

Creating Toys for All

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■ **Creating Toys for All (23 December, 2002) :**

>>>By Birger Agergaard,
Illustrations: The Project Group

Creative European Workshops develop Prototypes of Toys. According to Italian Architect, it is possible to make the Toys attractive to All

The Challenge: Is it possible to design, test and commercialise therapeutic toys for disabled children, working together with them, then put them into mainstream production in ordinary markets?



Picture text: 'Coffee Break' is a memory game with such multisensorial stimuli as colour and sound. 9-16 bags with different colours on their faces can be combined to make 18-32 pairs of colours.

Italian architect Isabella Steffan has been working with a European project involving participants from 20 countries whose aim is to achieve this.

Two and a half years ago, she was asked by the Italian association ADG (one of six European partners) to participate in the 'EC Innovation programme - Production of Innovative Play Products in sheltered Workshops', co-ordinated by Fördern durch Spielmittel with financial support from the EU.

A consistent part of the work was planned to be carried out in workshops, of which three have been organised so far: in Sweden, Italy and the UK respectively.

Isabella Steffan, who is Vice-President of the Italian Institute for Design and Disability IIDD, took part as an architect and ergonomist. Towards the end of 1999, she co-organised the Italian workshop, following it up with an exhibition in Milan together with IIDD.

The project has now reached the stage where 125 toys have been designed as initial prototypes, while 13 of them have been developed for testing and production. For example, a set of memory cards, called 'Coffee Break', developed during the Italian workshop, has been manufactured as a regular prototype and already tested in five different toy libraries/hospitals.

Stimulating Atmosphere

'The European atmosphere is very stimulating: it is really challenging when people with such different backgrounds try to understand and work with each other to reach a common goal. The theme, helping disabled people live a better life, was not new to me. What was new and interesting was applying the approach to toys and co-organising an international creativity workshop' she comments.

Isabella Steffan found it very rewarding to work in direct contact with users at the sheltered workshops, with their families, their physiotherapists and teachers, in order to understand the children's special needs.

Fördern durch Spielmittel afterwards asked Ms Steffan to be responsible for constructing the prototypes of the toys designed in Italy.

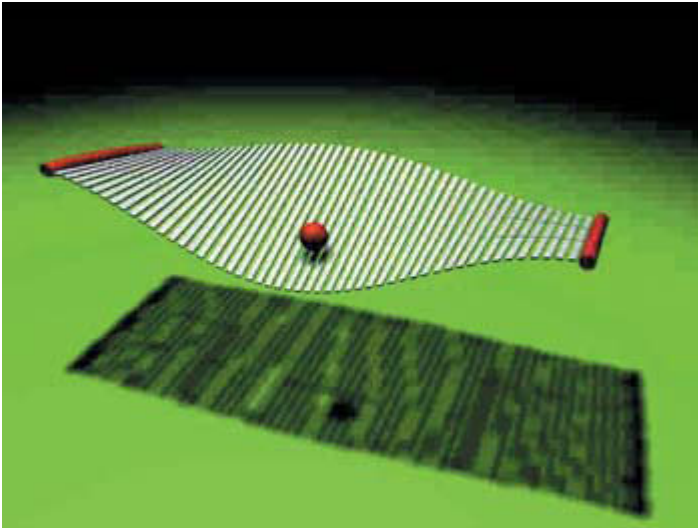
Criteria

The ideas for the toys chosen for further development and testing were based on a set of criteria, in particular:

- **therapeutic functions for disabled children;**
- **inclusion of different functions;**
- **new on the toy market;**
- **easy to manufacture and commercialise.**

Says Isabella Steffan: 'Some models were tested during the workshops, then duplicated and tested by many users - both disabled and non-disabled children - to verify their usability. If necessary, they are redesigned in the direction of user needs.

Another good thing about the method of creative workshops is that designers are encouraged to work together with specialists in a wide variety of other fields, from ergonomists to rehabilitation experts.'



Picture text: 'Flying Carpet' is a flexible carpet to be grasped in the hands by two participants standing up. The game consists of bouncing a ball on it: the act of control improves social and motory skills

It is possible

Isabella Steffan and the other participants in the project are fully aware that toys chosen for commercialisation will

only be a success if they are commercialised on a broad scale. The toys must comply with industrial standards and be made of materials suitable for industrial production. Obviously, this means that compromises are necessary.

'But I think it is possible to design and commercialise toys for a large target group, including non-disabled children.'

Applicable Concept

A report drawn up by the non-profit association and coordinator, Fördern durch Spielmittel, states that developing the toys in direct co-operation with the users has proven efficient. The concept of such creative workshops will be applicable to many other types of businesses and organisations.

Facts: The Project Partners

- [Fördern durch Spielmittel - Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder e.V. \(Berlin; Project Co-ordinator\)](#)
- [NCFE, Nordic Centre for Research on Toys and Educational Media, Halmstad University, Sweden](#)
- [BTG British Toymakers Guild, Bath, U.K.](#)
- [ADG Associazione Donatella Gazzola, Lissone, Italy](#)
- [CIL Centro Internazionale Ludoteche, Florence, Italy](#)
- ARTO European Marketing Organisation for products made by disabled people, Furstenwalde, Germany.

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