

Abschlussbericht

Final for COMENIUS

Final meeting from 5/5/2012-13/5/2012

Report by Gerhard Beil - with special thanks to the translators Margit Holler and Claire Skowronek

We are so homesick!

„From the raindrop to the river.....“ Raminta, Daniela and Paulina the lively Lithuanian girls, kept on singing on the way back from Strasburg to Rheinzabern. They enjoyed „Europahauptstadt“ („Capital City of Europe“) very much. Our host Alexandra Pagels-Kraus sighed some days later, „ We are so homesick“- she missed the kind Simona from Francavilla Fontana at the heel of the Italian boot.

Alexandra is not an individual case. What has happened? Wouldn't it be better to ask, Comenius, what do you want more than this, that young people in Europe are meeting, and are making contacts and they want to meet again on their own initiative? In former times wasn't it usual that our youth mostly met on Europe's battlefields? But let us start from the beginning.

Eight schools – one subject

For the Final of the Comenius-Project „Exploring Europe's Water“ which was financed by the EU, eight COMENIUS-schools from Kilminki/Finland, Prienai/Lithuania, Rzeszów/ Poland, Budapest/ Hungary, Francavilla Fontana/Italy, Betanzos/ Spain and Walsal/ England met at the location of the coordinating school, the IGS/Schulcampus Rheinzabern to end the project that had been lasting for two years and to take the last administrative barriers so that support money can flow. Despite „times of exams“ and pressure of time in all the countries the group seemed to be inspired, - maybe it was last but not least Peter and Saint Michael, the patron saints of Rheinzabern who played their parts, too. What didn't they talk about lots of facts concerning the topic water! Chemical analysis, exploring waterways, building ships, having videoconferences by skypeing, developing film and theatre scenes etc... Every country provided a legend. So „the Lorelei“(Germany) is known everywhere, „Egle, the queen of the grass-snakes“(Lithuania) or „Tündérrózsza“, the transformed fairy (Hungary). According to the age, the meetings and the work groups should as well be for elementary school as up to secondary school. More information is shown here, www.comenius-exeuwa.eu.

Circus as bridgebuilder

While the higher classes of the „IGS/RS+“ were working in interesting projects with lasting character, the students of the classes 5-7 met with the COMENIUS-kids for a circus project, to work out a common programme which was supposed to be presented during a school festival. Managed by the „circus educator“ Markus Kohne - Centrum Mikado- and the excellent support service of teachers and parents (some of them had even taken one week free of work!!) the future artists really started to understand and realize each other, with all their senses while testing the circus equipment, while building bridges and pyramids, making diabolos dance, rotating plates, balancing on a rope, walking on big balls or riding on the unicycles across the gym. The main purpose was the encouragement of performance and circus arts abilities as well as new physical, mental and emotional experiences. Discipline, concentration, consideration or sense of responsibility, elementary virtues which are usually given short during the regular lessons, played a very special role while doing the activities. As a by-product English was learned studiously. Not the shade of Babylonian confusion of languages could be felt, instead the inhibitions vanished.

Water was the subject - to meet was the aim

In the programme were various offers to meet the country and its people. A tour through the castle park in Karlsruhe, a tour through the city were on the programme just as well as a trip to the house of biospheres in Fischbach with a giant slide, a path through the treetops and a path along the water to learn more about the water. Friday afternoon there were some game activities with model boats and sailingboats, splashing around in the water or taking a sun bath. A hearty picnic organized by the parents ended the open air event.

For the teachers there was a special cultural and culinary programme with many facets such as guided tours in the Terra Sigillata Museum in the 2000 years old TABERNAE (the river Rhine as ancient way of transports) or a tour through the park of Karlsruhe`s castle and Orangerie.

The UNESCO world cultural heritage, the cathedral of Speyer (the river Rhine as most important historical space for the tombs of the emperors and kings of the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation) was so impressive especially because of its architecture and as well as focus of the European history. There was talk of emperors, kings and chancellors, of reformation, revolution and of a free Europe. A roll of honour remembered St. Teresia Benedicta a Cruce, Edith Stein who acted in Speyer and she is venerated very much. She died 1942 in Auschwitz. But who knew that she is the patron saint of Europe? „Grande natione!“, this was exclaimed with admiration by „Preside“ Francesco Carone from Francavilla Fontana in Salento, Italy. Because there was just the season for rhubarb Vera and Zsófi from Budapest enjoyed the delicious rhubarb cake – „finom rebarbara torta“. The Lithuanians Juratė, Dovilė and Diana from Prienai at the river Memel were astonished about the reams of wine which are poured out in case that a new bishop is enthroned. The Finnish teachers even had a geographical historical tour of Speyer at the river Rhine to the depths of the Wasgau. „Palatine - a taste of paradise“ could be felt, fertile fields with vegetables in the plains and a touch of Toscana along the „Weinstraße“ – Route of Wine“. The majestic Palatine Forest with its steep

