



This paper is taken from

*A Europe of Many Cultures
Proceedings of the fifth Conference of the Children's
Identity and Citizenship in Europe Thematic Network*

London: CiCe 2003

edited by Alistair Ross, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 1 85377 369 7

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Tatkovic, N., Muradbegovic, A., and Morosini, S. (2003) Multicultural education: present situation and prospects of the Italian minority in the Croatian region of Istria, in Ross, A. (ed) A Europe of Many Cultures. London: CiCe, pp 23 - 29

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This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- Cass Mitchell-Riddle, head of the CiCe Coordination Unit
- London Metropolitan University for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The SOCRATES programme and the personnel of DGXXII for their support and encouragement.

Multicultural education: present situation and prospects of the Italian minority in the Croatian region of Istria

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Introduction

Istria is a region of Croatia in which Croatian and Italian cultures are in constant contact, a multicultural feature interwoven into the work and life of its citizens. The cultural heritages expressed through customs, languages, attire, folklore and music are passed on through daily experiences, especially upbringing and education. A multicultural education strategy is very important in the Croatian school system at all levels.

During periods of mass migration and intercultural contact the values transmitted to the next generation change. Pedagogy and its related disciplines investigate new approaches to learning and transmitting cultural values. The success of communication and interaction is dependent on the recognition and acceptance of cultural difference. Tolerance is “a way of thinking, feeling, and acting that gives us peace in our individuality, respect for those unlike us, the wisdom to discern humane values and the courage to act upon them” (Bullard, 1996). Awareness of one's own and other's culture does not mean exclusion, but the inclusion of differences. Particularly in schools it leads to recognition and respect for cultural diversity as a means of promoting the well-being of all.

Research shows the majority of young people in Croatia are critical of the lack of democracy in political and social life, including the human and minority rights which are necessary to enter the European Union (Baranovic, 2002; 357).

Multiculturalism as a process of interaction in Croatia

Multiculturalism is not “a melting pot” where cultures merge into a cosmopolitan culture, nor is it coexistence or dichotic (Perotti). Multiculturalism is a process of interaction, with the potential for an individual to belong to several cultures while still retaining authentic elements of their own culture (Council of Europe). Multiculturalism entails one or more official languages, a common judicial system, democratic laws of social consent, recognition and respect for human rights as well as the individual's right to freedom in the face of community pressure to conform.

Croatia is a multicultural community with specific problems and experiences from the specific historical circumstances of the region¹. Investing effort and energy in its campaign to enter the European Union, Croatia needs to put majority - minority group relationships in order, particularly through the education system, with support from international declarations such as OUN, UNESCO, OECD and the Council of Europe. Croatia strives to cultural pluralism as a foundation for successful coexistence of ethnic groups based on “mutual understanding, dialogue and tolerance, showing respect to others and the unknown, as well as learning the skill of living with differences” (Previšić,

¹ The same can be said for the region of Istria

1994; 19). Cultural pluralism is different from cultural assimilation, which is the absorption of immigrant cultures into the majority culture. It is also different from cultural retention, in which cultural identity is preserved by enclosed groups (Spajic-Vrkaš, 1993; 151).

Implementing multiculturalism in Croatian education, included in many policy statements in the Republic of Croatia, has had varying degrees of success. It is not sufficient to formally define new relations – they require systematic action. Teachers must be prepared to promote co-operative learning in a framework of multicultural education and didactics.

The Italian national minority in Istria

"The Italian national community historically located in Istria, Kvarner, Dalmatia, and Slovenia was, upon the fall of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, divided into two after the countries of Slovenia and Croatia were established Language pluralism is characteristic of Istria. In addition to standard Italian, the members of the Italian minority speak four variations of Italian: Istriot, Istrian-Venetian, the Localitsrian Venetian dialect and the regional Istrian-Venetian *koine* (Milani- Kruljac, 1984: 7).

Standard Italian is used only in schools; in all other situations dialect is spoken. This has been common practice for almost forty years. The Italian community no longer identifies with the standard Italian language, but with its own dialect, which has become a sort of “national language” for this ethnic group (Filipi, 1989a: 80).

National minority rights in the Republic of Croatia

National minority rights are regulated in the constitution and in laws and regulations on human and national minority rights, based on European Union law on the rights of national minorities. Proposals for multicultural education are included in the government's 2000-2004 Plan for Croatia, which forecast that “contemporary principles in the education process would be introduced, with an emphasis on the principles of freedom, democracy, human rights, openness, innovation, tolerance and diversity” (Government of Croatia, 2000; 28). The National Council for Education on Human Rights was founded in 2002 as a government advisory body. It applied the National program for Education on Human Rights, which represents “the basic framework for the establishment and development of education in the field of human rights, ... which includes intercultural understanding and upholds the development and rights of national minorities” (Government of Croatia, 2002).

