Research Questions
Sustaining Minoritized Languages in Europe (SMiLE)

Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

The Research Questions are designed to provide a comparable profile of each community that highlights patterns in how the community responds to internal and external influences in language revitalization or maintenance. The questions and issues below have been formulated in a semi-structured interview format. However, they can easily be adapted to targeted groups (language education, community leadership, government policy, performance and cultural industry, and other stakeholders) or be answered wholly or in part on the basis of earlier research, experiences, observations, analyses, and/or other sources. In each section, key questions are followed by a number of prompts to ensure depth and breadth of response, as well as consistency across the case studies. While we expect each case study to address all questions to some degree for comparative purposes, these questions are merely guidelines to invite meaningful discussions, and are by no means intended to restrict the breadth of topics addressed.

Note: The research site, whether a specific program or initiative and the community that supports it, or a larger community that supports several programs and/or approaches, will in most questions be simply referred to as 'the community.'

A. Introduction of Program and Community
The purpose of this section is to identify a description of the program(s) and community on which specific historical, economic, political, social, and cultural events and can be anchored to the other questions and vitality indicators.

1. Provide a description of the language program and community.

    1.1 Name the language, and any dialects, and sub-dialects.
    1.2 Name the autochthonous or minoritized community/communities that speak the language.
    1.3 Describe the geographic area in which the language is spoken.
    1.4 Provide a brief history of the language.

2. Provide a brief history of the language revitalization efforts and the immediate community that the program serves or is situated in.

    2.1 How did the language revitalization efforts begin? What are some of the key factors or triggers that led to increased language revitalization or

changes in attitudes (a leader, a historical catalyst, policy, revival or renewed interest in an art form…)

2.2   Are there some sociological stages that you can identify in your trajectory related to group development that influence and intersect with other factors driving minoritized language revitalization movements as they develop over time?

2.3   Can you identify any phases in the developmental stages in the language revitalization movement where exogenous forces have a greater influence? Can you identify any stages where endogenous forces have had a greater influence? Please explain the interplay between these forces.

3.   Who are the key social actors today (individuals, societies and organizations, schools)?

4.   Given known problems with numbers of speakers, we need some reference points to these numbers. Please provide your definition for native speaker and new speakers (or your preferred terminology for these categories). Please provide your data sources.

4.1 What was the number of native speakers at the apex of this language's vitality, and what was the approximate number at the time the revitalization efforts were initiated and at other important points of time in its development?

4.2   What is the percentage of native and new speakers to the total population of the community? To the total population of the state or nation (if different)?

B.   Attitudes

1.   Given that the relationship between the dominant language(s) to a minoritized language is the key to why the languages are or are not used in different domains, what are prevailing attitudes towards the majority language today?

1.1   In what ways or domains has the language gained or lost prestige? How have these changed at different times in the history of the revitalization efforts?

1.2   How has this relationship or attitudes changed over time?

1.3   What were the triggers that caused this shift/these shifts?

2.   Describe the influence of dominant language ideologies, such as 'one language one state,' in the community and/or in the language revitalization movement?

2.1   What are the outcomes, expected and unexpected?

2.2   What alternative/counter discourses/ideological frames have been

mobilized in the community or in the language revitalization movement? For example, has there been resistance to language planning measures? What is/are the source(s) of that resistance?

    2.3   What are the outcomes, expected and unexpected?

3.   What models of community are implied in definitions of "language," "speakers," "place" and how are they mobilized in the community or language revitalization efforts?

4.   To what extent do revitalization efforts look to the past/tradition versus take a prospective approach, thinking of the future or modernity?

    4.1   How are traditions re-invented or redesigned?
    4.2   In what ways is minoritized language practice or planning oriented towards use of the language to discuss new, modern or dynamic domains?
    4.3   How do planners or activists identify current needs and/or changes and respond to them? (for example, targeting specific populations, language practices, uses of media, etc.)

C.   Intergenerational Transmission and Lifelong Learning

1.   What support do adults/caregivers need to use the language in the home? What kinds of support are being made available to them?

2.   To what extent is a monolingual household the ideal, valorized, or the goal of revitalization efforts? If not, what are the goals for family use?

