

## **Gymnázium a ZŠ sv. Vincenta de Paul, Bratislava**

### ***Regional Culture – Identity in the Past, Identity for the Future Joint Activity Report (2004/5)***

The center of our project group's joint activities this school year was the publication of the volume *Europe on the Way* – another combined effort of our project group similar to the European calendar from previous two years, but this time on a much larger scale. Compiling, editing, printing, and last not least physically distributing this 119-pages thick, large A4 format brochure documenting our group's work in the last three years proved a formidable challenge. The results and the enthusiastic reception of the publication (both among those involved in the project and those who had known nothing about the project prior to receiving the brochure), have however shown that this was work well invested; the brochure has for many of our schools turned into our chief means of disseminating project results and advertising the underlying idea of our project: search for regional cultural identity in a Europe that is becoming unified.

The book combines contributions from all five countries. There are two main sections dealing with two aspects of the search mentioned above: that of searching for our region's cultural identities in the past, and that of trying to determine what it will be like in the future. In between the two poles of investigation, by a lucky coincidence, we were also able to deal with current events, something that had not been originally intended at the project's outset: for four out of five countries participating in the project, the middle of the three academic years marked the year when the four countries joined the fifth country (Austria) in the European Union. This event was marked by the unforgettable common celebration (April 2004) at the Austrian castle of Kittsee located in the centre of the triangle Austria–Hungary–Slovakia, in the presence of ministers of education from the countries involved:

<http://vincentdepaul.sk/foto/socrates/2003-4/eu>.

This was an extra international project meeting that had originally never been envisioned; and if it seemed to us that something on a similar scale could not be accomplished in the following academic year, 2004/5 proved us wrong. In some ways, what happened in 2004/5 can be seen as the final triumph of our efforts from the last three years, as it involved the most creative part of the students' activities (in composing the brochure) and, for at least some of the schools involved, also the wish most frequently expressed by student participants was fulfilled: that of more extensive international travel by students from partner schools.

This year, similarly to previous years, an extra and previously unscheduled, third international project meeting took place, one year after the Kittsee celebration. Out of the initiative of the Austrian government agency, KulturKontakt Austria (formerly Österreichischer Kulturservice), at whose contact seminar in Vienna in January 2002 the five schools started their cooperation:

<http://www.abc-network.org/de/meetings/2002/>

a final international meeting took place in Kraków, Poland, from 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April 2005, under the auspices of ABC Network, an initiative unifying several Socrates projects into a larger collaborative unit. The organizers invited, also similar to previous years, Socrates participants from three other Socrates projects:

<http://www.abc-network.org/de/meetings/2005/participants.html>.

What made the Kraków meeting unique for at least two of the schools participating in our project was that, following a proposal of the Austrian school (Klagenfurt), we tried to bring in more participants than the customary number of two students and two teachers per school. In the end, both the Austrian and the Slovak school took part in the Kraków meeting with entire classes of students (over 20 Austrians and almost 40 Slovaks). It was the first experiment on such a large scale during an international meeting, and it corresponded to the desire often expressed by our students: getting to know one's peers not only through online communication, but especially through personal meetings. Our earliest inspiration for doing this, however, was the students exchange program already conducted in 2002/3 between the Hungarian (Várpalota) and Polish (Skoczów) school who had organized weeklong stays of

students in a host country in the previous academic year. We believe it will be personal contacts like this that will have the longest lasting effect on our students' experience with the European dimension. We are convinced that when they think back to the process of European integration a few years away from now, images connected with our project work – such as balloons of many colours jointly flying into the sky during the EU expansion celebrations at the Kittsee castle:

<http://vincentdepaul.sk/foto/socrates/2003-4/eu/index9.htm>

or the students' personal conversations with the ministers of education of their own countries during the presentation of our project in front of TV cameras (including ORF) in Kittsee:

<http://vincentdepaul.sk/foto/socrates/2003-4/eu/index8.htm>

or Kraków's main square and Old Town scenery, the site of our final, grand-scale international project meeting, but also a place we had already visited earlier during one of our international project meetings that were independently organized by our own project group:

<http://vincentdepaul.sk/foto/socrates/2002-3/skoczow/sk17.htm>

will be those images that will most visibly stand out in our students' memories for years and decades to come.

Another important final product of our activities was a traveling exhibition that, similarly to the brochure, documents the progress of our project group's work in the past three years. It was officially for the first time presented during our individual group's final international project meeting in Bratislava (14–17<sup>th</sup> March 2005), to the great interest of participants from the 5 countries, as well as invited representatives of regional and educational authorities and the media (print, regional TV):

<http://vincentdepaul.sk/foto/socrates/2004-5/bratislava/index4.htm>.

Immediately after the conclusion of the Bratislava meeting, the traveling exhibition was transferred to Austria, where it was expanded to include additional materials about the Austrian school and the very first project meeting in Vienna, Austria (January 2002). From Austria, the exhibition traveled to Poland where it was used during our final presentation in Kraków to introduce our project to other Socrates projects schools who attended the event. From Kraków, the exhibition was again moved to Ostrava, Czech Republic. This was a great and interactive way of disseminating our project's results beside the more traditional opportunities afforded to us by the brochure.

