

THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL PROJECTS ON THE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN INTO GERMAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The paper deals with the study of the widespread tendency in Germany to organize cultural projects for the integration of children and adolescents from migrant families into the German society. Due to the constantly increasing flow of migrants in recent decades, the educational work with children and adolescents from their families has become relevant, since a significant number of them are likely to remain in Germany and will affect the economy and development of the country. Moreover, it is necessary to ensure the harmonious coexistence of representatives of different cultures today and in the future. The primary objective is to provide migrant children and young people with educational opportunities. Successful integration requires a lot of work, and various cultural projects play an important role here. One of the advantages of integrating into society through culture is the fact that the interaction with representatives of different cultures, as a rule, takes place outside the language, through the visual arts, dance, theater, music, etc. It helps in solving the problems of racism and discrimination. When participating in creative cultural projects, children and young people can overcome fears associated with the language barrier. The intercultural communication through creativity is usually carried out between migrant adults and children, who are the representatives of different cultures and nationalities, and the Germans, the representatives of the host culture. In addition, many children from migrant families have negative experiences in their home country (war, violence), which negatively affects their psyche. In this regard, creative activities act as an art therapy. The article describes various examples of working with children, adolescents and young people in the context of cultural educational activities.

Keywords: Working with children, cultural educational project, migrant, communication, integration, refugees

1 INTRODUCTION

The first decades of the 21st century were marked by a growing flow of migration to European countries. According to The World Migration Report 2022, the number of migrants is increasing every year and in 2020 there were around 281 million international migrants in the world, which equated to 3.6% of the global population (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2022, p. 23). Germany is the second country in the world after the United States in terms of the number of migrants (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2022, p. 24). A significant part of refugees are children and young people under 18: at the end of 2020, those under 18 years of age constituted around 38% of the refugee population (8 million of the 20.7 million refugees) (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2022, p. 45). According to the German Youth Institute, by the end of 2020, there were 6.7 million children and young people under the age of 25 living in Germany. The problem of adaptation of

migrants, especially the adaptation of children and young people, is one of the most significant issues from various points of view – economic, social and humanitarian.

When it comes to the integration of children and adolescents into the society of the host state, first of all, education issues are dealt with. “Education is probably one of the most valuable spaces which allows avoiding social exclusion and promoting social cohesion” (Kugai, 2022, p. 2). A significant number of studies have been devoted to the problems of migrant children education in Europe (Frick and Wagner, 2000; Harte, Herrera and Stepanek, 2016; Kowalczyk, 2010; Kugai, 2022). In this article we turn to a different aspect: various activities that promote the integration of migrants. We are interested in a variety of cultural projects existing in Germany aimed at migrant children. Out-of-school work with migrant children and young people plays a significant role. Young people have the opportunity to spend their free time immersing into the culture of the host country and, at the same time, use their own culture for further integration.

Integration into society through culture takes place outside the language, namely through dance, theater, music, visual arts, etc. When participating in creative cultural projects, children and young people can overcome the language barrier and learn more about other cultures. As a rule, the intercultural communication through creativity is carried out between migrants, who are the representatives of different cultures and nationalities, and the Germans, the representatives of the host culture. In this article we consider some relevant German projects in the context of the integration of migrant children.

2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the paper is to study the cultural educational projects which enable the integration of children and adolescents from migrant families into the host society, German in particular. The article describes various examples of working with children, adolescents and young people in the context of cultural educational activities.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The Issue of Migrants Integration into Host Society

Broad coverage in the media of issues related to the arrival of a large number of migrant children, their situation and prospects for further residence, reflects the significance of these problems for German society. According to surveys, the problems of migration, including child migration, have been the most significant for German residents since 2015. This issue worries local residents even more than the problems of terrorism, the educational system and crime.

Migrants are still sometimes referred to as “Gastarbeiter”. This term appeared in 1950s, when laborers from other countries were employed in Germany. “Gast” is a guest, with the assumption that someday they will come back home, that they are only guests here, and there is no need to integrate them in the host country society. In this regard, migrant children often face problems associated with their cultural identity and national self-determination. The majority of them cannot attribute themselves to any nation; they are left without a homeland and without a language. They no longer speak the native language of their parents, because they do not know it, but they are not native speakers of German either. Even if they are fluent in German, it is perceived by the Germans only as a “miracle”.

Most of the migrant children and young people in Germany have a complicated and often tragic biography. Many of them were forced to leave their homes, relatives and familiar environment. They face a lot of difficulties in the host country. Most young migrants coming to Europe find it difficult to meet their peers and adapt to new environment. Various organizations and associations in Germany create projects and facilitate migrants’ communication with the host society through art and culture (Rauch, 2018).

The cultural education of young people is essential for successful integration because, firstly, it offers various opportunities for communication and thus promotes language acquisition. Secondly, it also opens up opportunities for young people to express themselves without words, which is important for non-native speakers. Youth education gives children access to new forms of cultural expression and thus promotes mutual understanding.

Cultural education, in our understanding, is the out-of-school education, aimed at children and young people who are currently in the country, regardless of when they arrived there, the level of language proficiency and the level of education of their parents. Cultural education promotes intellectual learning through sensual and aesthetic forms, and young people can experience a sense of self-identity, realize their strengths and interests. It is of great importance when people feel inferior due to the lack of language skills. When taking part in educational cultural projects migrants can feel their competence and significance, which is important

for any young person in order to be able to reach success in life.

Cultural education facilitates communication between people, regardless of their origin, and thus carries a socially constructive element. In the long run this meaningful and society-shaping work is an important investment into society development as a whole. Cultural education is based on the needs of young people and their interests. It is dynamic; it undergoes constant changes and develops along with society (Rauch, 2018).

