

Lublin Good Practice Case Study 1

Rumour Exchange Shop

Summary Description

The Rumours Exchange Shop is a clever and effective way get members of the public thinking about rumours in a public space, and if well handled, can also attract positive media attention. It is no more than a set of blank posters on which passers-by write rumours they have heard or are aware of. The process is facilitated by a member of the C4I team. It has the added advantage of gathering additional material for the identification of rumours locally.

Background

Working on the C4I project, we discovered that all of us, as a team, felt a bit intimidated by the use of the word 'rumour' in connection with a project run by the Municipality of Lublin. The word itself felt 'unofficial' and far too detached from the language usually employed when describing issues of intercultural integration. The challenge for us was to develop an anti-rumours methodology, literally – as we did not quite know what to do with the 'rumour' part of it.

A second challenge emerged from the fact that in order to prevent any rumours, one has to repeat them, which at first sight did not seem like such a great idea. In short, the C4I project presented a major challenge



Rumours Exchange Shop, photo by A. Amanoail

to the entire team and we had to find a justification or pretext to discuss and work on 'anti-rumours in order to be able to proceed with implementation.

One of our C4I Local Network members came up with a very creative way to open the discussion about rumours and move it to a public space. It coincided with the need to meet people in the street relating to the rumour identification process. We felt that, despite valuable knowledge accumulated by means of focused group interviews and questionnaires, we had not fully grasped what was really on people's mind when it comes to rumours about migrants in Lublin. It was time to go out and hear what real people had to say! During one of many discussions we had with our Local Network, the idea of *Rumour Exchange Shop* was born.

The idea of public writing on large (2 by 3 meter) recycled advertising posters came originally from a member of the C4I Local Network, Wojtek Olchowski, inspired by people's behaviour in public spaces – writing on the buildings' walls, buses etc. Though in most cases it is not only illegal but regarded as vandalism, it indicates a natural need to express opinions using more traditional methods than those offered by



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our digitised world. What people share in writing is often honest and open, which was crucial to our rumour-collecting goal. Artistic projects using crowd-sourced knowledge are popular around the world, deploying various means to register what's on people's minds: video cameras, cameras, surveys. The question was: Would people be as willing to share their opinions in writing when asked to participate in a social-artistic project created specifically for this purpose? Participation was encouraged by the way the Rumours Exchange Shop was constructed –surfaces made out of recycled banners convinced people that their engagement was not vandalism, while the solid construction of the Shop provided reassurance that their opinions mattered.

Specific Goal and Target

The target group was the general public and the primary goal was to encourage them to reflect on rumours and the effect that they have in a lively and informal manner, and in a public place.

A secondary goal was to contribute to the identification and ongoing understanding of rumours in Lublin about migrants

Actions and Timescale

For four days outside the Centre of Culture, a municipal cultural institution and home of Municipal Public Library, a construction made of old banners was displayed and passers-by were invited to write the rumours they had heard or considered widespread among Lubliners. The goal was to engage the local community in public discussion of how foreigners and migrants are perceived.

The event attracted many people: young and old, male and female, working or studying, Polish and foreign nationals. Some wanted to share their stories, but not in writing; but most of them, to our surprise, were very keen to share the rumours... or in many cases their own opinions or messages to newcomers. The messages were usually very friendly and inviting, the opinions – as is to be expected – varied.

Outcomes

Though the official, scientific identification of rumours had been completed, the Rumour Exchange Shop also offers a valuable barometer of social attitudes towards migrants. Although some people had feared the initiative would have unintended adverse effects, by strengthening and fixing misconceptions about foreigners, in fact the experience actually proved to be the opposite: it became an opportunity to identify and confront the 'power of rumours'.

The Rumours Exchange Shop attracted the immediate attention of the media. The event got coverage in all three local radio stations, two local and one nationwide television, three local newspapers and the most popular nationwide online news provider. It became a great opportunity to spread the message about the project and of wider municipal intercultural initiatives. More than that, it was a unique chance to talk about the rumours and how to address them in the media.

Learning along the way:

The entire five-day event was an important lesson to all of the people who took part in it: the organizers, volunteers (who later joined the Local Network and became involved in designing campaign activities as well) as people passing the Shop. It opened the debate on the way we see foreigners in Lublin and proved that the image is not always positive.