

Expert Seminar on History Teaching
in the Eastern Mediterranean:
An Interdisciplinary Approach
to Co-operation on History Teaching
in Post-Conflict Settings

Nicosia, Cyprus
13-14 December 2023



REPORT ON
HISTORY TEACHING
IN CONFLICT & POST-CONFLICT
SETTINGS: CURRENT STATE
& RECOMMENDATIONS



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The Association for Historical
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The University of Cyprus



European Forum for Reconciliation
and Cooperation in History and Social
Sciences Education (EFREC) of the
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Introductory statement:

The aim of the conference was to discuss history education in divided societies, with an emphasis on (post)conflict societies in the Eastern Mediterranean, and suggest ways forward through an interdisciplinary approach which takes into perspective the contribution of different academic disciplines and input from civil society.

This report is intended to serve as an initial overview of account directions for history education for scholars, stakeholders, and civil education actors rather than as a concluding statement.

Ethical considerations:

With respect to the sensitivity of history education, especially in post-conflict settings like Cyprus, and in turbulent times like the current, presenter names have been omitted from this report.

Executive Summary

This document contains the proceedings and recommendations of the *Expert Seminar on History Teaching in the Eastern Mediterranean: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Co-operation on History Teaching in Post-Conflict Settings*, which took place at the Home for Cooperation in the Nicosia Buffer Zone, Cyprus, on December 13 and 14, 2023. Scholars and practitioners from various academic disciplines including history, history education, social psychology, political sciences, conflict resolution, and peace education discussed the current problems of history education in the Eastern Mediterranean countries of Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine and addressed it in a comparative perspective, i.e. through the cases of Germany? Spain, Northern Ireland and specific cases from Latin America.

Experts from European organizations, such as the European Forum for Reconciliation and Cooperation in History and Social Sciences Education (EFREC) of the Leibniz Institute for Educational Media – Georg Eckert Institute (GEI), EuroClio – European Association of History Educators, and the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTe) of the Council of Europe (CoE) also participated in the conference, sharing their experience on several issues related to their scope of work.

The conference was co-organized by the GEI in collaboration with the MAKINGHISTORIES project, the University of Cyprus, and the Association of Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR). The main themes of the conference were curriculum and textbook content, pedagogies and teacher training, memory politics and identity-making intersections, civil society involvement in curriculum design, interdisciplinarity, technologies and history education, and synergies between different history education actors.

Contemporary history education in the Eastern Mediterranean faces multifaceted challenges. Centralized curricula and textbooks perpetuate traditional didactic learning methods, omitting multiperspectivity, and ethnic minority representation. Political influence on content and a lack of ethnic diversity exacerbate these issues. Pedagogical approaches prioritize content delivery, while insufficient teacher training compounds the problem. Moreover, the agency of non-traditional history education actors is hindered by centralized systems and funding shortages. Assessment practices prioritize rote memorization, while history education is often entangled in politics and identity-making, especially in conflict contexts. National commemorations perpetuate ethnocentric narratives and fuel trauma.

The conference elucidated openings and opportunities to face the identified challenges. Opportunities include fostering cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders, civil society, and international organizations. This can take place through interdisciplinary research and practice (i.e. between peace education, social and developmental psychology, conflict resolution, human rights, and environmental education). Multiperspectivity – endorsed by educators, used successfully by many non-traditional actors, and included in policy recommendations by most authorities – can be capitalized to develop critical historical thinking, foster inclusive narratives and encourage contact between differing/conflicting groups to diminish prejudices and build trust.

The opportunities outlined in this report underscore the ongoing transition towards active learning methodologies, including multiperspectivity and competence-based teaching. We propose that the best way forward for history education is to capitalize on these findings, through international and local research, and interdisciplinarity.

Introduction

This report builds on conclusions/findings/discussions from the *Expert Seminar on History Education in the Eastern Mediterranean: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Co-operation on History Teaching in Post-Conflict Settings* conference, held on the 13th and 14th of December 2023 at the Home for Cooperation, located in the UN-controlled Buffer Zone in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The conference was co-organized by the Georg Eckert Institute - European Forum for Reconciliation and Cooperation in History and Social Sciences Education (GEI/EFREC) in collaboration with the *MAKINGHISTORIES*¹ project and the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), EUROCLIO, and the secretariat and members of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTe) of the Council of Europe also participated in the conference.

The expert seminar brought together researchers, academics, and practitioners from different backgrounds including history, history education, social psychology, political sciences, peace studies, and conflict resolution. The conference aimed to discuss history education, with an emphasis on conflict and post-conflict societies in the Eastern Mediterranean.² Participants' presentations covered work in the area including Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, also seen in relation to the European framework.

This report seeks to further discuss the current state of history teaching in the region and suggest ways forward. Two Cypriot experts from across the divide, a history educator and a social anthropologist, contributed to this report on behalf of the AHDR. This report serves as an initial account of future directions for history education for scholars, stakeholders, and civil education actors. It calls for future discussion, and is not a concluding statement.

The report begins with a summary of the proceedings of the six panels of the conference, constituting Section 1. Next, in Sections 2 and 3, the topics addressed and the questions discussed in the panels are categorized and analysed terms of *Challenges* and *Opportunities*. In Section 4, *Implications and Ways Forward*, the findings are contextualised through consideration of their practical and theoretical implications. Finally, Section 5 discusses what specific actions could be taken based on these findings, for policymaking and research. The report concludes with a summary.

¹ For more on the project see: <https://making-histories.eu/en/home-en/>

² This report does not aim to create a 'Mediterranean' stereotype or generalisation. However, as showcased in the conference, there are shared experiences and commonalities, such as traditional and teacher-centred pedagogies; also, attachment to the textbook. Neither do we imply that conflict and post-conflict settings – such as, Israel and Palestine, Northern Ireland, and Bosnia-Herzegovina – are all the same. However, as these societies have suffered from division, they bear similarities in that what has prevailed after the conflict is the preservation of the memory of one-sided victimization and an ethnocentric orientation to history teaching (Psaltis et al., 2017).

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Summary of conference proceedings

Panel 1: State of History Teaching in the Eastern Mediterranean

In the first panel of the conference discussants presented the state of history education in Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Greece, and Turkey. The significance of curriculum and educational materials was discussed in the context of history teaching and conflict resolution. Regarding these processes, the role of civil society – that is, of actors aiming to social change, either individuals or groups, that are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities or businesses, such as non-core groups³ representatives or teachers' groups - and the need for cooperation among NGOs was stressed. The main questions posed by panellists were: *What is the state of the art of history teaching in these countries and what are the main challenges?*; *How should conflict be taught?*; and *How should history education be in post-conflict settings?* Master narratives and their role in undermining historical thinking, competitive victimhood, traumas, forgiveness, and anxiety between the 'Self'/'ingroup' and the 'Other'/'outgroup'⁴ in conflict societies were some of the key issues introduced.

Further issues addressed by Panel 1 were: *How is the past interpreted and transmitted to future generations?* and *What happens when either side of the conflict disagrees with the narrative about the past?* Historical dialogue was seen as crucial in relation to these issues. The panelists highlighted how maintaining the established official narratives has played a big role in perpetuating conflict. One observation noted how history education is all about political and military actions in the past. Concerning this, it was showcased how historical materials and curricula change when there are political shifts. It was concluded that, to a large degree because of the above, there is no place for health, environmental, gender, migration, or LGBTQI+ history, while additionally, violence is being normalized in historical discourses.

In terms of identity-making, the panellists discussed the questions: *How is history education used as a tool to re/produce national identity?* and, in the case of the Cyprus conflict specifically, *How is it related to discourses of the 'motherlands' [Turkey and Greece]?* The daily practices of schools were discussed, particularly with commemorations and exams, which emphasize one-way learning and require students to memorize historical information, thus creating anxiety for both teachers and students. The importance of teachers in cultivating historical understanding to future generations was emphasised and the effect of teachers in this case was discussed.

