

Cultures Interactive e.V. –

Intercultural Education and Violence Prevention, NGO,

Berlin

Abstract:

Cultures Interactive (CI) is a registered non-profit association/ NGO for “violence prevention and intercultural education” (Berlin, Germany), which works mostly in East-German rural and small city communities and in Berlin inner city districts (also in Poland and the Czech Republic on occasion); there it serves schools, youth clubs, municipalities and social work institutions. Methodologically CI has developed a youth-cultural approach for preventing – and countering – violent extremism and hate crime (mostly rightwing extremism/ neo-Nazism, Islamist/ Jihadist, every-day xenophobic and other group-prejudiced/ exclusionary behaviour) – predominantly among young people of disadvantaged backgrounds.

The CI approach combines elements of civic and historical education, pedagogical exercises, psychologically based group-dynamics, and informal peer-learning and peer teaching of youth-cultural activities among young people (including activities as Breakdance, Skateboarding, Slam Poetry, Techno-DJ-ing and Digital Music Production as well as Comic and Graffiti Visual Design and others). The methods applied include anti-bias and diversity training, mediation/moderation techniques, as well as gender awareness and anti-aggression work. Furthermore, media pedagogical work is applied providing settings in which fictional media narratives (films, TV, songs) of the young peoples’ own choice are viewed and reflected upon in a group facilitated interaction.

Hence, during youth-cultural workshop sessions groups of at risk adolescents from mostly deprived backgrounds gain physical/ acrobatic, aesthetic and technological competences while they at the same time learn about the history of anti-violence and anti-racist stances which emerged among US urban ghetto adolescents when they turned towards performing HipHop instead of gang warfare. In these workshops participants also learn how to express themselves more freely in a group and reflect on their every-day social and peer interaction and biographical experiences, thus beginning to think about how to realize a life free of resentment, violence and extremism.

The CI approach is novel in the sense that it surpasses the largely cognitive, informational and history-teaching methods of interventions applied by most civic education and social work programs. CI focuses on cultural and emotional intelligence and is thus able to reach out to those adolescents which seem most resistant to any of the traditional pedagogical practices and are at risk of turning away from the school system and from civilized society altogether. Conversely, the CI approach also goes beyond what is generally referred to as Experience Education or Education Adventure **Outdoors** in that it includes systematic skill learning,

group-dynamic learning, and methods of civic/ historical education. For example, in socially deprived East and West German communities CI works with adolescents who do not have access to any youth-cultural identification other than being ‘national’, ‘anti-foreigner’, ‘anti-leftist’ etc. or being ‘ethnic’ respectively, then easily turning into organized neo-Nazism or fundamentalism. Delivering first-hand experience and training in urban youth-cultural practices establishes the working relationship on the basis of which questions of personal mind-set, biographical experience, civil life and human rights may effectively be brought up – and processes of a self-reflexive exchange on related issues can be facilitated.

CI works in different settings: It offers one or two day workshops in schools and youth centres of disadvantaged rural, small town or inner-city areas offering youth-cultural and civic education courses. In the post-event follow-up phase CI consults and supports the community in building up networks between adolescents and community representatives. There CI works with teachers and community professionals as police, public administration, clubs/ associations, the local press/ media, instructing and training them about the – often disregarded and underrated – phenomena of right-wing-extremism, fundamentalism and adolescent violence and how to deal with it. Furthermore, CI has started a program of pre-vocational training which qualifies disadvantaged adolescents to become youth-cultural trainers for peer group settings.

CI also engages in empirical best-practice research funded by the EU evaluating methods of pedagogical intervention, extremism and hate-crime prevention, youth-cultures, and media interaction (see the rubric “Forschung” /research and the EU research projects). The scientific and methodological framework of this research consists of qualitative methods of social and media-interaction research, psycho-therapy research and trauma studies, and narratology. The target is to develop criteria and pedagogical tools of social work which work well with risk populations among European adolescents and evaluate methods of intervention.

CI receives funding from sources of local, federal and European sources -- Ministry of Family and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, the Federal and State Offices of Civic Education, EU Social Funds, EU Research Support, EU DG Research and DG Home funds, and private sponsoring.

Key words:

Prevention of adolescent violence, right-wing-extremism, political extremism and religious fundamentalism, Youth-cultural social work, civic education, psychologically based group-dynamic work, peer-learning, informal-learning, Community consulting, vocational training, EU research projects.