There are a number of problems here. Cultural education is faced with an increase in the heterogeneity of youth groups and newly arriving migrants, who have different social status, level of education, moral and cultural values.

The stay of migrants in the country can be long-term and short-term. Accordingly, cultural education of migrants must meet the following requirements: short-term meetings that do not continue, meetings in the medium term, which can abruptly stop and may not continue, and long-term stable contacts, in which social support is closely connected with cultural and aesthetic expression.

Cultural education is a potential for aesthetic and artistic practices, a space for meetings, where primary mutual understanding is carried out not through language, but through the means of visual and performing arts: painting, design, music, dance and theater. It is direct access to communication and the integration into society through culture. Cultural education supports and stimulates young people, gives them an impetus for their own ideas, helps to discover in themselves not only linguistic, but also other skills, such as music, dance, visual, mimic and manual skills.

3.2 Cultural Educational Projects Aimed at Migrant Children Integration

Today in Germany there are many cultural educational projects and initiatives that bring together children and young people from different countries and cultures, but with common interests. Shared experiences and mutual cultural exchange strengthen interpersonal ties and help build friendship. Such educational projects help to solve the problems of racism and discrimination as well. "Cultural education is a field in which a great deal of ambitious projects are being carried out with refugees. In keeping with their own self-image as active members of civil society, cultural institutions have been committed advocates for refugees and for their participation in cultural life" (Ziese and Gritschke, 2016).

Circus project "Circus brings people together" ("Zirkus bringt Menschen zusammen") for underage migrants started in mid-February 2017 in the Schiffer orphanage, where refugee boys lived. Once a week, teenagers immersed themselves in the world of Circus Paletti (Mannheim) for 1.5 hours, practiced various circus disciplines: juggling, acrobatics, rope dancing, riding a unicycle, etc. All participants of the project acquire new knowledge and skills with interest, setting new goals for their physical development and each time achieving something new (Verleger, 2017). The atmosphere in the circus is very trusting, which contributes to the development of interpersonal and intercultural communication.

The project team at the Refugio art workshop organizes music workshops and supervises small music groups with young people from different countries. The participants of the project experience a language barrier at first, as they speak different languages, but it is easy to overcome. Music is a language that is clear to everyone (Rauch, 2018).

In Hamburg, there is an international theater troupe consisting of girls from Libya, Turkey, Armenia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iran and Germany. They put on contemporary plays, often documentary. The main theme of the theatre is "Foreign yet close", so it is called "Fremd doch nah" (Roesler and Tatsch, 2017).

Sport is also a part of a culture. "Buntkicktgut" is the name of the intercultural street football league in Germany. Social worker and amateur soccer player Rudi Heid created it with teenagers who kicked the ball in front of their house every day. The children live in a hostel for migrants and come from various countries: Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and Armenia. Both boys and girls are involved. The initiative "Buntkicktgut" aims at giving young people of different cultural and national origin meaningful and healthy leisure activities and opening up opportunities for social and cultural learning.

As part of the project "Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point", young refugees are being trained as museum guides so that they can provide guided museum tours for Arabic-speaking refugees in their native language. This project also aims to facilitate the interchange of diverse cultural and historical experiences. Since 2018, the guides have also been guiding visitors in German and English through the Museum for Islamic Art, the Museum of the Ancient Near East, the Bode Museum and the German Historical Museum.

"Beeman – A New Super Hero Helps Young Refugees" is a 15-minute short film with the superhero Beeman,

who solves all problems of the young migrants with his super honey. This film is about young refugees who face a lot of problems caused by bureaucracy and racism in Germany. If they do not have a passport, Beeman will cast the "Global Passport". Beeman will help them to buy a ticket for public transport if they do not understand the language. This successful film project is made together with refugees. Although it is a fiction story, it is based on their personal experiences. Taking part in this project, young people were able to express themselves and tell about the issues that concern them (Vowinkel, 2017).

When choosing the topic of a cultural project, the opinion of the migrants should be taken into account because only they know what concerns them most. The life and interests of the young migrants can be reflected in any kind of art, be it theater, dance or visual arts.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion it should be noted that the current situation in Germany has become a kind of strength test for the authorities and residents of the country. A huge influx of migrants and refugees stirred up a calm German society, leaving it no chance to remain the same as before. Various changes in the society and revision of many rules and values are inevitable.

The huge number of migrant children and young people determines the migration policy pursued by the federal and regional authorities. The contribution of efforts and means to their adaptation, integration and development is a contribution to the future of the German society. First of all, most of migrant children and adolescents have a hard lot, various psychological problems and even severe mental trauma. They do not speak German. Many of them are neglected because their parents are sometimes entrusted with a huge responsibility for the maintenance of the family left in their homeland. On the one hand, many of these children already have life experience that is unlikely to be erased from memory and to allow them to forget about the difficulties they have experienced, on the other hand, as long as they remain children, it is possible to lay in them the foundations of a peaceful life, harmonious development, to help them pave the right path in life. What will be invested in the minds of these children at this stage will largely determine the future of the German society.

Projects aimed at cultural education of diverse society are gaining more and more importance as a basis for the integration of migrants. However, they are often underestimated. Integration processes should penetrate into all sectors of society because stereotypes exist everywhere, both among the representatives of the host culture and among the migrants themselves. A successful experience of the integration process enhances the desire to be open to new things and perceive the unfamiliar. The projects are designed not only to arouse interest and curiosity among their participants and to arrange events, but also to promote tolerance to cultural diversity. Such events help to realize that differences are common and unifying. These aspects need to be taken into account when it comes to inclusiveness and diversity in a migrant society. Integration policy is one of the central political tasks in Germany, which is seen as the task of the whole society. Integration is not only an idea, but also a desire to make some efforts, and it can be successful only as a mutual process.

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