

Intercultural event "INTERKUUL 2001"

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Abstract

In autumn 2000, employees of the Residential College Hustedt (HVHS), members of various ethnic and cultural minorities, facilitators of integration work and members of the city administration founded a network with the objective of making a common contribution to integration in the city of Celle and its region by cultural means. For that purpose we founded a work group to prepare for the intercultural city event "INTERKUUL 2001". It took place on 23rd September 2001 and brought together between 4,000 and 5,000 people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. During the preparation period and analysis of the project work there were many meetings, talks, discussions, inquiries, studies, plans and organisational work which were already part of an intercultural laboratory. The preparation phase, and the event itself, provided many practical opportunities for intercultural learning and offered various occasions to enhance the awareness of the participants' own culture as well as learning to know better, and respect, other cultures. Our project created many impressions and started activities which contributed to a better understanding between the cultures with regard to tolerance and integration; they also initiated a form of public, conscious neighbourhood between members of minority cultures and the culture of the majority. Awareness of our Residential College and our educational programmes was also improved among the citizens of Celle, particularly among migrants and minorities.

Goals and objectives

By participating in the project we intended to make a contribution to improve the coexistence of the majority society and minorities in Celle and its region, as well as the coexistence of the different minorities. We intended to enhance the sensibility for other cultures and to foster an awareness with regard to our own culture. By improving mutual information we tried to intensify the interest in and the knowledge about other cultures; our further intention was to initiate and foster a willingness to establish intercultural contacts and meetings. Working with migrants and cultural minorities, we tried to select fields of co-operation for the above mentioned groups, create an appropriate network, and thereby support the formation of contacts between migrants and minorities and the city administration. This was to be achieved by our joint organisation of small intercultural events and productions, with a large intercultural festival for the city of Celle and its region as a main event.

Contents

Having initially discussed and planned the project internally, we started to go out "into the streets" to establish contacts with different minorities, associations, institutions and organisations with which we wanted to implement the project. The migrant groups were mainly Yezidic Kurds, Turks and repatriated Germans from Russia.

We visited their associations as well as some of them in their homes, and invited them to visit us; we went to their events and festivities to present our project. It was through this dialogue that we could gain their representatives' confidence, awaken their interest in co-operation with us, and integrate them into our network.

From the beginning of our work, the "Forum against Violence and Right-Wing Extremism" in Celle to which our organisation belongs, was an essential support for us. Its members come from various civilian social associations, institutions and organisations, which fight against xenophobia and violence and work for tolerance and overcoming prejudices, in short: doing integration work. These include representatives of trade unions, churches, political parties, as well as other political, social and charitable organisations and associations and last but not least, representatives of the city administration.

This was in favour of the project and facilitated its conception, so that we could acquire the city administration as a partner and co-organiser of our intercultural event, and that we could rely on the support of various administrative offices. These included: Social Welfare Office, Youth Welfare Office, Public Affairs Office, Tourist Office. In addition local politicians also actively supported our work.

Furthermore, we secured the support of a large number of people from the above-mentioned institutions, organisations, foundations and associations, who were prepared to permanently work in our "preparation group". In addition, representatives of educational associations, vocational schools, schools, youth centres, kindergartens and individuals participated in our work. Finally the preparation group consisted of 20 to 25 people meeting on a regular basis in various groupings. The above-mentioned processes and preparation lasted approximately one year, from 1st October 2000 to 23rd September 2001.

In the meetings of the preparation group we worked on the content and organisation and discussed new ideas. We discussed and reflected on our work, developed our activities, organised and improved our resources, planned and developed our intercultural event, "INTERKUUL 2001".

Representatives of minorities living in Celle as well as other immigrants participated regularly in the group work, particularly Yezidic Kurds, Turks, and repatriates from Russia and Kazakhstan. It was with their participation that we could ensure that our preparations corresponded to their ideas, needs and wishes.

During the preparation period, we worked intensively on public relations, advertising and particularly on raising sponsorship to fund the planned main event.

At the end of this period, we had a clear idea of the content and organisation in the process of the event "INTERKUUL 2001". All participating groups had developed ideas and concepts of how to present themselves and their integration work during our event. That was also true for the minorities and immigrants who wanted to give a general idea of their situation and their daily life in Celle, of their way of life and their culture.

