

Primary School Franceta Preserna, Kranj.

20th of April- 24th of April 2009

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A late Sunday afternoon in Oslo three girls met at the airport, very excited about their next week. They had been chosen to do a two week placement in Kranj, Slovenia. Cecilie, Line and Eva could not wait to board their flight to Prague and then Ljubliana.

However the day was going to be a bit more excited than planned. On a tight schedule in Prague we had no time to lose on any delays, and our heartbeats raced when we realized that the flight from Oslo had been delayed for more than three hours. We had only 15 minutes to get off the plane to board the one for Ljubliana. We started preparing for a night in Prague, disappointed we would not be able to participate on the first day at the school in Kranj. Well, we got another, positive, surprise when we arrived in Prague. The plane was waiting for us! That is called service. So after feeling the looks from the passengers at the Ljublianian travellers, we found our sets in an already delayed air plane.

On the arrival at Ljubliana airport, a man came up to us and presented himself as the headmaster of the Primary School Franceta Preserna Mr. Ales Zitnik. We were so happy we finally had arrived to Slovenia, and tired after a long and challenging travel. Mr Zitnik drove us the 15min journey to the small city outside the capital of Slovenia, Kranj.

Our accommodation was at a campus for students at a secondary school close to Sola Franceta Preserna. We got warned to expect a lot of noise from the 2nd grade students, but we must admit we have experienced a lot more disturbance in some Norwegian Campuses...

Some facts about the Slovenian education system.

On the first day we had a meeting with the headmaster Mr. Zitnik. He gave us an introduction in to the Slovenian education system, and we had the opportunity to come with questions too.

In 1997 the Slovenian government legislated 9 years schooling for all children, and pupils had to start school at the age of 6. There are different choices to make after 9 years at primary school, most of the pupils continue studying in 2ndary schools. These schools have different subjects the students can choose from. Some of the 2ndary schools offer work-related study programs, and other schools are related to specific subjects such as chemistry, biology, sport etc. When the students have passed their finals they can choose whether they would apply to universities or go straight into work.

It did strike us that it sounds like the educational progress in Slovenia is quite similar to the Norwegian system, except from a few aspects. In Norway we have 10 years of primary school, and the students cannot specialise in just a few subjects. We will describe the differences on a deeper level later

in this report.

Mr. Zitnik also walked us through the structural system at Primary School Franceta Preserna. A few aspects seemed interesting. We was told that the

1.-4. grades had their own classrooms (as in Norway), however the 5th to the 9nd grades have different rooms for different subjects. The rooms are equipped appropriately for the actual subject. It can be compared to the tradition we have for the 7th till 10th grade students in Norway where they have specific room for science (naturfag), home economics and art. The Slovenian schools have taken this even further and have rooms for English, Biology, Chemistry and so on. This aspect did seem really interesting and we were eager to see how this would work in real.

By dividing the rooms into subjects the actual teacher for the subject taught in that room does all the preparatory work and has all his/her books in the actual classroom. The teachers also have to make their own plan/curriculum for the year. They only have goals they have to achieve (which are given by the government), and the teachers make the plans depending on the books the school has.

Each year the school also have bulks with different subjects. Each subject has the duration of five days. The subjects involve sport, culture, science and nature, health and technology (25 days all together). During our visit the children had had a project in climate changes, how to take care of the earth and reusable energy sources. In one of the classes the children had made a water mill. It was made with precision and based on theory and creativity.



The Slovenian school is a non-cost school, however they have to pay for their school meals and books. Some of the less privileged pupils do get founding which pays for the meals and books.

Our first impression of the primary school.



On the first day (after our meeting with Mr Zitnik) we went to the local swimming pool in Kranj to observe the pupils. The school also divide the classes, and split them into boys and girls. This means that boys go one week and the girls the following week and so on. Kranj is known for having a good program for swimming, and the school arranges a yearly trip to the coast where the pupils go swimming for a week.

For the past few years Norwegian swimming pools have had to close down, due to lack of founding from the government. It is a paradox, as Norway has such a long coastline and most of the children enjoy swimming in their school holidays. We were looking forward to see how the swimming lessons in Kranj was organized. Both on a pedagogical and on a structural level. We must admit we got really impressed. The pupils walked in to the pool on lines, listened to the instructor and swam for over an hour.

It was hard for us to see in what way the instructor gave the pupils the different tasks, but we could easily see that all the pupils got the message and acted on it.

We also got amazed by all the own-produced art in the classrooms. It made the classrooms look so inviting and creative. It was evident that the children had put a lot of effort into the projects. In one of the class rooms we got amazed by some drawings of some butterflies. At the first glance it seemed to be colourful drawings, but when we looked closer we could see that the drawings were made by drawing small circles.



Physical education

We also had the opportunity participate in a yearly school project. Once a year the physical department in Slovenia evaluate the children's physical abilities. We have to admit we had our doubts about this project, thinking that this kind of evaluation would have a bad effect on the pupils, leading to bullying and loss of confidence. We were proven wrong.