Sensitive issues in the context of history education, such as atrocities, were discussed. Explicitly, the panelists discussed how violent narratives need to be considered and addressed, given that the presence of violence and its way of being taught affect students and societies in several ways. In relation to this, the importance of conflict transformation pedagogy for history

³ We use the term 'non-core' to indicate non-dominant groups, and differentiate from minority groups that might be given (by law or convention) certain privileges. Non-core groups are, but not exclusive to, ethnic/race/cultural/religious/gender, sexuality, and disability groups.

⁴ In social sciences, the 'Self'/'ingroup' refers to people perceived to be the same and thus feeling they belong to the same group while the 'outgroup' represents other people, perceived to be outside of one's group. Throughout the report we use both, in line with the different conventions of history education (Self/Other) and social psychology (ingroup/outgroup).

education was highlighted. A further issue addressed by Panel 1 was how popular culture and new media have a controversial impact on history education.

Panel 2: History Teaching and Conflict Transformation

The second panel of experts brought together social psychologists, who conduct research about and in postconflict settings in the Eastern Mediterranean, raising a variety of issues about master narratives and history education, such as how social psychological theories can enrich history teaching with knowledge of dealing with prejudice reduction and the issue of conflict transformation (Psaltis et al. 2017).

Panel 2 participants discussed the questions *How is the outgroup/'Other' being characterized?* and *How are they being framed as enemies through history education?* Panellists explained that master narratives create hostile feelings in learners toward the outgroups/'Other' and thus preclude trust-building and empathy. The panel shared research from different Mediterranean settings to show that there is mostly identification and attachment to one's ingroup/the Self, although attachment to one's ingroup does not necessarily require hostility toward outgroups. The importance of contact – either direct or indirect – with the outgroups/'Other' was highlighted. In relation how social psychology can contribute to history education, it was stressed that theories related to social identity, as well as other social psychological theories of intergroup relations (i.e., integrated threat theory, contact hypothesis, moral disengagement, collective guilt, attribution theory, etc), can help us understand the way master narratives are (in)formed. It was furthermore highlighted that there is a need to expand our discussion and understanding of these narratives not only in relation to the role of identities, but also in the way they orient people who have internalised them towards "otherness" (e.g. stereotypes, prejudice, distrust).

Exclusive forms of national identity and sectarianism were also identified as root causes of conflict. In this sense, common civic identity was discussed as a constructive concept for conflict resolution. Instead of demonizing diverse identities, embracing them was suggested. It was also highlighted that conflicts often emerge from power imbalances and social inequalities.

Through the Panel 2 discussions, national narratives – even from opposite sides of a conflict – were shown to be very similar to each other. The structure of these narratives is generally the same: good and bad, evil and victim, guilty and innocent, etc. The issue of *Whose voice is being heard and whose voice is silent?*, was also addressed by the panel.

The panel furthermore presented findings to show that dialogue and mediation help to diminish prejudices. The benefits of interdisciplinarity and social educational approaches were highlighted, and the transformative power of history education in conflict societies was emphasized. Current social movements and street protests, which can indirectly fuel or empower, were also discussed in relation to history narratives. Panellists put forward that theory and practice should be combined in history education and the approach of transformative history teaching was put forward by one of the panellists as it was expounded in COST IS 1205⁵.

⁵ https://www.ucy.ac.cy/directory/documents/dir/cpsaltis/History_Teaching_Recommendations_for_the_Teaching_of_Intergroup_Conflicts_COST_IS1205.pdf

The panel expanded on the issue of violence by discussing the question, *How can we denormalize violence?* The necessity for a new approach to gender and intersectionality was highlighted. Memory was raised as an important aspect of history education and sharing stories of different voices was seen as cardinal. Different tools such as designing new digital strategies were suggested while funding was seen as an important issue for scholars. Lastly, the participants of Panel 2 talked about how the effect of history education should be measured.

Panel 3: Reflections on the Role of Track Diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean and History Teaching Reforms

The third panel participants discussed how political aspects of the Cyprus conflict affect history education in the island; for instance, in how narratives and representations of the other are affected by major milestones such as the Annan Plan (2004) and Crans Montana (2017) peace negotiations; subsequently, both educational material and educational practices are affected. The absence of coordinating mechanisms was seen as problematic as, on the one hand, there is no coordination to deal with conflict in the framework of education and, on the other hand, different histories are being taught. Panellists addressed the questions *What is the initial point of the historical conflict?* and, also, *How does it affect conflict resolution in history education?*, highlighting that the first issue affects how history is taught and also is crucial for historical understanding. The need for critical thinking was stressed.

The importance of diplomacy was also highlighted by the panel. The Cyprus conflict was defined as a top-down process; however, the importance of civil society's contribution to decision-making processes in divided societies was emphasized. Especially in the context of Cyprus, the panellists noted that the public is not regularly informed about developments in the political process. Given that this is highly important to inform citizens, civil society's participation in decision-making and informing people was highly encouraged. In line to this, panellists emphasised that teachers have a determinant role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes.

Violence and violent conflicts as a barrier to any peace efforts were also discussed by Panel 3, raising the questions: *Is there an ideal time for peace education and history education in conflict societies?; When is this ideal time?; and, Can/should peace/history education continue during times of violence?* Peace as a holistic concept and multi-track diplomacy were seen as important in relation to these questions. Peace and history teaching is part of this holistic peace process. In their presentation, the participants of the *Greek-Turkish Forum (GTF)*⁶ argued that the forum created mutual understanding by providing a space to meet regularly and thus enhancing respect, trust, and understanding. These positive improvements eliminate negative perceptions and prejudices of the 'Other' which are cultivated in particular through the media. It was furthermore suggested that track-two diplomacy can also help in feeding ideas from academics, NGOs, and the grassroots into direct policy proposals to the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus and also the leaders of Greece and Turkey.

Religious-based conflicts, caused by the conviction that a person's religion is more important or superior to other religions,

6 For more on the Forum, see: <http://greeturkishforum.com/>

were discussed. Respect and multiculturalism were highlighted as crucial elements of history education, too. Lastly, the audience raised the issue what keeps peacebuilders motivated, given that dealing with conflicts is stressful and that activists are mostly voluntarily attending those activities.

Panel 4: Perspectives of Bi-and Multi-lateral Cooperation in History Education

Panel 4 discussants presented the OHE report (2023) on the organisation's sixteen member-states and discussed, *Why do we learn history and why is it important?* History was seen as a key element in preventing misunderstanding, misconceptions and political manipulations. Panellists drew attention to the question *How is history taught?* The need for methods that emphasise multiperspectivity and include the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, languages, nationalities, religions, genders, and the experiences of minorities in history curricula were emphasized. This is based on the understanding that diversity is fundamental for living together in a democratic society. To this end, it was highlighted that civil society, teachers' associations, and representatives of minority groups need to take part in decision-making regarding history education.

Furthermore, panellists noted that the ideas and influence of parents, who have a big – perhaps the biggest – impact on their children, had not been discussed in the conference. Lastly, the panel noted that teachers tend to voice concerns about overloaded curricula, which causes problems for daily activities. Following upon the issues discussed in Panel 4, members of the audience called attention to the facts that a) there was no reference to how macrohistory and microhistory (e.g. local and oral history) are and can be connected, and b) that a major obstacle remains that historical narratives tend to raise only some voices - usually the dominant ones and/or those that serve the hegemonic narratives - while silencing others.

Panel 5: Bi- and Multi-lateral Cooperation in Curriculum Development and the Best Practice Teaching Aids In Post-conflict Settings

Panel 5 discussants took up the issues of textbook commissioning - that is, the process by which individuals and/or committees are appointed by the government authorities⁷ to either revise and rewrite existing textbooks or write new ones altogether. Panellists illustrated that in some contexts, textbook commissions contribute to the preparation process of textbooks, while, in others, textbooks are prepared by educational authorities, excluding or restricting the input of civil society. Some questions raised by the panel included: *How are textbooks commissioned?; How could they be?; What are the benefits of textbook commissions for history education?; and, finally, What are the pros and cons of these either governmental or non-governmental commissions?* Moreover, panellists noted that societies need time and distance to deal with painful pasts and heal their wounds. In relation

7 Textbooks are not always commissioned by government authorities. For instance, they can be commissioned at the state or private level, i.e. Lower Saxony or a publishing house. However, in all participating countries of this conference, textbooks are commissioned and authorised by the country's government.

to this, Panel 4 discussants emphasised that curricula and textbooks tend to remain silent on past suffering which may perpetuate denial and impunity. Drawing on this issue, panellists discussed the question *How can history teaching affect the reconciliation process?*, explaining how one-sided narratives of states generally aim to foster national unity, a strategy that nonetheless contributes to the perpetuation of conflict.

