

“Imagine” – A Worldwide Photography Project with Young People

Background information on www.gtz.de/imagine

© Philipp Abresch and
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)
2002-2004

Background information

- [From idea to project](#)
- [Photography as method](#)
- [Intercultural dialogue](#)
- [The public](#)
- [Sensitisation](#)

From idea to project



“Imagine” began with a very catchy idea by Berlin journalist Philipp Abresch: at various points in various countries, children should record their lives with a camera. Abresch had already conducted a similar project in Kosovo, and he knew how fascinating the way young people view a seemingly familiar situation can be.

His idea aroused considerable interest at the GTZ Office in Berlin, and GTZ staff in the priority area “youth” were quick to recognise its potential. The 26-year-old political science student became a full-fledged GTZ partner in cooperation.

For GTZ, the “Imagine” co-project became highly visible both within the organisation and outside of it. GTZ staff from 40 countries joined in with great enthusiasm. In the industrialised countries, such as the USA and Germany, the “Imagine” team worked together with schools, the media and private individuals. This wide-ranging network was what ultimately turned the vision of GTZ and Philipp Abresch into reality.

The photography project aroused the interest of a total of 500 young people in 45 countries. They were between 10 and 16 years of age and came from every possible social urban or rural background. Many of the young participants had never held a camera in their hands before. The GTZ employees

on site organised a number of photo workshops, so that the use of the camera could be practised and the project's aims and purposes discussed. Thus the young photographers learned a great deal about the countries involved in the project and about the various cultures from which the other young people came.

April 30, 2002, was the big day. Everywhere in the world young people pressed a button on their cameras and released the shutter. They visited their parents in banana plantations and rice fields. They snapped pictures of their friends in their local high school or in the bare surroundings of the village school – brushing teeth in Kabul, riding sleighs in Greenland, in the floods in Russia. That is how 12,000 photographs came to be taken on April 30, 2002 – a snapshot of the world from the viewpoint of the young.

At the close of the international photography day, the pictures were developed on site. The 500 participants then selected three photos that they wanted to show to other people all over the world and sent them to the GTZ Office in Berlin. Each of the 1500 final pictures is accompanied by an explanatory text. Formal interviews were held with 80 of the young photographers.

The "Imagine" exhibition first opened on August 23, 2002, at GTZ Haus in Berlin in the presence of Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, the German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, and under the patronage of Yoko Ono.

[top](#)

Photography as method



"Imagine" seeks to promote intercultural dialogue throughout the world: both young people and adults are to gain a stronger sense of their own identity along with understanding, respect and tolerance for other cultures. The "Imagine" pictures give a multifaceted insight into the everyday life of children and youth – comparison reveals some differences, but it also shows points in common.

The core of "Imagine" is the dialogue that takes place *about and through* the photos: among the young people, between the generations, and above all among the various cultures. Photos can help to surmount language barriers and offer an insight into the lives and cultures of other people. Not least, photographs open up access to a culture's visual characteristics.

The impact of pictures is direct: they address the viewer's emotions. They can make abstract themes tangible and enable associative communication. This emotional, non-verbal form of expression puts into sharp focus problems that exist all over the world, such as environmental degradation or child labour.

Photography supports and increases people's political and social participation. Thus those affected have an opportunity through "Imagine AIDS" to consider, in word and picture, how their own lives have been changed by HIV/AIDS and what their own fears, dreams and wishes might be. The photos and texts, as exhibition or book, address a new public on the subject of HIV/AIDS and provide a different audience for the people affected.

The observers, for their part, can identify much more readily with each individual theme because of the often very personal content. The foundation is thus laid for better understanding and for dialogue between people from different cultural circles, generations or social levels.

Besides, new ideas about one's self can emerge from comparing one's own with others' views of oneself. In this case, photography is the medium for interpreting of one's own everyday life: it stimulates reflection on one's own identity. This intensive analysis of these points and the attention attracted by the photographers themselves can build their self-confidence and a more positive self-image.

In addition, development workers gain within their work a deeper insight and more direct access to the lives of the people that the projects are endeavouring to support.

[top](#)

Intercultural dialogue



The "Imagine" photos were made available not only to a wider audience but also to the young photographers themselves, and purposely used to generate dialogue – through exhibition-related activities, the networking of young people with one another, intercultural encounters, and photography instruction. Some 25 workshops or events for intercultural dialogue with young people took place in connection with the "Imagine" exhibition both within and outside of Germany. Many supporting activities became occasions for again using the medium of photography as a means of communication (for example: a photo campaign on the subject of violence in Argentina, German youth responding in photos to the pictures in "Imagine", a photography contest with the theme "How I Live in Frankfurt").

