

Learners Voices

From... **PATHWAYS**

TO INTERCULTURAL
AND POLITICAL
EDUCATION



Vorsicht
Minen
auf
sowjetzonalen Gebiet

ACHTUNG MINEN!
Gesperrt!
Lebensgefahr!



Cultural diversity is not just visible and effective across national borders. Within each nation diversity is also present in regional, communal and political relations.

Therefore a person's experience of life can feature positive opportunities for cultural exchange but can also include aspects of social exclusion.

This specific social and cultural background combined with a unique world view experience exerts a significant influence on an individual's learning behaviour. Consequently this also has an effect on learning providers and how they engage learners with intercultural and political education.

The EU funded Pathways project aimed to find a common understanding of intercultural and political education.

The project partners were drawn from five countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom. Here are the voices of some of the participants of the project.





How PATHWAYS changed my life

An Essay on a Learning Partnership

Gert Tschögl – Research Society Burgenland

During the last work-session in Lillehammer the suggestion was made, to write down some personal experiences on the Learning Partnership as a sort of statement on reflection about our own ongoing development in intercultural understanding and learning – or should I say multicultural or trans-cultural? “How this Grundtvig Learning Partnership has changed my life?” was just a humoristic suggestion for a title of these short essays.

It was a sunny Sunday. Back from Lillehammer, I started to edit a short video on the meeting in Norway. Editing a video means to see all the clips again and again. I filmed mostly portraits of the participants. My camera is a cheap one, having an awful microphone. I decided to underlay the video with music, of course with Scandinavian musicians. So the only possibility to give an impression of the meeting is to express it with the video’s pictures. I had to concentrate myself on the faces of the participants during the work-sessions, and collected some expressive gesticulation by filming of them. Sometimes gestures tell more than words. The raw material consists of more than one hour. One second features 30 frames – 30 moments per second of how people express themselves through helping their words by gesture. And looking on this world of human informal language, you can find mostly similarities. It is amazing, but human beings are united by their common gestures, although divided by languages, culture or any other social peculiarities. At least in this Learning Partnership formed by Belgians, Norwegians, Germans, British and Austrians – all with different cultural, social and lifestyle backgrounds – the informal language of gestures is understandable. Of course we also do know that cultural impacts – or better to say, cultural layers – like gestures, can also be seen as specific cultural codes. And sometimes diversities of cultural codes evoke conflicts. But these thoughts are nothing new which could “change my life”.

But was then anything during the Learning Partnership that could change anything in me? Maybe my first visit to a mosque in Belgium was a moment like this. I had been never before inside of a mosque, even not as tourist. The visit triggered my interest, and I started to compare the given introduction into customs and practice of the Islam with those of other religions. I found differences and equalities. I heard about interesting religious, cultural and philosophical approaches: with some I agree, with others not. But did it alter my view of intercultural understanding? What means to understand a culture? What kind of tools and skills do I need for an intercultural understanding? And is it enough to understand only? How we find approaches in order to respect different cultural characteristics and attributes?

Or was it the visit and lecture during our first meeting in Göttingen (Germany), which caused an impact on my personal understanding different lifestyles? The Academy Waldschlösschen, first foundation in Germany and Europe in adult education, which offers courses on social and sexual pedagogical topics for gays, lesbians and for HIV-positive people. “The acceptance of different ways of living and sexuality, the curiosity on the unknown as enrichment” – quoted from the academy’s self-conception. But also nothing new for me, who was socialized as Cultural Anthropologist into the scientific world.

And I don’t want miss the meeting in Carlisle (North Cumbria, UK). Beside the interesting talks and discussions there, I learnt about another (historical) border-



region in Europe. Very interesting for someone like me, who grew up in a region along the former Iron-Curtain. A forgotten border which has to be marked as street address in the middle of town: Scotch Street – English Street. Just a manner to mark an old border, to keep it in the public memory? But why preserving borders? Tourist interests or interests of nationalism?

