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**REINVENTING EDUCATION**

2-5 June 2021

**VOLUME I**

**Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"**

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**VOLUME I**

**Citizenship, Work and The  
Global Age**

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This volume contains papers presented in the 2nd International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” which took place online on 2-5 June 2021. The Conference was devoted to the needs and prospects of Reinventing Education.

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education ‘for what’ as well as ‘how’ and ‘for whom’ has become unavoidable and yet it largely remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems. Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and interdisciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners’ mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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## Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

### A Premise

What is education for? This philosophical question cannot be answered ignoring contributions from social and educational sciences. The growing focus on learning outcomes should have prompted discussion on the values and aims in defining policy objectives and developing accountability systems and evidence-based approaches. Whereas for years public discourse on education has most frequently been confined to a merely sector-based perspective, without addressing the relationship (i.e., interdependency and/or autonomy) with globalised societies or to face the new challenges of contemporary's world. The relationship between education and society and the issue of aims can be observed in a new context which has seen the weakening of the society-nation equation and the strengthening of global dimensions.

The crisis born of the pandemic is more and more global and multidimensional. It inevitably obliges to ask what the post-pandemic socio-economic scenarios could be and what challenges might emerge from the transformations of education and training systems and policies. Many researchers and observers think that the most relevant of these challenges is that of inequalities between and within countries. The medium-long term nature of many of these challenges poses a complex question: does the pandemic tend to widen or narrow the time-space horizons of people perceptions, rationalities, and decisions?

For decades, the field of education and training has witnessed continuous growth in globalization and internationalization: just think of the role of the large-scale assessment surveys and the increasing influence of international organisations. Phenomena and concepts such as policy mobility (lending and borrowing) or – within another field of research – policy learning, as well as global scaling up, global-local hybridization and policy assemblage might find a useful opportunity of debate and in-depth analysis in this stream. This might also be true of the related issue regarding how comparative research must be carried out and of the relationship between some government 'technologies' adopted in the latest cycle of policies – for example, quasi-market, evaluation, and autonomy of schools and universities – and the ever more criticized neo-liberal paradigm. In this framework, without any revival of the political or methodological nationalism, a critical rethinking of the national dimension, perhaps too hurriedly assumed to be 'obsolete', can be useful also for a comparative reflection. As to our continent we are in the presence not only of

globalization of educational policies, but also of their Europeanisation, due to the extent of the European Commission's strategy and its Open Method of Coordination. Beyond the official distinction between formal, non-formal, and unformal learning, it seems European initiatives and programmes shape a new policy world preparing the future of education, particularly through different expert networks, new ways of conceptualizing knowledge, and disseminating standards. On these issues there is no lack of reflections and research, some of which very critical indeed, whose results deserve to be broadly shared and discussed, too.

The equipping of the new generations with the tools – knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values – to live in a plural and interconnected world is delicate matter indeed in Europe. It is the issue at stake for the encounters – and at times clashes – between old and new visions and forms of pluralism and secularism. Around this theme are developed educational policies and strongly heterogeneous curricula. Such topic is linked also to the variability in young people's competences and attitudes towards 'cultural otherness'.

Life-long learning is another question of notable importance at international level as it implies both a diverse temporal horizon for education and its link to the dimensions of work. And a different approach to the relationship between school and extra-scholastic (life-wide) learning is also implied. From this stems the necessity of greater investment for example in both the early years (ECEC) and the adult education. We might ask, however, how much has been done to achieve this goal, and whether it risks remaining a fascinating but largely unfinished project for a long time.

Within a general rethinking of the aims and the means at the disposal of education systems, many papers ask whether until now enough has been done to educate towards citizenship and democracy and whether various national educational systems have adopted this issue as their core mission.

A second group of questions derives from some crucial challenges – such as the dramatic deterioration of the biosphere, the climate, and the health – which impose both the necessity of rethinking this mission in a planetary context and redefining the 'citizenship' as a concept not merely national, but multi-level, that is ranging from global to local; and in our continent European, too. How deeply are our nations presently involved in the task of educating their citizens in terms of knowledge of global and trans-national issues? And are they striving to build a collective common consciousness in Europe? What help is being given in this sense by proposals elaborated and experiences promoted by international organizations or the EU?



