

## EPILOGUE AND BEYOND. HORIZONS YET TO BE EXPLORED

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As the international community grapples with growing social fragmentation, democratic backsliding, protracted conflicts, climate crises, forced populations' displacement, and rising online and offline hate speech, the importance of the DIALECT projects possesses a new urgency.

As research results of all DIALECT projects have shown, the fighting of structural racism and intolerance may be accomplished also through integrating an already tested "*community-building through football3*" methodology not only in local community level but mainly in the physical education curriculum. More specifically, as DIALECT3 project has shown, indeed, under the lens of intersectionality the implementation of innovative tools such as the football3 methodology in schools has contributed to the search for "*a more comprehensive and intersectional approach to prevent and fight against intolerance, racism, and discrimination*". DIALECT2 has also indicated that tackling racism as part of intersectional stereotypes in schools is in accord to supporting the inclusion of migrant, refugee, and Roma adolescents, boys, and girls promoting the formation of school communities of tolerance through the physical education curriculum.

Summing up all research data, of all DIALECT projects, results are more than optimistic considering youths empowerment to combating

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racism, hate intolerance on and off line and aspects of discrimination at community level. Research data have shown that behavioral changes emerge with a focus on aspects of *resilience* and particularly the dimension of *control* to overcome adverse conditions, while a noticeable increase in the level of *engagement* and interest, has been observed, as well as in the adherence to the established rules and values. Also, behavioral changes were observed in regards to stances towards fairness and respect to norms and *fair play*; the male youths have been observed to be more cooperative and supportive towards their female counterparts, and the girls have been observed to have a newfound confidence in their abilities, in contrast to their previous reluctance. Such research findings prove to be very important, also, since participating adolescents may have realized the purpose of football - through the implementation of football3 - is to develop a mutual understanding, to bond, to connect, to interact with others, rather than scoring to win the game.

Research data have also shown that as far as social inclusion is concerned, data showed an impact on aspects such as the *sense of belonging*, *self-efficacy* and *self-esteem* to participating adolescents. Data also suggest that through the participatory approach promoted by football3 methodology, not only improved youths' understanding of fairness and inclusion, but also equipped them with skills that transcended the physical education school courses such as teamwork and collaboration over individual differences, further reinforcing the importance of equality and inclusion.

The above results indicated that the good practice of football3 methodology implementation through school curricula should be continued and reinforced. Therefore the DIALECT team has currently embarked upon a fourth DIALECT project<sup>1</sup> which building on the robust legacy of the previous DIALECT projects turns attention to early childhood as a strategic and transformative entry point for countering polarization and fostering a culture of inclusion, mutual respect, and civic responsibility. In an era where youth are increasingly

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1. Project's title: «Enlarging DIALECT's communities of Tolerance Through Football, focusing on Younger Children» (DIALECT4), EUROPEAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EACEA), ERASMUS-SPORT-2024-SCP, GA101184384. Project partners of this also pan-european project include agencies from Greece, Italy,

exposed to divisive narratives and extremist ideologies—often amplified through digital media—early and holistic interventions become critical.

Anchored in proven methodologies such as football<sup>3</sup>, participatory learning, and digital and media literacy, DIALECT<sup>4</sup> seeks to empower children with the social and emotional tools needed to navigate diversity, resist manipulation, and build democratic communities from the ground up. The project aligns with global agendas such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG4 on quality education and SDG16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions), and echoes UNESCO's call for intercultural competence and resilience in education systems. By embedding values of tolerance, cooperation, and fairness at an early age, DIALECT<sup>4</sup> not only contributes to national cohesion but also to a broader transnational effort to safeguard democratic values and human rights. It affirms that in turbulent times, the most effective form of resistance to division is not reactive, but proactive: to educate, connect, and empower the next generation from the very beginning.

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Serbia, Hungary (ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL ITALIA ETS, OLTALOM SPORTEGYESULET, FOND FOOTBALL FRIENDS ZA UNAPREDENJE SPORTSKOG OBRAZOVANJA KROZ FUTBAL, COMMON GOAL GGMBH), while ACTIONAID HELLAS is co-ordinating the project, EKKE has undertaken all research activities and UEFA FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN FONDATION, UEFA, is supporting the implementation tasks. EKKE's research team includes: J. Tsiganou, N. Spyropoulou, K. Vezyrgianni (project's co-ordinators) D. Kondyli, M. Tsevreni, K. Bourlesa and the scientific associates, N. Klironomos and A. Nitta.