



Learning  
Interculturality  
From Religion 2

# LIFE

# TWO

newsletter  
issue

# 1

Project  
Objectives &  
Challenges

**Learning Intercultura-  
lity from Religions  
towards Outreach  
Activities**

[www.lifetwo.eu](http://www.lifetwo.eu)

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



A photograph showing the lower legs and feet of four teenagers sitting on wooden steps. They are wearing various styles of jeans and sneakers. The background shows a calm lake and a cloudy sky.

The EU was conceived as a bastion of democracy and inclusivity. However, in today's Europe the resurgence of extremist rhetoric can undermine democratic values. Teenagers building their identity and looking for a sense of purpose are more likely to be attracted to radical ideas and movements, since they are more responsive to various influences.

## What is LIFE TWO

The "LIFE TWO: Learning Interculturality from Religions towards Outreach Activities" project aims to foster a participatory pedagogical methodology for secondary education, by focusing on the good practices around inclusive education and promotion of human values.

"LIFE TWO" is based on a previous model ("Life"), which was successfully addressed to primary education in five European countries, as part of the religious education courses. The current project intends to test the method in secondary schools and propose a strategy to prevent and combat any forms of racism, intolerance and hatred. In total, seven different countries will participate in it. The project is funded by the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union, Key Action 3: Support for policy reform – Sub-action: Social Inclusion and Common Values: The Contribution in the Field of Education and Training.

# The Partnership

## What We Expect from the Project

1.



CENTRO STUDI VILLA MONTESCA  
FONDAZIONE

The **Hallgarten Franchetti Centro Studi Villa Montescà Foundation** is internationally renowned for top quality research and training in European research and cooperation, design of innovative education and training methods and approaches, Cultural and social promotion, information technology and communication, new combinations of didactics and technology, education for European integration and cooperation in the field of education at local, regional and European level. By Villa Montescà, in 1909 Maria Montessori organized the seminar that gave birth to the first publication of the scientific pedagogic method universally known as the 'Montessori Method'. The aim of the Foundation activities is to help establish an efficient educational system which can help to overcome the barriers to education, speed up the recognition of learning outcomes achieved in formal, informal and non-formal approaches to encourage an active participation in the learning process also by those people who, owing to marginalization, may be excluded from it. One of the main achievements pursued is to get to reach the important result of letting students learn to express their own perceptions and understand the differences between religious or ethnic groups. Thanks to LIFE TWO students will investigate with creativity other spiritual dimensions and cultures different from theirs. At the same time teachers are expected to be





involved in the elaboration of new curriculum on pluralistic religious education to apply in their classes; on the other side, one major aim is also to involve other relevant institutional actors, as policy makers, stakeholders, public administrators, etc with a considerable broadening of the project impact, innovation of school strategies and development of transversal competences by the link to European priorities and actions.

2.



**Eğitim ve Gençlik Çalışmaları Derneği Enstitüsü - EGEÇED** (Institute for Educational and Youth Studies) is a non-profit association founded by professionals of the education field (teachers, trainers, academics, managers and supervisors).

The members of EGEÇED are part of a network of schools which includes general, vocational and special education schools. EGEÇED is a network of schools in Izmir city, focusing on special education local schools (primary and secondary), while it has established collaborations with universities.

The objective of EGEÇED is to gather the professionals who work in the field of the education, contributing to the improvement of the quality of education, as well as to introduce modern applications into the educational system. Moreover, the aim is to contribute to the development of sustainable exchange between educational professionals in Turkey and Europe, supporting intercultural dimension for educators and youth.

EGEÇED consists of 42 members and 300 volunteers (teachers, school managers, inspectors, students from high schools, universities), including religion education teachers. The organization has broad experience in the field of the EU projects and project management. Members of the association have very high competences in research, teaching, training and evaluation. Experts involved in the project are familiar with European policies, strategies and priorities of education and inclusion of children with special needs through art and music, as well as Erasmus+ procedures.

Turkey is a very multicultural, multiethnic and multi-religious country. The core element of a happy and successful society is being respectful to other cultures, religions and lifestyles.

Considering that the EU is also very cosmopolitan, the project will be proven useful not only for high-school students, but also for society in general. In our case, LIFE-TWO and its outputs will help high school students become aware of other cultures and religions and help build a more tolerant society.

3.



