

PANGEA – Intercultural media workshop

Author of the case study

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Abstract in English

Although being in need of ways of communication and medial participation, refugees and migrants very often don't have the necessary possibilities and skills; The intercultural media workshop PANGEA provides free internet access and tries to teach very basic media skills especially to young foreigners. The creation of art and media projects is also a part of the conception, which by the way may call attention in public.

Abstract in italiano

Nonostante abbiano bisogno di modi di comunicare e di partecipazione mediatica, i rifugiati e gli immigrati molto spesso non ne hanno le qualifiche e le possibilità necessarie; Il laboratorio mediatico interculturale PANGEA provvede all'accesso gratuito ad internet e prova a insegnare delle nozioni basilari sui media. La creazione di progetti artistici e mediatici risulta quindi una parte della concezione secondo cui in questo modo si potrebbe richiamare l'attenzione del pubblico.

Area

Media, education, art.

Kind-category of project

Training in media skills, editorial project, art project.

Kind-category of actor

Registered association.

Country

Austria.

Year

Founded in 2002 as a part of MEDEA, independent association since 2005.

5 key-words

media, skills, internet access, training, refugees, migrants.

1 THE PROJECT

1.1 Description of the project *(objectives, activities and results)*

Actor

PANGEA – Interkulturelle Medienwerkstatt

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4020 Linz

AUSTRIA

www.pangea.at

Objectives

“PANGEA” calls itself a “Werkstatt”, which can be translated as workshop. This term already shows to some extent the way the organisation aims to go. “PANGEA” is supposed to be a place where people can create and learn at the same time skills in the field of using and producing media and art. Basically, young people get free access to the internet. Furthermore the organisation tries to teach media skills to these people by offering courses and seminars. Another activity is to initiate and organise different projects in the field of media and art, within which the youth is the main actor.

The philosophy behind can be described as encouraging young children and adults with a migration or refugee background to think about questions of identity and “new home” in order to find one’s own position. Additionally they want the people to present themselves and not to be presented like objects. Finally, “PANGEA” wants to contribute to intercultural communication and understanding in general.

Concrete basic goals are:

- offering channels of communication and information by the means of internet access;
- staying in contact with the home country by using internet;
- teaching media skills on a simple level;
- serving as a forum of mutual learning, helping or just understanding;
- supporting social skills like self organisation;
- delivering a platform for creative work and art;
- confronting public with migration/refugee themes by means of art projects.

Normal Business

The free internet access is the heart of the service which the institution offers. The opportunity to use the computers four days a week attracts a lot of people. In 2005 “PANGEA” counted 383 registered users from 36 different countries. 100 of them came more or less regularly in order to use the institution and 20 up to 30 are characterized as the core group. Contemporarily, there are 10 work station with computers. But it is planned to enlarge the facilities. According to the organization, they could as well double the amount of places to use the full capacity.

Beside this service “PANGEA” gives additional assistance with different training courses and seminars referring to media skills like introductions in using computer and internet. Mostly following the main goal of teaching basic skills, the courses are arranged according to individual levels of knowledge. However, “PANGEA” also tries to offer possibilities for media coaching on a higher level like for example web design. Due to the difficult financial situation in current times this programme cannot take place as often as they wish. The staff consists of three people working in part-time and several volunteers from time to time.

Furthermore, “PANGEA” provides help and advice concerning problems with authorities, legal or employment matters. This finds place on a rather informal level and can be seen as a first step for people who don’t know whom and how to contact at all.

Following the idea of gender mainstreaming, “PANGEA” makes special effort to encourage girls to participate on every level. Since usually girls are less interested or used to work with computers and internet, “PANGEA” has established a special girls-day once a week. Response, however, is very low according to organisation’s representative. But they are going to try harder in order to improve on this field.

Single Projects

Another main part of “PANGEA”’s activities is the organisation of different projects in fields concerning art and media. For example, these projects are about photography, creating posters, filmmaking, radio, and designing of web pages. Every project refers to migration topics.

