

Meet'In EuroMed

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SALTO-YOUTH
EUROMED
RESOURCE CENTRE



Education and Culture



AWARDED PROJECT : ACTION I

"Meet the history"

– understand the present – improve the future

A youth meeting for building bridges among the three cultures

Karl Luster-Haggeney, a youth worker from the Casino Youth Centre in Hamm, Northwest Germany, organised a youth exchange between 16 young people from different Euro-Mediterraneans countries. The purpose was to bring together young people from different countries where the three cultures - Islam, Judaism and Christianity - are present. Aged from 15 to 22-years-old, participants from Egypt, Israel, Palestine and Spain, spent a fortnight together tackling racism, xenophobia and discussing intercultural learning and how to improve mutual respect in intercultural discourse.

The idea was born after participant in the Salto-Youth EuroMed training course "Let's meet the three cultures!" held in Cordoba in 2004. Intercultural exchange, learning and respect are than gastronomy and folklore. It is one of the focal points of our work in the Youth Centre in Hamm-Pelkum. I felt certain, that this training course would offer us not only possibilities in the international youth exchange, but also in the intercultural work in our district.

It was a very deep moving experience to meet in Cordoba so many people from other cultures being engaged in various fields of working for a enhancing the coexistence of the three cultures - Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Contact-making was easy and highly motivated by the "Spirit of Cordoba" as I returned to Hamm. I got support from our municipality and with Khalid Bhihi, I found a pupil from the high school who helped me in planning and realising the youth meeting.

Together with our partners (Lucy Talgieh, Wi'am Center for Conflict Resolution



Bethlehem, Palestine; Dganit Schreiber, Department of Youth and Social Activities Jerusalem, Israel; Menatallah Shafer Tawfik and Mohamed Maher Fawzi, Orouba Youth Center Cairo, Egypt; and Ouafa Kyali,

Asociación Columbares Beniaján, Spain) I agreed on the topic: "Meet the history – understand the present – improve the future, a youth meeting for building bridges among the three cultures".



The core objective was to explore the idea that, whether in the past or present, the same religions and cultures have always been practices in different ways and in different places without inevitably betraying the basic values of their culture.

We decided to organise the meeting in the form of a tent camp. This way, we would enhance the feeling of equality and connection, relatedness and solidarity among the participants and add a very special atmosphere to the whole meeting. Although August 2005, was by far the coldest and rainiest August since many years, most participants said the tent camp idea was one of the best moments of this meeting. After the first night we got a lot of blankets from local people and could enjoy the life in the fresh air to the fullest.

The centre of all activities was the heated communal tent and the kitchen trailer of the youth centre. Group work took place in several pavilions. We had breakfast and lunch in a youth hostel in the neighbourhood. A local bakery offered us cakes, which we enjoyed with hot cappuccino and chocolate in the kitchen trailer during our coffee breaks. So to some extent, we lived as a small village, admittedly not completely self-sufficient: the head of the near day-care-centre did our complete laundry everyday! – washing and during rainy days, also drying. Furthermore, a nearby parenting support centre granted us free access to their wireless LAN, so that we were still connected to the "world" and to everyone's home countries.

Support from the local population and organisations were strong. More than 30 of them helped us. We cooperated with Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities to learn about their work and present situation. Local experts went out to find traces of the cultures. We were invited by farmers to get to know how farming is in Germany today. The local hunters association took us on a stake out at four o'clock in the morning so we could experience the awakening of the nature. Other persons provided

us with cars or took over shuttle services. My colleague in the youth centre invited all of us to a barbecue at her private house. Participants appreciated this unwarranted support and it created a feeling of being welcomed and integrated in Hamm – much more than a feeling, to be part of a meeting with young people from other countries.

All this formed a personal basis, on which the discussion of more difficult and sensitive questions has been possible, although in every way it was not easy. A focal point of the meeting was the examination of national stereotypes and the Holocaust as a part of the hosting country's history.

It shall not be kept secret that the discussion of the Holocaust for some participants and team members was not without controversy. For them, until our meeting, the Holocaust was an event exaggerated in the interest of Israel. It was part of history and therefore not worth dealing with. We could not clear out these concerns for everyone. In order to avoid further conflict and a stalemate in the discussion amongst participants, we decided to change our angle to tackle this subject. According to the notion "Who is not willing to remember also the bad parts of history is inevitably condemned to repeat them one day", we treated it as an insistent example of German history and the consequences of racist ideologies and uncritically transported stereotypes. We learned the importance and necessity to become aware of basic values in order not to be seduced by ideologies that disrespect humanity. A moving moment was a ceremony for all victims of racial hate and political persecution, prepared by youths during the meeting and performed in the concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen. This was a particularly emotional and peace-building moment.

Despite the closeness created in our "global village", the camp was not free from conflicts, but we overcame them together. By living and working together, we learned that we are never allowed to lose hope for

a better life together and dream of mutual peace. Last but not least, the "Spirit of Cordoba" got a sibling in the "Spirit of Hamm". With this spirit it was easy not only to work effectively, but also to celebrate the event of being together and to arrange the common leisure time. For this we appreciated the contributions of all participants, no matter whether youngster or team members. Especially from those who gave everything they could and a little bit more to keep the common dream of a peaceful living together of the three cultures alive

Our efforts were rewarded when we received a "EuroMed Youth Award" on 15 October in Cairo. We were happy about it and take it as a symbol for it is the only important Award we received. Very gratifying as well, were the statements from two of our participants during the meeting:

"For me this youth meeting means, that never again I will think about Palestinians as I had thought of them in the past." (An Israeli youth in the presence of the Lord Mayor of Hamm during the official reception of the city of Hamm)

"For the first time in my life I have the hope, that a peace still one day can be possible." (A Palestinian youth in the final evaluation)

This youth meeting should be the first step into a lasting partnership among the participating organisations



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