

1. Origins

The idea for the Spielmarkt (play market) Potsdam emerged during an advanced training course in educational play between 1989 and 1991 with participants from both East and West Germany. The core of the project was the wish to employ elements of educational play in youth social work, both inside and out of school. Another goal of the event was (and still is) national and international networking between educational play experts. The Internationale Bildungsforum (International Educational Forum) Spielmarkt has been a cooperation of several regional churches from the very start, with the additional participation of other educational bodies.

The first Spielmarkt took place in Berlin in 1991. In its second year, it had to move to the Sternkirche Potsdam for reasons of space. Since 1996, the event has been taking place every year beginning of May, in the convention building on the premises of the Hoffbauer Foundation in Potsdam Herrmannswerder. Visitor numbers have varied between 2,500 and 4,000 per event. This educational forum combines training courses, a trade fair, and a play festival.

2. Responsible body and partners

The responsible bodies of the Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam are the Jugendpfarrämter (youth rectories) and Evangelischen Ämter für Kinder und Jugendarbeit (Protestant Offices for Child and Youth Work) der Evangelischen Landeskirchen (Protestant regional churches) of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia and the EKM, the Protestant-Lutheran regional church of Saxony, the regional church of Anhalt, as well as the Hoffbauer Foundation Potsdam and the Stephanus Foundation Berlin, both active in the welfare and social area. The short name for the responsible body is: Evangelische Jugend (Protestant Youth). Partners of the Spielmarkt include the Sozialpädagogische Fortbildungsinstitut (Institute for Social Education) Berlin-Brandenburg (SFBB), the Bundesverband Kulturarbeit der evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland (Federal Association for Cultural Work of the Protestant Youth in Germany), the VCP – Verband Christlicher Pfadfinderinnen und Pfadfinder (Association of Christian Girl Guides and Boy Scouts), the Kompetenzzentrum geschlechtergerechte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe Sachsen-Anhalt e.V. (Competence Centre for Gender-Sensitive Child and Youth Help Saxony-Anhalt), the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Evangelischen Jugend in Deutschland e.V. (AEJ) (Federation of Protestant Youth in Germany), die „Freunde des FEZ e.V.“ ("Friends of FEZ"), the evangelische Jugendbildungsstätte (Protestant youth educational institution) Villa Jühling, the Zentrum für soziales Lernen (Centre for Social Learning) Magdeburg, the Lidingö Folkhögskola (adult education centre) in Sweden and the Akademie für Gruppe und Bildung (Academy for Groups and Education) in Austria. The Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam is also regularly supported by, among others, the Medienstelle des Kirchenkreises Barnim (Media office of the parish Barnim), the Oberlinhaus Potsdam, the evangelische Gymnasium (Protestant secondary high school) Hermannswerder, the Protestant congregation Potsdam – Hermannswerder, and the Protestant Academy Oldenburg.

3. Patron

The official Patron of the Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam is the Minister for Education, Youth and Sports of the German Federal State of Brandenburg.

4. Target groups

The Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam is specifically targeted at:

- employees of the Churches, welfare and social workers, ministers and priests, educators in congregations and religious education
- experts in child and youth help, working for public or independent bodies
- teachers and social workers in schools
- volunteers
- therapists
- students enrolled in educative or social work courses in (under)graduate schools and universities
- parents

The visitors and participants of the Spielmarkt Potsdam are mainly coming from the German federal states of Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, Thuringia, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Lower Saxony, Hamburg, and North Rhine-Westphalia, but also regularly from other European countries, such as Austria, Sweden, Poland, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Lithuania.

5. Profile

By holding the Spielmarkt Potsdam event, the Protestant Youth follows a very Protestant understanding of education, going far beyond the transfer of religious knowledge. Melanchthon called education „eruditio“, which can be translated as "de-brutalisation", the opposite of brutalisation, which is what can happen when people can neither make themselves understood nor want to understand others. It follows from this that education is also a commandment of charity. With this background, playing becomes „the creative plane of human existence on which the tracks of the Creator become readable“ (H. Rahner). „Humans only play where they can be human in the full sense of the word, and they can only be fully human where they play“ (Fr. Schiller). This understanding of playing forms the foundation of the Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam.

The Spielmarkt was consciously created in Potsdam after the fall of the Berlin Wall as an international educational forum. It was meant to serve as an open platform for communication for anybody with background in pedagogical or social work in Germany and Europe, especially after decades of separation during the Cold War.

While the event design provides a fairly constant framework, the main theme of the Spielmarkt is different each year, encouraging playful discussion and interaction in the respective pedagogical fields of work. The main theme of each year's event has a major influence on the respective schedule.

The International Spielmarkt Potsdam usually takes place annually beginning of May, one Friday and Saturday between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. It is roughly divided into three sections: advanced training, a trade market/fair, and a performance area, each with formats of their own.

a) Advanced training: lectures, seminars and workshops centred around the main theme

Lectures (90 - 120 minutes):

About two lectures per day related to the main theme with subsequent open discussion.

