Project Title: Digital environment as a medium for national and international peace
Country/ies and/or tribal or ethnic lands where project will take place: Constanta, Romania
Sponsoring Institution: International Students House London
Project Leader and name of all student team members: Diana Andreea Catana (Romania, King’s College London) – co-leader; Alexandru-Marian Catana (Romania, University of Westminster) – co-leader;

Project summary: This project is aimed at creating peace and international friendships through education. By bringing people together around a common project, we can help mitigate the distrust between communities, ethnic segregation and promote integration. We will be facilitating youth from a diverse background (Romanian, Turkish, Ukrainian) to build an intercultural community while exploring the digital world together. We hope that this will be their start at building an international, inclusive network and learning new skills that will become essential by the time they graduate and/or enter the job market.

Constanta, the city where the project will run, is among the more ethnically diverse places in the country. This diversity has seen a boom since the start of the Ukrainian war, with around 7000 refugees settling in the periphery or areas surrounding the city. For this reason, we looked at these areas of the city and decided to target refugee students and local students in primary and secondary school. We selected this age group due to their reduced opportunities for developing computer literacy. Whilst it is mandatory that high school students have IT classes, the same rules do not apply for earlier stages of the education system. This lack of access leads to decreased computer literacy rates for students who drop out of school earlier.

We found out about Mr. Bogdan-Andrei Gheorgiu, who has been offering free digital skills lessons to Romanian students aged 8-14 in the northernmost area of the city in his own computer lab. We decided to collaborate with him and lean into his experience with children, help him reach out and integrate other ethnic minorities in the area, as well as add more layers and workshops to diversify his curriculum with additional hardware and software that is generally inaccessible to the wider population.

Background: We strongly believe that peace means sustainable growth, help, and acceptance and celebration of diversity. On a national level, peace can only come from a place where growth, whether economic, social, or intellectual, is being actively promoted. Better circumstances lead to less struggle, and more progress as a society. At a higher level, by going beyond tolerance, through collaboration and sharing the growth across country borders, long-term conflicts are reduced, and international peace is built. As Nelson Mandela once said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”, we decided to take the path of education for peace development. By investing in the youth at an individual scale and through expansion of their skill sets, their growth can promote the country’s progress, in effect driving national peace. Furthermore, by including refugee and ethnic minority students, through teamwork, collaboration, and investment in them, they will build a core international community from which they can find the help, support, and skills necessary to rebuild their country or integrate in their new home.

One of the most relevant subjects of 21st century education which can lead to the development of a country is computer literacy. This is because nowadays we increasingly depend on the use of digital tools as seen especially in the last few years. As such, we aim to invest in the youth by teaching computer literacy, revealing what can be done in the virtual world and nurturing international friendships and collaborations. By providing a springboard for digital skills development and corroborated with the fact that the IT-industry is becoming the biggest contributor to any economy nowadays, we can achieve peace in the long term by creating training the youth, increasing chances of employability, and allowing the country to develop harmoniously whilst avoiding the brain drain phenomenon prevalent in Eastern European countries.

While both of us have been privileged to study at prestigious universities in the UK, we can be considered propagators of the brain drain. For this reason, we want to be drivers of peace and bring back the expertise we gathered abroad to our home country. Diana wants to use her experience of teaching and delivering STEM material to home and international students, whilst Alexandru wants to encourage and help students

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1 According to latest census data: [https://www.recensamantromania.ro](https://www.recensamantromania.ro)
2 Press release values from the Ministry of External Affairs of Romania at: [https://adevarul.ro/](https://adevarul.ro/)
3 Source: The Economist at [https://www.economist.com](https://www.economist.com)
interested in the videogaming industry to start developing their own projects from home. Together, we can tell a story and encourage the youth to be open-minded, enterprising, and focused on their skills and future.

Implementation: The project will take place over the period of 2 months in a multi-phase approach:

Phase 1: Gathering, purchasing, and shipping the necessary additional hardware. Setting up the new software and optimizing it for the workshops.

Phase 2: Brainstorming and preparation of the workshop materials in consultation with Bogdan. After an initial consultation, we believe the workshops should cover the following themes and should include group work, to encourage the development of teamwork skills and the creation of international bonds:

- Computer basics: specifications, hardware, software, networks, cybersecurity
- Microsoft Office packages and road to the European Computer Driving License (ECDL)
- Coding in Python to solve problems, process and visualize data – introduction to data science
- Creativity using technology/ IT in 2 parts: Graphic Design and 3D design
- Career workshop: tips for marketing yourself, what the sector offers and how to find work

Phase 3: Announcement of the free workshops: We will rely on Bogdan’s network and reach out to local schools before the school year ends to advertise the workshops and gather students. We will also contact the local press and will print an advert in the paper. To increase inclusivity and accessibility we will be recruiting interpreters or Ukrainian or Turkish speaking teachers to assist in delivering the workshops.

Phase 4: Running the workshop: Each workshop envisioned here will take one day, with 2 distinct workshops running in the same week for the period of 3 weeks. The cycle should start mid to end-June, around the time school pauses for the summer. We took this decision in order to allow students to fully commit their time to the workshop material.

Anticipated Results: For key performance and success indicators (KPI), we will continuously check the students’ training progress. Their understanding will be assessed informally by monitoring engagement, attendance, and creativity. Since we are incorporating a group work aspect to each workshop, the more ambitious and creative the projects the students come up with, the more successful the teaching was in terms of integrating knowledge and promoting international teamwork. Another good KPI will be the number of students of different nationalities we can reach with our workshop. This does not exclude the possibility of running repeat sessions either in parallel or sequentially, after one workshop cycle ended.

The impact of this project can be viewed from different perspectives: socially and chronologically. Socially, we have on one hand, individual impact since we are exposing potential career paths that students can consider for their future and how they can continue their development. This impact is in effect the precursor of national peace. On the other hand, we have a collective social impact – helping develop a community of future leaders that nurtures diversity and inclusivity. By bringing different communities together, students will learn acceptance as well as appreciation of diversity itself. This is the basis of networking, a lifelong skill necessary nowadays, and international peace. Chronologically, short-term benefits are providing the foundations for students to navigate the digital world. We anticipate that our workshop will raise awareness of the sector as well as provide the first few steps in exploration of all the educational resources available online. In the long-term, we believe we are helping develop a networked community with the knowledge and skills to pursue relevant and impactful careers in the 21st century for a better world.

We anticipate that the workshop and Bogdan’s lab will gather attention with the availability of last-gen hardware and software. To ensure the scalability and longevity of the project, a charity/ not-for-profit model can be implemented, whereas students who can afford to use the facilities for their own projects will pay per use and cover the lab’s running costs. Nonetheless, the inclusive education side of the project remains as Bogdan will keep running free sessions for disadvantaged students beyond the time-frame of the project.