

An abstract graphic design featuring three blue circles of varying sizes and two thin blue lines. One large circle is at the top, a smaller one is in the middle, and another large one is at the bottom right. The lines intersect to form a triangular shape that frames the text on the left.

# MARS REPORT

Cyprus/Hungary Exchange

Impressions of two Media people of two different cultures, in two EU countries on two different sports, through the lives of two different athletes, working towards one single cause: to create awareness and contribute to a Media campaign to abolish Racism in Sports

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Trip and filming in Cyprus from the 3-11 of January

I know Maria Georgiadou since 7 years; we've met at a Circom conference. We did together a coproduction as new members in the EU. It was at least in Hungary a big success. To work with her again was very easy going, because we share the opinion of filming, we have the same taste and work in the same direction. During my visit there I had the chance not only filming with her, but I learned a lot about Cyprus. About the history, politics, the divided country. It was much more, than filming in a foreign country, which I did before several times.

The idea to have some coming from the same profession, having a similar background means a lot.

A journalist asks questions, every time, so it is essential to have someone who answers them.

The filming was also well organized. We had a cameraman who works for CyBC and as a young talent a young producer from the same company. We four were the team, who met Jorgos, the basketball player. he came with his friends and teammates. First I expected someone, taking part in Special Olympics, more problematic.

But he answers, in Greek of course, every question and became after the slowly begin, more open and funny and cute. We spend a lot of time together before shooting, only to get an idea about them. Jorgos must be seen as a successful person, who achieved a lot. His personal story is sad and came to this level, only because he was able to overcome lots of difficulties. He is a small hero.

To film was easy and was without serious difficulties.

To film in a foreign country in a foreign language didn't seem to me at all difficult.

Thank you for the wonderful idea and the wonderful opportunity.

Judit Klein

Pécs, 2012-02-06

Roma videos always come with music, said my Hungarian colleague while trying to put together our script into the postproduction flow! So do the Cyprus ones, I might add... only in this case it seemed that the heartbeat of Giorgos, the Special Olympics' basketball champion was louder and more effective than any piece of music... much like the ball bouncing on the playground at a rhythmical tip toe dance of his nonlinear life...

MARS project was certainly a journey. One might say it was much more than a journey... or rather, a journey to more than one destination. For my-self it turned out to be not only a roundtrip to Hungary but a journey towards a deeper understanding of people, of false impressions, in deconstructing of stereotypes, in taking down communication barriers, of building up moral standards.

## **The Cyprus report:**

### **Idea/Story layout:**

To a small country like Cyprus, an Olympic medal is more that anyone can hope for. What if this country's wildest dream comes to life through a small group of disabled people?

The "Walls of the City" are torn down for these giants of the victorious human spirit on body. The lime light of the media turns to them making them the "man of the hour". How long is this "Hour"?

A moderate portrait of a Special Olympics' athlete who excelled in his/her sport of choice will be produced and podcasted.

The report its-self will aim to provoke the establishment of diverse ideals, others than the stereotype of the stronger or the healthier conquers all. Our ambition is to overthrow the superhuman new-age- man and make an effort to re-establish a different kind of hero;

The portrayed athlete will display and argue a case in which he/she was able to stand above any mental or physical disadvantage through hardships caused mainly by social intolerance or/and lack of false media exposure.

Did the state award this outstanding citizen as they should, provide for him/her a means for a sustainable living? Do they feel they earned the respect of their fellow citizens and have integrated into a welcoming society?

What in their opinion should change in the way the media acknowledge or slight them shortly after the lime light moves away?

### **Preproduction:**

The Cyprus part of the story seems much more than a conjuncture.

Earlier this year, and only a few days after the filming part of the MARS project in Cyprus was completed, APOEL football club was awarded the national annual award for the best athletes for 2011. On March 7, this magnificent football team made it to the 8 of the Champions League 2012.

During that same award ceremony the National Special Olympics Basketball team got the award for the best Special Olympics athlete. The team that brought home

golden, silver and bronze medals from World and European championships got its 30 seconds of glory. And that was that...

APOEL is making news headlines, and its Champion League victories are being portrayed as the best moment in the country's sports' history.

