

Generations in Dialogue – A project model¹

“The bracing climate, which is formed in such mixed groups, is beneficial”

(Generations in Dialogue, participant aged 65 years)

In the project “Generations in Dialogue” that was realized from January 2010 to June 2011, the potentials of dialogue in the active media work were tested and evaluated for the promotion of media literacy and the support of dialogue between several generations.

With the support of “Aktion Mensch”, it was possible to initiate contacts between adolescents – preferably the ones from the educationally disadvantaged environment – and elder people, to stimulate a dialogue and to make a media product with the help of media. Adolescents aged between 14 and 20 years as well as older people – mainly over 60 years –, were involved. A total of eleven different educational projects were initiated and implemented in different places and always with other participants and varied media.

Unlike many other projects “Generations”, it was neither sought that the older people teach the younger ones, nor the other way round. Rather, the different groups were supposed to devote equal both a common task and a common theme. It was therefore judicious not only to stake on a good dialogue, but a dialogue of equals (in eye level), and that right **from** the very beginning. Especially the exchange between the generation of grandparents and grandchildren who are not relatives happens to be more important than ever because of the demographic changes.

The dialogue evolved in the processing and development of various topics, it also occurred during the production of multimedia articles, in dealing with media, media content and media experiences as well as during the publication and presentation of common products. At the same time, Media literacy is promoted through active relations media - in the sense of a critical-reflexive use of media, the own active and creative design of media and the ability to assess and evaluate developments of the media. This is a crucial prerequisite for both generations of social and cultural life in our times of media.



¹Parts of this article trace back to “Generations in Dialogue: Concept and Principles” and “Helpful tools for Planning” (refer. Kupser/Pöttinger 2011)

From the DJ battle to cooking studio

There were many ideas about what you can do with a group consisting of old and young people. The fundamental principle was that each of the projects can be completed within a week and that the group should be built, as well as possible, of 15 young and 10 older people.

Some projects will be briefly explained here:

- How do I want to live?** For a week, the pupils of the Social Care School “Neuendettelsau” shot movies together with older people. At the beginning of the project period, which lasted one week, the two groups that were still unknown to each other, met then. They became familiar with the equipment and film aesthetic matters in small groups. They shot four short videos that particularly deal with this topic: "How do I imagine my future life? How and where do I want to live? “
- Showcase Giesing.** In a five-day project, younger and older people met in order to tell stories about their neighborhood. With the help of photographic equipment (camera, tripod, photo-camera and slides), 14 pupils of a secondary school worked on small films, texts and illustrations with nine older people. There were lots of discussions, and laughing, experiences were exchanged, technology and art were combined. At the end there was a performance for all passers-by and residents of the neighborhood with two self-made and very artistic films, which were shown in the showcase of a former department store.
- Generation DJ Battle.** This project involved the clash of two music styles and preferences that are generations related. Radio programs were developed in intergenerational small groups in the cities Nuremberg, Würzburg, Munich and Augsburg for egoFM. Pairs consisting of a young and an older person played their favorite song or favorite music, and justified why they liked that play particularly.
- Generations in the intercultural dialogue.** An event that deals with the dialogue of two generations and many cultures was filmed by a camera team of young migrants called the Street Kids from Fürstenfeldbruck.
- Kitchen Studio – Cooking with Grandma and Ömer.** Another group from Fürstenfeldbruck mainly with Turks and Germans of both generations planned and filmed as well a TV cooking show. They worked together on the technical equipment, the stage design as well as the main and supporting roles in cooking and moderation.
- GPS Paper Chase.** Are computer games just for young people? Is hiking only for older people? Those who said that were taught better in the GPS mission! The digital paper chases were produced by students of the Vocational College in Eichstätt and older persons from the German Alpine Club. They did not only use hiking and climbing



shoes, but most of all GPS devices, video-cameras and photos-cameras. The task was to lay tracks and make a documentation of the search.

- **We are the most beautiful!** Young and old people took pictures of themselves using the media. On the occasion of the exhibition "*Mel Ramos. 50 Years of Pop Art*", the media workshop with adolescent girls and older ladies took place in the Museum Villa Stuck. Over two days, photographs were taken and converted with graphics software. There were also long discussions about popular beauty stereotypes and their breakthrough.

Some practical advices

The most important first: **An intergenerational project should not only be about the encounter, but also about making some space for the meeting.**

It is not easy to attract different age groups for a common project. For the acquisition of participants, we should refer to address pools and facilitate the start with low-threshold and short offers (for example through documentation, refer to the project *Generation in Intercultural Dialogue*); that would help allay possible fears about media. Also, there should be different incentives to acquire participants. These could be a good starting point:

- a theme
- a special place
- an institution
- teamers with a special knowledge and if possible celebrities
- the free DVD at the end of the project
- the media itself

The more attractive the better; having a project dealing with photography at a museum with a photographer as an expert – for example –, is quite attractive. This definitely is a guarantee for more multifaceted deals.

During the cooperation between age-specific groups some unevenness can easily arise. For a dialogue among equals, the members need openness, time, motivation for media relations and they have to be interested in the topic. Especially small mixed age groups have proven to be reliable. The impingement of opinions should be accepted and artistically dealt with.

The enthusiasm for media, which almost depends on the age, can be used to initiate an exchange. However, the approach to media is different from generations to generations. While the younger generation tends to start immediately with the realization of the project, the older people do want to get information about the functions of the media. Finding the right cadence in this case is a big challenge for the caring team. Basically, the technology should be intuitively and easy to use, otherwise the dialogue process would be more hindered than it would go forward. This rule counts for the use of educational media "classics" such as audio or video work, as well as for working with Web 2.0.

If the emphasis of such a project is focused on a dialogue, the mutual perception particularly plays an important part. It takes a lot of time and people need enough space to get to know each other and for the exchanges. An active process on a common goal with enough space seems to be the silver bullet for a successful intergenerational project.

A good dialogue

The project *Generations in Dialogue* encountered a great feedback from the participants and the press as well as from the audience, the cooperation partners and the. Apparently no one had expected that this unusual constellation of people could get along with each other or even more: that each group could learn so much positive things out of these meetings. Getting to that point was certainly not easy, but not so rocky that no one would like to tread it more often. And when this is successful, both attendees and supervisors get an equal benefit from it. Then something that an older participant concluded about working with young people might come true: „One can really be for the life“.



More information and experiences on the project: www.GenerationenimDialog.de

Literature

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