Finally, starting from infant and primary schools, what weight does citizenship education have in schools, what approaches are adopted and what have shown to be the most effective? What didactics are applied and what seem to be the most promising experiences? To what extent are teachers prepared and motivated and students interested in it? Universities and adult education should also play a role in citizenship education. What proposals and significant experiences can be described and examined?

The Volume also includes contributions on the relationship between education and economic systems which is a classic subject of social science. During the twentieth century, the functionalist perspective established a close link between 'school for the masses' and the construction of individuals personalities conforming to values and social objectives. Professions have then become more and more specialized and therefore requiring ever more targeted skills. Hence, the insistence on the need to train future workers in technical and technological skills, as well as more recently in the 'soft skills' climate, increasingly necessary in certain sectors of the economy (Industry 4.0). The alliance between the functionalist perspective and the neoliberal visions finds its conceptual and practical pivot in the employability conceptual frame. On the other hand, since the 1970s, critical research has highlighted that formal education system contributes to the reproduction of inequalities, confirming and strengthening hierarchies and power relations between different actors of the economic system. These lines of investigation have underlined the weight of cultural and social capital in determining school performance, but also the inflation of educational credentials as a combined effect of mass schooling and changes in the economic system. In more recent times, the fragmentation of the educational and training systems, because of the multiplication of public and private agencies in charge of training citizens, in addition to the explosion of the non-formal and informal as learning places (e.g., on the Internet), challenges the school to maintain its primacy as a place responsible for training workers. Moreover, it questions its ability to continue to represent a social elevator and / or a place of social justice.

The issue of the reproduction of inequalities and differential returns of educational qualifications fuels lively and stimulating interdisciplinary debates: economic stagnation, mass unemployment and job instability affect the inclusion of young generations in the labour market. Recently, in the context of lifelong learning policies, the relationship between training and work has become increasingly central, but the definition of the goals of these policies is not neutral: in the neoliberal mantra it is a question of guaranteeing the adaptability, employability and autonomy of each individual, so that one can occupy a place in society according to the dominant values. There is no shortage of critical voices about this individualistic and functionalist interpretation

of the Lifelong Learning vision. On the other hand, even the supporters of neoliberal-inspired policies want an inclusive training offer (from a meritocratic perspective), as it is essential for recruiting resources and supporting flexible production systems focused on knowledge.

The attention of scholars focuses on the effects of the 'knowledge society' in the educational system of European countries. In this perspective, several studies have focused attention on the orientation processes that contribute to the reproduction of inequalities as the students from the lower classes tend to orient themselves, and are oriented by their teachers, towards the vocational paths, stigmatized within the educational systems.



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# Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue at School in the Process of Building a European Citizenship. Principles and Practices

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**ABSTRACT:** *European Union has undergone a profound evolution passing gradually from six to twenty-seven States, thus giving rise to a community where the identities of Europeans merge into a vast multicultural platform. In following the Schengen agreements, many borders have been removed and European citizens became free to move within the EU boundaries to study and work abroad and to experience collectively the common space. Thanks to the new and old migratory flows, in many cities there is now a great variety of languages and we live, more and more, in a community of culturally different individuals. In this frame, nowadays, in schools, universities, offices, the religious topic is sometimes the subject of debates and controversies, others it is left completely out of public space. However, if it is true that religion can represent the place where the person redesigns his identity, today the religious element can constitute the fundamental content of citizenship as an ineliminable dimension of the pluralistic configuration of contemporary society. The paper aims at giving an overview on some recommendations and guidelines produced in recent decades by European institutions on the function of interreligious dialogue in the construction of European citizenship and it focuses on the role played by religious actors in this process. Finally, it dwells on some case studies and practical applications.*

