



Photo: Members of the Germany Intergenerational Study Tour pose with members of the Interest Group “13. February 1945”, a remembrance organization addressing the destruction of Dresden during World War II. The four German youngsters in the back row are students from a grammar school, a key partner organization of the interest group (Dresden, June 4, 2008).

The Germany Intergenerational Study Tour - 2008

A Visit to the Intergenerational Country

Final Report

By:

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Introduction

This report shares some of the highlights from the 2008 *Germany Intergenerational Study Tour* which was organized by Travel & Learn, Inc., Penn State University, and the *Projektbüro “Dialog der Generationen”* (National Service Centre on Intergenerational Practice, based in Berlin). From June 1-7, 2008, a group of seven international guests travelled through three German cities (Berlin, Dresden and Halle) to see various intergenerational programs and practices in action and to meet many of the practitioners, scholars, volunteers, students, and other stakeholders who are the driving forces behind Germany’s pioneering and dynamic intergenerational movement.

Our guests came from Japan, the Netherlands, Taiwan and America, with their expertise spanning the fields of intergenerational practice, gerontology, family studies, environmental education, and demography.

The Study Tour combined site visits and theoretical seminars to enable our guests to see intergenerational connections where they actually happen and to reflect on these experiences

in the context of social changes, policies and educational theories that are prevalent in Germany today.

The sub-title we chose for this study tour – *A Visit to the Intergenerational Country!* – gives a sense of what is happening in Germany. At the moment, “intergenerational” seems to be a magic word that sounds throughout Germany and seems to be a “door opener” in the political, social and funding spheres. An external observer of developments over the last two years in the area of intergenerational practice (IP) in Germany might get the impression that all activities that had smouldered in the underground suddenly flourished. Actually, there are two major policy programs with intergenerational solidarity themes that have contributed significantly to the enormous public attention the field achieves at the moment – the Multi-Generational Centres and the Intergenerational Voluntary Services, both funded by the Federal Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women and Youth.

Intergenerational practice has become a well known and accredited method but is still in transition in terms of efforts to professionalize and mainstream this emergent field.. The name “intergenerational country” was chosen to convey a feeling of the current debate and to share the sense of excitement about IP work in Germany.

Stops On Our Journey

Berlin

We chose Berlin, the capital of Germany and still one of the most exciting and dynamic places of the country after the reunification of East and West in 1989, as the first station of the Tour.

The *kick-off seminar* was hosted by the *Projektbüro “Dialog der Generationen”*, the National Service Centre and networking organization promoting intergenerational practice in Germany. The goals of the seminar were to get to know each other, share our motivations and interests to join this Tour, and gain and gain a sense of the background and current status of intergenerational practice in Germany.

The first presentation was provided by Dr. Andreas Hoff (Oxford Institute of Aging). Andreas outlined some of the social, economic, and historical trends that have contributed to national policies aimed at supporting families. He distinguished between “cheap” solutions to demographic challenges (retaining and strengthening solidarity inside and outside families) and “expensive” solutions (delivered by the social services of the welfare state). Afterwards followed a vivid discussion around the differences in early childcare policies and resources between East and West-Germany. In East-Germany, there is a broad supply of early childcare support services whereas in West-Germany, there is a relative lack of such facilities. The state of affairs in the West can be attributed to the moral discussion (and hesitancy) about starting out-of-family-childcare services for children under the age of three.

The second presentation was delivered by Study Tour co-coordinators Tabea Schlimbach (German Youth Institute) and Iris Marreel, (Projektbüro “Dialog der Generationen”). Tabea introduced key theoretical concepts and definitions in Germany connected to the increasingly popular term “intergenerational.” Iris then provided an overview of the various developments within the field of intergenerational practice in Germany. Ten years after the first survey, which detected 154 projects, around 10,000 projects have been initiated. The reason for this boom of intergenerational practice can be found in the social realization that dramatic

demographic changes have already started taking place and that various measures are needed in all social areas to build up the civil society and opportunities for positive forms of civic engagement.

The projects visited in Berlin represent good practice examples promoted by the two major policy programs noted in the Introduction section. In the afternoon we were welcomed by Djamila Younis (project manager) at the *Kreativhaus* in Berlin-Mitte which is one of the 500 national Multi-Generational centres (“Mehrgenerationenhäuser”), funded by the Federal Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women and Youth. Each centre receives 40,000 Euros per year for 5 years, and after that, they are expected to be self sufficient. Djamila gave us a very stimulating and engaged insight into the local implementation of the program. She outlined the identity founding aspect and the advisory service within the network of Multi-Generational Centres as two vital features of the program. Our Dutch guests were particularly impressed by the entrepreneurial element of the program which is realized at the *Kreativhaus* by handling a café, a rental of theatre costumes and a range of creative and educational programs.

The first long, intense and very hot day of the summer was topped by a beautiful boat trip on the river Spree through the centre of Berlin. We were accompanied by two witnesses of the *Centre of Witnesses of Contemporary History* (ZZB) in Berlin. The Centre promotes dialogue between the generations on contemporary history (National Socialism, post-war period, political, cultural events in East and West Berlin, life in the divided and the reunified city). Both shared their knowledge about Berlin and their volunteering work as witnesses in an informal way in small conversations.

