DEVELOPING LOCAL DEMOCRACY AGAINST RIGHT WING EXTREMISM

Examples of common, everyday racism among ordinary people abound in Saxony (East Germany). The young father who lives next door, the nice people from the history club, the sport team of young people, the mayor, there are plenty of examples in the recent past. They talk about cultural homogeneity in Germany and that Jews are not victims but ‘a people of offenders’ (MP Martin Hohmann (CDU) in a speech for the German National Day, on 03.10.2003). Almost no one of them would call itself specifically right wing. They are part of the majority of citizens, part of the common racism of this society or part of a non-sensitive society.

These opinions constitute the background for crimes motivated by right wing extremism, they offer a wide variety of points of contact for extreme right parties and organizations.

While in all of Germany the numbers of right wing extremists declined in 2002 by 2.2% compared to previous year’s figures, the numbers rose in Saxony by 2.4% during the same period. In absolute numbers that means that Germany had about 45,000 right wing extremists in 2002, out of which 3,400 in Saxony.

"Nationalistic oriented" adolescents find their place usually in neo-nazi movements and in the skinhead and Kameradschaft scene. These extreme right groups had about 850 members in 2002, compared to 600 in 2001. These 850 people were organized in 40 different groups in 2002. Already 5 new ones were formed in Saxony in 2003. Saxony has the best-organized system for selling extreme right music and materials. Skinhead music is still one of the main means to recruit new members. There are about 25 neo-nazi bands in Saxony.

To recognise the problem and to name it as such (right wing extremism) is one of the aims of the Mobile Counselling Teams of the Kulturbüro Sachsen e.V. Only on the basis of this will it be possible to mobilize and strengthen broad societal opposition. In almost every little village we find people pointing out those problems and working against racism and discrimination. It is important to work with them and to help them to strengthen their networks.

We see right wing extremism as a problem of the society as a whole and not as a purely adolescent problem. That means that we want to reach the different social/societal groups, and make them sensitive to the problem. The aim of our work is the improvement of democratic structures in a way that they become visible to people. We want to empower them to take action.

Examples of good practice in Eastern Germany
EXAMPLES OF 'NORMAL' SITUATIONS IN SAXONY (EASTERN GERMANY)

Underneath we list several examples of situations that we have encountered in our work.

Childcare...
The "Organisation for Germanic Traditions Black Sun Meissen" which is lead by a former member of the extreme-right National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) offers help with homework for children and adolescents as well as childcare, besides the care for Germanic traditions. Disguised as programs to keep up traditions they introduce children to neo-nazi ideas. Some of its events are even attended by complete local families.

The father...
Adolescents and young adults celebrate a cultural festival against racism in a town near Dresden. They are a broad mix of people, among them several with dyed hair in wild colours. A local young man with his little daughter on his arm passes by, shakes his head and says loud enough for the adolescents to hear: "People like those would have been sent through the chimney in Adolf’s time."

Volleyball...
The volleyball team of a youth club takes part in local matches under the name C 18. When asked, the members of the team give the following explanation for the name: C stands for the word ‘club’ and 18 is the average age of the team members. But it is more likely that C 18 stands for Combat 18 (in the alphabet A is the first letter and H is the eighth letter) thus Combat ‘Adolf Hitler’ which is a militant neo-nazi organisation. Only a few weeks ago police searched the houses of members of this organisation in Germany.

The neighbours...
The Jewish Community in Leipzig wants to transform one of their houses into a new meeting place for the congregation. For years Jewish refugees from the former Soviet Union have moved to Germany so the number of the Jewish communities’ members has increased and nowadays up to 90% of them are migrants. There is a strong need for integrating these new members. The congregations need bigger rooms for meetings and mutual learning. Some neighbours and house-owners in this specific part of town in Leipzig do not want a Jewish community centre, they feel disturbed in their peace and order by a meeting of Jews nearby. One owner of a neighbouring real estate has sued them for depreciation of his property. He pointed out, according to court records, that he now could only rent his estate to Islamic fundamentalists and right wing people. Some people are afraid, that Islamic fundamentalists are going to detonate a bomb in their neighbourhood and don’t want the Jews there.