During the panel, student learning was discussed through the example of *Out of Eden Learn Project*⁸, a social media-like historical learning platform, offering young people between 3 and 19 years old opportunities for dialogue and to build understandings with peers from different backgrounds from all around the world. Panellists demonstrated how, through the project, students were invited to slow down, interact, and connect, and also encouraged to link the history lessons taught to their family histories and explore personal connections. In addition, the project supported students to consider different perspectives on the past and reflect on how it is remembered.

The ways of remembrance were also discussed by the Panel 5. For instance, the panel raised the questions, *What is remembered, how, and by whom?* and, *How does it become visible in public?* The questions, *How is the past transmitted culturally?* and *How are identities reproduced?* were also addressed. Addressing these questions, the panel put forward the argument that it is necessary to create a safe space for children to interact, get inspired, and engage in dialogue.

Panel 6: Teaching and teacher training

Panel 6 participants began discussing the effect of far-right and racist discourses on history education. Attention was brought to the fact that such phenomena can easily trigger political tensions and spread fear and anxiety. It was also highlighted that from the perspective of groups on the (far)right, changing history education constitutes a threat to national identity loss of historical truth.

The importance of interdisciplinarity was also highlighted, in that it can help achieve a more holistic approach to history education. Panellists argued that history education needs to liaise with social and developmental psychology, peace education, human rights, anti-racism, environmental education, and conflict transformation, and also pointed to the importance of outdoor education for the teaching of history. The *IMAGINE*⁹ project – implemented by the AHDR and being under the auspices of the Bi-communal Technical Committee of Education – was brought as a successful example of how history education actions can increase contact between the two communities in Cyprus and, by doing so, promote peace, understanding and anti-racism. Finally, the panellists discussed the meaning of critical thinking in history education or, in the words of the panellists themselves, "thinking over thinking" (reflecting critically on the ways we think). The need for a critical understanding of political violence, evidence sourcing, interpretation, and problem-solving was emphasised. Moreover, experts highlighted that we need to consider how critical thinking can be used as problem-solving and encourage multiperspectivity. Finally, the discussants of Panel 6 pointed out the importance of conflict resolution and reconciliation in history teaching.

8 For more on the project, see: <https://learn.outofedenwalk.com/about/>

9 For more on the project, see: <https://www.ahdr.info/peace-education/58-education-for-a-culture-of-peace-imagine>

2

Challenges

Many, if not most, of the issues outlined in the panel discussions identified important challenges when it comes to history education in post conflict settings. As it became obvious during the different conference discussions, these challenges are multifaceted and relate to the educational, social, and cultural aspects of history education in divided societies. Addressing these challenges is necessary for promoting informed decision-making, fostering equity and inclusion, and driving positive change in educational systems and practices; it is also essential for implementing sustainable solutions that have broad support.

Politics and identity

As shown throughout the conference, history education might suffer in the context of history-politics and identity-making, especially in current and 'frozen' conflicts. This is because, firstly, the Self and 'Other' are clearly formed and given specific roles (i.e. that of the victim and the enemy, respectively). Secondly, the persistence of a common homogenised identity results in the exclusion of minorities and newly-arrived populations. The above are exaggerated through the repetition of master narratives that produce 'othering' accounts of their neighbouring community. During various discussions, politics and identity building were demonstrated to be problematic. Panelists pointed out that focusing on, or silencing, past suffering through curricula and textbooks, may facilitate collective amnesia and ultimately denial and impunity. Caution was raised in relation to the fact that this might cause resentment by victims, as renewed injustice can become an additional source of conflict, constitute a missed opportunity to provide recognition and redress, and leave a vacuum that favors thriving of sectarian conflict narratives (e.g. Northern Ireland and Lebanon).

Curricula & Textbook

The conference brought to the fore how one of the most significant challenges concerning history education pertains to the rigidity of curricula and textbooks and reliance on conventional teaching methods. Textbooks, governed by centralised educational authorities, remain the predominant resource for history education, perpetuating traditional didactic learning methods. Multiperspectivity, as well as source- and competence-based learning is still notably absent in the majority of the Eastern Mediterranean cases, hindering a comprehensive understanding of historical events.

The focus of curricula and textbooks on political and military history was outlined as an additional challenge, as this kind of history portrays and results in selective victim narratives. That is, textbooks tend to portray the Self as the victim while dehumanising the Other, often through images depicting violence, hence reinforcing biases and distorting historical realities.

In addition, as manifested throughout the conference, political influence in history education has been decisive: as curricula and textbooks often reflect political perspectives of nation-states, ethnic diversity and empathy are often neglected. As a result, there is inadequate representation of non-dominant groups – such as, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, religious, gender, and sexuality groups – which are inadequately represented or completely absent in history textbooks. This lack of non-core groups coverage perpetuates marginalisation and inhibits a holistic understanding of history.

Multiperspectivity

The (lack of) implementation and theorisation of multiperspectivity was raised as a further challenge. Concerns were: one, the extent to which multiperspectivity can foster critical thinking; two, the broad definition of the term; and three, the different approaches of different disciplines. When it comes to historical thinking specifically, concerns were expressed about how multiperspectivity can assess different perspectives as interpretations of different modes (i.e. written or visual) based on evidence, sourcing, interpretation, etc. It was also noted that sometimes the term is used by people who superficially interpret multiperspectivity as a postmodern relativist approach.¹⁰ A further concern about multiperspectivity was that perspectives from other fields and methodologies are not taken into consideration. For instance, anti-racism, peace studies, psychology, sociology, social anthropology, cultural studies, can become comprehensive tools for understanding complex societal dynamics and, thus, supplement history education; yet these perspectives are excluded from curricula and textbooks.

Pedagogies and teacher training

Regarding the majority of settings, discussed in the conference pedagogies were reported as strenuous, as they center on unidirectional instruction, with challenges attributed to overloaded curricula, textbooks, and exams. Panelists specifically discussed that content overload prevents teachers from implementing more inquiry-based approaches, which require more time to be developed in class.

Moreover, throughout the conference the need for further teacher professional development became clear. Discussants and audience members brought to the fore how qualification requirements vary between primary and secondary levels, while in many countries the initial training typically occurs at the undergraduate or postgraduate level; after this, many teachers do not undergo training for several years.

Use of technology

Although technology was mostly discussed through a positive lens (see the following section, *Opportunities*), technology related challenges were flagged. It was pointed out that online sources depicting the past might vary - for instance, popular culture, TV series, cartoons, videos, visuals, and social media - raising different issues of concern. Two were highlighted. One, the existence of these online 'sources' created the illusion of accepting online images about history as historical facts. Two, the prevalence of online sources has enabled the strengthening of these sources against scientific historiography.

¹⁰ Of course, this is not the case and not the intention of the academics who proposed multiperspectivity in the first place. Indeed, all voices must be brought into the arena for discussion and debate; however, multiperspectivity entails the rigorous examination and evaluation of the various points of view.

History education actors

Regarding history education challenges, in most countries history education is, for the most part – and in some cases, such as in Cyprus, exclusively –, the responsibility of the local stakeholders. Even though local civil society and international organizations are actively working towards building and improving history education capacity¹¹, in some areas, such as designing history curricula and teacher training, their efforts and work is regularly unsupported or even halted or undermined by centralized education systems.

Funding was highlighted as another disconcerting issue to civil society building-capacity. Explicitly, the lack of funding came up as a big obstacle in developing educational material, teacher training, and building synergies that can enable capacity building in history education.

Assessment

Participants in the conference noted that time pressures arise from overloaded curricula and high-stakes exams. As a result of this, history training does not give space for creativity and critical thinking. Instead, it focuses on a one-sided, didactic learning process, as previously discussed.

