'WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY DIFFERENCE?': THE ARTISTIC USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA BUILDS BRIDGES BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS

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Projects fostering intergenerational bonding and dialogue are increasingly in demand: The demographic profile of Europe is changing and by the year 2050 almost half of Europeans will be over 50, while at the same time the birth rate continues to fall. Demographic ageing is strongly affecting the relationships among generations. Family structures are changing: More and more children and young people are growing up far away from their grandparents and an increasing proportion of the population grows old without having children and grandchildren. Nevertheless, older people often wish to keep in touch with younger people to transfer own experiences and to keep up with a quick changing world. Young people value the wealth of experience and knowledge of the older generation and are keen on learning about past times. The demand for organising engagements between the generations is on the increase.

The European project "mix@ges - Intergenerational Bonding via Creative New Media," explores in five European countries how the artistic use of digital media can bring together both young and old. The project aims to encourage intergenerational bonding and support social linkage in order to challenge and overcome negative stereotypes between the generations and to foster cross-generation interaction. It endeavours to bridge both the generational gap as well as the digital divide by enhancing media literacy of older people, strengthening media competence of young people and allowing intergenerational access to digital media.

Through its outcomes, products and recommendations the project aims to contribute to the European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity in 2012 by enabling more older citizens to develop, enhance and use their skills in new ways. This complements the EY2012 consideration that older people 'still have a lot to give and to experience even after they have reached an advanced age'. It encourages older people to partake in intergenerational activities and allow them to get involved in many social activities that

are currently digital, such as social networks, new media and wikis.

Furthermore "mix@ges" aims to create incentives and access to social, civic, cultural and intercultural competences and creativity in intergenerational learning. In general, the ideas behind intergenerational project work endeavour to bring together young and old to establish new relationships across the age groups, to reassess the participants' view of the other generation and to help them recognize differences and, in particular, similarities. However, bringing together different age groups is not enough to create a successful intergenerational dialogue. The content, the activities and the methods employed when groups are brought together, need to appeal to and cater for both generations.

Artistic projects are well-suited to stimulate an exchange between the generations. The non-formal learning environment provides opportunities for every participant, regardless of his or her formal educational background, to bring and share individual skills and personal experiences. Creative activity tends to take place on both an emotional and personal level. Projects introducing new topics for both generations have the potential to provide a perfect setting for intergenerational communication as they offer opportunities to share learning on equal terms. Successful intergenerational collaborations in the arts are perceived as rewarding and interesting by all participants. Furthermore, such projects can be highly motivational and increase the desire

for more intergenerational learning experiences.

The project "mix@ges - Intergenerational Bonding via Creative New Media" wants to provide new spaces for such creative exchanges between the generations by exploring innovative approaches and methods. The project, funded by the European Union within the Lifelong Learning Programme, runs from 2011 to 2013 and involves a consortium of partners from Scotland, Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Belgium. In their respective countries, the partners implemented creative new media workshops in collaboration with national organisations such as museums, schools, youth or senior associations. In each country several intergenerational workshops under the guidance of artists and media experts, have involved the creation of artistic media products. The media products include iPod movies, audio guides for a museum, art blogs, Tag tool performances, digital music and photographs. Most important, the groups got to know each other and had fun together. All workshops were evaluated and the results are published in a bespoke handbook for media educators, trainers, artists, and practitioners.

More similarities than differences: "Tagging Sculptures" in Germany

The first mix@ges workshop was held in May 2012 at the LehmbruckMuseum in Duisburg, Germany. This workshop consisted of a group of young people aged 14 to 20 and people over the age of 60. Under the guidance of two Tag tool artists and an

art educator the group created narrative light installations with the help of a digital drawing board and a Tag tool console. Visitors of the museum observed the group 'tagging' visual sculptures on canvas, on the walls of the museum halls and on real sculptures.

The participants, artists and organisers carried out an evaluation after the workshop. While the young participants expected to 'meet new people' or 'to gain new experiences', the older participants were 'curious about new media', wanted to 'reduce their fear of the computer' and most importantly wished to 'do something together with young people'. Both generations shared a mutual curiosity and a desire to have a meaningful and enjoyable time together.

The liveliest exchanges between young and older participants took place when the group work was topic or biography based. Personal photos provided by the participants offered the opportunity for some of the group to describe the depicted event, while the others re-enacted the images with the Tag tool. Other thematic exercises like painting to music or the improvisation of short plays, and the added potential of the intervals, provided enough space for generation-spanning discussions. At the suggestion of both a young and an older participant, the group expressed the desire to establish a regular Tag tool group and to continue to meet after the four day workshop had finished.