Italians in Istria realise their rights through the Italian Union (Unione Italiana), an autonomous, democratic and pluralistic Italian association in Croatia (and in Slovenia), which articulates general and specific needs of the Italian minority, such as the promotion of schools, rights to education on European dimensions, and collaboration with ministries and organisations at national and local level. The Italian Union preserves Italian dialects, translates school textbooks, introduces Italian books and texts, and implements pedagogical and administrative autonomy. It opens new school grades, new schools, pre-school institutions, finances bilingualism, brings in external collaborators such as professors from Italy, creates school networks, introduces new studies, and equips schools as competitive and attractive educational institutions. Supplementary education and

additional qualification are provided for education staff through specialised courses and financial assistance for projects, and support for the Institute for Historical Research in Rovinj (Croatia). The Italian Union also assists Italian departments in the Teacher Training College and the Faculty of Philosophy in Pula, where Italian and Croatian language studies are taught.

Italian minority rights in Istria

The rights of the Italian minority in Istria are set out in the Statute of the County of Istria, which defines the preservation of ethnic and cultural characteristics and the promotion of social, territorial, cultural and ethnic distinctiveness. Istria aspires to avoid situations that could damage Istria's pluralistic and multiethnic characteristics. According to the Statute, the Italian language has equal rights with Croatian in all cities and municipalities which contain Italian minorities, guarantees the right to use Italian (spoken and written) in public, to found cultural, publishing and other institutions, and the right to express national distinctiveness. The statute guarantees the right to establish educational institutions, and to institute special programmes of Italian history, culture and science. Where statutes are bilingual, it is compulsory to learn both Croatian and Italian in all schools, while in non-bilingual areas, Italian language is offered as a subject. Croatian is compulsory in all schools where classes are taught in Italian.

The education of members of the Italian minority in Croatia

Education rights in national minority languages is regulated in law. The education of all members of the Italian minority at all levels is part of the education system in Croatia. Financial resources for this - from pre-school institutions to post-secondary education - are allocated from the state budget. Schools with instruction in a minority group language can be established with a smaller number of students than needed for a Croatian-language school. Teaching programmes must offer compulsory content on the distinctive features of the particular national minority (mother tongue, literature, history, geography and culture). The Ministry of Education and Sport, after consulting the national minority's association, establishes teaching plans and programmes.

In Italian minority schools Croatian school textbooks are translated for general subjects, but Italian textbooks are used for subjects that foster national affiliation. Italy also gives additional resources for textbooks and equipment, which raises the pedagogical standards of Italian schools and pre-school institutions to a higher level.

Registration in these schools and classes is the same as in Croatian schools. Teaching is by teachers who are either members of the national minority, or by non-members of the national minority who nevertheless can speak and write the language in question fluently.

Pre-school and school institutions – meeting places for various cultures

During and after the war migration increased, which had a direct influence on Croatia's ethnic composition. The influence of minority cultures increased, and the numbers enrolling in Italian language pre-schools and other educational institutions, of pupils not directly linked to the Italian minority, increased (often as a means of learning Italian). This intensified the issue of preserving the national identity of the Italian minority. Pre-school and school institutions with classes in Italian are places where children from various cultural backgrounds can meet and learn about multiculturalism, tolerance

towards different cultures, democracy and coexistence within the multicultural region of Istria. Multiculturalism presents Croatia (and Istria) with two approaches to this: firstly, to improve Croatia's cultural identity, repressed through the course of history; and secondly to create the foundation of cultural pluralism, integrating all groups within a democratic framework and simultaneously preserving national cultural (Sekulic-Majurec, 1996; 678).

Democratic coexistence and human rights should be implemented from pre-school to post-secondary institutions, becoming an integral part of general knowledge and the factors necessary for children in a multicultural setting. Multicultural education promotes consciousness of the individual's national, religious, language and cultural identity as a basis for understanding and accepting cultural difference, "because being in possession of one's own national, religious, language, cultural and other identities does not contradict the acceptance of collaborating and cooperating with others who are, by these criteria, different" (Previšić, 1994; 19).

Italian pre-school and school institutions in Istria

According to the Ministry, in 2002/2003 there are twelve pre-school institutions with a total of 650 children, and seven elementary schools with a total of 1270 pupils: three secondary schools with varying secondary school programmes have a total of 711 students, divided into 51 classes. All education in these institutions is in Italian as the main language.

