

Roberta goes to Europe

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Girls enjoy working with robots: they especially like to carry out tasks that are related to nature. Credit: © Fraunhofer IAIS

The idea that girls are not interested in science and technology is a popular misconception. For the past five years, school girls have been working with robots in "Roberta courses". And now Roberta is ready to take Europe. At this year's Hannover Messe, Roberta organizers will provide an overview of the new Roberta centers that are operating in six different countries.

The tension mounts: Will the demonstration work? Will the robot ant mark the path to food, and will it be able to send other robot ants information on how to find it? In the end, everything works out well, and the robots purposefully head towards their food source. Five years ago, the Fraunhofer Institute for Intelligent Analysis and Information Systems in Sankt Augustin initiated the "Roberta® – Girls Discover Robots"

project, which has been extremely successful.

Girls have shown a great deal of enthusiasm for the project. “Our experience with children in robot courses has shown that girls are not interested in programming armored vehicles, combat or football robots,” says project manager Gabriele Thiedig. Instead, Roberta course participants program their robots to dance or to organize a rescue operation.

The Roberta development team has also produced a series of teaching and learning materials. Without much effort, teachers can use these materials to conduct robot courses in a way that is interesting to girls. A cooperation agreement between Fraunhofer IAIS and the non-profit Competence Center for Technology-Diversity-Equal Opportunity has created a Germany-wide Roberta network served by qualified multipliers. There are currently 22 regional Roberta centers in Germany, where interested school groups and their teachers can get information about courses from experienced instructors. One such course is the “Smart Girls” initiative. By allowing girls to gain experience with robotics, the initiative aims to spark high school girls’ interest in technical trades and university programs.

From 21 to 25 April, the TectoYou youth initiative will be at the Hannover Messe to give young people aged 12 to 16 the opportunity to check out what Roberta has to offer. “On Girl’s Day, however, courses will be offered to girls only,” says project manager Theidig. TectoYou’s female Roberta instructors will also be on hand to talk about their experiences, along with teams participating in the RoboCupJunior competition.

Roberta is already well-known across Germany, and further regional centers are to be set up, while a European dimension begins to take shape. In fact, 12 regional centers have already opened in England,

Sweden, Austria, Switzerland and Italy, and organizers hope that more will be added soon.

Source: Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft

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