

A SEA TO GROW IN PEACE”
Cultural exchange programme for schools and youth from the two
sides of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea

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The Mediterranean Area is considered as a priority area in the programs of the Ministry for Education and University Research (MIUR). Because of the importance of relations and exchanges between schools to reinforce European integration and education to democratic citizenship, the Council of Europe encourages Member States to create opportunities of “meetings” by establishing a Program of Permanent Teacher Training (www.coe.int). The Program enables teachers/school executives to enlarge their knowledge by participating in training stages. Most programs are open to teachers from new democracies.

I personally had the opportunity to participate in some of the In-service Training Courses of the Council of Europe both in Italy and abroad with a scholarship, thus reinforcing my skills and exchanging experiences with European colleagues on different issues related with the promotion and defense of children’s rights in different Areas of Europe and the World and the fundamental role played by education to citizenship. Also the Socrates National Agency, INDIRE in Florence (www.indire.it), with which I collaborate as member of the National Commission for the Evaluation of SOCRATES Comenius 1 Projects, pays great attention to these issues and stimulates schools to promote projects to that end.

The Regional School Office of the Marches – General Direction – where I work as contact person for the Studies Office of the European Area/International Exchanges (www.marche.istruzione.it) – was chosen to organize a Visit for 13 experts and political decision-makers of the Socrates Arion Observation – Innovation Action Program from different European countries in Ancona - Senigallia from 17-21 May 2004 . The agenda of the meeting shall include issues connected to the concept of “exclusion”, equal opportunities, integration, multi-culturality and right protection. The Guarantor for Childhood, a new institutional office established by the Region Marches, shall participate in the event.

The Regional School Office of the Marches is committed to all initiatives implemented by MIUR, Council of Europe and INDIRE that bring added value to the “Marches model” and therefore accepted the invitation of the Mayor and Secretary of the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns (Association established in Ancona in April 1999 before the Ministerial Conference on the Adriatic Sea) for a strict collaboration to define a common path towards the building of a European culture, with special attention to the accompaniment and integration process of nations from the Balkan Area.

The collaboration and synergy between local administrations and the school sector must determine the conditions to implement and develop fruitful relations for exchange, training and cultural growth both at local and international level in order to build a reference picture of the numerous best practices that exist in school institutions and promote the construction of active citizenship and stable peace relations.

On 18 September 2003 a Program Agreement was signed between the Regional School Office of the Marches and the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns at the Municipality of Ancona to realize the program of exchange and twinning between schools and youth in cities and towns on the two shores of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea with name “A Sea to Grow in Peace” through the establishment of mutual collaborations between schools and local government institutions.

The Project was officially presented on 24 October 2003 in Rijeka (Croatia) during the 5th Annual Plenary Session of the Forum. Prestigious politicians and school representatives participated in the event.

The event shall be presented during INFORSCUOLA - 21st Conference Exhibition of School, Training and Orientation Didactics and Technologies, organized by the Regional School Office of the Marches at the Pesaro Trade Center on 25-26-27 November 2003. The Regional School Offices of the Marches home page contains texts and programs, as well as links with participating organisms and administrations (www.marche.istruzione.it).

Project activities are in progress and the Regional School Offices of the Marches – Municipality of Ancona, Council for Education, Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns have clear long-term objectives in mind. The creation of the Permanent Working Group (regional inter-institutional committee) shall favor the comparison and exchange between school actors and local administrators to implement accurate projects on the emerging needs of children and youth that, although living in different cities and towns, are united by the sea as a creative space for sharing and integration, education, socio-economic and cultural resource.

The parties are working to identify strategies to promote, support, reinforce, valorize exchange and twinning activities and projects between schools and youth in a bilateral and/or multilateral dimension, in which multiple subjects pursue the values of transnational co-operation, the affirmation of a culture of solidarity and peace, the reinforcement of European roots and identity.

The parties shall activate common actions aimed at implementing initiatives of education to solidarity and pacific coexistence, tolerance, defense and respect of human rights, sustainable development, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic education, legitimacy, active citizenship and responsible participation in school curricula and policies for orientation and support to education and youth, with the maritime basin of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea as common factor as meeting place for communities and populations that live on the two shores of the sea.

