

**INFORMATION-PRESENTATION-JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROJECT**  
**ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME KA220-VET- COOPERATION PARTNER-**  
**SHIPS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**  
**PROTECTI Reducing Psychosocial Risks In Law Enforcement:**  
Training To Wellbeing  
**Project Number| PT01-KA220 - VET- 000028146**

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***Reduction of psychosocial risks in law enforcement: training to well-being***

**Project led by Florencio Vicente Castro. IP.**  
fvicentec@gmail.com

**Working in collaboration with research members of INFAD**

**Amara García Belloso**  
amgarciab@alumnos.unex.es  
**Juan José Maldonado Briegas**  
jjmaldonado@unex.es  
**Ana Isabel Sánchez Iglesias**  
anatrefacio@yahoo.es  
**Silvio Manuel da Rocha Brito**  
silvio.brito@ipt.pt

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The INFAD Association of Psychology and Education, in cooperation with several other partners, especially the Family Law Centre, Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra-3004–545 Coimbra.

Email: [cdf@fd.uc.pt](mailto:cdf@fd.uc.pt) <http://www.centrodedireitodafamilia.org> has participated in the ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME KA220-VET. Project Numberl PT01-KA220 - VET- 000028146.

A Project that has allowed us from INFAD to intensely approach the topic of **“Psychology meeting health”**; **“I didn’t find psychology so healthy”**; **“Psychology meeting health”**.

For INFAD, this and other already completed Erasmus + projects are and have been of vital importance for their contribution to the field of science and to the society to which we owe ourselves, providing efforts and conclusions, such as those we present in this Project Information-Presentation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes mental well-being as a fundamental component of health and places it as one of the main concerns for the coming years (Mental Health Action Plan, 2013-2020). Mental health is being the subject of significant investments from all states in the world, with strategies that empower people to maintain healthy behaviours related to mental health, improving the quality of life (WHO) and reducing the psychosocial risks of mental health disorders. This is also a concern of the member states in their national mental health strategies (Portuguese National Mental Health Program - Priority Health Programs 2020 Goals) and in the production of legislation that specifically refers to the balance between work and life and the reduction of psychosocial risks.

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The WHO defines mental health as a state of well-being that allows people to develop and apply their skills and potential, cope with normal daily stress, and work productively. It is fundamental to the quality of life and translates into health, social, and economic benefits. Working conditions in Western countries have undergone enormous changes in work organization and worker demands in recent decades.

A high percentage of workers in the European Union are exposed to psychosocial stressors in the workplace, and the consequences are disastrous for workers, organizations, and society in general (Kristensen et al., 2005). Among the factors related to the workplace, the European Union has highlighted psychosocial factors as a priority, and it is even considered one of the most important fields of research soon (EU-OSHA, 2000). Psychosocial factors refer to characteristics inherent to the conditions and organization of work that affect the health of individuals through psychological and physiological processes, with psychosocial risks at work being the result of the interaction between the individual, their living conditions, and their working conditions. Exposure to these risks can favour the deterioration of the healthy functioning of people at an organic, emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioural level.

According to the EU Active Population Survey (1997-2007), 55.6 million European workers reported that their mental well-being was affected by exposure to psychosocial risks. In Portugal, just over 10% of organizations have procedures to deal with psychosocial risks in a work context. In countries like the United Kingdom or Ireland, this percentage reaches or exceeds 80%. However, there are studies on cost-effective interventions that promote psychological health at work that suggest a return on investment of €13.62 for every €1 spent (Matrix, 2013 in EU-OSHA, 2014)

When addressing particularly stressful professions, in addition to the application of standards, it is of utmost importance to improve protective factors in the workplace and reduce the effect of the existence of psychosocial risks, which can contribute to the development of psychological health problems at work, having an impact on the individual, the family, and the organization, preparing law enforcement authorities to manage them properly. Therefore, it is important to promote the well-being of individuals, their balance between work and personal life, and the functioning of the organization. Often, this permanent exposure to the risks ends up affecting individual well-being in such a way that it manifests in a tense family climate, which in turn will influence their capacity for work, and these, in turn, will impact the organization and, again, the individual, becoming a circle of stress factors for the well-being of that worker.

*Recognizing these reasons, it is of utmost relevance to address the risks to which public order agents are subject, as well as to design well-being strategies and the application of a program adapted to the needs expressed. This is the objective of the project Reduction of Psychosocial Risks in the Security Forces and Corps: Training as a means for Well-being - PROTECT.*

The PROTECT project will aim to address four training modules designed to improve the skills of public order forces in managing stress factors for well-being and reducing psychosocial risks and their impact.

1. Stress reduction strategies.
2. Emergency strategies for normative grief.
3. Healthy retirement.
4. Work-life balance.

**1. Emergency Stress Reduction.** This module has aimed to provide skills to public order agents on how to deal with events that can potentially harm both physical and emotional health. This is a cross-cutting competence that can be used in the field when more difficult interventions are required, but also, it can be transferred to the workplace or home when high levels of stress can lead to a lack of adequate response and deterioration of mental health and/or psychic well-being.

**2. Strategies for normative grief.** Several times, law enforcement officers need to deal with death. Sometimes it's about the death of a stranger, a suicide, collecting the body, being at the scene of a homicide, other

times it's about dealing with the death of a fellow officer. These skills are not addressed in regular training. This module has tried to equip law enforcement officers with competencies to properly face death and grief, promoting skills to carry out normative grief (from an evolutionary and psychological point of view), reducing stress and anxiety factors related to death.

**3. Healthy Phasing-Out: Healthy Retirement.** This training block has been directed at agents close to retirement age. This stage can be a growing factor of vulnerability for mental illness, as individuals often associate retirement with a sense of worthlessness of themselves and in addition, most individuals go home without activities or hobbies in mind creating a void that can transform into depression or other types of unhealthy mental state. It is necessary to prepare people for retirement. Healthy Phasing-Out involves skills of gradual disconnection from work, both cognitive and emotional, which will allow agents to much better accept the transition to retirement when it arrives. By promoting this, we are also promoting a healthier work environment, where stress factors, such as retirement, can be addressed gradually from an organizational point of view.