Many teachers used the photographs in their classes in intercultural education. "If you open your eyes in this world, you understand both yourself and foreign people and places better. 'Imagine' is a special opportunity to enrich your school education with direct global experience of people the same age." (Annette Schavan). At the exhibitions (for example, at the "writers' workshop" in Sindelfingen) and especially in the school classes, people eagerly took advantage of the chance to forward letters and emails to the "Imagine" photographers. This resulted in numerous personal contacts between young people.

"Imagine Germany" actively urged direct interchange between German and non-German youth. The aim of this intercultural meeting among young people was to weld together foreign and familiar views of Germany. "Thus 'Imagine Germany' is in this respect a project for dialogue: it provides accounts of everyday German life that open to us new points of view on that life and smooth the way for us to see it through someone else's eyes. What more could cultural exchange possibly do?" (Wolfgang Thierse)

[top](#)

The public



“Imagine” had a major impact on the public. The messages of the world’s youth who had pictured their daily life had a powerful emotional effect on many people (“More instructive than many a professional lecture”, commented *Spiegel Online*). The medium of photography, functioning as it does across language barriers, has an immediate, direct impact. “Imagine” thus reached a very broad audience. The photo pages of the “Imagine” home page were some of the most frequently visited on the GTZ website in 2002-2003. The simple, mobile, inexpensive exhibition proved attractive to many both at home and abroad: politicians, youth groups, urban galleries, and schools. The project reached a large number of people of various ages in more than 30 countries. In Berlin alone, there were some 10,000 visitors to the exhibition. Frankfurt’s Museum of World Cultures had more than 2000 visitors on a single weekend. The support by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) – memos on the exhibition from Parliamentary State Secretary Stather to all *Bundestag* representatives – and the cooperation of well-known personalities in public life in Germany, such as Wolfgang Thierse, Christina Rau, and Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, contributed measurably to the public effectiveness of “Imagine”.

Exhibitions and activities, and especially the presence of foreign young people (at the opening in 2002 and on the photo safari in 2003) created repeated opportunities for news reporting. Around 150 articles in daily newspapers, 20 interviews and live broadcasts on the radio, and eight TV shows resulted, not to mention nearly 100 internet publications, which in most cases supplied a link to the “Imagine” website. Magazines such as *Stern* and *Spiegel*, periodicals like *Tina* or *Woman*, and youth magazines like *Geolino* were interested in both the pictures and the stories behind them.

[top](#)

Sensitisation



It proved possible to use this great public interest to underline the significance of cultural factors and of the potential residing in young players within the development context. It was always a matter of speaking *with* the children and young people and not *about* them – and of letting them speak for themselves. The events surrounding “Imagine” often offered a forum for this kind of dialogue. Examples are the panel discussion with Minister Wieczorek-Zeul on September 23, 2002, the workshop *Lebenswelt* (“the world we live in”) with 80 young people and adults on September 24, 2002, and the concluding event “Imagine Germany” on September 19, 2003. Through the photos themselves, “Imagine” gave young people throughout the world a voice – and attempted to ensure that people were listening to that voice universally. International events and conferences – for example the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg, the World Bank’s Youth,

Development and Peace Conference in Paris in 2003, the education trade fair Didacta in Cologne in 2004, the UNESCO International Conference on Education (the segment for education ministers) in Geneva in 2004 – offered significant opportunities for presenting “Imagine”, and thus to come a step closer to the goal of heeding what youth have to say. Contacts were established with organisations in the field of international cooperation as well. “Young people are right at the top of the agenda for development work, and the photos make clear just how important their role is – in today’s society and in the future,” said James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, talking about “Imagine”.

In the UNICEF report “The State of the World’s Children 2003” introduced “Imagine” as a GTZ reference project. “Youth as Partner” was the GTZ theme of the year 2003, to which “Imagine” made a clear contribution all over the world.

[top](#)

Dateiname: en-imagine-background.doc
Verzeichnis: C:\prisma\aktuelle Redaktion\imagine\englisch
Vorlage: C:\userdata\applicationdata\Microsoft\Vorlagen\Normal.dot
Titel: "Imagine" – A Worldwide Photography Project with Young People
Thema:
Autor: GTZ, Imagine
Stichwörter: "Imagine", photo, photos, pictures, youth, youth photos, youth photo day,
GTZ
Kommentar:
Erstelldatum: 22.12.2005 15:11
Änderung Nummer: 3
Letztes Speicherdatum: 22.12.2005 15:12
Zuletzt gespeichert von: Wolfgang Barina
Letztes Druckdatum: 22.12.2005 15:12
Nach letztem vollständigen Druck
Anzahl Seiten: 5
Anzahl Wörter: 1.828 (ca.)
Anzahl Zeichen: 9.690 (ca.)