Preparation seminar

During a preparation seminar "Integration and Cultural Bridging", organised two weeks prior to the intercultural event, we once again ascertained our goals. Measures were put into place to achieve these objectives. Even after careful and critical examination, we were convinced that bringing different cultures together in a joint intercultural event

would be a good way to foster the awareness of one's own culture and the understanding of other cultures.

We finished the final organisational coordination, agreed on the schedule for the event, determined the arrangement for the stage and the stands and also decided on the contributions of the groups and the job allocations during the event. We went about the last days before the event with the feeling of having prepared the event properly and being able to conclude any remaining work in time.

Then the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, hit the United States and caused a situation that jeopardized the implementation of our event. For quite some time, the city administration of Celle, our co-organiser, thought about cancelling the entire event.

After intense discussions we finally agreed on continuing with the event using the following argument:

It would be an additional victory for the terrorists, if an event which was to take place in the name of cultural understanding, was cancelled because of their crimes. In such a situation it is necessary to demonstrate publicly the will and commitment to understanding and solidarity with people of other cultures, and also to protect Islamic fellow citizens against general allegations and discrimination.

INTERKUUL 2001

On 23rd September 2001, our event finally took place on the largest square in the centre of Celle. It opened at 11.00 am and ended at 5.00 pm. The opening speeches pointed out the special importance of the event only a few days after the terrorist attacks in the United States and emphasized the will to coexist peacefully with our foreign fellow citizens.

INTERKUUL 2001 was also the initial event of the "Week of the Foreign Fellow Citizen" in Celle.

At the beginning the weather was dull, but fortunately cleared up later. Accordingly the ambience and atmosphere also became brighter. The programme included music, song and dance from different cultures, as well as good food and drinks. There were a number of activities for children and teenagers to participate in and the adults were invited to take part in a language game. A programme, printed in six languages, pointed out the highlights of the day and an excellent presenter cheerfully led through the event. He invited visitors and guests of the different ethnic groups to participate in talks, exchange of experience and common activities.

All over the square there were lively conversations and many friendly and festive people talked –perhaps for the first time - in an unrestrained manner to people they had never taken much notice of before, or might even have considered with suspicion. In short, the joint event INTERKUUL 2001 was an excellent platform for an unrestrained and positive encounter of people of different cultures and also for intercultural learning. About 4,000 to 5,000 people attended the event. So far, no intercultural event of this dimension has ever taken place in the city of Celle. All the people involved, as well as the local press, considered it a great success. In particular, the representatives of the participating minorities and many members of other cultures were glad that they could participate in such an event.

According to estimates we learned that about 60 per cent of the visitors and guests were members of the majority culture and about 40 per cent members of different minority cultures. Fortunately, many families came to visit the event with their children, as well as teenagers.

We also want to point out the large contribution to the project and especially to our intercultural event that our partners and the local network made with respect to financing and manpower. The City of Celle estimates its expenses (non-cash benefits and manpower) at about DM 12,000 (German marks), additional to the monetary

subsidy of the city and the rural district. We estimate the value of our local network's participation (manpower and non-cash benefits) in preparation and realization of the intercultural event at about DM 20,000. In addition, the sponsorship money we could procure, amounted to DM 9,050; sum total: DM 41,050.00 = 20,988.53 (Euro).

Without these indirect and direct project and event subsidies from our partners and our network, an intercultural event of this dimension would not have been feasible. This is not taking into consideration the services on our own account as a Residential College and the subsidies of the Grundtvig Project.

Analysis seminar

On 11th November 2001, the members of the analysis seminar confirmed our view with respect to the success of the event. Some participants would have wished for more integrating activities, e.g. not only spontaneous, but also organised dancing and singing together. Others would have preferred it if the event had lasted into the evening. Finally there was complete agreement in the desire to produce another intercultural event of a smaller scope during the remaining time of the project.

Further activities and consequences

During the period from November 2001 to April 2002 we continued co-operation with our local network. We analysed and thought of how to publish the results of our present work and continue the project together with our local partners.

The production of a video titled "INTERKUUL 2001" was one additional result. The video documents the event and contributes greatly to the public becoming aware of its results. The video forms part of the city's public library's collection as well as the district's film archives. In addition we have made it available to schools, vocational schools, associations and other interested parties.

