

Exemplary organisation: Cooperation project "You always have a choice"

Eulogy by Yasemin Karakasoglu



Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and I am exceptionally pleased that the Threshold Foundation thought of me when choosing someone to give the laudatory speech for the prize awarded to the cooperation project Osterholz-Tenever "You always have a choice" in the category "Exemplary Organization" of the Bremen Peace Award, presented by the Threshold Foundation for exemplary commitment to justice, peace and integrity of creation. This is the first time that the Threshold Foundation, which presents this award for the fifth time, has distinguished an initiative from Bremen.

I consider myself very privileged to be able to speak about this project in this setting because, to say so before I begin, I am a great fan of the cooperation project between the Comprehensive School Bremen East and the Bremen Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. It is a nationally unique project, in which an internationally renowned ensemble has "pitched its tent" on a permanent basis in a so-called underprivileged district of Bremen, in order to set up

its so-called future talent lab in an excellent practice room at the Comprehensive School Bremen East. In choosing a rather unusual practice room on the school grounds, the artists not only have direct contact with the whole breadth and depth of life, but also a new space was created for artistic inspiration and cultural transfer between musicians and pupils running in both directions.



But it is not this self-evident and much praised symbiosis between school and an internationally esteemed orchestra on which we focus our attention today, but its great cultural initiatives within the framework of the project "You always have a choice", with its particularly special event character, developed and realized in cooperation with the whole district of Osterholz-Tenever. We do not only have one prize winner here but three, the German Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra of Bremen, the Comprehensive School Bremen East and the district of Osterholz-Tenever, fondly known as OTe.

These three partners have - and I can say that straight out and with pride as a heart-felt resident of Bremen - created a nationwide innovative project, which especially deserves this award. I do not know where else in Germany it would have been possible to create, through impressive performances, a symbiosis between different directions in music and art, and all of this in a multi-cultural district and in active cooperation with inhabitants of all age groups. This project has crossed musical, cultural, social and professional borders and has given rise to a change in an entire district culture and how it is seen by the public.

The project has existed since 2008 and can look back in that short space of time on three large cultural projects, each one a success in itself and which have spread their light beyond Bremen.

And I am sure that those present in this hall know at least one of the pieces within the project, significantly called "You always have a choice". The title of the project says it all. It is about encouraging initiative, opening new perspectives and finding the courage to make the most of chances given. It includes plays such as Faust II with the main focus on Germany, "Africa is on its Way" with emphasis on Ghana/Africa, and finally Polski Blues, with the focus on Poland.



They are performances which start with the reality of OTe's inhabitants, their everyday themes of happiness and desperation, and which reflect limits and hopes, but also broach political subjects such as society, racism, war, peace and responsibility. Due to the emphasis on a particular country, the performances always build an intercultural bridge between the countries and cultures represented by the inhabitants of OTe, a multi-cultural district, where 80% of all youths have non-German cultural roots.

The project crosses cultural boundaries between the so-called classic and modern, between different ethnic and cultural traditions, between a middle-class concept of art and the expression of youth culture, and breaks through the vicious circle of social deprivation and educational disadvantage, which shape our educational system more than any other in Europe. The project partners have created a huge, holistic and lasting educational project, putting into practice a kind of project teaching, both inside and outside school, and breaking down the barriers between pupils and teachers.

The performances always take place locally and open-air, and in doing so, in many ways break through educated middle-class forms of artistic production and presentation, usually celebrated in especially designed temples in the city centre. Instead the project moves them to a new kind of public sphere on the periphery.



The pieces are extremely original, exciting and imaginative productions of known and new material, in which every conceivable art form and artistic competence can be seen and in which every one of the 300-500 actors can show off his or her own personal artistic ability. As well as the pupils and musicians, a large number of the inhabitants of the district, plus organizations and societies are also

involved in this project, for example, from sewing costumes, stage design, catering for the ensemble and much more.

One notices the great enthusiasm and tireless commitment of the performers both on and behind the stage. In this way, the project creates a cross-cultural and social community spirit in a so-called underprivileged district of Bremen, which through this term alone, is stigmatized in a way it does not deserve, and which makes it so difficult for its inhabitants to find acceptance beyond the district boundaries.

The realization of this project shows how untrue the prejudices about OTe are, and reveals the immense artistic and social potential of those who live there. For example, I was very impressed by Nan Felicia Qauteng, the "floor designer" as she ironically calls her daily job at the school. With great skill and patience, she taught songs from Ghana in the original language to the pupils of the comprehensive school, as part of the project "Africa is on its Way". In doing so, she brought an aspect of her personality into the project, which would have remained hidden in everyday life.

The project translates into practice the intercultural thought that does not emphasize the deficits of people with a so-called migration background through target group research, but makes clear that, on the one hand, cultural diversity is a normal part of our daily lives. On the other hand, it offers an enormous potential for creativity and innovation, if we take the first syllable of "intercultural" seriously and see in it the challenge to meet at eye level and show interest in one another.

It is therefore a project which clearly shows that intercultural education is not simply an airy-fairy vision kept by a few incorrigible do-gooders, but a constructive, lively starting point for living together, based on conviction and the desire for mutual respect.

"You always have a choice" unites hundreds of people during the course of a year and, after a successful performance, now looks forward to the next joint music project.

It is very important to point out that it is not just about a one-off intervention, a unique cooperation, for which the district is chosen as a backdrop and which is left as it was before, once the performance is over. It is an annual cultural impulse, which fascinates hundreds of people during the preparations which last for months, and which changes them through their participation. A win-win-win situation thus develops between the three project partners.

This is all possible, not simply because the responsible project partners are always able to find sponsors for the elaborate performances, but also on account of the long term cooperation perspective, which is clearly shown by the impressive 20 year tenancy agreement between the comprehensive school and the Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. It really is a project designed to last. This offers the opportunity to really get to know one another and develop together long term perspectives and projects.

For this reason, I wish this wonderful project all possible support and recognition far beyond today's award.