**4. Work-Life Balance:** this training approach has focused on the balance, the homeostasis between work and personal life. If on one hand we have job demands, a harder day or even a conflict, which can interfere with the police officer, and of course, the impact this will have on their mood and well-being when they get home; on the other hand, there are also family situations, such as a spouse's health problem, a child's poor school performance, mourning for a friend, or even the family's economic demands, which also influence the mood and well-being with which work operates, thus becoming a nefarious cycle for the individual, their family, and the organization for which they work. This module has intended to help both the organization and individuals to develop strategies that favour this balance, under penalty of increased absenteeism and presenteeism, decreased productivity, financial loss, and general impact on the functioning of the organization and, when it comes to risk professions, increased danger due to lack of adequate response.

The project, which has been carried out at a transnational level, has brought together the combined experience of researchers from the private, public, and police sectors, combining efforts to improve personalized training responses to reduce psychosocial risks in law enforcement and provide a training and organizational well-being model that can be replicated throughout Europe, expanding the impact towards a climate of cooperation in education/training and mental health and the maintenance of the need to promote mental health-friendly practices, in the organizational environment, in the case of a particularly stressful environment such as law enforcement, and reinforce the fight for equality, equity, and dignity in mental illness.

Writing an **Information-Presentation-Justification of the Project** for our journal "*International Journal of Developmental and Educational Psychology*. INFAD: Journal of Psychology" in its XXXVI-year, no. 1, and which, in this case, we have agreed upon with the title: "*Psychology meeting health*", obliges us to refer to and reflect on the two concepts involved: "**Psychology**" and "**Health**".

When we develop the **Information-Presentation-Justification of the Project** for the new issue of the journal, as is happening at this moment, we always question what we should indicate or what we should capture in those few paragraphs, which obliges us to leave written.

In the face of a doubtful, perhaps also lazy feeling, our inner world and our experience tell us that with enthusiasm and spirited work everything will be revitalized as new, that enthusiasm will unmask our fears, change our position in life, make us get out of what is cumbersome for us, and help us to love and live excitedly, what we do, even if it costs us what it costs... and knowing that "*what you can do today do not leave for tomorrow*" we get to it.

We believe that enthusiasm and a positive approach will make us all think about what we need to activate and/or change in life, and not to give up and set aside the negative, but to undertake the task of turning it into a positive.

And the illusion is constant in this case. Yes, illusion, but not only that, but we must also respond with rigor, scientific, and currentness. The feeling is, in this case, positive and we will try to reflect, above all, on what demands us to be doing an **Information-Presentation-Justification of the Project** for a Scientific Journal like ours. All of this appears internally as a lucid and diaphanous requirement, excited and positive, and with its

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load of demand. We refer to a journal well positioned scientifically and with many years of publication (antiquity in publication, modernity in content). The presentation is just a small detail in the face of all the scientific content of the Journal. The little before the much. I remember here the text of Tagore when he said "*Once I spoke of the sea to the brook, and the brook thought that my imagination was exaggerated. And on another occasion, I spoke of the brook to the sea and the sea thought that I was a derogatory slanderer*". Neither the presentation should be a minimum "brook" in front of an immense "sea", nor should an immense "sea" be in front of a brook. Neither an exaggerated imagination, nor a derogatory spirit. It is true that the set of implicit science, in this issue of the journal, is an "immense sea", and living it this way fills us with so much illusion that it compensates for everything conceivable to this "brook" of "Presentation-justification".

We said in previous paragraphs that we are aware that we are writing a Presentation for an issue of our journal that we have agreed upon as "**Psychology meeting health**". Two very involved concepts: "**Psychology**" and "**Health**". "**Health and Psychology**".

We will have to talk about both concepts or better yet, we should involve both in their entirety and link one with the other.

The word "health" already obliges us to reflect from Psychology. And to give Psychology a connotation of health - healthy.

The etymology of the word "health", derived from the Latin "salus", recalls concepts of "*being well, without illness, overcoming, salvation, safety and integrity, happiness, satisfaction...*". All of this is just a reminder of the complexity of the concept of health, which goes beyond the mere absence of disease and involves multiple aspects of our lives, including lifestyles, relationships and personal fulfilment and above all, also, of "*mental health*".

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes mental well-being as a fundamental component of health and positioned it as one of the main concerns for the coming years (it was already in the Mental Health Action Plan, 2013-2020 and it is in the 2020-2030 Agenda). "*Mental health*" is being the subject of significant investments from all states in the world, with strategies that empower people to maintain healthy behaviours related to their mental health, improving quality of life (WHO) and reducing the psychosocial risks of the disorders involved in it. This is also a concern of the EU member states in their national mental health strategies.

In Spain, during the month of April 2022, the Spanish Government established a commission of experts with the aim of obtaining a detailed diagnosis of the precarious situation in Spain. The result of this work is the PRESME Report, the first global study driven by a country's government on "*job insecurity and occupational mental health and its effects on mental health*".

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "*a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his community*". "*Mental health*" is an integral part of health and well-being and is more than the absence of a mental disorder.

In the "*PRESME Report*", 2023, mental disorders are defined as *those alterations in behaviour, emotion, and cognition that are negative, aversive, or unpleasant for the person who experiences them, and that have harmful consequences in their relationship with others*

In the EU, each year - according to 2023 data - one in six people (84 million people) has a mental health problem (anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol use disorders, etc.), distributed unevenly according to social class and age. Much of the discomfort and distress that people suffer has a social cause, which is expressed and perceived in the form of a great diversity of physical or psychic signs and symptoms, such as anxiety, depression or panic attacks, but also in the form of headaches, dizziness, back pain, paraesthesia's, fatigue and skin reactions, among many others. Anxiety and depression are the two main clinical pictures responsible for the burden of disease from mental health problems.

**Spain**, according to the report, has a high prevalence of mental health problems in the population aged 15 and over: 5.8% have chronic anxiety (1 in every 12 women, 1 in every 28 men, 1 in every 12 unemployed people,

1 in every 23 working people, and 1 in every 4 people unable to work) and 5.3% have depression (1 in every 14 women, 1 in every 31 men, 1 in every 13 unemployed people, 1 in every 40 working people, and 1 in every 4 people unable to work). Psychosocial suffering is usually delegated to a healthcare system that treats (and tends to over-medicalise) these health conditions.

Spain is the country that consumes the most anxiolytics and hypnotics per inhabitant in the world, according to the PRESME report data. Almost 11% of adults report having consumed tranquilisers, relaxants or sleeping pills in the last two weeks of 2023.

