised “in the light of what are profound demographic and societal changes – of our common European cultural heritage and of the planned European year with regard to citizens’ identification with the EU and to strengthening a sense of community within the union”.⁷ As RICHES research highlights, culture is the most effective means of creating a European identity that sees beyond notions of nation and state and can be employed as a unifying force. The research furthermore found that communities are empowered through their heritage either to strengthen their particular identities or to foster a sense of belonging to their home or host countries. The communities analysed in our six case studies could not be more diverse, yet a cultivation of languages, artefacts, beliefs and other CH materials, which are accessed and/or preserved through digital technologies, can stimulate, challenge and engage members from all walks of life, including those often marginalised communities and ethnic minorities. Acquisition of new talents, skills and the discovery of new information are possible

⁵ See RICHES Taxonomy for a detailed definition of the term identity - <http://resources.riches-project.eu/european-policy-brief-riches-taxonomy-of-cultural-heritage-definitions/>.

⁶ All in agreement with the European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015, item 52 - *Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage* <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0293+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

⁷ Ibid: Item 62.

through engagement with CH, especially via digital technologies. Cultural heritage websites examined as part of this study included:

- *Europeana* – www.europeana.eu (including thematic collections: *Europeana 1914-1918* – www.europeana1914-1918.eu and *Europeana 1989* – www.europeana1989.eu),
- *Euromuse* – www.euromuse.net,
- *Inventing Europe* – www.inventingeurope.eu/.

Intercultural dialogue both within and outside Europe is at the core of creating an inclusive Europe. Strengthening trust and having mutual respect for one another is important and the use of digital technologies in relation to CH can facilitate such conversations and partnerships, as revealed through the various RICHES case studies. As the research considers, even highlighting the daily life of European citizens in different countries and raising awareness of differing lifestyles, has the potential to mediate a sense of European belonging. Interest for other cultures is not limited to Europe but embraces cultural diversity worldwide and creates an awareness of Europe. As to the way that European CH websites should mediate cultural identities, respondents to the user questionnaire expressed a wish to understand their distinctive characteristics and commonalities and focus on unifying elements rather than on differences. This approach would help to foster a sense of belonging and yield a connected, cohesive Europe by stressing (cultural) similarities and fostering cultural exchange instead of emphasising a series of separate European communities. Innovative digital tools that start with the people's digital practices and demands have the potential to support an awareness of cultural pluralism, by providing new ways of dealing with CH as an engaged experience. These tools include, for example, use of e-magazines, newsletters, the Thesaurus Management Platform and a web portal for thesaurus management developed in the framework of the AthenaPlus Project.

Stereotyping, fear, racism and discrimination are root causes of social exclusion. CH lends itself to facilitating a sense of belonging for diasporic and ethnic minorities and can be “important in developing a true democratic and participative narrative for European heritage, including that of religious and ethnic minorities”.⁸ As the EU's policy on culture states, “even when it has its roots in a particular country or region, culture is a shared heritage” (<http://www.libergdc.eu/culture> accessed 31 January 2016). RICHES research underlined the importance of cultural pluralism within Europe and the openness to other European cultures. Communication with people from other European countries as well as social interactions and community values were considered as important components of contributing to a shared European identity. Values such as freedom to live one's own regional or national identity and culture anywhere in Europe were also underlined as essential. The research revealed that being European also means caring about politics and the current situation in Europe, about how people in Europe live today, as well as understanding information about current social and cultural events. The responses to our research questionnaire are comparable with the results of recent studies on European citizenship and European cultural values.⁹ For those communities who are negotiating notions of homeland and displacement, CH is at the core of linking identities. In summary, digital platforms allow a fluid identity to exist, which embraces many members of a community and enables multivocality.

Identity politics and a changing Europe

The gathering debate around issues of national sovereignty has considerable implications for the question of identity in Europe. With, for example, the UK grappling with the very idea of EU membership and Spain facing Catalonia's assertion of independence, there are grave concerns over how any potential political schism may impact upon local, community-level identity. Essentially, RICHES research is situated within this discourse, and argues that understanding and knowledge of notions such as identity need to be reflective of the reconstructions of a changing

⁸ Ibid: Item 48.

⁹ The Standard Eurobarometer 82.

Europe and for the “preservation of the cultural heritage of national minorities and for the promotion and protection of cultural diversity”.¹⁰

Contrary to the view of some cultural institutions, particularly those responsible for European CH digital platforms, CH cannot be understood as belonging to a single, distinctive strand, but rather should be seen from the perspective of ‘multiple identities’ pocketed in local communities or even in individual clusters across the continent. These identities do not seek to replace national identities, in whose space they are embodied or maintained for some form of unifying objective, but ensure cultural continuity and a sense of belonging. This not only contributes to fulfilling basic psychological needs, but ‘being secure in one’s own cultural identity enables one to act with greater freedom, flexibility, and openness to others of different background’ (Pinderhuges 1989: 11). It is this sense of identity that empowers individuals and groups to feel confident in acquiring a sense of belonging to a Europe of cultural pluralism; a community of cultures united in diversity, as this study acknowledges.