Rocks and the famous Trifels in Annweiler`s „Burg-Dreifaltigkeit“ (Castle –Trinity), the „Wieslauter Valley“ with its mystic „Teufelstisch“ (a rock called „table of the devil“) and the legendary „Jungfernsprung“. Sanna-Mari, Harry und Annika were impressed by the variety of the landscape. While having a short look at the banner „Shoe City“ in Hauenstein both ladies were a bit impressed for a short moment.

The highlight of the day was the view from the balcony of the southern Route of Wine. In the old castle courtyard of the ruins Landeck the „Palatine Trio“ Bratwurst, Saumagen and Leberknödel. „Fläschknepp“ were delicious, too, of course together with a „Maulvoll“ of vine out of a „Schoppenglass“ (a palatine measureà ½ a litre). Not forgetting the „Flammkuchen“ and the hearty yeast dumplings (sweet yeast dumplings are eaten in Italy during the Advent fast!).

„Wonderful, mervaiglioso, nagy, suuri, gran, puikus, wielki...“, was to be heard the whole time after the „Ehrenfels“ had started from Sankt Goar to Rudesheim. Of course Heinrich Heine`s „Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten...“ was played, the song about the alluring Lorelei who seemed to comb her shining hair in the morning sun. By Friedrich Silcher`s melody people from all over the world who love this region as especially typical German were and are spellbound. This way is called UNESCO World Cultural Heritage „Mittelrhein-

Tal, (Middle Rhine Valley), where there is always a new panorama with castles, medieval small towns and steep hillsides with wine plants, after every bending of the river. Castle Gutenfels, Bacharach, die Pfalz near Kaub, the Mäuseturm near Bingen, the Niederwalddenkmal above Rudesheim... The „Ehrenfels“ landed. In the Drosselgass the Rhine romantic was ended brightly merry with wine. The learning objective of the day was obviously reached. In the form of wine water tastes delicious, too.

„Comenius harmonists“ in the European Parliament

The Comenius programme has been funded by the EU, why shouldn`t we say THANK YOU. So a common trip to the European Parliament in Strasburg was a highlight for students and teachers. We had been invited by Jutta Steinruck (Member of the European Parliament) but she had to be in Brussels on this „Day of Europe“- May 9th where they had to vote about a topic which is concerning all Europeans especially the younger ones: the mobile phone. Which topic could be better to make the importance of the European Parliament clearer.

So it was left to Mrs. Steinruck`s assistant to give us an idea of the European Parliament. Besides the great halls were impressive but empty. At first there was a real „Parade of Flags“ with photo shooting in the courtyard of the „Palais Louise Weiss“. The young people became aware of Europe more with their feelings than with their minds. So under the 27 flags of the European countries more than 100 students, teachers and parents sang some of Allmann/Metz created „Watersongs“ which meanwhile have become earworms „From the raindrop to the river“, „Come on board“ and „Find your way“. And what about the band? German teachers, English drummers, Hungarian fiddlers became „The COMENIUS Harmonists“. Great enthusiasm everywhere!

„Only the Bigos is missing“, one of the Agnieszkas said. She didn't know the Alsatian „Choucroute,, (Sauerkraut)! Passing the German-French telestation ARTE we went in the direction of the city center. Nobody noticed that we were crossing the imperial quarter of Stasbourg where William II had left his architectural prints to provoke the Alsatians. Nevertheless there were some talks about war especially because of the memories of May 9th 1945. German and European history is complicated, but where could it be explained better than here in the hundreds of years long embattled area of the upper Rhine Basin, Europe`s heart today.

May 9th was a day of festival for the Eastern bloc for long years although it had not brought freedom to the people. The real reason why this day was named „Day of Europe / Europatag“ has been another one. May 9th 1950 the French foreign minister Robert Schuman had his vision of a united Europe for the first time.

A touch of European history and culture was given by the Gothic Cathedral of Strasbourg where the bright rose could be admired in the setting sun. This rose is a symbol of „the Holy Town“ and the symbol of divine love. Once the holy statues at the entrance of the cathedral had been beheaded by revolutionists because they wanted to do homage to „a religion of rationality“. Don't you agree that all secular masteries which wanted to create a kingdom of heaven on earth left hell instead?