## THE PROJECT: MORE THAN JUST A REALITY AND A PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED

If all of this is true, it represents a great demand and need for help in the psychological field and health. It's like a knock on the heart of science, psychology, and health, telling us: *"If you're not well, you can't build a better world."*

## "THOSE WHO LEAVE..." A PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED TO RESPOND

### The Demand to Take Care of Ourselves.

At a recent *Wellbeing Summit* (Bilbao Wellness Summit, 2022), international experts highlighted the importance of taking care of oneself, of taking care of ourselves, to take care of society and the planet. The congress made it clear that it is necessary to be well to build a better world, and real cases of this obligation were cited.

It was indicated how May 26, 2018, was a dark day in the history of Amnesty International. One of its employees, **Gaëtan Mootoo**, 65 years old, took his own life in the Paris office. He left a letter in which he pointed out as causes the great work pressure and the lack of support from his bosses.

A few weeks later, an intern from the Geneva office, **Roz McGregor**, 28 years old, also committed suicide. Her family said that the organization did not support her with the acute anxiety she was suffering from, according to 'The Guardian'.

A few months later (2019), a new Secretary General, the South African **Kumi Naidoo**, took over the leadership of the NGO. He set himself the goal of overcoming this situation, which clearly highlighted structural problems at the level of internal culture with respect to mental health. In addition, he had his regular work, with actions to protect human rights at a global level, with a high traumatic load.

**Naidoo** spoke of his experience at the Wellbeing Summit for Social Change, in June 2022. In front of 1,000 attendees, he opened his heart. Instead of highlighting what many describe as great management of a complex situation, he admitted that he failed in something fundamental: **"taking care of himself"**. *"I completely underestimated the effect it was having on me (...) I was working 20 hours a day and had a perpetual sleep deficit,"* Naidoo said. *"I was being irresponsible, politically and socially."*

At the end of 2019, **Naidoo** left that position that many consider so successful and began **"a healing process"**. From learning how to use breathing or meditation to calm the nervous system to working on past traumas, including the suicide of his own mother. *"I will never again be ashamed or apologize for taking care of my own well-being,"* he confessed. *"The fight for a fairer world is a marathon, not a sprint."*

**Naidoo** was not the only one to open up on such a personal level to the public. Dozens of leaders from the world of activism, social change, or professionals who promote public interest issues, showed that *"we can no longer have speeches only about ideas, without incorporating our challenges as human beings"*.

**Jay Coen Gilbert**, the co-founder of the B-Corp movement, which advocates for companies that create a positive impact on society, acknowledged: *"I had to slow down to start growing."*

A professional in aid to people in need narrates her story like this: *"I was fighting for my cause, and I left my health on the way. I know this tune well, it happened to me. I left my skin conducting journalistic investigations that made history, like the Panama Papers, and along the way I lost an ovary, my thyroid was unbalanced, and I had burnout syndrome."*

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### “Human giver syndrome”

On airplanes, they tell us: “*Put on your oxygen mask first, before putting it on others*”. However, in ‘*passionate*’ professions, where we fight for social injustices, for human pain and for betrayals to health, and fundamentally for building a better world, it is very normal to forget that basic principle, to take care of ourselves. Experts call it ‘*human giver syndrome*’.

Natalia Junquera publishes in the newspaper “El País<sup>1</sup>” Madrid an interview with **Gary Stevenson** (economist and activist for social justice and peace) that helps us clarify something important.

At 12 years old, Gary Stevenson was selling candies. At 16, he was expelled from school for selling hashish. At 23, *Citigroup* gave him a bonus of 47,000 euros for selling... money, loans. It was double the annual salary of his father, a postal worker. At 26, he was a millionaire, but he had holes in his shoes and was unable to buy a new sofa. Mentally and physically exhausted, he decided to leave, despite claims that he was threatened to stay. Now, at 36 years old, the British economist has become an activist. He dedicates his time to alerting about the collapse of the economy due to inequality. He tells his story in *The Money Game*. An intruder at the top of the world (Ed. Península).

The interviewer asks him: “*You mention in the book that shortly before joining Citigroup, an employee committed suicide by jumping from the 20th floor. Did you think about that man while you were working?*”

Gary Stevenson responds. The truth is, no. Banks have a long history of suicides from skyscrapers. He could have jumped from the outside, but he jumped from the inner courtyard, he wanted to be seen. *People would look at the man who had committed suicide and then go back to their desk to work*. That speaks to how that world works, the level of obsession. When they told me, I also thought: “*Things happen*”. It’s an example of the dehumanization that place produces, a bank office

I live frugally. In my life, I quickly went from being judged for being poor to being judged for being rich. Economists have been getting it wrong for 15 years. Very intelligent people, with expensive suits and haircuts and who have been to the best universities, are constantly making mistakes. We are losing the welfare standards that our parents fought for.

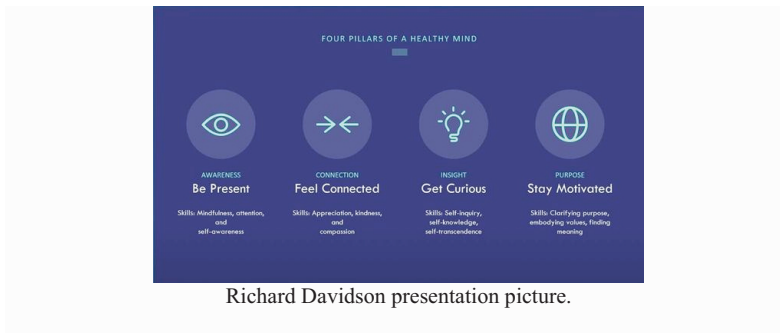
### THOSE WHO “DON’T LEAVE” BUT DEMAND HELP

Everything that precedes indicates that we live in complex times, where we are being challenged at many levels. **Only if we take care of ourselves, can we change society for the better and not harm the planet anymore**. This is the effort and the importance of individual care, not as something selfish, but for the good of society. Many - the ones already mentioned and several more - suffered the consequences of societal pressure and could not resist it.

### WHAT CAN WE PSYCHOLOGISTS DO AND WHAT CAN OUR INFAD MAGAZINE CONTRIBUTE? LET’S TALK ABOUT NEUROSCIENCE AND WELL-BEING

The psychologist and psychiatrist **Richard Davidson**, an eminence in the world of neuroscience, indicates what his research has shown to be the four fundamental pillars of a healthy mind. Dr. **Sara King** summarized it with a beautiful and simple phrase: *stopping, pausing this accelerated world, is key*. “**Times are urgent, let us slow down.**”

- Being present (**awareness**)
- Feeling connected (**connection**)
- Being curious (**understanding**)
- Staying motivated (**purpose**)



Richard Davidson states: “We are usually valued for what we do, not for what we are. In that race, it seems like it’s never enough. ‘I am enough’ reminds you that you are fantastic, just as you are. You don’t always have to be proving it.”