My sincere thanks to the General Director, Michele De Gregorio, to MIUR General Direction for International Relations, to Giuseppe Campagnoli coordinator of the Studies Office – General Direction, to the Mayor of Ancona, Fabio Sturani, to the Councillor for Education of the Municipality of Ancona, Maria Grazia Camilletti, to the Secretary of the Forum, Bruno Bravetti, to Claudio Grassini, to IRRE , to the members of the Permanent Working Group and to my colleagues of the School Regional Office.

Premise

The Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns (constituted by 50 municipalities of Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Montenegro and Greece) and the School Institutions believe that the meeting between the civic communities of the respective countries and the intercultural exchange of experiences and organized learning within the pedagogic field can:

- contribute to the economic, social and cultural growth of the people and of the coast territory,
- promote the construction of an active citizenship and foster stable, peaceful relationships,
- favor the attainment of the objectives to pursue within the scope of the European enlargement and integration.

In this picture, supported by the European Union structures and agencies, in the perspective of an interinstitutional collaboration, the Local authorities and the School Institutions intend to create a strong synergy in order to favor the setting up of new networks. These actions will be carried out through the promotion of twinning programs and exchanges of present and past experiences between the schools and young people living in different cities of the Adriatic and Ionian coasts and joined by their common feeling about the sea. The sea is considered in this perspective as a space of sharing and integration, and an educational, economic and cultural resource.

The program "A sea to grow in peace" intends to co-ordinate and consolidate the existing bonds between the cities, encourage new twinning initiatives between the school and the youth world, and activate an institutional and organizational framework to support the various initiatives.

The reference frame

Twinning cities were born after the second world war, when the people of the European continent felt the need to draw reciprocally near and cooperate to reconstruct Peace. In those years the first contacts essentially consisted in exchanges of experiences in the scope of the local life.

Today, fifty years later, the twinning initiatives - boosted by International Organisms and particularly by the European Union- have multiplied and reached the dimension of a real movement that connects the Communes of different countries to a network of dense and organized citizens.

Twinning bodies are a choice of solidarity. This choice is effective when it involves not only the governments and the institutions of the cities, but also when it stretches to the respective populations and particularly to young people, promoting their active citizenship and participation.

In the Final Declaration adopted by the Congress of the Communes and twinned corporate body (Anversa 2002), it is reaffirmed that twin actions must be strengthened to achieve the following aims:

- to live together, according to some key values of our society, such as harmony, prosperous environment and solidarity that supposes respect and mutual comprehension. Twinning represents a valid tool in the struggle against all the forms of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance; It contributes to the widening and the utilization of the European Union; It promotes active citizenship and local democracy, together with the integration of disadvantaged and marginalized people;
- to build a European welfare on the territory that is respectful of differences through economic cooperation, oriented to a sustainable development of Environment and committed to the safeguard of the resources for future generations; to approach again the people that live in our territory; to allow the exchange of experiences and "know-how", as promoter of sustainable development, to multiply the means and the available resources with the aim of increasing the comfort of its inhabitants;

- to achieve a European and international dimension of Education and Knowledge; to promote communication among different cultures, to strengthen the opportunities of education, training and the acquisition of know-how throughout life; to build relationships between cities in a pedagogic dimension and to create a favorable climate for European citizens; to favor the practices of cooperation between educational institutions, in order to increase a European and intercultural added value to education.

Twinning and School

Twinning is a way to participate in the life of schools and in the world of young people in a country; It makes it possible to exchange and discover the needs and expectations through the language, the interests, the habits, the traditions, the music, and the food. Within this context the themes of the multi-ethnic and the multi-cultural society can be tackled, and in the light of a real experience. To do interculturalism it means then to cause interaction and comprehension, in a human and cultural enriching mutual perspective.

To reach this aim, the twinned partners undertake a periodic exchange of various material, within a defined deadline fixed according to their resources, to their Internet access and to the twinned countries real logistic possibilities.

In this sense, it is advisable that the twinning project will be implemented by the first classes of all school levels in order to give all children the opportunity to grow together.

