



LIVING LIBRARY
A project for a values-based education
(Municipality of Valongo)

Education is a fundamental and universal human right. It leads to the complete development of personality, as well as to the participation of the individual in the societal promotion of tolerance and it establishes a healthy relationship between people. For this reason, it is fundamental the implementation of projects that promote education for citizenship as a way to create responsible, autonomous, and sympathetic people, who know their rights and duties, who respect and dialogue with others, who have a democratic, plural, critical and creative spirit, and who guide themselves by the respect of human rights.

On the other hand, diversity is a characteristic of today's societies. This implies that we have to search for intentional strategies to deconstruct stereotypes and to strengthen activities that school *curricula* already integrate. Considering that the population of Valongo is one of the youngest in the region of Porto, we have at our disposal a large number of people who can be considered as a strategical target audience.

Last but not least, social exclusion phenomena can only be eliminated through continuous efforts and, for this reason, intervention has to engage people's attitudes and empower agents who are socially excluded or at risk of exclusion.

The municipality of Valongo has, for these reasons, been promoting several educational processes that target equality and human rights. The Living Library is one of the non formal activities implemented. It has been running since 2010.

The Living Library. It is aimed at students between 14 and 18 years old, and it uses the slogan "*don't judge a book by its cover*".

Thus, it allows an informal and constructive dialogue between students and people who are frequently the recipients of prejudices and stereotypes. It also creates the opportunity to promote an interpersonal relationship between groups, which usually are not able to interact with the latter, and it also permits them to challenge their own stereotypes and prejudices in a structured, protected and time limited environment.

Its main goals are:

- To promote a value-based education;
- To sensitize the youth to the importance of inclusion, cultural diversity and equal opportunities;
- To foster the development of an European citizenship that respects cultural diversity and human rights;
- To fight discrimination and to deconstruct stereotypes as a way to build bridges between people, cultures, and religions;
- To enable the empowerment of local agents, in particular of those who are immigrants, through their involvement in all stages of the project;



- To create the opportunity of interaction between groups of people who usually do not meet.

A Living Library is a physical space decorated just like a normal library. In this project there is an element of itinerancy, as it visits the different schools of the municipality. Before the implementation of the activity a meeting with a teacher takes place; during this meeting the necessary steps to prepare the activity in each class are explained. Afterwards, each teacher debates with its class the goals of the Living Library and prepares in advance some questions to present to the books; this ensures that the youngsters do not become blocked during the interaction with the human books. At the same time, NGO's are contacted and partnerships are made. These NGO's identify Human Books, volunteers who will participate in the project and will assume a stereotype. The Human Books should have personal experience, as well as technical and scientific preparation so that they are able to challenge stereotypes. To help them in this process, the municipality trains them and helps them to anticipate difficulties, problems, and how to face challenges.

On the day the activity takes place, at least four different human books are available to be read. There is a librarian who creates four sub-groups in each class, gives out the instructions, makes sure the activity is evaluated, etc. Each group talks to the human book, posing questions for about twenty minutes. When this period of time ends, the groups exchange human books and restart reading it. This process continues until every group has made contact with all the books.

There are several examples of these stereotypes, such as: ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, mental illness, oncological disease, and, of course, multiple discrimination. Finally, the activity is evaluated and teachers integrate it in their classes.

Some of the results of the project are:

- To sensitize and raising awareness regarding different issues that indirectly contribute to the increase of an intercultural competence;
- The creation of opportunities to challenge stereotypes;
- The dissemination of the potentialities, difficulties and the culture of migrant communities among non traditional target audiences and different age groups;
- The promotion of dialogue between different actors of the organized and non-organized civil society in Valongo;
- The deconstruction of stereotypes regarding ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, disability, mental disease, poverty, etc;
- The promotion of interculturality issues in the local community, especially through Media;
- The high level of satisfaction of participants in qualitative questionnaires (the average results vary between 4,9 and 5 in a scale of up to 5 points, in which 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest);
- School communities consider the Living Library one of the most interesting activities implemented in schools at the present.

Other quantitative results are:

- 6 schools were involved in 2010 and 8 in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016;



- More than 10 volunteers were present at each Living Library edition;
- Since 2010 more than 4200 youngsters participated in the project.

We believe that the Living Library remains a uniquely useful tool to foster peaceful coexistence, understanding, and tolerance and to bring people closer together in mutual respect for the human dignity of the individual – whether as books, readers, or organisers.