Reconciliation above the graves

And where were the borderlines? Nobody was aware of that when crossing of the borderline in Lauterbourg. Today the borderlines are only noticed when we use the mobile phone in the case of changing the network, „Welcome to France...“.

It is a pity, but this is a fact, too - the price of freedom. The security check for the entry to the European Parliament took much longer than all the border checks from Portugal to Finland together.

But let us remember the words in Lithuania a year ago: The Nemunas/die Memel is the father of all rivers and we use to say „Father Rhine“. For hundreds of years both rivers were the symbol for martial struggles in the west and east of Middle Europe. Let us remember the current 200 years „anniversary “ of Napoleon`s crusade against Russia; in the year 1812 the emperor of the French started for it from Lithuania. The „Marseillaise“, by Rouget de Lisle was composed in the year 1792 in Strasburg; it should become the farewell of the Grand Armée. In Lithuania graves of soldiers from those days are still well attended today. If reconciliation above the graves, the war cemeteries (that is the watchword of the German War Cemeteries Care) should make any sense, then especially here in the upper Rhine area where the ground is blood-drenched much more than in hardly any other place. Many war cemeteries show this and they remind us, „Memo-rial“!

Raminta, Daniela and Paulina meanwhile were going on with singing „ From the raindrop...“ Or they were talking about „Rudupis“ Prienai, their favourite basketball team.... – European reality!

Water was the subject, human meeting was the aim. Bettina Vierthaler, Katja Juntunen, Adelé Beresovskaja, Agnieszka Batog, Zsófia Kovács, Mario Andrisano, Juan Gonzales Parga und Anne Marie Williams could report to Brussels: „ Mission accomplished!“

Finale furioso

Finally there was a school festival of the IGS/RS+ the following weekend. In its centre were placed all the projects, mainly the European circus project and the songs on the big stage in the schoolyard. The audience were some hundreds of spectators and the circus artists and the singers could perform and present their shows or them, ...with magnificent spring weather in a public festival atmosphere. Accompanied by exciting music the young artists presented in top form. Bilingually presented by Daniel Werling from Hatzenbühl and Patrik Pallagi from Budapest. One highlight followed the former one, thunderous applause embraced everybody.

The international choir, directed by our principal Mr. Allmann was a delight too, so „the chief“ thanked all „the helping hands“ in front and behind the stage. Not least he mentioned the patrons and helpers in particular the parents' council of our school and „the Sparkasse“.

The choir was as well the setting for to welcome the guests of honour, county commissioner Dr. Brechtel member of parliament Jutta Steinruck, member of parliament Martin Brandl, member of parliament Barbara Schleicher-Rothmund, mayor Uwe Schwind and mayor Gerhard Beil.

Albeit tired but very happy parents and teachers met for the final party with „Six Affair“ in the brickworks museum Jockgrim while the Exeuwa-Kids had their party in the youth centre (Juze) with disco music. Many a tear flew and it seemed to become a small stream when one had to say goodbye inevitably.

Step by step the Comenius-Teams disappeared into all compass points. But soon they enthused on the internet about how great everything had been in Germany. Was it a chance that the facebook shares climbed in those days? Have a look in it (facebook), you can see how friendships have grown. And much will remain lasting.

Manifold thanks

All persons involved in the project, particularly headmaster Pete Allmann, coordinator Bettina Lang-Vierthaler, SEB (school parents` council) vice Christine Gartner and a lot of parents and teachers are thanked cordially for the hospitality and the support of the project, which has become a true motion. Thanks as well to all host parents in the eight countries, the national coordinators and schools. They all have accomplished supreme performances so that a new facet of the picture of Europe could be arising. A „Raindrop“ turned into a real big wave of enthusiasm which seemed to carry along everybody during the meetings and during this one week.

Johann Amos Comenius would have enjoyed it. With justification the EU meeting programme bears his name. Already in the 17th century Comenius supported meeting, tolerance and education for all children to bring them up as better human beings. His biography just proves how important peace is for Europe.

Our thanks to all the persons responsible in the EU. And the teacher Carlos M. Iglesias Candal from Betanzos from the Spanish Galicia got to the heart of it, „No words can express the feelings that filled my heart to see young people laughing and cooperating in peace. I do continue to trust in that better world is possible across the nations and borders. Thanks Comenius young people. I always will keep a special memory of my colleagues for their understanding my failures, for their help and love. Thank you so much...“

Are there further words necessary?