And last but not least the meeting in Lillehammer (Norway): amazing how people live with that cold climate. But seriously: my visit there gave me once more evidence of the consciousness of the importance of education policy in Northern European countries.

PATHWAYS, a Learning Partnership that triggers more questions than answers. And what if the learning partnership has no effects like “changing my life”? Did this project fail the aim then? In the language of the Neoliberalism: yes; in the language of social pedagogy: no. A Learning Partnership itself is a tool to strengthen shared ideas, approaches, views or consciousness of certain topics, problems or issues Europe-wide. It generates a sustainable consciousness of not to be isolated in ideas and engagement, but having partners with the same efforts and approaches. And so my answer to the colleagues of the project is: you didn't change my life, but strengthened my opinions and ideas in terms of solidarity and variety.



My Pathways experience: the meeting in Ghent
Kristin Adam: Thüringer Volkshochschulverband

I attended the meeting in Gent in Belgium. The most interesting experience was the visit to a Mosque. This Mosque in particular was the biggest Arabic Mosque of Gent.

It was the first time for me inside a Mosque. In the beginning I was really astonished because in my mind I had a different image of a Mosque. From the outside it looks like an apartment house and inside it is divided in different parts for men, women and common activities. We were allowed to be in the prayers room where a woman from the Mosque explained about Islam in Belgium. Impressing for me were the strict rules of prayers in Muslim religion and I learned a lot about the difficulties Muslims have to face in everyday life in Europe.

I am grateful that we've got the chance to see behind the curtain and gained knowledge of work and life in a Mosque.



The value of comparing apples and oranges
Håvard Lund: Oppland fylkesbibliotek

You can't compare apples and oranges, or so the saying goes, because they are incomparable. That's just plain wrong. Believe me. I have tried for two years. It's not only possible. It's an enriching experience.

Being a representative of the only library in the partnership, I certainly felt like the odd one out at our first meeting in Göttingen. But as we tried to agree on a common sense of the

term “political education”, it seemed as though we all were different kinds of fruit. Some saw political education as a neutral term, some as a term with murky ideological connotations. Others did not use the term at all. We could not agree, and it was beautiful.

My obvious point is that all the partner organizations, and all the people participating, came with different backgrounds, different skills, expectations and perspectives. The organizations work within vastly different frameworks, towards different goals. And yet I would argue that this was an advantage. It was to me.

To learn about other countries, regions, organizations and their work is in itself of great value. It widened my perspective. That is not to say the partnership was some sort of a Grand Tour. There was more to it than that.

As I am writing this, I can look back on experiences that probably will shape how I work. There are more tools in my toolbox now. I have seen dedicated professionals. Germans, Britons, Belgians and Austrians doing their jobs, the methods they use, how they interact with different target groups, how they engage within their communities – all intercultural in some way. I saw or heard about initiatives crossing borders, religions, age, gender, sexuality and social standing. It’s been impressive, and of course it relates to issues facing libraries in Norway.

Sometimes knowledge is not where you expect to find it. Our working sessions, good as they were, were not the only time for learning. I remember coffee breaks in Jena, a beer in Carlisle, a dinner in Belgium – times when I got to talk to partners, guests, anybody. Talking to people about their life, about issues in their community, their history – there is always a little something to learn. Actually, sometimes a whole lot.

I have certainly learned that we are different. And the same.



My Pathway Experience **Wolfgang Volkmer: Thüringer Volkshochschulverband**

Yes, PATHWAYS is my first learning partnership. According to this expectations and insecurities are high. What kind of people will I meet? What topics will be discussed? How will we collaborate?

