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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 IX

Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity and support local communities in exploring their identity, sharing their experiences with other identity groups and working together with those groups on common concerns.

Suggested Approach:

- Provide resources for the creation of local community organisations and for their activities to promote self awareness within communities and engagement with other communities.

"The Song is Over" – a documentary re-visiting Tartar, Christian Orthodox and Old Believers villages where religious songs were sung and recorded in 1980's

Country: Poland

Background

- In terms of ethnicity Poland is a relatively homogeneous state since the end of World War II. This is a major change, resulting from the Holocaust and the flight and removal of the German populations.
- The Polish nationality makes up an overwhelming 99.3% majority of the population. According to the 2002 census, the remainder of the population is made up of small minorities of Germans (152,897), Belarusians (c. 49,000), Ukrainians (c. 30,000), Tatars, Lithuanians, Roma, Lemkos, Russians, Karaites, Slovaks, and Czechs. Among newly arrived citizens, the Vietnamese are the largest ethnic group, followed by Greeks, and Armenians.
- In terms of religion Catholics make up over 90% of the population (94.8% according to church baptism statistics). Religious minorities include Polish Orthodox (1.3% or about 509,500), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.3% or about 123,034), Eastern Catholics (0.2%), Lutherans (0.2%), and smaller minorities of Mariavites, Polish Catholics, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jews, Muslims (including the Tatars of Białystok) and various Protestant communities (about

86,880 in the largest, the Evangelical-Augsburg Church, and about as many in smaller churches).

- From the 13th to 17th centuries various groups of Tatars settled and/or found refuge within the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. Although by the 18th century the Tatars adopted the local language, they maintained their Islamic religion and many Tatar traditions (e.g. the sacrifice of bulls in their mosques during the main religious festivals). This led to the formation of a distinctive Muslim culture in Poland, in which the elements of Muslim orthodoxy mixed with religious tolerance and a relatively liberal society.
- About 5,500 Tatars lived within the inter-war boundaries of Poland (1920-1939). The Tatars preserved their cultural identity and sustained a number of Tatar organisations, including a Tatar archive unit and a museum in Wilno (Vilnius).
- The Tatars suffered serious losses during World War II and after the border change in 1945 a large part of them found themselves in the Soviet Union. It is estimated that about 3000 Tatars live in present-day Poland, of which about 500 declared Tatar (rather than Polish) nationality in the 2002 census. There are two Tatar villages (Bohoniki and Kruszyniany) in the north-east of present-day Poland, as well as urban Tatar communities in Warsaw, Gdańsk, Białystok, and Gorzów Wielkopolski. Tatars in Poland sometimes have a Muslim surname with a Polish ending: for example, *Ryzwanowicz, Jakubowicz*.
- Old Believers became separated after 1666–1667 from the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church as a protest against church reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon to bring the Russian Orthodox Church more in line with the Greek Orthodox Church. Old Believers have no regular clergy (and no three-level hierarchy as the Orthodox Church has), and their liturgies and religious observances are conducted by 'spiritual fathers'.
- The Polish government is the only EU state which does not have an Equality Commission set up to deal with issues such as racism, xenophobia and discrimination in Poland[1].
- Inter-religious dialogue, is not prioritized among lay members of society, due in part to the relative homogonous religious make up-of Polish society. Ecumenical debate does take place in Poland at the religious leadership level rather than at the grass-roots level. There have been ongoing disputes between Polish Catholics and Jews which have been influenced by the memory of the Holocaust. [2]

[1] http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/pdf/en/Poland%20-%20SR%202007.pdf

[2] http://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree/Chrostowski_Catholic-Jewis_Poland%201993-94.pdf

Goals

- To use a creative documentary medium through which to recover and raise awareness of communities of a diverse religious and ethnic make-up.
- To work towards creating a space for discussion about religious diversity and promote greater tolerance of minority religious communities in Poland.

Method

- The project comprises a 50-minute documentary made by Piotr Borowski.
- He filmed the journey of a group of people from the Studio Theatre, Warsaw to villages in Northeastern Poland where religious songs had been recorded 20 years ago from the religious communities of the Old Believers, Christian Orthodox and Tartar communities.
- They looked for the people who sang the religious songs. In many cases the singers are no longer alive, so the documentary makers speak with their family members
- They played the religious songs to the surviving relatives and documented these encounters.
- The result is moving and showed the demise in terms of numbers and traditional activity of the communities of Old Believers and Tatars.

Impact

- The documentary has been screened in Warsaw theatres as well as in London at the Central School of Speech and Drama in September 2008 and is due to be screened in other European Film Festivals.
- The power of creative and professional documenting as a methodology of maintaining oral tradition and religious practices in rural communities is evident in the production of this documentary.
- One of the outcomes of this documentary is that it goes some way to making inter-religious action accessible at grass roots level in a creative and innovative way.

Enabling conditions

- The Studio Theatre of Warsaw[3] has been established since 1997 and aspires to use theatre as a form of integration in Poland.
- The Studio Theatre Warsaw received funding from the Batory Foundation Poland under the "For Tolerance" funding stream in 2007. The aim of the programme, implemented since 2006, is to foster attitudes of openness

[3] http://www.studiumteatralne.pl/indexAng.html

towards racial, ethnic and religious differences as well as prevent intolerance and discrimination.

- The Batory Foundation[4] provides grants to NGOs for diverse education and cultural projects that recover and discover the roots of a multinational Poland and preserve a common multicultural heritage, especially that of Polish Jews.
- It also supports art projects that provide a new voice in the discussion about Polish anti-Semitism and Poland's tolerance and intolerance, as well as projects opposing acts of xenophobia and racism.
- The Studio Theatre of Warsaw also presented a play entitled "Sources of Memory" by Hanna Krall which was based on the story of a Jewess who survived the Shoah.

Contact/References

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Web based version of the documentary:

http://www.studiumteatralne.pl/koniec_piesni/index.html

Website for Centre for Culture and Dialogue:

www.ckid.pl

[4] http://www.batory.org.pl/english/tolerance/index.htm
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