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LEARNING EUROPE

REPORT AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

PROJECT

English-spoken meetings held among high school students in Florence and Pistoia and master's candidate students in James Madison University's European Union Policy Studies program in Florence on topics relating to the European Union and Europe - Italy - USA.

The JMU students, by virtue of their specialized training in European studies, teach the Italian students the main historical, political and economic aspects of the European integration process. A discussion is formed between the Italian and JMU students in the process, with focuses on their own themes of the meetings and more generally on society and lifestyles in the US, Europe, and in Italy.

INVOLVED PARTIES

James Madison University in Florence, MA in EU Policy Studies (postgraduate master's program lasting one year)

Antenna Europe Direct, City of Florence

Various Florence and Pistoia high schools

PURPOSES

Create moments of youth cultural exchange between Italy - USA.

Increase knowledge about the EU and the European awareness of students of Italian high schools, as part of citizenship education.

Improve the ability to interact in English for Italian students, through dialogue with native speakers.

Improve the presentation and cross-cultural interaction skills of JMU students.

STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

The project is structured in two sessions (two sessions of two hours each) for each class involved.

The meetings are held in schools and/or in the classrooms of James Madison University. It starts with a moment of "fun" (quiz of general culture on the USA and the EU, to break the ice). It then continues with a series of presentations in Power Point format by the students of James Madison University on major issues of European integration. During the presentations, it tries to involve the Italian students as much as possible, as they are encouraged to test their knowledge and get involved and interact with the US students. Also in this regard, at the end of each presentation there will be a moment of reflection on the themes covered with questions from Italian students and debate. The meeting ends with a moment of free dialogue, where the Italian and JMU students can ask whatever questions they like. At the end of the second session, Italian students and teachers fill out an evaluation questionnaire on the meetings.

The JMU students are generally accompanied by an assistant of James Madison University program, who deals with the general organizational aspects of the project and, during the sessions, has the task of facilitating and stimulating cultural exchange and language translation. In the event that the assistant is unable to attend the sessions, their tasks are done by staff from Antenna Europe Direct of the town of Florence, or JMU teachers. In recent meetings, the JMU students have had a large degree of autonomy and confidence with the Italian students and teachers, which allowed them to perform the meetings unaccompanied and totally autonomous.

DETAILED SCHEDULE OF THE SESSIONS

SESSION 1: "ICE-BREAKER" GAME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE EU

- **Handout glossaries with the main terms in English and Italian used in the session, and read aloud the terms in both languages.**
- **Presentation of the American student and the project (brief)**
- **American Trivia Jeopardy (Power Point):** To break the ice, we begin with a trivia game with questions about the USA addressed to the Italian students, who are divided into teams; questions have a different score depending on their difficulty; the team that accumulates the most points in the end wins the game.
- **History of the EU (Power Point):** Introductory slides on EU history
 - EU symbols
 - Historical reasons and political foundations of the European integration process
 - Two ideas of Europe: Altiero Spinelli and Jean Monnet
 - The enlargements
 - The treaties that built the EU: Defining treaties, History and main contents of the treaties (Treaty of Paris, Treaty of Rome, EURATOM Treaty; the Single European Act; Maastricht Treaty; Schengen Agreement)
 - The future of the EU: the innovations of the Lisbon Treaty and future enlargements.
 - Questions for students: What is the EU for you? Would you be in favor of a European federation? What do you think about EU enlargement? Do you think a new war in Europe is possible?

Remaining space for comparison of lifestyles and cultural patterns American and European / Italian.

SESSION 2: INSTITUTIONS, POLICIES, CURIOSITY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE EU

- **Schengen Game/ European Trivia Jeopardy:** Two games we alternate in the session. The Italian students are asked trivia questions about the EU and its Member States.
- **EU institutions** (Power Point): Presentation of the main EU institutions and the EU legislature
 - European Commission
 - European Council
 - European Parliament
 - European Court of Justice
 - European Central Bank
 - High Representative for CFSP
 - Legislative structure of the EU
 - Questions for students: What do you think of the new European foreign minister? Do you think the EU's institutional structure is complex or easy to understand?
- **Euro design** (Power Point): The meaning of the design printed on the EURO banknotes; final game: "How many countries do you have in your wallet?"
- **"What can the EU do for you? What can you do for the EU"** (Power Point): presentation of EU policies and opportunities for participation in their framing, divided into three sections:
 - 1) What has the EU done? The EU's basic policies
 - Common Market
 - Euro
 - Four fundamental freedoms of the EU
 - 2) What is the EU doing for you?
 - Presentation of the most significant current EU programs for young people (Erasmus Program, environmental policy in relation to the initiative "Click @ Tree", Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU)
 - 3) How can you participate? The possibilities for participation of young people in the EU
 - Vote for the renewal of the European Parliament: practical registration information for voting in EU elections, presentation of the European Parliament party groups and where Italian national parliamentarians are located in these party group
 - Other forms of participation: EU online debate: "Debate Europe", European Voluntary Service: "Youth for Europe", the role of NGOs and social movements at the EU level
 - Questions: What do you think of the free movement in Europe? What topic do you think should be discussed today at the EU level? Are you interested in political or social participation? What do you think of the cultural exchange?

Remaining space for discussion and dialogue with US students.

Evaluation questionnaires for Italian teachers and students involved.

PROJECT EVALUATION

STRENGTHS

- Presentations conducted by students for students: ease of involvement, greater attention to the explanations, greater opportunities for debate.
- Generally, very positive interaction with students and professors, with active participation from the latter in the course of the sessions and the preparation of students.

- Generally high and lively participation by students with questions and interventions; in moments of dialogue, Italian students also often touched on issues of great depth, such as a debate on the death penalty, US health care reform, and the Obama presidency.
- The English, in most cases, does not reveal an excessive barrier to dialogue with the US students and understanding of the presentations. In various cases, in the light of the evaluation questionnaires, meetings also seem to be an important opportunity to increase their knowledge on European issues
- Good coordination between JMU, Europe Direct, and the schools involved

CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

- Difficulty in adapting the content to the different levels of Italian students: kids involved were aged 15 to 18 years; the level of English also varied according to the classes, as well as the interest in European issues.
- Organizational challenges related to frequent changes of meeting dates and times; inevitable given the different needs and availability of the various parties involved.
- Yet, Increased interaction with Italian students in the second session, necessarily more "heavy" for its content; assessment in this regard the inclusion of additional moments for games (quizzes and other constructive games).
- The teachers, in the evaluation questionnaires, generally suggest to increase the number of meetings and extend them to more classes.
- Some principals have required the project to be extended to all their school.

In general, the project, which has involved 2,204 students of the Florentine high schools in the academic years from 2008-2017, has been assessed to be extremely positive by all the participants, and the general demand by Florentine teachers and students was to increase the opportunities for exchanges.

The average number of hours that were spent by the students and by JMU in the project was about 60 hours of actual teaching in schools. Each hour of teaching was carried out by one to two students from JMU and accompanied by an assistant, who performed the function of cultural and linguistic mediator, for a total of about 180 hours. The preparation of the materials for the project, the assistant's training, and students took roughly a commitment of 30 hours. Coordination with the schools, the Europe Direct office, and material organizational management in the three months took about 30 hours of project implementation.

The total number of hours allocated to the project by the staff and students of JMU, from 2008 to 2017, was approximately 2,160 hours.