**KEYWORDS:** *European Citizenship, Education, Religions, Pluralism, Interreligious Dialogue*

## 1. Religions, cultures and citizenship

Religious pluralism is a constitutive reality of European societies, but the coexistence among the different faiths has not always given rise to dialogue. The social, political and cultural changes of the last decades transformed the geopolitical scenario of religions, generating fertile ground for inter-religious exchange but potential conflicts, too. Suffice it to know the change that occurred following the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9, 1989), the inter-ethnic and religious conflict that tore apart the former Yugoslavia, globalization, the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent intensification of the migratory phenomenon. All

these historical events produced in European societies a hybridization of cultures, ethnic groups and religious systems that threaten the continuity of the social bond. As concerns this phenomenon, in recent years the European institutions have provided the Member States with principles that guide the management of religious pluralism, particularly in the field of education in relation to the construction of citizenship.

The European institution that mainly deals with issues related to education in religious pluralism is the Council of Europe. In one of its recommendations, it describes education for democratic citizenship as «a factor of social, mutual understanding, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and solidarity which favors the establishment of peaceful and harmonious relations between peoples and within them» (Recommendation 12/2002 *Education for democratic citizenship*). In this sense, it is interesting to note how the initiatives promoting dialogue between institutions and religious communities and/or within the latter are often delegated to local realities that are held responsible for «making citizens aware that the mixture of cultures and civilizations, and their cultural enrichment, have contributed and continue to contribute to the construction of Europe, its cultural heritage and its values» (Recommendation 170/2005 on *Intercultural and inter-faith dialogue: initiatives and responsibilities of local authorities*). Local democracies should also «pay attention to the involvement of young people in intercultural dialogue, including through the development of policies aimed at preparing them to live in multicultural societies» (Recommendation 245/2008 *Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue: an opportunity for local democracy*). To fulfil this mandate, according to the Council of Europe it would be essential «to promote knowledge of religions in schools, an integral part of the knowledge of the history of humanity and civilizations, as well as indispensable for the history of conflicts between peoples» (Recommendation 1720/2005 *Education and religion*). Therefore, citizens are called to be critically aware and «invited to have a climate of openness in the classrooms to foster social, civic and intercultural competences» (Recommendation 195/ 2018 *On promotion of common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching*). Consequently, we move from a citizen's responsibility to activism up to critical awareness first acquired through tolerance, passing through dialogue and therefore from a 'passive' acceptance to an active search for confrontation with the other.

What do European institutions mean when they refer to 'the other'? We can find an initial answer in some recommendations that define and frame the different cultures of Europe. Starting from Jewish culture, in 1987 Council of Europe defined 'considerable and distinctive' «the contribution that Jews and the tradition of Judaism have made to the historical development of Europe, in the cultural field and other fields» (Resolution 885/1987 *Jewish contribution to European culture*) and welcomed any enhancement initiative in this sense, such as the instruction of the symposium on Sephardi Jews and European cultures

held in Toledo on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> April of the same year. With the same intent, Recommendation 1162/1991 on *Contribution of the Islamic civilization to European culture* described the Islamic culture:

Islam together with Christianity and Judaism, has had, over the centuries and in its different forms, an influence on European civilization [...] Islam has suffered and still suffers from incorrect presentations, for example through hostile stereotypes [...] and there is very little awareness in Europe of both the importance of Islam's past contributions and the potentially positive role of Islam in today's European society. Historical errors, educational eclecticism and an overly simplified media approach are responsible for this situation [...] a balanced and objective description of the history of Islam must be included in educational curricula and textbooks.

Also in this case, Council of Europe invite member States organizing thematic days on specific topics such as the institution of European Day of Averroes with the *Resolution on Islam and European Averroës Day* (1998), in which reciprocal influences were recalled in the fields of sciences and arts and contribution of Islamic civilization to European culture, especially through 'Al Andalus', the placement of Avicenna in this civilization and the influence exercised by Averroé on the culture of the Christian Middle Ages marked by obscurantism.

During the years Council of Europe produced other documents calibrated on the historical need of the time. For example, in the late 80s, some recommendations were promulgated on the relationship with Orthodox churches after the fall of Berlin, on the importance of the Yiddish culture and on Roma and Travellers integration in society. This last-mentioned case focuses on the school integration of Roma children and on strategies to avoid school dropout (Resolution 1989 *On school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children* and Recommendation 4/2000 on the *Education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe*). In this sense, strategies include, for example, the participation of representatives of the Roma community in the development of educational material on the history, culture or language of the Roma and the support for the training and recruitment of teachers within the Roma community.