Am I enough? This question summarizes for me a world of ideas to answer, and it is something that many of us often repeat to ourselves once we get older. We have a lot to do, yes, but perhaps there is already enough journey with being present and being.

In a world obsessed with doing more, having more, consuming more, experiencing more, the “fear of missing out” or **FOMO** (Fear of Missing Out) - the name of the syndrome in English - has become an epidemic. But this incessant search for gratification and personal fulfilment does not seem to make us happier, or freer<sup>2</sup>. The **FOMO** phenomenon is understood as the fear of being absent. It is related to the anxiety generated by the fear of missing out on a social event or any other positive experience, especially the type of activities that you find out about via social networks. **It refers to the irresistible need to be continuously connected to the internet** and to actively participate in social networks. Thus, the various platforms that exist today to establish live and direct contact, play a crucial role in the development of addictions to mobile phones or even to video game consoles that allow online interaction with other players. The **FOMO** phenomenon acts in such a way in the person, that they begin to excessively use digital platforms driven by the fear of being excluded and missing out on experiences. The desire to stay constantly connected and to compulsively check social networks arises. Being this, the first thing to consult when waking up and the last thing before going to sleep. In this way, the use of networks encompasses the main daily activities of the person, leading to a problematic routine. The misuse or problematic use of networks occurs when the person uses them to alleviate some discomfort such as stress, the feeling of loneliness or depression. The person tends to get involved more and more since social networks provide a series of rewards and comfort, experiencing a sense of self-efficacy, belonging and satisfaction. With this, real relationships begin to be ignored, changing them for daily virtual interaction.

Also, recently published<sup>1</sup> (Alfonso Torices Madrid) is “*Radiography of new addictions*”. Video games and social networks among teenagers, and casinos, betting, online sex or compulsive shopping among adults.

The first year of the Behavioural Addictions Centre at the Gregorio Marañón Hospital in Madrid, a unique centre of its kind in Spain, has allowed specialists to make a detailed radiography of these new substance-free dependencies, unrelated to the consumption of narcotics, but which also hook and mortgage the life of those who suffer from them.

The centre, which only treats non-substance dependencies and does not require you to go through the primary care or mental health filter to obtain specialized therapy, the first thing it certifies is that there is a direct relationship between each type of addiction and the sex or age of the person. patient who suffers from it.

The first major evidence is that the things that hook young people and adults have very little in common. In its first twelve months of operation, 140 teenagers contacted the centre for help. After filling out the questionnaires



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that allow to discover the range of addiction and psychological affectation they suffer, half suffered a high degree of dependence, so they were included in the specific program, which provides for a personalized plan and psychiatric and psychological therapies both individual and group for a maximum of one year.

The average age of the addicted teenagers was 14 years old and three out of four were boys. Generally, their main problem was addiction to video games (two out of three), followed by dependence on social networks (37%) and, more residually, problems with pornography (2.8%) and shopping (1.4%).

But if the division is made by sexes, the differences appear in all their dimension. Although there are cases of multi-dependence, video games are the problem for 92% of male teenagers while social networks are for 63% of girls. They have in common that in both cases their problems come from a problematic use of screens and the internet.

When the magnifying glass is put on adults, the radiography changes completely. The majority profile of the 482 who came to the centre is that of a man (eight out of ten), about 38 years old and to whom, mainly, gambling is ruining his life. Casinos, betting and other gambling products caught 36% of these citizens and on seven out of ten occasions the addiction came through the 'online' version. 90% are men and almost all have disorders due to their attachment to video games. Other underlying pathologies the second most relevant evidence from the medical balance is that among the adults who needed to be admitted receiving individualized therapy, 24%, one in four, was poly-addicted and many presented other underlying psychological alterations or pathologies. For example, among patients with pathological gambling, the most frequent psychiatric diseases were depression and anxiety disorder, often accompanied by excessive alcohol consumption.

**About the loneliness of young people.** It is also true that young people, they are more alone than the elderly. **Do social networks promote isolation?**<sup>1</sup>

The era of communication has become the era of isolation. The imposed loneliness, with the burden of suffering and illness it carries, has become a much bigger problem for young people than even for their grandparents. There are already more teenagers and young people locked in their rooms, bored in front of a computer screen, than older people left to their fate in front of the television. New technologies and social networks have replaced the street, conversation, and human contact as forms of relationship. The smiles on Instagram and TikTok are not as open, nor as sincere as they seem to be on the mobile.

**What is happening?** A recent study promoted by the ONCE Foundation in collaboration with the Aid in Action organization ensures that one in four young people aged 16 to 29 (25.5%) declare themselves lonely. Three out of four, 75.8%, say they have suffered unwanted loneliness for more than a year; and almost half of the youth, 45.7%, have that same feeling. Connected only by a click, about 1,800 young people participated in the study that reached these conclusions, and that was not limited to the realization of the classic survey. The work included a deep analysis of the significant risk factors that cause this situation, in addition to a discussion group with experts and vulnerable groups to define solutions and recommendations on possible social programs. "It is curious to note that we live in an aged and lonely society, and that those who manifest a greater degree of loneliness are not precisely the elderly, but the young," reflects the professor of Neuropsychology at the University of Deusto, Natalia Ojeda, president of the International Association of Neuropsychology. "Despite the fact that they supposedly have everything and that today they are more connected than ever, they feel lonely." Why? For something as simple (perhaps also as complex) and so linked to the human condition as that people, for their emotional well-being, need to relate. "The feeling of company and being well with others does not necessarily come from the relationships that are woven through the internet," summarizes the expert. A screen and a mouse are not enough to build trust, cordiality, respect and, very importantly, the necessary affections to forge a friendship relationship. Although social networks, according to recent research known, they are not the determining cause of youth loneliness, it is, and to a large extent, the presence that has been lost with them. What matters is to see each other's faces for real.

**Going out to real life.** In the complicity that requires the creation of a friendship relationship - as in a couple or any other -, not only words count, but no matter also how much video and audio is shared. They weigh and enrich - in addition to the commitment, of course - the gesture, the intonation, the look that accompanies it, the attentive listening, the reactions that each moment provokes... In short, human warmth, the lived life.