Current and planned projects are:

- “Ich – eine Provokation?” (“Me – a provocation?”)
The aims are to find out in which way young people with foreign origin are seen as a provocation by the Austrian public because of their appearance and behaviour. The participants discuss the topic in order to create a newspaper, a radio programme, and to organise a public happening. Within the scope of these activities they will try to get in contact with people on the street or elsewhere in public where they can test the argument of provocation in practise.
- “Act Against Racism”
Young people create and design in smaller groups posters dealing with different stereotypes and prejudices of different groups of foreigners. These posters may be published in public space as well as on internet. Meanwhile the participants can receive skills in graphic art and web design.
- “She thinks outside the box”
A project, which can be rather seen as an internal evaluation of the already mentioned deficit in involving girls and women in order to find out an adequate “best practice”.

List of older projects (partly in cooperation with MEDEA):

- “Artenreich” -“(bio)diversity” (2001)
Investigation and documentation of different ways and patterns of living in the Austrian town Linz. It consisted of a couple of different approaches ranging from street art to web presentation.
<http://www.servus.at/medea/artenreich/>
- “Nationalsozialismus in Österreich aus der Sicht minderjähriger Migrantinnen” – “Nazism in Austria from the point of view of underaged migrants” (2001)
Education of young migrants about history.
- “Absurdes Orchester” – “Absurd orchestra” (2002)
An orchestra consisting of musicians from different countries and cultures.
- “Dialog der Kulturen” – “Dialogue of cultures” (2002)
Enlightenment or education of public and participants about misperception in cultural matters by the means of photo presentation and open discussion meetings.
- “MTV Generation” (2003)
Challenging music video clips concerning carried stereotypes and images.

This was followed by professional photo sessions in order to question ways of self presentation.

- “Sprache des Anderen” – “Language of the other” (2004)
Language and writing project, where young people had to express their understanding and feeling referring to home and home country. The approach of creative writing should help to find one’s own identity.
- “Kalender der Kulturen” – “Calendar of cultures”
An every year published calendar, which contents art photographs made by the young people.

1.2 Time, structure and steps of the project

PANGEA’s already mentioned close connection of media and art finds its roots in the “mother” project MEDEA, which was founded in 1998. Originally, MEDEA was a kind of spin-off project from the education programme of the independent radio station FRO in Linz based on the idea of a combination of delivering media skills and creating art projects.

"PANGEA“ started in 2002, when the idea came up to accomodate the obvious demand of an internet access for young migrants and refugees. At this time the main support concerning finance and equipment came from Austrian’s large NGO Volkshilfe. After the end of this partnership, MEDEA decided to carry on with the "PANGEA" project with its own means.

In 2005 “PANGEA“ seperated from MEDEA as a self-contained association, mainly because of the problems of financing and the amount of work, that threatened the original intention of MEDEA. In autumn 2005 "PANGEA" had to endure a big financial crisis.

1.3 Place and context

“PANGEA” meets its big challenge in an often disregarded field: The refugees’ deficit of media skills on a basic level and the necessity of skills for dealing with the world of media in order to support the construction and establishment of one’s own identity in a new or foreign environment.

Regarding the first point, the organisation stresses on the importance of the term ‘low-level’. “Sometimes, there come people, who are in Austria not for longer than three days. Partly, they have never seen a computer or don’t know how to use it,” states a member of “PANGEA”. Another problem is the lack of language knowledge. But exactly these people need a possibility to stay in contact with their families or to find out what’s going on in their home countries. Hence the internet is an optimal instrument for them.

Furthermore, on the next level the media education activities take place: In order to become clearer about identities, about perception of oneself and not at least to receive specific skills, which could be helpful for example for searching a job.

