

The uniT - Project „Klimagwandl“

*A pilot project of uniT at the interface of adult education, active citizenship
and art in the framework of the Erasmus+ -project „Fusion of Art and
Education“
October 21 – August 22*



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Introduction

The Erasmus+ funding gave uniT the opportunity to use and develop its existing expertise in the cooperation between artists and adult educators.

Following the objectives of the project application, this project was about promoting political participation and enabling collaboration between artists and adult educators and participants. The end result was a performance in public space.

In summary, it can be said that the artists in this project proved how valuable they can be in political education work.

Project Preparation

PLANNING

The work on the concrete project began in a steering group. Its members were: the artistic director of uniT, the head of education, the project manager for the Erasmus project and the two designated trainers from the education and art sectors.

This steering group concretised the above-mentioned objectives:

- with the choice of the theme of climate change,
- with the decision to work intergeneratively - with senior citizens and students, and
- with the specification of a budget and time frame.

All other implementation steps were delegated to the project group.

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An artist and an adult educator took over the permanent facilitation of the group. There was the possibility for other artists to work with the group as needed if the budget allowed it.

FINDING THE PARTICIPANTS AND ARTISTS

The next step was to find participants and interested artists. To achieve this we used different communication channels:

- Sending information by email via different distribution channels (uniT lists, lists of other organisations and NGOs in the field of youth and seniors; Styrian cultural scene,....)
- Facebook
- Website
- Word of Mouth
- There was a multiplier event to present the project and the IO1. At this event, a leaflet the pilot project was presented and a leaflet was distributed to acquire participants.

CONCRETISATION OF THE TOPIC AND PLANNING OF THE FINAL RESULT

Once participants had been found, the project could begin and a joint planning of the work could start. In addition to the above-mentioned guidelines, the trainers set a time frame. Otherwise, the planning as well as the rest of the work was very process- and participant-oriented. Decisions were made consensually in the group, and the trainers made sure that the focus of the work was maintained.

The format of the presentation at the end was also left in the hands of the group. This changed during the project. Initially, a kind of theatrical climate conference was envisaged. But since good texts had emerged during the project work, they wanted to present them in a kind of spectacle with music. The group leaders had only two guidelines for the presentation: It should not be a moral sermon and it should make different voices audible....

With the decision to present the text, it also became clearer which artists were needed. uniT helped with the search. The following criteria were important for the selection:

- The artists should come from different disciplines: Direction, dramaturgy, music and stage design.
- The artists should have some experience in working with "amateurs".
- They should be able to work with the material and the ideas of the group.
- They should be young. This seemingly strange criterion was important because the rather young participants unfortunately "crumbled away" in the course of the project. With this criterion we wanted to strengthen the intergenerational aspect again.

In the end, it was two musicians, a dramaturge, a costume designer and a video artist who worked with the participants in the last weeks before the performance.

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Working phase

TIME FRAME, PARTICIPANTS, CONTENT

The concrete work on the project took place in several phases from November - August. There were different formats of work.

- 1) Workshops to exchange experiences and to deal with the topic. For this purpose, there was a meeting of about three hours every 3 weeks. (November - June).

The participants shared experiences they had made in their commitment to a better climate policy. These reached back to the time of the protests against nuclear power plants and the founding of the Green Party.

In the exchange of these experiences, the current concerns about climate change became more and more important. It was agreed to work on this topic. The trainers suggested different methods:

- Working with images about climate change - painting, metaphors, sculptures
- Reading a text on climate change, deleting everything unnecessary until only a few key words remain, then writing ones own text, doing the same with this text and writing another text.
- Writing Haikus
- Writing a text with the title „The climate goes into therapy“.

The text work was well received by the participants, some of whom also worked on the texts at home, which led to the decision to make these texts the basis of the performance.

- 2) Intensive week - the existing material was tested for its suitability for the stage, and possible forms of presentation were tested.
- 3) Sewing costumes - the "Klimagwandl" - 3 days
- 4) 2 weeks rehearsal
- 5) 3 performances

Besides the artists and trainers, there were 12 participants aged 22-75, 2 men, the rest women. The young participants who were there at first unfortunately "crumbled away" over time, the main reason being the study stress associated with Corona. Only one remained..

