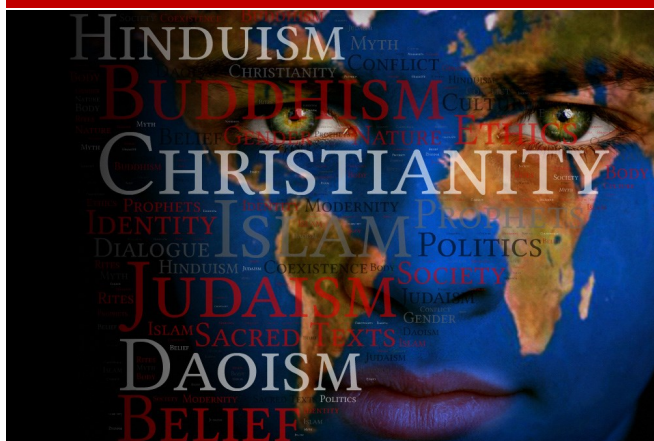


NEWS FROM IERS

IERS Newsletter #1

December 2014



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IERS Project Overview

Religious and cultural diversity are today more than ever a critical and political challenge, as the recent emergencies related to geo-political and economical global transformations clearly show. European countries are concerned by a big immigration flow that demands an educational effort in order to foster the mutual understanding and integration in a multicultural and multireligious context.

The IERS Project aims respond to these educative challenges. The project rationale is based on the conviction that an a-confessional, objective, high-quality teaching about religion supports the development of social, civic and intercultural competences, educating towards a positive and critical understanding of cultural and religious differences. Nowadays, European countries have different models of religious education in public schools, and often the teaching of religions through a scientific, critical, historical and intercultural lens is still in an experimental level.

For this reason the IERS project aims to involve high school in-service teachers by developing a complete set of didactic tools and training experiences in order to enable teachers and pupils to explore in a non-superficial way religions and cultures of non-European countries, as well as raising the knowledge of the religious traditions that contributed to the common European cultural Identity, promoting it in the best way suited for encourage intra -and extra-European cultural dialogue attitudes.

Main Outcomes of the IERS Project:

- Baseline study which analyzes the actual situation of teaching about religions throughout Europe.
- Innovative didactic tools such as Multimedia Digital Modules to be used in classroom activities, accompanied by a Handbook.
- A virtual community, created inside the eTwinning platform, in order to enable different teachers to review the projects' main outcomes.
- National and international workshops.
- Pilot activities in order to experiment and assess the Digital Modules in actual school environment. Involved teachers carry on the piloting phase in their own classes.

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

To apply for this newsletter write an e-mail to

iers.comenius@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.



Venice Kick-Off Meeting (07/01/14 — 10/01/14)

In January 7-9, 2014 the Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University of Venice hosted a three-day meeting to work with the European project partners in presence in Venice for launching the IERS project activities. Participants from the Institut Européen en Sciences des Religions, the University of Salamanca, the University of Augsburg, Oxfam Italia Intercultura, and University of Southern Denmark attended the event.

The meeting had two focal points:

The first issue was to set forth the Baseline study activities: This workpackage is meant to analyze and synthesize the state of the art of the partner countries' ap-

proaches regarding religious education and their relations with studies about religions and with the related European recommendations.

The second main point was to establish the topics for the Digital Modules. After a intense discussion, three main thematic areas, in which the modules has to be developed, has been unanimously decided:

- Introduction to religious traditions Modules.
- Thematic Modules on Conflict & Coexistence in Religion.
- Introduction to the study of religion Modules.

Paris' IERS Meeting (21/10/14 — 23/10/14)



From 21 to 23 October 2014, the second IERS meeting was held in Paris at Ecole pratique des hautes études head office. Participants from the 6 member teams gathered with several teachers from France and Italy. After the starting meeting held in Venice on January 2014, this second one was a crucial step in the progress of the collective work because each team is now fully engaged in his specific activity and has got an accurate overview of how the project is articulated around the different tasks. So the collaboration between all the teams is no more a priority conceived in an abstract way, but has become an actual process.

In Paris, the focus was mainly on the production of digital modules at a critical stage when the writing work is

largely engaged but when some useful adjustments can still be done: thus, some modules were divided in two while others were integrated as a page in larger ones. In addition, the presence of teachers from different countries and different academic disciplines (History-Geography, Religious sciences and English) was particularly fruitful to help the participants integrating pedagogical considerations, while the presence of an expert in education science confronted everybody to have a more reflexive view on the developments and limits of our involvement in the collective work.

