

COMENIUS PROJECT: VISIT TO ROMANIA

Last January Juan Viera and I were in Romania, on the preparatory visit of the COMENIUS PROJECT which, as you know, has been given to our school. This project funded by the European Commission, part of the Socrates National Agency, provides development and understanding among European cultures through the exchange and cooperation among schools from different countries. Its aims are:

- Improve and increase the mobility of pupils and educational staff across the EU.
- Enhance and increase partnerships among schools in different EU Member States.
- Encourage language learning, innovative ICT-based content, services and better teaching techniques and practices.
- Enhance the quality and European dimension of teacher training.
- Improve pedagogical approaches and school management.

All of this means working together with other European schools (at least three schools from three participating countries) on a common project. This gives a European dimension to our school and opens it to other students, teachers and educational systems. Furthermore, the school is subsidized, training and innovation credits are given and several exchanges for participating teachers and pupils among schools are carried out. Participation is voluntary but with commitment.

We were in Lugoj, a town in the west of the country, close to Hungarian border. This is a small town with about 46,000 inhabitants and with a lot of cultural and artistic interest. The participating school was in this town and we stayed there during our visit.

In the preparatory meeting not all the schools could participate due to travel problems caused by snowstorm in Central Europe. In fact, we were in Munich which was covered in snow and we just about arrived in time to transfer to Timisoara (I think Juan and I broke the record in running across the airport with our hand luggage and passports in our mouths). In spite of these setbacks , we arrived safe and sound, but it was impossible for the teachers from Poland and Bulgaria to arrive. Nevertheless, the schools from Romania (coordinator), Scotland, Sicily, Seville were also present.

In the meeting we introduced ourselves, spoke about our schools, our towns, the contents of the project (especially the coordinating school), and, most importantly, the meeting dates.

The experience was extremely positive, and in spite of the cold weather we were given a very warm welcome. Even though there were few resources, the Romanian teachers' commitment was admirable. We visited the schools in this town observing the facilities and the work methods they use. One thing that surprised us was the fact that in primary schools there are groups where most of the classes are in German.

We also visited the town and other places of artistic and cultural interest nearby, such as Timisoara (a beautiful city), Deva and Hunedoara with a beautiful castle, where we felt the presence of "Dracula". We went on guided visits in English in all these places. This visit made us realise how important English is to communicate in other countries in the world. The exchange of experiences with people from other countries is very positive in many ways, for our work as teachers, learning about different lifestyles, cultures, etc to be more open-minded.

Finally, our school will organize a visit to our town during the next academic year, and we hope it will be good experience for everybody.

Francisco Carrillo

Translation: Nina and Laura López.