Role of online and digital practices

In raising awareness of the consequences of new digital practices in the CH domain and their impact on issues of identity and belonging, this study appreciates the contribution of both internal and external migration in Europe. For example, while the Romani-Gypsy and Traveller minority is a vibrant cultural representation across the continent, it is also one of the least understood minorities. However, digital technologies can play a critical role in altering some of the negative perceptions and attitudes that they face by supporting wider availability of reliable information on the Roma and their culture. Correspondingly, even though the Surinamese presence in the Netherlands is contested, digital media is used to facilitate its representation in the country and for bottom-up activism by providing a means for individual and community voices left out of mainstream media and national and international debates.

To some extent, all of the groups in the study used social media for communication and outreach within the community, sharing information and/or maintaining close ties to their (religious) culture, homelands or a worldwide diaspora. As seen within the case study of the Spanish-speaking community in Berlin, people can reside in a place while, irrespective of what is going on around them, still live ‘in’ their own culture. Technology such as Skype and Facetime enables easy contact with the original home base. YouTube provides access to videos and music and often generates targeted output, to reach specific (minority) communities, creating a type of unmediated heritage, often with significant following. The Waldensian Church in northern Italy has helped its congregation to feel connected by providing streamed coverage of Sunday services, community Facebook discussions (with almost 2,000 followers) and by using WhatsApp and Twitter to quickly share news. It has built and sustained a strong inclusive community through use of social media.

It was observed that often younger and more educated generations develop integral community platforms, such as *Marokko.nl*. This includes sharing intangible forms of heritage such as music and dances through live media practices, as well as important day-to-day interaction. These form an essential part of the community’s everyday life, often more so than CH offered through websites of official cultural institutions. The community platforms leave space for discussion and exchange, and provide an opportunity for flexible and individual engagement with the community’s culture as well as European CH. Content in the native language creates an atmosphere of empathy as well as a sense of ‘We-ness’, and offers the possibility of in-depth participation for migrants with linguistic deficit.

Despite Europe arguably being the world’s wealthiest continent, communities such as the Jewish people in Rostock and many others face being bypassed by the digital revolution due to limited

¹⁰ See item 52: European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 *Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage for Europe* (2014/2149(INI)). <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0293+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

financial resources. Together with a higher degree of digital illiteracy in the older generations, this potentially signals a two-tier Europe with people more or less able to access, engage in or enjoy the continent's rich cultural heritage through online media.

With a greater number of services becoming digital, including everyday tasks such as banking, what happens to people that either don't have or can't use the internet at home?¹¹

The Global Libraries project (Turkey), funded by grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides training sessions to people in their own communities to prevent social exclusion. The Turkish government has expanded access to computers and the Internet in its public libraries to support digital literacy and to avoid exclusion and isolation of a high proportion of its population from engagement in the digital era.¹² This has been recognised by the European Parliament¹³ which calls for greater support of digital innovation to ensure that e-infrastructures engage new audiences and create better access to and exploitation of digital CH.

It is important for the content of general CH websites, such as those considered within this research, to be inclusive, diverse, reflective of Europe's cultural pluralism, and based in a framework that reflects European values and human rights. Improvements in multilingual access and content are advised, which can be achieved through advanced technologies and Linked Open Data. This would further facilitate a sense of belonging through overcoming language barriers, providing context, and satisfying expectations of different audiences.

Although it may have been a traditional perception that educational systems, laws and rules of conduct are the most influential methods of minority integration, RICHES research has clearly shown that cultural heritage, supported by digital technologies, can play a role in bringing diverse groups together and has the potential to lead to more harmonious interaction, symbiotic relationships and integrated communities and identity.¹⁴

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Main Recommendations Emerging from the Research

A series of recommendations are provided aimed at a range of policy-makers at European, national, regional and local levels.

Specific recommendations addressing national, regional and local policy-makers:

1. Greater focus should be placed on identity from the perspective of local communities and groups to encourage more bottom-up participation, local voices and empowerment of marginalised peoples across the continent, which will contribute to a more inclusive, flexible and tolerant EU.

In particular, we recommend the funding of initiatives or research that can help to increase the visibility, by means of digital platforms, of individual testimonies of historical events that reveal diverse backgrounds of people and emphasise their mobility and portability of their CH, to create a stronger sense of belonging to Europe.