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Baseline Study — Short Synopsis

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1. Introduction

The IESR baseline study of religion education maps and analyses teaching (about) religion in the official curricula for public upper-secondary schools. Be it in the shape of a time-tabled religion education (RE) (confessional or non-confessional) or as a dimension in other school subjects. Apart from looking at the five participating countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, it also highlights the most important trans-national European recommendations for teaching about religion in schools.

2. European projects and recommendations

Supra-national processes such as globalization, pluralization and migration are a challenge to Europe and its nation-states. Some challenges are met, on the European supra-national political level, with educational projects and recommendations, be it from e.g. the Council of Europe, OSCE or the European Commission, and be it with a focus on e.g. 'citizenship education', 'intercultural education', 'inter-religious dialogue', - or religion education. Common to these recommendations about religion education is a perceived need to ensure that educational institutions provide teaching *about* different religions (and non-religious world-views) in a balanced, impartial and pluralistic way. The main common aims are to contribute to the learner's capability for active citizenship and tolerance as well as intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in order to strengthen and secure social cohesion, democracy and human rights. However, differences and nuances can also be detected, not least when it comes to the question if this kind of teaching should primarily or solely aim at learning *about* religion from the neutral point of view of the study of religions or whether it should include learning *from* religions with regard to the existential and/or spiritual-religious formation of the pupils.

3. RE and religion-related topics in upper-secondary schools in European countries

As pointed out by many scholars, diversity is great when it comes to religion education in the public school systems of Europe. Inside the national systems, a great variety can also be detected, e.g. between the various German 'Länder' and between primary and upper-secondary school. With certain reservations, though, four main models or categories may be used to map the field: 1) No state-guaranteed time-tabled RE, confessional or not, 2) state-guaranteed, optional, time-tabled confessional (or 'separative') RE, with or without an alternative subject like e.g. 'Ethics' or 'Values', 3) state-guaranteed time-tabled non-confessional (or 'integrative') RE with or without a possibility for opting out, and 4) dimensional religion education, i.e. teaching about religion only as a part of other school subjects like history, art, literature etc. (Alberts 2007, Jensen 2005, Schreiner 2002, Willaime 2007).

Numbers 2-4 of these models are played out in the official curricula for upper-secondary public schools in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

3.1 Denmark

The Danish Constitution, § 4, makes the Evangelical-Lutheran Church the Established Church of Denmark, to be supported by the state. However, this does not have legal consequences for RE in public schools, and the Constitution does not hold any information as regards RE. Christianity is allotted more time in the various RE subjects than any other religion, and this but also other things give it a special and privileged status, especially in primary and lower-secondary school. RE in Denmark, nevertheless, is an example of state-guaranteed non-confessional, integrative RE.

In two types of the school-programs offered at the level of upper-secondary school, namely *Gymnasium* (STX) and *Higher Preparatory Examination* (HF), RE is a compulsory subject closely connected to the academic study of religions. All RE teachers at this level are educated to a MA level at one of the three Danish university departments for the Study of Religions. In STX RE is called *Religion* and it is timetabled with three lessons per week for one year, ending with an oral exam. At HF *Religion* is a part of a package of subjects called 'Cultural and Social Sciences' with one exam. Here *Religion*, together with *History* and *Social Science* is supposed to contribute with knowledge and skills built around cross-disciplinary themes. In HF and at STX it is also possible to choose a B-level elective in *Religion*. Despite differences, RE in both STX and HF aims at providing methods and theories pertaining to the academic study of religions and scientifically based knowledge about religion, religious and non-

religious discourses about religion and religions, and about the diversity of and within religions as well as about issues related to religions in society. The subjects aim at contributing to the students *Allgemeinbildung* and social formation by providing them with knowledge and analytical-critical skills. The major religions of the world play a key role in the curriculum as does the theories and methods of the academic study of religions, e.g. history, phenomenology and sociology of religion theories and methods.

