



Europe for Citizens Programme

Strand 2.1	Town Twinning
Beneficiary organisation	FREUNDSCHAFTSKREIS LANDKREIS MAINZ-BINGEN - PROVINZ VERONA EV (DE)
Project title	Kommunale Partnerschaften als Antwort auf die europäische Krise
Dates of the project event	16/09/2016 - 19/09/2016
Direct participants involved	106
Partners	Powiat Nyski (PL), ASSOCIAZIONE GEMELLAGGI VERONESI (IT)

Project impact:

What do you consider to be the most important achievements of your project? Please describe the main project results.

- strengthening old friendships/building new ones among participants from different countries
- sensitize participants for the advantages of being a citizen of the European Union and raising awareness to issues and developments endangering European integration
- inspire participants to extend their civic participation by giving examples on how values such as solidarity and integration can be incorporated in daily life
- spread knowledge on how refugee work is organized in Mainz-Bingen and on crucial elements for successful integration

In which way were the issues tackled? How did you manage to involve the participants in the debates on this topic?

Since personal exchange played a crucial role during the project implementation, the participants met persons working professionally or voluntarily in fields where European values such as solidarity play a crucial role. For example, state secretary Heike Raab, who is a representative of Rhineland-Palatine at the German federal government as well as at the EU, reported on her work and on the history of European partnership programs. Additionally, the team members met several professional as well as voluntary workers in the field of refugee work as well as refugees for exchange and discussions. By the means of personal encounters, participants were inspired and reflected collectively on the meaning, the advantages as well as the challenges of the EU. By meeting refugee workers, examples were given on how European values such as solidarity, integration and citizen participation can be brought to live; by meeting refugees and learning about their stories, especially during the visit of an

exhibition showing authentic pictures of the flights refugees undertook, participants were sensitized for the reasons for seeking asylum. Those encounters were accompanied by workshops and discussion groups to further analyze important aspects and questions.

By those personal encounters, the participants became intellectually as well as emotionally involved and inspired. Thus, participation in debates was high. The friendly atmosphere further enhanced very open and lively discussions, in which opinions were exchanged and reflected. Although points of views sometimes differed, the participants ultimately always came to agree on the common standards and principles highlighted and institutionalized by the EU and thus reinforced their commitment.

What was the key message of the citizens involved in the project?

How do you see the future of the project and its partnership?

Especially during times of European crises, transnational projects like “Kommunale Partnerschaften als Antwort auf die europäische Krise” help to maintain communication and the feelings of togetherness and solidarity among European neighbours. Our meeting in September 2016 undermined that fact, as participants easily refreshed old friendships and established new ones. Additionally, the discussions helped to discover shared views, moral standards and led to new ideas of cooperation. Thus, the importance of the project is very high, but depends on the active participation and organization of the partners involved to keep partnerships and project alive. Since the bonds between Mainz-Bingen, Associazione Gemellaggi Veronsi and Powiat Nyski are strong, the prospects for future cooperations are good. Other regions may need special encouragement to extend their partnership activities.

Direct testimonies from project participants (if any)

Please provide us with some testimonies from participants collected within the project implementation.

Miriam Pappert:

I actually complete my “FSJ-Kultur” at the “Kreisverwaltung Mainz-Bingen”. So I got the chance to participate at “Kommunale Partnerschaften als Antwort auf die europäische Krise”. It was a really nice and interesting weekend with a lot of important experiences. I got the chance to meet new people from different cultures and I could learn much from them.

In my opinion this kind of exchange is very important because today’s whole world is widely connected and we all face the same problems and have to work together on a lot of worldwide issues. Especially in times of populism and rising nationalism the value and importance of intercultural communication shouldn’t be underestimated. Of course on the one side the

contact via internet is the easiest and fastest way of communication, but on the other side a real meeting has a lot of advantages and is much more effective. In discussions you still keep objective and just talk about the facts, this you can also do via Internet. But the real important part, which isn't possible in this way via online communication, was after the formal discussion. The people stayed together, talked about their life in their country, about their culture and the differences to the others. We had a very important exchange of opinions and point of views. On this weekend I had the chance to get to know people from other cultures in their free time on a daily base and I learned to understand their point of view and their way to live. The people's mentality differs from country to country and you can't experience this via mail or video chat. The understanding of other mentalities and cultural backgrounds is an important advantage for my future: It can help to comprehend where somebody is coming from and why he has his specific point of view. In some cases it might even prevent conflicts or help to solve them. Maybe the comprehension of the other mentality can have influence on my own life and my own coming decisions.

If I got the chance to participate the "Kommunale Partnerschaften als Antwort auf die europäische Krise" twice, I would definitely say "yes" because it offers a lot of advantages. But when the next meeting will take place I sadly won't work at the Kreisverwaltung Mainz-Bingen anymore.

Ursula Link, Ober-Hilbersheim

"To show people from other countries my own country is a really great feeling. To look at it with different eyes and help the visitors to dive in deeper (traditions, culture, food, etc.) as they normally can, when being a normal tourist in this country is a great pleasure as well. To learn from each other is precious and has helped both sides to find a great solidarity/connectivity, rather than just communicating through the internet. We must go on discussing with people from other countries. It helps to understand each other, it helps to understand differences and to accept them. It helps to build Europe. I am looking forward to the next meeting."