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The Shared Societies Project:
Leadership for Dialogue, Diversity and Social Cohesion
Building a world safe for difference

Replicable example of practice

Commitment VIII

Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society at local and national level

Suggested approach:

- Introduce citizens to materials that encourage them to think about their society and their place in it and the place of other identity groups. Also invite them to consider how they would want to see society in the future and the place it offers for different identity groups

"Don't Miss the Kiss"

Country: Bosnia-Herzegovina

Background

- Tuzla is a large industrial city which during the Bosnian war established a reputation for tolerance and mutual support. There is a very high proportion of marriages between people of different nationalities.
- The municipality has a tradition of independent thinking, self help and creative approaches to problems.
- The leadership of the municipality is active in seeking ways to engage with and empower citizens as a safeguard against nationalism.

Goals

- To gain an entry in the Guiness Book of Records as the large number of people kissing at the same time
- To encourage the population to have a bit of fun
- To encourage people to take responsibility for their own actions and lower some of their inhibitions
- To promote tolerance

Method

- The mayor invited as many people as possible to gather on a designated day to kiss their nearest and dearest. 6613 was the existing record for "synchronised osculation" in the Guiness Book of Records.

- The municipality prepared for 7 months and publicised the event as widely and creatively as possible. People came from other parts of the country to take part. The name "Don't Miss the Kiss" was adopted.
- The imam opposed it but this provided the opportunity to challenge restrictive religion. The mayor believes that people want help to withstand religious pressure. Someone has to give the lead and this event provided the support people wanted to act for themselves. It was described as an expression of love and not something to be hidden. As a manifestation of this an elder Muslim couple (82 and 78) took part and kissed for the first time in public.
- On September 1, 2007, 6980 couples kissed for 10 seconds setting a new record

Impact

- The event lifted the spirits of the people and gave them confidence in their own judgement and the value of tolerance.
- Gave people a sense of pride in their town and pleasure in living there.
- The religious opposition could not challenge 12,000 people. It was reported that when a senior mufti met a foreign diplomat afterwards he welcomed him to the "city of love."

Enabling conditions

- The city has a tradition of expressing itself
- The municipality has always acted quickly to challenge intolerance and to repair the consequences of intolerance
- The mayor is very active, visible, iconoclastic and popular and therefore able to lead such a campaign

Comments

- This may seem like a frivolous example and was presented that way by the council but it had a very serious purpose - to engage with and involve the public in self expression and in this way empower them.
- The basic principles on which the council works are three "Ts" – encouraging tolerance, talent and technology.
- As with many of the initiatives of the council it does not draw attention to the serious purpose of promoting tolerance but nonetheless this aspect is central and experienced directly by the population.

Contact/References

The municipal website (only in Bosnian) is at http://www.tuzla.ba/tuzla/