

Intercultural Opening of Organisations

Guidelines



In addition to these guidelines on intercultural opening of institutions the NILE network has developed the following tools to support the process of intercultural mainstreaming in the field of adult education:

- The DVD "Transfer" with good practice examples from Greece, the UK and Austria
- A methodological guide for implementing Intercultural Learning Activities
- The newzine "Get InterCultural" with different articles related to the media diversity issue

The tools are available for download from the website: www.intercultural-learning.net

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I. Introduction

From 2005 a working group established in the framework of the Network on Intercultural Learning in Europe, NILE, developed 10 questions which should enable public organisations working in different fields, but especially in the field of adult education to take a first step forward in kicking off a process of **intercultural opening** in their own working environment. The working group, composed of NILE partners from Italy, Hungary, Lithuania, The Netherlands and Germany, started the process by first of all checking the state of the art in the countries and coming to the obvious conclusion that the stage of development of discussion and tools available lies wide apart.

Depending on the stage of the development of discussion and activities in the respective country and from an analysis of current discussions (see annexe), the group came to the 'findings', that basically there are three distinct areas, in which in some way the process of implementing an intercultural opening of organisations is implemented:

1. **Equality/anti discrimination. This approach is usually manifested in legislation but can also be found in the work of NGOs**
2. **Diversity management. This tends to be the approach taken by businesses/private companies. This applies especially to multinational companies and can be found across the board in Europe.**
3. **Intercultural Opening. This approach tends to be adopted by all other institutions, but especially in the countries of so called 'old Europe' where the concept is more developed and is now being implemented on a broader scale on community level especially in Germany.**

It is understood by all participants that all three approaches are of importance and different mixtures of the three are used depending on the country. It is therefore necessary to incorporate all three of them into any universally acceptable definition.

From this finding it was not far to the conclusion that the group needed at least a mutual understanding of what the questions to be developed would set out to achieve. Therefore NILE partners decided to set the definition as follows:

Intercultural competence

From a basis in equality, fostering diversity and cultural awareness/opening and promoting diversity as added value on all organisational levels and endorsed by all employees.

*The main **goal** of this process is:*

To change institutions through organisational development so that they cater to the needs of all.

It is important to note that:

*Organisational development is firmly based in a threefold **learning process** on an **individual** – a **professional** – and a **structural** level.*

Why intercultural opening of organisations?

We spend nearly one third of our lives at work. Many of us do it as employees, managers or self-employers in positions with social benefits or in less important, lucrative jobs as well as ones that barely help make ends meet. The tiny part of the world of jobs we are involved in is also a reflection of ourselves. This is the case even if we only feel like cogwheels in the machine of a trans- and multinational corporations and even if the subject of our work is also our devotion.

The team, group, department or collective that we work in operates along generally accepted, written, strict and well-defined as well as unspoken community cultural and social rules.

The following scan, developed in the framework of NILE, is to help us find out how open these rules are. Openness refers to how much room the characteristics and versatility of different cultures are given within the rules. We in Europe frequently assume that we all think and live in the same way since we decorate our homes in similar ways, our children learn similar things in school and we mean largely the same by the concepts that characterise our lives. This is why it often comes a surprise and is hard to understand why one European thinks, practices their religion, brings up children, celebrates holidays and runs community relations and uses work methods in a different way than the other.

Our work place is the first environment where intercultural learning can take place, if we raise awareness on this.

- Are our workplaces ready to provide a homely environment for people with different cultural backgrounds?
- Are we ready to view our everyday lives from other people's perspectives?
- Are we ready to see habits that are distant from our way of life as natural?
- Is our organisation ready to help us answer these questions and even more, help us answer them with a 'yes'?

