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## Virtual film festival takes centre stage

Since 1997 the NetDays project, designed to promote use of new media in education across the EU, has helped foster links between countries and cultural organisations. Julie Nightingale reports on the latest NetDays week

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A post-modern attack on the cult of the media by a Wallace and Gromit-style character, referencing Andy Warhol and TV evangelism and collectively directed by Norwegian auteurs sounds like a topic Mark Lawson should be rubbing his chin quizzically over on Late Review. Yet this high-minded, witty condemnation of television and its role in modern society was one of the exhibits in NetDays, a European Union initiative for young people, highlighting the benefits new media brings to education and culture.

NetDays was set up in 1997 to promote the use of new media in education throughout the European Union, raising awareness of technology and its potential with an emphasis on fostering partnerships between countries and cultural organisations in public and private sectors.

Its centrepiece is a showcase of online and offline events during an annual NetDays week, held last year at Nemo, Amsterdam's science and technology museum, with winning projects chosen by an international jury from more than 600 entries. The Norwegian effort, Media - and its power over me, took the prize in the 16-25 category of NetDays' first virtual film festival. It was produced by four 18-year-old media students and was inspired by their studies and some personal disenchantment with the way media dominates modern life.

"We had recently had a project about post-modernism and had produced a website on it," explains Simon Kristian, 18. "Post-modernism is a very vague term but one of the post-modern theories is that the media is no longer reliant on reality to shape the way we perceive it. On TV today you get a selection of what the media thinks is important."

Dina Tasic, 15, from Austria, won the 7- to 15-year-old category for her film, 60 seconds of my life, a tour which takes in her sitting room, her bike, and the landscape near her home with the camera constantly shifting to give the impression of seeing Dina's world through her eyes. The judges were also impressed by her editing skills and use of colour.

Interestingly, Dina had no film-making ambitions prior to the competition - she plans to be an artist - but took up the invitation from her teacher to take part out of curiosity. She still professes not to be especially interested in technology itself.

The overall winner of the main competition was a French project, Parcours inter N.E.T., a virtual recreation of the town of Terrasson-Lavilledieu near Brive in the Dordogne, France.

It was set up by Espace Culture Multimedia (ECM) and Temps Jeune, an organisation dedicated to disadvantaged or disaffected youngsters, as a way to introduce young people to working with CD-roms, digital cameras and the internet. The technology unleashed something in their imagination, says Thierry Loiseau of ECM.

"I would have been happy to stop when they were familiar with multimedia, but it was the children who saw the possibilities and wanted to go further and create the virtual tour," he insists.

The tour traces a route through the streets, using individual digital camera shots taken every few metres. Such is the intimacy evoked by the photographs that you actually feel you are walking through the town and get a taste of what it is like to live there, said the judges.

ECM is now helping to set up a multimedia project in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, an exceptional venture while political relations between France and its former colony continue to be poor. As their partners in Africa have yet to get their own internet connection, children from Ivory Coast are talking to their French counterparts from a cyber cafe, exchanging poems, drawings and pictures online, and using that old-fashioned medium, letter-writing.

"Eventually we are hoping to export the multimedia

application we used to create virtual Terrasson to the Ivory Coast and help them to build a virtual version of Abidjan," says Loiseau.

Other projects in competition included Eleven Attitudes from Austria, an internet platform for football supporters worldwide that was one of the runners-up. Fans were asked to send their comments explaining what motivated their support for a club. The project culminated in a documentary shot during 2004's European Championships in Portugal.

The theme of this year's event was dialogue between cultures and image, and many of the projects included collaboration with one or more nations, such as the Czech Republic's work with the Taiwan Youth Knowledge Network which brought together students from both countries in a series of art workshops, lectures and a film festival.

The number of projects entered was up 25% on 2003, partly a reflection of the inclusion of projects from the 10 new EU member states.

Ursa Bajzel, the NetDays coordinator for Slovenia, one of the new member states, says the European-wide scheme gives young people an unrivalled opportunity to air their ideas on an international stage.

"It provides us with the chance to participate alongside other countries but also to work with other organisations in Slovenia and for the children to be seen and heard and present their thoughts to a wide audience."

Digital cameras, PCs and other ICT equipment are widely used in Slovenia's schools, says Bajzel, so children are largely familiar with it. In addition, many schools are involved in other Euro projects where ICT is well used, such as the Leonardo Da Vinci cultural programme that fosters collaboration on culture-based projects between EU member states.

What's needed now, says Bajzel, is a shift to the next level, beyond familiarisation with ICT to looking at how it is used pedagogically.

"In the past few years there has been great progress. There are a lot of teacher training courses and workshops organised by educational institutes for teachers on digital photography or other technology in the classroom and I think most children already use some sort of new technology, if not digital cameras then email or MP3. They need perhaps a push up into how to integrate the knowledge that they have into everyday learning."

This key point is underlined by José Pessanha, NetDays

coordinator for the European Commission. With NetDays now entering its ninth year, he believes the emphasis has to change.

"Each year we get projects which are more sophisticated, more interesting so, in a sense, I would say that the initial objective of NetDays has been achieved. In future, perhaps, we should try to find new objectives to avoid repetition. There have been so many changes since 1997 in education and technology that the very concept of NetDays could and should be re-evaluated.

"Now I think we should invest in people, which means preparing people to develop content and the necessary pedagogical tools and skills."

This kind of thinking, which highlights ICT's role in teaching across the curriculum, will be new to some countries, less so to the UK and some others, he acknowledged.

"There are countries more advanced than others in terms of availability of infrastructure and awareness among teachers and training. I know that the situation in the UK is quite advanced and has no problem in that respect. But everywhere there is an important investment made by ministries, teachers, students and even parents. All countries are committed and all are advancing."

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NetDays projects: [www.netdayseurope.org](http://www.netdayseurope.org)

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