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It should also be mentioned that the start of the project and a longer period of the project was overshadowed by Corona, one had to meet with masks or only in virtual space at all. This made the beginning very difficult.

COOPERATIONS

We were very grateful for two cooperation partners in this project:

- a) La Strada - this is a festival of street art in Graz that included the performance in its programme, which was a great help in the logistical handling and promotion of the project. (The festival's promotional material reaches tens of thousands of people).
- b) A shopping centre in Graz: We wanted the performance to take place in public space, the cooperation with the centre made this possible

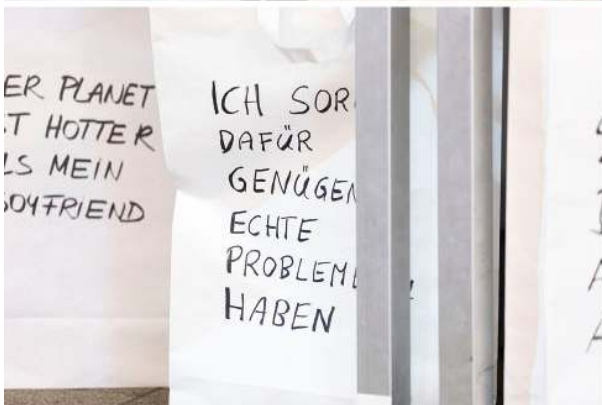
OUTCOME

The result presented to the public was "Klimagwandl" - a performance in a shopping centre. "Klimagwandl" is a play on words - climate change and "Gwandl". "Gwandl" is a dialect word for clothes. In the performance and in the work, the "Gwandl" played a big role. It was the unifying factor for all participants, they sewed this common "Gwandl" and they wore it on stage.

There were 3 performances of Klimagwandl in cooperation with La Strada in a shopping centre in Graz in front of about 120 official visitors and all the random passers-by who watched for a short or longer time. We hope that there will be one or two more opportunities to perform.

In addition, there are the participants' texts that express their concerns - in various forms, from rap to philosophical reflection. And - not to be forgotten - there are the participants' learning experiences, too.

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Reflection - Evaluation – Lessons learnt

PROCEDURE

In order to reflect on the experiences of the project and learn from them for future projects, the following methods of evaluation were used:

- a qualitative interview of the project leader with one trainer
- 3 rounds of discussions of all participants, the artists and the trainers recorded.

RESULTS

For the participants, one of the most important experiences in the project was that they had to overcome barriers, leave comfort zones. They had to perform in public. The stage as such, the singing, the public speaking - these were all different challenges that made one or the other of them realize their inhibitions. All of them were very proud that they had made it. What was important to them was the help from the group and the artists, the mutual trust that was built up during this time.

Especially regarding active citizenship, we consider this to be a very important learning experience, because it requires the courage to make one's view of things public.

The participants could also clearly see the added value of the artistic approach to this topic. One participant put it this way: "It's great when you can take a subject that is bothering you and put it into a form and laugh about it."

Overall, there was very positive feedback from the participants; trust, respect and communication were the guiding words of their experience in this work.

For the adult educator, it was an interesting experience to prescribe so little in terms of content and process, to trust the group completely. The group was given the freedom to decide and develop something while it was the task of the adult educator to maintain a focus.

The artists emphasized that they were very challenged in their creativity in the project. It was not predictable which problems would arise in the work, which resistance from the participants would be encountered, and which limits. One had to react to all these unknowns in a situational and creative way. However, the artists often highlighted that this group was much more open with their proposals than is sometimes the case with professionals. They said that the long run-up to the collaboration in the group was very important to make such a product possible at all.

The cooperation between the artists and the adult educator was smooth, there was no

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competition, no mutual interference. The artists had the impression that the group facilitators really supported them.

Some other remarks are still important for the reflection of the project:

- Participants who are working on something for themselves in a creative process are very vulnerable. That is a problem when you present something publicly. In this particular project, the result was text-heavy, because for some participants, shortening or condensing would have meant offending them. The question is how to deal with this in future projects. In this project, the confrontation with the participants was avoided.
- The location of the performance was a problem. On the one hand, a public space like a shopping centre is good, especially for such a politically oriented project, but on the other hand, it is not the place for a performance with a lot of text.



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