

Discovering the world through languages, even from our own homes

By Sophie Aristotelous

I am a recent Journalism MA graduate from London. I interviewed the Council of Europe for a feature I wrote on European Day of Languages in a children's news magazine I created as part of my degree. I thought it was a great way to introduce my young readers to learning about languages and the world around them.



Every year, on September 26, European Day of Languages is celebrated, and this year is no different.

Despite the Coronavirus affecting many aspects of our lives, including travel and social events, hundreds of events have been organised so far for this year's European Day of Languages, with around 200,000 people involved.

Events, big and small, are registered annually on the Council of Europe's calendar. They are expecting up to 1,000 events to take place in total this year.

Although this is on a somewhat smaller scale than the 1,400 events arranged last year, Michael Armstrong, Head of Administration at the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, explained why the day is still important in 2020.

He said: "We may not be able to travel this year but through languages we can discover culture."

This sentiment echoes the motto for this year's celebration, "discover the world through languages".

A language day was first introduced on September 26 in 2002. This followed the European Year of Languages which, jointly coordinated by the Council of Europe and the European Commission, took place in 2001.

The day was created to celebrate language learning and remind people that we live in a multicultural world. It brings different languages together and is a celebration of diversity.

Although there are more than 225 languages spoken in Europe, this is only 3% of the languages in the world.

However, celebrations extend much further than the one continent. In fact, there has been an event to celebrate European Day of Languages on every continent, apart from Antarctica.

Michael said: “It’s also not just about European languages as people from all over the world have migrated to Europe and we want to celebrate this too.”



This map shows the events planned for this year’s European Day of Languages

European Day of Languages is for all people, but it is most often celebrated in schools.

Michael explained: “Teachers dress up in national costumes and children from different linguistic backgrounds can become the star of the day and share it with their class.”



School celebrations often involve teaching children about language, culture and national dress

With the challenges of teaching during lockdown, the European Centre for Modern Languages have recently published additional [research](#) and tools to help language teachers and they are also running [webinars on online teaching](#).

With lots going on for this year's European Day of Languages, both on and offline, here is our guide to the 7 ways to celebrate it in 2020.

1. Attend a socially-distanced event

Despite Covid-19 measures, some events like shows, exhibitions, language fairs and festivals are still taking place this year.

Check out the many events taking place all over the world on the Council of Europe's [calendar](#).

2. Organise your own event

If you have an out-of-the-box idea, or no events are taking place in your area, why not host your own celebrations?

The Council of Europe have suggested some [ideas for a 'socially-distanced' event](#) on their website, aimed at language learning and activities for children.

There are even some materials, such as posters, postcards, and images, available to download from their website.

This makes the annual [competition](#) for the most innovative European Day of Languages' event even more challenging.

No matter how small-scale, let the Council of Europe know your plans by adding the event to the calendar.



Events like speak dating, language fairs and festivals are organised to celebrate European Day of Languages

3. Participate in online activities

If you would rather stay home, the Council of Europe have designed some online activities, including the 'Why did you decide to learn a language?' poll, 'Myth or fact' quiz and 'Which language is it?' game.

4. Go to an online event

You can also take part in online events.

For example, the European Commission's translation field offices are organising activities like quizzes, radio contests, webinars, interactive workshops, games and lectures. These can all be found in the online calendar and you can participate from anywhere in the world.

The European Commission are also hosting an online conference called "Education begins with language", from 10:00-12:00 on September 28. Participants need to register beforehand.

5. Learn a language

One of the aims of the day is to encourage people to learn a second language.

Over half the world is bilingual and the benefits of this include opening someone's eyes to the many different cultures that exist in the world.

The Council of Europe have designed The Secret Agent's Language Challenges App to help make language learning accessible and fun.

6. Turn to social media

Follow what's going on by looking at the European Day of Language's Facebook page.

Alternatively, check out everything Language Day related on Twitter, using the hashtag #coeEDL

7. Challenge yourself

Get competitive by taking part in one of the Council of Europe's competitions.

Take part in "What do you dare to do in a foreign language?" video challenge or, if creativity is more your thing, enter the design a T-shirt competition, which is open for entries until 31 December 2020.

