THE ROUTES PROJECT
METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON THE USE OF THE ROUTES PORTAL FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

The didactic of migrations is particularly difficult and complex nowadays.

Within the Routes Project the word *didactic* has mainly two aspects: on the one hand it represents the research and production of all the material included in the Project and on the other hand the analysis and the use of this material.

Moreover, being on the net, the Project is not only addressed to the young who attend school, but to potentially unlimited and indefinite users, of any age and origins. For these potential users of the Portal we can draw on a kind of learning that was taught us by some French pedagogists many years ago, and almost forgotten nowadays: that of life-long learning or continuing education, concerned about evening course education for workers, vocational courses for social workers, and for the University of the third age, today. Therefore, the words "students" and "didactic" acquire a wider meaning than the one strictly related to school learning.

The particular complexity is also due to the fact that the migration issue has *now* a higher *specific weight* compared to other historical themes. Actually, history is always history of the present because the questions about the past are linked to the contemporary problems; this is still truer as for the theme of migrations, that has a stronger impact on the daily routine, on the individual and collective imagination, on the political programs and decisions, on the mass-media work, and on the social integration practices (both of inclusion or exclusion), than any other issues.

In addition, this theme has also much to do with our idea of future, that is, with our feeling of security or insecurity projected beyond the present.

The didactic, then, can't be aside from the fact that today the issue of migrations is object of a public and political use which can distort both the present and the past for electoral and

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propagandistic purposes. This is evident in any of the countries involved in the *Routes* Project: think of the recent French political actions towards Romany people. Therefore, the didactic must consider the so-called "pre-conditions" of learning, before any other matters. That is to say that, when students begin studying about migrations, they already have an opinion, a trend, a common sense, a mental and emotional universe formed on the basis of both information inputs and cultural models or personal experience. I mean, there is already a strong influence of myths and prejudices in them.

For these reasons the teaching and training of the **critical tools** must, more than ever, be the fundamental core of the didactic. Which are the main critical tools?

Firstly: **the relevance of facts**, both of the current facts and of the past ones. On this issue we often have ideas and opinions with no appropriate information, that is to say that the interpretation often prevails over the knowledge of the facts. The first critical tool is therefore the research and the critical use of the sources to really know what has happened and what is happening.

Secondly: we shouldn't *flatten* the past on the present, but we should distinguish the events in a spatiotemporal sense, in a synchronic and diachronic way, that is, we should reconstruct **the context**. All this helps to avoid hurried comparisons between completely different contexts: how can we compare the economic Italian migration of half a century ago to the Romanian and Slovakian one of today? What about the situation of Germany, Belgium, France and England which hosted the emigrants after the first or the second world war compared to their situation nowadays?

Thirdly: besides distinguishing it is necessary **to identify the links**, the constants, the global trends which are common to different countries, to the past and the contemporary world. In other words, distinctions and analogies teach us to consider the identities, the national, the European and the local identities, in a flexible way. This debate is very strong today, both in Italy and in Belgium.

The main teaching tool for the comparison and the distinction is represented by the **key words**, that is, by the appropriate use of analytic and interpretative categories. For example, it is important not to confuse the political asylum with the economic migration, to distinguish the

Jewish Diaspora from the expulsions after the crisis of 1929, to think about the differences between integration and assimilation, prejudice and stereotype, between rights and duties, freedom and security, nation and State, nation and Europe, and so on.

We can say therefore that the theme of migration is not only multidisciplinary but it represents an actual crossroad of the contemporary knowledge. The peculiarity of this knowledge is that it implies the relationship with the 'other', that is the problems related to the identities. So, the critical learning involves a didactic procedure that works as **a special mirror** in which, who looks for his/her own image will find it only in relation with the 'other' and in a dynamic way. In few words, **the identity is seen as relationship and change.**

Lastly, some considerations about two of the fundamental tools of the Portal: the English language and the information technology. Both of them are more and more used in the teaching of any subjects and, for some aspects, compared to the past, they allow a better work on the communication dynamics or on the logic processes of the hypertext: the identification, the connection and the cross-reference.

But even here, we can notice the particular weight of the current and contemporary times. And therefore, for a critical training, besides using these tools, we should also **ask ourselves some questions**. For instance, what is the difference between the research of the sources on line rather than in the paper records or archives? What is the difference between a photo found on the net instead of a photo included in a family album, or in an emigrant's dossier of a police record? What is the difference between a migrant today and a migrant of the past, when there wasn't internet, nor T.V. and English was not an international language yet? Between the perception of the events and of the distance today and the one when the news update was not in real time? Between the migratory policies today and those when the governments did not have the availability of the current database? All this means to work on the depth of time and on the relationships among the different generations. What I briefly said is very difficult to carry out and verify in the everyday teaching and needs teachers at a high professional level. But the training of the 'school operators' could be an issue to deal with, in a better way, in a future European Project.

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