

NEWSLETTER

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THIS ISSUE'S FEATURED ARTICLES:

TACKLING THE PRESSING CHALLENGE IN THE CARE OF AT-RISK OLDER ADULTS WITH DEMENTIA, DISABILITIES, OR COMORBIDITIES

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by Anthony Polychronakis, Team International Affairs and European Policy, City of Rotterdam

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by Ton Bakker MD PhD, Professor RUAS and Canan Ziylan PhD senior researcher and lecturer in Nutrition, Prevention, Geriatrics and Dementia

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EDITORIAL:

by Anthony Polychronakis, City of Rotterdam

Addressing a critical societal issue: The SACRED project and the essential need for improved healthcare education on caring for older adults with dementia and disabilities/ comorbidities

Welcome, dear reader, to the first newsletter of the SACRED Erasmus+ EU-funded project: **Sharing and Caring for At-Risk Elderly with Dementia or Disabilities.**

SACRED is a collaborative initiative that brings together nine partners organizations from across Europe, guided by the City of Rotterdam, with key participants from the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium, Greece, Spain, and France. This project unites professionals, academics, students, European networks, and civil society organizations in addressing the urgent gaps in healthcare education for for students and professionals regarding older adults care particularly those living with dementia and disabilities/comorbidities.

A Changing Landscape in Healthcare:

Europe's aging population is reshaping the healthcare landscape. In 2020, over 20% of the EU population was aged 65 or older, and this proportion is set to rise significantly in the coming decades. Life expectancy has also increased, from 78 years in 2002 to 82 years in 2020. Currently, 7.8 million people in the EU live with dementia, a number expected to soar to 14.3 million by 2050. As the demand for care intensifies, so does the need for skilled caregivers capable of meeting the complex, evolving needs of this aging population.

Despite this growing need, Europe's healthcare system remains **fragmented** and **underprepared** to address the challenges presented by dementia and disabilities/comorbidities at various stages. There is a critical gap in specialized training and tailored care solutions for caregivers. To address this there is a strong need to **embrace a holistic, integrated approach to caregiving**—one that fosters collaboration across educational institutions, local governments, healthcare organizations, and civil society to enhance the quality and accessibility of care.

Our Motivation:

In response to this pressing need, the SACRED project was launched. With the growing prevalence of dementia across Europe, the complexity of care demands a **workforce** that is not only compassionate but also **highly skilled** and **well-informed**. SACRED's mission is to provide a scalable, sustainable solution by developing an innovative e-learning platform. The platform goal is to empower healthcare students and professionals with the specialized training they need to provide high-quality care to older adults across Europe.

The SACRED project will deliver several key outcomes: a **report of evidence based interventions**, a **comprehensive needs assessment**, a **gap analysis**, and a **database of 20 good practices** from six pilot sites. Additionally, the project will co-create a dynamic **e-learning platform** and launch an extensive **awareness campaign** to strengthen understanding and capacity in older adults care across Europe.

Join us in addressing these challenges:

We invite you to contribute your experience, practices, and knowledge to this crucial effort.



Anthony Polychronakis, Team International Affairs and European Policy City of Rotterdam

1. INTERVIEW ON DEMENTIA, ACCESIBILITY AND DISABILITIES

by **Ton Bakker** MD PhD, Professor RUAS Preservation of optimal bio-psycho-social functioning in older adults from a life course perspective and Stichting Wetenschap Balans and **Canan Ziylan**, PhD senior researcher and lecturer in Nutrition, Prevention, Geriatrics and Dementia.

There is much negative publicity about the health care for the frail older adults, for example with dementia and multi-morbidity. However, in scientific research programs the results are also quite disappointing. We see a low percentage (< 50 %) of treatment fidelity in the intervention programs at stake. We do not apply what we agree on. Research on the educational content with respect to frail older adults shows that this is very poor within every health care profession. From the perspective of formal education, the professionals who provide treatment and care the frail older adults are relatively unqualified and incompetent.

Government, health inspection and umbrella organizations should focus on solving this issue instead of enforcing their control mechanisms. Formal education is the hallmark of quality treatment and care especially in case of complex and unpredictable health problems of older adults with dementia and multi-morbidity. If we don't change our policy and don't invest in the solution of fundamental educational shortcomings we continue to build on quicksand.