Since the organisation of our work environment changes with the changes in employees' views and following the decisions of group, company and organisation leaders, it is important to ask these questions at both the **individual and the organisational** levels. Our questionnaire does not and cannot give a categorical evaluation of the answers. Our primary aim is to raise interest and put the key words that should be included in the language of a workplace in the centre if our workplace is to develop interculturality.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire, besides being a working tool, was intended to be more than just a questionnaire. Our working group has tried to collect ideas that may launch action in your organisation. Our goal is to contribute to intercultural learning in a way that helps formulate the most important questions.

- Is my work environment conscious enough in intercultural issues?
- Can we put out consciousness into action?
- Are we self-conscious in the right way to be interculturally conscious too?

The explanations and examples, good practices and ideas could correspond to the stages of a process which may start by asking the above questions.

If we have motivated you to step onto this path, it was already a worthwhile undertaking and we would be happy to receive your feed back.

Members of the NILE working group:

Marina van Casteren, Odyssee, The Netherlands
Vilija Lukosuniene, Lithuanian Adult Education Association
Tom Hunter and Zsófia Fesztbaum, Hungarian Folkhighschool Association
Isabelle Di Stefano/Cristina Pani, UPTER Rome, Italy
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II. The scan - 9 questions

The scan is meant to be a tool for raising awareness on intercultural issues in organisations and institutions, but only as a preparatory step.

The intercultural dimension analysed by the scan refers to the internal organisation of institutions. The information gathered by answering the questions serve to make individual employees aware of intercultural changes and issues inside organisations, so that the organisation can, in a second step, develop a common strategy. A cohesive intercultural opening of any organisation should be an integrated part of quality assurance and is a constant and complex process, which will probably need external support.

Question 1

What is your organisation's vision or mission statement on intercultural issues?

Explanation

The question is important to raise an awareness of the necessity of a written mission or vision of the institution. Sometimes a vision on diversity or intercultural opening might be in the minds of directors or staff members and sometimes they are even practically implementing it, but it is necessary to make this transparent, develop different activities to foster the intercultural opening process and communicate it inside and outside of the institution/organisation.

If the question seems to vague it can be formulated and structured in three steps giving more details and relating it to the social context:

- a) Is the mission/vision of your organisation based on the intercultural dimension of the social context/s in which it operates at local level. How?
- b) Does the intercultural dimension of the organisation have to satisfy all needs expressed by members of different cultures present in the social context? Why and How?
- c) Does the intercultural dimension of the organisation have to satisfy only the needs expressed by a specific, limited number of members of different cultures present in the social context? Are there preferential cultures whose needs are to be mainly satisfied by the organisation? Why and How?

Action

- Develop a mission statement or vision engaging the whole institution
- Identify which intercultural needs of your target groups or clients are relevant to the mission statement and take these into regard

Guidance

A good practice example is given by the Volkshochschule Stuttgart in Germany. This institution has developed and implemented intercultural guiding principles affecting the whole institution and not only individual classes. This meant that all employees had to be taken on board in the discussion process and breaking it down to the very practical way of teaching in general.

Only in this way it was possible for the Volkshochschule Stuttgart to develop new approach (**see Part III**)

Question 2

Has your organisation developed a policy based on the vision or mission statement?

a) If so, please describe.

b) If no, please turn to the guidance example

Explanation

If your vision and mission statement is to be implemented you need to identify goals on different levels. These goals would manifest themselves in a specific policy related to the level on which the organisation plans its intercultural opening process.

Action

Develop a policy and identify the levels on which the institution may start acting.

Guidance

Different good practice examples are given by organisations of social work, such as Caritas, different youth organisations and also organisations delivering family counselling support in Germany. For the last mentioned a working group was established which developed guidelines for the intercultural opening of family counselling. On the website www.idaev.de a database with different examples (in German) can be found.

