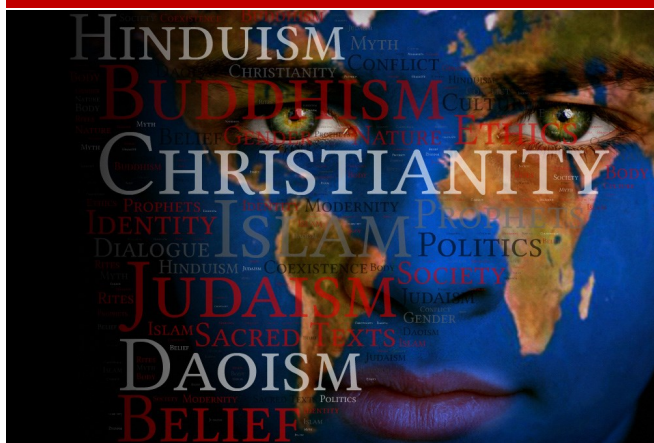


NEWS FROM IERS

IERS Newsletter #3

April 2016



Index

- IERS final dissemination event
- Why do we need Education about Religions?
A common voice from the school world.
- The Pilot Phase - Evaluation
- Pilot Experience by one of the German Teachers
- IERS Project as an example of good practice
- The Voice of a Piloting Teacher and his Pupils
- In-Service teacher training course

IERS PROJECT FINAL DISSEMINATION EVENT:

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE "TEACHING THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS AND FREE THOUGHT IN SCHOOL. ITALIAN AND EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES"

As its Final Dissemination Event, the **IERS Consortium**, in cooperation with the **Center for the study on secularism "Piero Calamandrei"**, the **University of Turin**, the **University of Rome**, the **"Benvenuti in Italia" Foundation** and the **UVA-Universolaltro Association**, organized the **International Conference "Teaching the history of religions and free thought in school. Italian and European perspectives"** which took place the second of April 2016, in Turin (Italy)

The conference was organized in three sessions. In the morning the first session was devoted to **academic analysis** of the matter. The question of teaching about religions was presented from the sociological, historical and political point of view, by some university professors: **Giovanni Filoramo** (University of Turin), **Mariachiara Giorda** (University of Bologna), **Tim Jensen** (University of Southern Denmark and President of International Association for the History of Religions), **Gian Enrico Rusconi** (University of Turin and President of Calamandrei study Centre), **Massimo Raveri** (University of Venice) and **Renaud**

Rochette (École Pratique des Hautes Études). **Massimo Raveri** and **Tim Jensen** are respectively the **Head of the IERS Project** and the **Head of the Danish Team** inside the IERS Consortium, and **Renaud Rochette** is **researcher** (he is author of several Digital Modules) of the French Team. While Tim Jensen presented the European framework of RE in which contextualize the IERS Project, Massimo Raveri and Renaud Rochette explained the underlying idea of Religious Studies-based Religious Education as Intercultural Education that informed the main actions and results of the IERS Project.

All the speakers confirmed the **necessity of re-thinking** the teaching about religions in schools in Italy and Europe as an a-confessional and scientific knowledge aimed to foster civic and intercultural skills of peaceful coexistence and of active citizenship.

With support of the Lifelong
Learning Programme of the
European Union.





First Session of the Conference with Tim Jensen of the IERS Danish Team speaking (first on the right). Massimo Raveri, Head of the IERS Project and Renaud Rochette, from the French team, also present (second and third from left).

people (Islamic, Hebrew, Catholic, Evangelical) and **organizations tied with the school system** (teachers and school worker unions, student organizations) had the opportunity to express their opinions on the IERS project didactic proposal.

Their views have been collected and a **Common Declaration** is planned to be presented to the Italian **Ministry of Education, University and Research**. An excerpt of this declaration is published also in this Newsletter, because of its reasons and voices that go beyond the Italian boundaries towards an European dimension.