On 9th November 2001, an ecumenical mass was celebrated in the municipal church of Celle, which was attended by Christians of all denominations, Muslims, Yezidic Kurds, Buddhists and representatives of the Jewish community. In the evening we held a music event which was attended by members of different cultures.

Weekend seminar "Islam"

During a weekend seminar from April 20th to 21st, 2002, with the subject "Islam – religious, cultural and social-political aspects", network members and vocational scholars from Celle dealt with this topic. Apart from German colleagues, representatives, especially of the Turkish minority from Celle and its region participated in the seminar. A competent speaker gave a lecture, followed by an extensive discussion about the different aspects of Islam, particularly about the coexistence of Germans and Turks. It was particularly favourable that about 15 vocational scholars who had just started with an Islam project in their school participated in the seminar. They were visibly further motivated with regard to a continuation of their work. During the second part, we discussed an intercultural weekend in our Residential College Hustedt, which we intended to organise in August 2002.

Visit to the mosque

A few weeks after our seminar, the "Turkish-Islamic association, Nienhagen", one of our partners, invited us to visit the mosque and to attend a mass. Apart from the Islamic believers, about 20 people from Celle and its neighbourhood participated, including members of our network. It was an impressive event which helped to intensify the co-operation with this partner.

Seminar "Intercultural learning"

From August 10th to 11th 2002, we hosted a seminar in the Residential College Hustedt with the subject "Intercultural learning through cultural productions – utopia or reality?". We witnessed an engaging discussion by a highly qualified Italian instructor about the experience with the coexistence of different cultures, and in particular, immigrants reported intensely and frankly on their situation. Many statements during the discussion referred to our event "INTERKUUL 2001". Besides local representatives of our network, the participants were mainly Yezidic Kurds and muslim Turks. In the evening, there was an intercultural event in our school which was hosted by our Turkish partner and ourselves. Turkish meals, music and dance, as well as an exchange of experiences and conversation, contributed to a successful intercultural event that evening. In addition to the participants of our seminars, about 40 members of the Turkish minority came with their children from outside Celle to celebrate. An analysis next morning came to the conclusion that joint cultural productions of members of the majority and minority cultures were considered to be a very appropriate means to learn from each other and to enhance the awareness of one's own culture as well as the tolerance towards other cultures. Cultural productions with intercultural claims and contents were considered to be an important contribution to integration in multicultural societies.

Intercultural cooking

Shortly after this weekend, there was an "intercultural cooking" event in the rural district of Celle, with women of different cultural minorities and representatives of the majority culture participating. Representatives of our network also participated. The women had a pleasant evening talking to each other about their traditions, meals and drinks, invitations and visits, and also about festivities and events.

Methods

According to the various demands, we applied multi-faceted methods during the project.

Within the complex contact approach/encounter we particularly applied methods such as conversations, invitations, visits, brief reports, overhead slides and discussions. The main aspect of the applied methods was to gain the participants' confidence, to convince them of the importance of our work, and to motivate the addressees to participate in the project work. First of all, we had to establish a good relationship with the minorities' representatives and convince them of the purpose of our project. That also meant clearly communicating advantages to the representatives which the project could possibly provide them with: e.g. more attention to their problems, public perception, informing the German population about their situation, their daily life and culture, reducing prejudice and xenophobic attitudes, overcoming isolation, arranging contacts with representatives of the city, articulation and support of their demands.

It was particularly important for the work in the preparation group to assure continuity and the binding character of participation. The meeting appointments had to be fixed so that all members could attend the meetings as often as possible. Transparency and frankness were the principles of this work, all information was made accessible to everybody. This step ensured confidence and enhanced motivation to participate. It was a positive aspect that some members, if willing, were assigned tasks on which they reported in the follow-up meetings. We discussed all suggestions and the majority of the decisions were made unanimously.

To provide as many resources as possible for the preparation group, we continually asked ourselves the question; 'who to pick for which contribution to the project?', utilising people within the group as well as from outside. By this means we soon had a general overview of all feasible possibilities.

There was an amazing variety of existing integrative activities and initiatives in the social field. Our project provided an opportunity to emphasize the cultural aspect of integration. Soon, interested people understood that intercultural activities can indeed bring fun and pleasure to the process of integration, therefore people begin to favour integration.