Still on the study of other cultures, it's important to stress the role of the teaching of history in the reconciliation of people. Recommendation 1283 (1996) on *History and the learning of history in Europe* points out the political role of the History, because it can foster «understanding, tolerance and trust between individuals and peoples of Europe». It is then underlined that the teaching of History should allow students to acquire the intellectual capacity to analyze and interpret information in a critical and responsible way, to grasp the complexity of subjects and to appreciate cultural diversity. Recommendation 15 (2001) on *The Objectives of History Teaching in the 21st Century* highlights the potential of the teaching of history as «decisive factor of reconciliation, recognition, mutual understanding and trust between peoples». The

teaching of history would also help the identification of stereotypes based on national, racial, religious and other prejudices by stressing, in the programs, the positive reciprocal influences between countries, religions and schools of different thought in the historical development of Europe.

## **2. Pluralism, intercultural education and interreligious dialogue at school**

Yet, if we look at the different European contexts, we realize how the mosaic of educational systems is varied and how the paradigms on the relationship between education and religions are extremely diversified. According to some scholars such as Flavio Pajer (2007) and Wanda Alberts (2008), we can group the various types of religious teachings in Europe, classifying them according to the criterion of confessionality, into four categories:

1. theological-based religious teachings - *teaching/learning into religion*: openly confessional, close to the parish catechesis, managed on their own by the churches in those countries where one or the other Christian confession can still enjoy of direct influence in public school system. This is mainly the case of Ireland, Malta, Poland for Catholic religious education, Greece and Romania for the Orthodox area;
2. religious teachings based on theology and science of religion - *teaching/learning from religions*, as in the case of Italy in which the scholastic religious discourse is in continuity with catechesis because it preserves the same material object, but differs because it does not have the same pastoral purposes, making own the same educational purposes as the school;
3. teachings based on the sciences of religions - *teaching/learning about religions*, courses of religious and ethical-religious instruction that do not derive from a particular theological vision and which tend to present facts, doctrines and systems religious in the most impartial way possible and in comparative terms. This is the case, for example, of the teaching in England 'Multifaith religious education' or the Swiss canton of Zurich and Ticino, for example, which introduced a compulsory course in 'Religion and culture';
4. intradisciplinary approach to the religious fact - *teaching/learning out of religion*, as in France, the only European country where, under the old law of separation between state and churches, it isn't possible for public schools to impart religious teachings, not even of a non-confessional type. The only possibility is to enhance the 'religious dimension' in the contents of the various subjects.

The question then arises whether these different approaches to the management of religious pluralism in European societies follow the

indications of the European institutions or whether they simply arise from single national histories and experiences with the religious fact. Recommendation 1093 (1989) on *Education of the children of migrants* states that «the goal of intercultural education is to prepare all children, indigenous and migrant, for life in a pluricultural society». Resolution 312 (1995) *Response of education systems to the problem of racism* attests that school systems can effectively contribute to the promotion of respect, tolerance and solidarity towards people or groups of different ethnic, cultural or religious origins through actions such as the use of educational material that reflects the cultural diversity of European society and encouraging initiatives aimed at promoting cooperation between schools and local communities.

According to Recommendation 1720 (2005) on *Education and Religion* «governments should promote education in religions, encourage dialogue with and between religions [...] and teach children the history and philosophy of major religions with objectivity». Council of Europe also admits that «unfortunately, across Europe there is a shortage of qualified teachers to give comparative education in different religions».

