ENLARGING ONE'S VISION

Strumenti per la ricerca educativa in ambito internazionale



A CURA DI G. BANDINI E S. POLENGHI



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The History on Line Project: an Experience of international cooperation in History of Education

PAOLO BIANCHINI

1. The rolling phase: from the idea to the form

The starting idea of the project moved by the awareness that the progressive affirmation of digital historiography has introduced a significant opportunity for revisioning the traditional methods of historical research, teaching and learning. We have moved towards the possibility of having whole archives and libraries bought to use by a click of a (mouse) button. The digitalization of printed documents and texts have allowed them to be easily consulted at distance, but also has allowed access to films, audio, iconographic and photographic material. (Noiret, 2013).

It has become possible to develop a studying and teaching of history approach based on the direct access to the sources, beside the more traditional methodology oriented exclusively to printed manuals, that explain the sources without making possible to view them directly.

The potential easy access to direct sources through digitalized archives has made possible for professionals researchers, teachers and students to think to a reconstruction and explanation of history, coming out from a stronger correlation between a direct use of the sources and their historical interpretation.

The History-on-line project wanted to face some emerging needs in historiography: (Cohen-Rosenzweig, 2006)

- 1. The strong need to research, gather and enhance accessibility, through the building up of comprehensive database providing internal research instruments, of a plurality of tools for the study of history, already existing in the net at European level as:
- Direct sources for modern and contemporary history (documentary archives, digital libraries, icon libraries, video libraries);
- Didactic materials (manuals, on-line training courses, Guidelines, handouts, maps archives, history encyclopaedias and dictionaries);
- Other specialist tools (historical essays, online history rewievs, monographs, software and databases for the analysis of history sources).

- 2. The need to develop a methodology for history writing emerged, which exploited the potential of multimedia, making the sources and materials used for reconstructing the event available alongside the interpretation given by the writer. This would allow the reader/student to critically evaluate the process followed by the writer and to autonomously form their own interpretation of the historical topic in focus.
- 3. It appeared necessary to develop and make accessible for University professors, researchers and students a training package focusing on the use of multimedia and digital contents to produce historical didactic materials based on online cooperative writing, as to make possible to build up a shared European interpretation of history, as resulting from the different national perspective.

Moving from these reflections the project aimed to build an international web portal for professional and non-professional historians, focusing on History of Education. The original project design has envisioned a two-year period for implementing the desired interventions. The main objectives of the project were:

- "to promote integration between University history professors, researchers and students of different European countries involving them in a common effort for the development of an Internet Portal that will become the common point of reference for the innovation of materials and methodologies for history writing, teaching and learning based on the effective use of ICT potential";
- "to facilitate the availability and reproduction of historical sources and interpretative materials (original documents, films, photos, classic text etc.) by their gathering and accessibility through Internet based Data Bases and specifically built up research engines";
- "to offer new methods of history writing exploiting ICT potential in terms of interactivity, in order to enhance an autonomous process of understanding historical events and issues of the reader, through the possibility to verify the interpretation of the sources made by the writer, by accessing them directly;
- "to develop new forms of historical writing enhancing, through multimediality, the construction of a shared interpretation of history events at European level, experimenting forms of transnational online cooperative historical writing".

For this purpose the Portal was thought to "host training packages, developed on the basis of European best practices in the field, to refer to as a guide for the development of innovative methodologies of history analysis and writing, based on the strict correspondence between history interpretation and availability of the sources and on the on-line cooperative writing of history at

transnational level". At the same time, according to the objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme, the project was intended to "contribute fostering an European discussion between history professors, researchers and students in order to share knowledge and information for history reconstruction and create a common perspective in the interpretation of the history of Europe".

The first idea was developed by the Universities of Turin and Macerata in the summer of 2006 and was shared at the beginning only with some tested partners, like the UNED, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, from Spain, and the Georg Eckert Institut from Germany. With those partners existed a previous and very satisfacting co-operation in the field of the research on school textbooks. Once verified their interest to participate, it was necessary to find a partner able to supervise the management of the project, which is one of the most demanding task of every European call. For this role was chosen Pixel, an education and training agency based in Florence, with a great experience in this sort of job. It was exactly Pixel who helped the proposers to find other partners in different European countries. The project was then joined by Carl von Ossietzky Universitat (Germany), Tei of Messolongi, department of Applied Informatics in management and economy (Greece), Academie de Strasbourg (France), National school of political studies and public administration (Romania) and Fatih University of Istambul (Turkey).

The project was presented also by the University of Debrecen (Hungary), which actually was not able to take part in the project and was kept out.