Tolerance?
During the official (re-)opening of a club house for young people in the presence of local police, the mayor, the deputy district administrator, and other representatives of local government around 15 adolescents wore polo shirts with Thor’s hammer, symbols of the extreme right band Screwdriver. The ends of their sleeves were in the colours of the flag of the “German Reich”. One wore a shirt with the lettering “European tour 1939-1945”. They ignored the ban on neo-nazi symbolism imposed by the social worker at the centre. Nobody seemed to realise anything was wrong. The mayor talked in his speech about tolerance and respect for human dignity, which should be an integral part of the work of the youth club. The adolescents returned to their work - making garlands (paper chains) - in the garden of the house, and listened to the music of neo-nazi bands such as “Landser” and “Screwdriver”. The other visitors took tours of the house and celebrated.

All these are examples of situations that we (the Mobile Counselling Teams of the Kulturbüro Sachsen) face in our daily work. They are not just examples from dangerous boneheads or organized neo-nazis, but examples of a common racism among ordinary people. The young
father who lives next door, the nice people from the history club, the sport team of young people, the mayor. The picture is completed by the discourse of opinion leaders, among them politicians. There are plenty of examples in the recent past. They talk about cultural homogeneity in Germany and that Jews are not victims but "a people of offenders"\(^1\). Almost no one of them would call him/herself specifically right wing. They are part of the majority of citizens, part of the common racism of this society or part of a non-sensitive society. These opinions constitute the background for crimes motivated by right wing extremism. They offer the possibility for extreme right parties and organisations to make a link with the wider public.

**LOCAL DEMOCRACY DEVELOPMENT TO COMBAT RIGHT WING EXTREMISM**

In conversations and training courses offered by the Mobile Counselling Team (Mobile Beratungsteam) of the Cultural Office of Saxony (Kulturbüro Sachsen) we often encounter people who hope that the “other” will do something. People cry for the police, juridical help, for action taken by schools and social work. It happens still too often that the ones who point out and name the problem are seen as troublemakers by the local communities. As if they are the problem, and not those who disrupt the peaceful and democratic coexistence by extreme right activities.

The aim of our work is the improvement of democratic structures in a way that they become visible to people. We want to empower them to take action.

We start by trying to describe the social setting more thoroughly in order to find resources to solve the problem:

- Who has the problem?
- Who suffered from right wing attacks?
- Who pointed out the problem?
- What is already being done in schools, by youth social work, by non-profit and profit organisations, and by political administrators?
- Where are deficits?
- How can non-right wing adolescents in the town be strengthened?
- Does anyone take notice of them?
- Which projects can be useful to recognise the problem and to solve it?

The motto of our project is “Working for a democratic culture is working against right wing extremism”. We take the interests and ideas of the democratic people in the area and develop local strategies against the dominance of groups of the extreme right. We take one step at a time and work project by project. We use social-cultural projects (you will find several examples in this info-leaflet), and ways of intercultural learning. We connect peer leaders we trained, with local groups to set up self organised and local ways towards change.

The following project descriptions are examples how to change local situations and how to deal with problems in a social-cultural context. Of course no single project can change the whole of society. But step by step people will take responsibility and will become aware of the daily racism in their lives.

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\(^1\) Member of parliament Martin Hohmann (CDU) in a speech for the German National Day, on 03.10.2003, In: www.cdu-neuhof.de/ am 31.10.2003; www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/inhalt/co/15978/1.html
EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Example 1:
"Live Courage Against Racism!" - Corporate Responsibility in Action

Organiser:
Public Transport Company Leipzig (LVB), National Film Service Saxony (Landesfilmdienst Sachsen e.V.), Expert group for Youth Issues and Extremism of Leipzig (Fachreferat für jugendpolitische Sonderaufgaben und Extremismus der Stadt Leipzig), Evangelical Youth Parish Leipzig (Evangelisches Stadtjugendpfarramt Leipzig) and Cultural Office of Saxony (Kulturbüro Sachsen e.V.)

Target group:
Tram driver and other workers in the public transport system Leipzig.

Background:
Regularly one can find racist slogans spray-painted on trams and buses. Attacks happen against migrants on the public transport system as well. A 2002 study about friendliness in the public transport system showed that there is a fear of violence in trams and buses and at bus stops, keeping potential users from using the public transport system. The company wanted to counteract this situation actively. It went in search for competent partners within the region, in order to carry out a project against violence, xenophobia and racism.

Aim:
The aim is to train staff of the public transport system in dealing with discrimination in trams and buses, to increase the feeling of security for migrants who use the public transport and to officially give a sign against racism and right wing extremism.

Training of the LVB drivers:
About 950 drivers of LVB have been trained throughout the year 2003 by the teams of this project. We used a concept of training adapted to the specific needs of this certain target group. The trainings have been carried out by a team of two with groups of about 20 drivers. Within the trainings it became obvious, that daily racism is widespread throughout the average population. It was also present among the participants in the training. The training contained three parts: the first focused on defining racism, the second on discussion, and the third on finding out about participants’ own possibilities for action. The different parts have all started with specific film sequences.