3.2 Italy

The Italian Constitution Article 7 clearly distinguishes between state and religion (in casu the Catholic Church), making each of the two independent and sovereign in its own right and domain. Italy can thus be classified as 'secular' (*laicità*) with regard to Article 7. However, with regard to RE in public schools, the relation between the secular state and the Catholic church is one of cooperation and RE in Italy can be classified as a kind of state-guaranteed confessional and separative RE. A special agreement between the Catholic Church and the Ministry of Education ensures that *Insegnamento della religione cattolica* (IRC) is provided in the normal curricula in pre-, primary-, secondary- and upper-secondary school as an optional subject. As an alternative, pupils can choose between having specific didactical activities, individual study activities or they may choose not to attend school during the teaching of IRC. Some schools, however, have organized non-confessional courses on history of religions. State upper-secondary education is offered by the *Licei* (the general path), divided in six school-types. IRC teachers in *Licei* are authorized by the ecclesiastical authorities and needs qualifications, for example a degree in theology or a diploma issued by a study of religions institute recognized by the Church. The profile, overall aims and core contents in the curricula for the different *Licei* centres on transmitting the teachings of the Catholic Church with a focus on its dogmatic and ethical doctrines, Church history, as well as on the impact and contribution of the Catholic Church and Christianity on individual identity formation, social relations and the culture and history of Europe and the world.

IRC shall thus contribute to the student's personal religious-spiritual identity formation as well as to social-ethical-civic formation, including inter-religious and intercultural dialogue. Knowledge of 'other religions' and 'system of meanings' is thus also to be included in the teaching. Religion-related topics and themes can be found in some of the other subjects primarily aiming at providing the students with historical-cultural knowledge about different religions and religious aspects in a perspective of a European culture and history.

3.3 Germany

The German Constitution separates state and religion (church), yet at the same time guarantees that confessional religious education ('Religionsunterricht') shall be offered as a regular though optional school subject in state schools. Several alternative subjects are offered, depending on the 'Bundesland' in question, e.g. 'Ethik' and 'Werte und Normen'. Responsibility for the subject is divided between the Bundesrepublik and the Länder, and there are thus significant differences from one 'Bundesland' to the other. In some Ländern the confessional *Religionsunterricht* includes more than one religion and aims at a combination of religious instruction with learning about religions, and in quite a few Ländern there is a system of 'multi-confessional' RE.

This is the case in Bavaria, where Catholic, Evangelical-Lutheran, (Christian) Orthodox, Jewish, Old-Catholic and Islamic confessional RE and the alternative 'Ethik' are offered in the upper-secondary gymnasium. At the same time, in the law on education law and constitution of Bavaria, the Christian Churches and Christian tradition are mentioned as important foundations of education and 'Bildung' in general. A look at the curriculum for the different confessional RE types in Bavaria shows several common features. RE is meant to familiarize the pupils with the dogmatics, rituals and history of the church/religion in question and show its relevance for modern life and society and for the life and identity of the pupils. RE also aims at the student's personal religious-spiritual identity formation and realization of a so-called 'religious dimension' as a fundamental dimension of all human life and foundation of true values and morals. Other religions are also to be taught in order to develop the student's ability to make the right personal choices in a world with many possible worldviews. The alternative 'Ethik' includes learning about different religions but also aims at contributing to the student's personal and societal moral formation and ethical competences. Religions and religions-related topics are included in the curriculum for some of the other subjects in the Gymnasium, particularly History, with a focus on historical-cultural knowledge including religious-related conflicts.

3.4 Spain

The Catholic Church has played a highly important role in Spanish history, in relation to the state, in relation to society at large, and in relation to education in public and private state or state funded schools. During the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, the privileged position of the Catholic Church was crowned with a 1953 Agreement (Concordat) between the Spanish state and the Holy See. Education was "developed on the basis of Catholic dogma and religious teaching was imparted in all schools, public, or private, and at all levels, even at the university". After the death of Franco in 1975 things changed but as regards RE, they did not change that much. Moral education continued to be a battleground, and so did RE, and the Catholic Church is still exercising its strong influence. The 1978 Spanish Constitution, with the additional 1980 law on freedom of religion, and the 1979 Agreements between the Spanish State and the Vatican (Holy See), constitute the two basic pillars also in regard to RE. The state in principle is secular, and the state guarantees freedom of religion (§ 16) and the right to education, and education (§ 27) "shall aim at the full development of the human personality with due respect for democratic principles of coexistence and the fundamental rights and freedoms".

