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Hungary: Immigropoly - the Migration Game, by IDResearch Ltd.

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Conversation with Viktor Glied, co-developer of [Immigropoly](#), a project featured as a good practice on the European Web Site on Integration (EWSI).

Interview by András Kováts, independent expert on immigration and social integration – EWSI Country Coordinator for Hungary.

In 2011, a group of professors from the University of Pécs created [Immigropoly, an interactive online game](#) (available [here](#)) with the aim to inform young audience on immigration and integration issues.

The game is not only a free-time activity, it has also proved to be a versatile educational tool, touching on various issues from the fields of Social Sciences in general, and especially Sociology, Psychology, History, Culture and Ecopolitical Studies.

Could you tell us how the idea was conceived and when you decided to make it into a project?

Well, we started to work with migration and migrants in 2007. This topic was closely linked to our main fields of interest which are Africa and Globalisation. We started to look into issues related to migration in an African context, and later on we widened our horizon. As all of us teach or work at the university (the University of Pécs), the most natural thing was to go to young people and ask them their views on the problems related to migration, immigration, integration and multiculturalism. We've done a lot of things-- interviews, surveys, focus-group discussions--, and we found that, first and foremost, they are uninformed. We thought that this could be the reason that the number of people in Hungary who refuse immigrants, or even the idea of immigration as such, is so high. We wanted to find the link between these things and we found that the main reason is the lack of information. Obviously there are other factors as well, but being uninformed is very strong among them. And how can we reach out to young people? The solution was at our fingertips, as we had been developing multimedia programmes and games for, among others, NATO, and these NATO-related concepts were developed into a role-play, called Immigropoly. At first it was a game played in a group of four, but now it is possible for twelve people to play together.

And what is this game about? What is its key message? Having played it myself I know that it has many layers, but is there anything that you have set as its main objective?

Yes, Yes. The most important aim was, that besides trying to send positive messages and not to exaggerate the problems related to immigration and integration, we wanted to create a very objective game that is not biased toward the positive notions and that shows the background of emigration and immigration, the life of immigrants and the roots of their problems, that gives an objective picture of the main sending and receiving countries and the difficulties of living together. But it emphasizes as much as possible the positive aspects of this, and these are the things one should seek in order to achieve peaceful coexistence, however much we hear these days that there is no such thing.

And the game, which is also a multimedia tool and resource, shares a lot of information, knowledge and messages in a playful way, and the players' feedback is rather positive about this. We made a lot of changes between the first and the second versions of the game. We used less information and inserted it in smaller bits at closer intervals. We did it exactly because today's youth, the Y-Generation, are used to a faster life, for example they are on Facebook while watching TV or listening to music, chatting and studying at the same time, and it is exactly why we made Immigropoly so diverse and so multi-faceted. They are the generation roughly between 14-15 and 30 years old.

We've definitely seen that in Hungary it became a very successful programme. Both among users, and among professionals it has a good reputation. And we have seen some international success as well: you've received a UN award and it is very popular on the EWSI site. Could you tell us something about this? What makes this programme so popular and successful?

What I'm saying now is my personal view, I'm aware that my colleagues would have a different opinion. The fact is, that I don't consider it a success in its strict sense as it cannot change the fundamental problems to the extent we'd like it to. The level of xenophobia has been increasing year after year, which is influenced by many things; economic problems, the ambiguous role of politics. The positive change in young people's attitudes is very slow to come. Some people even say that the level of the problems surrounding immigration is far beyond the reach of such a programme as Immigropoly.

The game has been played by tens of thousands of people, it is known by many partner organisations, there have been publications and presentations about it, we have organised a summer school related to it. These things have happened exactly because it has a novel approach, a multimedia approach to immigration, the life of immigrants. It creates a positive atmosphere, it is full of good effects and good music and all kinds of things that can make it emotionally attractive. So it is a big success from a developer's point of view, but this is the part I'm less interested in.

The other part that I consider a success is the feedback of the young people whom we met through the game or the project in general. They have a very positive view on this project, and other integration-related projects by other organisations as well, as there is a clear view of the future in these and they find it positive. They multiply the effects of these projects, they play the game, start talking about issues related to immigration. So I think there is a new public discourse starting up, there are a few thousand or even tens of thousands of young people who we can reach through the project and who are offered a positive view of the future, and it is an extremely difficult task, due to their attitude and level of interest. Obviously we can do more and I think we should do more. Immigropoly can still be developed.

