

European history crossroads as pathways to intercultural and media education (EHISTO)

COMENIUS Multilateral projects

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Abstract

EHISTO (European history crossroads as pathways to intercultural and media education) is concerned with the mediation of history in popular (science) media and the question of social and political responsibility of journalists and other mediators of history, especially teachers, in the field of commercial presentation of history. The project responds to the increasing significance of a commercialised mediation of history within the public historical culture and reflects the fact that these representations, which do not always meet the EU standards for history education, can have a lasting impact on the young generation's understanding of history.

Using the example of popular history magazines, the project shall, besides the necessary basic research, develop didactically reflected materials for both history education in school as well as initial and in-service teacher training. On one hand enable a media-critical examination of history magazines and on the other hand, by working with the history magazines, the project addresses itself to popular interpretations of history from the participating countries and reflects

their similarities and differences in European cultures of remembrance. Therefore, this approach not only trains media-critical competences but furthermore enables a multi-perspective and comparative access to history.

The project EHISTO will last two years and is funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Programme with about 300,000 euros. Partners from six European nations take part in the project.

Keywords: *History, Methodology, Intercultural, Crossroads, Media, Critical Analysis*

1 INTRODUCTION

An active European citizenship has to be built on a public awareness of the common European heritage and shared values as well as on respect for diversity by integrating the different national experiences. Here, history teaching as well as the initial teacher training and in-service teacher training have to play a crucial role because all over Europe the field of history is still characterised by national conceptions of history. Different multi-perspective EU-projects have responded to the challenge of encouraging history education to increasingly take up more European topics, compare different national perspectives, to highlight transnational topics like migration and cultural exchange and to aim for intercultural competences. But the influence of extracurricular, commercial ways of presenting history in mass media on the pupils' view of history has not yet found adequate recognition in those meritorious projects, although it is widely known that commercial public history has a very high impact on layman-recipients and that particularly young people often have not yet the competences required to critically evaluate and decode the message of history presentations in mass media. Therefore a congruous connection of the build-up of intercultural and media-critical competences in dealing with the European heritage has yet to take place. It is the initial consideration of the EHISTO project that this challenge must no longer be neglected – not least to contribute to the success and sustainability of on-going and future projects in the area of promoting intercultural history education in Europe.

EHISTO links together civic with intercultural and media-critical competences. As examples for the purpose of dealing with the mass-medially conveyed cultures of history the project uses popular history magazines for the following reasons:

1. The magazines are subject to commercial conditions.
2. They represent a medium that both pupils and teachers consume and that covers very many topics, which are both a high curricular connectivity as well as up-to-dateness (due to its periodicity). In addition the magazines demonstrate curriculum-compatible mediality (text, pictorial documents, graphic) and are well obtainable for the use in lessons.
3. The popular history magazines in Europe are – in contrast to other commercially characterised media products (e.g. films, video games, comics) – on the one hand strongly focused on national markets. On the other hand, as it has been shown by previous studies (see below), the magazines from different countries have many topics in common (e.g. famous personalities; events with pan-European impact like wars, peace settlements, revolutions; transnational phenomena like migrations, culture exchange, religions, social and political movements). Dealing with topics like these – so called “European History Crossroads” – in classroom, may strengthen the pupils' cultural awareness by the ability to relate their own local, regional and national perception of history to the points of view of other countries. Therefore popular history magazines offer the best conditions for a transnational, intercultural and multilingual comparison of national conceptions of history.

By encouraging pupils to expose themselves to the differences and commonalities of national cultures of history in Europe the project is based on the findings of several previous projects: Council of Europe projects (e.g. “The Image of the Other in History Teaching”, “Shared Histories for a Europe without dividing Lines”, “Crossroads of European Histories - Multiple Outlooks”) as well as LLP-Projects (e.g. “Exploring European History & Heritage”). But EHISTO intends to take an important further step towards increasing the critical understanding of the history discourse in commercial mass media. The underlying motive is to fight xenophobia at its base and to encourage an inclusive European citizenship by providing the necessary tools for the history classroom.

The innovative potential of EHISTO consists of a close linkage between the awareness of the diversity of European heritage and of intercultural competences on the one hand and of the historical media competences on the other hand using the example of “European History Crossroads” in popular history magazines. This entails the encouragement of both “cultural awareness” and “social and civic competence” as well as “intercultural competence” as key competences of the LLP, for the social and historical foundations of civil societies being reflected and the latter being seen from multiple perspectives.