¹¹ Prof. Dr. Mehmet Emin Kucuk (Hacettepe Technology Transfer Center, Turkey): [Global Libraries Project Turkey Education-Learning](#) presentation made at the RICHES Ankara Workshop in May 2015.

¹² See RICHES publication - D3.1 Transformation, change and best practice for CH processes @ <http://resources.riches-project.eu/d3-1-transformantion-change-and-best-practice-for-ch-processes/>.

¹³ See item 46, European Parliament resolution of 8 September 2015 - *Towards an Integrated Approach to Cultural Heritage*. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0293+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

¹⁴ Ibid: See item 65.

2. Local and regional politicians need to be more proactive in understanding the diasporic lifestyles of minority community groups.

Policy continues to be made in traditional ways, even though society has changed. We recommend that policy-makers are made more aware of the online digital footprint of these groups, as this will provide a greater understanding of different cultures, reduce misunderstandings and enable decisions to be made that fit the needs of all residents.

Specific recommendations addressing European and national policy-makers:

3. European digital CH content should reflect cultural pluralism through a network of interrelated identities and their interactions and should be inclusive. Equal representation of European ethnic groups, including various minority groups, within the content of the websites that are set up to reflect European CH (such as those explored within the project), as well as multilingual access, is vital. Content in the native language creates an atmosphere of empathy as well as a sense of 'Wenness', and offers the possibility of in-depth participation for migrants with linguistic deficit.

Therefore, we recommend improving the diversity of digital CH content in a multilingual way that represents all groups equally.

4. Use of digital technologies to access, re-use and build CH content provides community members with communication tools, which in turn helps them to strengthen their community. Communities need to have access to CH content. Digital media are used for bottom-up activism. Digital media provide the means for individual and community voices left out of mainstream media. Projects that support CH and the use of digital technologies are crucial as they can foster integration and support a horizontal way of working.

Accordingly, we recommend funding for projects that support CH and the use of digital technologies to access CH.

5. Today's Europe cannot be understood without understanding its complex past. RICHES research has demonstrated that minority communities make a positive and important contribution to Europe's CH, but currently, this is little known and understood.

We recommend further projects that address and promote a broader historical understanding and greater knowledge of minority communities and their cultural contribution to European heritage.

6. A lack of financial resources as well as generational issues means that some people may not have access to, or the skills to use, Internet services and digital media. This signals a divided, two-tier Europe in terms of access as well as levels of digital literacy. The all-encompassing application of technological development may result in sections of the population becoming isolated and disenfranchised.

We recommend that community hubs, as illustrated within the Global Libraries (Turkey) example, are promoted to reduce the risk of isolation of specific groups of people.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The recommendations in this policy brief are based on the outcomes of RICHES project deliverables D4.1 - *European identity, belonging and the role for digital CH*, which focused on the use of digital CH techniques for identity-building processes within European Communities and D3.1 - *Transformation, change and best practice for CH processes* – that considers institutional change, including the role of libraries, as well as unmediated CH.

Within the project's overarching research theme on the role of CH in European social development, this specific study explores how communities engage with their heritage in a changing digital world, and investigates the role of digital CH to facilitate the development of a European identity and a sense of belonging among people of diverse origins.

The exploratory mixed-method research design combined desk research (clarifying terminology and learning from historical perspectives), analysis of three CH websites hosted by non-profit organisations, and empirical, qualitative research in six European minority communities. These six case studies were selected as examples of specifically complex processes of identity-formation, reflecting the cultural diversity in Europe: through expert interviews, surveys, and focus groups, these case studies investigated how individual community members represent, preserve, and transmit their CH in digital format, in order to keep a sense of belonging with the home countries alive, as well as to facilitate integration within the new country.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME

RICHES: Renewal, Innovation and Change: Heritage and European Society

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PROMOTER SRL (PROMOTER)

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TURKIYE CUMHURİYETİ KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM BAKANLIĞI (KYGM)

Ankara, Turkey

FUNDING SCHEME

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SSH.2013.5.2-2 Transmitting and benefiting from cultural heritage in Europe

DURATION

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BUDGET

EU contribution: 2,432,356 €

WEBSITE

RICHES website: <http://www.riches-project.eu/>

RICHES resources website: <http://resources.riches-project.eu/>

RICHES blog on Digital Meets Culture: <http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/riches/>

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Use the hashtag #richesEU to join the RICHES Project community on Twitter.

Subscribe to the RICHES Project YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/richesEU

FURTHER READING

References

Pinderhughes, E. (1989) *Understanding Race, Ethnicity and Power: The Key to Efficacy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Free Press

Websites

RICHES deliverable D4.1 – *European identity, belonging and the role for digital CH*

RICHES deliverable D3.1 - *Transformation, change and best practice for CH processes*

<http://riches-project.eu/deliverables.html>

<http://www.libergdc.eu/culture>

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