To attempt to remedy these shortcomings in 2007 ODHIR (the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE) produced the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, a more implementing and emblematic document on the management of religious diversity at school, translated into Italian in 2015 and published in the text *I Principi di Toledo e le Religioni a scuola* (Saggiolo/Bernardo, 2015). These guidelines are divided in three main areas:

1. The preparation of teachers, in which is emphasized that the need for an accurate preparation based on a solid tradition of studies should correspond to a profound commitment to guarantee the student religious freedom. Furthermore, teachers should ensure that they have intercultural and interreligious skills which should therefore enable them, among other things, to understand the impact of religions and on society and culture, be aware of the religious diversity present in the communities and be able to connect it to global trends (the concept of *glocality*: knowing the local to understand the global) and create a learning environment where all students feel respected in expressing their opinions, guiding students in discussions and debates in a balanced way.
2. Programs and curricula. This section emphasizes the importance of evaluating the objectivity and equity of a teaching, so that there is no disparity between the majority religion and the other faiths present in the school. Attention to the specificity of the territory is a particularly crucial aspect: the training offer should also be structured with respect to the different local manifestations of religious plurality. The preparation of curricula, textbooks and teaching materials for teaching on religions should

therefore be elaborated in an inclusive manner and trying to avoid material marked by prejudices that corroborate negative stereotypes.

3. The role of families and religious communities. It's crucial take into account and not weaken the role of families and religious organizations in transmitting the values of their faith by holding remember that the principles enshrined in international law on this matter are clear in affirming that parents have the right to educate their children in accordance with their religious or philosophical beliefs.

### **3. The role of religious actors in education for dialogue**

We focused on European principles that regulate religious pluralism and on how fundamental the interaction and relations between school systems and religious communities are in educating to interreligious dialogue. Let us now try to understand briefly the positions of some religious actors on the topics of pluralism and dialogue. It is useful to start with an emblematic document produced jointly by the representatives of different confessions during events such as interfaith councils or forums.

In 2008, European Council of Religious Leaders produced The *Berlin Declaration on Interreligious Dialogue*. The text states that religions have always permeated Europe; the various places of worship in the area are proof of this. Furthermore, it is emphasized how interreligious dialogue is capable of enhancing both the differences and the things in common to those who practice it and that it consists in negotiating truths or making sacrifices of one's beliefs, but in one exchange of experiences that must enrich the other's point of view. The document affirms, finally, that everything must take place within the framework of respect for and promotion of human rights and that interreligious dialogue should help to rebalance asymmetric relationships in terms of power, economic and/or social disparities that often occur between peoples. Religious leaders therefore commit themselves in a common action against poverty, violence, ethnic, religious and gender discrimination.

Let's briefly analyze some of the most important documents produced by the religious institution that is the main and greatest driving force (for its weight and for its possibilities) of interreligious dialogue from 1965 to the present day: The Catholic Church. After Vatican Council II and *Nostra Aetate* declaration – document that laid the foundations for the relationship of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions – over the years various documents on dialogue with other confessions and on religious freedom were produced.

In 1991 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue jointly with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples promulgated

*Dialogue and Proclamation* in which The Catholic Church identifies four main forms of interreligious dialogue:

- a. The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in a spirit of openness and good neighborliness, sharing their human concerns;
- b. The dialogue of action, where Christians and others actively collaborate for the common good (e.g. offering services, solidarity works, distribution of food, clothing, blood donation, neighborhood cleaning)
- c. The dialogue of theological exchanges, where experts seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values;
- d. The dialogue of religious experience, where people rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches, for example as regards prayer and contemplation, faith and the ways of seeking God or the absolute.

Later, it was added also the interreligious dialogue as a 'political tool' for promoting peace in international relations and for facilitating the coexistence of communities within a State (for example, the 'agreements' are the result of the work between religious and political institutions) or the world, as in the case of Pope Francis and Aḥmad Muḥammad Aḥmad Al-Tayyib. These two emblematic figures for Catholicism and Islam met on various occasions, most recently in 2019 when they jointly produced the *Document on Human Fraterniy for world peace and common coexistence* (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019), in which they declare to «adopt the culture of dialogue as a way; common collaboration as a conduct; mutual knowledge as a method and criterion» and define the diversity of religion as «the fruit of a wise divine will, from which derives the right to freedom of belief».