Drawing on the example of Cyprus, for instance, panellists argued that high-stake exams in secondary education only measure content knowledge of the single ethnocentric narrative; in addition, teachers ‘teach to the test’ avoiding the teaching of disciplinary understanding, which is not measured by the exams.

Commemorations

Last but not least, in relation to history education challenges as identified in the conference, panellists brought to the fore how commemorations and national celebrations can also be a challenging factor when it comes to history in school. This is because they are means of shaping the past to specific ends and needs; furthermore, these practices build and maintain ethnocentric national identities and also fuel trauma (Zembylas, 2019).

¹¹ The degree of civil society involvement varies between countries. For example, civil society in Lebanon has played a fundamental role in supporting history education teachers, including teacher training and, most importantly, driving change in disciplinary capacity development in history education. Contrasting this is the example of Cyprus, where history education is tightly controlled. Other countries, such as Greece, are open to European-funded projects and collaborations; however, there is still much resistance on behalf of stakeholders to collaborate with civil society on building history education capacity.

3 Opportunities



Despite the challenges discussed above, throughout the presentations and discussions it became obvious that the current state of history education in the Eastern Mediterranean and post/conflict settings *does* create a range of opportunities. It is essential to highlight opportunities and bring them to the fore, as they can provide insight into *what* can be done and *how* to enhance history education and complementary fields.

Curricula, textbooks & educational material

In almost all countries participating in the conference, notwithstanding the challenges and resistance, civil society has actively and successfully contributed to designing history curricula and educational materials – as well as teacher training on them – with some remarkable results. Examples shared were the *Contested Histories*¹² project by EUROCLIO – a project addressing controversies over statues, memorials, street names and other representations of disputed historical legacies – and the supplementary material produced by AHDR - i.e., *How to introduce gender in history teaching, The Ottoman period in Cyprus: Learning to explore continuity, change and diversity and Introducing oral history*.¹³ It is also worth mentioning the Council of Europe project *Developing a culture of co-operation when teaching and learning history*¹⁴, and the AHDR and Council of Europe publication *Multiperspectivity in Teaching and Learning History*¹⁵.

These initiatives can constitute an opportunity for building on and learning from existing capacity. Existing projects for students can also serve as an example of opening up the curriculum.

Multiperspectivity

Throughout the conference it became obvious that multiperspectivity in history education constitutes another significant opportunity for an inclusive classroom, in that it can provide openings. For instance, the *Out of Eden Learning Project and Education of the Muslim Minority Children in Thrace*¹⁶ enabled students to connect 'big' histories with their family stories. This example manifests that local actors who have been collaborating with international bodies have existing capacity that other history education actors can build on.

Furthermore, conference discussions elaborated that there is a widespread consensus that different perspectives should be presented and discussed in the classroom, even though this might not be the current reality and even though the textbook is the main – if not the exclusive – history teaching and learning tool in the southeast Mediterranean countries. Multiple perspectives were seen as a way of combating monolithic views and stereotypes, as well as challenging dominant narratives.

12 For more on the project, see: <https://contestedhistories.org/>

13 For the complete list of AHDR supplementary material, see: <https://www.ahdr.info/our-work/supplementary-educational-materials>

14 For the publication, see: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/teacher-education/7542-developing-a-culture-of-co-operation-when-teaching-and-learning-history.html>

15 For the publication, see: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680492f87>

16 For more on the project, see: <https://museduc.gr/en/>

International Synergies

Synergies and cooperation through the work of international or European organisations (such as UNESCO¹⁷, OHE-CoE¹⁸, GEI¹⁹) and research networks (such as *MAKINGHISTORIES*) can be a pathway of building capacity - that is, informing and updating both the work of NGOs as well as official stakeholders. Also, bodies such as the OHE (OHE, 2023), through regular reports on the current state of history education, can open a pathway for authorities and local actors to work on building and enhancing history education in a targeted manner.

Specifically in relation to post/conflict settings, another opportunity could be what has been done with book/curricula comparison or collaboration by former enemies. An example has been the Poland-Germany joined textbook, from the *Europe – Our History* series²⁰. The textbook is intended to be used day to day in curricular history teaching as a textbook and workbook. What is more, it draws together not only a list of topics but also learning objectives for teachers and learners to cover. A further example was the Germany/France bilateral book²¹, which, notably, is an outcome of student initiation which offers an example for putting into practice students' wishes and initiatives of the French-German Youth Parliament in 2003. Used in high school history classes, the book opens up space for pupils to find their sources of information, and make open questions; furthermore, it deals with contentious issues such as Communism. Similarly, *The Lausanne Project*²² collaborated with Turkish and Greek high school teachers, to give young people the skills to come up with their own narratives on the Lausanne Treaty and its outcomes.

Local synergies

Again with regard to conflict and post-conflict societies, existing initiatives demonstrate an opportunity to work on issues other than history education at local level and, by doing so, break barriers and create positive interactions and spaces where academics, practitioners and stakeholders can initiate

17 A significant publication by UNESCO in the field of History Education is The UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision (2010) found here: efrec.gei.de/fileadmin/Medien/News/Publications/Falk_Pingel_UNESCO_Guidebook_on_Textbook_Research_and_Textbook_Revision.pdf

18 For the joint publication *Renewing History Education to Uphold Democracy* (2024), by Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute, International Society of History Didactics (ISHD), EuroClio – European Association of History Educators and Federation for European Education (FEDE), see here: [pdf_Renewing_History_Education_To_Uphold_Democracy_Council_of_Europe_2024.pdf](https://www.renewing-history-education-to-uphold-democracy-council-of-europe-2024.pdf)

19 For the Mission Textbook: The History of the Georg Eckert Institute (2022), see: https://efrec.gei.de/fileadmin/Medien/News/Publications/Fuchs_Henne_Sammler_Mission_Textbook_The_History_of_the_Georg_Eckert_Institute.pdf

20 The series overall aim is to make a contribution to helping school students develop an awareness of history on the basis of knowledge backed by facts and sources and characterised by critical reflection on historical events. For more on the series, see: <https://en.europa-unsere-geschichte.org/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CEurope%20%E2%80%93%20Our%20History%E2%80%9D%20is,judgements%20on%20the%20issues%20discussed>.

21 For more information, see: <https://www.dw.com/en/joint-german-french-history-book-a-history-maker-itself/a-2078903>

22 For more on the project, see: <https://thelausanneproject.com/teaching-resources/>

inclusive and critical discussions on history education. In Cyprus examples at the political level include the bi-communal Technical Committee in Education (TCE), established by the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities and aiming to improve and strengthen education capacity across the divide on different educational issues²³; in terms of civil society, the *IMAGINE* project by the AHDR, using anti-racist education to create open dialogue and anti-stereotype pedagogical practices, is noteworthy.

Use of technology

Digital technologies can also constitute an opportunity, given that their positive use was emphasized, both in terms of classroom practices and at the policy-making level. For instance, by employing digital methods of delivering historical content, the *Start-Up Nation Project* enabled interactive learning experiences, helped students cultivate historical skills (e.g. by making connections between source, context, and subject), and enabled historical perspective-taking.²⁴ In turn, the *Out of Eden* project showcased that technology can also be a means of addressing family and marginalized histories and connecting the personal to the collective, as well as problematizing remembering and addressing issues of commemoration.

The use of digital tools for disseminating findings and engaging society can also be an opportunity for taking history out of the classroom - albeit this might entail dangers, as discussed in the next section.

