

# Islam Experience Centre





# 1. What is the Islam Experience Centre?

**'Through a wonderful and unique journey in virtual reality, pupils and students are introduced, in these polarized times, to the true basic message of Islam and its extraordinary history in a new, high-tech way. Educational, positive, promoting solidarity and above all: fun!'**

The Islam Experience Centre (IXC) is a private initiative from the Islamic community from The Netherlands. The idea of "doing something" about the growing gap between Muslims and non-Muslims came about a few years ago. Over the years, both the moral and financial support for the project grew and finally the organization was a fact.

The IXC focuses on promoting understanding and empathy between different population groups. This is done by focusing on religious and cultural literacy.

Removing inaccurate ideas and fears about Islam, by pointing to the positive historical practice and entering into a constructive dialogue, form the fundamental principles in this regard. The aim is to contribute to a more harmonious society. A necessary goal in these times of polarization and radicalization.

Islam Experience Centre  
Rotterdam, april 2021



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## 2. It starts with a VR-Experience



Islam. The word alone often gives rise to frowned eyebrows, polemic or debate. Many have a negative connotation and this is not least the result of a lack of information, misconceptions and distortions. But of course images of extremists and radicals play a role as well. Every day we are confronted with all types of negativity. But is this the true message of Islam? Of course not!

In pluriform societies 'understanding' and respect for each other's philosophy of life, should be the norm. This starts with the removal of fear images and ignorance. A playful, virtual journey through the history of Islam, sharing the historical, positive message of the religion and sharing what Islam has contributed to the progress of humanity, will contribute to this goal.

The dialogue / conversation that is central after the VR experience, also offers the participants the opportunity to come closer together and listen to each other's experiences and feelings. With this initiative we aim primarily, and in a simple way, to promote empathy and understanding. Thanks to the help of some special donors, we were able to start this project last year.

Elementary schools, secondary schools and even the university showed their interest. So we visited them all and as a result many hundreds of pupils and students have already seen this experience. And they were more than enthusiastic, they were thrilled. Both the schools

and the students. And both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is unlike any initiative. With our current resources (of 25 VR glasses and the already produced VR video) we are able to reach 10,000 students a year. A great start.

But given the growing polarization in many societies, it is more than necessary that we roll out this project and share the true message of Islam - that of empathy and harmony - with many more young people and students.

We want to get to the 500,000 a year mark. And not only through our mobile service where we visit schools and institutions, as we do now, but also with a physical location where families, muslim and non-muslim, can visit us and experience the message in the most advanced way.

The uniqueness of this project is also that it can be deployed in practically any country. Both the mobile service and the physical location. It has, in line with our wonderful religion, a universal character. Only the language of the videos needs to be converted. The organization's long-term goal is to establish Islam Experience Centres in various places to share the message of Islam as easily accessible as possible, with as many people as possible.



## 3. Content of the video and lesson

Via a so-called '360 experience' in virtual reality (which is played synchronously on all glasses), the participants are first taken on a journey through time, during which various important locations, inventions, cultural expressions and religious core values from Islam are shown. More specifically, the following scenario will be played:

Sitting on the couch in a living room, the television shows short excerpts of some violent events that have contributed to the negative image of Islam (including the attack on the Twin Towers). Then the door is knocked. When the door is opened, a bright light shines and the participant is unexpectedly transported to the Middle East of the 8th - 10th century. You end up in the "House of Wisdom" in Baghdad, where you see an elderly scholar joining you.

On the basis of images, sounds and a "voice-over" in both the historic library and the beautiful garden through which people then walk, they are informed about the art and academic merits of the time.

The participants then travel on to the Kaaba where they become acquainted with the historical principles of faith. When the evening starts, one ends up in the desert, where one sees which inventions during the "Islamic Golden Age" have contributed to things that we all use today and which we consider to be very useful (think of the camera, planes and coffee, among others). Suddenly, the call to the first prayer of the day is heard softly in the distance. The environment is fading and suddenly you are back on the couch in front of the (now test-giving) television.

