

REPORT

May 18, 2008

Maarit Jaakkola

maarit.jaakkola@mediaskooppi.net

www.mediaskooppi.net

## Observations at the YPRT Meeting by the members of Mediaskooppi Network

Mediaskooppi network was invited to the 3rd Youth Protection Roundtable Meeting (May 14–16, 2008) in Gößweinstein/Nuernberg, Germany. The representatives of Mediaskooppi were the junior experts Kaisa Läärä (19) and Viivi Olkinuora (18) from Tampere, Finland. The coordinator Maarit Jaakkola acted as a tutor.

The Youth Protection Roundtable (YPRT) is a project funded in the framework of the Safer Internet Action Plan of the European Commission from November 2006 till April 2009. The main goal of the YPRT is to encourage the dialogue between child welfare organizations and companies producing hardware and software. The theme of the roundtable meeting was to discuss young people's safety in Internet use. One aim was to include youngsters' view on the matters in bringing senior and junior experts together to exchange views regarding issues of a safe and secure use of the Internet and online behavior of youngsters.

The number of participants in the meeting went up to 80 people, of whom 18 were young people aged between 14 and 19 years. The national youth teams from six different European countries had taken part in the Safer Internet Day Competition. Mediaskooppi's input in the work included the following activities:

1. Mediaskooppi members formed a media team which was in charge of the production of podcasts for the website ([www.yprt.eu](http://www.yprt.eu)). The team planned and realized 11 podcasts altogether. The podcasts included interviews with all the national youth teams (Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovenia), an interview with a senior expert (the chief executor John Fisher from the UK) and a Greek teacher (Hionia Georgila) as well as a discussion among the Finnish team members. Furthermore, the production of podcasts included a preparation of an exercise for the junior experts.
2. The participants of Mediaskooppi participated in the workshops of the Youth Protection Roundtable and in the common sessions with senior experts.

Main topics of the sessions consisted of listing risks involved in the Internet use of the youth and finding solutions for them:

1. Risks: PC insecurity (e.g. viruses, trojans), copyright infringement, violent contents (e.g. pedophilia, pornography) and inappropriate Net behavior (e.g. privacy assaults, addiction, racism) and security risks (e.g. phishing, e-commerce).
2. Solutions: emerging and future technologies, filtering, blocking, ID security, teaching of media literacy.

During the common discourse with both junior and senior experts, among other things the following questions aroused discussion among the Finnish team:

1. Compared to the participating countries, Finland is at a more advanced level when it comes to teaching digital literacy and safe Internet use. A lot of work has been done at schools, and Finland was the only country among the participants to have media education in the national curriculum. Among others the Mannerheim League of Child Welfare, Save the Children and smaller societies have been active in the field, along with Mediaskooppi Network.
2. Because of the heterogeneity of the culture, education and legislation there is a certain incompatibility between the participating countries. Because of different standards in both cultural, social and technological issues exchanging experiences and practices is problematic on an equal level. A consensus on common European guidelines is needed but a common European view on safe Internet use is not possible so far. In different countries various risks and dangers are emphasized differently. It is worth remembering that technological change is more rapid than the social and cultural changes. In many of the participating countries the national discourse is still concentrated on technical problems.
3. At the meeting risks and threats of the Internet (use) were extremely overemphasized. In our opinion, a problem-centered view should always be compensated by a positive approach. The Internet provides the youth with several constructive and beneficial things such as involvement in a community and identity building. If we are not aware of the benefits of the virtual worlds for the youth, new risks may emerge.
4. Among the most discussed risks in the Internet use of the young were pornography and racism. What bothered us was that the questions were mostly put from adults' perspective. Not only child pornography made by adults is a matter that should have been discussed more thoroughly at the meeting. In our opinion the most problematic matter is the behavior of "just normal" individuals. Disclosing private and intimate information is nowadays easy and attractive but the consequences cannot be realized, or even not predicted, at the moment of publishing. Instead of lamenting phenomena small organizations are not capable of changing we should concentrate on examining the individual behavior of Internet users, both young and older. This does not mean that we could not be active in the national discourse against harmful contents.

5. Many of the participants at the meeting believed that the Internet is an isolated isle although many problems we can see on the Net are not separate phenomena but part of wide-ranging social problems. The Internet only makes those problems visible. As we have aspired to show in our educations, it is of no use contrasting virtual world versus real life. Many of the phenomena present in the Internet (pedophilia, racism, problems in the youth's welfare, violence) are known from the real world, too.
6. We want to put stress on the view that censorship is not the only and even not the most appropriate way to react to problems and risks of Internet use. Material should be accessible to be discussed openly. Also the functions of social control mechanisms are often underestimated. Even though blocking of sites rather surprisingly got support from the side of the youth at the meeting, on our agenda the best way to minimize risks is to raise awareness of them and to teach media literacy. Media literacy, for one, can be taught in both formal (schools and other educational institutions) and informal environments (in the family, on the Internet, among friends and adults). Furthermore, it is of no use mystifying the new forms of literacy: in its simplest form teaching and learning media literacy (or: digital literacy) stands for critical discussion and self reflection about the experienced.
7. The need for adults' education in digital cultures and virtual worlds is drastically rising. The work that Mediaskooppi network has carried out in Finland would also be of great use in other countries. In future, we tend to offer our educational resources and ideas also abroad.

In sum, the meeting allowed us to exchange opinions and experiences in the field work of media education and child welfare. One of the benefits of the meeting for us was the chance to become aware of the importance and topicality of our activities and to review them on an international scale. As further suggestions for the organizers to develop the concept of the meetings we present the following proposals:

1. It would be useful to conduct a comparative survey where the legislative and cultural state of Internet safety issues in different European countries would be examined. Without facts the discussion may remain equivocal and frustrating. Therefore, the inclusion of research and researchers in the meetings could be especially fruitful.
2. On the other hand, it would be insightful to learn about practices, projects and experiences in different countries as well. The exchange of these ideas should be put more forcefully into practice in prestructured workshops.
3. In future, the participants of a conference should make preparations for the meeting more carefully. A preliminary task could advance the face-to-face discussions at the conference location. This time the aim of the conference was unclear to most of the youth teams and their tutors.

4. The knowledge and competence of the senior experts could be made more visible and accessible to others during the meeting. More keynote speakers could be invited and mixed workshops with junior and senior experts should be organized. We do not support the concept where the division into junior and senior participants is maintained but, instead, we would encourage the exchange of feelings, opinions and insights between the generations in order to fix the digital divide between the generations. In this respect, the meeting – like so many other similar events before – was not that successful.

May 18, 2008  
Tampere, Finland

Maarit Jaakkola, tutor & coordinator  
Kaisa Läärä, member  
Viivi Olkinuora, member