



Youth Meeting on the Occasion of the General Assembly of the Association of Towns Awarded the Europeprize

Darmstadt City of Science, June 5th-8th

Youth Meeting Report



Hauptamt
Büro für Städtepartnerschaften



Welcome to Darmstadt

Upon invitation by the Office of City Partnerships and International Relations of the Science City of Darmstadt, and in collaboration with the Educational Youth Institute of the Science City of Darmstadt, the Intercultural Bureau of the Science City of Darmstadt, and Network ROPE – European Network for Educational and Youthwork Services a group of 26 young people aged 16 to 26 took part in the Youth Meeting on the Occasion of the General Assembly of the Association of Towns Awarded the Europeprize from June 5th to 8th.

The meeting brought together youth from: Austria (Graz, Klagenfurt), Germany (Mühlheim an der Ruhr, Passau, Regensburg, Speyer, Würzburg), Hungary (Szeged), Italy (Brescia), and Poland (Czestochowa). Darmstadt was represented by members of the Youth Forum Darmstadt (Jana Kucz, Lena Wendzich, Fi-

liz Gülsular, Saskia Schöning, Sriram Srivigneswaramoorthy, Zedef Baraki, Andrea Kucz, Jessica Roßner, Martina Pupp, Nikolas Hatz, Mario DiSchiena, Kachung Shek, Manuel Bauer) who got involved in the Youth Meeting, its documentation, and the "Cross-Culture Dialogue - Europe-Speechless"-event. The delegations were accommodated in a youth hostel neighbouring one of the most picturesque places in Darmstadt: the city-lake Woog. Inevitably, it seems, its waters attracted an international team of swimmers just after arrival. But let us start from the beginning ...

By the later afternoon of June 5th everybody who was expected actually had arrived to Darmstadt. The Youth Meeting Team members, Jule Maldonado, Sven Rasch, and Paul Czekalla welcomed their guests at the youth hostel's reception handing out little welcome presents and – more practical – city maps so nobody would ever get lost in town when no locals were around.



A first occasion for socializing in informal ways: dividing the rooms amongst participants, and as said before: swimming in the lake nearby. After dinner the Team formally and officially opened the youth meeting by introducing itself and facilitating the getting-to-know-each-other-phase playing the popular “Bingo – Find someone who ...”-game. Even the honourable head of the Social Department of the Science City of Darmstadt, Mr. Jochen Partsch, and the head of the Office of City Partnerships and International Relations of the Science City of Darmstadt, Mr. Bernd Schäfer, seemed to enjoy this fun. There speeches, in any case, were entertaining and rewarded with applause. The Team continued the session presenting a slide-show to explain the idea and history of the Europeprize also highlighting Europe’s oldest interstatal institution: the Council of Europe. After an overview of the programme it was the time for the workshop-leaders to present their Theatre-, Capoeira-, and Dabke-workshops which would start the next morning.

The first day (June 6th 2008)

The idea to train everybody in only four workshop-sessions so he or she would be able to present live on stage in front of an expected crowd of 300 highly ranked international guests (amongst them the lord mayors of participants’ hometowns) probably seemed a little bit too ambitious in the beginning – but as you will see in the documentary movie attached to this report (provided by the “Junge Filmproduktion Kranichstein”) – it was not!

The first workshop-sessions started right after breakfast. The participants (most of them wearing the fancy blue-coloured T-Shirts which had been given to them the night before by Mr. Partsch) got involved in the international workflow from the start. The workshops they could choose from were firstly: “Theatre” (run by Dirk Schirdewahn and Nadja Soukup from the



“Theaterlabor Darmstadt”), secondly: “Capoeira” (run by Contramestre Macaco Apollones from the group “Centro Cultural de Capoeira São Salvador”), and thirdly: “Dabke” (run by Elvira Bijedic and Khaled Abu Ras from the “Dabke-school Heidelberg”). All workshops aimed to reflect and to express in a creative and interactive way the intercultural dimension of Europe. 2008 – as everybody knows – was declared the “Year of Intercultural Dialogue” by the European Commission!

In the “Theatre”-workshop it pretty soon turned out that its participants were mostly concerned about Europe’s immigration and Human Rights policy. So what they were trying was to find a scenic or theatrical expression for the miserable situation of those people who do not benefit from European high standards of living, but are – sometimes in brutal ways – kept outside the borderlines of the European Union: refugees, asylum-seekers, humans looking

out for a better life!

“Capoeira” a kind of mixture between martial arts and dancing was originally created by Africans protracted to Brazil as slaves but has a lot more influences from various cultures. It is in itself an intercultural project that can teach easily the positive impact of different cultures and traditions blending into something new. In fact it is a very dynamic and to some couch-potatoe-kind-of-guys challenging thing to do in the morning. But the sound and moves of Capoeira are inescapable in the end!