The municipality of Rome also gives a good example of a vision for a multicultural city (see Part III)



Question 3

a) In terms of personnel composition, how representative is your organisation of the diversity in society? (percentage of ethnic minority/migrant population)

b) What specific intercultural policies on recruitment and selection of staff does your organisation have? (e.g. positive discrimination, development of new networks and advertisements)

Explanation

If the mission statement and the vision are to have a visible impact the personnel composition and recruitment strategy of the institution would be one of the consequences in mid or long term. This is easier in large institutions, but can also be thought about in smaller organisations when there is a new job opening

Action

- Develop positive discrimination rules and policies or activities to heighten the number of staff members with an ethnic minority and migrant background
- Develop an appropriate intercultural recruitment strategy

Guidance

In the framework of the EQUAL programme a prize competition has been established in Hungary, which serves to identify companies active in the above mentioned regard.

The aim of the *Inclusive workplaces award* is to put into focus organisations that carry out more in terms of integration than they are legally obligated to. The protection of these minority groups is now part of the law although finding a good example of programmes that take the extra step and promote intercultural competence is rather difficult.

A large diverse group of organisations decides on the recipients of the prize, including NGOs local government, commercial businesses and trade unions.

One winner is Hewlett Packard Hungary. They have worked out a diversity promotion plan whose main tenet is that the more cultures that meet at the same workplace the better the work will be. A high level person is employed full time whose position within the company is to make this happen. Specific training courses are held which strengthen the relationships between minority groups in the company. Their motto is, "*diversity and equality the grantee for success*".

The Budapest water company is another winner of the award and are the only public company who maintained 15% of the labour pool from the Roma community. They also accept many employees who do not have a high level of education. They employ a specialist to oversee the needs of minority workers.

Question 4

On the basis of your organisations main activities, what concrete action plans for an intercultural opening have you developed?

Explanation

An action plan can help to transform the mission statement into concrete activities. These activities can demonstrate and promote the interculturality of either the target groups, the clients, or then institution itself. An example could be to organize an annual festival or day of open doors with cultural diversity in food, music or literature.

Guidance

Two good practice examples can be identified from Lithuania (see Part III)

Soros International House (SIH) is a language teaching and teacher training centre with the international team of teachers from different parts of the world such as Great Britain, Australia, United States, Brazil, Italy, Spain, China, Mexico, Venezuela, Canada and of course from Lithuania. All international team members bring their own attitudes, perceptions and beliefs to the team. Therefore it's very important to build a high performance international team based on mutual understanding and respect.

Question 5

How is your Public Relations policy influenced by intercultural issues?

Explanation

Not all organisations, especially the smaller ones have an elaborated Public Relations policy. Nevertheless some or many of the PR activities of organisations can serve for promotion of intercultural issues. It is worthwhile to develop an explicit policy because this can also demonstrate to the outside world the intercultural profile and engagement of the organisation.

Action

Formulate a coherent PR policy based on the vision or mission statement of the institution

Guidance

It is important to establish a good cooperation with different media (TV, Print, Radio) so that they can occasionally write or report about interesting developments in your organisation. The NILE working group on cooperation between media and adult education has produced the Newzine: '**Get Intercultural**' where you can find some suggestions on how to get the attention of the media.

But also the media themselves have developed different prizes and projects to promote cultural diversity and intercultural issues. One recent inspiring example is the **Boundless Media Award, honouring cultural diversity and cross-border journalism:**

The Boundless Media Award was launched in November 2006 in Essen, Germany, during the media conference "Migration and Integration – Europe´s big challenge. What role do the media play?" organised by WDR, together with France Télévisions, Zweites Deutsches

Fernsehen (ZDF) and the EBU. The award aims at encouraging journalism that effectively and in innovative ways contributes to the ongoing dialogue between cultures and peoples by raising awareness of diversity and tolerance through professional journalism.

The Young Euro-Mediterranean Academy for Intercultural Journalism aims at developing intercultural skills and promotes culture-sensitive journalism.

The award organisers share an idea of **cultural diversity** which is based on the principles of nondiscrimination of all human beings according to their social origin or cultural background, gender, race, language, religion or any other opinion or belief, as confirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948). The Boundless Media Award aims at encouraging quality journalism, which helps better understanding the human right to cultural self-determination in the spirit of the UDHR.