All's fair and well, unless it's again the same story we have every single weekend at the end of each news bulleting instead of the beginning, and in all the sports programmes: football, football players, football coaches, and so on and so forth...

MARS project came as an opportunity to try diversifying the media sports landscape. Could we achieve such an enormous task?

### **Development:**



Giorgos belongs to the Special Olympics National team of Cyprus. He was not our first choice for this project not only because in his family environment there are more people with special needs, which made it impossible for us to film him in his house with his family, but because he himself is very sensitive of the subject and avoids talking about his feelings. Also, we were informed that because of his mental situation he was not up to making complex associations, which would consequently affect the report.

Still, we decided to go along with this option for two reasons; first, we needed to see with our own eyes this golden boy of the Special Olympics World Championships. The second reason for this choice was the fact that Cyprus holds an annual event which runs for twenty years now and its sole purpose is to collect money for the people with special needs. This event, something like a telethon, which lasts for 3 whole days each November, manages to raise over 2500 euros per year, in an island of 800 thousand inhabitants. The latter led us to believe that there was ground to build on and that both the media and the public would hold a favourable position towards a report that portrayed such a person in a positive light.



Meeting Giorgos was a surprise by itself. He was nothing like we expected. He was sociable, easy going, versatile and brighter than many people who are widely considered as “normal”. In fact, if we didn’t know beforehand that he had learning difficulties or belonged to the Special Olympics team, we could be fooled by his overwhelming

personality who graduated from a cook school, takes part in two different theatrical groups and participates in their shows.

Still, he appeared very cautious as to how and where this media exposure would be destined for. Partially his scruples derive from the attitude of a couple of the Special Olympics officials who are overprotective towards their athletes being exposed by the media, generating even obstacles for them to be featured in mass media reports such as not providing permits for filming during training or granting copyrights for games’ video footage.

## **Production:**

### Cyprus

#### **Content:**

If one should expect to see a basketball athlete in the classical sense of the term, one would be in for a surprise. Giorgos and his playmates whom he brought to the filming location for a training in an open court were by far very different from the athlete stereotype. But they were just as much in contrast with the special needs people stereotype as well.



Giorgos is very conscious of his mental and physical situation. He knows that he has trouble remembering the early years of his childhood in a detailed and linear form, mainly because he wasn’t able to speak before the age of 8.



He understands that he has difficulties in processing complex meanings and instructions that is why he and his teammates are not able to follow a detailed game plan. And this is the reason why he asks to be partially coached on how he should construct the beginning of his sentences when he answers to the questions of this report.



And this by itself shows that he's much more developed than most of the ordinary/normal people who are being interviewed on a daily basis by the media. Giorgos seems that he's much closer than most people to the Socrates' philosophical motto: "Know Thyself".

And because of that fact he contacts himself with dignity, truthfulness and mental clarity, during the entire course of the interview and as we're sure, he does in his everyday life as well.

He appreciates the merits of a team sport in the procedure of his socialization. He acknowledges the social and personal rejections he suffered before he became a prominent athlete.

He speaks of his feelings, of other people's misapprehensions regarding his condition, the fact that not only did he not give up when almost everybody had written him off, but managed to trick the system by enlisting in the army while he wasn't supposed to.

Sadly we cannot air Giorgos' long interview on air, the dish he prepared for us to show off his cooking skills, obtained at a regular cooks' school where nobody knew anything about his so called deficiencies and his positive energy which is overflowing while on stage.

But we can share his personal vision of his future in sports: to get a gold medal at London Special Olympics Championship and retire only to become a volunteer in the Special Olympics family...

Because, for Giorgos, being different merely means that you do something differently from anybody else. So, the whole world is different in that sense, aren't they?

### **Technical Aspects:**

The filming was kept at a minimum cost level with people chipping in their expertizes largely at their own personal time. The filming locations were also limited by the particularities of the subject and Giorgos family situation, as well as the limitations imposed by some of the Special Olympics officials.

Other than that, no extraordinary conditions were required other than the usual procedure of magazine show reports.



## Hungary

### **Content:**

When in Hungary we had again the opportunity to exchange information which was not limited to the task in hand.