Through existing projects, the conference also showcased how technology can contribute to history education been benefited by other disciplines. For instance, the emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches through *MAKINGHISTORIES*, and *The Digital Thrace Project* suggests an opportunity for a more holistic understanding of and engagement with historical culture. *MAKINGHISTORIES* is an interdisciplinary project that explores how we think, make, and recreate history, formed by a network of 18 institutions around the world and a team of more than 50 teachers, academics, and workers of museums and memory sites. *The Digital Thrace Project*, a collaborative project between The Laboratory of Technologies, Research and Applications in Education of the Department of History and Ethnology, and The +MorPhoSe Linguistics Laboratory, created a digital environment interconnecting the cultural and historic heritage of Thrace. Its aims were a) digital recording and preservation, b) contributing

23 The TCE's mandate was to a) review research and good practices and also undertake new research on education's potential to contribute to conflict transformation, peace, reconciliation and the countering of prejudice, discrimination, racism, xenophobia and extremism; b) suggest a mutually acceptable mechanism for the implementation of confidence-building measures in schools in order to promote contact and cooperation between students and educators from the two communities; and c) to make recommendations regarding the coordination of the two educational systems (UNFICYP, 2015; United Nations, 2016).

24 Explicitly, the project enabled participating teachers to narrow down the scope of the material taught in each topic; also, it enabled diverse teaching methods and the development of thinking skills characteristic of the field of historical knowledge. Assessment was also facilitated through the program. Explicitly, the matriculation exam in history was conducted on school computers and included questions that integrate digital media. It therefore focused on developing the digital literacy of students, alongside their historical skills.

to future research, and c) promotion and social use. Moreover, projects such as *The Shared Society Index*²⁵ manifest the importance of offering opportunities at the psychological and educational level in terms of promoting tolerant, equal, and respectful relations among young people, which can enable meaningful and open dialogue in (post)conflict countries.

25 For more on the project, see: https://en.achord.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/achord/files/isspy_2021_exec_summary_english.pdf

4

Implications and ways forward for history education in (post)conflict societies in the Eastern Mediterranean

Before suggesting ways forward, it is necessary to consider the broader significance of the findings presented in the report, by addressing the question of what these findings mean for education, stakeholders, and future actions in the region. Hence, we reflect critically on the issues addressed above before presenting pathways for supporting history education and outlining possibilities for the specific context of the conference, namely the southeastern part of Europe and, more specifically, Cyprus. Although we address these topics with the specific context in mind, we hope that colleagues and organisations in other contexts may find them useful and can draw on them for their work.

Curricula & textbooks

Regarding curricula and textbook changes and revisions, it should be taken into consideration that questioning master narratives may be potentially destabilizing. This is because collective anxieties²⁶ are central to how communities respond to changes, as changes relating to history are often perceived as a disruption of the core of a community's identity (Ahmed, 2004; Hutchison and Bleiker, 2008; Ross 2006 cited in Christodoulou, 2018). In addition, as the revision of textbooks reflects the stakeholders' attempts to change the policy and narrative of the textbooks according to the shifts in the political context, with history education and textbooks often being instrumentalized (Perikleous, 2015; Latif, 2019), attempts to revise curricula and textbooks will most certainly result in 'history wars', the public debates over the interpretation, goals, values, and legitimacy of the history.

However, in spite of potential conflicts and 'history wars', curriculum and textbook modifications are not only necessary in healthy democratic societies, but they are also desperately needed as shown throughout the conference, in order to break the vicious circle that creates the 'history wars' in the first place. This is because the existing monolithic features of curricula and textbooks do not encourage critical historical thinking, depriving students from the opportunity to engage in meaningful and discipline-based learning (Makriyianni and Psaltis, 2007; Georgiou, 2020; Perikleous, 2022). Moreover, supplying students with a definite, condensed, linear and one-sided narrative of the past goes against the discipline of history (Rusen, 2008). The value of interdisciplinarity – i.e. through the contribution of antiracism education, peace studies, and social and developmental psychology (see Psaltis & Wagoner (2025) proposal of Genetic Social Psychology) is key. These approaches can not only deepen our understanding of epistemological issues of social constructivist frameworks and our understanding of change but also help touch sensitive issues, drawing on conflict resolution experiences deepen our understanding of internal dynamics and intergroup dynamics, so that any new intervention can be implemented by mono-communal or bicomunal workshops of history teachers implicated in the expected change, as it was the strategy of AHDR in Cyprus from the beginning of its work.

Emphasizing competency-based learning and methodological approaches to history can mitigate resistance to curricular

revisions, in addition to promoting critical thinking. This approach can be especially beneficial when it comes to conflict and post-conflict societies settings. This approach is based on second-order concepts or procedural concepts, that is, the tools that shape the way in which the 'stuff' or 'substance' is understood, organized and debated, as well as the ways in which it is actually generated (History Association, 2024) which, in turn, drive primary and secondary sources analysis and interrogation. Capacity building can involve European and international organizations, such as EUROCLIO, UNESCO, OHTE, and CoE.

Regarding the content of curricula and textbooks, as panellists elaborated during the conference, the way forward is historical imagination in the sense of 'what could have been if...!' In the words of one of the conference participants, "we need to see in the past alternatives to the present, not just (one) explanation to it". To this end, 'close curricula', that is curricula that are tightly controlled and thus inflexible (Jobrack, 2007), are replaced with 'open' ones (Kohl, 1969) that foster a supportive and inclusive classroom community and enable flexible learning environments. Lastly, given the need for temporal distance for societies to deal with sensitive and controversial history, changes should start from less controversial events.

Multiperspectivity

Multiperspectivity can indeed enhance history education in various ways, yet not without complexities. To start with, even though 'multiperspectivity' (as a term, at least) is rooted in history education, it can have different meanings in both theory and practice. This is the case even more when multiperspectivity is informed by interdisciplinarity, as discussed below. Moreover, its epistemological bases need to be clarified so as to avoid the misconception of a postmodern relativist approach.

A related predicament is that when it comes to moral development and conflict resolution, questioning different perspectives might seem 'disrespectful' and 'rude.' In relation to this, we should bear in mind that multiperspectivity, if misinterpreted as a practice where everything goes, can be extremely dangerous as it might lead to nihilism or relativism (Lee and Shemilt, 2004). Notably, this can be even more exaggerated in traditional and/or post-conflict contexts where students are exposed to a single or limited narratives (Georgiou, 2020). It can be suggested that one way to interpret multiperspectivity could be premised on Piaget's social psychology and his notion of promoting relations of co-operation (Makriyianni & Psaltis, 2008). There is a relationship of mutual respect between self/other/ingroup-outgroup where both perspectives are expressed, potentially come to socio-cognitive conflict and then after evaluation and argumentation they could be co-ordinated into a more comprehensive view which is developmentally more advanced than both the previous one-sided perspectives.

A contrasting challenge is that, in certain communities, particularly in settings that need to (urgently) build a unified/civic identity, different narratives are seen as a threat to social cohesion because they do not seem to promote a collective memory or common vision. Indeed, in one case presented at the conference, a comprehensive unified narrative was actively promoted by the authorities.

These conundrums can be overcome by using multiperspectivity as part of a competences-based history. That is, curricula, textbooks and educators should use multiperspectivity as part of historical inquiry that considers, compares and assess different narratives. In this way, students can be empowered

²⁶ Anxiety can be defined as "a diffuse, unpleasant, vague sense of apprehension" (Sadock, Sadock, and Ruiz 2015, p.387 cited in Christodoulou, 2018) related to the possibility that the worst scenario will happen. Explicitly, these anxieties are related to (in)security, explicitly, the 'loss of national identity,' 'loss of historical truth,' 'impact on the conflict,' and 'serving foreign interests' (Christodoulou, 2018).

to develop critical thinking and the capacity to develop a more cautious or tentative approach when relating a narrative to a *valid* point of view or a *legitimate* perspective (Chapman, 2009), a skill most needed at a time when fake news and echo chambers thrive.

Multiperspectivity can be especially beneficial to post/conflict countries, as it has been internationally recognized as the most effective way for history teaching to contribute to post-conflict understanding (McCully, 2012). As highlighted above, engaging with different interpretations/perspectives should not imply that every viewpoint is legitimate and acceptable.

Moreover, multiperspectivity means much more than teaching two competing master narratives. The approach needs to evolve towards a more inclusive and diverse curriculum that acknowledges various perspectives in addition to the ethnic ones and addresses the gap that has been found in teaching about minorities - i.e. ethnic, religious, linguistic, gender - and marginalized groups.