For examples it could be characterized by some operational tools that have as object:

- Themes and sketches (customs, cultural particular appearances);
- Information about everyday life and the organization of classes and students;
- News and researches about one's own historical roots and the partner's cultural background;
- Stories, experiences, questionnaires and information about original cultural features;
- Individual letters or group's letters (between classes or single students);
- Photos of the class;
- Small acquired manufactured articles or products made by the class or single students;
- Training occasions for students, teachers and the school executive committees in order to the exchange some experiences, methodologies and didactic materials.

The Adriatic and Ionian Sea as educational resource

The maritime basin of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea can offer some educational contents to the pedagogic action and to the twinning practices. For example:

- The sea: from borderline to space of integration. If in the past the sea was a line of natural boundary and demarcation amongst Nations and Continents, today it can and must be "lived" as an opportunity of encounter between people and their communities that share a common rich history, together with problems and a common destiny. It's an occasion for growing a culture of Dialogue and promoting "workshops" of Democracy and solidarity, where the future European citizens can be raised;
- The sea as the place of the memory and future perspective, through the circumstances of History, Culture and technological challenges. The stories of fishermen and other actors that have "lived" the sea. Characters that are rich of humanity, weave and refer to a patrimony of values and culture that must be recovered in order to give some sense to contemporary life;

- The sea as a micro system to be defended, against all forms of exploitation that is disrespectful of the nature rhythms and the habitat of Man. Education to the safeguard of the environment and biodiversity as a fair and sustainable development of the sea resource.
- The Sea as an economic resource and a source of comfort: the work of Man transforming Nature and entering into a relationship of mutual cooperation with the Environment.
 - The system of small and medium-size shipyards and numerous subcontractors working in the same sector is an essential part of the economic history of coastal cities. They reach great levels of integration and elevated specialization and constitute a challenge for new professional and occupational profiles.
 - The fishing system: the consumption of Fish, which is a highly nourishing food, within food education, is a particularly interesting theme to the young people.
 - The Harbor as a place of exchange between cultures and ethnic groups. The harbor as a privileged place for an education that is receptive to Dialogue and Welcome, a place that is open to the international dimension; the harbor as a doorway for runaways, illegal immigrants, and refugees fleeing away from war zones, and Hunger, and looking for a dignified future.
- The Sea and Leisure Time: the beach as a place to spend some quality time of relax and socialization. A place to recover a dimension of harmony within oneself, Nature and Environment. An opportunity to educate about one's own free time, and talk about responsible Tourism, using the opportunity of meeting new persons.

Program framework

Some common actions are suggested in order to stimulate twinning initiatives and set up schools and cities networks between the eastern and western coast of the Adriatic and Ionian Sea.

They can be divided into 3 macro-areas:

1. Communication and Social Areas

- Construction of Web Sites as containers of common experiences and videoconferences between young students of the twinned cities (with the contribution of teachers, technicians and experts).
- Incentive to the establishment of networks made up of more than two twinned cities in order to implement their cultural exchange. This goal can be achieved through the use of the Internet and e-mail in order to favor contacts between young people and classes and exchange didactic material and researches on the common theme.
- Organization of meetings and thematic seminars of study referring to the sea as an educational resource that is functional to the promotion of the young people's identity and integration. Participation in the "Socrates Actions"- "Youth- Leonardo" –"Socrates - Arion" (May 2004) and other initiatives promoted by the European Council (Study Seminars and/or In-Service Training Courses of the European Council). Organization of study visits, meetings to foster the partners' mutual acquaintance, and contacts between schools and institutes in order to implement mobility actions and exchanges of students/ teachers. Experiences of responsible tourism.

- The diffusion of European languages through the organization of Language Courses (Italian, English, German, French, Spanish) within initiatives such as the "European Day of Languages" (26 September of each year). Actions that target associations of operators and teachers who are involved in twinning activities. The schools that are interested in this project could provide places, modern technologies, human and professional resources.

2. Historical area

- Carrying out of historical researches, documents, interviews and production of various materials: CD-ROM and/ or video, tape recorded documents, students journals. Exchanges of material between the twinned cities.

- The identification of historical traditions and the elaboration of literary texts connected to one's own territory and the themes of the "A sea to grow in peace" program. Music, Art, Dance and Theatre as tools of knowledge and expressive communication. In-depth analysis of themes, such as Multiculturalism, Peace, and Childhood Legislation.