The institutions of the Islamic world articulated the discourse on religious diversity and interreligious dialogue especially after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The historical-political scenario of the time made necessary to take clear-cut positions: it was not only a duty to dissociate from violence condemning terrorism and fundamentalism, but above all put the dialogic nature of Islam and the history of its peaceful interactions with other cultures and religions in the center of their teachings. There are several initiatives promoted and statements produced in the last two decades. An example is the interreligious meeting called *Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions* held in Kazakhstan in 2003 in which, among other things, religious leaders state that the diversity of religious beliefs and practices should not lead to mutual suspicion, but to «mutual acceptance and harmony that enhances the distinctive features of every religion and culture» and that educational programs are essential tools for promoting positive attitudes towards religions and cultures.

In 2003 too, a similar initiative was promoted by the Doha International Center on Interfaith Dialogue (DICID). Since then, every



year in Doha (Qatar) a Conference on Interreligious Dialogue has been held in the context of Abrahamic monotheism. Also noteworthy is *The Amman message* (2004), a particularly relevant document that deals with the most difficult dialogue, the intra-religious one, in order to sanction unity in contemporary Islamic religious pluralism. Moreover, the *Open Letter to Pope Benedict XVI*, a theological response to the ambiguous quotation of the pontiff in Regensburg about Islam in 2006, and the following document *A common word between me and you*, which spreads a dialogical message starting from the commandments common to Christians and Muslims, that are love for God and love for Neighbor. Finally, another important document is the *Marrakesch Declaration* (2016), which reaffirms the inviolable right to religious freedom of minorities in lands with an Islamic majority.

#### **4. Italy and religious teaching: theories and case studies**

How does the Italian school system manage and interpret education in cultural and religious pluralism and dialogue? Ministerial Circular n. 73 of 2 March 1994, *Intercultural dialogue and democratic coexistence: the planning commitment of the school*, affirms that «intercultural education does not end with the problems posed by the presence of foreign pupils at school, but constitutes the highest and most global response to racism and anti-Semitism». In 2007 the National Observatory for the Integration of foreign students and Intercultural education produced a vademecum named *The Italian way for intercultural schools and the integration of foreign students* in which Islamophobia and anti-Gypsyism appear for the first time as forms of racism. In these recommendations it is also stated that the presence of immigrants in the school can make more evident some mechanisms such as stereotypes, images or representations that bring together characters or traits connected to each other, respond to criteria of economy and mental simplification in order to preserve a difference in favor of oneself and one's group.

In the last National Training Plan for Teachers (2016-2019) at the section called *Integration, citizenship skills and global citizenship*, the ministry of public education states that:

Historical-religious skills are necessary to understand each of the great faith communities, their history, the history of their relationships [...]. The presence of teachers capable of making diversity an extraordinary educational opportunity is therefore essential. An adequate formation to the pluri-religious landscape is therefore essential to develop in pupils critical thinking, an attitude to dialogue (intercultural and interreligious), respect and mutual understanding [...].

It is therefore evident that intercultural and interreligious dialogue at school is seen as a tool, not only for understanding religious diversity in Italy, but also for the deconstruction of stereotypes, prejudices and conflict prevention. Also in this case, as underlined by the above mentioned Toledo Principles, the importance of having teachers capable of presenting religions in the plural is highlighted. We know that in Italian public schools of each order and degree one hour a week is dedicated to the teaching of Catholic Religion (IRC). Certainly, there is a right not to use it, but there is vacation of a valid alternative offer as well as constituting a training deficit, because it deprives some pupils of a space in which to address religious issues and it also nourishes the possibility that the pupils who 'leave' the class feel isolated.

With regard to the educational nature of religious teaching a school Saggiaro (2019) affirms that «the educational dimension understood as an apparatus for the transmission of knowledge, practices, knowledge is an integral part of all the human processes that go under the name of religion» and he underlines the need to spread the knowledge of the religious fact regardless of the individual memberships. He describes also the above mentioned field of *learning from religions* as a learning environment that does not offer data and notions, but rather «instructions to build a wealth of knowledge on the religious fact, creating an interaction profitable with the inhabitants of the area». A knowledge laboratory, therefore, in which everyday life becomes a matter of study and elaboration of awareness.

