

Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook: tools for learning history and geography in a multicultural perspective (MIH)

COMENIUS Multilateral project

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Abstract

MIH project (Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook: tools for learning History and Geography in a multicultural perspective) is a Comenius Multilateral Project funded with support from the European Commission that has been developed from 2009 to 2011.

Conceived from the idea of educating lower and upper Secondary School pupils in a process of construction of a European identity by involving them in the culture of other countries, MIH project meets this need by providing new methodological and ICT tools that could help teachers and pupils to plunge deeper into both cultures and languages of another nations via their History and Geography, and opens the way to introduce a European perspective in History and Geography school *curricula* and classroom activities.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, Geography, History, Learning Objects, methodology, ICT tools*

1 INTRODUCTION

MIH project, conceived in 2008, stems from two main forces: on the one hand, the ongoing debate, at the time, on European identity linked to the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty by member states; on the other hand, the process of school reform that is taking place in all countries of the union, focused on the notion of competence, was undermining the traditional system of disciplinary teaching and pushed to a new alliance between history and geography.

The MIH (Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook) project provides new tools that help teachers and pupils to plunge deeper into the culture and the language of another nation via its memorials, its history and its landscape/geography. Moreover, it intends to promote the common European identity, as it introduces a European perspective in the schools' History and Geography programmes, which are usually confined to national borders.

The multiculturalism of MIH (the **M** of the acronym) must be understood as sharing perspectives and study topics specifically related to common European or national identity constructions. One of the aims of the project, the most relevant, was to provide the schools with the national narratives that contribute to form the national identities, in the belief that this would be useful at the mutual understanding within the European area.

The "**I**" of the project is for "interdisciplinary" and clearly indicates that the Digital Modules involve multiple disciplines and key skills. The contents and the methodologies that the project was intended to develop were the historical and geographical for two reasons: first of all because most of the identity construction of nation states has been focused on the study of history and geography, and secondly, because recently, in some countries at schools, the two disciplines was increasingly juxtaposed to almost merge into a single "geo-history", or, in others, were incorporated in the teaching of "social sciences".

The **H**andbook should be considered a guide for teachers. It should accompany the teacher through:

- the epistemological and methodological approach to the teaching of History and Geography in a multicultural and interdisciplinary perspective, according to the results of the research carried out during the MIH project;
- the design and deployment of learning objects (Digital Modules), that allow, by using historical and geographical documents and contents, the construction of materials for individual learning and classroom activities;
- the comparative description, in terms of contents and didactical proposals, of a digital modules selection produced during the project.

The Handbook can be used both by teachers interested in multicultural learning as well as by those involved in CLIL projects. In the latter case, teachers have at their disposal the consistent path, the original documents and a general methodology that recent reports have shown to be missing.

The Digital Modules are the final tool of the project. The modules are available as free materials that can be used in class or for independent study by pupils and represent an important contribution to the development of digital educational content.

2 PARTNERSHIP

The consortium is composed by the following institutions:

- University of Salamanca (Spain).
- Pädagogische Hochschule Tirol (Austria).
- Hafelekar Unternehmensberatung Schober GmbH – Innsbruck (Austria).
- Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres – Créteil (France).
- University of Augsburg (Germany).
- University of Siegen (Germany).
- Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia (Italy).
- Społeczna Wyższa Szkoła Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania (Poland).

The University of Salamanca leads the initiative and has well-documented experiences in international projects. It is involved via its InterAction and eLearning Research Group (GRIAL – <http://grial.usal.es>), currently focusing on the production of educational podcasts and Learning Objects for both eLearning and bLearning contexts.

The German Universities of Augsburg and Siegen contribute with long expertise in Didactics of History in the fields of multicultural dialogue, methods and contents for teaching History in bilingual classes. They will share the responsibility for piloting the complete toolset.

The Department of History of the University of Venice contributes with scholars involved in teacher training, in History and Geography Methodologies and Didactics. They are responsible for the state-of-the-art Studies and the Methodology for content developing.

The Polish Academy of Management has a language unit and also provides training for teachers. The Academy has vast experience in managing European projects. All the staff is competent in inter-cultural education.

The trainers at the IUFM of Créteil, a public teacher-training institute currently attached to the University of Paris XII, have already developed school handbooks and participated in European cooperation (MOBIDIC project - <http://www.mobidic.org/start.htm>). They are responsible for the layout of the Handbook.