The deficiencies that unwanted loneliness brings to young people and adolescents have nothing to do with family relationships, studies or the work environment, which they do consider good. What they miss are real friends, of flesh and blood, and not virtual ones, which they have in abundance. "Part of today's psychotherapy is aimed at teaching young people to leave virtual networks and go out into the street, to face real life so that they begin to relate to their peers," details Natalia Ojeda.

School or work bullying, which 37.2% of young people complain about, and mental health, present in the form of anxiety and depression (in most cases perceived, not diagnosed) in 89.2% of those surveyed, explain the lack of communication that plagues them. "Technology will stay with us. Any form of learning and skill development will have to count on it," warns neuropsychology, but we must be aware of its successes and failures.

### **How to maintain focus in a world full of options and stimuli?**

The Danish philosopher and psychologist **Svend Brinkmann** proposes us to recover moderation and self-control to learn to discern what is important, to say no and to lose ourselves in that multitude of things that, deep down, prevent us from valuing what we have, feeling good with who we are and with how our life is.

Cultivating moderation and having the courage to commit to something, setting aside the constant options and temptations that dominate our consumer society, will allow us to develop a more satisfying lifestyle and a better connection with ourselves, with others, and with the planet we all share. A necessary book that reminds us that missing out on things can be a real source of joy.

**Rafael Santandreu** in his book "**Without Fear**" (2022), comes to tell us that currently there is more anxiety because modern life has a lot of self-demand. In response to this, we affirm that optimism and positivity help health.

Good humour and calm reduce stress. The accumulation of emotional tension, on the other hand, causes discomfort and promotes illness. Positive thoughts promote mental and bodily well-being. They reduce inflammation and improve quality of life.

A study with 616 volunteers with normal blood pressure followed for 4 years showed that pessimists had three times the risk of suffering from hypertension. Optimists have half the risk of heart disease, according to a study that followed 1,603 men with an average age of 61 years for 10 years. Optimists reach old age with a lower risk of Alzheimer's and other dementias.

### **THE CURRENT WORLD IS VERY COMPETITIVE**

Both in work and personal life, we need to be productive, efficient, correct, high performing, meet deadlines, face difficult situations, make decisions, show proactivity, renew ourselves, and continuously update ourselves.

All of this induces a state of stress that, while initially drives and motivates us to stay alert and give our best, if maintained continuously, leads to a decrease in motivation, performance, and enjoyment of work activity that can even induce some disorder such as burnout, anxiety disorders or depressive symptoms.

To avoid this, aside from other considerations, advice and the application of relaxation techniques such as breathing, it is necessary to have rest periods in which to relax both physically and psychologically and disconnect from everyday problems.

That is, it becomes necessary to rethink our personal life, about stopping being essential and believing it until you die trying. It becomes necessary to rethink about taking care of ourselves and taking care of our environment. About deceleration.

### **WHAT DO WE DO, IN THE MEANTIME, THE PSYCHOLOGISTS?**

**It's hard to give useful advice for everyone, but initially one is enough for us: "Take ownership of our time".**

While we are writing this PRESENTATION of the Project, a good friend sends us a WhatsApp, where with three words she tells us something that I am sure of. "... With so much fuss" and she refers to the fact that we have not answered one of her writings. How right she is! We think. And when minutes later we continue writing, we see and

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reread a text by Arturo Pérez Reverte in the XL Semanal of the Press (May 12, 2024) which ironically indicates how numerous authors advise and write self-help books with advice similar to that of my friend: “Be less to be more”, to “achieve fame, trust in yourself, speak fifteen languages or buy a mansion in the Caribbean... or how to become ‘millioneti’ little by little” Obviously Pérez Reverte was heavily ironic throughout his text. Our friend was not being ironic, she was right in her diagnosis. But it serves us to raise that desire of “having” more than “being” and consequently we ask ourselves a question.

### What to change? Reflections on the use of time

What to change is not a trivial question. It is an obligation in the face of a very important reflection. A transcendent field of analysis related to the ways of work and life of the population in the **use of time**.

According to data from the INE, in the fourth quarter of 2022, 2.89 million more hours of overtime were worked per week - several of them unpaid. Carrying out shorter working days has a very positive impact on improving the quality of life and improving people's care, reconciling school hours, study, as well as reducing pressure on the environment. In addition, there are more opportunities for participation in social life due to, among other reasons, undesirable working hours. Research shows that people who work fewer hours improve their quality of life, have greater life satisfaction, better health and are happier.

When addressing particularly stressful professions, as is the case with the objectives of this project, it is even of utmost importance to improve the protective factors in the workplace and reduce the effect of the existence of psychosocial risks, which can contribute to the development of psychological health problems at work, having an impact on the individual, the family and the organization, preparing the authorities to manage them properly. Therefore, it is important to promote the well-being of everyone, their balance between work and personal life and the functioning of the organization. Often, this permanent exposure to risks ends up affecting individual well-being in such a way that it manifests itself in a tense family climate, which in turn will influence their ability to work, and these, in turn, will impact the organization and, again, the individual, becoming a circle of stress factors for the well-being of that worker.

“Given this, it is of utmost importance to address the risks to which the groups most related to social issues and human behaviours are subject, and in the management of stress factors for well-being and the reduction of psychosocial risks and their impact. Being teachers and researchers is a beautiful profession, but we must be aware of its complications and from INFAD we must provide answers.”

“This reflection-re-education-awareness obliges us, as individual and collective well-being implies multiple responses. Some of them, which we formulate from the point of view of a multidisciplinary research and reflection approach that combines neuroscience, psychology, pedagogy and teaching to achieve the well-being of individuals and communities and that sometimes are a bit contrary to what society sometimes demands of us or we demand of ourselves in these times.”

“Having come this far, we ask ourselves the question, **why does society demand so much from us? Who are we to demand so much from ourselves? What response do we give to this?**”

Some contributions and scientific publications or publications warn us about this **obsession with ‘having’ and forgetting ‘being’**

I know that I am drafting a PRESENTATION for the INFAD Journal, and I demand to give myself some scientific response or at least bibliographic references that accredit this contribution between Psychology and Mental Health. I evoke and bring to my memory some quotes, advice? and references to take care of ourselves better than we do. It's like a summary of health challenges and vital values.