It was an overall very interesting experience since, as was the case in Cyprus as well, we were given the chance to commune into each other's cuisine, traditions, historical background, financial situation, cultural and mentality similarities or differences.

For my-self, coming from the Mediterranean, to have to travel several hours in the snow to go to filming location was certainly a first. For a Greek Cypriot, who has being in contact with the Roma people only through media reports, meeting István Pisont was a revelation.

Stereotypes, no matter how reason indicates that they could not be true have an extremely strong habit to crawl back into position. Tens of reports have been broadcasted and watched regarding the integration of Roma people, of the respect of the diversity in the EU, still one can find herself in expecting a camp and even a tent, or the very least a lot of folklore such as floral skirts and fortune telling.

None of those made their way into our Hungarian report, simply because they weren't there at all.

Instead, we were welcomed into sparkling clean houses, no different in any sense than the average Hungarian Budapest building. One of such housed the Roma football player who bit the odds and enjoyed a career with the leading football clubs of the Hungarian first league.

Not only did he make it as a football star in Hungary, but his talent was scouted by teams outside his country's borderline. So, yes! This Roma man lead a nomadic life for a while, only to be summoned up back home 3 years ago, when he was assigned the trainer's post for the National Youth football team of Hungary.

Accomplished as he was and quite busy in his mission, we enjoyed a few personal moments with his family. His players and workmates were more than happy to welcome the crew to training. What an honour to be trained by one of the greatest, was the input we got from the Hungarian youngsters! Even the gloomy and snow weather indulged us, allowing us not only a couple of sunny days for our filming



project but the melting of the snow, to the joy of the filming crew and colleagues in Budapest, and alas, to my personal disappointment...



### **Technical Aspects:**

The filming took place in more locations than in Cyprus in a more organised form which had everything to do with the will of the featured athlete and his surrounding people and their wish of this report to make the most of the publicity given.

In addition, the Hungarian crew handled the report as any other magazine report and was given the adequate filming consequence needed.

Other than that, working and technical procedures are very similar in both countries, Hungary and Cyprus, since both reports were done with a single camera in a digital format.

### **Post Production:**

The last part of the exchange didn't go as smoothly as expected. Incompatibility of formats kicked in which resulted to poor end visual product on the Cyprus end and a lot of extra work hours, frustration and delays.

Because of the fact that the Hungarian report was to be filmed after the Cyprus one, it was decided that the report filmed in Cyprus should be roughly edited and trimmed in position in Hungary where both reports would be sewed together and further edited.

Unfortunately, different formats and workflows created an editorial babel.

Since CyBC would not have Avid which was the workflow that would be used in Hungary, it was decided to outsource the editing procedure with the recruitment of voluntary contribution.

In addition, archive footage was not mad available as promised, since the Special Olympics were being very cautious in publicizing any of their copyrights material, being overprotected with the exposure of their athletes in the media.

## Hungary

Having a draft roughly edited material from Cyprus, we ended up in Hungary where the local report was easily put together, but the Cyprus one could not be adjusted as it should have within the workflow available.



The raw material (unedited filming) was not accessible and thus, impossible to edit as such, placing pictures over sound bites or replacing pieces that were left out in the final product.

That, along with language communication barriers, lack of time and wasting expensive workflow facilities and personnel, it was decided to finalize the editing of the Cyprus part of the report back home.



## Cyprus

A procedure which unfortunately didn't pay up and a very easy going everyday task became a huge hassle.

The Budapest timeline file is not compatible with the workflow in Cyprus.

