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Experience Report about my internship for media-net-works in Umea, Sweden and Achill Island, Ireland

I did a five months internship for 'media-net-works', a project funded by the **e Learning Initiative** of the European Commission.

"The aim of the project is to promote active citizenship through digital and media competence in combination with intercultural awareness.
During the piloting of the training programme participants were involved actively in building and maintaining (moderating) their own transnational communities in order to share knowledge and insights into political, social and cultural collective decision-making.
In order to train responsibility for these new media of exchange, participants analysed existing virtual communities and the discursive behaviour observed in these fora. They also reflected on their own behaviour as moderators, contributors or "lurkers" by documenting and questioning their own use of media and intercultural behaviour (e.g. dominance, power-distance in a digital environment, etc.). On a meta-level the participants kept their own log-book in the form of a "portfolio" where with the help of "can-do"-statements they followed their own learning path on the way to increased digital, media and intercultural competence. In order to facilitate and illustrate this learning process they formed their own virtual community of meta-discussions but also face-to-face meetings where these experiences could be shared, demonstrated and evaluated. The international piloting helped produce a realistic and adaptable training course which clearly points out the concept of active project work for involved learning in these three areas."
(Source: http://www.media-net-works.de)

My main task during my internship was helping to organize and facilitate the pilot training programme, developed by the media-net-works project. Within the training programme new and innovative teaching and education methods, which have been developed in the media-net-works! Project, have been tested and evaluated.

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As my university, the RheinAhrCampus in Remagen, Germany, is the coordinator of the project I knew the project and some of the key people for quite a while and got very interested in it as I really enjoy the combination of international communication and the use of new information and communication technology. I also already knew a few people at the University of Umea, one of the other participating universities. After a while I became more and more involved in it and this resulted in the opportunity to do an internship in a very international and exciting environment.

My internship was divided into two main parts, and after a three day kick off during a meeting in Brighton, England I headed to Umea, Sweden where I was to work for three months with Patricia Shrimpton, the co-organizer of the media-net-works project at the University of Umea and professor at the Department of Modern Languages. Life couldn't have treated me better, since the people I worked with were absolutely amazing and I felt very welcome and comfortable right from the beginning. The University of Umea was, besides the University of Leon in Spain and the RheinAhrCampus in Germany one of the involved universities.

To avoid misunderstandings I'd like to clarify the terms participants, partners and co-organisers, for this is always a bit tricky when it comes to working in such a diverse project environment.
The participants are the students of the respective participating universities. They are at the same time the 'guinea pigs' for media-net-works!, since the new teaching and education methods are being tested on them.
The partners are the involved institutions, like the mentioned universities and other adult learning institutions in Germany and Europe.
The co-organisers are the people who are working at those institutions and who started and maintain the project.

My main task in Umea was to work with the participants and help the co-organisers with their work. I had already participated in similar projects, but I have never expected the amount of work and diverse tasks that comes with the organisation of such an international project. It was very interesting to see how things work behind the curtain and I really enjoyed the variety of responsibilities I had.

To improve the communication amongst the different stations all over Europe and to test new ways of supporting training courses we introduced a dynamic online platform, called moodle. One of my tasks was to work and maintain the moodle and to give technical support for the participants and co-organisers. I introduced the Swedish participants to the moodle and showed them what they can do with it and gain from it. Since this was the main communication platform for everybody it was very interesting to see all the different contributions and suggestions of the participants and co-organisers. Everything worked very well and I think the moodle will find its way into further projects and also local courses or other insets at the partner institutions.

Besides that I had the chance to work closely together with Pat Shrimpton and could therefore gain a good and detailed insight into her 'local' work in Umea and her 'international' work in several projects. I learned a lot about European University System in general and the Swedish in particular. I also experienced the differences in working, teaching and living habits which are really interesting and worthwhile experiences for me.

I also had the time to attend two lectures, held by Pat Shrimpton about British and American Realia. The concept of 'Realia courses' are to provide a general overview about the history, economy, social and cultural habits, recent developments of a country and how all those things influence its today's actions and positions. I learned a lot about the United Kingdom and the USA which helped me to understand and reflect upon their respective actions and developments.

Furthermore I attended a course about Environmental Policy and Administration in Sweden and the EU.

In addition to that I spent a lot of time at the HumLab, a high-tech-thing-tank where I met very interesting people who are doing research on all sorts of 'on-the-edge' technologies and developments. During one of the seminars which are organised frequently by the HumLab I met Howard Rheingold, the author of books like 'SmartMobs', 'Virtual Communities' and the likes. He really is a fascinating character and he, besides others, inspired me look more deeply into the field of weblogs and other current developments which are going to change the internet and our life in general. I also met professional weblogger and researcher during the BlogWalk5, a 'low scale but highly efficient' approach to bring interested and

interesting people all over the world together to talk about weblogs and other interesting related topics.

I was also looking for ways to implement weblogs or other new technologies into the training course, but since we already had a good working online platform we stayed with it, but I kept discussing those new developments with some of the co-organisers.

To sum it up, I would say my time in Sweden was the most inspiring and amazing experience I ever had and I really enjoyed it.

The second part of my internship took place on Achill Island in Ireland where I had the chance to work at Achill Tourism, the local tourism office. This was an addition to my main task on Achill, the preparation of the 'residential stay' respectively project meeting. After four month of virtual cooperation and communication all the participants and co-organisers came to Achill Island for a one week meeting.

I was the local contact person for the project and 'prepared the ground'. I established new contacts and kept old ones alive. I organized partly the accommodation and the catering for about 40 people and organized things like the reception party, newspaper articles, 'advertisings' for our project and tried to involve as many local people as possible.

Of course I continued my work with the moodle and tried to function as the 'communication hub' between Achill and the project.

There were some many 'little things' to organize that it would go beyond the scope of this report to mention them all. This variety of tasks and challenges definitely improved my organisational skills and my multitasking ability.

It was also very interesting to see how the local business work and how the community is structured. Achill depends very much on tourism, so I could really learn a lot about 'hands-on-approaches' and how small businesses cope with today's challenges.

The meeting itself was filled with workshops, lectures and activities. I participated in the 'VC4U' workshop, where we tried to promote a virtual community, which some of the students created during the preparatory course. Besides that I've been 'general dogsbody' and driver, since I knew the local people and places quite well.

After returning to Germany I've been involved in the wrap-up of the project and the documentation of the residential stay and project meeting.

Recapitulating I would say that my whole internship has been an amazing experience for me and I'm really grateful for having gotten this chance.

I met great people and learned a lot about Europe and what it means to be European. I definitely improved my language and organisational skills and became much more self-confident.

I really believe that this internship has influenced both my personal and professional development and I will benefit from it in many ways.