Apart from joint activities, each school also engaged in activities of its own that, each in its own unique way, contributed to the exploration of our project's subject matter. Let us state only a few examples of unique project work conducted by each school in 2004/5. The Hungarian school in Várpalota (beside organizing the first international project meeting in this academic year, from 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> October 2004, mainly devoted to preparations for our brochure's publication) adapted one of the tales from our book about King Matthias for the stage, and gave a public performance of it for all students, teachers and guests. The Polish school in Skoczów organized a school competition titled *My Vision of Future Europe*. The school in Ostrava, Czech Republic (beside heroically tackling all issues connected with the publishing of the book that was printed in their country), prepared a photo exhibition of the Michal mine and students shot entertaining video sequences about Ostrava attractions, to be later on edited for a film distributed on a CD to all partner schools. The Austrian school in Klagenfurt distributed questionnaires among students to obtain feedback on the project work and our traveling exhibition; Austrian students also took a closer look at examining Polish literature. Students in Bratislava, Slovakia, were asked to create webpages (with only minimal help from teachers) featuring Biblical quotations and the students' own commentaries about those quotations, to showcase their own school's identity: the Slovak school was the only church-based school from among those participating in the project.

Our project work was continually evaluated: in person during international project meetings (at least twice a year), and in writing thanks to regular email communication, especially in February and August when applications for prolonging the project for another year, or final end-year reports were due. Communication was not easy for us; we had to overcome many problems. Creating webpages documenting our group's work proved to be so difficult and time-demanding that we were forced to abandon our original intention of setting up a common

web server; as it turned out, administering one's own school's web pages was often all we could handle in this domain of our activities.

The final international meeting in Kraków was a success to the degree that the Austrian organizers (KulturKontakt Austria) contemplate a (perhaps less formal) continuation of all the schools' cooperation in the following academic year 2005/6. The new initiative will be called ComeTogether and another large-scale international meeting is envisioned in Austria for early 2006. So far, none of the five schools has declined to participate in this extension of our activity; therefore, it appears that our group's cooperation is not concluded yet, although it may officially be regarded as completed in terms of our three-year Socrates project.

### ***Regionálna kultúra – identita v minulosti, identita pre budúcnosť Opis projektu (2004/5)***

V tomto školskom roku sa konali tri medzinárodné projektové stretnutia, počas ktorých sme plánovali a vyhodnocovali priebeh našej práce; dve zo stretnutí patrili medzi pravidelné, jedno záverečné sa uskutočnilo navyše. Kým počas prvého roka projektu sme skúmali predovšetkým kultúrnu identitu našich regiónov v minulosti a počas druhého roka sme sa často venovali aktuálnym udalostiam (išlo o rok rozšírenia EÚ), tak počas záverečného roka našej spolupráce sme sa snažili orientovať najmä na budúcnosť. Ako si mladí ľudia z piatich zúčastnených krajín predstavujú zosúladenie individuálnej kultúrnej identity regiónov s pokračujúcim zjednocovaním Európy? Môže vôbec existovať rôznorodosť napriek alebo uprostred zjednotenosti? Naše hlavné médium pre úvahy o tejto otázke sa zároveň stalo jedným z našich finálnych produktov pre tento školský rok: išlo o spoločnú publikáciu všetkých 5 škôl v knižnej forme, *Europe on the Way* (Európa na ceste). Počas prvého stretnutia vo Várpalote (október 2004) sme sa venovali najmä zakončeniu prác potrebných pre vydanie knižky; príspevky z predošlých školských rokov sme zhrnuli v jej prvej časti, kým v druhej časti sme dali priestor kreatívnejšiemu prístupu k problematike *Moje vlastné miesto v Európe* (študentské eseje, ilustrácie, poézia...). Prvé výtlačky knižky boli distribuované počas stretnutia v Bratislave (marec 2005), ktorého druhým hlavným bodom bolo otvorenie impozantnej putovnej výstavy. Výstavu sme predstavili aj účastníkom troch iných nezávislých projektov Socrates, ktorí sa so zástupcami nášho projektu Socrates stretli počas špeciálneho projektového stretnutia v Krakóve (apríl 2005). Krakovské stretnutie bolo pre našu školu výnimočné najmä tým, že sa nám do Poľska podarilo priviezť veľké množstvo účastníkov (35 študentov a 4 učiteľov) – najväčší počet spomedzi všetkých 17 zúčastnených škôl, ktoré sa väčšinou prezentovali iba obvyklým počtom 2 študentov a 2 učiteľov. Popri spoločnej činnosti sa v tomto školskom roku každá škola venovala i svojim vlastným iniciatívam súvisiacim s obsahovou náplňou projektu; v správe o spoločných aktivitách uvádzame aj konkrétne príklady individuálnych aktivít.