

Erlangen: A Diveristy Picnic Banquet and Living Library

Case Study 1: Picnic Banquet of Diversity and a Living Library

Summary Description

To launch the *C4i Communication für Vielfalt* (Communication for Diversity) campaign, the city of Erlangen built a banquet table over 180 meters in length and hosted a giant picnic along the main street of the city. About 1,000 Erlangers and asylum seekers directly communicated and exchanged with each other, and took away with them information about rumours and how to counter them.

Along Erlangen's longest picnic table, ten 'Talking Books' offered open conversations with refugees.

Background

The cities Erlangen and Nuremberg began their C4I programme in February 2014. With the slogan: *Don't parrot, inquire!*, citizens of Erlangen were invited to reveal prejudices and rumours about refugees in everyday conversations and to debunk them with facts.

Middle Franconia's government obliged Erlangen on September 3rd to accommodate 300 new refugees. They were housed in tents near the swimming bath *Freibad West*. Prejudices about refugees thus gained new political relevance. About 500 refugees lived in Erlangen in September 2014.

The prototype for the picnic banquet was the *Friedenstafel* of the neighbouring city of Nürnberg¹. The basic concept was replicated (large public banquet), while the content (fight rumours against refugees) and additional programme elements were adapted to suit the theme were added.

Partners, Sponsors and Volunteers

The banquet was a highly cross-departmental action, including various public institutions such as the public library (for the Living Library), the public safety unit (for the large event), the public refuse collection unit, the press and PR department, the Mayor's office, etc.

The Mayor of Erlangen officially opened the event. External partners included:

- two main local breweries to sponsor the 160 beer benches and tables;
- two large flower shops to sponsor over 160 flower pots for decoration;
- the city of Nuremberg to provide the table cloths and the original banquet concept, including organisation checklists, management masterplans etc.;
- E.F.I.E., a key local NGO that supports refugees in Erlangen to establish the contact with the refugees, bring together the E.F.I.E. refugee band, and carry out the living library;
- Tameru Zergeye, World Guinness Record Holder in walking on crutches and refugee from Ethiopia to challenge stereotypes in an entertaining way;
- Over 20 independent volunteers, part of the C4i Erlangen network to set up the banquet, decorate the table, support the Talking Library, invite and inform participants and sell balloons.



¹ See <http://www.nuernberg.de/internet/menschenrechte/friedenstafel.html>

Specific Goal and Target

The aim was to disseminate facts to counter rumours and to spark conversation about it. Specific communication tools, such as the Living Library, were used to encourage exchange in a deeper and sincere manner and not just symbolically share a large table.

The positive ambience - live music, flower bouquets, white table cloths and 400 balloons released in a symbolic act of diversity and togetherness - was key to conveying a positive feeling, in addition to the 'knowledge of facts' that refugees are not 'a threat' but can be an enriching source for our city.

The following was the Order of events on September 20th 2014:

12:00 am:	Opening of the banquet
12:00 am to 4:00 pm:	Selling of balloons at the information stand
12:30 pm:	live show: 'Circumventing my residential obligation' by Tameru Zegeye (Guinness world record for the fastest 100m on forearm crutches – inverted)
1:00 to 1:30 pm:	Talking Library
1:30 to 2:00 pm:	EFIE live band session 1 (EFIE: voluntary refugees' charity of Erlangen)
2:00 to 2:30 pm:	Talking Library
2:30 to 3:30 pm:	EFIE live band session 2
3:00 pm:	500 balloons flying simultaneously, laying down a marker against prejudices
4:00 pm:	Closing the banquet

'Living books' to borrow - Saturday, 13.9.2014 , 1-3 pm

Using the concept of a Living Library, along the length of the table people were explicitly invited to ask 10 asylum seekers about their life, talents, skills, experiences and dreams. The aim was to pose questions one would not normally dare to, thus overcoming rumours and getting to know one another. Banquet participants met people with extraordinary résumés with exceptional stories to tell; learned about unexpected talents of people living next door – refugees in Erlangen.

The Living Library offers conversations with people who are often pigeonholed in society and therefore often experience prejudice. Expressing curiosity is central to learning from Living Books, asking questions and hopefully revising assumptions and addressing prejudices and preconceptions.

The following are the rules for Living Library *participants*:

- Refugees register as a narrator by themselves or in pairs.
- Topics may include: talents, hobbies, know-how or any specific subjects to be written in the *Living Book*. The aim of the Living Library is to show that refugee status does not define the person: refugees are people with ideas, talents, knowledge and interesting stories.
- All participating Living Books receive after registering a contract for their commitment and participation in the Living Library. Each receives a 50 € allowance for volunteering.
- Each Living Book may bring a person they trust to explain details and give language support. Just one such person is allowed, to ensure that a full Living Library can take place simultaneously, that each feels comfortable and supported, and to enhance conversations.
- The Living Library is an opportunity to engage with new people and tell stories. The main aim is that to enjoy it and have fun!

