

Our Trip to Düsseldorf and Neuss (9.12.2009)

On 9th December, 2010 our bilingual social studies course went on a trip to the trading company METRO Group to learn more about sustainable development. First of all we went to the RFID Innovation Center (Neuss). After that we had an interview in Düsseldorf at METRO Cash & Carry headquarter with the sustainability manager Louise Dearnley. At the end of our field trip we followed a guide through the Metro flagship store.

We were divided up into expert groups for each "station" of our trip. Beforehand we had to do some research on the internet to prepare questions about our topics. My topic was the RFID Innovation Center in Neuss.

We met at about eight o'clock in front of our school. From there we drove with a rental bus to the RFID Center in Neuss which took us about 25 minutes.

In the center we had a one hour guided tour. We learned a lot about the new technology in trade and retailing in this really short time.

RFID is based on tags which all have a unique EPC (Electronic Product Code) number. This code gives you all the information about the product. This code has eighty digits including header, transportation unit, manufacturer ID, type of goods (like meat, fish or vegetables etc.) and a product serial number.

The guide told us that those tags are used on many products today for example on a WM ticket, ski pass, golfball, book of a library, CDs, DVDs etc. Then we were informed about the tags themselves. The guide told us that there are even tags in paper and that they are washable and flexible so that they can be put on clothes, too.

She told us that a tag basically consists of a small passive antenna and a chip with the EPC. The tags can only be activated if they are in an electro magnetic field for example under a gate which consists of two active antennas. The active antennas create radiofrequency waves which are transmitted to the tag. The very low amount of electric energy which is transmitted is sufficient to fuel the tag so that the information on the chip can be sent back to the active antenna. Simultaneously you can check on a screen which is connected to the gate which information has been transferred and what products are on a certain pallet. The costs of a tag are about six to seven cents which is still too expensive to put it onto each yoghurt cup. We learned that the application of those tags makes the work in warehouses much faster which means that it reduces labour costs as well as energy consumption.

Then we visited the future apparel store of Gerry Weber with the smart mirror. In the end of this guided tour they showed us more technologies of the future like the smart fridge or the smart washing machines.

After this first visit we went to Düsseldorf to meet Louise Dearnley, a sustainability manager of Metro cash&carry. First of all she introduced herself and told us something about her work and sustainability. She showed us a lot of sustainable products sold by METRO and answered every single question we had patiently. She talked about the labels like "Fair Trade" "FSC" "Marine Stewardship Council" or "The blue angel" and what they are labelling. She was really well informed and told us a lot about the social contacts and connections of METRO all over the world and could tell us everything about sustainability and alternative energy which Metro uses but even about bad things like child labour in development countries. After this interview (which took about one hour) we had a delicious meal with wraps and muffins. During this meal we could ask Louise Dearnley some more questions.

After this short break we went to our next "stop": the Metro store which is divided up in the food- and nonfood parts. The guide who spoke German the whole tour showed us the different departments (like fish, meat, sweets, wine or fruits etc.) of the store and told us a lot about them. He also told us a bit about the alternative energy resources (like solar energy) the METRO store uses. We were informed about how the products or animals (fish) get into the market and how the storage of these products is organized and managed. But I think all in all he didn't really know why we visited the Metro market and what we wanted to know or hear. In fact he just did his usual guided tour through the market and showed us the "attractions", like the bowl with the crabs which we were allowed to touch. We sometimes wanted to ask him something about sustainability and energy but he avoided them and talked about something completely different. This tour was a bit shorter as planned but I think it was interesting to have a guided tour like this. And it was really nice that we were allowed to go into the cold storage room of METRO.

That was our last "station" so we drove back with the bus. At about 15:20 we were back at our school in Pulheim.

All in all I think this trip was an interesting and funny one with a lot of information. We learned so many new things about RFID, sustainability and the METRO Group.

My favourite "station" of this day was the RFID Innovation Center in Neuss because there they talked a lot about the future and what shopping can look like in the in some years and I am really interested in the future. And they told us so much we didn't know before like all this stuff about the unique numbers on the tags.

by Lisa-Marie Braun