The last partnership was established with an ICT company, Easy Technologies (Italy) for the management of the technical issues relating to the planning, development and handling of the project's website and for the technical assistance to all partners throughout the project's activities.

The project was finally applicated for the European Lifelong Learning Programme – Erasmus Sub Programme – Multilateral Project Action – at the beginning of 2007 (precisely for the call EAC/61/2006 with deadline at 30 March 2007) with the title "History on Line". The applicant organisation was the University of Macerata and the administrative and scientific management of the project were committed to the university of Macerata and Turin.

Figure 1

LLP Application: Call EAC/61/2006 Programme [ERASMUS] Project Acronym [History On Linc]

A5 Lifelor	ng Learning	Obj	ectives and Priorities addressed
Objecti	ves of th	ie L	ifelong Learning Programme
			pelow, which of the Objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme this application addresses (See Decision Article ructions for Completing the Application Form)
CODE			Description
LLP	Obj	а	To contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field;
			as it involves European Universities in the development of an Internet Portal focusing on the experimenting y reconstruction and writing.
			w methods of history writing that exploits ICT potential in order to enhance an autonomous process of vents, through the possibility to verify the interpretation of the sources made by the writer accessing them
			w forms of historical writing enhancing, through multimediality, the construction of a shared interpretation of ean level experimenting forms of transnational online cooperative historical writing.

2. The taking off phase: the hard challenge with reality

The project was approved by EC and was financed for two years. The activities started at the beginning of 2008. The first task was to share with all partners the concrete actions of the project and to define more precisely the field of research. The main problem was, in effect, that only the proposers, that is researchers from University of Turin, Macerata, Uned and Georg Eckert Institut, were expert in history of education and specifically in history of textbooks. The colleagues from other universities and research and training centers were specialists in history of political thinking, of literature or in military history, and were not so interested in a two years job strictly limited to school history.

That was the most complexe and strenuous phase of the entire project, because it was necessary to find a mediation between the different historical approaches of the partners whitout loosing the contact with the objectives of the project, fundamental for the final evaluation. Then, whole the first meeting, held in Florence on March 2008, was entirely dedicated to look for a shared field of research, that was found in the history of culture. Concretely, all partners accepted to use sources directly linked to school culture (textbooks, exercise books, laws and school programs) or related to the fostering of citizenship and of public opinion, such as statues, political cartoon and literary texts.

More than this, it was accepted the structure of the portal planned by the proposers. In effect, there are many examples of extremely valid history portals on line and it is well known that the building of a serious historiographic portal requires considerably great resources and job. (Bandini-Bianchini 2007).

Then, it was decided to use the two-year period of the project to build an initial working base, a platform that could be implemented later, by creating

what the American historian Roy Rosenzweig defined an "invented archive", including not only archive material, but also books and data-bases. (Rosenzweig, 2001).

Each of the partners had to contribute to the construction and implementation of the site, by gathering and inputting material in three sections:

- qualitative and quantitative research-oriented sources and instruments of a cultural, economic and social nature;
- instruments to help experts and non-experts historians to use the sources: specialised bibliography and webliography, on-line guides for searching and studying history, aimed at non-expert students and researchers.
- experiments in writing history on line, linking historical reconstruction with its sources, to highlight and render more coherent the connections between them.

In order to be coherent with this plan and for keeping up to date with the most recent historiographical theories, the portal focuses on the instruments (books, journals, school manuals, songs, teaching materials, specialised publishers, laws and school regulations, caricatures, cartoons, etc.), the practices (formal and informal education, political, professional and religious associations, etc.), the physical spaces (home, school, public and private institutions, etc.), as well as the professions (intellectuals, teachers, stakeholders, opinion leaders, etc.) that societies, in some historical periods, have used in performing their task of creating and transmitting culture. (Genet-Zorzi, 2011)

Finally, also the name of the portal was accepted by all partners and the domain historyonline.eu was bought.

The Portal was therefore organized in three main sections where professionals and amateurs historians can find different materials to carry out historical research through the exploitation of information technologies and the Web:

1. Building History On-Line:

This section is designed to own everything that an historian needs to start his work into the Web, that is primary and secondary sources and the instruments to use them. It includes two main kinds of historical sources:

A. Qualitative and quantitative research oriented sources on the portal: each partner contributed to the construction and implementation of the HOL website by gathering and inputting historical sources. The partnership created two sort of database, one at supranational level about classics of education, and another one at national level, about a topic chosen by each partner on the theme of History of Education.

B. Bibliography and Webliography related to the History of Education: the aim was to build comprehensive bibliography and webliography related to the History of Education.

2. Studying History On-Line:

This section hosts a training package for specialists and not specialists to make historical research through ICT. The objective of this activity is to train people to start research about history.