### “The sweet doing nothing.”

“**Andrew J. Smart (2014)**, a young American scientist of Swedish origin, published a book in Spain titled ‘the art and science of doing nothing. the brain's autopilot’. It's a kind of ‘*the sweet doing nothing.*’”

"In his book, relying on the latest advances in neuroscience, he makes a passionate defense of the 'idleness' of the Italian 'dolce far niente', as a creative engine, contrasting it with the capitalist idea and the Protestant ethic that time is always the most precious good, and the better it is used for productive performance, the more. According to Andrew, there is a so-called 'default neural network', the DMN, which enters feverish activity when we are not focused on a specific task, and it seems to us that our brain is at rest and dedicated to the sweet 'laziness'. This coherent neuronal oscillation, which interconnects different areas of our brain, facilitates introspection, self-knowledge and, with it, the development of our own identity; it stimulates creativity, facilitates the visualization of the future and the memory of the past, allows us to access our unconscious and our emotions, enhancing skills that we believed were dormant or forgotten, while helping us to know ourselves and, most importantly, to recognize ourselves. So, when it seems that our brain is doing nothing, -which is a lot, because it travels along the way-, that's when there is a possibility that the brightest ideas will emerge. In summary, it is acceptable, sometimes, to simply be attentive and observe, doubt, enjoy, walk and wonder what and why. The wandering or rambling of the mind is an excellent indicator that predicts people's happiness," explains Killingsworth. "In fact, the frequency with which our thinking leaves the present and where it tends to go predicts our happiness better than the activities in which we are involved."

"Let's take as an example the thought of what would have become of us if when Newton sat under that mythical 'apple tree', his brain, instead of being in this state of active idleness that we are talking about, had been found lifeless, exhausted and tired from hard work and had fallen asleep and had not seen the famous 'apple' fall or, even having seen such an insignificant phenomenon, due to fatigue and satiety, the fact would not have aroused the slightest interest. Indeed, it is deduced that he would not have been able to conceive his theory about the law of gravity and, consequently, perhaps we would all be levitating in the streets like the girl from the exorcist. But it was not so, seeing it fall, aroused his curiosity, thinking, made different areas of his brain interconnect and this allowed him to offer us that very important law of our science, '*The law of gravity*'."

In 1970, **Frank Wilczek** from the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, deduced how atomic nuclei stay together. This breakthrough occurred while he was reviewing a completely different problem. Suddenly, he experienced a "sudden appearance in the mind" and realized that a failed approach in one area was successful in another.

The famous story recounts how Archimedes gained his inspiration regarding the principle of displacement ("*Anybody submerged in a fluid, whether wholly or partially, is buoyed up by a force equal to the weight of the fluid displaced*") while daydreaming in his bath. According to legend, he was so excited by his discovery that he ran out into the street naked, shouting: "*Eureka!*" (I have found it!).

**Henri Poincaré** spoke of ideas and incredible insights and intuitions that came to him suddenly and with immediate force.

**Mozart** also described his way of composing while walking or at night when he couldn't sleep. In those moments, musical pieces would whirl around and join with longer ones without him doing anything to prompt it. He would then hum them and transcribe them into musical notation.

In a survey conducted with distinguished scientists, they indicated that this is a common phenomenon. Most of them had their best ideas when they were not thinking about the problem. The ideas came to them while they were walking, having fun, or working on some other unrelated problem (Michalko, 2002).

Idleness is understood by **Miguel de Cervantes** in "*The Dialogue of the Dogs*" as "*the mother of thoughts*." "*It is the case, then, that as I was idle all day, and idleness is the mother of thoughts, I began to recall some Latin phrases that remained with me from the many I heard when I went to study with my masters. It seemed to me that I found myself somewhat improved in understanding, and I decided, as if I knew how to speak, to make use of them on any occasion that might present itself.*"

The "creative" leisure of humanists is opposed to the "non-leisure" or "business" of politicians and economists'.

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**Fray Luis de León** elaborates on this same idea in his ode to the quiet life: "...What a peaceful life / the one that flees from the worldly noise / and follows the hidden path, where have gone / the few wise who have existed in the world."

Fray Luis wrote this ode before being imprisoned. His escape from this world leads him to yearn for solitude and the retreat of a secluded place. In this ode, Fray Luis recreates one of the recurring themes in poetry throughout the ages, the "Beatus ille" (blessed is he), based on a famous poem by Horace that takes the initial words of that poem. Fray Luis gave it greater force in his ode, enumerating the ideal of happiness based on the absence of passions—vanity, greed, etc.—and living according to one's own conscience, in seclusion.

What a peaceful life / for the one who flees from worldly noise, / and follows the hidden / path, where have gone / the few wise ones who have existed in the world.

*Graffiti found on a wall in Coimbra very close to the Palacio dos Melos where we had the Project meeting.*



### “Doing more and having more” or “the fear of missing out”

Also, **Svend Brinkmann**, psychologist, philosopher, writer and speaker. Born in Denmark, he teaches Psychology at the University of Aalborg and is the presenter of the programs "Live Fast" (live fast), on Danish television, and the series Meaningful Life, on Danish Radio 1. In his book "The Joy of Missing Out", he presents, as Steven Poole says in The Guardian, "a synthetic and intelligent manifesto in favour of personal degrowth". Or "An invigorating onslaught against the modern pressure to do and be more"

**Brinkmann** aims to "free us from overstimulated modern lives through the old-fashioned ideas of restraint and moderation." His ideas fit perfectly into the counterculture of "less is more" led by Marie Kondo, offering a reminder of a message as old as time. "Value what you have; don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good; cultivate your garden" - Steven Poole, The Guardian.

**Svend Brinkmann** presents us with an intelligent and provocative manifesto in favour of personal degrowth and against the modern pressure to do, have and be more.

Current quotes and citations abound to be able to increase our proposal, but referring not to the present we find several rushes from Greek philosophers that enrich this answer. In the following texts, practically extracted from the internet, we find the following.:

#### “In Praise of Idleness”<sup>2</sup>

For his part, Brian O’Conor in his book "In Praise of Idleness" presents an alternative and totally stimulating view on our favourite mortal sin: idleness. To what extent is an idle life a good life? The first book that challenges modern philosophy in its condemnation of idleness, revealing why being idle is a state of true freedom.

For millennia, idleness and laziness have been considered vices. Everyone is expected to work to survive and get ahead. Devoting energy to anything other than work and personal improvement can seem like a moral failure or a luxury.