In the seminars we also dealt with the theoretical side of the encounter of cultures and intercultural learning, which, however, was only one main field among many. The project was very much practice-orientated so that we constantly came back to discuss the situation and the problems of immigrants in their daily life. We received reports about the personal biography and the family background of participants (biographic method, work on individual cases), as well as about the actual life situation, the problems and experiences in the field of mutual social relations (interview, report, inquiry). Again and again, we had to deal with "inter-cultural situations" or we re-created them by using prepared dialogues or role-play. By discussing these situations we obtained a lot of information and cognition about our own culture and others. The discussions also enhanced awareness of our own culture. Apart from that, we added analytical and receptive methods to these processes, methods for getting to know each other and illustrating other cultures and religions (impulse reports, reports, overhead slides, photos, videos, multimedia learning patterns).

We planned and organised the "INTERKUUL 2001" event in a way that gave as many possibilities for intercultural encounters as possible. This was true for families with children (people could participate in activities such as a make-up course, painting, doing handicrafts or playing, and there was a playing mobile, a magician and a circus for children), for teenagers (fitness contest of the MTV sports club Celle), as well as for adults (eating and drinking together with people of different ethnic and cultural origin, accordingly a wide variety of meals and drinks and finally having the chance of getting to know and speak to each other, spontaneous invitations to dance together and so on). We also offered a "language game" and hereby created an organised activity for all members of different cultures to gain initial direct contact with each other. The task was to ask people who one considered came from another culture for words in their respective languages. According to our observations people made abundant use of these opportunities. Kurdish and German music and dance groups as well as groups of repatriates from Russia provided superb musical entertainment.

Best Practice

The main success of our participation in the project was that the event "INTERKUUL 2001" took place in the city of Celle and the intercultural evening was arranged at the Residential College Hustedt. Both events allowed people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to meet each other and make contact in a friendly atmosphere. Boosting their consciousness regarding their own culture, people actively increased their tolerance towards other cultures practising acceptance in the most practical way of all.

The second significant result was the good work of our network and preparation group. Often, the group constituted a wide field for experimenting with regard to the handling of cultural differences, it was an offer to jointly achieve successes and solve problems. At the same time, this co-operation offered an excellent opportunity for intercultural

learning and multi-ethnic practice. The good results of the co-operation was a significant contribution to the project's overall success..

Strengthening the existing integration network in the city of Celle and the region as well as enriching it by cultural exercise and practice has to be considered an additional success. It became quite clear that the "cultural dimension" - i.e. adequate perception and respect with regard to other cultures is a very important aspect of integration. We do not consider it a biased process of adaptation of immigrants and minorities to the majority's society, but a complete society-specific development of actively taking steps to meet the other party that demands at least as much commitment and responsibility from the "residents" as from the "migrant groups".

The improvement of the contacts, above all, of Yezidic Kurds with the city administration is a direct result of the project and the intercultural event. They contributed mainly to improving mutual perception and communication. Several meetings have been held since.

Another very special result of the project was that we were able to win all political parties as sponsors – as well as businesses and financial institutes- for "INTERKUUL 2001". The co-operation of the city's administration was exceptionally helpful in this matter.

A very positive aspect of the intercultural event was that individual civil associations, federations, charitable and social institutions, educational institutes as well as migrant group's associations were given ample opportunity to present themselves with their stalls and booths. Everybody was given the chance to present visitors and guests with their work, showing their integration efforts.

I would like to express my special thanks to public relations, advertisement, and co-operation with the local printed media. The support from the Celle's local newspapers for our project was very great.

Last, but not least, the follow-up results and activities are also of some importance. They ensure the improvement of the atmosphere and contacts between residents and migrants and minorities in the city of Celle and the entire region. The City's slogan "We in Celle" has indeed received new momentum by focussing on the situation of the "foreign citizens" and showing that you can live with them and celebrate with them in perfect neighbourliness. Which, of course, is also true for the other relationship direction.

Comments

Participating staff members as well as our educational institution were glad to receive such positive feedback from private and public, especially with regard to the good success of the "INTERKUUL 2001" event. As proof, we would like to present some comments from the local press (all translated):

"'Interkuul 2001': A motley meeting on the Großen Plan (large square)

Almost like a large family: 4,000 people of the city of Celle celebrate the intercultural event

At the 'Interkuul 2001', approximately 4,000 people from Celle, being of the most diverse nationalities came together to seek talks and entertainment in an atmosphere unconstrained and almost familiar that is not often to be found in Celle" (Cellesche Zeitung, 24th September 2001)

"'Interkuul 2001' a giant success with about 4,000 visitors and guests'

'German folk music meets Kurd music band: An absolute first!'