3. Writing History On-Line:

For the realization of this section each partner had to elaborate an historical essay using the documents available in the data bases of the section Building History On-Line. In effect, the project's declared aim was to experiment new forms of writing history on line, or texts that the reader can check linking historic reconstruction with its sources, in order to highlight the connections between them.

3. The flight phase: the strength of the group... and of the planning!

To achieve all the activities the job was divided in 7 different work packages and the actions of each partner were precisely scheduled through all and two years.

Activities WP1: DEVELOPMENT PROJECT INTERNET WEBSITE 2009	Partners Involved	Gen	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Sep
Activity 1 Coordinators and Easytech write a first version of the Portal Guide-on-line and publish it in the portal									
Expected Result: the first version of the Portal Guide-on-line is published on line	Coordinators Easytech	x							
Tools: a section of the portal dedicated to the Guide-on-line									
DEADLINE: 31 ST GENUARY 2009									
Activity 2 Easytech builds search engines for the single sections of the portal Expected Result: the first versions of the search engines of the individual sections can be used on-line. Experimentation starts Tools: search engines; data bases Deadline: 30 TH May 2009	Easytech				x	x			
Activity 3 Easytech following the suggestions emerged during the fourth partners' meeting will complete the portal Expected Result: portal is operational in every section Tools: portal; web site	Easytech								x
Expected Result: the first versions of the search engines of the individual sections can be used on-line. Experimentation starts Tools: search engines; data bases Deadline: 30 TH May 2009 Activity 3 Easytech following the suggestions emerged during the fourth partners' meeting will complete the portal Expected Result: portal is operational in every section	,				х	x			

A very detailed project management and project activity were prepared, to allow to all partners to manage and to check all the phases of the job. More then this, three meetings (Berlanga De Duero – Spain –11th and 12th September 2008, Istambul 2nd and 3rd April 2009 and Macerata 20th September 2009) were organized to coordinate the activities and to solve in an established way the problems that emerged during the work. The very open and collaborative setting of the meetings allowed the evolution of a positive group interaction which facilitated hugely the implementation of the project.

Each work package was aimed at the completion of a part of the project and of the site:

- Work package 1: the HOL web portal





Commission.

All the project's contents reflect the All the project's contents reflect the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Homepage

What is it History on Line?

HOL is an international web portal for professional and non-professional historians, focusing on the History of Education. In this site you can find three kinds of materials: a) research instruments, like sources (texts and data bases), bibliography and webliography, b) a guide for the online study of history and c) sample papers, which have been written by making use of the portal resources.

Which goals does it want to reach?

HOL would like to encourage the historical research by professional and non-professional historians, to facilitate the availability and reproducibility of primary historical sources, to offer new tools for qualitative and quantitative analysis, to promote the integration between researchers coming from different European countries, to promote new ways of writing history online, and to make resources on the history of education and didactics accessible to teachers and secondary school students.

Who works at the web portal?

HOL brings together a pool of Universities from various European countries, which collaborate closely and contribute equally to the different sections of the portal HOL is funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the EU.

| 2008 History OnLine | info@history-on-line.eu |

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

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The work package 1 was addressed to build the infrastructure of the portal, which represented the overall objective of the project. The aim of the website was to provide the partners with a centre of information to refer to in order to be fully aware of the progress in the carrying out of the activities and to access to all the documents and books to be used to accomplish their task.

After the conclusion of Work package 1, in Autumn of 2008, HOL was available, proposing as a virtual centre of reference for the researchers involved in the project and more in general for all European citizens for making history through the effective and innovative use of ICT. The portal was ready to host all the expected materials, developed on the basis of historiographical best practises, to refer to as a guide for the development of innovative technologies of history analysis and writing, based on the strict correspondence

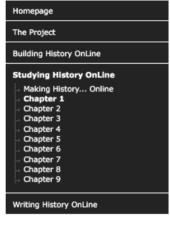
between history interpretation, availability of sources used as a reference and the on line co-operative writing at transational level. (Mounier, 2012)

- Work package 2: Building history on-line



The overall objective of this section was to collect tools for the study of history. For this purpose each partner created a workgroup composed by historian professors, researchers and students, that were in charge of the gathering and analysis of the digital archives and tools for the study of history. In the Building History on Line section each partner set a data base containing the sources that he was using for his own research. That is why are now available data bases on textbooks, on school laws, on caricatures and on many other topics, described in detail and very easy to use also for non expert historians. In this section it is also available a data base containg the first editions of about 100 classics of education of every Country involved in the project. The data base of the Classics of the education offers also all the informations about the books and their editions in the international context. It was also created a search engine for the bibliography (around 500 records) and webliography (around 200 records) related to the history of education and of culture. This activity was concluded in March 2009.