But what if idleness, instead of being a vice or defect, were an effective form of resistance? What if it allowed us to experience freedom in its fullest form?

Far from questioning these conventional ideas, modern philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer and de Beauvoir support and deepen them. O'Connor exposes the prejudices behind these reasonings, questioning the official view of our culture: that the incessant hustle, self-making, utility and productivity are the very core of what is right for human beings

Gathering ideas from Ancient Greece and on the importance of play in thinkers like Schiller and Marcuse, O'Connor presents an empathetic view of idleness, which allows us to look at our modern cult of work and effort in a new light. A stimulating reflection.

### **The “Art of Being Free” The Enchiridion by Epictetus**

Translate to UK English: With the philosophical background ideas about “The Art of Being Free”, classic wisdom texts, Epictetus shows us how to manage our emotions by applying the essence of Stoic teachings: tranquility of mind, absence of fears and freedom.

Born as a slave in Rome, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus teaches us that mental freedom is supreme, as it can liberate us anywhere, even in a prison. The *art of being free* is a new and magnificent edition of Epictetus' famous manual on Stoic life philosophy, the *Enchiridion*. It also offers a selection of reflections related to freedom, collected in his *Dissertations*, which show the most stimulating aspects of his philosophy.

Freedom, for Epictetus, is a psychological and ethical achievement, a gift that only we can give ourselves. We can all be free if we learn to assign a primary value to what we can control – desires, judgments, motivations and reactions – to treat what does not depend on us with equanimity, and to see our circumstances as opportunities to act and be well, regardless of what happens to us or the actions of others.

This famous manual by Epictetus on Stoicism, fully relevant today, is a powerful method for managing emotions such as fear, anxiety, envy, anger or resentment. It shows us how to handle life situations, from the most common to the most demanding, applying the essence of Stoic teachings: tranquility of mind, absence of fears and freedom.

### **The Art of Keeping Calm <sup>3</sup>**

A manual of classic wisdom on anger management written by Seneca, one of the leading representatives of Stoicism. In his vehement essay *On Anger*, Seneca, a famous Roman thinker of the first century of our era and one of the most prominent figures of Stoicism, argues that anger is the most destructive passion for the human race..

His own life is proof of this: he barely managed to preserve it under the reign of the choleric Emperor Caligula and lost it under the rule of Nero.

This new translation is an accurate selection of the essential wisdom from *On Anger*. Presented with an enlightening introduction, it offers readers a timeless guide to avoiding and controlling anger. It vividly illustrates why this emotion is so dangerous and why knowing how to manage it has great benefits for individuals and society.

Seneca's reflections on anger have never been more relevant than today, when uncivil discourse increasingly contaminates public debate. Whether readers are interested in their own personal development or yearn for a renewal of the political sphere, they will find in Seneca's wisdom a valuable antidote to the ills of an angry age.

### **The Art of Cultivating True Friendship by Cicero**

#### **A manual of classic wisdom on deep and authentic friendships written by Cicero.<sup>4</sup>**

An honest and eloquent guide to finding and cherishing true friends, *The Art of Cultivating True Friendship* speaks today as powerfully as when it was written.

In a world where social networks, online relationships and increasing isolation threaten the very idea of deep and authentic friendships, the search for true friends is more important than ever. In this short book, one of the best on the subject, the famous Roman politician and philosopher Cicero offers us a captivating guide to finding, preserving and valuing friends. With wit and wisdom, Cicero shows us not only how to build friendships but also why they should be a key part of our lives. Because, as Cicero says, a life without friends is not worth living.

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Presented in a new translation, which adapts this classic to our time, *The Art of Cultivating True Friendship* is full of timeless reflections and advice that have inspired readers for over two thousand years, from Saint Augustine and Dante to our days.

### “De Senectute: The Art of Aging by Cicero

A manual of classic wisdom on the art of living the second half of life with pleasure.

Are you worried that old age will inevitably mean losing your libido, your health, and even your desire to play? Well, Cicero has good news for you. In *The Art of Aging*, the great Roman politician and philosopher eloquently describes how we can make the second half of life the best part of all, and perhaps discover that reading and gardening are much more enjoyable than sex.

Full of timeless wisdom and practical guidance, this short and charming classic directly addresses the great fears of aging and argues why these concerns are very exaggerated, or totally wrong.

Montaigne said that Cicero's book “makes one eager to grow old.” In a world obsessed with the futile pursuit of youth, its lessons are more relevant today than ever.

Presented in a new translation that adapts this classic to our times, Cicero's *\*The Art of Growing Old\** has delighted and inspired many readers for over two thousand years.

## LET'S GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING...

### Let's return to the essential idea of this PRESENTATION: “Psychology meeting health.” Two very involved concepts: “Psychology” and “Health. And here let's enter the field of psychology.

Psychology where man goes from reflecting on the world to reflecting on “his” world, “his” own world, his “I” himself.

Boring wrote: “It may be true that it is man who perceives the significance of behaviour, but it is also true that seeking the significance of “his” behaviour points out the problem of (his) existence to man himself. Having come to that reflective maturity about the sense of our “I” is perhaps the main starting point of current Psychology.

Man stands out and differentiates himself evolutionarily from other beings for having introduced, in his vital system, a referential element to himself, and a symbolic system. Man, no longer lives only in a simple and pure physical universe, but in a universe referential to his own “I”. Man, lives during imaginary emotions, hopes, fears, illusions and disappointments, during his fantasies and his “dreams.” “What disturbs and alarms man is no longer the things themselves, but the opinions and figurations that man has about things,” the wise Greek Epithetus said more than two thousand years ago.

Psychology is not only concerned with how we are, but with how we see ourselves, remember, behave, how we learn...

## PSYCHOLOGY IN SEARCH OF MEANING

In 1963, in *\*The Vital Balance\**, Karl Menninger outlined a question that, despite its apparent simplicity, has been of great relevance in the history of psychological knowledge: “What is behind the symptom? (¿Qué hay detrás de un síntoma? ¿Qué hay detrás de una conducta?)”. The well-known American researcher invoked with this question what he considered to be the ultimate meaning of symptoms. Because, in his words, “nobody steals a watch for the mere purpose of obtaining an object. Nobody slits their throat with the sole aim of dying. Human motivation is not that simple”; rather, it is the result of a multitude of pressures and events that the psychologist, psychiatrist, professional, or therapist must discover and describe. The areas of exchange in human communication are multiple, and sometimes simultaneous, and a person's intentions can be implicitly revealed in any behaviour-communication, because everything a person does serves to tell who they are.