3. Skills area

- Realization of a competition to create the logotype of the twinned cities. Theme: "A sea to grow in peace" with prizes awarded by the Communes and/ or other sponsors.

Operational proposals

The Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Sea Cities and Towns and the School Regional Office will furnish an organizational support to implement and spread networks of twinned schools between coastal cities.

To this end the Permanent Working Group is established with the following members:

For the School Regional Office of the Marches

Three representatives of the School Regional Office of the Marches – General Direction,

One representative of IRRE-Marches,

One representative of High School executive managers,

One representative of Primary-Middle School executive managers,
appointed by the School Regional Office of the Marches.

Per the Forum

One representative of the Secretary Office,

One representative of the Mayor of the participating cities and towns,

One Councilor for Education,

One Councilor for Social Services – Youth Policies.

The Permanent Working Group shall be integrated from time to time with representatives of Bodies, Institutions and Associations that share the program and work for its realization.

The Permanent Working Group shall have the following functions:

- To identify strategies aimed at guaranteeing the diffusion and support to twinning and exchange activities between schools and youth centers,
- To coordinate activities on the territory and create a network with useful materials and information for the program realization,

- To provide assistance and consultancy to teachers to facilitate their work in twinning activities,
- To monitor implemented initiatives,
- To inform about the progress of the initiative;
- To evaluate needs and propose additions.

The Permanent Working Group shall prepare an operational plan of the activities, with details on offices, responsibilities and resources.

In particular, the parties undertake:

- to realize dissemination initiatives of the program “A Sea to Grow in Peace” (conferences, meetings, training activities, exchange of material, etc.) to promote and implement it;
 - to set up a dedicated database, preferably using existing archives in schools from different grades, youth centers, volunteering associations and social private sector, existing twinning activities on the territory and share the information on the net in order to multiply opportunities for meetings.
 - to make information, experiences and documentation for the program realization available on the net;
 - to counsel and provide assistance during the different steps of the program realization process and, in particular, for the submission of application forms for European funds to the European Council and other possible agencies, including national and international institutions;
- organization and realization of two meetings to compare and evaluate the program;
- to promote moments of training, comparison and verification of the program for the various participants, and especially teachers, school executive managers and local administrators
 - to link with other institutions and regional bodies engaged in the same program through the transnational co-ordination office established at the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns.

Resources

The financial resources needed for the realization of the program shall be made available by the Local Bodies. The School Regional Office of the Marches undertakes to offer technical-professional support to the schools in the network. The signatory parties agree upon and defined the scope and management modes of available resources.

Moreover, the parties shall act before Institutions and local, national and European Agencies to find funds that shall be managed in full compliance with the project finalities.

Schools from EU Member Countries or from countries which are entering the Euro zone (Italy, Greece, Slovenia) will be stimulated to apply to EU programs such as Socrates - Comenius- Leonardo, Youth, Arion and other EU Actions.

For schools from no-European Countries we will try to activate other financing sources from the European Council or from other national laws.

The Local corporate body won't fail to support the initiatives with its own resources together with the School Regional Office which will verify further opportunities of financial support with the Ministry for Education and University Research - MIUR- the Department for the Development of the Relationships International 4th Office, with the European Council, with the INDIRE- Florence (Ex BDP Agency National Socrates) and with the ISFOL Rome.

The search of human, professional and financial resources will be strengthened through the experiences networking.

notes

The Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities and Towns members are in Italy, in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia: Trieste, in the region of Veneto : Venice, Chioggia, in Emilia and Romagna: Cesenatico, Ravenna, Rimini, in the region of the Marches: Pesaro, Fano, Senigallia, Ancona, Civitanova Marche, S. Benedetto del Tronto; in Abruzzo: Pescara, Termoli; in the region of Puglia: Bari, Molfetta, Barletta, Brindisi, Tricase, Torchiariolo, S. Pietro Vernotico, Manfredonia; In Puglia: Taranto
In Slovenia: Koper;
In Croatia: Dubrovnik, Ploce, Chaff, Rijeka, Sibenik, Split, and Zadar;
In Bodnis-Herzegovina: Neum;
In Montenegro: Cafe;
In Albania: Valona, Durazzo, Lezhe, Saranda, and Shkoder;
In Greece: Corfù, Igoumenitsa, Parga, Patrasso, and Preveza.

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