Our first surprise came when the pupils came in to the gym. They all walked behind their teacher and waited quietly to the instructions. It is worth mentioning that the whole school was involved in the project. If this had been a Norwegian school, the pupils would have entered the gym and instantly started running around, hanging upside down in the equipment, screaming and laughing. And the teacher would have a great challenge in getting the kids to listening to the instructions. This was one of the first experiences we had to see how the Norwegian and Slovenian pupils had some differences. One of the teachers at the school thought it could be related to the lack of interest in physical activities. This left us with a few questions, which we might not have time to discuss here. But we got a bit puzzled when none of the pupils went outside to play in the breaks. They stayed inside the corridors, chatting to each other, looking at the internet and other activities. On the contrary the pupils seemed to enjoy to swim and participate in the given tasks in physical education.

On this actual day, of the tests, the classes were given different tasks to do, and they were all about testing coordination, strength in different parts of the body, jumps, condition and other tasks. Each pupil had a separate paper where the teacher wrote down the test results for each task. This paper has the results from the previous year's written on them, so the teachers and the physical department in

Slovenia can monitor the progress from year to year. The aim was also to help the children to lead them into appropriate sports, according to their physical results. Another important effect of the testing was to single out the children who could be in the danger zone of having some learning and physical disabilities.

We tried to observe how the children interacted with each other. Having a special focus on the “unspoken language” to each other's abilities. It was a joy to observe. They were so supportive to each other, and when two and two students had to do the same test side by side there was no competition, they focused on their own ability to do the test. Even between boys and girls there was no such competition. Some of the girls were stronger in some of the tasks, and the boys did not worry about that. In Norway this would have been difficult. The social status in the groups is related to how good you are in sports, and losing for a girl would be the worst thing ever.

Later we understood why this was possible. The children did give each other positive feedback in all the subjects. It seemed to us that it was just as good to give a good answer to a question in science as in gymnastic. In one of the chemistry classes we observed some of the students getting the thumb up from their classmates for asking correctly on the teacher's challenging questions. In another subject, computer, the pupils were so eager to be the one to answer the questions. Even if the kids were 13 years old, there was no problem in getting them to actively participate in the lesson. In Norway we do find it challenging to get this particularly age-group wanting to ask questions and have this eager to show their knowledge (the “famous Norwegian Jantelov”).

Break and meal times.

In Norway all pupils have to go outside during the breaks. Even if the weather is bad, they are not allowed to stay inside. In one of the classes we visited in Sola Franceta Preserna, some of the pupils had a lot of questions about Norwegian school kids. When we told them that everyone had to spend their breaks outside the reactions from the class were surprising. They could not believe we could be so mean to the children. Especially when they also realized they had to be outside during the winter too.

One of the reasons for this reaction became evident to us when we experienced that none of the Slovenian pupils did go outside during breaks. At first we did find the running and loud talking in the corridors noisy and disturbing, but we got used to it after the first day at the school. In one way it was similar to the Norwegian kids, except from the fact that they make all the noise outside..

This gave us as students a challenge too, we are so used to be outside during breaks. At the end of the day we did get headaches and felt a bit tired, it did help when we went outside for some fresh air.

Lunch/meals

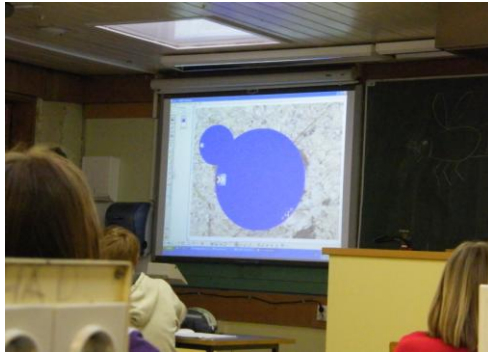
Every day the children had the opportunity to have 2-3 meals at the school. As mentioned previously, some children with little money is given money from the government to pay for the lunch. Mr Ales explained to us the values of having nutritional and healthy food at school, and had a specific focus on how it improved the children's ability to perform well at school. The meals involved breakfast, lunch and late lunch. We really enjoyed the food, as it was very tasty and healthy. Also the ladies at the canteen were so helpful and kind. One of our favourite meals must have been the one where we had some sweet potato balls with plum-jam inside. It tasted a bit like the Norwegian dish called Raspeball, only sweeter and better.

We can see the benefits of having school lunch, and we all agree on the importance of having a good nutritional diet for the pupils. The logistic challenges of having the whole school dining in one canteen were also interesting to observe. At first we did not understand how the canteen ladies could manage to feed all the pupils in 30 minutes, but the solution to this was to have different break times for the different classes. It worked perfectly well, we must say.