Our “Dabke”-workshop again proved the fact that international and intercultural encounters can have more than positive effects: The workshop-leaders stem from such different places as Bosnia and Palestine. The two fell in love in the beautiful city of Heidelberg and gave birth to their son Adel, an Israeli-citizen by birth, now one year old, brought up in three languages:



German, Arabic and Bosnian, and a little Mr. Sunshine who never complained when his parents taught the participants the not so easy steps of a very old dance: The dabke is very popular in the Near and Middle East and symbolizes the spirit of community. It is said that it originates from the efforts made by villagers to flatten the soil by stomping it together with their feet ... Anyways: it is a fascinating way to move as a group and goes with very cool rhythms!

For the evening programme participants could choose from two big events: a gala concert at the “Darmstadtium”, the Science City of Darmstadt’s brandnew science- and conference centre featuring choirs from Graz (Austria), Trondheim (Norway), and Darmstadt to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the city partnership programme, and the city festival “Darmstadt unter Strom” – hard to translate but something like “The Electric City Night”. So while some of the participants were listening to Brahms, Mozart, Grieg,

and Wagner, others would enjoy the colorful programme of the “European Night” in the city centre with a lot of walking acts, live music and fun fair attractions. The market place saw a spectacular light-and sound-show, and there was the opportunity to shop until midnight. The whole group finally ended up on the science- and congress centre’s rooftop to gaze at a brilliant display of fireworks and to have some champagne (and unfortunately no caviar)! Still a very nice way to relax from the workshops and another chance to meet people from all over Europe.



The second day (June 7th 2008)

On Saturday morning participants went to the workshops again to bring to perfection their performances that were scheduled for eight 'o'clock at night. So enough time after lunch to see some more of the beauties of the Science City of Darmstadt. The team had organised a little walk up the nearby hill called "Mathildenhöhe". A milestone in the history of modern architecture the "Mathildenhöhe" presents some outstanding examples of art nouveau housing and landscaping. The exhibition hall and the former studio building of artists like Joseph Maria Olbrich, Peter Behrens, and Albin Müller are crowned by the so called "wedding tower". Resembling the five fingers of an outstretched hand it is also called the "Five-Finger-Tower" in the vernacular. In the shade of old sycamore trees the group joined the final banquet of the annual "Grenzgang" – a kind of peregrination walking the city borderlines.

The banquet consisted mainly of pea soup with sausage and local beer, kind of sturdy meal, but lekker enough if you have it in such a unique place!

Down the hill we walked to catch a bus to get to the main station. There we rented out bicycles for every participant to start the Youth Meeting Foto-Rallye. The team had figured out some places in town where the participants – divided into four groups named by Darmstadt's partner cities Alkmaar, Bursa, Graz, and Plock – had to go by bike as fast as they could and to fulfill some tasks there (like this one: find the English cellphone in the city centre, get all inside and take a group-photo). Exactly three and a half minute after the groups had got on their bicycles some really heavy rains started. Nevertheless some people completely managed to get to every place and to manage with the tasks and the weather. Some others understandable enough went to the youth hostel straight away to towel themselves off. With the weather you never know!



The participants from Darmstadt by the way had their own tricky task: They were asked by the team to organize the prices for the rallye-people in the way that they were given only one egg to be exchanged for something better. And what they would get better for the egg they should again exchange for something even better and so on and so on. They really succeeded perfectly by bringing back: 12 books, 1 CD, 1 DVD, 1 bedside lamp, 1 cake of soap, some pottery, a vase, and a nice brooch of seemingly silver! If it was true what somebody told us in America they do that as a sport and some people have gained even a luxurious cabriolet for a simple pinhead. Well, this seems to be a different story again ...

In the evening then with everybody dressed up prettily for the final event we were entering a shuttle-bus to bring us to the festival location the “Hofgut Oberfeld”, a historic estate which offers an ideal atmosphere for a

summernight-party. In fact, when we arrived, the party was already started. Some 300 guests, invited by the lord mayor of the Science City of Darmstadt, Mr. Walter Hoffmann, were enjoying oysters and venison, entertaining dutch chanties and some first choice wine. At first we had some hard time to get all the attention the performances deserved. But after only a while the workshop-performers had a big audience to their presentations and the whole show was just perfectly wonderful – don’t miss watching the documentary!

Mr. Hoffmann thanked the participants and the team for their presentation and was himself made a present by Mr. Thomas Enzenbner, a participant from Klagenfurt who certainly will get ahead as a politician himself – some people can talk! The cravat in limegreen and darkred he gave to the lord mayor he also presented to Mr. Sven Rasch from the team. He has been wearing it and conveyed that it made a permanent impression to many people’s eyes!



Unfortunately two of the participants from Austria already had to leave this beautiful night to catch their train. But not for everybody it was already time to say goodbye. On the contrary the party lasted for some time as the marvelous Bigband from Alkmaar performed pop- and jazz-classics in series. One could see a lot of people dancing under a starry sky ...

... and one could see a lot of people crying the next morning. But let us keep silent about wrench and desperation here and rather look forward to another Youth Meeting on Occasion of the coming General Assembly of the Association of Towns awarded the Europeprize in 2009!

on behalf of the Science City of Darmstadt

The Youth Meeting Team (Sven Rasch, Jule Maldonado, Paul Czekalla)



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