



Terra Incognita 4 - The European Adventure (Romania)

Summary

Terra Incognita 4 – the European Adventure - has been developed as a multiplayer online game bringing together a wide range of audience. By allowing participants to virtually travel throughout Europe, the game has succeeded in enabling debates amongst participants on topics related to European integration, European values and cultural diversity. New technologies (Internet and mobile phone) have been used to involve participants and increase their awareness of European issues.

The project

The main objective of the project is to raise awareness on the European integration process and European cultural heritage amongst an audience that is usually uninformed about European developments. By keeping citizens actively informed in a creative and innovative way, Terra Incognita 4 contributes to enhancing their knowledge of the EU accession process. At the same time, participants are encouraged to use new communication technologies as a tool for discovering European cultural diversity.

Sector(s) covered

Main Sector

Society

Other Sectors

Education/Training/Lifelong learning
Arts and Creative Industry

The project targets a wide audience ranging from pupils and students to employees and adults (age 13-50).

Approach

Terra Incognita 4 consists of a series of interactive events simultaneously taking place in the real world and on the Internet. Planned as an interactive platform for information and debate about cultural diversity and European values, the project invites the audience to embark on a virtual adventure facilitated by Internet and mobile technology. Each user has a game avatar in the virtual European space. The avatar travels to different European cities according to the personal interests of the user. Players use the Internet (website, email) and their mobile phone (text messages) to share information with other users. As a premiere the avatar is asking the player questions via SMS and the player can reply to these via SMS, directing the avatar to the action it should take. Avatars keep playing while the user is logged off and pop up in new locations and new situations when the player logs in again. A chat-system enables users to exchange views and help each other to overcome the game challenges.

Element of innovation – the process

By building an interactive multi-player game, the project developed an innovative approach to information dissemination on topics related to European integration and European cultural diversity. Terra Incognita 4 succeeded in reaching an audience that generally shows little or no interest in European issues.



The design of the game encourages users to carry out research on the Internet and cooperate with fellow users with a view to finding a correct answer and moving forward in the game. The competitive and real-time format of the game proved an efficient incentive to keep users abreast for longer periods and in a more in-depth manner. Besides, users could engage with topics reflecting their own personal experience, while putting their personal experience into the wider European framework of cultural diversity. The mix of personal involvement, cooperation with other users and the competitive component made European related topics extremely appealing to users, challenging their perceptions of European policy development and initiatives.

Key successes

(outcomes, results, impacts)

Terra Incognita 4 has resulted in the creation of a database containing information spanning 29 European countries, 73 European cities and several interest areas (economics, politics, sports, culture, history, humanities, and so on). Alongside the communication platform allowing users to virtually travel throughout Europe and the general public to familiarise with European related topics, the project has also generated 540 CD-ROMs (an offline game version). Over 1800 players benefited from the interactive game, while 1000 benefited from the offline game. Various statistics demonstrate the considerable success of this project amongst citizens, such as the number of subjects/destinations visited, the average exposure of players to the game topics and the number of visits on the website. The project was widely disseminated during conferences and festivals and was presented at one of the most important digital art and culture festivals in Europe, the Transmediale 2007 Berlin festival.

The major achievement of this project consists in developing an appealing and effective way to communicate complex and often unattractive topics to citizens. The use of interactive communication formats has enabled participants to engage in public debates on specific topics as well as in problem-solving initiatives in a way that traditional information channels (e.g. TV, press) would not have made possible. By doing so, participants were encouraged to reflect upon their personal experience under the wider European perspective, diversity and cultural debate.

The success of the present initiative points to the fact that the use of new technologies can support awareness-raising initiatives that appeal to new audiences, while fostering public debates and cooperation amongst participants.

Challenges

Moderating the forum for the online game platform has been an extremely difficult task, mostly because of the huge number of players who generated daily debates. The intensity of debates amongst users required constant IT support and an effective moderating process. The problem was overcome by allocating more moderators.

Transferability and sustainability

The platform can be further refined and used in the future, both from a technical and a content point of view (e.g. introducing new game models, specialising in topic and geographical areas, translating the game into other languages). Small game competitions can be re-launched, thus gathering a larger number of users.



The offline version of the game (CD-Rom) allows for the organizing of small competitions with two players or two-player teams. The multimedia product is targeted at European information multipliers and institutions working with children and teenagers (e.g. schools, associations and clubs). As such, the offline version of the game can constitute a valuable education tool, which can be used in other training and education contexts (formal, non-formal and lifelong learning).

Special Highlights

The design of the game format (interactive, real-time, competitive and multi-player) has been an effective tool in engaging people on European topics, such as European integration and European cultural diversity. The competitive format stimulates participants to carry out research on European policies and issues, and to cooperate with fellow participants through live chats and debating fora. The avatar is asking the player questions via SMS and the player can reply to these via SMS, directing the avatar to the action it should take. Avatars keep playing while the user is logged off and pop up in new locations and new situations when the player logs in again.

Key characteristics

General purpose of the practice	Promotes creative and innovative solutions to society problems
Target group	Pupils, students, employees, youths, adults, 13-50
Type of learning	Informal
Level of implementation	National
Funding	Public (EU funding)
Time frame	2006
Leading organisations	N.A
	AltArt Foundation

Further information

Website of the project:

www.altart.org

Additional Information:

The project was presented at the Transmediale 2007 festival in Berlin <http://www.transmediale.de>