Information at: www.euromedalex.org

Question 6

What kind of educational opportunities, courses and coaching about intercultural issues are available to staff members in the organisation?

Explanation

It is important to give opportunities to all involved persons to participate in intercultural learning with the aim of creating commitment, engagement and motivation. It can also help lower fears, which almost always play a role in intercultural change processes. If the staff is of mixed ethnic composition a training or excursion of the whole group can have also have an intercultural impact.

Action

- Develop or promote training opportunities for staff.
- Include intercultural activities in company staff excursions

Guidance

Initiated by its participation in NILE the Dutch training organisation Odyssee has gone through a process of 'kicking off an intercultural opening of the organisation. Information is available in the documentation of NILE results from the first phase of the project, documented in IPE 53: Adult Education Embracing -diversity, Volume II

Information at: www.intercultural-learning.net

Question 7

Does your organisation have platforms or forums that allow staff members active involvement in the decision making process regarding intercultural issues?

Explanations

A real commitment on the side of the management as well as the staff level is needed for intercultural opening to be successful. By establishing platforms and forums for engagement amongst the staff, more commitment can be created. Although the level of commitment in general will depend on the composition and level of decision making of the employee, it is important to involve the whole institution in the process.

Action

Create possibilities for active involvement of all staff members as integral part of the policy.

Guidance

An example of how this can be achieved on municipality level is given by the city of Rome:

Active civic participation:

- Establishment of the **Councillor for Multi-Ethnic Policies** (2001) representing the foreign communities inside the town and municipal council and constituted by four Assistant City Councillors elected by migrant residents;
- Creation of a network of formal and informal representative bodies, including the Foreign Citizens' Council of Representatives and the Council of Religions, in charge of promoting ethnic, spiritual and cultural pluralism.
- Election of the representatives of the foreign communities through universal suffrage.

Social services:

Social and working inclusion through specific programmes of autonomy education directed to minor persons.

Multiethnicity:

- Series of public meetings illustrating the town's dynamic intercultural and multicultural aspects;
- Series of meetings with immigrants writers;
- Constitution of citizen councils related to religion issues, to women engaged in political activities;
- Promoting a movement representing citizenship issues for second generation immigrants.

Question 8

How are individual staff members involved in

- a) getting information**
- b) promoting and**
- c) implementing intercultural opening?**

Explanation

This question is about the internal communication policy of the institution on all issues of intercultural relevance. It can serve to reflect on the current situation and in which way the organisation will move in the process.

Action

Analyze the current internal and external communication policy, strategy and activities concerning intercultural issues of the institution and identify strengths and weaknesses. Build on strengths and remedy weaknesses in the communication process.

Question 9

Does the institution gather information that can be used to identify the cultural and educational needs of the specific target groups?

Does the Organisation offer a way for the clients to voice their needs and how does the institution adapt its services and programmes to the cultural needs of the clients?

Explanation

By answering this question the organisation can better assess and develop activities that satisfy the specific demand and needs of the target groups and clients.

The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) has revealed:

'In Adult Education participation remains highly unequal. Those most in need participate least. Finding new ways to motivate and involve excluded groups is a high priority for policy, research and funding.

This requires a shift from supply - to demand - driven policy, a focus on diversity of provision to meet different individuals' and group needs, and more support for locally determined adult learning opportunities'. (from: EAEA study: trends and issues in adult learning).

If the needs of the clients are central in your approach, then a change from supply to demand driven offer and as such it can be used as a quality assurance tool: Demand driven services, education, means listening to the views, notions, ideas of the clients, students with the aim to improve the quality of the services and programmes.