Interdisciplinarity

A (more) interdisciplinary perspective can lead to a more dynamic history education system in post-conflict settings. For instance, peace education and social psychology can complement history teaching practices by reducing the dehumanization of the 'Other', raising students' awareness of their personal experiences and biases in viewing the 'Other' by fostering perspective-taking, and deconstructing stereotypes and outgroup/'Other' homogeneity. Social developmental psychology can also shed light on important epistemological debates about historical thinking and historical consciousness, in understanding the how processes of social construction relate to social identities and power asymmetries in forms of communication (domination, submission, co-operation) (see Psaltis & Wagoner, 2025); in addition, it can offer valuable insights into the internal and external dynamics of intergroup conflict. The benefits of the social psychology contribution to history education are twofold. Firstly, students need to develop narrative competence and bravery to challenge myths about the 'Other'. Secondly, these insights can facilitate reflection on the position of individuals, institutions, and leadership.²⁷

At the same time, employing models and strategies of peace studies and peace education to supplement the teaching and learning of history can contribute to the better understanding of the root causes of violence and conflict, especially in contexts such as the ones under consideration. This assists in the development of a comprehensive approach to building competences required to live in peaceful and democratic societies. For example, as brought up during the meeting, Johan Galtung's model of the triangle of violence (Galtung, 1969) can assist researchers in identifying the problematic areas in curricula, textbooks and pedagogical practices and enhance efforts to eradicate xenophobia, animosity and hatred towards the 'other'.

Interdisciplinarity means making use of the methods or concepts of one or more disciplines. However, different disciplines

²⁷ This reflection on the position of individuals, institutions, and leadership is beneficial at two levels. Firstly, challenging ethnocentric myths is crucial in that individuals, institutions, and leaderships can become more open in working with collaborating with the 'Other' and in opening up spaces to include the latter in curricula and textbooks. Secondly, teachers can help students challenge myths about the 'Other', only if they do so themselves.

might have different methodologies and/or goals, meaning that different disciplines are not always compatible, for instance, there are different disciplines with different methodologies and aims, such as enhancing intercultural relations, reconciliation, social justice and critical thinking.

Given all the above, it is essential that different disciplines and methodologies are clearly identified and *possible* overlaps are defined. Following, we need to answer the question: Are we aiming for a collusion and collaboration of different fields? Or, are we aiming for interdisciplinary history, that is historical scholarship which makes use of the methods or concepts of one or more disciplines other than history? On the one hand, it could be argued that if the aim is an interdisciplinary understanding of a historical phenomenon, then contributions from various disciplines are not only desirable, they are necessary as we are getting ready to cross the first quarter of the 21st century, especially amidst the AI revolution.

Yet it could be argued that history education constitutes a distinctive field with its own rules and distinctive epistemology, which need to be respected and which already does a lot; in the words of one of the experts, "maybe we ask too much of history?". If we opt to follow the first scenario, it becomes imperative to meticulously devise novel interdisciplinary methodologies. Conversely, should we opt for the second scenario, it is incumbent upon us to systematically delineate the manner in which diverse disciplines and methodologies can enhance history education. In either scenario, a thorough examination is needed to ascertain the junctures at which disciplines converge or interventions are most efficacious. For instance, the optimal timing for interventions such as anti-racist education or peace education – that is, whether they are most beneficial prior to, during, or subsequent to specific segments of history instruction – must be investigated through rigorously designed and targeted research methodologies.

Synergies

Designing and implementing history education through interdisciplinarity is intrinsically linked with synergies. Notably, present realities might not always favor synergies. In the last few years, Europe has experienced the return of armed conflicts and new eruptions of unresolved frozen conflicts, while new nationalist and populist movements have grown in popularity around the world. Additionally, the situation raises concerns about the role of organizations such as UNESCO or the Council of Europe, traditionally responsible for addressing bi- and multi-lateral curricula and textbook reform. These organizations are now confronted with a growing number of civil society initiatives, leading to challenges such as competition, communication gaps, and fragmentation.

As panellists suggested, more openness is required, as well as more collaboration. Dedication to shared objectives is also crucial. This is because both international and local organizations can introduce innovation and affect policy while also having an impact on supplementary educational material. Moreover, synergies can enable the sharing of experiences, common obstacles, and lessons learned from local and international actors. Physical spaces, such as the library and archives of the GEI can also provide a tangible opportunity for collaboration. Considering armed conflicts and populist movements, it is also imperative to focus on building resilience and ensuring the enforcement of existing mandates.

Synergies can also be instrumental in adopting common standards and principles, as, for example, the guidelines of the CoE regarding competencies, or OHTE's recommendations. These can provide common ground where different authorities, communities, and people can meet, and work together on developing teacher professional development, methodologies, and educational material. Synergies can be vital in sharing successful stories as well as sharing challenges. However, the extent to which these recommendations are adopted and implemented depends on the willingness of stakeholders to collaborate and engage in a dialogue that transcends political and cultural divides. In line to this resilience and flexibility *from all parts* is required.

Pedagogies

The 'know-how' approach implies a shift towards a pedagogical approach that necessitates critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the complexity of history. This shift requires teacher training programs and resources for professional development opportunities that will enable educators to effectively incorporate disciplinary teaching and learning into their classrooms.

Practical examples and evidence-based research discussed in the conference elucidated how teachers can make a change both in their classroom and policymaking when: a) they can draw inspiration through the sharing of new approaches; b) they have the autonomy to take risks and become catalysts and, c) engage as (co)researchers of learning. These goals cannot be achieved as long as textbooks are the only tool for delivering curricular content.

To achieve positive change in pedagogies, it is essential that teacher training is mandatory and takes place *at the same time* of reforms, and continues after. Moreover, training needs to be targeted, and tailored to the needs of teachers. For instance, it is often the case that some teachers have been undertaking continuous training whereas others, for different reasons, do not; hence diverse training is needed. In addition, when it comes to teacher training, collaboration with experts in educational policy, curriculum development, and pedagogy, as well as practising teachers and historians, is essential for translating theoretical and conceptual changes into practical educational reform.

Meaning of history education

Related to the above is the prerequisite to defining *what history is*. It is only by going back to the basics of history that we can think about how we can incorporate methodologies of other disciplines. (It is worth flagging that, in the conference, despite the various discussions on history education, a discussion on what history education is was almost absent). Especially in settings such as Cyprus, where disciplines and fields other than history might prevail over history education, the clear distinction between the conceptualization of different disciplines must be clear. In addition, it is necessary to consider how memory or 'practical history' (Oakeshott, 1933) might affect history education. What is more, this might be even more exaggerated in (post)conflict contexts such as Cyprus, where 'practical history', or memory, might be mistaken for history (Georgiou, 2020).

In relation to what is history, conference presentations and discussions also seemed to connote different goals of history. It has been discussed, for instance, that although no form of history education can ever adequately rectify or compensate for past

crimes, history textbooks can form part of a wider mechanism of offering some minimal form of material and symbolic historical justice. Trust-building, empathy, and conflict transformation have also been discussed within history education. Yet, it is debatable whether these are the goals of history.²⁸ What was clear, however, to all participants is that in our geographical area history teaching needs to urgently stop being hostage to nationalism and the promotion of simplistic one-sided victimization narratives.

To this end, historians are indispensable in history education reform due to their expertise in historical inquiry and contextualizing events. Varied viewpoints can guarantee a more holistic approach while challenging conventional histories. The addition of new and younger historians, as well as those with expertise in non-political or military history, enriches education with new perspectives and thus inclusivity, and a broader scope of study.

Stakeholders & Civil society

Collaborative efforts between traditional and non-traditional history education actors – that is stakeholders and civil society – are essential, as both parties stand to benefit significantly from each other's strengths and expertise. It is therefore necessary that channels of cooperation are established.²⁹ One way of doing so is by finding common ground on issues that are officially in place; for instance, anti-racism education, as was the case of *IMAGINE* by the AHDR. Civil society in Cyprus, particularly organizations like the AHDR could play a crucial role in developing educational materials with the help of academics, and fostering historical understanding may contribute significantly to shaping the direction of history education.