At the same time though, this right to education also secures the right of all parents to "obtain for their children a religious and moral instruction which is coherent with their own convictions" (§ 27.3), and with the 1979 Agreements between the state and the Holy See this in fact gives the Catholic Church a privileged position (the privileg-

es of the Church being written into the 1979 Agreement) in regard to education: Every school in every Spanish school in every more or less otherwise autonomous region must offer *confessional* RE as a school subject. Due to its confessional character it must be *optional* but it *must* be there, and it is the Catholic Church (Spanish Episcopal Conference), like in Germany, that decides and provides the contents (curriculum) and the teachers and their education. But the state pays for it all.

The ideological and political struggles about education, including moral and religious education, also show in the fact that almost every government since Franco has introduced its own new educational system and law. At the moment Spain is again in between two laws, the L.O.E. and the L.O.M.C.E. The confessional RE however is to be offered in both the old and the new one, but contents and conditions as regards the alternatives are not finalized in regard to the new system, L.O.M.C.E. In the old one, L.O.E. the alternative was 'History and Culture of Religions' - the only subject in the Spanish public school reflecting some of the ingredients and approaches in non-confessional integrative RE in other countries. In the new system it seems that an alternative called Civil and Social Values or Ethical Values is to be taught.

3.5 France

The French Constitution declares France a secular (*laïque*), democratic and social Republic. A consequence of *laïcité* so far has been the omission of a time-tabled religion education (RE) as a subject in its own in the public school system. In the last twenty years, however, there has been a growing political, professional and public focus on the necessity to give teaching about 'religious matters' ('*faits religieux*') a higher profile in the school, and the teaching about religious matters have been introduced into the curriculum of various school subjects, especially History. In upper-secondary school it is mainly when dealing with Antiquity or the medieval period, that the curriculum and guidelines for the various subjects include or make room for a study of religious traditions and matters. When dealing with the centuries after the Middle Ages, religious issues are mostly connected to cultural-political discussions, conflicts or war. But how and to what extent religious matters are included in History or other disciplines also depends on the choices made by the teacher. In some of the curricula or guidelines it is possible to choose religious matters, for example in the subject 'Civil, juridical and social education' where discussions about *laïcité* and religion can be included, or in Philosophy, where religious philosophical thinkers or philosophical discussions related to the concept of religion may be taught. In general, the approach to religious traditions and matters can be characterized as analytical-critical, stressing the need of historical-cultural contextualization and the distinction between an insider and outsider perspective on religion(s). A state supported program for in-service training of teachers in regard to teaching about religion in a professional scientifically based way has been located with the IESR - *Institut européen en sciences des religions*.

Concluding remarks

As is evident from the base line study on the situation as regards religion education (RE) in the countries participating in the IESR, it is but Denmark that has developed a study-of-religions based timetabled RE. And, even in Denmark this is so primarily in upper-secondary school.

As for the other countries, the dominating trend is still to have confessional/religious RE based upon the teachings of the religion/church in charge of the teaching, the contents and most often also the training of the teachers. However, in all countries, this has long ago become an option, in the name of freedom of religion. Moreover, the need to teach about other religions than the one of the pupils and their parents is evident, and it does color the curricula in various ways. But, the teachers are not very well trained for teaching about religions other than their own. In all countries with confessional religion education, the state now has to also find ways to offer confessional RE linked to other religions than the majority Christian religion. RE has thus to a certain degree become multi-confessional. In addition to this, the rule is that an alternative to the confessional RE is offered (Ethics, Values, or the like) but this subject does not entail much about religion.

In France, teaching about religion(s) is as is the case in Denmark for upper-secondary school, strictly study-of-religions based (and thus 'secular' rather than religious RE) but in France teaching about religion takes place as a dimension within other school subjects, not least History.

Consequently, the IERS project is an important way for the EU to help promote the implementation of various recommendations for a secular, objective, study-of-religions based religion education to help foster mutual understanding and tolerance.

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The Digital Modules' Contents

The IERS project involves the production of digital modules. The digital modules are intended for teachers in secondary or upper-secondary schools, in various school subjects (History, Geography, Humanities, Philosophy, but also Religious Education teachers). Each digital module focuses on a specific topic of the studies of religions, in order to provide teachers with up-to-date information about the three monotheistic traditions and religions of Asia. The perspective is the one of academic and scientific study and research.