Table 1 Number of institutions in Istria where the programmes are carried out in either the Croatian or Italian language, and the number of children attending these programmes.

| Pre-schools | Total | Croatian | | Italian | |
|-----------------------|--------|----------|-----|---------|-----|
| Number of pre-schools | 45 | 33 | 73% | 12 | 27% |
| Number of children | 5 401 | 4 751 | 88% | 650 | 12% |
| Elementary schools | | | | | |
| Number of schools | 55 | 48 | 87% | 7 | 13% |
| Number of pupils | 18 843 | 17 573 | 93% | 1 270 | 7% |
| Secondary schools | | | | | |
| Number of schools | 24 | 21 | 87% | 3 | 13% |
| Number of students | 9 226 | 8 515 | 92% | 711 | 8% |

Table 1 shows almost twice as many children enrol in pre-school institutions (12%) than in elementary (7%) and secondary (8%) schools (enrolment percentages in Croatian schools is similar at all levels of education). The number of Italian pre-school institutions is twice as high (27%) as either the percentage of elementary or secondary schools (13%) (again, the percentage of Croatian pre-school, elementary and secondary schools are similar). Enrolment in Italian-language elementary schools is about 50% less than that for Italian-language pre-school institutions. One reasons may be parents enrolling children in

Italian-language pre-school institutions to introducing their children to Italian at an early age, or it may be that there is insufficient space in Croatian pre-school institutions for children of non-Italian nationality.

Italian minority education in Istria seen from both the perspective of the Croatian majority population and from that of the Italian minority. From the majority perspective, it can be seen that the minority's right to preserve their culture and national identity by means of schooling is statutorily regulated. But from the Italian minority perspective, legal dispositions have not been realised in practice. Milotti and Zani (2001) cite the following problems: (1) normative-legislative; (2) school networks; (3) textbooks and (4) trained staff.

1. Normative and legislative problems

The law on education in the minority language (implemented in 2000) conflicts with previous instructions (for example, on employing foreigners in educational institutions; on programmes for work in minority schools increasing the total hours of study so that pupils have the same hours in their mother tongue as they do for Croatian, and others).

2. School networks

Members of the Italian minority need to maintain the existing network of educational institutions without having to decrease and combine grade levels. They want to open new educational institutions in places where there is a genuine interest from parents and children.

3. Textbooks

Difficulties in working and teaching in Italian schools because of the lack of bilingual pedagogical documents and textbooks in Italian.

4. Trained Staff

There is difficulty in employing competently trained staff (especially in elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools) because of the lack of educated staff in specific fields (Milotti, C. and Yani, N., 2001; pg. 372).

The new Constitutional law on national minorities applies a new model to finance education: the government no longer allots resources, but the Council for National Minorities (whose membership is only of members of national minorities) allots resources to the minority groups.

Minority languages in post-secondary education in Istria

The education of teachers who will work in pre-school, elementary and secondary schools where classes are taught in a minority language provides the opportunity for students to study their subject in the language, both spoken and written. The Teacher Training College of Pula is the only institution educating teachers and pre-school teachers in Croatian and Italian, thus providing post-secondary education for the Italian minority.

Studies in Italian language and literature began in 1962. In 1991 the Pedagogical Academy became the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Rijeka, cooperating with the University of Trieste for professors from Italy to work with the Faculty of Pedagogy in conducting classes in Italian. This cooperation spread to the Teacher Training College (which is separated from the Faculty of Pedagogy) in 1997/1998.

Since 1998, 124 students have studied in Italian and Croatian at the Teacher Training College of Pula (32 future teachers and 92 future pre-school teachers)

Directions for future teachers and pre-school teachers of the Italian minority

For Croatian schools to be central in the development of a multicultural society based on cultural pluralism, we must educate teachers as well as students, for they will be the transmitters of knowledge in education. This will include the development of skills in cooperating and collaborating with others; showing respect for others; tolerating different ideas; communicating and empathising; and recognising bias and prejudice.

Preventing the formation of stereotypes and prejudices towards different cultures and languages is of importance in all schools in Istria, because cultural plurality exists in all aspects of daily life. Understanding cultural plurality presupposes the acceptance of different ways of life, beliefs and linguistic usage, which can be realised both through understanding the value of solidarity and through understanding rights and duties.

School should be where young people experience rights to justice, equality and similar issues, and the relationship between justice, duty and obligation (Godler, 1991; 69). Schools should therefore be responsible for teaching democratic coexistence, interdependence and causality, respect and value for social and cultural difference, and understanding social organisation of other cultures.

Conclusions

1. Following the war it is imperative that the Croatian school system expects young people to develop tolerance and understanding of diversity, develop understanding between ethnic groups and the goal of fostering peace.
2. Croatia is a young democratic nation with no democratic tradition, so there is a specific need for multicultural education.
3. Croatia and Istria will need to learn from the work of others in tackling multicultural issues through education, evaluating and adapting these to our conditions.
4. Italian schools in Istria promote peaceful coexistence and tolerance of diversity, and preserve the Italian language and culture to maintain the characteristics of the territory, "which extends to all the opportunity to create pluralism, multilingualism, and multiculturalism in a democratic manner".
5. Italian schools have always been instruments of a democratic society, promoting coexistence in a dual-cultural society.
6. Negative experiences in other regions of Croatia should not be generalised; Croatia should learn from the positive traditions of Istrian multiculturalism, based on historic traditions of coexistence and tolerance. This example can give Croatia a peaceful future between all its various cultures.

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