The project is based on the results of a conference in Amsterdam in 2011 at which the mass-medial presentation of “European History Crossroads” in popular history magazines was explored from a comparative European perspective and evaluated for its potential for the advancement of LL-key competences for history teaching. All project partners have a strong focus in the areas of “Teaching about European history and heritage in multiple perspectives”, “media and intercultural competences” and are closely linked to schools and teacher training. This is an important precondition because EHISTO is based on a continuous and close cooperation with school teachers and pupils of the pilot-schools in all phases. Some of the partners have collaborated at the International Society for History Didactics and EuroClio and participated in European projects or even coordinated them (e.g. “Regards Croisés”, “MIH-Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook”). They take now the next step to include extracurricular factors of mass-medial and commercial presentation of history and media education in conveying history in schools. After all the integration of the FWU in EHISTO involves decisive advantages for the Europe-wide supply of work materials in the form of complimentary Learning Objects (LO) because of its long-standing competence in the area of European cooperation in eLearning and dissemination.

2 PARTNERSHIP

The EHISTO project includes, besides the University of Augsburg as coordinator, five European research centers, which are all experienced in multi-perspectival and media-critical approaches to history education. The project also involves a number of European secondary schools, several associated partners, and four internationally renowned consultants. All these different institutions and partners will be working together in order to achieve the project aims.

Project Partners:

- University of Augsburg, Germany
- University of Salamanca, Spain
- Academy of Management Lodz, Poland
- Dalarna University, Sweden
- University of East Anglia, United Kingdom
- FWU – Institute for Film and Pictures in Science and Education, Germany

3 OBJECTIVES

The project aims at establishing intercultural and media-critical competence within the civic and history education in Europe by using multi-perspective and transnational historical topics („European History Crossroads“). The subject matter to be analysed is commercial mass media, especially popular history magazines, which often emphasize one-sided national narratives.

EHISTO joins other multi-perspective and transcultural civic education projects in the area of history education (e. g. “image of the other” and “shared history”). The project even goes beyond their aims by trying to close the gap between the historical images formed in school and those formed outside. This should give pupils further competences in analysing and assessing this phenomenon. EHISTO therefore develops and tests the innovative concept of a transnational and multi-perspective “historical media education”, which strives to close the observed gap between the scholastically conveyed conception of history and the history culture outside the school walls. The aim is to integrate this training content (comparing history presentation in national commercial mass media, the combination of media-critical and intercultural competence) into schools as well as initial and in-service teacher training.

4 WORKPLAN

Altogether, EHISTO has five main work phases that are structured in a coherent process:

Phase 1: Baseline study of the needs and best practice examples in schools concerning the intercultural and media analytical competences and recording the actual state of the required national market of popular history magazines to find some topics which are part of the magazines, the school syllabi and in the curricula of teacher trainings.

Phase 2: Development of teaching materials, focusing on media education and on multi-perspective oriented history teaching. At the same time, a module and a module guide for initial teacher training will be developed.

Phase 3: In terms of the results of phase 1 and 2, a course and a handbook for in-service teacher training will be developed.

Phase 4: The developed materials (teacher material and teacher manual, teacher module and guide for initial teacher training and the module for in-service teacher training) will be tested, evaluated and revised.

Phase 5: Documentation and publication of the EHISTO results.

5 OUTCOMES

Based on the research results obtained in the first phase of the project, EHISTO will develop theoretical and empirical tools in order to implement the project outcomes into the educational landscape. EHISTO, together with schools, institutions for initial and in-service teacher training and educational media experts, conceptualises

1. Learning objects that are available online, including teacher manuals for the secondary level focused on historical topics that are covered by national magazines and syllabi of all partnering countries (“European History Crossroads”). The materials consist of history and media-didactically edited content.
2. Project seminars for initial teacher training along with a module guide
3. Teacher course with a handbook for the use in in-service teacher training that integrates the new approach along with activating methods.

4. Finally, the project results will be made available for policy makers and stakeholders in order to contribute to the development of a European teacher education reference frame called “transnational history media education”.

6 CONCLUSION

At the end of the first year of the EHISTO project, the baseline study and the development of teaching materials are available in order to start the initial and in-service teacher training. These pilot experiences will take place during the first half of the second year and the results will be presented in the third meeting of the project that will hold in Salamanca at middle of May, 2014. The outcomes improvement will be applied during the second half of the next year in order to present the final results during the closure conference.

All EHISTO results are available through the official website of the project, <http://european-crossroads.eu>. In addition to the website, the project has presence in Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/pages/EHISTO/296656033780361> and Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/ehisto>.

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