To formulate and adhere to an integral masterplan based on evidence-based methods and interventions to solve this issue is imperative. **Education as will be developed within the SACRED project can be one of the building blocks of that masterplan.**

All help and care provided should be **person-centered**. A lot of care and welfare organizations have their mouths full of being and performing 'person-centered'. But that is quite disappointing in practice. People's needs are not so much considered; care is mainly organized based on supply. Choices are more financially driven or based on a short-term vision.

Of course, finances are important, but **inadequate training of health care professionals has major consequences for care recipients and caregivers** themselves. In our research into neuropsychiatric symptoms or 'problem behavior' in people with dementia, we saw that really listening to people, really getting to know them and understanding where behavior comes from, including them in the treatment plan, is very effective.

Our research is always about '**valuable aging**'. That actually starts from childhood. We are not born under equal circumstances, so valuable aging does not come naturally to everyone. It is especially important that we look much more broadly at what is needed from early childhood to eventually become a valuable (older) adult up to and including the last phase of life. We are one human being with one life course, there is **no place for a fragmented care** system to go with that. For that reason, **SACRED will look into older adults with dementia and multimorbidity from an integral perspective, with older adult as the central player and focus.**



Ton Bakker, MD PhD, Professor RUAS



Canan Ziylan PhD, senior researcher and lecturer RUAS

2. THE KICK OFF MEETING

by the City of Rotterdam

The SACRED project kick-off event took place in Rotterdam from November 11 to 14, **hosted by the City of Rotterdam with the University of Applied Sciences** partner of this project and coordinated by the city of Rotterdam, the project's lead applicant.

Futhermore, the event brought together representatives from nine partner organizations across Europe, including universities, local governments, research institutes, and care providers. Participating organizations came from Italy (Veneto Region, ISRAA Treviso), Belgium (Odisee University of Applied Sciences), Spain (Polibienestar University of Valencia, Anrimac, San Cristóbal de La Laguna), Greece (Alterra Vita, Syros), the Netherlands (AFEdemy Age-Friendly Environment Academy), and France/Belgium (ELISAN – European Local Inclusion and Social Action Network).

Under the theme *"United in Diversity"*, the Erasmus+ National Agency actively contributed to the meeting supporting the consortium, highlighting the importance of collaboration and the measurement of the project's impact.

The kick-off marked the official launch of the SACRED project, focused on:

- Developing and co-creating an **innovative e-learning platform** for healthcare professionals and students to enhance care for older adults with dementia, disabilities, or comorbidities.
- Establishing a **database of best practices** across six pilot sites.

- Promoting long-term improvements in elder care through a comprehensive awareness campaign.

Key discussions centered around the needs of older adults, the specialized knowledge and skills required by caregivers, and the critical gaps in the current healthcare education system. The event highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary and cross-regional collaboration to achieve innovative and impactful results in older adults care.

An advisory board was also established to provide external expertise on quality control throughout the project's stages, from analysis to implementation. This board will be led by Karel Haga, Board Member of OSO (Forum for Senior Citizens' Organisations in the Netherlands).

The event also offered valuable opportunities to explore local good practices in Rotterdam, particularly focusing on the **STIP Method**. This evidence-based approach plays a key role in quality dementia care (prevention and treatment) in nursing homes, with potential applications in home care. Emphasis was placed on the importance of implementation, interdisciplinary training, and continuous education within the STIP framework.

In addition, **local study visits** included:

The **Field Academy**, where the City Verse project demonstrated design thinking in Rotterdam. This visit contributed to the co-creation of a development plan for the SACRED project, particularly focusing on evidence-based approaches to dementia care

The **Natural History Museum**, where an interactive approach for people with dementia was showcased.

The kick-off event set the stage for SACRED's ambitious goals, fostering collaboration, evidence-based practices, and practical solutions to improve older adult care across Europe.



SACRED Kick off meeting Rotterdam, 11-14 November 2024



SACRED Kick off meeting Rotterdam, 11-14 November 2024

3. WHO WE ARE



City of Rotterdam

<https://www.rotterdam.nl/>

"We aim to further the commitment to creating an inclusive society where everyone, regardless of age or ability, can thrive".