The second session was devoted to more pragmatic issues concerning the **best practices developed to solve the challenge of a high-quality teaching about religions in school**. Professor **Raveri** and **Giovanni Lapis** presented IERS project and its work methods, while **Daniele Marcuglia** e **Antonio M. Seoane Pardo**, school teachers who have been involved in the IERS Digital Modules Pilot, presented their features and their use in schools. Antonio M. Seoane, teacher of philosophy in a Spanish secondary school, devoted his speech explaining the Digital Modules' structure and contents. Daniele Marcuglia, professor of History, Philosophy and Catholic Religion in an Italian secondary school, described his work in classes using the IERS modules. **The Italian association UVA-Universolaltro**, associated partner of the IERS Project, described his work in Rome schools teaching history of religions. In The second half of the second session several **Italian religious associations of young**

The third session was devoted to Italian **legal and political issues**. Two members of the Italian Parliament, **On. Davide Mattiello** and **On. Umberto D'Ottavio**, intervened to confirm their intention to support the didactic proposal about teaching of history of religions in schools.



Giovanni Lapis, IERS Project Manager and Beatrice Nuti, author of the Body and Religions Digital Module, (center) co-chairing the Second Session

The IERS newsletter contains information about project implementation activities and achievements. All partners contribute to its contents, reporting also latest news on studies and research.

For further information about the project please visit our website:

<http://iers.unive.it/>

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This newsletter reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Why do we need Education about Religions?

A common voice from the school world.

In occasion of the final IERS Project Dissemination Conference "Teaching the history of religions and free thought in school. Italian and European perspectives", the views of several Italian religious associations of young people (Islamic, Hebrew, Catholic, Evangelical) and organizations tied with the school system (teachers and school worker unions, student organizations) have been collected in a Common Declaration which is planned to be presented to the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research.

Although they referred to the Italian situation, their voices and reasons go beyond the Italian boundaries and embrace a common European dimension. That's why we publish here an excerpt:

Religious diversity can become a source of prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination in increasingly complex and plural European society. Religion is not going to disappear from the public space despite the secularization process. Faced with this, national and supranational policies are called to draw interventions to confirm fundamental principles such as equality and freedom in relation to personal choices to join religion or another system of thought, or not.

Knowing and understanding past and present religions can be an important tool in order to affirm equality,

tolerance, dialogue, respectful and inclusive secularism.

European institutions have expressed some recommendations that urge member states to draw educational policies more attentive to religious diversity.

For example, in "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" approved by 47 States of the Council of Europe in 2008, which strongly stresses that the European future depends on the develop of human rights, democracy and mutual understanding promoted by intercultural education; in "Toledo Guiding Principles on teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools" released by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2007; in "Signposts-Policies and practices for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education" released by the Council of Europe in 2014.

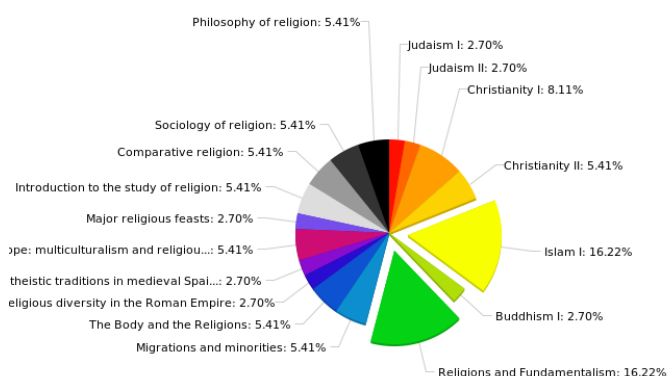
These papers put in evidence that religious illiteracy makes difficult to understand many aspects of history, art, literature, representing a cultural shortage for citizens, and most important, this illiteracy is the fertile ground for discrimination, intolerance, and political and religious radicalism.