It is impossible to give numbers and statistics about the nationalities of the users of “PAGEA” or about their countries of origin. It depends on changing waves of migration. For example the war in Afghanistan caused a big increase in users from

this area. Currently the biggest number is from different African countries like Nigeria, followed by people from the former Soviet Union.

Some background data referring to general situation in Linz:

There are about 140 different nationalities at all.

Officially registered foreigners: 24,275 – 12.9 % of total population

Main groups among these are:

- Former Yugoslavia: 48.5 %
- Turkey: 12 %
- Germany: 5.9 %
- Former Soviet Union: 4.3 %

[state 1.1.2005, Homepage city of Linz,

http://www.linz.at/zahlen/040_Bevolkerung/070_Auslaender/]

According to the group, in the region of Linz there is no other comparable institution than “PANGEA”.

1.4 Target

Although the organisation is open to everyone, the main target group of “PANGEA“ are young asylum seekers, refugees, and first or second generation migrants from the whole region of Linz at the age of 16 up to 30. Altogether users of “PANGEA“ come from 36 different countries.

Girls are also a special target group which “PANGEA“ tries to reach. In 2005 only 12% of the registered users have been girls.

In order to reach the people, “PANGEA“ uses word of mouth as well as its contacts to different organisations engaged in this field.

Another side is the external effect of “PANGEA“’s activities. Especially the art projects most of the time are supposed to affect public and to attract attention.

1.5 Methodology

How to attract interest?

The main problem within the project field remains the participation and the interest of the young people in such activities. Because of this, “PANGEA” tries to support the initiative from the youth’s side.

“It’s the best, when people come with their own ideas - obtrusion is much more difficult”, said Michael Reindl from “PANGEA”.

The more complicated and ambitious the projects are, the the harder it gets to attract the interest among the girls and boys, so is another experience of the group. One of the main issues is the question of reliability. It seems to be very difficult to encourage people for continuous work. Hence the preferred approach is the low levelled one – in skills and extent.

The methodology in short:

- Low-level education and skills as a main principle of the work of “PANGEA”.

- Offering an (almost) free internet access can be seen as a good way to attract young people.
- Not the results but the process of project work is important for “PANGEA”.
- On every level “PANGEA” supports the perception of the users as self-acting subjects instead of managed objects. They can offer ideas and influence the development of projects as well as they can boycott it.

1.6 Authors, funding and networks

Funding

As members of “PANGEA” tell, financing is one of the biggest problem that “PANGEA“ is facing. By the end of 2005 the organisation was close to a financial ruin. Hence the financial situation allows only a minimized programme in order to stay alive. Because of this “PANGEA” is not able to implement larger projects at this time. Moreover the financial uncertainty makes long-term future planning nearly impossible.

In the beginning, the main sponsor was the Austrian NGO Volkshilfe. But their support ended after a view years.

Now, the “PANGEA”‘s funding consists mainly of financial support from the federal state of Oberösterreich as well as from the city of Linz. Furthermore they receive money from grants for single projects. This can be a project proposal from the before mentioned federal state, the city or the European Union. However, receiving the big grants, especially from the EU, is impossible at this time because of the precarious financial situation of the whole organisation. Thus they aren’t able to go the risky way of a long and extensive application period, when one can’t be sure that there is any success.

Even though there is a symbolic membership fee of 10 € a year for every user who works with the computers or takes part in another project “PANGEA” offers, the fee can’t contribute significantly to the whole budget.

Networks

Main partners are the local independent radio FRO, which is also the place where the idea of “PANGEA” was born. They make it possible to realise broadcasting projects with young people. On top of that different other organisations recommend people to contact “PANGEA” and to use their offers.

