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Media communities?
Trans-national mobility?
What do we mean by that?

The two-year European Project MediaPlayingCommunities initiates and supports the establishment of so-called "media communities". These groups consist of children, parents, media experts, caregivers and pedagogical staff, but also people from the communities and associated clubs and societies. The media communities meet in a childcare facility and all engage in media playing. The groups have been formed in all the project's partner countries, namely in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Spain, and the UK. The project arranges two trans-national mobility visits in four different places during its life time, so the local communities can meet personally, and not only virtually. This gives them an opportunity to exchange their experiences and learn from each other. Thus children, parents, caregivers and pedagogical staff travel to another country to meet a community there. The first two mobility visits took place in September 2008 in Udine/Italy and in Graz/Austria. The next two events are planned for 2009 in Copenhagen/Denmark und in Cawsand/UK.

For further information visit the project website:
www.mediaplaying.net

"Hello, hello – Here we are!" An Austrian story about trans-national mobility

"What? We are expecting 40 people?"

Sabine, the manager of Kinderhaus Gösing has to sit down on hearing this news. Never before has the old house on the outskirts of Graz seen such a large crowd! But the initial shock soon gives way to strategic planning. And above all the Institute Connect's team supports the mobility from the beginning. Connect is a small department within the Volkshilfe Steiermark which is occupied mainly with carrying out projects in the Lifelong Learning Programmes of the European Union. Connect also ensures a sustainable implementation of products developed in European projects offering further training for both the childcare and the elderly care sectors, which the institute offers as in-house courses.

Planning

The Volkshilfe Steiermark is one of the largest social providers in the south-east region of Austria with 2,200 employed staff, one third of them working in services for children and families. The Volkshilfe is therefore well equipped for supporting and carrying out such an ambitious European project as MediaPlayingCommunities, and it has enough resources and know-how to host such a large international event as the mobility visit.

However, what is an organisation without the people in it? Alongside Sabine, the Kinderhaus manager, the Connect project worker Cordula helps make the event a success. She is a passionate pedagogue with a long experience in the practical work with children and functions as a link between the Institute Connect and the Kinderhaus.

But there is also Bernhard, our IT-coordinator, who sees to providing enough



Multi-voiced, multi-lingual: the "Hello, hello" song welcoming rite is really caught on

technical equipment to facilitate media playing for so many people.

When I desperately turned to him: "Help, Bernhard, we are expecting 40 visitors and we only have one computer and printer, one digital camera and one video-camera in the Kinderhaus!" he came up with a good solution. Sponsoring is the key to our problem and we set up a letter that he sent to all his IT-contacts. He was finally successful at the company "ACP Computers". They equipped us with two laptops and webcams, two printers and two digital-cameras. And eventually the Institute Connect contributed to the mobility with a video-camera and a video-beamer. Now we were well prepared for the crowd!

However, there was still so much that needed to be organized in the run-up of the event: plenty of accommodation, a minibus for the transfer from and to the hotel, and also children's seats for bus. Christina, project worker in Connect, obtained these at the last minute.

Then the Kinderhaus team and the workers in Connect set up the programme together. They were supported in this by Manuela who is the manager for all Volkshilfe childcare services in Graz. She provided three childminders

to help during the mobility visit and therefore relieve the Kinderhaus team who have to care for their own 30 children that will be present in the facility.

First of all we defined our aims for the meeting: Our guests should feel welcome and have lots of opportunities to exchange experiences both with each other and us hosts. We also want them to get to know everyday life in our childcare services and to learn about Austrian culture. And naturally they should be provided with a variety of offers for media playing. Yet our main aim is to provide a child-friendly and flexible programme that allows spontaneous adjustments according to the situation

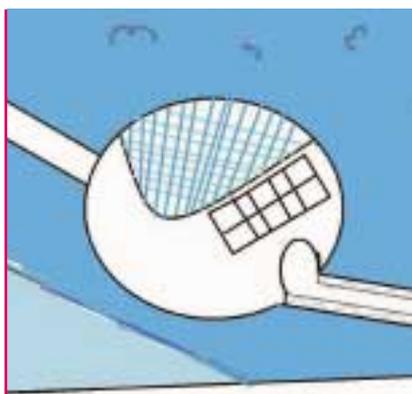
Treasure hunt

Children love to discover secrets and to trace things and so we decided at once in favour of a treasure hunt. Close to the Kinderhaus, situated on a hill, there are the ruins of an old castle. Hence, we have the appropriate scenery just outside our front-door. The children will hunt for the treasure with cameras and video-cameras. We even managed to arrange a knights' meal in the castle as a reward.

Cordula has long worked as a pedagogue in the Kinderhaus, and she has experienced that the children like using the Paint programme to draw pictures on the computer. This inspired her to have the children draw their favourite sights in Graz and send them to our guests before the visit. Together we then plan to search for these sights at the mobility using cameras. The children will then compare the drawings with the photos they have taken.