The Pilot Phase - Evaluation

Beginning with September 2014 the teachers start to testing the IERS digital modules with their pupils in the associated schools and evaluating their use in classroom activities with pupils.

With regard to the Spanish, German, Italian, French and Danish partner schools, the local partner staff gave the teachers an introduction to the IERS project, its outcomes and the methodological aspects involved before testing the modules (teacher training and support actions – WP6). Following testing teachers' feedbacks were constantly collected throughout answers to online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. On the basis of 29 piloting teachers' feedbacks an interim evaluation report was designed in November 2015. The final report involving 50+ teachers will be published by the very end of the Project (end of April 2016). Giving an overview so far, it can be stressed that most of the teachers tested the modules in history lessons (46 %), confessional (29 %) or non-

confessional RE (18 %). But there are far more subjects, in which the modules were tested. The wide range of subjects, beginning from social studies and



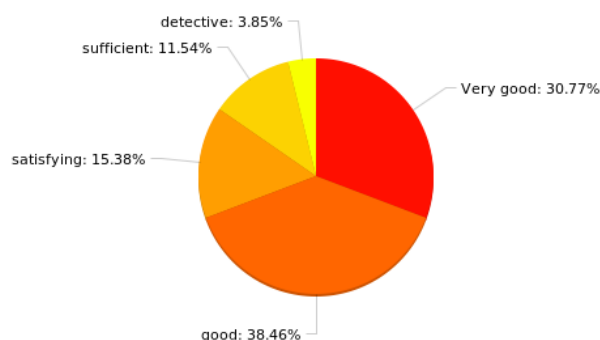
The choice of the topics of the partner school teachers from Spain, Germany, Italy, France and Denmark.

and ranging to foreign language or art lessons shows that the topics of the modules easily fit into the curricula of a wide range of subjects in each partner country. Moreover, it can be concluded from the teachers' statements that the modules are particularly suitable for upper stage classes (beginning with 9th/10th grade).

Concerning the assessment of the IERS-Project itself it can be stated that the underlying quasi-ideology of the IERS project received great approval. All of the teachers agreed on the statement that the IERS outcomes are truly an educational component, which could be one solution on how to deal with and to handle challenges emerging from an increasingly multi-cultural and religiously diverse Europe.

With regard to the assessment of the pilot content it can be concluded from the teachers' statements that the choice of the topics has its finger firmly on the pulse of the present – particularly in regards to highly relevant socio-political and socio-cultural realities.

The great variety of topics can also be seen as an "encyclopedia" of issues related to or emerged from religion(s). The modules themselves mainly received very positive appraisal (arithmetic mean: 1.83).



The modules themselves mainly received very positive appraisal

The teachers particularly highlighted the technical design of the modules, the layout of the digital environment, the scientifically outstanding quality of the teachers' texts, and last but not least the choice of the resources. However, the teachers' statements also reveal the necessity of improvement from a school's practical point of view. For the IERS-project the teachers' feedback thus turned out as a truly practical assistance for the optimisation of the teaching and learning materials. Moreover, the piloting can be seen as a fruitful cooperation between scientific staff and the persons who will finally use the IERS outcomes.

Pilot Experience by one of the German Teachers

The following article is an excerpt of an interview between the national project leader Felix Petzold and the Pilot teacher Philipp Bernhard. It took place at the end of September.

Dear Mr. Bernhard. Thanks for testing one of our modules and for taking time to answer some questions.

First of all: Please, be so kind and tell me a little bit about yourself with regard to your professional career.

I'm a teacher at a "Gymnasium" in Bavaria, which is equivalent to a British grammar school. We have students from Year 5 (11-year-olds) to Year 12 (18-year-olds). I've been working as a fully-qualified teacher for 1,5 years now. My subjects are English, History and Ethics/Philosophy.

Could you tell me something about your pilot experience, like which module did you test, in which class.