4 modules written by Syddansk Universitet deal with the theoretical approaches, with an introduction to the study of religion and analytical tools and methods:

- introductory module about the study of religion
- comparative religion
- sociology of religion
- philosophy of religion

10 modules written by Università Ca' Foscari (Venice) and IESR-EPHE (Paris) give an introduction to the main religions. The approach is always the same: how each religious tradition originates? How does it form and develop in a special historical context? The internal diversity is taken into account. There will be space for presenting myths, rites and beliefs, themselves inscribed in history:

- 2 modules on Judaism (IESR)
- 2 modules on Christianity (IESR)
- 2 modules on Islam (IESR)
- 1 module on Hinduism (Università Ca' Foscari)
- 2 modules on Buddhism (Università Ca' Foscari)
- 1 module on Daoism (Università Ca' Foscari)

9 modules written by Università Ca' Foscari and IESR-EPHE focus to explore, in various aspects the theme of

religious diversity, conflicts and coexistence in the past and in the present:

- Religious diversity and dialogue through the history of China (Università Ca' Foscari)
- Gender and sexuality (Università Ca' Foscari)
- Religions and Fundamentalism (Università Ca' Foscari)
- Migration and minorities (Università Ca' Foscari)
- The body and the religions (Università Ca' Foscari)
- Major religious feasts (Università Ca' Foscari and IESR)
- Religious diversity in the Roman Empire (IESR)
- The three monotheistic traditions in Spain and Sicily (IESR)
- Contemporary Europe: multiculturalism and religious diversity (IESR)

The digital modules contents are divided into "sections" focusing on one particular aspect of the topic. Each section is built around 2 to 4 resources (texts, pictures, maps, videos, audio...) which can be used in the classroom. Each resource is accompanied by a quick presentation (for the teachers and the pupils) which provides the background in order to have a better understanding of its meaning and purpose. The resource also comes with suggestions for work with the pupils in the form of broad guidelines since detailed questions may be useful in a curriculum and useless in another. Every section is supplemented by a text which gives the teacher detailed information about the subject. Links between pages of different digital modules will encourage teachers and pupils to take a cross-cultural approach.

Digital Modules and pages can be used in whole, but each resource can also be reached directly and used per se.

Digital Interface

IERS DMs are multimedia contents developed by a team of researchers, high school teachers and technicians to provide teachers in Secondary School with tools for facing religious issues within their own subjects.

These DMs deal with three different approaches to religious traditions and practices. One of them is aimed to offer an approximation to some transversal and general topics involved in the study of religious traditions from sociological, philosophical and comparative perspectives. Other modules are devoted to explain the main roots, traditions and other rites from the most diffused religions in the world, both Western and Eastern religions. Finally, other DMs face intercultural questions involved in the coexistence of different religious traditions, especially those relevant in educational and school context, in order to let students become aware of multicultural diversity and so fostering the mutual understanding and integration.

The modules have been developed in HTML5 in order to be accessible regardless the device, be it a computer, a tablet PC or a smartphone. They include text, pictures and multimedia contents, as so as activities addressed to students and further information for teachers. They are available in English, Italian, Spanish, German, Danish and French.



A first prototype of these DMs, aimed to the study of Buddhism and Buddhist traditions, is available for its use in the project website (<http://iers.unive.it/about/contents-production/>). The rest of module, up to the 23, will be periodically released before April 2015.

From January 2015, a pilot stage will be developed at partner schools, in order to experiment the possibilities of such digital modules with students in classroom activities. In case you are a teacher or a school interested in becoming part of our network, please do not hesitate to contact us (iers.comenius@unive.it).

IERS Project eTwinning Community

One of the IERS project main outcomes are a set of support activities specifically dedicated to teachers. In order to have a centralized direction of these actions, the IERS Project chose to fruitfully use the eTwinning Platform, the Internet Platform dedicated to European Schools, part of the Erasmus+ Program.

Inside the eTwinning platform a dedicated "Twin Space" was opened, entitled "Intercultural Education through Religious Studies: School Paths" which is a little "project inside a project".