Founded in 2005, **San Jorge University (Zaragoza, Spain)** is a non-profit foundation that currently has about 3,000 students. Despite its youth, it has not stopped growing by increasing its academic offer, ranging from the Social Sciences (Journalism, Advertising and Public Relations, Translation and Intercultural Communication) to the Health Sciences (Nursing, Pharmacy, Psychology) or Technology (Architecture and Computer Engineering), among other undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.

Its objectives include the training of well-prepared professionals for the 21st century labor market, accustomed to problem solving and teamwork, with good management of technological tools; all this without neglecting education in terms of human values. The team is young and dedicated to innovative teaching and personalized attention to students.

In the field of interculturality, USJ welcomes a large number of foreign students each year, representing overall a very significant percentage of its students. In addition to the aforementioned degree in Translation and Intercultural Communication, the research group on "Migrations, Interculturality and Human Development" studying such issues, is obtaining remarkable results in terms of publications, financing and participation in national and European projects.

Regarding LIFE-TWO project, it's worth mentioning that about 15% of the population in Spain is of foreign origin, especially present in the educational stage. Within two decades, Spain has become from being a country that emits emigrants to one that receives immigrants, just like other southern European countries. This reversal in the flows of people, who come with their respective cultural and religious baggage, represents a social challenge that must be urgently addressed, starting from education.

Therefore, the LIFE-TWO project is of special interest, as it will provide tools to the education professionals, who must respond to situations for which they have not received necessary training, as well as to exchange points of view on the matter, allowing the promotion of new approaches that facilitate intercultural coexistence and a more inclusive and respectful society.



4.



The intercultural environment in Bulgaria is specific due to the enhanced social role of the internal minorities, not because of the influence of emigration waves. Unlike the Schengen countries in the consortium implementing the LIFE 2 project, in which one of the results of globalization can be measured by the importation of new cultural models from outside through migration flows, or Turkey, which is strongly shaken by refugee influx, Bulgaria does not suffer from external pressure. The intercultural environment is formed by the presence of compact and demographically growing, in comparison to the dominant Bulgarian and Orthodox communities, ethnic minorities - Roma, Turks and religious ones - Bulgarian Muslims, the so-called Pomaks.

Bulgaria has a sustainable model of coexistence that manifests itself in everyday life. However, there are established models of prejudice and fear that draw distinct boundaries between majority and minorities. On a macro level, educational programs promote intercultural education - guidelines, strategies, national plans - but the main challenge here is how these national programs operate on the micro-level: at school, the place where intercultural communication takes place.

Another challenge in the context of the Bulgarian school is how religions are taught - in the curriculum they are represented mainly through cultural and historical viewpoints. Defending the secular nature of education, the school allows the study of religions only as an elective subject, which greatly limits the teachers' capabilities, who are obliged to conform to the wish or unwillingness of the parents and their prejudices. So, if we have to define the next challenge, it is the growing role of the parents and the need to involve them as allies.

Center for Educational Initiatives expects the LIFE 2 project to offer a functional model for the transfer of good practices and encourage the creation of a teaching community that exists in an environment of confidence and tranquility.



5.



**έδρα** social cooperative  
activities for  
vulnerable groups

### **Social Cooperative Activities for Vulnerable Groups - EDRA**

(K.S.D.E.O. EDRA) is a Non-Profit Organization that, since 2001 promotes mental health and protects the rights of vulnerable groups.

EDRA provides mental health services and raises awareness on matters concerning mental health, supports children with learning difficulties, intervenes therapeutically in the field of special education and mental retardation, develops national and European initiatives for socially vulnerable groups and provides life-long training programs for all groups.