Results - What did we manage?
Together with participants of the training and users of the trams a special tram was developed. The “tram of courage” rides regularly in the public transport system of Leipzig. Its look was changed inside and outside. The front part of the tram kept the typical seats, but those seats were provided with inscriptions saying “for blondes only”, “for blacks/reds or whites only”, “for fat/thin people only”, “for brown eyed/blue eyed people only”. There is one blue chair that stands out among the others, it states “for tolerant people only”. In the back of the tram is a little exhibition that informs the tram users about right wing extremism and racism. Part of it is a constant exhibition, another part changes frequently. It mainly shows pictures of school classes.

Another important result was the fact that the transport company openly took position against daily racism and incorporated the training against racism as part of the regular schooling of the drivers. The company funded most of the project itself.

There was clearly positive feedback from all involved. As especially positive they named the participative structure of the training. This project has been documented and evaluated by Cultural Office of Saxony (Kulturbüro Sachsen).
Example 2:  
"Hallo. Nazi" - Theatre, Discussion, Workshops  

Organiser: Theater Junge Generation (TJG) and Kulturbüro Sachsen.  

Target group: Volunteers of local groups and projects in Saxony.  

Aim:  
Theatre projects are workshops for creating new ideas and actions, and for being together in solidarity. Young people and young adults take over the power over their own actions. They test strategies against right wing violence in a practical way through role playing. By reflecting on these strategies they are transformed into concrete ideas for action and projects in society. Theatre workshops allow young people to experience their own potential, their skills and limits. Young people have the possibility to act, to help with suggestions, critique and questions and to experience and test themselves in democratic processes of debate in order to find a common basis for working together. The aim of the project "Hallo. Nazi" is to support young people in their efforts against right wing extremism.  

Realisation of the project: 8 months.  

Performance of the stage-play "Hallo Nazi":  
Young people experience the performance of the play "Hallo-Nazi" in their local youth club. After the performance there is a chance to get into a discussion with educational workers from the theatre, with the dramatic adviser, members of the Foreigner’s Council in Dresden, the actors and people of the press.  

Workshop:  
The next day, the young people learn the basics of pedagogical theatre work. They discuss the play and work on their own variations of the play they have seen the day before. The workshop focuses on self-knowledge (feelings involved with violence, hate, powerlessness).  

Method of pedagogical theatre work:  
By using the "Theatre of the Oppressed" method of Augusto Boal young people are asked to replay the play, to discuss and change it by acting. By doing so, they get more and more into the role of a participant, leaving the role of a watcher. They turn into actors themselves. During these processes they meet their own fears and limits but also their resources and skills.  

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• phone +49-351-8894169  
• www.kulturbuero-sachsen.de
Local peer leaders (volunteers) organised in a NGO (Peer-Training Sachsen e.V.)

**Target group:**
The trainings and workshops are organised for young people in the same age as the trainers (peers), the trainings have a modular character and can last a day, a weekend or a week.

**Targets of the project and contents:**
More than 20 young people are organised in the „Peer-Training Sachsen e.V." association. During their spare time they visit schools. They work with pupils on several topics: intercultural training of communication, mediation, solving conflicts without using violence, working against racism, and certain methodical inputs on moderation and debating. Essential points of the work, which is coordinated by our three main bases in Leipzig, Dresden and Hoyerswerda, are:

- Volunteering and voluntary work;
- Using peers (young people) to train peers;
- To train consciousness of both participants and trainers.

Self-perception and outside perception can be trained best, funniest and most honestly by trainers of the same age group.

**Realisation of the project:**
The workshops have a modular concept. Trainings can last a day, a weekend or a whole week. The training focuses on the specific needs of the participants and therefore allows even participating teachers or social workers to enrich their knowledge and experiences. Of course the organisation always tries to develop its work further and to further educate the trainers. Therefore the organisation also runs a program of further education for the volunteers, that focuses on developing new methods and on widening the issues we teach.

• **Contact for more information:**
  - Peer-Training Sachsen e.V.
  - Lessingstrasse 7 • D-04109 Leipzig
  - phone +49-341-35590685 • fax +49-341-35590686
  - peers@demokratisches-sachsen.de

**Example 4:**

"Workshop Europe" - A European Project of Theatre and Encounter for Pupils, in Partnership with Professional Theatres for Young People

**Organiser:**
Association for Children and Youth Theatre (Verein zur Förderung des Kinder- und Jugendtheaters e.V.), Dresden; in cooperation with schools in Dresden, Wroclaw (PL), Liberec (CZ) and Coventry (GB).

