

The Balkan Cyber Tea House and Related Promotional Activities – Summary of Activities

a. Planned activities

The original project proposal included the installation of an Internet tea house, where two computers connected to the Internet would be available for any interested individuals at Meeting 2004. At the same time, these computers were planned to be used to advertise the Balkan Bytes beneficiary networks by running their multimedia presentations — specifically created for this occasion. As a “cyber tea house,” tea was to served to visitors during the event, with each herbal tea representing a different South Eastern European country.

b. Achievements

Overall, all planned activities were implemented successfully. In fact, as a result of efficient project implementation, activities were implemented on a much higher level than originally planned for – without extending the budget. This included both the extent of the Cyber Tea House (e.g. number of services) as well as its quality (e.g. multimedia presentations).

Eventually, three computer workstations were installed at the booth, all connected to a high-speed Internet line and a printer. Each computer ran an Internet browser, by default displaying websites relevant to the Balkan Bytes project, such as the regional Balkan Bytes website, a local network website or the regional content exchange news portal. These workstations proved to be very useful to the organisers (by being able to perform last-minute work for the event) as well as to Meeting 2004 participants. Conference visitors used these workstations to perform their own work, to look at Balkan Bytes web content, as well as various other South Eastern European websites.

Anyone who came to the counter of the booth or to use a computer workstation were briefly introduced to the Balkan Bytes project, and the work of the beneficiary electronic networks. Interested individuals could also take promotional materials such as brochures, caps or posters. To attract even more people to the event, tea was served periodically. This service attracted a large number of diverse people, who then received a brief introduction to the reason for the tea house: the Balkan Bytes project and the generous support of the Italian Ministry for the Environment and Territory.

The project was implemented in a way that the benefits of this one-time event would reach even further. For this reason every beneficiary network was offered funding to design high-quality multimedia presentations about their networks. The purpose of these presentations was to create a generic “appetiser” for potential network users and donors. These presentations were intended to be run in a variety of different contexts (e.g. exhibitions, conferences, workshops, locally as well as internationally). Altogether five of seven electronic networks used the opportunity and prepared such presentations: Bluelink

(Bulgaria), EkoNet (FYR Macedonia), EkoMrezaBiH (Bosnia and Herzegovina), QKE (Albania) and StrawberryNet (Romania). One representative from each of these networks was invited to the event to introduce their presentations to conference visitors as well as to the other networks.

The REC used a competitive process to choose which networks would be asked to give their multimedia presentation based on a project proposal. A conscious effort was made to only provide a few guidelines (e.g. “few words, great visual impact”), so that every network could maximise its creativity. Eventually, the budget of preparing each of these presentations ranged between EUR 1,000 and 1,200. For an example, see the appendix, which contains a project proposal from Bluelink in Bulgaria.

All presentations were prepared on a CD-ROM using Macromedia Flash technology. All of them can be run on any modern computer without having to install other programs. Being “appetisers,” these presentations featured an attractive look and minimal text. Although half of the presentations have included their own sound, music was played consistently through stereo equipment. The presentations were running on a large projection screen, in the middle of the Cyber Tea House (see photos below.)

The Balkan Cyber Tea House included a number of different promotional activities. Above the Internet corner of the booth, a large poster was displayed announcing the tea house as well as listing all beneficiary networks of the project, the project partners and the project’s funder. By using the available funds even more efficiently than planned, some of the networks prepared additional materials beyond the originally planned multimedia presentations. These included posters, brochures and CD’s printed with labels. Conference visitors were given the chance to take copies of these materials. In addition, generic promotional materials were also available, providing information about the REC and L’Umana Dimora.

An important component of the Balkan Cyber Tea House was that network representatives could learn from the presentations of other networks, as well as provide feedback to the others so that these presentations could be improved even further after the exhibition. As part of a session on the second day of the event, the group reviewed every presentation. Overall, all presentation were found to be of very high quality and have demonstrated a high level of creativity, professionalism and activity in the field of electronic networking.

Taking these discussions further, on the last day of the event a joint session was organised with the participation of network representatives and young environmental leaders. Before the session, all young environmental leaders were given the opportunity to look at the multimedia presentations of the networks to give them a generic impression of the networks’ work, as well as to provide an opportunity to ask questions.

This event was followed by a formal joint session, with the aim to map out ways of an improved future collaboration of networks and young environmental leaders. A networking auction was organised, entitled “What can NGOs and electronic networks

give and take from each other?" Beyond valuable generic discussions, the concrete output of the event was a list of areas where the two groups could work together.

Finally, a web page was prepared about the Balkan Cyber Tea House, accessible on the Balkan Bytes website at

<http://www.rec.org/REC/Programs/SEE_Networking/GIF/Rimini/Rimini2004.html>.

This web page includes a short overview of the event, photographs from the booth and links to the project's beneficiary networks.