Seminars (75 minutes):

Up to 40 seminars per day about working methods and theoretical reflection on them.

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Workshops (45 minutes):

Up to 30 workshops per day are open for participation. They are mainly consisting of practical exercises, cooperative actions, and taster courses.

b) Market

In this area, about 50 to 70 exhibitors can present and sell their products ranging from games and other playing materials to literature and pedagogical working aids. Among the exhibitors are game manufacturers and designers, publishers and specialist booksellers, societies/clubs, schools, and toy stores specialising in therapeutic pedagogy, among others. What they have in common is their interest to meet and interact with professional pedagogues, parents, and interested visitors.

c) Performance area

This is an area for outdoor activities. It includes the „Spielwiese“ (playground), on which games and toys can be tested. There are interactive musical performances and other offers with experiential education background, such as rope installations, canoeing, and several creative activities. There are also exhibitions and interactive installations within the church building. Finally, the Internationale Spielmarkt also features concerts, live performances, and theatre shows.

Intensive collaboration with exhibitors and speakers is necessary in order to ensure a wide selection and the high quality of the Spielmarkt. This is the only way to have a new, rich, and relevant event each and every year. The Spielmarkt team therefore mainly invites

- relevant speakers from different areas of work
- publishers for pedagogical practice and specialist booksellers
- project initiators, societies/clubs and schools, initiatives, entities and individual people willing to demonstrate and discuss their respective projects
- game developers and publishers of alternative/educative toys
- small commercial projects like circuses, puppeteers, wooden toy manufacturers
- international suppliers of pedagogical projects

The internationality of the event is underlined by a standing cooperation with the Lidingö Folkhögskola in Stockholm, Sweden, which has a focus on recreational and experiential education. It was intensified by a joint international summer academy in Stockholm which is primarily aimed at developing a sustainable network in this field. Since 2002, there have been three of these summer academies in Stockholm. In 2009, the Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam was among the select few German events in the European Year for Creativity and Innovation, and in 2010, an EU project („GROWTH BY MEETING ONE ANOTHER - integrate and activate by games“) was conducted with participants from ten different countries within the framework of „Jugend in Aktion“ (youth in action).

The Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam is among the few educative offers in the new German States which draws from more than one State and more than one church. It is supported by the State Ministry for Education, Youth, and Sports of Brandenburg as well as by federal funds of the Federation of Protestant Youth in Germany (AEJ), which is the Protestant umbrella youth association in Germany. In addition, there are a large number of different cooperation partners which support the Spielmarkt personally and financially. Stand fees from exhibitors, participation fees and own financing by the responsible bodies complete the financing of the event.

The Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam is accredited as advanced training course for teachers in the German Federal States of Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Berlin, Thuringia, and

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Saxony. It is also continuously evaluated. Opinion surveys of the participants are a major focus in this. The statistical results are used to make statements about target groups and effects, and to tailor the Spielmarkt further to the needs of those target groups.

6. Educational forum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam: Building sustainable networks

It is the main aim of the Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam to foster a sustainable network in educational play beyond the scope of the annual Spielmarkt event. This is achieved, for example, by

- integration of (advanced) training modules into the event,
- the annual Spielmarkt journal containing supplemental data and articles by specialists
- the cooperation with play markets in Remscheid (Bundesakademie für Spiel -Theater - und Medienerziehung), the Academy for Groups and Education in Austria, and the Lidingö Folkhögskola in Stockholm.

Additionally, new connections are formed every year through the event - between visitors and participants/exhibitors, but also between institutions and speakers/performers. New projects are being discussed, and other events are being planned. Because of this, the Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam has become a nexus of ideas for new possibilities of collaboration in the area of advanced training and in project work with children and teenagers.

7. Work and organisational structure

The Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam is planned, organised, and guided by a team of very diverse people from different but mostly pedagogical work fields in Christian and non-Christian institutions. Most of the team members are representatives of the responsible bodies or the event partners. Some people are also employed in specific areas on a temporary basis for an appropriate fee. The core team consists of about ten to fifteen people.

During the annual event, and for some time immediately before and after, the Bildungsforum Internationaler Spielmarkt Potsdam is supported by some 80 volunteers. They are mostly teenagers and adolescents from Berlin, Brandenburg, and Saxony-Anhalt. These volunteers are accompanied and tutored by experts in order for them to be able to get a qualified, detailed look at and into the structures and working methods of such a large-scale event.

8. Information and communication

The latest news and retrospectives about the Spielmarkt Potsdam can be found on the website of the event at www.spielmarkt-potsdam.de, its newsletter, and on its Facebook page. The Medienstelle des Kirchenkreises Barnim (media office of the parish Barnim) serves as information and service centre for participants. The telephone hotline for visitors is operated by the Spielberatungsstelle des Kinder- und Jugendpfarramtes der EKM (play consulting office of the child and youth rectory of the EKM) in Magdeburg.

9. Contacts

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