

MERIDIUM

Meridium (Multilingualism in Europe as a Resource for Immigration – Dialogue Initiative among the Universities of Mediterranean) aims to the constitution of a **network between several European universities** situated in those countries of the Mediterranean Europe directly involved in migration phenomena¹. This network provides to establish:

- A **research and local surveys** addressed to reveal the degree of awareness of multilingualism coming from migration flows within different national communities;
- A **Study and Documentation Centre in Multilingualism in the Mediterranean Europe** settled up by the University for Foreigner of Perugia as a permanent monitoring and consultancy centre aimed to promotion and research of best practices and policies upon multilingualism and language integration.

The project offers to supply a concrete instrument of **support** “on the territory” for the **European policies for the promotion of the multilingualism and the linguistic integration of immigration**.

From this point of view, the **Mediterranean Europe** deserves to be considered such as a **sub-system of specific interest** due to the presence of particular conditions linked to historic and cultural as well as geographic peculiarities, now connected also to the socio-economical setting.

In particular, the Mediterranean Europe is a region historically characterized by continuous dynamic contacts and exchanges in correspondence of a sort of cultural double “fault line”: Eastern/Western Europe (where Latin and Slavonic traditions meet each other), Northern/Southern Europe (contact between Europe and Arab Islamic world). Because of its geographic position, Italy is situated into the core of these “faults” representing a significant cultural “bridge” among them. Furthermore, the linguistic framework of this area is intensely diversified due to the co-existence of languages belonging to different language families (from the Romance groups of the Western area, to the Slavic, Greek and Albanian groups of the Eastern part, until the Turkish and Maltese representing the expansion of Semitic languages on the South of the Mediterranean Sea); and, nevertheless, all these are characterized by lasting phenomena of convergence (e.g. the Balkan linguistic area, the Maltese language genesis, the penetration of Arab in Italian and Spanish vocabulary).

The data herewith recalled underline a fragmented language framework which, however, has known important opportunities of exchange in its history and which, nowadays, has the possibility to be

¹ Besides Italy, represented by the University for Foreigners of Perugia as lead partner of Meridium, are part of the Consortium:

- Spain (Salamanca University),
- Portugal (Universidade Nova di Lisbona),
- Slovenia (Università del Litorale),
- Malta (Malta university),
- Romania (Brasov university and Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca).

consolidated as a laboratory of experiences aiming to the construction of a European democratic and inclusive multilingualism. We cannot forget then that the economically speaking strongest countries in Mediterranean Europe are more and more committed in investments and exchanges with the Eastern Europe and the South of Mediterranean Sea, from which they are attracting consistent migration flows motivated by real opportunities of socio-economic integration in these regions offering a model of economic development based on small and medium enterprise.

The network of social and economic exchanges linking together the countries of Mediterranean Europe represents therefore a valid incentive to the **implementation of defined measures** with the objective of **conjugating**, systematically and according to the needs, the **goal of promoting diversified language and cultural knowledge to demands of professional mobility and social inclusion**.

Measures should focus on those strategic areas represented, for instance, by the fields of **primary education**, on one hand, and of **professional and adult training**, on the other hand. In fact, it is fundamental operating first through systematic actions on support of the so-called “**second generation**” **immigrants**, who in the Mediterranean Europe are facing insufficient and disorganized measures of integration and inclusion policies.

This fact determines significant negative consequences upon educative and social aspects, as Italian case demonstrates, since school failure between immigrant students is far more common than between their Italian mates (*Students with non Italian citizenship. Compulsory school and public schools. 2004-2005, Ministry of University and Research, Roma, 2005*). Besides, support must be equally guaranteed to adults, for whom language skill weakness can seriously limit any perspectives of inclusion/progress on professional field and, for immigrants, the social integration in the hosting countries.

From this point of view, the regional context examined needs capillary and urgent measures to be taken for promoting multilingualism, since, as the Special Eurobarometer 243 “Europeans and their Languages” reveals, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Romania’s average on the acquisition of any languages other than their mother tongue is far below the European average (41%-47% against the 56%).

The intensity of migration flows within the borders of the European Union adds complexity to the difficult pathway of a “European citizenship”. It represents, however, a challenge for more effective strategies of social inclusion to be implemented, first of all, by the means of language integration of immigrants in the hosting societies and by erasing awareness of the latter upon the need of getting in touch with the pluralism of languages in a constructive way, as the pluralism belongs to the daily life of each one.

In particular, the Consortium aims to study the nature of the correlations between linguistic and educational policies and the development/diffusion of attitudes concerning multilingualism and linguistic diversity. The **objective is to carry out an integrated evaluation and to determine the corresponding indicators:**

- How do the linguistic and educational policies affect (as carried out in a local circle) the perception and the attitude of the citizens (native and immigrants) towards linguistic diversity and to multilingualism?
- How does the fact of living in a highly dense centre of immigration/emigration affect these perceptions/attitudes?
- To which degree do these perceptions/attitudes fluctuate between the age of children and that of adults?
- How is the behaviour of institutions and of the working world toward linguistic diversity and multilingualism really perceived?

In each of the **“receptor” countries** of immigration in the area (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Slovenia and Malta) **one intends to realize:**

- Country reports targeted at the initial census of distribution and of the characteristics of ethnic minorities
- further selection of some case studies (medium-small provinces) characterised by high immigration density coming from Mediterranean countries. In these countries there will be:
 - a. context **analysis** (spotting and analysis of local linguistic policies, the presence of significant projects, and the presence of ethnic and/or intercultural associations operating in the area, etc.)
 - b. **surveys** by way of questionnaires to reveal the degree of awareness of the presence or multilingual repertoires and the propensity to conceive them as a resource. Two types of samples will be selected:
 - i. elementary school pupils;
 - ii. adults residing in the area.

In Romania, **“exporting” country of emigration**, the country report will have the objective of locating the areas with the highest rate of emigration. For each of these, actions a) and b) will be made with the necessary modifications.

- a1. **analysis** of policies, projects and programmes promoting language learning (basic and higher levels); analysis of policies, projects and programmes for maintaining language of

origin in countries of immigration, evaluation of their effectiveness, specification of indicators.

- b1. **surveys** by way of questionnaires to reveal (among children and adults) the awareness of utility of multilingual competences, the propensity to conceive them as a resource and their diffusion.

In particular, the research facilities which support the network perform teaching and specialized research activities in the fields of Applied Linguistics, Language Teaching and Intercultural Communication/Mediation. They guarantee the possession of updated tools and methods for the study of the acquisition of multilingual skills, and for the teaching of modern languages.

The University for Foreigners of Perugia, as applicant institution and scientific coordinator of the project, will be committed to create and maintain a Centre of Study and Documentation on Multilingualism in Mediterranean Europe. This Centre would offer a stable structure for research and consultation for the promotion and monitoring of support policies for multilingualism and the linguistic integration of immigration.

The University for Foreigners of Perugia will organize and host the **consortium meetings and the final International Conference**.