    2.1   How is the local/minoritized language fostered in the home?
    2.2   How is the majority language included in the home?

3.   Discuss perceptions about language acquisition and how they affect parental and grandparental engagement and language transmission?

    3.1 If there are misperceptions, how have they been or how are they being addressed? Are some more persistent than others?

4.   What role does intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and practices, such as traditional music forms, art forms, crafts, farming or herding, foodways, ecological knowledge, play in transmission of the language?

    4.1 To what degree does seeking out this knowledge by younger generations

from older generations create motivation to learn the language?

    4.2   How is this motivation leveraged from individual motivation into larger group motivation or to affecting the larger community?

5.   What strategies are used to bridge the gap between "school" or "authority" language practices, competencies and sources of legitimacy, and the wider society?

    5.1   What specific language revitalization strategies engage people at different stages in their life cycle? (youth or family, forming new families, moving from community, moving back to community…).
        5.1.1   How do they sustain this or not? Are there programs or approaches in place to help sustain these?
        5.1.2   What are some key moments for interventions in the developmental process (linguistic, communicative, social) have been understudied?

    5.2   What strategies include people with non-scholastic linguistic and cultural competencies and authority?
    5. 3   What strategies include engagement with traditional culture or lifeways, such as music, dance, textiles, sports, foodways…?
    5.4   What strategies include multigenerational activities and/or transmission?

D.   Support and Infrastructure

1.   How is the language regarded as a commodity and/or a source of income?

    1.1   To what extent is competence in the language linked to any kind of employment?
    1.2. In what ways does it contribute to an international image?
    1.3. How does the language relate to markets (e.g., art, artisanal goods, music)?
    1.4. What role does tourism play in support of language revitalization or use? Is it seen as crucial to tourism?
    1.5   How is language part of the educational economy (production of teachers, hiring of teachers, support of school infrastructure, academics about the language…)? When and how did this occur? To what degree of the economy (part or whole)?
    1.6   In what ways is language an incentive for business, manufacturing, and commerce (advertising, hiring, government incentives…)?

2.   What are public ways of recognizing or valorizing the language?

    2.1   Are there festivals or events that support language use? For example, music

festivals or poetry contests where the language is required?

2.2   Are there prizes, publishing, recordings…Are these on a local, national, or international level?

3.   What infrastructure supports the creation of new materials for language learning and/or literacy?

4.   What are the specific local, national or international policies that have directly affected the community or program in positive ways? How have these been exploited?

4.1   What are the specific local, national or international policies that have directly affected the community or program in negative ways? How have these been fought against or dealt with? Have there been positive outcomes that were unexpected (such as solidarity or focus on internal growth)?

E.   Responses to New Media, Domains, and Speakers

1.   How important are new technologies in communication in the minoritized language?
   1.1   How are they used? By whom? When or where?
   1.2   Who develops them? How are they accessed?
   1.3   How are they supported (training, updates, advertising)?
   1.4   How much of the language resources are allocated to developing and supporting new technologies?
   1.5   What are the consequences of new technologies?

2.   How have new domains for language use been developed and/or expanded? For whom?
   2.1   Have older domains been restored? How did this come about?
   2.2   What roles have the arts (old or new musical genres, traditional arts, new art forms or movements) played in creating new domains or expanding use of the language?

3.   What issues surrounding authenticity affect the way language revitalization efforts are designed or received? How are speakers are defined or evaluated?
   3.1   Who are the actors in authentication? Have these changed over the years?
   3.2   Where and how do these issues get resolved, or not?

4.   How does the community determine new speakers?
   4.1   How are new speakers integrated into the speech community and into larger social contexts?

4.2　What are the kinds of value and authority that new forms of language have? What debates surround these themes (and related issues of speakers, language proficiency in different registers etc…)?

F.　Further Questions

1.　What other questions or issues not listed here that the community or program need to know more about*?* What don't you know, what would you like to know, and what do you need to know?

2.　What do you, as researchers, need to know more about, if different*?* What don't you know, what would you like to know, and what do you need to know?

2.1　Describe a targeted revitalization research project that is needed in this community.

3.　What are the questions that you asked or discussed during interviews or in research teams that are not asked here?