

Park(T)Raum¹

Für ein gutes Miteinander²

A model project for intergenerational
cooperation in public spaces

Outline of the project

¹ Translator's note: The German title of the project is a pun which is based on the double meaning of "Raum" and "Traum", meaning that a park area (i.e. "Parkraum") is at the same time also a little bit of a dream ("Traum") come true.

² Translator's note: Second title of the project, emphasizing the project's goal, namely the successful and peaceful coexistence of people of different civilizations and of different generations in public spaces.

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The intergenerational project “Park(T)Raum - Für ein gutes Miteinander” attempts to bring about co-operation between the official park attendants³ and senior citizens, primarily migrants, who work as volunteers. These senior citizens regularly contribute their share as voluntary park attendants’ assistants, cooperating with children and youth care workers.

The project had its origin in conflicts which had arisen between the residents in the neighbourhood and the users of a little park in the 15th district of Vienna. In 2005, the Gebietsbetreuung Storchengrund⁴ organised mediation talks on the topic “Bringing people together in the park”, with the goal of finding, together with those involved and affected by the problem, solutions for existing conflicts. Based on a commonly developed collection of ideas of the young as well as the senior citizens who had successfully been brought together, the Gebietsbetreuung Storchengrund, the park attendants’ centre Zeit!Raum and the Vienna Social Services elaborated a concept for the intergenerational project “Park(T)Raum”. In 2006, this model project was translated in to reality in two parks in the 15th district.

Goals of the project

- **Creating solidarity among the generations in real life**

In order to take the changes in the demographic structure of society into account, the project’s set goals were the development of new forms of bringing people together and the promotion of mutual understanding among the generations. While working for the project, the senior citizens were to be given an opportunity to assume social responsibility and contribute to the functioning of society.

- **Dialogue between the generations**

The goal of this cooperation was to foster the bridge building between the generations because after all, children, youngsters, young adults, adults and senior citizens worked together and contributed their share to the common project. By means of the intergenerational park attendants, the children and the youngsters were given the opportunity to actually get into contact with elderly people, to be on a par with them, and to exchange ideas and thoughts with them.

- **Making use of the senior citizens’ knowledge and experience for the benefit of the community**

Since each generation has its own particular knowledge, experience and skills, the goal of the project was to enable senior citizens to share their knowledge and skills with others, also in the context of arising (intergenerational) conflicts.

- **Solving conflicts together; conflict management**

The neighbouring residents and the users of the park should experience that their concerns and needs can meet and be met and that they are taken seriously.

³ Translator’s note: In Vienna the so called “Parkbetreuer” (park attendants) coach the children and young people in the park, arrange games and sports events for them and offer first psychological assistance, if need be.

⁴ Translator’s note: is the former name of the area renewal office in the 15th district of Vienna; the name was changed on January 1, 2007. The current name is Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung im 14. und 15. Bezirk. The Storchengrund is a quarter in the 15th district of Vienna, famous for its population of storks in former days, which gave the area its name.

- **Dialogue of civilisations**

Through the cooperation of the park attendants with elderly volunteers with a specific migration background, barriers both of culture and of language, which are jointly responsible for the existing conflicts, shall be reduced.

Execution of the project

From June to the end of October 2006 park attendants worked in Haidmannspark and in Dadlerpark on two afternoons per week. Along with two to three park attendants, two voluntary senior citizen migrants (with Turkish or Serbo-Croat/Bosnian migrant background) were present, and cooperated with the park attendants. During the working hours of the park attendants games and sports suited for the size of the area and the users of the relevant parks, were offered by park attendants.

In Haidmannspark, several so-called "Park(T)Raum-Cafés" and a Halloween party were organised in addition to the regular park attendants' programme. The cafés were meeting points where the visitors of the park could get together, sit down and have a chat, slowly getting to know each other and exchanging thoughts and ideas. The organisation of parties and events with the help and assistance of the users of the park and its neighbouring residents aimed at fostering good neighbourly relations and the togetherness of young and old.