This first meeting did not take me particularly far. Sandwiched in a small bus we are driving into the hinterland of Göttingen (Germany). The Academy Waldschlösschen is silhouetted against the grey autumn weather. It is a nationwide well known academy for further education dealing with topics all around sexual identity. This is the place that brings together our partner consortium. During the first evening we share food that we brought from our home countries and present ourselves and our organisation with self made posters. We get in contact with each other and laugh a lot. To this very day the poster made by Variety Town from England decorates my office. It doesn’t take long till we have our first discussions about political and intercultural education. We realise each country has its own social construct of political and intercultural education. Political education for example is tightly joint with the history as well as with the lived multiculturalism of each country. Even between eastern Germany and western Germany we can clearly see differences. Also we realised that it doesn’t matter how you name it: intercultural

and political education is a broad concept that aims to empower people to participate within the society.

During all of our following project meetings in Carlisle, Eisenstaedt and Lillehammer I realised that it is not the exchange on a meta-level that helps on but the meeting of practice and the background of the respective country. I was stoked by the educational centre “sammen om Leaningcenter”. In this centre 360 adults and 20 children from various countries receive a peculiar intensive education and advisory service to make their settling easier. It is good to see that wanted integration can work out if people are not excluded but free to participate with the society. This is a positive example that I will accompany during my work back at home in Thuringia, Germany.



The long and winding Pathways: An Experience

Mark Costello: Variety Town

You always start a new journey with both excitement and fear. New faces and places, who knows what will happen. I guess all you can do is be yourself and get stuck in.

Two and a half years have passed since I traveled to a contact seminar in Graz, Austria. My reference point for many towns and cities in Europe is football clubs. I'd heard of Sturm Graz, I knew it was in Austria, but wasn't sure quite were.

I went along to the seminar because I wanted myself and the organization I represented to be involved in a European partnership, and I was interested in the topic: Political and intercultural education. After a couple of days of “horse trading” groups formed and plans were developed. Margit from TVV in Germany agreed to coordinate and we all agreed to submit an application to Grundtvig. That was it! The next day we said our goodbyes. I traveled home via Girona in Catalonia where I stayed for a night before getting a connecting flight to Newcastle. I guess that homeward bound experience was an indication of what the Pathways project would become, taking me and colleagues to new and sometimes unexpected places and learning about geography, Europe, its people and ourselves along the way.

We came together again as a project team almost one year after the seminar in Graz. We met in a place I hadn't heard of Göttingen in Germany. (Didn't know the football team!) This was followed by our partners visiting us in Carlisle, a spring trip to Eisenstadt in Austria, autumn in Gent in Belgium, winter in Lillehammer in Norway and finally summer in Jena in Germany.

Those are the places we have traveled together. As people and professionals we have also traveled together through discussions about community, citizenship, culture and politics. The project has also existed at a time of change. When it began in 2009 Europe felt prosperous and was increasing numbers of migrant workers entering local economies to fill job gaps and support the provision of essential services. More recently however, member states are facing mass unemployment, austerity measures and wholesale cuts to public services. This has huge implications for political and intercultural learning. Financially it becomes more difficult for governments and local authorities to pledge support to equality and intercultural activity. Politically in the face of other needs, it becomes more acceptable to make financial cuts in this area.



So we are in different times, but what pathways has enabled us to do is to engage with this debate with our partners across the continent. Rather than recoil into nationalism, xenophobia and blame, we can understand more readily the challenges that face us and we can feel, certainly I do a sense of real solidarity with my partner brothers and sisters.



My impression of the PATHWAYS adventure

Nadia Srasra - Voem

PATHWAYS to intercultural & political education, what a theme. This was my first impression, a little bit scared about the impact of this project.

The reason was that I didn't participate to the first meeting in Graz and I didn't know what to expect from a Grundtvig Learningpartnership.

The first meeting in Göttingen – Germany was a nice kick off meeting to learn the others partners and to get a clear image of the project! As we established a clear action plan around the project, the aims and the theory we were ready to start! I was packed with a lot of information to brief my colleagues and the

board of VOEM in Belgium.

Happy that I was when the board of VOEM decided that I should coordinate the project from my work. My European adventure could start!

I was amazed about the different understanding of the terms of political and intercultural education. Every meeting was another revelation about understanding the theme. There was a lot of space to explain the meaning within our work.