**Target group:**
The target group of the project is high school pupils and young people from Poland, Czech Republic, Germany and Great Britain.

The participants have different roots and cultural backgrounds. They did not decide on globalisation processes or the development of the European Union, but they do have to live with these decisions. What does that mean for the young people and their perspectives for the future? Which chances and which forces do they experience? What does a European House look like in their town, in their hopes and wishes and in their fears?

**Aims of the project:**
With the help of professional theatre makers young people work and act out their environment and their dreams of the world. In a fantasy laboratory young people from four different
countries of Europe are encouraged to express their visions and utopias with the help of the methods and possibilities of the theatre.

The task of the leaders of the play is to help the young people to find out about skills they didn’t know they had. The plays are shown and discussed, and connected during annual workshops, where all groups take part. The aim is to have a common production at the end of this two years project. The project has its final highlight during a theatre camp in the summer of 2006 in Dresden.

During the camp “EUROPA RELOADED!” a play will be developed around the following story: “A new planet was discovered, which closely resembles the Earth. This could be a second chance for mankind. A group of young people from four different nations is sent there, to settle and test this planet. What could their lives together look like, if they could start all over again? These young people were chosen, because they practice a certain art, that mankind knows for more than 2000 years: the ritual – the play – theatre. From time to time they return to Earth in order to tell people about their experiences and to carry out experiments.”

**Realisation of the project:**
Workshop Europe is prepared to take place from April 2004 to summer 2006. The young people are 13 or 14 years old at the beginning of the project. Languages for the workshops are English and German. In every participating country there will be at least one production every year. Regular meetings and workshops provide a chance to get to know each other, to exchange viewpoints for discussion.

- **Contact for more information:**
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**Example 5:**

**Regional Network "Tolerant Saxony" - www.tolerantes-sachsen.de**

**Target group:**
The project aims to reach local anti-fascist and anti-racist groups and associations in Saxony, bringing together projects for youth and culture, social-cultural projects, and associations for political education.

**Aim of the network:**
The project’s motto is “Together we will be stronger”. Within the network, there is an exchange of ideas for projects, models of financing, experiences and many other types of information. The aim is to learn from one another and to have fun with one another. A common lobby towards governmental institutions in Saxony strengthens the separate local initiatives.

**The network:**
The network www.tolerantes-sachsen.de is a platform of local initiatives and associations, working concretely and practically against right wing extremism, racism and antisemitism in its many forms. The network supports the development of a democratic and tolerant culture in Saxony. All projects and organisations within the network support the inalienable human rights, the freedom, dignity and equality of all people. As racism, antisemitism and right wing extremism contradict these rights, they are fought by the network without violence and in a creative way. Of course “Tolerant Saxony” welcomes initiatives and organisations that want to join the network, whether they are small or big, loose or strictly organised, new or established.
The practical work of the network:
The annual national meeting of all organisations in Saxony (called "Landestreffen") is both parliament and professional platform of the network. At the Landestreffen the aims and objectives of the upcoming year are chosen, the editorial staff of the internet platform is elected and there is an exchange of ideas.

The social-cultural grouping within the network promotes the cooperation of different projects. Tours of bands, mobile theatre or lectures are linked, with the aim to make them more effective. For example, when a band has several gigs within the same region there is less organisation work, less cost and a better spread of information.

There is a grouping working for further education that is used to spread knowledge, experiences and methods from the network experts. There is also a pool of trainers, specialising in the education of full time workers in schools, police, judiciary and youth workers. They offer educational modules on several topics such as "structures and strategy of right wing extremism", "training on antiracism" or "training of democracy in schools and juvenile work".

The internet portal offers the possibility to communicate local and regional activities. The site is securely limited to those who have a password. The site shows the creativity and variety of anti racist projects throughout Saxony. A "page of knowledge" provides practical insights. It contains information on sponsorship, actual statistics about antisemitism, and even counter-arguments for the most commonly uttered prejudice.

Two sub-groups plan two annual campaigns on antisemitism and about sports without racism. The campaign on antisemitism is part of the annual campaign around 9 November (International Day Against Fascism and Antisemitism) of the UNITED network. In 2004 there will be an essay competition on the issue of antisemitism accompanied by seminars, and other activities to fight in a creative way the increase of antisemitism in Saxony.

Contact for more information:
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