In Dadlerpark, the neighbourhood care centre, together with the park attendant's team, organised a holiday game activity under the motto "Quiz in the Park". This activity was to take the children on an adventure trip on foot, familiarising them with their park and its surroundings in a very special and unique way. The individual quiz stations were hosted by park attendants, voluntary senior citizens and members of the neighbourhood care centre. Furthermore various crafting activities, such as pumpkin cutting, kite building, etc. were offered, and not only the professional park attendants but also the volunteering senior citizens were able to contribute their know-how and skills. The project followed the approach of community oriented work, linking and activating as an essential element resources which existed in this part of the city. Taking the situation of the people living in this area as a point of departure, the goal was to improve their status quo with lasting effect. The project was developed to reach out to several target groups across the boundaries of official responsibilities of different authorities. Furthermore, special attention was paid to the activation and involvement of a wide variety of participants. Mediation between the participants and conflict resolution represented yet another essential part of the project. The intergenerational work enabled the exchange of thoughts and ideas and model oriented learning based on the cooperation between young and old. Thanks to the experiences drawn from this project, it was possible to demonstrate which shared community oriented processes are able to contribute to an improvement of the situation in a part of the city. The project has furthermore shown that sufficient time is an essential factor both for the start-up and the development phases of these processes.

Results of the project

Creating solidarity among the generations in real life/Dialogue between the generations/ Making use of the senior citizens' knowledge and experience for the profit of the community

Within the framework of the project a successful exchange of thoughts and ideas between young and old took place: senior citizen volunteers easily found access to the children and youth and succeeded in gaining their confidence. The relationship between the elderly volunteers and the young park visitors was characterised by mutual respect.

The volunteering senior citizens were able to contribute their share in a wide variety of fields and respects, be it in games, sports activities, in talks with parents, in providing learning support or many more other things. They were important contact persons for the children, the youth and the parents and they were acknowledged both by the park attendants and the park users as bringing enrichment to the entire team. The volunteering senior citizens were able to give the children and the youth positive impulses, they motivated them to participate in various activities and offered them support with their problems. They were also highly appreciated by the park users as well as by the professional park attendants for their versatile qualities such as the flexibility, endurance and patience which they put into their work. They were able to pass on a lot of their own know-how and experience and proved to be attentive and sensitive observers of what happened in the park.

What was equally essential was the open and successful cooperation between the professional park attendants and the volunteering senior citizens. Being integrated into the park attendants' team and given them an opportunity to help, gave a boost to the volunteering senior citizens' self-confidence and self esteem. Through this cooperation, they found new perspectives and new goals.

Solving conflicts together/conflict management

The conflicts in Haidmannspark were tackled in several ways. With the help of the project, the neighbouring residents were given the feeling that somebody paid attention to their concerns.

Due to the park attendants and an appropriately adapted scope of care and attendance, it was possible to reduce the noise level during the working hours of the park attendants, thus creating a relaxed and calm atmosphere in the park. Long-time conflicts such as, for instance, those caused by ball playing in Haidmannspark was allayed during the working hours of the park attendants and sometimes even beyond that time. The park attendants also became important contact persons for many a neighbouring resident.

As a result of the positive atmosphere in the Park(T)Raum Cafés, constructive discussions took place. The goal of these discussions was to enhance the communication between the different generations and the different civilisations in personal talks. Neighbouring residents also came to the cafés and used the chance for a little chat.

Within the framework of the regular working hours of the park attendants and in the Park(T)Raum Cafés the topic of "Getting together" of park users and neighbouring residents was focussed on. During the course of the project, a continuing growth of understanding between neighbouring residents and park users was observed.

Dialogue of the civilisations

The cultural background of the staff of volunteers represented a substantial component for the functioning of mutual understanding and cooperation between park attendants, park users and volunteers. The park attendants were able to establish good contacts to children and especially to those with a migrant background, as well as their accompanying persons (mainly their mothers).

Due to their proficiency in the mother tongues of their conversation partners, it was a lot easier to gain access to the children, youngsters and adults with similar migrant backgrounds. The cultural background of the volunteering senior citizens functioned as a bridge and was an essential contribution to the enhancement of social integration by bringing park visitors from the most diverse civilisations on board in the project.