One of the success factors is the synergies with other projects or programmes, and the conscious involvement of these programmes in

**this process.**

Exactly.

Because as you said, it is much more than an online resource, more than simply a game. It is rather a kind of vision of the world from a migration point of view. Have there been any partnerships during the implementation of the project that you find worth mentioning?

I'd talk about it in two parts. First, there is a part that we call research, with the participation of many actors. It is a years' long process, and this gives the background information, the knowledge, the vision and the strategy of the programme. It was done in the form of workshops, focus-group discussions, surveys, visits to schools and university lectures and the results were processed during the game's creation. This I'd call the development part. There are hardly any civil society organisations or research institutions in Hungary that work in the field of migration and that we didn't visit or didn't interview. It was a mapping exercise to find out who was out there and with whom we wanted to work on this project. Consequently there are hardly any organisations that don't know about this project.

The other part is the programming part, which is simply about the look of such a game. It is extremely interesting, as one would never think about how many different things should be taken into consideration, how many hidden messages such a programme contains. It is about the music and sound, the graphic design of the characters, whether they should be realistic or cartoon-like, or whether they should be sympathetic at first or rather neutral, or challenging. And we have made many interesting partnerships related to these aspects as well. With IT programmers and developers and graphic designers who weren't even interested in the content and message of the game in the beginning but later on, as they began to dig deeper, they started to realise what an interesting world it is. They have given a lot to the game, and we have started other projects together since the realisation of Immigropoly.

As a result of this we nominated the project for the UN multicultural prize where it was selected among the top ten out of four hundred nominees. Without the support of the European Integration Fund we wouldn't have been able to realise the project. We have received many donations, books, lectures for free, price discounts and such. But we haven't found any developer or investor that would have invested in launching the game on the market.

Does it mean that you are planning to make it a market product?

Yes, though I'd rather talk about sponsorship, i.e. when the market supports the game, because it would keep its playful and educative profile and we'd avoid making those compromises that a commercial contract or market-based sponsorship would imply.

And is there anything that you would do differently if you started the project now?

Yes, of course. It is our game, we like it very much, we tested it for months and we have tried an awful lot of things and alternatives but I have to admit that there are still little flaws, mistakes, complications in it that we'd correct. And what would we have done differently? Looking at the success of the game, it would have been good to start with an international programme, an international development on a much larger scale. When we started it we didn't think that it would be such a big success. Had we had more resources, more support from the beginning, we could have created a much stronger, further reaching, better known and used international tool. Many of our critics and partners told us this. But we didn't think that there was (and probably still is) such a big need for such a thing.

I see. And if someone somewhere else in Europe started something similar what would you advise them? I'm thinking about two kinds of things: first the general advice and recommendations, and second, those that are related to the local characteristics. It is a Hungarian development reflecting the Hungarian social context, and its success is related to this context as well. It is not evident that it would have the same success in the Netherlands or Bulgaria.

I think everything is related to the social context. We live in Hungary, we can't think otherwise, we cannot separate ourselves from the local reality, but we are also European citizens and we try to find ourselves in a European reality as well, though the problems we encounter are problems seen from our perspective in Pécs, in Hungary, and not from the perspective of another town, say in Germany. My first observation is that the material we use is very much contextualised, it is adjusted to the Hungarian way of thinking and the same should be done in other European countries as well. Although we draw on examples and stories from Western-Europe, even those are filtered through a particular Hungarian point of view, which is more simplifying, more emotional, I'd even say passionate. In other countries probably a more pragmatic approach is needed. I think this game can be developed elsewhere in Europe as well, but the local context should be reflected in it. Obviously those who play it in Amsterdam, Lyon, Brussels or Essen are less interested in references about migration in Hungary, and can be attracted through issues that are related to the problems and questions they deal with. It is an awful lot of work, there are about 140 pages of written material, a whole book, behind the programme, developed by a team of six and one should do the same in other countries in order to make it successful. The main challenge of the development is to find the balance between the 'playability', i.e. the type of content young people are interested in, and the messages and information the programme wants to convey. So finding the right balance is key.

Thank you for the conversation.

Source: EWSI Country Coordinator for Hungary.