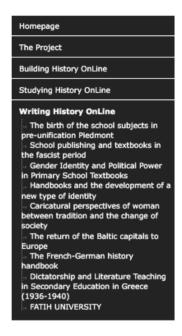
- Work package 3: Development of training packages





The objective of this phase was the development of the section Studying History on Line. Each partner created a training package for the historical research in the digital era. At the conclusion of this activity, in June 2009, a guide to the use of digital contents for making history on the Web and for the on line co-operative writing of history were ready. Thus it is available in HOL a training package developed on the basis of European best practices in the field of history analysis and writing through the strict correspondence between history interpretation and availability of the sources.

- Work package 4: Creation of a paper using ICT based sources



The overall objective of this phase was the implementation of the section Writing History on Line, by drafting a paper on the history of education and culture making use of the documents available in the databases of the HOL portal. Each partner wrote an historical multimedia essay. At the end of the activity, in June 2009, this section contained some interesting experiments in writing history on line: are now available essays on textbooks' history in Franco's Spain and in the Greece of the Second World War, on the first phases of the history of Turkish education, and so on. HOL's declared aim was, in effect, to experiment new forms of making digital history, allowing to the reader to check and, if necessary, to integrate or confute the thesis of the historians, referring directly to the sources reproduced in the site.

- Work package 5-6-7: Exploitation of the portal and transversal activities

The overall objectives of these phases were the creation of pilot groups for each partner for the testing of the portal and the mating of reports of the activities of the portal exploitation. These activities were concluded in September 2009. This was a very important activity because the assessment gives a great importance to the communication of the results of the project, perhaps bigger than to the financial reports. The dissemination strategy adopted by the project partnership involved a series of actions aimed to make the results

of the project available to individuals who were not directly involved in the project itself (dissemination) and to acquire visibility, institutional consent, official recognition, further financial support and feedback on the project. The portal was used in lessons, simposiums and seminars. During the last meeting in Macerata a big conference on the use of the Web for historians was organized and many national and international experts were called to evaluate the project and the HOL site.

4. The landing phase: towards a new take-off or toward the hangar?

When the HOL project finished, at the end of September 2009, we realized that a remarcable job had been done, but we were also aware of the efforts made for the management of a project with such a big magnitude, as it had to deal with a big number of issues and many stakeholders. The latest struggle in this sense was the preparation of the final report for the EC, which required several weeks of work but had a very good impact in the evaluation of the project, obtaining a global score of 9/10 – Very Good.

The excellent judgment obtained in the evaluation was a great satisfaction for all partners, especially for promoters. Here, however, it is also important to point out some other positive effects and to highlight some problems that emerged after the end of the project. The most obvious legacy of HOL was undoubtedly the harmony between the partners. The project did indeed create a general environment of cooperation between all the participating members. As a result, the two years of working togheter really allowed to create synergy between all members, a matter made possible only because of the project. The climate highly collaborative has encouraged all the partners to give very finalised contributions to the successful result of the project. They were meaningful and appropriate. The dialogue has created the possibility of cultural exchanges with the aim of sharing skills and competences and to overcome the conflicts, very bright in the starting phase of the project.

This same harmony between the partners has meant that they have continued to cooperate beyond the end of the project. The University of Turin and the UNED continue to work, under the direction of the Georg Eckert Institut, to build an open platform on textbooks research containing an International Common Textbook Catalogue, a digital library, archives and all the materials that can be useful for researchers in the field of the school history and school publishing.

Moreover, new data bases and new essays were hosted on the site in the following years, enriching the already substantial offer of sources and research of HOL. The most part of them is currently being printed from the publisher

Peter Lang with the title *Textbooks and Citizenship in Modern and Contemporary Europe* (Paolo Bianchini and Roberto Sani editors).

A critical element is linked to the sustainability of the portal. In effect, the costs are not high, because HOL was designed to be implemented and modified easily. Nevertheless, to maintain a website involves, on the one hand, to face some technical costs (servers, hosting, software updating) and, on the other hand, to keep it alive scientifically, updating it and making it useful to potential users. Paradoxically, this second set of actions turned out to be easier than the first, since HOL is also used for teaching. It is more difficult, instead, to find the resources to deal with the technical costs of the portal, which are not prohibitive, but continuing over time. This has resulted in more than one migration of the site from the server of a partner to that of another, and to the change of the domain, which has not always been possible to retain at the end of the contract with the providers.

This problem refers to the perversion of the current way of understanding the technological development and the scientific research: it is, in fact, easier to find resources to start a new project rather than to continue an old one, which has tested its effectiveness and usefulness.

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