Technology

The Sola Franceta Preserna has a high and advanced level of technical equipment. Norway is far behind in this development. This was very surprising as we were not even sure whether we could find an internet connections for our laptop before we went to Sola Franceta Preserna. We have to admit we did have some prejudices before we left, and was kind of expecting a country that who had not developed much. We were again proven wrong.

Each classroom had a touch screens as well as a traditional blackboard. The touch screen was linked to the teacher's computer, and he/her could use the screen as a touch pad. By touching on different toolbars on the left of the screen they could choose colours to underline words (by using their finger as a pen) and scroll through the pages by touching the screen.



The teachers did also have other digital equipment, which made the teaching more interesting for the students and a good resource for the teachers. It is worth mentioning that the use of all the new equipment works really well when all the teachers feel confident in using it, this involves introduction-class for teachers and follow up support. In Norway it would boil down to the priorities of time and money. However, we do think the schools will benefit from it in the long term.

Different rooms for each subject.



As explained earlier in this report, the pupils have different classroom according to subjects. The photos above are from the biology room, which we really enjoyed seeing. On the back of the classroom they had a collection of different species of insects and rodents. We were really impressed with a Phylliidae, walking leaf. (Photo: Top right). This creature can be found on the coast of Slovenia, and we had never seen anything like it before. Apparently it is in the same family as the Walking stick insect, and it is not poisonous. We observed a lesson where the pupils were allowed to take them out of their cages. It was impressing to see how carefully the pupils handled the insects.

Dance and singing

The pupils had rehearsed songs and dances for us to see and join. We really enjoyed participating in this. To us, it seemed like the pupils really enjoyed these activities, and we could easily observe the excitement and pride in showing it to us. Traditional Slovenian dances and songs were really catchy, so the three Norwegian students often got caught singing Slovenian songs. (Well all the kids did find it hilarious, as we could not pronounce the word correctly...

Most of the pupils did not feel shy or embarrassed, as it is often seen in Norwegian school. Especially when it involves dancing with the opposite sex. We do not know if boy-lice and girl-lice exist in Slovenia, but the Norwegian kids are hysterical of catching those lice.



On the last day of our placement we arranged a Global Village event for the children at Sola Franceta Preserna. We had prepared a power point presentation, brought some Norwegian Brown cheese, chocolate and other traditional things from Norway and along with some students from Greece and India we invited the pupils to learn about our three countries. It was a big success, and we really enjoyed the facial expressions on the pupil's faces when they tried the brown cheese. We must admit that the chocolate was the hottest item on our stand.



Eva brought a long jumping rope to the Global Village. We were not sure if this was a familiar activity to the Slovenian children. We learned that they had done single jumping rope before, but not the long one. It was really interesting to see how the children took to the game so easily, and not only the girls. The boys were more excited about the jumping than the girls, something which is the complete opposite of Norwegian children. Jumping rope has been stigmatised as a girls activity in Norway, and the boys feel it is a stupid thing to engage in. This activity is a very good way of training coordination, high jumps, precision and rhythm and should not be a game for only one sex.

And the Slovenian boys will for us be a proof of this. Because it was a new activity it had not yet become a stigmatised game.



Hospitality and caring.

The teachers at Sola Franceta Preserna came across as very hospital and eager to engage in conversations with us. Off course some of the teachers did keep a distance, but this was possibly a language issue.

This was welcoming change for us. When we have our placement in Norwegian schools it is not unusual to feel we are in the way all the time, being an extra burden, entering the teachers room at Sola Franceta Preserna felt like a fresh summer breeze.

And this feeling mirrored the overall feeling we got from the Slovenian people. Everywhere we went people always smiled, and they made a great effort making shore we were safe and pleased.

Slovenia- the country of Gods leftovers.

On Friday Dunja(one of the teachers at the school) took us on a trip to a beautiful place named Bled. On the way she told us a tale about how Slovenia was made. And we must admit it was a appropriate description of Slovenia as we had experienced.

The story goes like this:

When God created the world, He gave Croatia a beautiful coastline, Austria got the Alps, Norway the glaciers, the Netherlands got amazing flat fields and so on.

When God had finished His creation He realized He still had some leftovers from creating all the different countries. God decided to give them all to Slovenia. So this is why Slovenia got pieces of all the different landscapes you can find in Europe.

Final thoughts.

We are all so grateful we were given the opportunity to experience another country's educational system. Mr Zitnik and the staff at Sola Franceta Preserna made this placement-experience to a worthy part of our education in becoming better teachers in the future. We feel it is important to widen our horizon in order to have a broad knowledge of different educational systems, theories and ideas.

The only disappointment was that we could not do the whole 2 weeks because of some logically difficulties. However, we do hope HiNT will be able to make arrangement for the next year's students to stay for the whole duration of the placement. It is worth it!

Slovenia is a country we would love to go back to at some point. The culture, people and nature is amazing, as well as the experience in Sola Franceta Preserna.

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