What I have appreciated the most that everyone could speak and say his opinion and every word was respected and everyone listen attentively. I am sure that my PATHWAYS towards Europe doesn't end here.

It is not for nothing that it's called a Learningpartnership, because I am already looking back to this experience as a learningproces that made me understand my work as well as myself.

Dear European partners, friends, I salute you!



My Voyage on PATHWAYS

Ulli Klaum / VNB Göttingen – Akademie Waldschlösschen

Graz - Attending the contact seminar, it was a second approach of the vnb/waldschloesschen, with great expectations and an interesting title, which I forgot. We Germans prepared a paper in advance, established so the title „pathways to...“ of our partnership. A common interest we found in the discussion of terms and definitions, e.g. political education, integration, european citizenship. We agreed in a sort of horizontal approach to what we shared. A central term had been our interest in exchanging „border experiences“ and



an „extended“ understanding of political education, not focused but not arbitrary, collecting best practices rather than knowing-it-all.

Göttingen – Our first meeting took place in the first of three border region we visited during our learning partnership, close to the former Iron Curtain (West/East-Germany). Our excursions provided an insight of projects dealing with political education and connecting their aims with experiences of their participants being in a cross-border situation (e.g. having diverse sexual orientations or becoming older, some living „close to the edge“): we visited the Iron Curtain Museum, the Senior Citizen Empowerment Center, The Memorial Concentration Camp Moringen and – of course – the Akademie Waldschloesschen. Organizing the Kick-Off-Meeting was quite a challenge to me. Fortunately we stayed and worked together at the Waldschlösschen. Looking back we were constantly in a hurry (sorry about that!): doing this, clearing that, going there, leaving this... Remarkably the group came together as a unit and we found out how (much) we can work and do together. Thanks to Everybody!

Carlisle – our second meeting and second border region. I found the history on their border extremely violent. People in this – and many other regions – had to fight and cope with existential crisis and fears. Good Job of our British friends to let us have less stressing activities. The whole thing to me was about good-practice! Much creative, political and social potential we got to know there. Definite highlight was the ENGAGE-Event in the old town hall of Carlisle. Mark rocks this place and we had the chance of becoming witnesses of the work of „Variety Town“ – and got it. Good cake!

Eisenstadt – close to the borders to Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. We passed the former Iron Curtain and visited the historic Pan-European Picnic Ground, the Europahaus and the Castle and Rust on Lake Neusiedl. Bravo: best food, best restaurants, best service. Only – I feel – we did not serve ourselves very good: too many lectures, too much work in one room. As a positive result we concluded in Eisenstadt our studies on political education in our regions/countries. Learnt and taught a whole lot until then. Anyway we found our self-conception: all attendant participants on the meetings of our partnership see themselves as learners, most of them as teachers as well. So we agreed on planning best-practice sessions for the following meetings: workshops being held by some of us and the rest of the group as learners from them and their input. Good Idea!

Gent – First meeting with explicit inputs and exchange on intercultural topics. Great city and interesting – new and inspiring – encounters, e.g. visting a mosque with a muslim guide. Mark presenting their education on diversity in Cumbria. Undoubtful highlight was the group as VIP-Guests at the at the annual ‘Emancipatieprijs 2010’ in Antwerp. Many times on the bus, walking by feet or in the car – myself two times by train in Brussels – a greatly filled see-saw meeting in the middle of Europe!

Lillehammer – Second meeting on intercultural topics! We are getting better and better: very familiar with each other and very professional at work. Finally we found our balance. A Best-Practice Example on how a Learning Partnership can look like. Biggest number of participants and most delicious meals ever. Now we can take everything and Mark did a great job when preparing the final report with everybody. Myself had a good practice example on moderating the group about: What was particular and specific about "Pathways"?

Looking forward to Jena – third and last meeting with an emphasis on intercultural education.