Rotterdam University
of Applied Sciences

<https://www.rotterdamuas.com/>

The Municipality of Rotterdam, led by the Mayor and vice-mayors, governs through six departments, including Social Development, which coordinates the SACRED project. Rotterdam, the second-largest city in the Netherlands, has a diverse population and is known for its youth, with 30% of its residents under 25. The city's economy, historically driven by its Port, is diversifying into sectors like health, education, and consumer services. Rotterdam is focused on improving accessibility for older adults and those with disabilities, with initiatives like the 'Older and Wiser' policy and the Local Agenda for Accessibility to support independent living, mobility, and social engagement.

RUAS has 39.000 students, 9 schools and 5 Research Centres, of which the School of Health Care studies and the Research Centre Innovations in Care is involved in SACRED. The goal of the School of Health Care studies and Research Centre is to innovate the approaches of both health promotion and long term care. RUAS does this by practice-oriented research and innovation projects carried out by students in collaboration with research lecturers, professors, professionals, citizens and business partners. Older adults are an important group RUAS collaborates with. By addressing real life challenges, such as frail older adults with dementia or multimorbidity, RUAS wants not only to gain knowledge, but also to implement it into practice. SACRED is a prime example of a project that aims to do just that, while making use of broad knowledge throughout Europe, as we face similar current and future challenges in health care for older adults.



www.odisee.be

"Wonderful to be a part of such an experienced consortium with backgrounds in teaching, research, caregiving and policy".

Odisee University of Applied sciences will lead the development and execution of the needs assessment in professionals, students and older adults with dementia and comorbidities

Next, Odisee University of Applied sciences will take part in the development and testing of the e-learning.

Finally, Odisee University of Applied sciences will seek for good practices in Flanders and aims to embed the developed e-learning in the teaching activities in its educational programs for nursing, occupational therapy and psychosocial gerontology.

"The richness in knowledge and practical experience in this SACRED project group creates a strong fundament for the further course of this project. Happy to be involved and to contribute in this project!"

POLIBIENESTAR, directed by Jorge Garcés, is a research institute of the University of Valencia specialised in social welfare policies. With more than 10 years of experience, it focuses on applied and multidisciplinary research on the sustainability of welfare systems, focusing on general society, vulnerable groups, businesses and the third sector. Its lines of research cover Health (integrated care, active ageing and mental health), Sustainability and Governance (sustainable cities, democratic participation) and Innovation and inclusive education (digital literacy and learning design).



"Knowledge, awareness, sharing and care are the 4 elements that will guide us in the SACRED project"

ISRAA is an Italian public senior care provider based in Treviso with knowledge and experience in assisting older people. Its Innovation and Development Department designs European, national and regional projects to promote the digitalisation of health and social services and to support new forms of inclusion, social innovation, active ageing and health. In the SACRED project, ISRAA will coordinate the implementation and evaluation phases (WP4), organise pilot activities in Treviso and disseminate the project's results in Italy and abroad.



"AFEdemy's mission is to realise inclusive societies for all by empowering stakeholders. To empower (future) care professionals with the skills to look after vulnerable older people, is one of the steps that could be taken on the journey towards more inclusive societies."

AFEdemy is a limited private company based in Gouda (Netherlands). Its mission is to capacity-build local, regional and national stakeholders to realise smart, inclusive and sustainable communities and cities. AFEdemy's role is to develop in close collaboration with the partners the curriculum and e-learning platform for higher education students and care professionals on learning on frail older people with dementia, multimorbidity or physical impairments. AFEdemy's mission is to realise inclusive societies for all by empowering stakeholders. To empower (future) care professionals with the skills to look after vulnerable older people, is one of the steps that could be taken on the journey towards more inclusive societies.



<http://alteravita-cyclades.gr/>

"Our motivation for joining this European project is to contribute with our expertise in community-based education and social intervention, with the aim of fostering inclusive, supportive environments that empower vulnerable populations".