Guidance

An example for a training approach to respect the cultural needs for example of elderly migrant women has been implemented in the Netherlands through the project IMWI (from 2004-2006). (see Part III)

III. Guidance in form of Good Practice

EXAMPLES FROM THE NETHERLANDS

IMWI Project: training for elderly migrant women

Background for the pilot projects

Although women of different cultures meet one another almost every day in their neighbourhood in the city Rotterdam: 'Pendrecht', lots of these women barely have contact with each other. Divided by differences in culture, religion, lifestyle, they never seem to realize that they might have even more in common. Poor living conditions in the more deprived neighbourhoods of Rotterdam and a great deal of social and economic problems are not restricted to a specific culture, colour or religion. The lack of contact or superficial contact between the different groups seems to create more problems and misunderstanding. Although the policy of the city council is aimed at strengthening the local communities they have not succeeded in building bridges between different groups in Pendrecht. The aim of this training is to gather women who want to strengthen the community as a whole by carrying out different activities to unite women regardless of their ethnicity, background. The central issue of the training is breaking down barriers and building bridges, and help the women to participate in society, to start in their own neighbourhood.

Aims and Objectives

- The participant comprehends the meaning of culture.
- The participant comprehends the meaning of identity.
- The participant has an insight in the different aspects of identity and the connection between culture, identity and religion.
- The participant has an insight in the different dimensions of intercultural communication.
- The participant is able to reflect on her own attitude in intercultural communication.
- The participant comprehends the meaning of influence and the connection to participation and commitment.
- The participant is able to reflect on her skills in intercultural settings.
- The participant is able to carry out activities that can help building bridges in the community.

5 steps to diversity/ intercultural opening¹ in your institution

STEP 1: State why diversity or intercultural opening is an issue for your organisation (or not).

- a. Do your services adapt to the possibilities / needs of the changing population?
- b. Is the composition of your personnel well equipped for future services?
- c. Seen from the perspective of your role in society, in what way is this helpful to your institute to be successful in the intercultural opening of your institute?
- d. Choose position on the above mentioned: what is the state of the art and where to go?

TIPS

- The vision and mission strategy of your institute normally has stated the importance of working with and for different people (as staff, clients, target groups): make this urgency explicit.
- A good reputation is worth a lot. It is depending on: the services, the sphere, the climate within your institute and the corporate governance: (the way you are involved in society issues).
- A clear answer to the 'why' question is the most important step to work successfully with diversity in / intercultural opening of your institution.
- How important intercultural opening / diversity is, depends on your institution: it is always tailor-made work.

STEP 2: Determine the goals for diversity/ intercultural opening

- a. On staff-personnel level (number of new jobs, competences)
- b. To clients: which services will contribute to, move to intercultural opening / diversity
- c. To society: how to contribute to the profile of 'a good institution' regarding to interculturality, to society.

TIPS

Working on intercultural opening\diversity is something for the short-middle- and long term and needs a sustainable strategy.

Make the targets as SMART as you can:

specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely.

- Measurable: although this is not easy for the softer targets like 'institutional' climate.
- Formulate priorities: not everything can be done at one time.
- In personnel- composition you can give it numbers as '...% of our personnel in 3 years will be filled in with\ exist on specific target groups (migrants....)', etc.
- Make a Chances-Risks Analysis. Be aware for instance that positive discrimination of certain groups will lead to great resistance.

¹ There are many different terms for describing this process in European countries. In this text we will use 2 terms, that are agreed on in the partner countries of the Nile network

- Goals in intercultural opening / diversity have to be seen in connection: they never stand apart, so manage them in connection.
- Take care that everybody within the organisation is informed about the goals, the vision and mission strategy. Keep the progress on the shared agenda.
- Say something about how you are going to work on these targets. Set up realistic goals, fitting in your institute: the climate, the structure.

STEP 3: Organize an effective, successful strategy

Working on intercultural opening / diversity means working on change management.

Very important is:

- a. Commitment is needed: top-down with initiatives that can rise bottom up.
- b. There must be some 'key-figures' (a team) who can accelerate the process and take responsibilities.