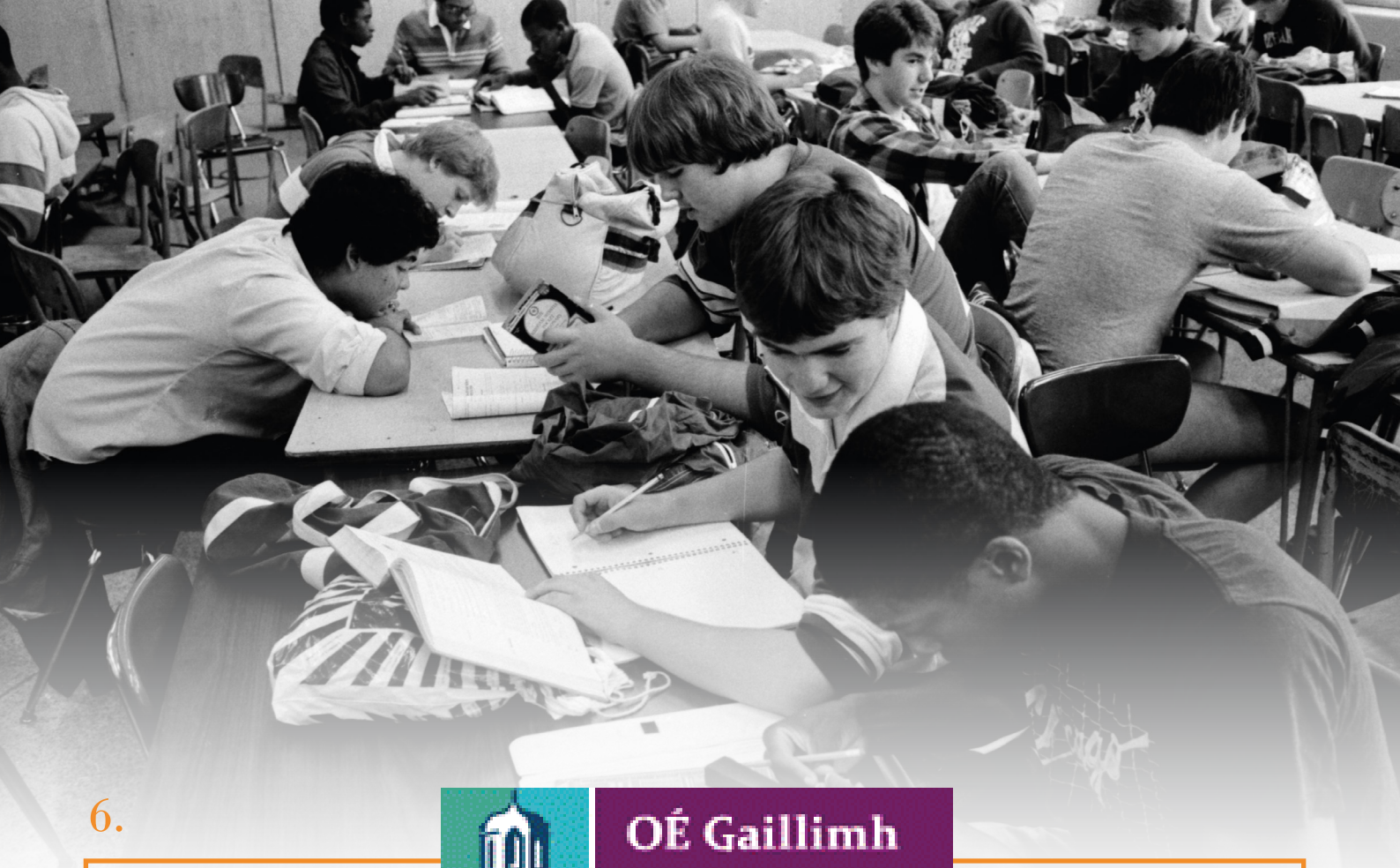
EDRA is also very active in the field of EU programmes, coordinating multiple large-scale projects and participating in numerous others as a partner, mainly focusing on subject areas such as:

1. methods of coping with mental health challenges
2. practices towards inclusion of socially marginalized groups
3. mitigation of inequalities in education

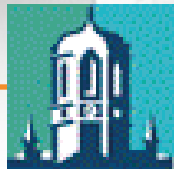
The LIFE-TWO project is of great importance for EDRA, since Greece has become a meeting point of different cultures throughout the years. However, many immigrants and refugees still live marginalized and for a large part of the Greek society, remain invisible. Moreover, the refugee crisis of 2015 deepened the need to find ways to help both sides learn to co-exist.

Regarding the project, the main challenge is the nature of the religious education course itself. In Greece, the Church has a great influence on various matters, one of which is the way the course is being taught. Consequently, the content is limited to Christianity and the principles of the Eastern Orthodox Church, ignoring other religions almost completely. Although attendance is no longer obligatory, this seems as a rather superficial solution. For example, it would be very helpful if additionally the content could expand, providing information on different religions, or connecting it with other disciplines (history, art etc).

It is our hope that through this project, students will integrate values such as acceptance and solidarity in their everyday life, making education a powerful tool for social inclusion.



6.