ALTERA VITA is Social Cooperative and research center based in Syros, Cyclades Greece, focused on education and awareness programs in Health, Environment, Culture, and Social Intervention.

It offers flexible training programs to promote social and professional changes in areas like Social Economy, Health Promotion, Sustainable Development, Arts, Pedagogy, Psychology, and New Technologies.

The center is part of the European Network of Social Authorities (ENSA), which fosters international cooperation in the social field, and leads the ENSEL Network for Social Emotional Learning.

Altera Vita supports vulnerable adults and minors through social reintegration and labor market entry, offering counseling. In collaboration with KEFIAP Syros, it assists people with disabilities, including those with neurological and developmental issues.

Anrimac is a Unipersonal Enterprise of Psychological services in San Cristóbal de La Laguna, Tenerife, which attends patients and families with psychological clinical and health issues, and provide assessment, formation and research in communitarian and job health problems.

The collaboration in this project will be done through Ph. Dr. Angela Rita Martin Caballero, an experienced psychologist and manager, in clinical attention, research and formation.

She will lead, in cooperation with the University of La Laguna, Faculty of Psychology (Associated Partner), and with other collaborative entities, the pilot of the SACRED project in Tenerife and test the E-learning among professionals and students.



<https://elisannetwork.wixsite.com/elisan-network>

Our purpose in this project is scaling up responses and practices at the European and international levels to effectively address the needs and enhance the quality of life of an aging population.

ELISAN (European Local Inclusion & Social Action Network) is a network that has been set up at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels and is an INGO enjoying participatory status at the Council of Europe.

Its main objective is to contribute to the building of a Social Europe that respects national models, to raises awareness about local social policies and to promote the scaling up of innovative social practices at European level.

ELISAN is a place for reflection, analysis, proposals and exchange of experiences. Its members share the common will to promote local social action among the European Institutions.

4. Eu and Partners News

December 10th 2024 SACRED High on the Agenda in Tenerife, Spain
by **Angela Rita Martín Caballero**

On December 10, the **ANRIMAC SACRED** partner, through PhD Dr. **Angela Rita Martín Caballero**, organized a meeting to illustrate the SACRED Project to the team of Medical Specialists of the S/C Salamanca Mental Health Unit belonging to the Nuestra Señora de Candelaria **University Hospital (HUNSC)** and the **Canary Islands University Hospital. (HUC)** in Tenerife,

Six psychiatrists, three Nurses Specialists in Mental Health, two Specialists in Clinical Psychology and a Social Worker from the Mental Health Service actively contributed. They expressed their interest to take part in the dissemination of the project among professional specifically for the needs analysis and the pilots.



Dr. Angela Rita Martín Caballero, ANRIMAC



Meeting Tenerife, 10 December 2024

*Brussels, March 3-4-5 2025 INVITATION -**SACRED at HOPE Responding to Heatwaves in Older People Ecosystem” EU Erasmus + funded project final conference, ENSA European Network of Social Authorities General Assembly 2025 and SACRED partner meeting.***

You are invited to a week of content activities and practices exchanges in Brussels to improve answers to societal challenges and connect with colleagues in the field of:

-Improving heat resilience among older adults

-Building an Inclusive Future: Empowering Sustainable Skills, Social Fairness, and Resilience

- March 3, HOPE final conference, Houses of the Dutch Provinces from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm with a networking lunch;
- March 4, ENSA general Assembly and joining 2 ENSA working groups Youth Family and Minors, Social Emotional Learning, Veneto Region Brussels Office from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm;
- March 5, SACRED partner meeting, Veneto Region Brussels Office from 10.00 am to 12.00 am;
- March 5, Older Adults working group, Veneto Region Brussels from 2.30 pm to 5.00 pm.

*Syros, May 25-30 2025 -**Get ready for SACRED 3rd partner meeting!***

2025 GREETINGS FROM THE SACRED PARTNERSHIP!



SACRED kick off meeting Rotterdam, 11-14 November 2025

"To ensure that no one is left behind, we must embrace the aging population and work to build inclusive societies that empower older adults to live with dignity, independence, and opportunity".

— United Nations, on SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)

Editing ELISAN NETWORK collaboration Elena Curtopassi and Monica Rovai

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