TIPS

- Greater organisations mostly will have a manager for intercultural issues, in the same position as for instance quality management.
- There are experts in Adult Education that can guide you through the process of developing and implementing intercultural opening / diversity and the management - issues.
- Take care of a 'good story' for the innerworld (within your organisation) and the outside world with an explanation why intercultural opening / diversity is so important.
- The participation of all people involved in your institution is the norm!
- Remember that this process is one of 'trial and error'.
- Keep in mind that the issues are open for discussion.
- Keep in mind that there are a lot of taboos and barriers on this issue!

STEP 4: Planning of Actions

Parts of an action plan are:

- a. Development, implementation of the policy on intercultural opening / diversity.
- b. Recruitment and selection of personnel: including competences etc.
- c. How to keep your personnel and taking care of their career perspectives
- d. To learn to have contact with each other, meeting each other, by training and education (staff within the institute and staff in contact with clients / customers.
- e. Target group communication (and marketing).

TIPS

- Plan Actions in connection, not isolated. E.g. education and training can be effective to take away the barriers in the field of language, non verbal behaviour, stereotyping, cultural prejudicing, and fear for the unknown.

- Education and training can be used on the level of knowledge, skills and attitude. It can be very helpful to improve intercultural 'meeting' each other.

STEP 5: Evaluation

- a. Monitoring the targets gives you insight in progress. Improvements of new actions can be better implemented.
- b. Make use of the diversity goals in annual reports, personnel papers, and in regularly meetings with you personnel.
- c. Test your profile in the 'outside': the society, include the intercultural opening / diversity.

What to evaluate:

- The number of migrant employed and their
- Functions in the organisation
- The length of their engagement
- Satisfaction of the clients / customers and the employees
- Respect in society

TIPS

- Keep attention to the goals
- In your evaluation, keep attention to the hard goals and also to the more 'soft' goals (not to measure, but there is a 'feeling' about this!)
- Evaluation helps for improvements of setting the goals, organizing the methods and carrying out the actions.
- Stimulate individual initiatives as well as successful group activities / initiatives.

EXAMPLE FROM GERMANY

A good practice example for a mission statement is given by the Volkshochschule Stuttgart in Germany. This institution has developed and implemented intercultural guiding principles affecting the whole institution and not only individual classes. This meant that all employees had to be taken on board in the discussion process and breaking it down to the very practical way of teaching in general.

Only in this way it was possible for the Volkshochschule Stuttgart to a new approach with the following characteristics:

- stimulating new experiences and reflections
- contributing to a cultural self-reflection by employees in their career-related trainings
- promoting an open-minded attitude, and stimulate individuals to question their own way of teaching
- testing if our visions and utopias can be put into practice
- contributing to a situation where intercultural learning becomes a part of our pedagogics.

EXAMPLES FROM LITHUANIA

Akiračio“adult secondary school an

Akiračio“adult secondary school which is situated in the centre of Vilnius tries to help the students from the age of 18 to continue their studies in the Russian language and obtain the secondary education. To succeed the best results in the educational process the flexible schedule and different forms of teaching are used. The most successful students integrated into the Lithuanian educational system have the possibility to study Social Studies, Arts and Ethics in the Lithuanian language according to their request. In order to realize the ideas of the long life learning the school widens the informal education. The main aim of which is to create the conditions for the adult students to adapt to the social and cultural surrounding keeping the democratic principles and values.

Teachers of different nationalities: Lithuanian, Russian, Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian and Byelorussian get in chime in the school community. All together we celebrate holidays: Christmas, The New Year Eve, Shrovetide, Easter and others. During these celebrations we sing songs, play traditional national game sand cook national dishes for each others. This way we become more open to the other peoples customs and traditions. The feeling of communication becomes stronger.