Other partners are:

[Medea](#) (Initiative für Kunst und Medien Linz)

[Radio FRO](#) (Freier Rundfunk Oberösterreich)

[Maiz](#) (Autonomes Integrationszentrum Linz)

[Fiftitu%](#) (Frauen in Kunst und Kultur OÖ)

[Kupf](#) (Kulturplattform Oberösterreich)

[linz09 Kulturhauptstadt](#)

2. COMMENTS AND HINTS FOR AN EVALUATION

2.1. Strengths

Being the only organisation in the region the services that “PANGEA” offers have to be appreciated, of course. The organisation is proud of it. But furthermore, the good idea seems to be to connect this low-level service with proceeding steps and activities. The very attractive offer of internet access allows a continuous contact with the youth, which may lead to cooperation with them on a voluntary basis.

Another good point in the project seems to be the combination of training skills and creating art projects. In many cases art doesn't need specific capabilities like language and cultural knowledge. It offers the possibility for everyone to create things and to get results in order to strengthen identity and self-confidence. This approach is further supported by the fundamental principle of “empowerment”. Young people are seen as actors, which can influence and define the way and process of their projects. They are creators, targets and motives in one person; not only objects of aid.

Moreover, the projects aren't only restricted to the internal sphere of “PANGEA”. Most of them, of course due to their medial character, aim to reach the public. This might be a good practise to reduce fear of contact from the youth's side and to oppose misperception from the majority's side. Furthermore, it seems like a good way, when migrants and refugees have the chance to fight for acceptance instead of someone else doing this for them. It is authentically, since they know their problems better and so they are involved in a mutual process.

From the author's point of view the employment of a person with “migration background” - although this term is questionable -, is a sign for realising intercultural practise on every level, also inside organisational structures.

From the organisations point of view “real intercultural practise” is one of the biggest strengths of “PANGEA”. In the region of Linz they claim a unique position in this area. “Nowhere else you can find such a variety of different ethnicities on one place.” It is actually inevitable that people of different origins meet each other within the locations of “PANGEA”.

The fact that “PANGEA” received a couple of awards for their work during the last years shows to some extent the success of the work:

- Award of the federal state for art within intercultural dialogue 2005 (in cooperation with MEDEA)
- City of cultures 2005 (in cooperation with the association Afghanmaug).
- Intercultural award 2005 (from the Austrian Social democrats for the current project Act Against Racism).
- City of cultures 2004 (award for becoming an association developed from a project).
- Swiss youth photo award 2003 (fourth place for a collection of pictures).
- European foundation for photography 2001.
- Integrative youth award of the city of Linz 2001.
- City of cultures 2001.
- “Kolaric lives” – poster competition 2001.
- “My neighbour lives” – photo competition 2001.

- Intercultural award 2000
(from the Austrian Social democrats).

2.2 Critical points

In view of the dramatic financial situation, it seems very difficult to criticise the project at all. "PANGEA" itself admits that they aren't able to realise more and bigger projects than providing the internet access and the low-level skills training, what is anyway already a very good practise.

Another unsolved problem is the reserved participation of girls in the activities.

Perhaps the practise to rely on one's own initiative could be criticised, because this might leave several good minded project ideas unused. But on the other hand this is also a good practise and cannot be changed as long as "PANGEA" follows its principles.

Regarding the intercultural ambition it might be questioned to what extent a real intercultural exchange takes place between the different ethnic groups. But as other examples show, intercultural exchange should not be an obligation following the superficial idea of: "You and you have to talk with each other ...". The informal way to meet by chance seems to be much more natural and cannot be criticised. Furthermore remains the deficit of intercultural exchange between minorities and the majority society. As long as the young people stay inside "PANGEA", they don't have any contact with the Austrians. But it might be difficult to organise it in another way. At some points the projects touch others or the public spheres of society.

It could also be argued that the separation itself contributes to improved intercultural practices. Here young migrants and refugees can receive skills, possibilities to communicate through electronic mediums and are supported in finding self-confidence without any pressure from external expectations. So it might be a good practise from an intercultural view.

LINKS

<http://www.servus.at/medea/news/index.de.htm>

the previous mother project of "PANGEA"