Organisation members of the first intercultural event in Celle, the 'Interkuul 2001' did in fact make the right decision. Despite the terrorist attacks in the U.S.A., the initial schedule was maintained and the event was not cancelled

'When the atmosphere is right, it is so much easier to meet and interact with each other', say Margret and Yayla. It is especially for this event that they have put on the Kurdish traditional costume....'This is, where you meet other people that you do not have much contact with otherwise' they sum up the advantages of the day's event. (...) 'Just like a large family reunion' - Behije Altun, member of the committee of the Yezidic Cultural Centre in Celle, is almost carried away by emotions.' 'Co-operation and the atmosphere between the cultures is exemplary', as is the communication between the organizers and the City." (Celler Kurier, September 26th, 2001)

Another comment regarding the intercultural evening at the Residential College Hustedt:

"Turkish hospitality at the Aller river"

One was instantly reminded of The Arabian Nights when the folk dancers group of the Turkish-Islamic Union Nienhagen danced to oriental music. And music, fun, and talking were indeed the central and common focus during this intercultural night that the Residential College Hustedt had invited everybody to come to." (Cellesche Zeitung, August 14th, 2002)

Evaluation

Both of the above chapters already anticipated many elements that were taken into consideration when evaluating the project. Therefore, in addition to some problems, we would like to mention suggestions and ideas that came up during the evaluation seminar in November 2001.

Problems encountered

Besides the usual problems and organisation slip-ups normally associated with events of such size there were two significant problems that we would like to name:

On the one hand, all the contacts that we were able to establish in the initial stages of the project to a Russian repatriates' association and to individual Kurds seemed to vanish into thin air never to play another part in the further project development. The association dissolved at the end of the year 2000, and was no longer available as a partner organisation.

With regard to the first contact with the Yezidic Kurds, the problem was that we had talked to private persons only. It was only when we established contacts to existing associations that we succeeded in developing sound co-operation. The development was very good once young members of the board underwent efforts in support of open co-operation.

On the other hand, our initially successful initiative to integrate the association of repatriates from Russia into the project proved to be a failure, one reason was that many of the migrants from the former Soviet Union do not like to be considered a cultural minority. All the more need then for our thanks to the Russian-German group of artists who knew how to musically centre at least some attention to the cultural background of this minority group.

Some selected suggestions and ideas for a continuation of the "Interkuul Process" in Celle and surrounding region that came up during the evaluation seminar:

Opening of a Café "Interkuul" in the City of Celle;
Establishing a help desk and consulting location for migrants and the "Ausländerbeirat",
Founding an "exercise company": "Intercultural City Council";
Organising an exhibition with the topic "Where we come from - how we live";
Offering more language courses for migrants, e.g. "A comparison of cultures" (possibly at the Residential College HVHS Hustedt respectively at the Volkshochschule Celle), asking professors from foreign cultures to teach and lecture;
Performing special intercultural events for students and young persons;
Arranging to let institutions "adopt" migrants (associations, churches, schools and so on.);
Presenting successful activities to the public as "intercultural bridging";
Integrating even more ethnic groups and cultural minorities into the work;
Identifying also the needs and requirements of the majority group with regard to relations with migrants and minorities;
Allow for an annual "INTERKUUL" event.

Service

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The video film "INTERKUUL 2001" is available (for hire) at the Residential College.

Tips for reading:

Erwachsenenbildung mit ethnischen Minderheiten und Migrant/innen, Eine Handreichung für Erwachsenenbildner/innen in Europa, Projekthandbuch des Netzwerkes "Lernen, in einer multikulturellen Gesellschaft zu leben" IIZ/DVV und NIACE

Erpenbeck, Gabriele, Wir leben in einer Einwanderungsgesellschaft , in: forum bildung, 1/99, Hannover

Guth, Helmut, Politische Bildung für eine multikulturelle Gesellschaft , in: Politische Bildung 1/91, Wien

Schulte, Axel, Zwischen Idee und Realität Demokratie als Leitbild von Politik und Pädagogik in der multikulturellen Einwanderungsgesellschaft, in: forum bildung, 1/91, Hannover