Our school pays much attention to the training of the cultural expression and its nurturance. So different short term and long term projects are carried out in the school These projects help the students to show, to know and to realize the cultural originality of different national communities, to warrant their succession and continuity. One of such projects carried out by the school community was the project named „Open the trunk with the Lithuanian people’s cultural heritage“. The project which was carried out for two years was orientated on the cognition and the nurturance of the historical ethnical and cultural heritage in Lithuania. The students who took part in the project selected the material according to the topic they had chosen, prepared scripts for sketches, issued stands and organized team shows: „Russian community in Lithuania“, „The Poles in Lithuania“, „The Byelorussians in Lithuania“, „The Easter customs in Lithuania“, „The Karaites in Lithuania“ and „The Jews in Lithuania“. Together with the teachers the participants of the project organized several educational excursions: to The Trakai Historical Museum, The Lithuanian State Vilnius Gaono Jewish Museum, The Lithuanian National Museum, The Prano Gudyno’s Restoration Centre of the Lithuanian Art Museum.

Communicating and working together the students obtained not only the knowledge about the Lithuanian people’s cultural heritage but also and new experience. They realized that they are the successors and fosters of their national culture. The project encouraged students in their abilities for the individual and creative work. The project strengthened the trust, tolerance and respect between the teachers and the students. It also showed the clarity of the variety of the ethno cultural traditions of Europe, positive attitude to the cultural dialogue and possibility of the international communication.

During the school holidays which are reconciled according to the students’ requests and possibilities with the Russian Orthodox Christmas and Easter holidays different thematic parties are held in school.

Soros International House (SIH), Lithuania

Soros International House (SIH) is a language teaching and teacher training centre with the international team of teachers from different parts of the world such as Great Britain, Australia, United States, Brazil, Italy, Spain, China, Mexico, Venezuela, Canada and of course from Lithuania. All international team members bring their own attitudes, perceptions and beliefs to the team. Therefore it's very important to build a high performance international team based on mutual understanding and respect.

I. Introduction into new culture

Any new teacher who applies for a position at SIH is sent a specially prepared set of information for "new teachers", which has been developed in the course of years, before his/her arrival. And on their arrival they are given some time to get adjusted to a new cultural environment. School director introduces them into the culture, policy of the school, while school Dos presents teaching issues. New teachers are assisted by local body teachers too, who take them round the city, share teaching experience.

Besides, any new teacher from a foreign country, who gets employed by SIH, is provided with a free of charge Lithuanian language course, which introduces them not only into the Lithuanian language, but they get some ideas about Lithuanian culture, traditions, way of life.

II. Celebrations

SIH has got a lot of experience in building and working with international teams. A lot of activities take place in the organisation to construct relations between different cultural background, which are based on mutual respect. One of the old traditions is the Opening of the New school year event during which new teachers are introduced by means of different fun activities. In a cosy and relaxed atmosphere teachers and office staff can talk on different subjects, new foreign teachers can get some info about do's and don'ts in Lithuania, introduce their native country. Institution Christmas parties are usually organised by a group of both local and foreign teachers. They introduce some elements of their own culture and traditions and usually these parties have got an international flavour of celebration. Besides Opening of the New school year and the End of the school year, Christmas celebration events, foreign teachers are stimulated to participate in other public events such as New Year, Independence day and many other state holiday celebrations.

III. Socializing

One of the successful team building activities is potluck parties at one of the local teachers' places or at the places of the foreign teachers who have already settled and have been living here for some time. Guests are invited to bring with them some typical for their country food. During these parties teachers get to know each other better, their family members, become more open to each other.

IV. Training seminars and peer observations

During Teacher training seminars each Friday, which are compulsory, local and foreign teachers have a very good opportunity to share their international teaching experience, discuss psychological issues, which are typical for students in different countries. Besides training seminars, teachers participate in peer observation activities. During the observation class they not only share their experience in teaching, but learn from each other about some cultural elements typical for one or other country.