International organizations can also assist local stakeholders to build and strengthen capacity in history teaching and learning, and offer guidelines for curriculum development. The emphasis on bilateral and multilateral cooperation in history education, as discussed in Panel 4 (see Section 1, above), implies opportunities for institutions in Cyprus to collaborate with international partners. This collaboration could involve sharing best practices, developing joint projects, and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of history. Collaborations with local actors, which the authorities see with suspicion, can also be facilitated and advanced by international institutions.

²⁸ Whether this is the role of peace education, could be questioned, too. For instance, as highlighted in the conference, some scholars (e.g. Cole 2007b, Corostelina and Lässig 2013) suggest that there might also be a number of serious problems with history education as well as peace education in the service of reconciliation. These problems range from the place and role envisioned for history teaching and peace education in reconciliation processes to the kinds of education reforms that might need to take place without falling into the traps of ideologization and indoctrination.

²⁹ When civil society history education actors collaborate with authorities and stakeholders, it opens up opportunities for constructive dialogue and positive outcomes. While there may be challenges in navigating political dynamics, the involvement of the state can greatly enhance the legitimacy and implementation of initiatives. This partnership provides valuable institutional backing and support, paving the way for meaningful engagement with historical narratives and fostering a culture of understanding and reconciliation.

Assessment

How do we ensure, through meaningful and deep assessment, that students have developed critical thinking skills, fostering a deeper understanding of diverse historical perspectives and events? Furthermore, if different disciplines/fields come together, what is it that we assess, and how do we do so, when it comes to student learning? Two further issues highlighted in the conference are: *How are educators assessed?* and *How are stakeholders assessed?*

Starting with student assessment, this should move beyond testing students' knowledge based on 'right' or 'wrong' answers, as this fails to integrate diverse and alternative interpretations into narratives or to develop students' historical thinking (Psaltis et al, 2011, p.350-51). Assessment should also be connected to the competences-based standards adopted in the curriculum. For example, in the case of the Greek Cypriot community, the curriculum makes explicit reference to using second-order concepts and multiple perspectives, yet student evaluations almost exclusively take place based on memorization.

To do so, suggested standards need to be adopted. Hence, stakeholders should be assessed regarding the implementation and progress they made regarding the guidelines, standards, recommendations, and policies they have agreed to adopt – both at the international and local level. Furthermore, stakeholders should be assessed on whether and to what degree they provided adequate support and provisions to educators, schools, communities, and students to engage with history in the ways determined in the curriculum. Educators should also be made accountable for their teaching and their commitment to professional development.

Finally, assessment should be meaningful and continuous, enabling focused interventions and improvements *long term* as well as *over different times*. In line with this, we need to put in place qualitative indicators that measure teaching, learning, assessment, on the one hand, and, on the other, policymaking decisions and subsequent implementation. Such measurements can allow stakeholders and educators to identify successful pedagogies, which can result in improved teaching techniques and teacher professional development.

Use of technology

As illustrated by different presentations, technology presents numerous advantages, revolutionizing various aspects of teaching and learning. However, alongside these benefits, it also introduces significant challenges that need careful consideration and strategic management. For instance, the appearance of online depictions of the past gave rise to the false impression that these representations are authentic historical sources/accounts. In addition, with the development of AI it is now very easy to fabricate historical evidence and so the challenges of a pedagogy for critical media literacy in parallel becomes imperative.³⁰

A note of caution should be drawn to the opportunity to generate high levels of student engagement and adaptability through technology, as the latter may badly impact students' performance – a reason why some countries started banning

30 Indeed, research has shown that students are ill-equipped to manage the emerging media landscape, by thinking, for example, that photos can be taken at face value (Schulten and Brown, 2017).

smartphones.³¹ Overall, the relationship between computer technology and educational innovation can be argued to be neither obvious nor necessary (Morante, 2002); in fact, a recent study shows that children learn better on paper, not screens (The Guardian, 2024a).³²

Implementations and interventions, therefore, should be driven by the questions *why* and *how* technology is put in use, in each specific case. That is, there must be a clear rationale and methodology on how technology is used. Digital implementations should be designed in a manner that creates active learning and helps students cultivate historical skills (i.e., making connections between source, context, and subject). Making connections with curriculum content and/or existing topics of engagement as set by stakeholders - i.e. human rights or migration, can also be beneficial.

Incorporation of technology can also help secure funding (for a more detailed discussion of funding, see below). Engaging with experts in educational technology, digital humanities, and media studies can be a way of circumventing the lack of funding for the humanities.

Funding

The use of technology, as well as civil society involvement and inter- and or multidisciplinary, raise the issue of funding. How can funding be secured to facilitate collaborations? Also, how can funding be used/pursued in a way that allows continuity and resilience - especially when it comes at times of conflict and division, or political stagnation?

As the case of *MAKINGHISTORIES* has demonstrated, one way of securing funding is through large-scale international collaborations that aim at capacity-building at the national level. Funding should also go beyond numeric measurement. That is, it should enable continuous and long-term monitoring in a spiral manner, through circles of testing, assessing, and improving, which measures change over time against qualitative criteria that evaluate long-term and nuanced change.

In addition, funding needs to provide space for flexibility, especially in settings historically affected by political turmoil or violence, such as the eastern Mediterranean.

Lastly, funding should also tackle connecting theory and practice.

Transferability

Finally, we should be careful of cross-country and intercultural transferability, as there might be challenges related to differences in terminology, methodologies, and cultural nuances. It is crucial to address these challenges to ensure that findings and recommendations are culturally sensitive and applicable, i.e. within the specific context of Cyprus.

It is necessary that capacity building – the process of developing and strengthening the skills, content, abilities, processes, resources, outcomes, and assessment regarding

31 The most recent example is England, where ministers have confirmed plans to ban the use of mobile phones in schools (The Guardian, 2024b).

32 Explicitly, the research showed that there is 'deeper reading' among children aged 10-12 from paper than from a screen, as screen reading is more shallow, resulting in producing weaker associations between probe words and text passages.

history education – involves local experts, that is, researchers, academics, practicing teachers, stakeholders, historians, and the civil society from various disciplines. The role of the latter can be instrumental, in several ways, as outlined above. Engaging local experts in curriculum development and conducting pilot studies with control groups could help identify difficulties and improve processes and materials. To accomplish this aim, existing knowledge and evidence-based research³³ should be capitalized on.

Politics and identity

Politics and identity might constitute the biggest challenge of all, in that they affect all history education related issues discussed in the conference and above.

As a result of both presentations and interactions, it became obvious that in the presence of ongoing violence, division, and extremism, those involved, naturally, become entrenched. How can one, therefore, navigate all the aforementioned implications amid politics and identity building? During this conference, it was made very clear that political goals, influences, gridlocks, and current conflict are influential when it comes to history education and reforms. In such settings, teaching and learning nuanced history becomes even more difficult, as any attempts for improvement need to go through stakeholders – especially the authorities and religious institutions – who maintain control over historical narratives (Perikleous, 2015).

In addition to challenges relating to politics and identity-building, there is also the complex landscape of current societies. Nowadays, many factors constantly create conflicting conditions on many levels: social, political, religious, and cultural. Moreover, the prevalence of market rules increases these inequalities, at the expense of constitutional freedoms and human rights, while we keep witnessing the generating and/or re-generating of totalitarian ideologies, throughout the world.

Overcoming history education instrumentalization and society polarisation, as showcased in the conference, can take place through diplomacy, strategic approaches, and resilience. These three principles should always underline all capacity-building efforts, always.

33 Such research exists in Cyprus; namely, by Makriyianni (2006) and Perikleous (2022) in primary education, and Georgiou (2020) in secondary education.

5

Conclusions

The conference highlighted the critical need for reconsidering and reshaping history teaching in the southeast of Europe, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean, with a particular emphasis on Cyprus. Accordingly, the report's findings draw attention to a wide range of difficulties and complexities, such as managing political influences, reconsidering curricula and textbooks, and implementing teacher training, as well as critically adopting multiperspectivity and innovative technology, creating synergies and fostering interdisciplinarity, engaging stakeholders, and rethinking assessment and funding.

