Almost 100 people, including History teachers, inspectors, teacher trainers, social workers, university researchers and cultural managers, and organizers attended a lively seminar which culminated in a shared recognition that migration history deserves more room in French curricula.

The event on 17 March 2010 at the Palais de la Porte Dorée in Paris, France, reflected on the question of the History of Migrations in France and Europe: which challenges for the classrooms? with lectures by French and international speakers offering insights into the teaching of migration history across Europe.

Round-tables attended by small groups of participants gave the opportunity to learn and exchange ideas about innovative educational practices related to the topic of discussion. Participants from France, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy and Switzerland had the opportunity to visit exhibitions held at the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration on the history of immigration in France, including a temporary one, focusing on the cultural inputs of migrants from Maghreb.

The event was organised jointly in a very fruitful partnership by the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration (CNHI), the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO), the French Association of History and Geography Teachers (APHG) and the National Institute for Pedagogical Research (INRP), who plan to maintain links and partnerships.

In the morning, various research projects were presented on the status of (im)migration history in textbooks, curricula and classroom practices. Benoit Falaize, from the Institut National de Recherche Pédagogique in Lyon, presented the main findings of his 2009 report, Enseigner l’histoire de l’immigration à l’école (Teaching history of immigration at school), investigating French classroom practice itself, rather than textbooks and curricula.

He felt the history of immigration was still insufficiently addressed in classrooms, while history textbooks have been adopting a more generous view of ‘other’ European nations and emphasising international relations. Indeed, he argued, migration is seen more as a topic to be addressed through great ambitious projects, or family memories – which struck a chord with participants, who agreed on the need to focus on the theme in new ways, and go beyond regarding it as simply being linked to colonization and end of Empire.

Dr Christiane Hintermann, from the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for European History and Public Spheres in Vienna, compared migration presentation in textbooks and exhibitions in Sweden and Austria, showing many do emphasize, nowadays, the ‘wider world’ as a reference point.

Thus, significant shifts have been made in most cases towards a less negative depiction of encounters with ‘the other’, with positive emphasis on the importance of intercultural exchange. “The thematization of immigration issues in history and civic education is used as a way to work towards countering prejudices and xenophobic tendencies in society,” she argued - and this was a major conclusion of the event. These themes were developed by Dr Charles Heimberg, from the University of Geneva, who discussed migration history within school curricula in Switzerland, Italy and Spain.

The parallel round tables in the afternoon focused on practical insights into how to introduce migration history in the classroom, with teachers and cultural mediators among others presenting inspiring examples of untouched topics and creative projects and thus showing how diverse and innovative the teaching approaches to migration history can be. The results of the round-tables were presented by the rapporteurs during a concluding plenary session.

One session dealt with Germanic invasions, led by Dr Rainer Riemenschneider from the Georg Eckert Institute in
Braunschweig, Germany, showing how once destructive discourses on the topic textbooks had shifted away from clashing nationalistic monologues towards narratives pointing up shared understanding and meeting points.

Vincent Marie, a High School teacher from Nîmes, presented an example of good teaching practice using paintings and visual sources to deconstruct the stereotype of the ‘barbarian’ as it is sometimes presented in France when dealing with the Germanic invasions.

In a session on workers’ migration Charles Heimberg, teacher trainer from Geneva, discussed the status of seasonal workers in Switzerland after WW2, as an example of how more social history can be introduced in the classrooms to promote understanding. Laurence De Cock, a high school teacher from Nanterre, then showed how local history can be used in classroom, using a mix of individual testimonies and official documents to discuss why the massacre of Italian immigrant workers in Aigues mortes (South West of France) in 1893 had been forgotten.

In the third round-table, Najjia Zeghoud and Alain Barbé from the CNHI, showed how online teaching modules ready for use in the classroom could be used in building school partnerships. One recent initiative focused on a project for 13-year old pupils from Fontenay-sous-Bois to study the settlement of migrant populations in their own city through the development of football clubs. Umberto Baldocchi, an Italian high school teacher trainer, described the *Europe, a Continent of Migrants* project linking five European countries working on life trajectories of migrants, and fostering active learning and multi-perspective approaches. Finally, Benny Christensen, High School teacher from Odense, outlined how the history of migrations is addressed in Denmark within the cultural studies curriculum, basing his talk on the topic he studied this year with his own student class on *Danish Identity – Cultural Encounters*.

**Main Findings**

Ralph Schor, professor of contemporary History at Sophia Antipolis University in Nice and expert on migration history presented in a final talk his reflections on the results of the day and the ways to think further. The specific Euro-wide dimension of this seminar was new for most participants - and much appreciated. “We got to discover how teachers were working with similar issues in other countries,” as one participant put it.

Reactions to Benny Christensen’s presentation on the teaching of migration in Denmark brought out striking differences to French approaches, with its very open history curriculum and a more hands-on approach of the topics. Some participants were really surprised that this kind of method could actually be implemented!

Many felt that in this context French teachers needed to ‘become more militant’ especially in the face of current challenges, and work not just to transmit knowledge but to educate the students, with the core of their work as the transmission of ‘good’ values.

It was pointed out, however, that there could be real risks in emphasizing such moral ends over historical objectivity, and the methodology which goes with it, while this can lead to tensions between the curricula of history and civic education – and also of geography, where migration is more traditionally covered.

These tensions appear for instance when dealing with issues related to ‘living together’ which “can become even more important than the history itself”, as Charles Heimberg explained in his lecture. Textbooks illustrate such changes, by using sources that are more and more contemporary. Thus the 1998 example of the soccer team winning the World Cup opened discussion about France as a multicultural country.

“Migration history can be used to show complexities in time, but also in the definition of identity: the construction of an image of ‘the other’ within a given society, also helps to reveal how this very society used to see, or still sees, itself.”

“We were delighted with the local successful participation of more than 70 French teachers, especially as this was not an officially free training day,” according to our APHG representative. “The programme was rich and diverse enough to fulfill the goals set for the event, and the transnational sharing of knowledge and good practices.” Now the hope is to continue this work and strengthen the link with the partners.

*Blandine Smilansky, EUROCLIO and APHG.*