

Connecting Youth Abroad And Nationally (Cyan)

Identity, heritage and human rights: opportunities for recognition and expression in our environment

Black Environment Network (BEN) wanted to enable ethnic minority Muslim youth in Swansea to play a positive role in society by first helping them to develop a sense of Welsh, British and European identity through practical environmental projects.

BEN South Wales Development Worker worked with a group of young people drawn from a number of Muslim youth groups. Together they explored themes in sustainable development, human rights, citizenship and the environment through a series of workshops. They used materials created by the Council of Europe and DEFRA's 'Taking It On' community activity pack to generate insights for feedback to local community regeneration schemes. From this process emerged a vision to explore ways for Mediterranean heritage to take root in the realities of a Welsh climate.

Common European Heritage

The young people had the idea that they would like to make contact with their peers in Southern Spain, to get inspiration for a multipurpose community centre and multicultural garden. Drawing on Moorish design elements, which are prominent in the Andalusia region, the Welsh youth group hopes to reflect Europe's common heritage of Islamic influences on the built and natural environment. The name CYAN is drawn from the first two letters of (CY)MRU and (AN)DALUSIA and conjures the vibrant colour featured in much Mediterranean architecture.

Making it happen

In April 2005, 14 young people from a range of backgrounds embarked on a fact-finding and networking visit to Cordoba, Seville and Gibraltar. Ethnic groups represented included Singaporean, Iranian, Pakistani, Iraqi, Sudanese, Bangladeshi and Welsh.

The group met with their Spanish counterparts and discussed, in English and Spanish, the influence of the hot climate and the tolerant culture on the design of buildings and gardens – which were often closely integrated in Moorish Spain. They recorded their experiences using video diaries, which they are editing to make a short film to present directly to decision-makers and policy-makers at a public seminar in Wales.

The Future

They are now planning to team up with another minority group in Swansea, the local Welsh-speaking youth group, whilst *Illiber*, a mainstream Spanish youth group, is teaming up with the Muslim youths in Granada to cooperate



on "The Olive Garden", a twinning of peace gardens project linking Wales and Spain.

Drawing on language support from the *Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO)* in Swansea, youth in both countries will use the Internet to develop the CYAN Project themes, perhaps by

swapping links for web sites on sustainable development issues in Spain and Wales and translating educational resources.

They hope to further embody their cultural bonds by using sustainable development principles to design and create a multipurpose community centre and multicultural garden in each country, donating centrepieces for one another's gardens.

In time, it is hoped that the project could lead to a twinning of Swansea with an Andalusian coastal city of a similar size.

FACTFILE

- **Funders:**

European Youth Foundation (EYF).

- **Partners:**

UK: Black Environment Network (BEN), Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO), Swansea Singaporean Society, Imam Khoei Centre, Welsh Environmental Link Creating opportunities for Muslim Engagement (WELCOME), Islamic Students Society (University of Wales Swansea), New Muslim Network (NMN) Wales, Swansea Muslim Youth League (SMYLe) and Racial Attacks & Harassment Monitoring Association (RAHMA).

Spain: Fundacion Mezquita de Granada and Illiber (both based in Granada).

- **Target:**

Muslim youth from Swansea aged 17-25.

Welsh-speaking youth from Swansea aged 17-25.

- **Numbers:**

14 young people (7 females and 7 males).

- **Resources:**

DEFRA 'Taking it on' activity pack.

Council of Europe: Compass Manual.

- **Key points:**

- The CYAN project has gone some way towards changing perceptions of Muslim presence in and contribution to European culture by introducing young Welsh Muslims to Moorish Spain.
- Their hands-on exposure to the heritage of the region as an example of a racially and religiously tolerant society, and a society that witnessed great scientific and technological advances benefiting Europe as a whole, has motivated the young people to be equally hands-on in the transformation of their own neighbourhoods.
- They bring back with them the inspiration of lessons in environmentally, socially and economically sustainable design.



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