The VR experience itself takes about 7



minutes (from start to finish) and takes place under the supervision of IXC staff, including a competent first-degree lecturer in religion and philosophy of life. After the VR experience, the glasses and headphones are taken and the dialogue is started. The associations with Islam written down at the beginning of the lesson will be read and discussed. Of course with reference to the virtual journey that the group has just made. The starting point for the dialogue is the group (not the IXC) and the individual experience of the participant. The lesson is finally completed by returning to the objectives of the lesson mentioned at the start. Finally, participants receive a small present in the form of something tasty and some writing materials.



### 3. A physical location

#### The VR-experience becomes a place

As stated, the goal is not only to expand the number of VR glasses but also to establish a physical location that will allow not only schoolchildren and students but also families - parents with children - and other interested parties to experience this unique VR journey.

In this location an additional experiential element will be added to the VR video (compared to the mobile version). The wind, the sun and the sand will be tangible. People will smell the scents of flowers and plants and the sounds will come in extra intense. This is a so called story-room.

In addition to this VR track, there will also be an 1 area where a stunning 360 VR video about the life of the Prophet (pbuh) will be shown while seated.

In addition to 360 and VR, AR (augmented reality) will also be used. With special glasses, holograms, of wild animals, historical events and miraculous events such as the splitting of the moon, will be visible in the middle of the room.



1b A VR cinema tells as part of the VR experience

There will also be a 2 playground for children, a 3 dining area, a 4 prayer room and a 5 beautiful 'social media space' (for photos, videos and more). This space will be entirely in the style of the IXC: Islamic, historical, high-tech and fun! You will also have the opportunity to

answer quiz questions on everything you have seen and experienced that day at the IXC, using the 'Ipad-for-a-day' that is handed out. Of course the winners of this quiz receive a prize at the end of the day.

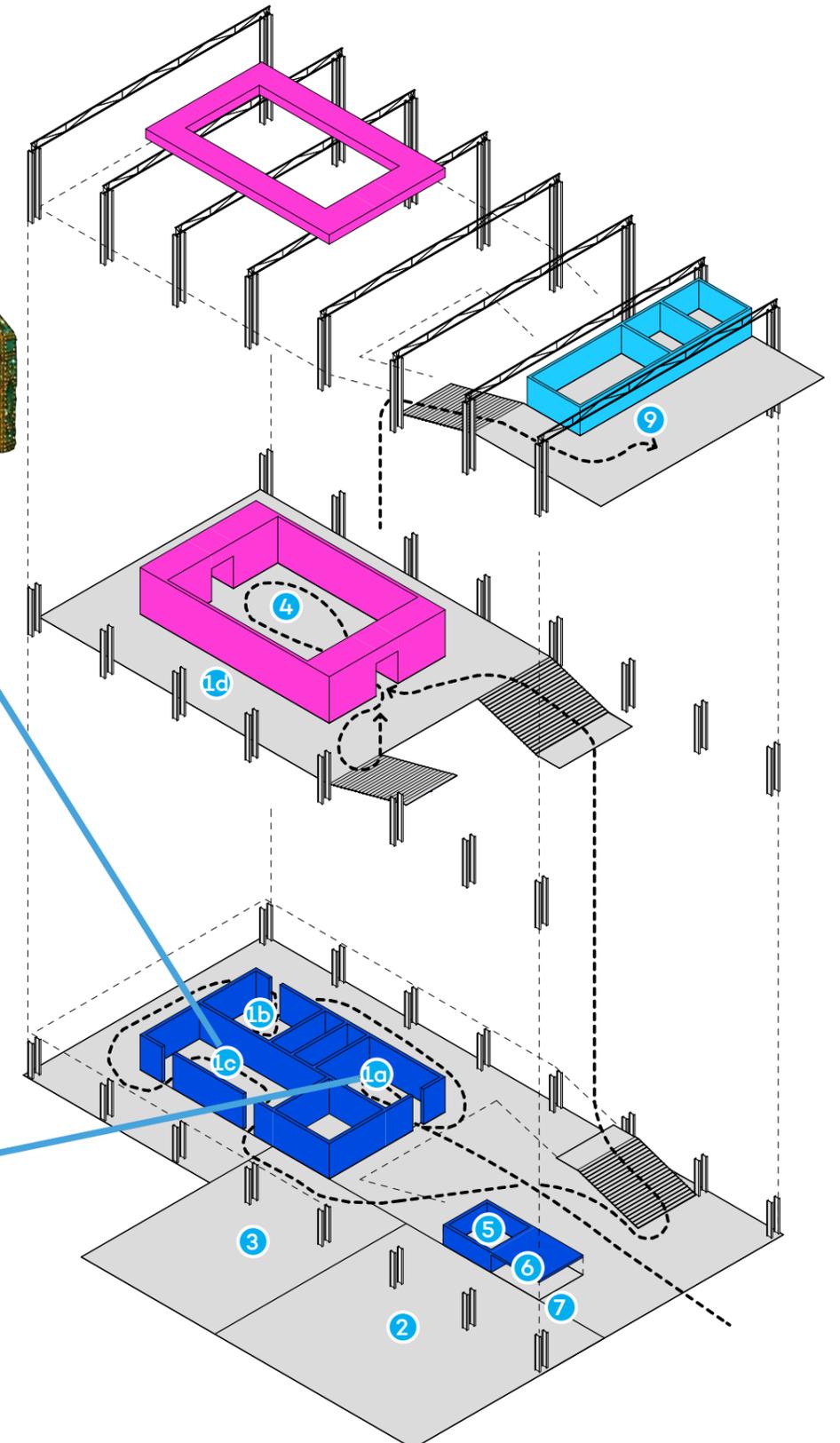
- 1 VR track through the building
  - a. VR room for 50 standing persons
  - b. VR cinema for 40 persons
  - c. Exhibition room (with real objects)
  - d. Holograms of Islamic relics
- 2 Playground for children  
Inside and outside middle eastern themes in a Dutch setting
- 3 Dining area with terrace
- 4 Prayer room  
(including washing spaces)
- 5 Social Media Room (Instagram)
- 6 Souvenir shop
- 7 Meeting spaces with roof terrace  
Possible to rent out



