

Intercultural Learning and the Environment

Sharing project progress with European partners

The Grundtvig programme offers community groups across Europe the chance to share learning through meetings for knowledge exchange in different host countries.

Stiftung Interkultur, an organisation working with refugees and gardens in Germany, led the partnership that also included groups from Graz in Austria and Arnhem in Holland as well as Black Environment Network (BEN) representing the UK.

The learning was based around the development of a community space by each partner over a three year period and offered the groups the chance to compare processes and progress. The grant would support international contact and the organisation and travel for exchange meetings.



Making it happen

BEN identified a Manchester community garden project within the BEN network as its representative participant. The Woodville Community Resource Centre houses diverse voluntary groups, and the management team and the services users were keen to be included as soon as they heard about it as they were convinced that such a project would benefit their various users in an area with little green space activity.



Manchester Health Forum (MHF) took the lead, recognising how much their members would appreciate an improved garden area, and a garden committee of service users took on the responsibility of designing the garden, planning the work and delegating roles. BEN facilitated this process by identifying and linking the organisations up to local expertise.

At the first international meeting hosted in Graz by the Austrian partners, the MHF member and the BEN Development Worker represented the Manchester aspect of the partnership and heard about the work of the other partners. It was a fantastic opportunity to travel to an unknown European city to see how others are developing their gardens from scratch. The additional opportunity to visit different community gardens and discuss the benefits of gardening and varied approaches to intercultural activities for ethnic communities living there was an eye opener. Learning and experiencing the different social contexts was exciting and stimulating.





At this meeting the partners together developed the work plan, agreed on the most important aspects of all the partners' projects, and how they would monitor and share their achievements. They created a short questionnaire for BEN and ARGE participants that would help with planning and evaluating people's experiences.

In Manchester, working with Groundwork, potential volunteers were brought together for training to use tools safely and develop the garden according to the design. The Woodville Centre users wanted a garden to meet a range of different needs: an area to relax in together, beds to grow fresh food to encourage exercise and healthy eating, and somewhere to plant trees for fruit and shade and to attract birds. Various plants and trees from different countries were selected to reflect the countries of origin of the users. Stories about these plants inspired intercultural dialogue. The garden committee oversaw progress and Groundwork supported the hard and dirty work of the volunteers transforming the space. Everyone was co-operating and learning together to make a beautiful intercultural garden that they could all enjoy. Every step in the process was discussed and monitored, so it could be shared with the European partners.

It was a proud day for the Centre and the Manchester Health Forum when the partners arrived from Europe to see the garden for themselves and how well it served the Centre users and the local Manchester area.

The Future

The Garden committee at the Centre has taken on responsibility for the aftercare and maintenance of the garden. There is a well trained pool of volunteers and the centre has contacts for help and support, through this project. There are also European contacts as a result of the exchange programme.

FACTFILE

- **Funders:**
Grundtvig
Big Lottery Fund
- **Partners:**
Stiftung Interkultur, Germany
ARGE Müllvermeidung, Holland
Stichting NEST!, Austria
Black Environment Network
Groundwork
- **Target:**
Different ethnic minority community groups in Europe who can achieve mutual benefit through knowledge exchange
- **Numbers:**
30 Staff and volunteers at Woodville Resource Centre
- **Key Points:**
 - Meeting with other Europeans makes the idea of being a European real and exciting
 - International exchange supports a broader confidence building and environmental awareness
 - International work highlights the importance of intercultural skills



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