I tested the module "Religion and the body" in my Year 9 Ethics class at the end of last school year in July. The Year 9 curriculum for Ethics for Gymnasium

in Bavaria covers the topics "Buddhism" as well as "Gender roles, partnership and family". I adapted the module to my purposes in order to revise aspects about what had already been covered in these two areas during the school year, focusing now on the aspect "Religion and the Body".

In which way did you use the modules?

As already mentioned, I adapted the module. I chose different sources and designed a Powerpoint presentation. On top, I prepared a handout for the students with an excerpt from one of the source texts for a phase of pair work.

Was it easy to integrate in your lessons?

Yes. The advantage of Ethics as a subject as well as the Ethic curriculum is that it allows some flexibility on the part of the teacher. So I decided to use the module in a revision lesson.

How do you assess the motivation, interest, and cooperation of the pupils dealing with the module?

I chose to focus the lesson on aspects I knew the stu-

dents would be interested in. And the lesson indeed went well. There were lively discussions in class.

What do think is/are the strong points of the module(s) you tested?

I like it that there is a variety of sources the teacher can choose from: texts, pictures and even videos. Also the guidelines for teachers can be helpful when adapting the module for your classroom.

Do you think there are things that have to be improved?

The reflective questions did not really help me when I was preparing my lesson. Maybe this is something every teacher has to work out for himself/herself and the specific purposes of the lesson. Another point might be that many of the texts and sources are rather complex and often difficult to understand.

My last question: From the support by the IERS staff, for example during the one-day workshop you attended, you got insights in the underlying so to say "ideology" of the project. Do you think that the modules are an educational component which leads to deal with the increasing multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies in European countries, in your case in Germany?

Absolutely. I think religious education as a key to inter-cultural understanding is in today's world more relevant than ever. If you look at the way religious arguments are used to instil fear and hatred in the current European refugee crisis working with the modules on "Coexistence & conflicts, difference & similarities in religions" can be a contribution to prevent students from following those who exploit religion for their racist agendas.

IERS Project as an example of good practice

In January the 26th in Palazzo Montecitorio, seat of the **Italian Chamber of Deputies**, has been held a Conference entitled *"Scuola & Religioni. Buone pratiche dell'offerta didattica formativa della scuola pubblica italiana"* (**School & Religions. Good Practices in the Educational Offer of the Italian Public School**).

IERS Project coordinators Massimo Raveri and Giovanni Lapis of Ca' Foscari University of Venice have been invited as speakers by the promoter of the seminar, **the deputy Hon. Davide Mattiello**.

The Conference, inaugurated by a message from the **Italian Minister of Education, University and Research, Hon. Stefania Giannini**, was meant to map the various good practices dedicated to the spreading inside the public schools of the knowledge of contemporary cultural and religious pluralism. There was a **strong concern** on the need to reinforce the dialogue with political and institutional representatives in order to enhance the educational offer with additional pilot projects.

IERS Project coordinators have been therefore invited to present the Project and its outcomes, the Digital



Aldo Moro Hall in the Italian Parliament

Modules, **as examples of good practices** aimed to create a school able to function as a place of cultural integration, anti-discrimination and citizenship education.

The meeting was attended by **deputies of the Commission on Culture, Science, Education**, such as **Hon. Umberto D'Ottavio**, and the **Prefect Giovanna Maria Rita Iurato**, head of the **Central Directorate for Religious Affairs** at the **Ministry of Interior**. Among the other speakers who took the floor there were professors of the University of Rome La Sapienza, University of Turin, University of Siena and



IERS Project Manager Giovanni Lapis explaining the IERS Project main outcomes

and University of Modena and Reggio-Emilia, who have studied the problem of teaching the history of religion in schools from different perspectives.

This event has been an extraordinary occasion for disseminating and exploiting IERS Project results at an institutional level, and it is a proof of a progressive awareness in Italy (as well as in other parts of Europe) of the increasing importance of tackling seriously the issue of religious pluralism in public education.

A video synopsis of the event (in Italian) is available [here](#).