Real Islamic relics in the exhibition room



The VR experience



## Connecting Islam with local culture



# The story of Islam as a journey



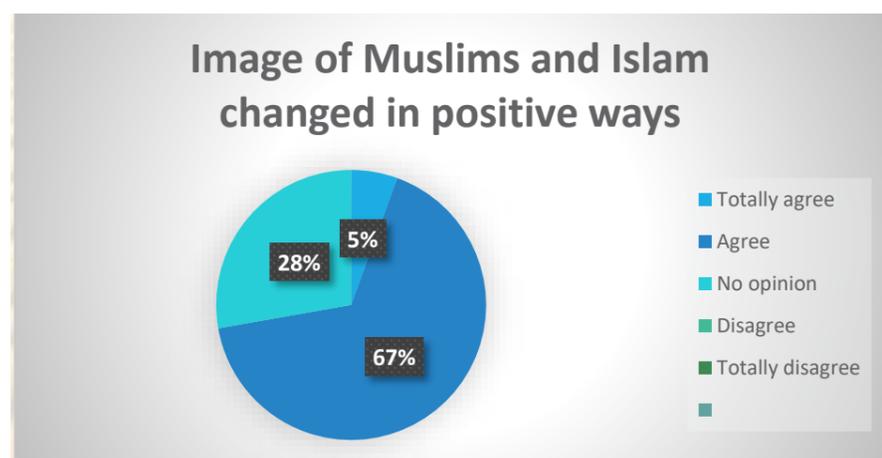
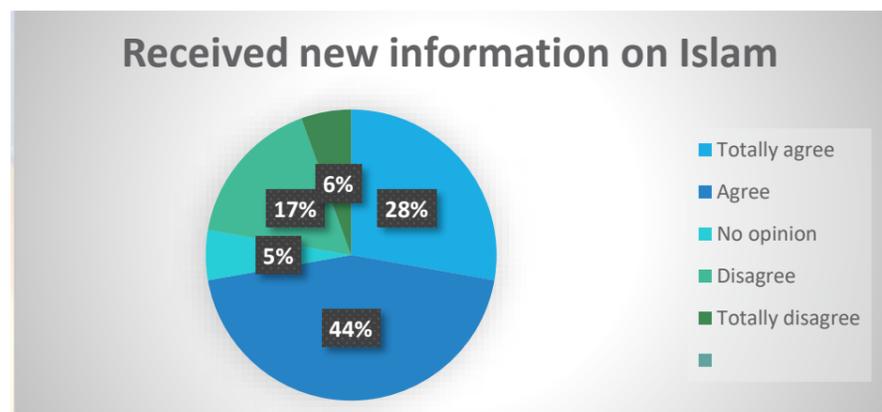
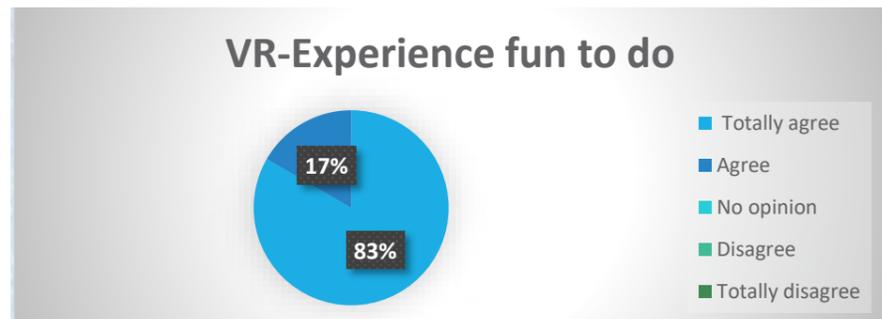
## The prayer room