Open day

Sabine thinks it is a good idea to give our visitors plenty of time to discover the Kin-



Created by the children with Paint as preliminary information for the visitors: the island "Murinsel"

derhaus and its facilities. Consequently we plan setting up various stations in all rooms of the house and arrange an open day on the first day. Each room has a tradition of its own and this should be discovered by our visitors, but they should also find media offers there.

The living room, for instance, is right next to the entrance. Here the children usually paint and draw, and do handicrafts. A books corner and a home corner are to be found here as well. In this room we set up a picture book workshop.

The dining room, situated in the centre of the house, is often called "The heart of the Kinderhaus". Here the children eat their snacks and lunches, and have their birthday parties. We plan to organize a welcome buffet with samples of traditional food provided both by guests and hosts. Here we will taste each others' food and thus stimulate all our senses. The reactions to the different tastes can be recorded immediately by taking photos.

In the gym hall the children of the Kinderhaus are usually allowed to have exercise all day. Special gymnastic apparatus are provided here for the children: ropes, climbing frames and a lot more. Our guests will be offered the use of all these facilities. Running, climbing and jumping can then be filmed and photographed.



"Has Mum taken a photo to show at home?"

Next to the gym is a workshop for creating objects from wood and other materials. A whiteboard is also available here. This provides Cordula and me with the inspiration for a special activity: The children will draw on the laptop using the Paint programme, and then they will project their picture on the whiteboard. Another child or adults can then complete the projected picture with normal whiteboard markers.



The children love drawing with Paint

This will give them a chance to work interactively using old and new media.

The house library is the place where the school children do their homework. Here, there is a large collection of books and also a computer with an internet connection. A tape recorder is also provided for making interviews and recording each other. In addition our visitors can save their photos on the computer and print them. They can download internet programmes for photo editing and also have access to e-mail.

The first floor has a cuddly room in which the little ones can take a rest. The atmosphere in the room is agreeably influenced by soft music and cosy mattresses on the floor. Here we plan to provide diverse material for laying mandalas. With the help of soft music the children can relax here. The final products of their concentrated work can then be photographed. The photos can be uploaded on the computer, printed or sent to friends by e-mail.

Another important place on the first floor is the creativity room: the tradition in this room is dressing up, acting, role-play, making music. Also our guests should have these opportunities and they have a film camera with which they can record their playing, or watch each other in real-time on the big TV set.



"So that's movie making. When I'm grown-up I'm going to be a camera woman"

In all the rooms we will have staff who can support them with the aid of media and give the necessary inputs. Our child-minders Albina, Caroline and Angelika, and the Connect workers Andrea and Cordula will be those providing the support here.

Finally we created an invitation letter for our guests intended to make them curious to go on the journey. Our Kinderhaus children had already been in contact with the kids in the German kindergarten, they had sent letters, pictures and video-clips by e-mail. But they hadn't exchanged ideas with the English and Hungarian guests before. Shortly before the visit, however, we received photos from Hungary and a letter from England that made us eager to meet the new people.

Welcome

And finally, the day has come! More than 60 people have gathered in the garden of Kinderhaus Gösting: Children and adults are standing in a circle, a bit nervous and tired from the long journey. But then Cordula starts singing her "Hello, hello" song and soon the excitement vanishes and everybody joins in. The song becomes the "hymn" of the mobility visit, a fixed ritual when we gather at the start or close of the daily activities. At the end we manage to sing the song in everybody's native language, and when listening to the tape recordings of the children taken in the library, we can hear children singing the "mobility hymn".

After this welcome everyone gathers in the building itself. It is time to approach the new contacts slowly and gain more confidence about the situation. The most important thing for the children is to discover the numerous alternatives for playing in the house. The existence of media equipment such as cameras and computers is only a matter of secondary importance. Some of the children are longing for physical exercise after the long journey and they cheerfully respond to the possibilities in the gym and garden.

Louie is swinging on the rings in the gym: Has Mum taken a photo to show at home? Just check it quickly and then he continues climbing, jumping and running with the other children.

Children and adults are playing "hide and seek" and "catch me if you can" in the gym. The children are running around, trying to escape. One adult or child then tries to catch them by taking a photo. As soon as this has succeeded, the child is caught.



"Catch me, if you can!"



"You don't see me!"



"Click! I got you!"

At the welcome buffet everybody meets and starts communicating; slowly we all lose the initial caution and start warming up. There is a lot of interest in painting and drawing on the laptops, and in the creative room with its offers for acting, role playing and watching each other in real-time on the large television or in a mirror on the wall. Neither the adults nor the children seem to tire of trying out new costumes and variations of acting, some of them are filming, but suddenly the camera is put aside and everyone joins in the performance, "... as you like it!"

Another fun game is using the webcam on the aquarium in the living room. One child is catching objects in the aquarium; she draws the webcam along the glass. Another child has to guess from the picture on the laptop: is it grass, a snail, something slimy...? And then finally: a fish!

What is a picture?

