

The Pollen project in a local event

On the last Sunday of September, African music and food, as well as science activities for kids attracted a lot of people to the main square of Terraços da Ponte (Sacavém, Loures district), a neighbourhood where some weeks before violent social conflicts had taken place. Several local organisations joined in this event and so did the Pollen team!

The population and mainly the kids (the highest percentage) could choose from a variety of activities offered by the local social organisations and from teachers from two of the Pollen schools, CAIC and Pomba da Paz. At lunch time, dishes from different African countries (Mozambique, Guine, Sao Tome Principe island, Angola) could be found in the different stands ran by people dressed up in typical costumes.

The national television covered the event and this time showed a positive image of that community.

The Pollen team set experiments aimed at getting the kids involved and challenging them to find out the science behind the phenomena. These were some of the experiments children got involved:

- . Removing an eggshell with vinegar (Introducing the concept of chemical reaction and relating it to the effect of acid rain on monuments)
- . Is black ink really black? (Cromatography experiment using filter paper strips and black ink to show that a given colour can be the result of the mixtures of several pigments)
- . Flowers changing colour (understanding capillary action and how chemicals and pollutants in the soil water contaminate our vegetables and plants).
- . Buttermaking by shaking cream in a jar (Learning about food composition and emulsions).

Rather surprisingly the kids came on their own, with no accompanying parents, and after having put on a T-shirt offered by the organisation, got enthusiastically involved in the activities.

For us, it all started some weeks before when we got an invitation from two teachers from one of the Pollen schools, CAIC, located in this neighbourhood. In a preparatory meeting, we realized the local department of urbanism, in cooperation with the local police department, was planning an open-air event to improve the relationships in the community and contradict the bad publicity of the neighbourhood due to recent social unrest, largely broadcast by the media. Taking part in this event allowed our Pollen team to get to know and create links with people in charge of local organisations in this community. Besides, the Pollen team had the opportunity to have a chat, in a relaxing atmosphere, with the Loures mayor, the local parish president and the governor of the Lisbon area and let them realize what has been done so far within the project. We have been told the idea is to carry on with such events. We'll be there again!