The Voice of a Piloting Teacher and his Pupils

The opinion of a Pilot teacher:

The IERS project is "simply" gorgeous!

It gave me a lot in terms of knowledge, teaching methods and motivation for setting up a lesson on religions a lot more usable by my students.

The students appreciated the systematic approach to religions, comparing them with the right sociological-scientific setting, thanks to IERS Project's materials.

Giuseppe Rubino, teacher at Vocational School IPSIA G. Giorgi of Potenza (Italy).

The opinion of some students:

1) R.C., 16 years: the lessons proposed have been interesting! I learned that religion is meant to be "plural"-religions.

2) M.C., 17 years : I am Muslim, but I always wanted to know the "other religions" . Thanks to the materials my teachers used and their useful information, my desire became reality!

3) A.F. 18 years: I personally have a particular interest in religion! With the multi-religious approach I've learned that the study of religions is a important part of the educational growth.

Project duration:

12/2013 — 04/2016

Project coordinator:

Prof. Massimo Raveri
Giovanni Lapis
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Newsletter Editors:

Giovanni Lapis
Felix Petzold

Graphic Design:

Oliver Mayer-Simmet

Project No.: 539803-LLP-1-
2013-1-ITCOMENIUS-CMP

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This newsletter reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Contact

Prof. Massimo Raveri
Giovanni Lapis
Department of Asian and North African Studies
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Consortium

École Pratique des Hautes Études, Institut européen en sciences des religions, France
Universidad de Salamanca, Research Group in InterAction and eLearning, Spain
Universität Augsburg, Lehrstuhl für Didaktik der Geschichte, Germany
Syddansk Universitet, The Study of Religion, Denmark
Oxfam Italia Intercultura, Italy

E-mail:

iers.comenius@unive.it

Visit our website:

<http://iers.unive.it/>

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION THROUGH RELIGIOUS STUDIES

RELIGIONS, FUNDAMENTALISMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

Intercultural Education Through Religious Studies is an innovative 5-day training course addressed to secondary school teachers and educators interested in **promoting intercultural dialogue, active democratic citizenship and human-rights values**.

The course has been designed by top-ranked universities and world-recognized NGOs in the field of religious studies and offers **innovative approaches and ICT tools** to educate towards a constructive and critical understanding of **cultural and religious differences**.

The course covers the following topics:

- **Introduction to the Main World Religious Traditions**
- **Coexistence & Conflict, Difference & Similarities in Religions**
- **Religious Plurality in Contemporary Societies**
- **The Sense and Methods of Teaching History of Religions in Schools**
- **Use of innovative ICT methodologies**

The learning materials have been tested in different EU secondary schools (Venice, Paris, Augsburg, Salamanca and Odense) in the frame of an European project called IERS - Comenius multilateral project 2013-15.

COURSE FEE: EUR 350.

A cultural programme of the hosting city will be offered to the course participants.

All the cost related to travel, accommodation and subsistence may be covered by the ErasmusPlus grant.

WHO IS THIS COURSE FOR?

Teachers, School principals, educators, higher education institutions offering outreach courses for adults.

PLACE & DATES: Venice (IT) 14th-18th of November 2016
13th-17th of March 2017

Erasmus+ Programme

Erasmus+ is the EU funding programme for staff mobility and development in Primary and Secondary schools and for Adult Education. For detailed information on how to apply you can consult the section KA1 – Staff Mobility of the Erasmus Plus Programme Guide that can be downloaded from this page: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/discover/guide/index_en.htm.

The Erasmus+ grant is regarded as a contribution to your project costs. When applying for a Key Action 1 project for school education/adult education staff you are eligible to receive funding for the following cost headings on a per participant basis: Travel, Individual Support, Organisational Support, Course Fees and Special Needs Support

Please note that our courses are structured in such a way that they could be **fully financed by the Mobility Staff grant**.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

<http://iers.unive.it>

or write to:

iers.comenius@unive.it