A real attraction for both adults and children is the laptop-whiteboard combination set up in the workshop. One child is drawing on the computer, another one on the whiteboard. Both pictures are merged into one on the board, but which one is the real picture now? When they try to print it out they only get the version on the computer, and when they cover the projector's lamp, there is only the picture on the whiteboard left. Both children and

What is a picture? Projection of a Paint-drawn picture on a whiteboard. Drawing with markers on the whiteboard... Exciting!



adults discover playfully: what is a picture? What is illusion? Competition is intense: "Look at me on the whiteboard! I can draw faster than you on the computer!" "And look, I can complete your painting, or I can destroy it!" "I can draw your shadow on the computer or on the whiteboard... which is easier?" "And when we take a photo of the whiteboard we have saved the picture and THEN we can print it together." A thousand possibilities! Discovering them and experimenting together appeals to the children's and the adults' mind alike.

Action and rest

Our programme aims at catering for many diverse needs of the children: some want to run around and be active; others prefer the peace and quiet in the cuddly room. They lay mandalas with stones and coloured glass pieces, with chestnuts and other natural materials. And the adults are surprised: I didn't know you could lay mandalas with bits and pieces, I only knew drawing and painting them. They take photos to document and try out themselves in their childcare services at home.

For the city tour and the treasure hunt to Castle Gösting we split the large group up into smaller ones. Cordula and I take charge of one group each. Children and parents from the Kinderhaus itself also participate in these excursions. They make friends and start planning: "Yes, next year we are going to visit you in Cornwall. We must e-mail each other!"

And again the exercise in the open air appeals to most of the children; as well as the treasure hunting they develop new fun games with the camera: lizards are enjoying the warm sunbeams on the stones near the ruins of the castle. They dash away in a second when the children approach and children spontaneously play "Catch me if you can" to get hold of the lizards with the cameras. Then they com-

Volkshilfe Kinderhaus Gösting

The Austrian media community has been established around Kinderhaus Gösting. This childcare facility is situated in an old villa in the north-west of Graz. The surroundings and the house itself offer a variety of possibilities to develop children's ideas and creativity. The childcare service is open all day and all years and provides care and education for 30 children aged 18 months up to 12 years.

Two pedagogues and four childminders are working in the house. Since there is a mixed age group of children – toddlers, kindergarten children and school children are all under one roof – the facility is attractive to many parents who have children belonging to the different age groups. And it is a practical facility for working parents too. But there are also a lot of social learning possibilities for children here: The little ones imitate the bigger ones, they learn by discovering their limits also in the interaction with children from other age groups than their own, and not only in interaction with adults. Older children often naturally take over responsibility for the smaller ones, functioning as role models and guides for the younger ones.

There are a few fixed rules in the Kinderhaus, and both children and adults stick to them. However, there is also a lot of confidence in children's autonomy and independence, so this set of rules is hardly ever broken.

Another special arrangement in the Kinderhaus is that children are offered two or three alternative pedagogical activities per day that themselves they can choose from. With the start of the project MediaPlaying-Communities, but independently from it, the Kinderhaus team and pedagogues placed their annual focus on media learning. The intention was to offer children possibilities to learn language and also the scope for design of various means of media, both conventional and modern ones. Consequently, children and adults have used computers, digital cameras and video-cameras in their daily practice, but also created a newspaper and picture books together. They produced a film about "Räuber Hotzenplotz", a popular children's book in Austria, have interviewed each other and some video records and taken innumerable photos. They have even visited the editorial office of a large newspaper in Graz.



All pictures are layed out on posters



"I take a photo of you"

pare their photos: "Look, I have caught the lizard's tail." "... and I managed to get its head on the photo!"



Catching lizards with the camera: They are sooo quick, you won't even get them

In the meantime Frankie has found the treasure box with all the sweets inside: Click! This triumph has to be recorded.



"Got it!" Frankie has discovered the treasure box with all the sweets inside

City children like the large climbing net on the artificial island in the river Mur best. They are also greatly attracted by the fairy tale train inside the caverns of the Castle Hill. When the children compare the Paint picture of the island that has been sent to them beforehand with reality and with the photos they have taken, one child utters spontaneously: "Look there is the climbing net! The Paint picture is really well done!"

The international language of playing

When we are observing the children playing, we don't notice immediately that three different languages are being spoken here.

Everyone seems to unite in the international language of play and to communicate non-verbally.

At the end of the second day we print out photos from the mobility visit and arrange them on large posters in the gym. It is a common, constructive activity which evokes memories and inspires the production of an overall picture. Two of the Kinderhaus children spontaneously take the video-cameras and make up some reportage to show afterwards to people that couldn't be present at the event. There is a camp fire arranged for the children in the garden. One girl stands beside the fire place and exclaims: "This is a wonderful day!" When it is time to say good-bye, a little boy is crying. He doesn't want to leave so soon. Presents for the hosts are exchanged and Jonas takes many photos of all events on the final day: He thus becomes the Kinderhaus' photo reporter. Time has passed so quickly, but luckily we have all the photos and films to bring back happy memories. And with all the material collected during the mobility visit we can continue media playing: editing films and photos, making up picture stories and a lot more. We have so many possibilities, and we are open for the countless variations of creatively playing with media...

Regina Egger



"Bye, bye!"

Masthead

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