Since the only space dedicated specifically to religions is the hour of Catholic Religion it is appropriate to offer an overview of the positions of this teaching regarding the relationship with other faiths. In 1987 Catholic Religion programs of elementary schools had as its main goal that of «recognize the main signs of the Catholic religion» and «demonstrate respect for people who live different religious choices or who do not adhere to no religious beliefs». In the middle schools it was added to the attitude of respect also «the overcoming of all forms of intolerance and fanaticism» and «an open confrontation and dialogue with other culturally relevant forms and religious traditions». In High schools to these aspects also took over the development of «skills for comparison between Catholicism, other Christian denominations, other religions and various systems of meaning».

In 2012, the Agreement between the Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Italian Episcopal Conference on guidelines for the teaching of the Catholic religion in schools of the second cycle of education and in education and professional training courses stated that the aim of the subject was recognizing «the role of religion in society and understands its nature in the perspective of a constructive dialogue based on the principle of religious freedom» and studying «the relationship of the Church with the contemporary world, with reference to new religious scenarios, globalization and migration of peoples».

Analyzing two case studies, they establish, in different ways, a link between some of the European recommendations, theological principles and indications and the concrete collaboration between schools and religious communities. Let's start from the last references in which the teaching of the Catholic religion helps students to deal with issues such as migration, religious freedom and interreligious dialogue. In the 2000s the Jesuit Refugee Service developed an awareness project dedicated to school called *Incontri – percorsi di dialogo interreligioso* (Encounters - paths of interreligious dialogue). The first motivation behind the project it was direct experience with forced migrants: some of the refugees with whom the service came into contact had experienced persecution religious and that, in some cases, had been the cause of the flight from their country. A second reflection started from a fact of reality: today, the global phenomenon of migration has resulted the different religious identities to mix and coexist in fact. Last but not least, the importance of remembering that in Italy there are some 'historical presences' (such as Jews and Waldensians) which for centuries have been an integral part of religious history and Italian culture, often unknown to most people except for the negative facts that have characterized it.

The project is part of that dialogue of life described above, proposing to make a contribution from below through the methodology of 'direct testimony', that tells the complexity of religions as much as they are complex the people who are part of it. After having listened to the witness of a religious faith in class, the project also includes some visits to a place of worship to allow students to get to know the territory in which they live also from a perspective of religious pluralism.

The Associations of Christian workers in Italy (ACLI) and Caritas, in collaboration with the Inter-religious Council and with the Inter-ethnic School of Europe in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) developed a project with similar characteristics named *Mir Sutra* (from the Bosnian language *Peace Tomorrow*). The initiative, that opens a window to the Balkans and its recent inter-ethnic and religious conflicts, consists of an educational trip to Sarajevo to help students reflect on the great themes of peace, interreligious dialogue and multiculturalism that distinguish the history and present of the city. It begins with a 'tour of memory' in the places that have made the history not only of Sarajevo, but of the whole of Europe (starting from the bridge where the archduke Francesco Ferdinando was assassinated, an episode that generated the First World War) followed by the 'reconciliation tour', which allows us to enter in the space of a morning in a Catholic church, an Orthodox church, a mosque and a synagogue. This project brings us back to the European indications in which knowledge of history is described as a factor of reconciliation and dialogue between peoples.

To conclude, from this first analysis we can trace, both in the European institutions and in religious actors, the need to govern and guide the management of content, methods and dynamics of the

learning/teaching of/on religions in the plural. The reasons start from different assumptions. In European institutions is evident the concern to promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence through dialogue between different religions that are geographically 'got closer' very quickly in the last thirty years, in order to prevent possible new conflicts. As regards the Catholic Church, the direct management of the contents on other religions it ensures that it itself is not excluded.

It's not easy to assess the impact of European policies on schools Italian and even less understand whether the Catholic Church – in its theology and in the practical applications that derive from it in the field of education – is in some way affected by it. What is certain is that the school and religious communities interact frequently locally; a dialogue on the territory that also takes place thanks to the deep interconnections that exist among those who live there: students, parents, teachers, places of worship are all part of an intercultural and interreligious community in constant evolution

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