## FOLLOWING STEPS

Our Project comes to an end. During his years of active and demanding life, we are in year 3, everything has meant a process of growth, continuity, development, scientific. It is not easy to forget the steps taken, the efforts

maintained, the hopes put into play and of which we feel proud. There have been many colleagues, researchers who have left their mark and their efforts in these years. I feel, we feel the need to be generous, without them, the project would not have been what it is. Thank you therefore to all of you historical friends, researchers, professionals, colleagues because you have been the essential part of this path and in this Project.

And we return to the title of this final section - following the steps - using the name of a painting from the Museum of Cáceres, the city in which we held an important session of the Project accompanied by academic and local authorities and held the session in the Hall of Honor of the Rectorate of the University of Extremadura. The Project was in its development. We all wanted him to be powerful and alive and this has continued until these last moments. Thanks to all of you who have made it possible.

*"Following in the footsteps" is an art painting that helps us evoke this gratitude to all the researchers who have walked leaving their mark on our Project. Thank you.*

In the Museum of Cáceres, in whose Fine Arts room, in the Casa de los Caballos, this extraordinary painting by Carmen Calvo is exhibited <sup>5</sup>

The composition of the painting is simple: seventy-three pieces of baked clay in the shape of human footprints, held together with pita or hemp rope, are superimposed on an aluminium plate. In its production, therefore, the four primordial elements of matter are present: the earth, the water that turns it into clay, the fire in which it has been cooked and the air that occupies the void left by the footprint.

Only two neutral colours appear, which get along well, without any enmity: grey and brown, one cold, silent and immobile, and the other warm. The painting has a rectangular shape, and "the rectangle produces a strange pleasure to our gaze [...] Also the books, after successive searches and trials, have ended up being definitively rectangular" Irene Vallejo sharply points out in *'The Infinite in a reed'*. Its size is medium, 150 x 100 centimetres, in a proportion of two thirds, close to the golden ratio (that of laptop screens), but presented vertically, which is coherent: the steps are movements, and we move in a vertical position, horizontality for us is stillness and rest, only reptiles move horizontally.

With such elemental materials, the author's talent has found the appropriate sensory form to transmit to the viewer her vision of the passage of time, of lost steps.

What do you see in this painting? Some pieces of clay that represent footprints; that is, a simple object, made with a raw material that here retains its elemental nobility, the biblical clay with which God created Adam and, later, one of the first materials that primitive man began to manipulate when he became craftsman.

What is it about? The painting is about past time, ours or someone else's, about what we were and are no longer, about what we had and no longer have and about the people we lost, about how little we have left when we have forgotten the faces of those who marked them. And it is about the future time: we too will disappear, our face will peel away in the memory of others, our steps will be erased by a wave, by a gust of wind, by those who come behind and will superimpose their steps on ours..., except on the miraculous occasions when a work of art manages to stop the gale of oblivion and fixes our stay on earth for memory.

The work proposes to be capable, in that relay race that is life, capable of transmitting that "witness" or that "flame" of positive activity and leaving it lit in the illusion of its continuity.

The project strives to transmit values, capabilities, personal growth, maturity, enthusiasm and aspirations to maintain, keep ourselves, trained and informed to face the changes that life has been bringing us and that perhaps, and I am sure of this, - I am not now able to imagine -, but changes that will be numerous and multiple and that we are beginning to see born.

Life is always illusion and illusion illuminate life. And in that "follow the steps" the Project has presented us:

1. Stress reduction strategies
2. Emergency strategies for normative grief
3. Healthy retirement
4. Work-life balance



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5. The Requirement to Take Care of Ourselves
6. The cases of those who couldn't stand the pressure and left.
7. The demand of those who do not leave and demand our help.
8. We have reflected a lot on Neuroscience and Wellbeing.
9. About the competitive world
10. About what psychologists should do.
11. And our reflections on the use of time.

## THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS:

*"Life is always illusion and illusion illuminate life."*

Centro De Direito Biomédico (E10161601 - Portugal)

Policijska Akademija (E10044810 - Croatia)

Polizei Berlin (E10196383 - Germany)

Iekšlietu Ministrijas Valsts Policija State Police of The Ministry Of interior (E10047718 - Latvia)

Infad

## GRACIAS A LOS COLABORADORES:

Dr<sup>a</sup>. Evita Lipe:

D<sup>a</sup>. Amara García Belloso.

D<sup>a</sup>. Ana Filipa Tavares Pereira.

D<sup>a</sup>. Maria Fatima Lacerda Amaral Gomes.

D<sup>a</sup>. Margarida.

D. Rui Filipe Resende Melo Coelho De Moura.

D<sup>a</sup>. Aijja Sulte

Badajoz 9 de junio 2024

INFAD Research team

## NOTAS

1. Fermin Apezteguia Diario HOY 14-05-24
2. Text reread and found on the internet. Web <https://koanlibros.com/libro/elogio-de-la-ociosidad-0> active on 16th May 2024
3. Séneca (Córdoba, 4 a.C. - Roma, 65 d.C.) was a prominent Roman philosopher, politician, orator and writer. A predominant figure in Roman politics during the reigns of Claudius and Nero, he was one of the most admired, influential and respected senators. Between the years 54 and 62, during the early years of the reign of his young pupil Nero, he de facto ruled the Roman Empire. As a writer, Seneca went down in history as one of the greatest representatives of Stoicism. His work constitutes the main written source of Stoic philosophy that has survived to the present day. He covers both plays and philosophical dialogues, treatises on natural philosophy and letters. Using an accessible style and away from technicalities, he outlined the main characteristics of late Stoicism, of which, along with Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, he is considered the greatest exponent of it.
4. Cicerón (106-43 a.C.) He was a committed politician, skilled orator, lawyer and philosopher. He is considered one of the most brilliant and influential intellectuals and thinkers of the Roman republican world. Imbued with the philosophical ideas of Stoicism, his philosophical and reflective work is increasingly appreciated in

today's world. Cicero presents philosophy as a way of access to happiness and therapy of the soul, always dealing with humanly timeless topics such as friendship, pain, old age, or happiness itself. Likewise, he is responsible for the introduction of the most famous Hellenic philosophical schools into the republican intelligentsia, as well as the creation of a philosophical vocabulary in Latin.

5. Eugenio Fuentes. Diario Hoy, Abril 7th 2024