Our Pathway to Austria Jasmina and Sarah from Belgium

We just came back from the amazing trip to Austria! In the beginning we didn't quite know what to expect from the project "Pathways to intercultural and political education" but after attending the meetings it all soon became clearer. It was very interesting to make the comparison of the intercultural and political education in the different participating countries, so we have learned a lot.

We must admit that we initially had a stereotypical image of Austria: lederhösens, a lot of beer, après-ski conditions, wooden shacks.. there stereotypes were soon replaced with astonishment and surprise. Austria is a beautiful country with very beautiful nature and a lot of culture!

It was a very nice and interesting trip. The people in the group immediately welcomed us warmly even if we were just "learners". We have learned a lot and we had a lot of fun aswell! So we would therefore like to thank Alfred, Gert and Margit for the entire organisation!



Field Report: Meeting in Lillehammer Stephanie Kirsch: Volkshochschule Sonnenberg

The PATHWAYS project meeting in Lillehammer/Norway was my first meeting within the project. It was revealing to me in different aspects.

Through the meeting with the different project partners I realized that political and intercultural education has various facets. I learned that political education is not only confined to the communication of political knowledge as well as intercultural education is not only confined to develop an understanding of cultures. In fact it is more about active participation and influence.

It was very interesting to learn that the involved project partners deal with issues and integration of Muslims, homosexual's and other marginalized groups.

I was stoked by the work of the work of the fylkesbibliothek in Lillehammer. This library truly understands itself as a place of education for all people. During our visit we were able to observe that the library is frequented by all different section of population. The audience was made up of senior citizen, migrant who checked the internet for information, families, and students of the local university as well as pupils who played card games.

I was also impressed by the work of the Læringsssenters, an adult education institution that works with refugees which have been admitted by Norway. The Læringsssenters proved that it is worth investing a sufficient amount of money for newcomer as in the long run there integration is to the best advantage for everyone. In this regards it was thought provoking that only a few words were spoken about asylum seekers. So the situation of asylum seekers seems to be as difficult in Norway as in most of the other European countries.

Finally it can be said that there are a lot of interesting and valuable starting points for political and intercultural education. Now we only have to link those ideas up and develop them further to the best advantage for all. So let's get ready for action!



Final Project Meeting in Jena 2011 **Halima An Paelinck**

On Saturday we left from Brussels to Jena, it was a long train journey but I was in good company so the time flew. After a good night's sleep we enjoyed a memorable visit to Buchenwald. Unbelievable what people are capable to do to one another, I left with a sadly but was pleased to have been there.

In the evening it was time to meet the other participants. We had a nice city walk followed by a delicious meal. The following days were instructive, enriching, memorable and fun. Especially the visit to the 'Imaginata' was fantastic, a true experiment for our senses. We had the opportunity to experience that not everything is what it seems. The most fun for me was the 'trip' in the dark tunnel with Nadia, it was really hilarious. Some of us dared to ride on a rope, I wisely let it pass ☺. Also very successful was the intercultural potluck, the various dishes of different countries tasted delicious and the dance qualities of our British participants were most surprising. The visit of the 'Lobdeburgschule' was impressive, the students are offered so many possibilities to develop themselves.

At the end of the day we enjoyed a delicious barbecue and a visit to the planetarium. Relaxed gazing at the beautiful stars for a while, for some of us more relaxing than for others ☺.

It was the ideal end of our visit to Jena. Thanks to everybody who was part of this and it was very very nice to meet you all. Hopefully we see each other again!



What We have learned!

“We are living in a diverse Europe“

“Different ways of countries to practise adult education”

“How buildings have to be, so that citizens use them”

“That civil courage of the soldiers did help to open the iron curtain”

“The visit to a mosque in Gent, to be inside – I was never before in a mosque”

“The work of the Akademie Waldschloesschen and the history of the Gay & Lesbian Movement”

“The Voluntaries and the Big Engagement in Carlisle Community (Bicycle Trips etc.)”

“The different roles/importance of NGOs and governmental’ institutions in different countries”

“LGBT Adult Ed Center in Germany!”

