Vienna Trip - July 2015

My perception on Vienna, Austria was exactly as I found it; beautiful, clean, picturesque and full of culture.

Taking advantage of the Hop-on-Hop-off Bus Tour, we managed to take in a wealth of information regarding Vienna's history with its worldwide renowned Opera Houses, Palaces, Museums and breath-taking architecture. However, more than anything else, what happened to impress me the most was how Austria has embraced immigrants and disadvantaged people with the help of European Funding.

Our hosts had very kindly organised for us to visit the A1 Internet Centre which is using IT as a resource to help disadvantaged people who may be immigrants that have come from war-torn countries like Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Syria etc. This stood out to be the highlight of my trip.

When we arrived, we were extremely impressed with the state-of-the-art technology available to targeted audiences such as the elderly and young children in order for them to improve their IT skills. Facilities available for children included simply playing board games, putting together power point presentations or inventing their own robot! The elderly are encouraged to use computers and familiarise themselves with the internet.

Internet Safety, media, graphics, picture editing, film making, coding and programming are just a few of the workshops that are being run at this centre. Schools are invited to attend pre-arranged morning sessions where students can learn almost anything about computers.

Also, in the afternoons, open programmes are run for all children. The Centre remains open until 6pm and children can come and play and use facilities free of charge. This can prove to be very useful especially for working parents. The Centre provides coaches to assist the children and also 'girls only' classes are being offered

once a week for Muslim girls who may not have been able to attend due to cultural reasons.

However, one of the things that astonished me more than anything else was the fact that on one side there seemed to be such an excellent facility available for children in Vienna with regards to IT, but on the other hand I was quite taken back when I discovered that schools finished at lunchtime and IT was not actually taught in their schools. Only private institutions offer this and even schooling is only available in the afternoons to parents who can afford to pay for it.

In the UK, children as young as 3 years are introduced to computer technology in the form of interactive games and online activities. Interactive whiteboards are a norm in almost all classrooms and our children are very familiar with IT from a very young age in comparison to Austria.

This seems quite unimaginable considering WIFI is so freely available throughout the country in Austria including buses, trains etc.

Another feature I loved about Vienna was the ease in which the transport system can be accessed with the use of a 'Vienna card'. This ticket can be purchased at a small cost but the beauty of this is you can use it on underground trains as well as trams. Such a convenient way to travel around the city as was proven on our visit.

Thank you to GOAL for showing us another part of the world which I am sure I may never have visited if it was not for the European Project.

Two things I would definitely bring back to the UK are the Internet Centre and their facilities which are accessed throughout school holidays and open for children free of charge. Also, the Travel Card which can be used on both trains and trams. Birmingham is preparing to run a tram system soon and I think this would be an excellent idea which the public I am sure, will find immensely useful.

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