When it comes to Cyprus specifically, it is necessary to encompass a nuanced approach to history education that involves reconciling traditional narratives and ways of doing things with the need for critical thinking, narrative competence, and active learning.

One of the most prominent themes of the conference was the relationship between conflict, history education, and identity building. Emphasizing competency-based learning and methodological approaches, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings, can help mitigate resistance and promote critical thinking. The contribution of other disciplines in the handling sensitive issues is also crucial. Moreover, fostering historical imagination and exploring alternatives to monolithic narratives are essential towards a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the past.

Multiperspectivity was hailed as a powerful tool for promoting empathy, critical thinking, and conflict resolution, but it also poses challenges, i.e., regarding how its conceptual and epistemological theorisation or/and in societies striving to build unified identities. However, teachers and other history education actors can assist students in becoming critical and sophisticated readers of historical narratives by including multiperspectivity that is clearly defined in terms of approach, concepts, methodology and goals, in competency-based history education.

Collaboration with specialists in educational policy and curriculum development, as well as intensive teacher training programs, are necessary to support pedagogical shifts towards critical thinking and interdisciplinary approaches. Synergies between global and local organizations present chances for creativity and the exchange of best practices, and also call for cooperation, transparency, and a shared vision.

In addition to cultivating historical knowledge and critical thinking abilities, assessments should go beyond memorization-based exams and hold stakeholders responsible for their dedication to educational change.

Technology integration in history classrooms needs to be supported by well-defined justifications and approaches that emphasize historical skill development and active learning. To that purpose, funding needs to be acquired. Funding must also support cooperation and guarantee resilience and continuity, particularly during periods of political unrest or conflict.

The report's findings and ways forward necessitate careful consideration of context variations, approaches, and sensitivities. It is imperative to involve local experts from various disciplines and stakeholders in curriculum development and evidence-based reform procedures. Essentially, the way forward for history education in the area is to encourage critical thinking and multiperspectivity while negotiating challenges with diplomacy, strategic tactics, and resilience.

This report is not meant to make a final comment, but an initiating account of ways forward for history education, for stakeholders, researchers, and civil education actors.

Organising Bodies

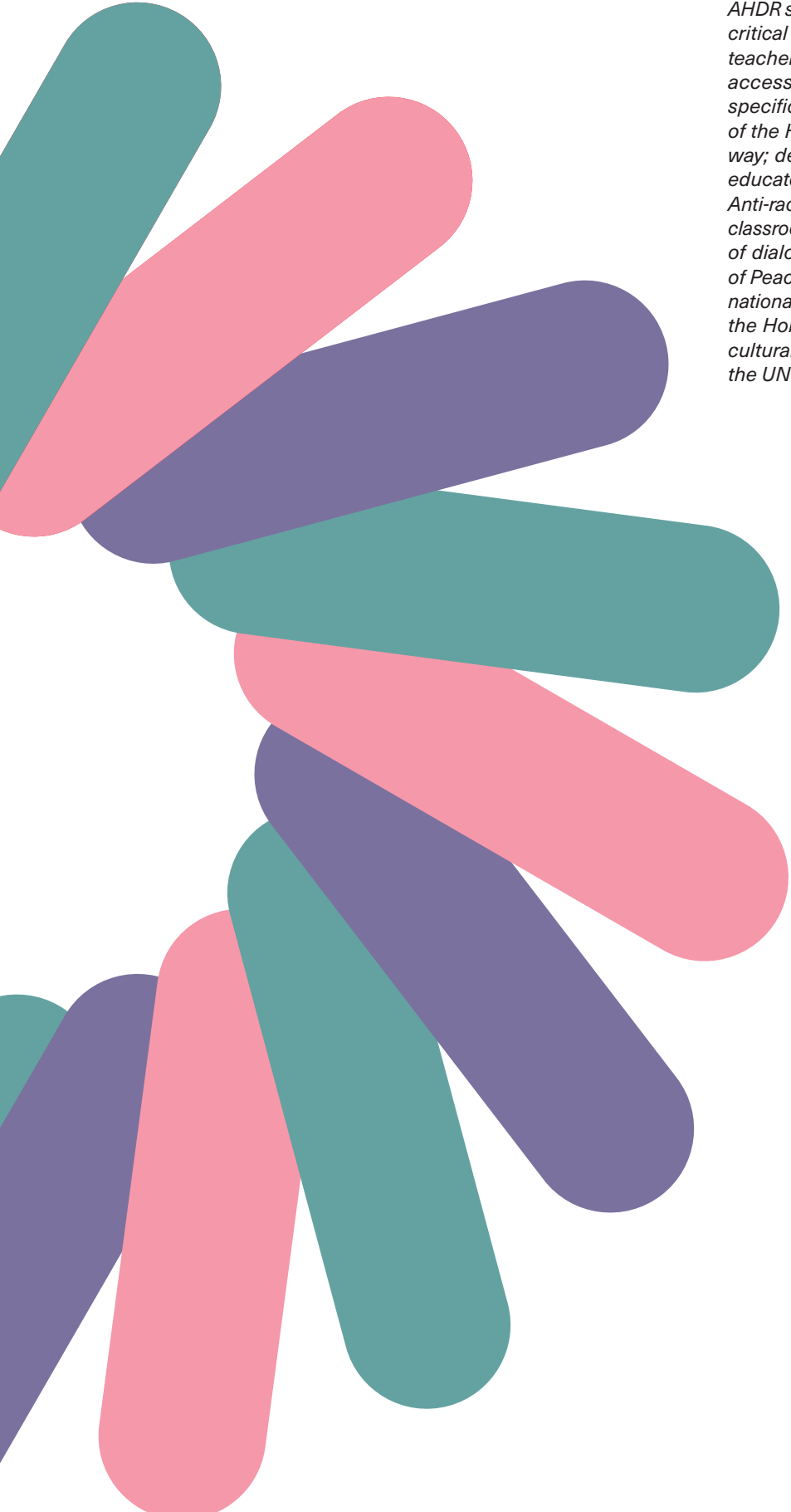
The Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) conducts research into the production, content and appropriation of educational media for schools in its socio-cultural, political, economic and historical contexts. At the core of the Institute is its research library containing the world's most comprehensive collection of school textbooks for history and social sciences education. GEI's European Forum for Reconciliation and Cooperation in History and Social Sciences Education (EFREC) organizes the exchange of ideas and facilitates cooperation between bi- and multilateral initiatives in the field of curricula and textbook revision in History and Social Science Education. It develops methods, standards and products that promote historical and political education geared towards understanding and cooperation.

MAKINGHISTORIES is a project funded under Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). It seeks to promote an interdisciplinary production of knowledge on historical culture and education through dialogue in a growing context of globalization. The project aims, through creating an international and interdisciplinary network of institutions, to produce new knowledge and enhance the role of historical representations in today's democratic and reflective societies.

The AHDR is a multi-communal, non-for-profit, non-governmental organization established in Nicosia in 2003. Since its foundation, the AHDR has enlisted members from various ethnic, linguistic, and professional backgrounds working at various educational levels in Cyprus, making the first steps towards a greater effort to maintain a continuous, open dialogue about enhanced pedagogic practices that could encourage the values of the discipline of history. The AHDR recognizes the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the UNESCO aims on education, and the Council of Europe's recommendations relevant to history teaching. Also, as host of the seminar, the AHDR brought its history teaching experts from the two communities (Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots) of Cyprus to attend the seminar and was responsible for the logistics of the event.

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The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research is an inter-communal, non-profit and non-governmental organization established in 2003 in Nicosia, Cyprus. The AHDR seeks to contribute to the advancement of dialogue, critical thinking and intercultural understanding amongst teachers, students, and the general public by providing access to various learning opportunities for all. More specifically, the AHDR promotes the study and research of the History of Cyprus in a critical and comprehensive way; develops supplementary educational material for educators and students in relation to History and Peace / Anti-racist Education to be shared and used in and beyond classrooms; increases public awareness on the importance of dialogue and multiperspectivity; promotes a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence through education at a local, national and international level. In 2011, the AHDR opened the Home for Cooperation (H4C), a unique educational, cultural and community center in the heart of Nicosia, in the UN Buffer Zone.