Hafelekar Agency staff is responsible for the evaluation program, dissemination and valorisation. They collaborate closely with the University of Salamanca in order to ensure the highest quality in the whole processes.

The Paedagogische Akademie of Innsbruck staff is expert in both teacher training, especially as related to the design of curricula, and language teacher training. They will design the training course.

3 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The aim of this Project is to build and share a set of tools including a Handbook, Digital Modules and a Teacher Training Course. They offered a structured path through European Contemporary History and Geography where the countries concerned were those of the Project partners.

MIH aims to:

- Further the development of a common European identity by having schools participate in the culture of other countries using their languages and their collective symbolic imagery.
- Contribute to the creation of a new generation of school textbooks supported by methodological guidelines for teachers and ICT-based contents that can support teachers involved in CLIL experiences, or who are simply interested in the area.
- Implement digital educational contents in schools.

3.1 Digital Modules design and production processes

Researchers involved during the project within the team produced 40 Digital Modules in original language; 37 of them have been also translated into English. The Digital Modules are available in the project website <http://mihproject.eu/dissemination/digital-modules>.

Contents' selection was carried out following the four topics agreed, taking care to indicate for each module the curricular level (according to the national educational system of the country where the module was produced), the kind of sources proposed for the didactical activities and a sum of methodological suggestions for its use in classroom.

The planning of the Digital Modules production involved researchers and teachers from each partner institution and from schools that participated in the project as associated partners. It was an important opportunity for exchanging scientific knowledge and for sharing teaching practices, by overcoming language barriers and advancing the mutual knowledge of content and teaching practices.

A comparative analysis of topics treatment in the Digital Modules revealed unexpected similarities, like for instance in the choice of the most significant events describing each topic or in the use of common sources. Common objectives to all modules are also the promotion of active citizenship, at national and European level, and the discovery of an historical and geographical past in its relation with the present time. From the didactical point of view, particular attention is devoted to improve in the pupils the acquisition of conceptual tools in order to use properly sources and documents, and the strengthening of spatial-temporal skills.

There was a pilot phase for testing the Digital Modules, where 73 teachers implemented the Digital Modules in their classes with approximately 800 pupils; students agreed to fill in a questionnaire proving their feedback with these learning experiences. Most of teachers used both materials and activities for enhancing their lessons but they did not need to significantly modify their plans for adding these resources as a complement for the lessons. Even when the Digital Modules were used to extend learning experience with extra-curricular contents (e.g. European cities), the experience has been welcomed.

Teachers appreciated very much the multicultural perspectives and considered that the whole Digital Modules provided a highly interesting multicultural approach, since it was possible to show the differences between the historical narratives in different countries and contexts, especially by analysing Digital Modules about the same topic coming from different learning scenarios. Sometimes the teacher decided to let students choose the Digital Modules they preferred and pupils were fascinated by the change of paradigm that relied on replacing the paper maps and textbooks with video clips and digital activities; they did also appreciate the use of digital contents and resources, as so as the different approaches that the use of such resources should allow.

3.2 Teacher Training courses development

One of the project tasks was the design and implementation of a training plan addressed to teachers. This was intended to prepare teachers in partner countries for using MIH methodology and products in classrooms. During the second year of the project, 73 teachers participated in a training course for then carrying out the pilot phase in classroom with pupils.

Each partner institution organized its own course in face-to-face or blended learning methodology, in order to introduce the goals and possibilities of MIH project results. Teachers knew the materials and contributed to define their use in the classroom according to the different school levels and curricular programmes.

3.3 Handbook for teachers

MIH Handbook has been produced taking into consideration the lessons learned by analysing users' experiences with MIH products and didactical solutions. The digital version of the handbook is available in the project website <http://mihproject.eu/dissemination/handbook> along with a set of video tutorials and some useful materials to support the production of new contents by teachers.

4 CONCLUSION

According to the EU Lifelong Learning Programme Objectives, MIH project was devoted to involve pupils in contributing to the creation of a sense of European citizenship, by promoting a multicultural approach of education in European schools with the support of Information and Communication Technologies and CLIL methodologies. Along the project lifecycle, the researchers' team has carried out each task trying to involve pupils –by means of their teachers– and has made them aware of the diversity and richness of the multicultural environment in which they live. From this point of view, the project provided the essential ingredients to enable this EU goal. As a challenge for the near future, MIH team will continue to point on multiculturalism as a key factor for developing new researching projects, academic proposals and training actions.

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