One participant outlined why the Tag tool workshop was so successful in fostering intergenerational dialogue, 'It does not matter whether you are old or young, stupid or smart.' 'We all had fun using our creativity', said an older participant who in the beginning was quite apprehensive about the new media. The young people expressed unanimous that they had enjoyed the workshop and learned a lot. For them it was an enriching experience, 'that the young and the older people worked so well together'. A 16-year-old got straight to the point: 'What do you mean by difference? People always talk about the gap between the generations; we should really be talking about the similarities. "

A plethora of opportunities: Mix@ges musicians in Scotland

The Scottish musical media workshop was a learning partnership between younger students from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, community music initiatives and older members of the Learning in Later Life Traditional Music Club at the Centre for Lifelong Learning at Strathclyde University in Glasgow.

A shared passion for music, composition and performance provided the starting point for the theme of this innovative workshop 'Scotland – Transitions and Transmissions'. Motivated by our enthusiastic media trainer, this creative group of fellow musicians developed and performed a sparkling repertoire of 11 traditional Scottish melodies and songs. The warm and friendly ethos of mutual respect and encouragement created an enjoyable workshop setting for the group and an animated exchange of skills and expertise. The new media experiences opened up a

plethora of opportunities to record, capture and present the results of their lively learning collaboration. The group explored the workings of camcorders and digital cameras to record the musicians making music together. The development of the mix@ges Musicians wiki space, as the core repository for their work, was acclaimed a major success by the entire group. Part of the trials and demonstrations involved inserting text, uploading images and YouTube videos to the wiki. A digital recorder was used to record musical arrangements and excerpts were uploaded to the wiki using SoundCloud software.

Transitions in learning, sharing and bonding between generations are visible for all to see in the practice and results of this workshop and transmissions via the mix@ges Musicians wiki are now publicly available via the wikispace.

'How easy it was to work with the older generations and the power of music to bring us together', one of the young participants concluded.

Half of the photo is yours: Cell-photo art in Slovenia

Today's cell phone is a versatile, multifunctional tool which has the facility to create audio, textual, video and photo files. Users of cell phones create files to share with their chosen audience. Intentionally or unintentionally, today's cell photography contributes to modern photography styles. Photographs taken with mobile or cell phones have become, by their uniqueness and widespread use, an

independent globally recognised genre called 'cell-photo art'. The young and the older participants of the Slovenian workshop, organised by ZDUS (the Slovenian Pensioners' Federation in Ljubljana) came together over one week to learn, share and create cell-photo art.

Older people seldom have opportunities to interact with the younger generation other than in their family setting. When they do have such an opportunity, it seems that the type and level of communication changes. Today's teenagers communicate mainly via new media and social networks, whereas older people have certain concerns about using such media. Following retirement, culture and the arts constitute the main themes for older people, thus approaching new media through the arts was very different for them from the usual routes they might take. Developing the programme for the workshop was quite challenging, since the organisers had to overcome stereotyping and look for activities with the potential to bridge the gap between the younger and older participants while keeping both generations motivated and interested.

Icebreakers have proven to be a good way of overcoming any initial awkwardness and shyness of the participants, and can also reduce the distance between individuals at the start of the workshops. The younger participants were reticent because of their respect for the older participants and the older participants could not find a topic which would interest the younger participants. The older participants initially came across as the dominant

party in the group. A series of questions related to cell phone photography and social networks prompted a discussion between the generations and they began to share their views and opinions. The approach proved to be a good way to explore the potential of both generations and to overcome any initial difficulties in respect of interaction.

Using the cell phone camera, participants were asked to capture 'handshaking' images of people both in motion and in portrait. When the group were involved in the task, creativity became the focus and there was no room for generational difference to interrupt the learning flow.

Non-formal learning has proved to be an excellent opportunity for the older to learn how new media can be used in a creative way. Furthermore, the creative collaboration supported social linkage between the generations. Assessment by the facilitator indicated that the participants also connected in their initial common misunderstanding of modern art. This shows that generations do not only bond in similarities, but also in differences.

The mix@ges experience

In total, fifteen creative intergenerational new media workshops took place in the five mix@ges-countries: In Belgium, young volunteers used their iPods to create short films together with older persons living in a seniors' home or attending a day-care centre. One of the most outstanding results is the film "Ada", shot by a 22-year old boy born in D.C. Congo who teamed up with an Alzheimer's German

lady aged 88. The result is a tear-jerking short movie full of positive vibes. In Scotland, young and old created an app about their neighbourhood for the "Commonwealth Games " in 2014 and in Germany an intergenerational group learned how to produce an audio guide for an art exhibition. In Austria, several museums invited school classes and retired persons to create media collages, real time visuals or a web app related to their on-going exhibition of contemporary art.

All creative results of the project will be showcased at the closing conference in Ljubljana to be held on 16th May 2013. At this 'International Encounter with Generations, the Arts and the Media' a handbook with the findings and lessons learned of the project will be presented and discussed with experts, artists, trainers and learners from all over Europe. Feel welcome to join this inspirational event!

Further information on the project and registration for the conference is available on the website: www.mixages.eu