V. Cultural display

Each country has got some specific for this country holidays or celebrations and teachers are willing to share their experience with their students during their class. For example-Halloween, which is widely popular in America, but not so widely celebrated here in Lithuania. A teacher from US got dressed in Halloween costume and had fun with her students. SIH is very flexible as to such traditional and cultural displays. Teachers are provided with an opportunity to choose for themselves if one or the other holiday could be presented to their students or not.

VI. Projects on intercultural issues

SIH is actively involved in a lot of intercultural Socrate/Lingua, Grundtvig and new Lifelong learning projects. By provoking and encouraging the interest of the audience in the less widely used European languages at the same time they promote ideas of respect, tolerance towards other nations, active citizenship, introduce different cultures and traditions.

SIH staff members and teachers participate in different activities of these projects such as promotional seminars, conferences, where intercultural issues are the key elements of the presentations and discussions.

EXAMPLES FROM ITALY

UPTER

- training workshops addressed to the representatives of the public administration, to the representatives of the migrants' association and to the single members of the ethnic minorities;
- contribution and support to the organisational knowledge and competences of the ethnic organisations (ODEO);
- Promotion of the literary award "Io e Roma" for the immigrants living in Rome;
- Realization of projects dealing with intercultural issues carried out at local, national and transnational level;

Storytelling concerning immigrant communities (project carried out by Upter in collaboration with the Rome municipality)

Main objective of the project is getting acknowledgement of the foreign communities living in Rome through the narration of their stories, in order to create a relationship with the hosting community. A particular aspect of this project is that story of the foreign communities is mainly intended as a collective experience (not as a series of individual experiences) representing common traditions and values, so that each foreign community can, through its collective storytelling, interact with the hosting community, creates an example of that social cohesion which characterizes Rome, a town considered to be a model of social cohesion as shown by the last CENSIS report of march 1996. www.censis.it

Municipality of Rome

Culture

- Visibility and circulation of foreign artists (for instance, during the Roman summer festival);
- Particular cultural initiatives addressed to foreigners, such as visits to museums centred on the cultural heritage of the immigrants' countries;
- Information on local newspapers and mass media written both in Italian and in various foreign languages;
- Cultural mediators and facilitators working by the telephone switchboards and the info-points of the Rome municipality;
- Constitution of the municipal register of the cultural mediators;
- Constitution of five intercultural centres connecting school to the foreign communities living in the territory;
- Intercultural education of the municipal staff.

Solidarity Libraries

This is a project coordinated municipality of Rome aiming to promote the cooperation and solidarity initiatives carried out by no profit or NGO associations in the third countries. The main purpose of the project is to support the creation of public libraries in the third countries, in order to diffuse culture and reading practices in these countries. Rome citizens and all users of the Rome libraries will be invited to give an economic support to this initiative.

Immigrants' communities living in Rome will also be involved in the project and a cultural programme with a special one-year twinning between Rome and Turin will be organized.

In this way, the project's purpose is to organize and promote old and new experiences and activities related to intercultural issues, according to some of the main objectives fixed by the United Nations.

The multi-ethnic Rome website is a result of the experience of the multicultural sector of the libraries of Rome municipalities, committed for years to a knowledge and communications project involving the different cultures coexisting and interacting in our country and our city.

Two editions of a guide to intercultural Rome followed these exchanges: "The Invisible City" (December 1998) and "Multi-ethnic Rome" (April 2000). This guide was drawn up by a team of Italian and foreign experts and intercultural mediators, who, because of their cosmopolitanism, are able to connect different cultures. In addition to the information and updates about a quickly growing multi-ethnic reality in Rome, the site is a showcase of multicultural and intercultural events in Rome, about a guide to bibliographic books and paths, several major links on interculture, immigration and the areas of the world represented in our country.

<http://www.romamultiethnica.it/> - e-mail: info@romamultiethnica.it

Agenzia Migra

Agenzia Migra is the first information agency in Europe with a staff prevalently made up of migrant correspondents, and promotes a close collaboration between autochthonous and immigrant journalists for an accurate representation of foreign communities in the Italian media. www.migranews.it