OÉ Gaillimh  
NUI Galway

Founded in 1845, the **National University of Ireland (NUI) Galway** is the largest and oldest university based in the west of Ireland. NUI Galway is a research-led University and is ranked in the top 1% of Universities globally. The School of Education, NUI Galway is the national leader in Ireland with respect to the issue of diversity in teaching and teacher education and our research focus includes religious diversity in different domains of the education system and school organisations.

A key issue in the Irish system is the manner in which Church and State co-exist within the sphere of education. The majority of schools at primary level (95%) and a significant percentage of second level schools are under the control of the Church (mainly the Catholic Church). Although historically the population of Ireland was mainly white and Catholic, a significant demographic change happened during the decade of rapid economic growth that became known as the Celtic Tiger (1990- 2006). During this period Ireland's demographic profile changed dramatically with respect to race, ethnicity, nationality and most notably, in the case of schools, religious affiliation and practice. The demographic change has created a demand for a more religiously diverse school system and curricula and teaching and learning approaches that promote inter-cultural and religious dialogue and tolerance. The work of researchers at the School of Education at NUI Galway is positioned at the nexus of these challenges faced by the system and the current impact on teacher educators, teachers and school leaders. NUI Galway will lead the research and evaluation component of LIFE 2 exploring the impact of pedagogic innovations on students' levels of religious and cultural tolerance across Europe. Our findings will inform teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers and policy makers.



7.



UNIVERSITY of  
NICOSIA

The **University of Nicosia (UNIC)** is the largest university in Cyprus, with more than 12,000 students from over 70 countries across the globe, coming together in an innovative and transformative learning space. Located in Nicosia and with presence in 18 other cities worldwide, we are driven by our pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning, innovation, research, technology, and a continually evolving academic environment. We empower our students and instill in them the confidence to make an impact in the world. Today, UNIC's programmes focus on cutting-edge research, making us global leaders in certain fields. Internationalisation is a central component of UNIC's strategy. This includes partnerships for degree programmes, student mobility, and opportunities for students post-graduation in academia or industry, in order to share knowledge and capabilities across countries. In Greece, we offer several joint Masters degrees with the top Greek universities: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University of Patras and the Hellenic Open University.

The implementation of the LIFETWO PROJECT in Cyprus will help increase the relevance of school curricula in order to better to respond to religious diversity in society brought about by both historical religious diversity and interfaith diversity due to migration. One of the expectations on the project is the change of the current character of Religious Education, as it is currently provided in schools in Cyprus, so as to promote religious (multi)literacies aiming at cultivating students' understanding of the diversity of religious meanings of concepts through critical-thinking and reflection processes. Furthermore, an additional expectation on the project is to cultivate secondary-education students' critical-thinking and reflection skills in successfully dealing with religious diversity in education and societal settings and lastly to build creative and innovative teaching and learning methodologies to facilitate the goals of interfaith Religious Education.



8.



The LIFE-TWO project is highly relevant for all educational institutions and all social sectors in the Netherlands.

The importance of religion in Dutch society prompted **Stichting Reflexion** to invite Tilburg University (TU), one of the leading research institutions in the country, to contribute to the LIFE-TWO project. The role of religion in education is a high ranking topic in a nationwide social-cultural discussion, all the more since other religions than the traditional Christian beliefs have gained a solid status in the country, most notably the Islam and to a lesser extent Buddhism.

Professor Dr. Monique Groeneboer teaches and researches various subjects related to Religious Education and dr. Marije van Amelsvoort is acting director of the Teacher Training Department at TU. They are contributing to the Life-Two project and the same goes for Leonie van de Ven and Joost Thissen, both representing Stichting Reflexion.

The role of religion in Dutch society can hardly be overestimated. Nowadays, only a few people are aware that the freedom of religion during the 15th and 16th century stood at the base of what the Dutch call the Golden Century, in which the Netherlands flourished more than any other country in the world. Freedom of religion drew the Sephardic Jews in Portugal towards a safe haven in the Netherlands. The Jews felt increasing pressure from the Inquisition, forcing them to become Christians. Instead, they fled and took their enormous wealth along. In their new home, they invested in promising industry, notably shipbuilding. That ensured the Dutch to have the strongest fleet worldwide, thanks to tolerance and freedom for all religious groups in society.

With "tolerance and freedom for all religious groups" as key subjects in the LIFE-TWO project, the relevance of the project in the Netherlands is obvious.

NEWSLETTER no.1

Thank You!



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