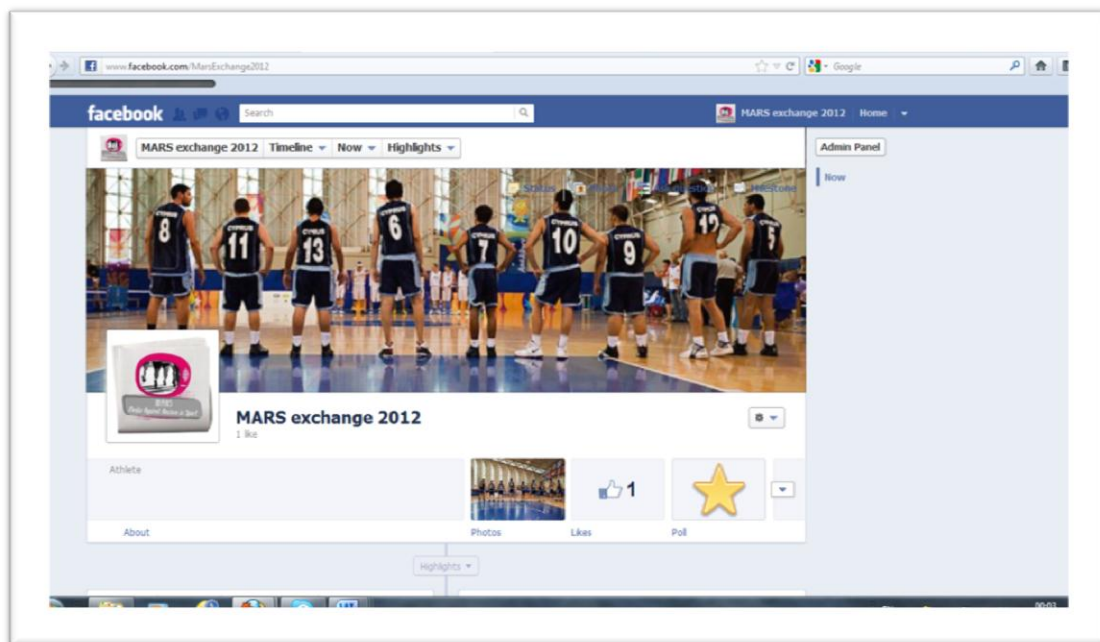
Editors cannot afford to invest any more of their personal time to resolve this issue but I'm quite confident that this issue will be resolved within the remaining 2 weeks of the deadline after the completion of the second leg of the exchange.

I must say the recession played its part in all these. Had there was financial support for this production, means would be made available to avoid this kind of incompatibility. Would people secure in their jobs they would make time to work for free for a good cause.

Having said that and certainly not pointing any fingers that should be pointed at me, I merely raise a question for future reference or to be kindly reviewed by the MARS project...

## Dissemination:

In our effort to increase the impact this exchange will hopefully generate in reducing the racism of the media coverage in sports, the report will be available on a private Educational organization's (American Academy Limassol/Paphos) YouTube channel.



A Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/MarsExchange2012>) is already set up in order to document and portray the exchange and the media reports that came out of it. Highlights of the production procedure will be pinned up and links will be offered of the url locations of more info regarding both the MARS project as well as other relevant topics (e.g. journalists for diversity, Special Olympics Cy, A.A. YouTube channel, etc.). An additional aim is to create and continue to generate awareness and exposure long after this exchange comes to an end with the use of questionnaires and competitions related to this exchange topic. The page is yet to be fully developed but and will do this in the following weeks.

In addition, the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation already broadcasted an extract of the Cyprus report during the morning magazine show, having a member of the Cyprus Special Olympics' Board as a studio guest.

Following that short feature, Giorgos was approached by a mainstream newspaper for an Interview.

Even though this fact shows how effective such reports may be towards the aim of abolishing racism in media coverage in sports, Giorgos himself feels very reluctant regarding being so openly exposed to the public eye. He's very sceptical about giving this interview or any additional media exposure for that matter, because as he says, it'll only end up getting him into trouble. If this unfortunate reaction depicts the deeply rooted rejection he suffered or the overprotection of his immediate environment is not a matter this exchange will pursue further.

Nevertheless it says a lot about the long way we have to go until both media and athletes not favoured by the media stop having second thoughts whether their report will result in a positive impact to the public opinion.



In the end, Giorgos settled for an interview with one condition: the entire basket team would be interviewed; was this decision a try to find refuge in a familiar safe haven his team holds or his honest effort to promote the team spirit is something left to be seen... as is the follow up of the MARS exchange and the stream of publicity to the sports less favoured by the media limelight it triggered!

Maria A. Georgiadou  
Nicosia, 24 March 2012