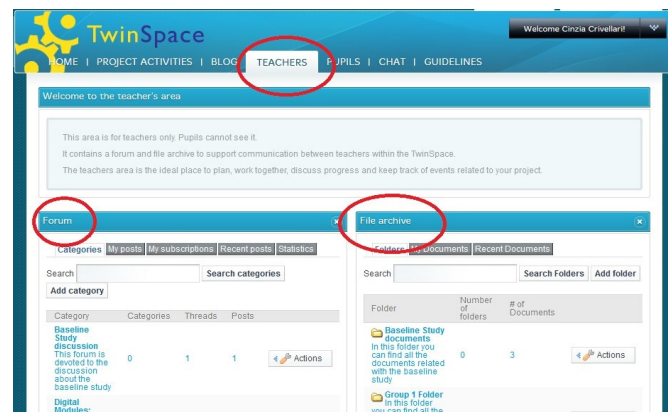
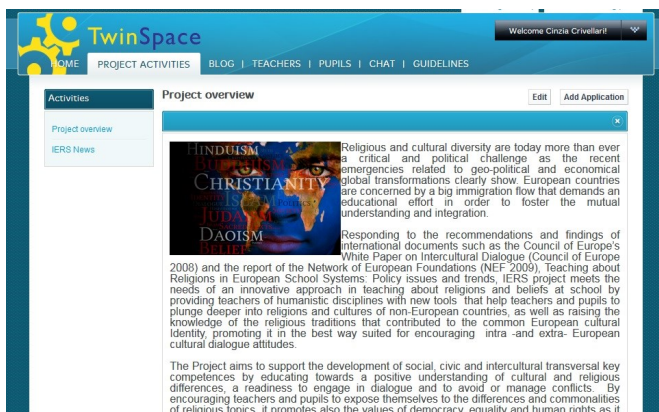
This virtual community provides a secure space which features public and private parts. The public one, which contains the Project Presentation, a space for presenting the various partner schools and the blog of the Project.

The private part can be accessed only by login and provides the working space for teachers: there is a file repository in which teachers can find the various steps of

the IERS Project main outcomes' production; that is, the Baseline Study and the Digital Modules. A forum and an internal mail service is available to communicate with the Twin Space Managers, the IERS Project organizers and the teachers from different countries.

This space is planned to enable the different teachers to review the projects' main outcomes, to exchange views, opinions and experience with other European colleagues, to provide feedback on the quality and feasibility of the teaching products, and to develop, with the support of digital modules' authors, new teaching methodology.

The "Intercultural Education through Religious Studies: School Paths" Twin Space has been promoted by teachers from two associated schools (IES Campo Charro from Spain and Liceo Foscarini from Italy).



Selection Of Our Partner School Presentation On eTwinning

Nyborg Gymnasium, an upper secondary school (USA: high school) is situated in the middle of Denmark - in Nyborg.

Nyborg Gymnasium offers three courses: the GCSE, the Higher Preparatory Examination and the International Baccalaureate (IB). Nyborg Gymnasium is a unique educational institution with an exciting and challenging academic, cultural and social environment with a strong international dimension. There are approximately 955 students and 95 teachers and a boarding school is located next to the school.

Website: <http://www.nyborg-gym.dk>

© Photo: Nyborg Gymnasium





Today's **Gymnasium Athenaeum** in Stade looks back on a long tradition as it is about 800 years old, one of the oldest schools in Northern Germany. There are approximately 1200 students and 120 teachers. In November 2013, Dennis Roeder, English and history teacher at the Athenaeum and one of our participating teachers, was awarded with the "German Teacher Prize 2013" for his extraordinary educational involvement.

Next Steps

Finalizing the Digital Module Production:

From the start of 2015 three first Digital Modules (with contents for pupils translated in national languages) will be available on the project website. These first three modules will deal with the contemporary issues of Religions and Fundamentalism, Religions in Migrations and Diasporas and the theme of the Body in the different religions. In mid-February other seven Digital Modules will be completed, and in mid-April all the 20 modules will be available on the project website.

Start of the Piloting Activities:

Starting from January 2015, all the teachers that have kindly offered cooperation in experimenting the Digital Modules in their classes will have full support by the Project Consortium through devices as the eTwinning Virtual Community. Teachers will freely choose the module they feel more interested in and pilot them in the modality they feel more comfortable with.

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The IERS newsletter is published from time to time and contains information about project implementation activities and achievements. All partners contribute to its contents, reporting also latest news on studies and research. To apply for this newsletter just write an e-mail to iers.comenius@unive.it.

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