The *visitor* rules of the Living Library are as follows:

- *Living Library* 'readers' can invite Living Books for a personal meeting for up to 20 minutes.
- The interview takes place at selected locations along the picnic banquets.
- Living Book decide what they want to say and what not, and this must be respected.
- Either the Living Book or the *reader* can cancel the conversation without reason at any time.
- The reader must 'return' the Living Book undamaged: It is forbidden to violate in any way the dignity of the Living Book.
- The Living Library enables a personal engagement refugees, and to interact with people with exciting and fascinating stories. The aim is to enjoy it and have fun!

Facts on the Table

Through workshops with political leaders and immigration stakeholders, and from an online survey, widespread rumours and prejudices concerning refugees and immigrants were gathered up to August 2014. Facts to debunk these rumours were also identified and presented on placemats called *Fakten auf den Tisch* (facts on the table). Distributed along the banquet, these placemats were intended to spark conversations about rumours and to enable reflection on them. In addition, on the back of the placemats guidelines and advice on how to effectively debunk rumours were printed², to give conversational guidance on how to argue against the rumours.

Attracting Participants

The main means of disseminating information about the event were as follows: Email-distribution (Siemens Intranet Newsletter, outreach to c. 25,000 Siemens staff in Erlangen-Nuremberg, all employees of Erlangen's city facilities: outreach c. 2000); Facebook (own page of *Kommunikation für Vielfalt* in Erlangen and Nuremberg), homepage of the city Erlangen. A flyer was also distributed in the city (2000 copies).

Challenges Encountered

The total budget was just 2,000 Euros. One of the key challenge was thus to mobilise the diverse partners, sponsors and volunteers to support the event and make it happen.

Outcomes

Media coverage of the banquet was very high and in some depth, including traditional media such as Radio, TV and newspapers and local magazines and Social Media like Facebook. A short article about the banquet was broadcasted in the *Rundschau* at *Bayerisches Fernsehen*. Strikingly, the media coverage was positive throughout, showcasing Erlangen as good example of engaging in discourse about refugees, during a time where the arrival of large numbers of refugees to German cities was largely portrayed in a negative light and seen as a "problematic situation" rather than "asset".

Overall the Picknick Bankett was a great success, many wanting to make it an annual event. It was a great opportunity to generate positive and active exchanges in one-to-one equality, between refugees and Erlangers:

- Enabling the exploration of issues positively
- Tacking them by recognising them as misunderstandings
- overcoming rumours with facts
- replacing fearful stereotypes with human, individual stories and friendly faces
- learning from each other
- making introductions and friendships, many of which still reported as ongoing
- over 1000 participants
- wide media coverage
- requests from Erlanger clubs, NGOs but also other cities across Germany to receive the "facts on the table" and to use them during public debates

8. Learning along the way

A number of very practical lessons were learned in terms of organising the event:



² These were based on: John Cook and Stephan Lewandowsky *Debunking Handbook* in five languages and available at: <http://www.skepticalscience.com/Debunking-Handbook-now-freely-available-download.html>

Attachment 3: Facts laid out on the line *Fakten auf den Tisch*

Kommunikation für Vielfalt
bringt
Fakten auf den Tisch

„Armutsmigranten aus Bulgarien und Rumänien...?“

Fakt ist:

- 72% der nach 2007 zugewanderten Bulgaren und Rumänen zwischen 25 und 44 gehen einer Erwerbstätigkeit nach
- 25% sind Akademiker
- 8% haben einen Abschluss in den Bereichen Mathematik, Technik, Naturwissenschaften oder Informatik

Stoppen Sie Gerüchte!

Kommunikation für Vielfalt
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Stadt Erlangen

Alle Ausländer sind...?!
Nicht nachplappern, sondern nachfragen!

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Erfolgreich gegen Gerüchte vorgehen – wie funktioniert das?

Haben Sie solche, oder vergleichbare Aussagen schon mal gehört: „Flüchtlinge nehmen unser Sozialsystem aus!“ „Es kommen lauter Armutsmigranten aus Osteuropa!“ „Die tragen nichts zu unserer Gesellschaft bei, sondern machen alles schlechter...?!“

Doch was tun, wenn Sie im Gespräch mit Bekannten oder Kollegen auf einmal mit derartigen Gerüchten und polemischen Falschaussagen konfrontiert werden?

Menschen gegen Ihre Vorurteile und Falschannahmen von Fakten zu überzeugen, ist oftmals sehr mühsam und leider oft erfolglos. Hier vier Regeln, die Ihnen im Gespräch gegen Gerüchte helfen:

Tipp Nr. 1: Konzentrieren Sie sich auf die Fakten, die Sie mitteilen möchten
Tipp Nr. 2: Formulieren Sie die Fakten nicht zu kompliziert
Tipp Nr. 3: Überfrachten Sie ihr Gegenüber nicht mit Infos: maximal 3-5 Fakten pro Gerücht
Tipp Nr. 4: Füllen Sie die Lücke, die ein Gerücht hinterlässt, mit Informationen

Alle Ausländer sind...?!
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