At the heart of the building



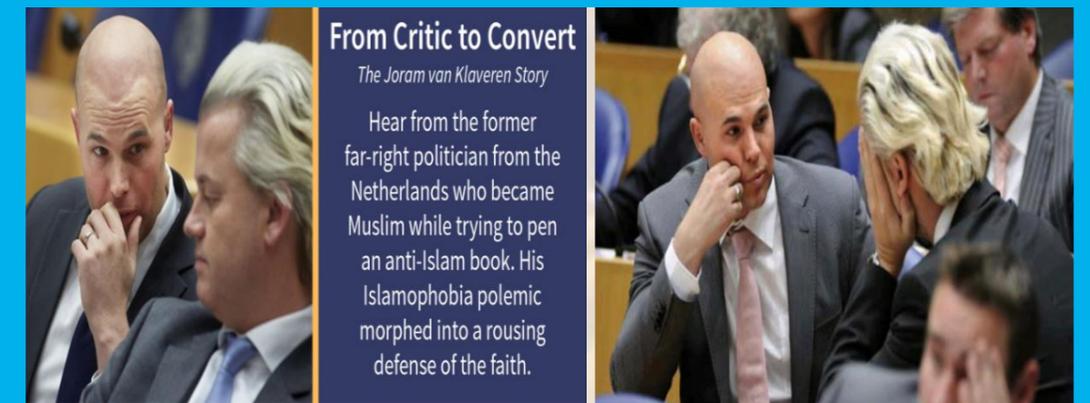
## 5. Results so far

After visiting the various institutions with the mobile VR Experience, we asked the participants each time over the past year (through a multiple choice survey), about their perceptions and ideas regarding the VR video and the lesson surrounding it. Based on the responses of 702 participants (ages 12 and up) we can conclude that more than 4 out of 5 participants found it very enjoyable to do. Nearly 3 out of 4 participants also say they received new information about Islam. And most importantly: almost 75% of the participants indicate that their perception of Islam and Muslims has changed in a positive way! A fantastic result.



## 6. Team

Our team and support, consists of several dedicated brothers and sisters. From both the Moroccan, Turkish, Pakistani-Surnamese and Dutch communities. The support from the community in Malaysia / Singapore can also not remain unsaid. One of the advocates of our organization is Joram van Klaveren, a muslim-convert and former 'crown-prince of Geert Wilders, the leader of the PVV, the most anti-islamic political party in Europe.





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