The last site visit in Berlin took us to the office of *“Seniorpartner in School (SiS).”* SiS is funded by the National Program of Intergenerational Volunteer Services in Germany. The Association trains older adults as voluntary mediators in public schools. Christiane Richter (initiator of SiS in 2001) a social worker and two senior volunteers told us all about their work, including the trials and tribulations of trying to reach children and teenagers in schools as well as their accomplishments in reducing school violence and conflict.



Photo (left): Matt Kaplan (U.S), Fusako Ishibashi (Japan), Guei-ying LinOu (Taiwan), and Nike (Shih Tsen) Liu (Taiwan) clowning around with theatre props during site visit to *Kreativhaus*, an award winning Multi-Generational Centre in Berlin. This is one of 500 such facilities in Germany (Berlin, June 2, 2008).

Photo (right): A beautiful view of the River Elbe as seen from the dome of the Church of our Ladies in Dresden.

Dresden

The streets of Dresden seem to be laden with classical music and ancient stories. Paying tribute to its rich culture and history, we started our stay in this beautiful Saxon city with a guided tour. We listened to the history of the procession of princes, admired the beauty of the Zwinger and enjoyed the panoramic view from the Dome of the famous Church of our Ladies. The following day was devoted to intergenerational work. In the morning, we met with representatives of the [interest group "13. February 1945."](#) The name refers to the day of the Bombing of Dresden in 1945, where major parts of the town were destroyed.

We were deeply touched when the *eye witnesses* told us how they experienced this tragic date. An inherent part of the activities of the eye witnesses is their collaboration with a local school. We were lucky to have some students joining the meeting and were impressed by their deep engagement in the work of the IG "13. February 1945" and the close connections between the eye witnesses and the students. This meeting might even have a follow-up since the students were highly interested in getting involved in the Japan Study Tour planned for December 2008. [For more information about the Japan tour, go to: <http://intergenerational.cas.psu.edu/Docs/JapanStudyTour2008.pdf>

The second site visit of the day took us to the [Media Culture Centre](#) which provides an open (public access) radio that is used by Dresden citizens of all ages. Organizers decided to bring members of a youth radio group and a senior radio group together on a common task. The cooperation not only ended in great features but also in an understanding that generations can work with each other at eye level, using the best resources and insights from both groups. After a lively discussion with old and young radio makers we were given an extended guided tour to all facilities of the Centre. And our hosts had prepared a surprise for us: a live radio feature on the Study Tour and an interview with Dr. Nike Liu (Taiwan) about her impressions of Germany and her experiences doing intergenerational work in Taiwan.

Halle

Halle – the secret culture capital of Saxony-Anhalt and a city of sciences – was our last stop of the tour and it was packed with agenda highlights. First, we were invited to visit the [Voluntary Services Agency](#). Two project managers gave us a presentation of their intergenerational work and introduced us to two current projects in detail: the [Intergenerational Voluntary Services](#) and "[Lifeworld](#)". The first project led to a discussion of what is considered as intergenerational: something open for all ages or involving many generations? The organization focuses on the former, with the overall goal of creating intensive and binding forms of volunteering for all ages. "[Lifeworld](#)" offers volunteering opportunities for young people to create a consciousness of responsibility and proactively encourage them to get involved in their communities. The desired principle is as easy as it is powerful: "once a volunteer, always a volunteer."

The site visit in the afternoon provided an example of how to create lively and natural cross-generational exchanges with the help of the arts. We met with two professors from the [Arts Academy Moritzburg](#) and were introduced to their *Seniors project*. In a triangular intergenerational setting (seniors, students, university teachers), older people achieved practical artistic acquirements by painting landscapes, portraits and impressive buildings. For many of them it was the first time to work artistically. At the same time, the students could improve their professional knowledge and educational skills. For the Study Tour group it was

impressive to see the artistic quality of the results and to discuss ways in which community arts projects can contribute to social cohesion during times of demographic change.

The *Final Seminar* of the Study Tour was conducted on the second day in Halle. It started with a scholarly presentation on intergenerational learning by Maria Worf from the University of Chemnitz in which she shared a model for framing inquiry into intergenerational didactics. Later on, we were joined by students from a seminar group (“sociology of generations”) and their university teacher, Roswitha Eisentraut, associate professor at the University of Halle, who described the research focus of the sociological institute. This was followed by a discussion with the students and the international visitors focused on intergenerational strategies across nations.

Our last intergenerational appointment was a guided tour of the *Franckesche Stiftungen*, a complex of historical buildings that now hosts several educational institutions, one of them being the *House of Generations*. This house was designed to have a residential home, a family center and a primary school all within the same immediate vicinity and thus to enable people of all ages to live and work together and to support each other.

To conclude our last evening, we went to the Market Church of Halle to listen to the G.F. Handel’s famous opus *The Messiah* (performed in the frame of the International Handel-Festival). Some of our tour participants chose to stay a few extra days to further discover the land and the people of Germany.

Conclusion

The Study Tour provided a compact, intensive experience of learning about the intergenerational field in Germany. The participants were given a deep insight into current developments and the great variety of programmes in the context of sociocultural and demographics trends in Germany. At the same time, the external views that participants had on IP in Germany were extremely helpful for exposing structural and methodical barriers to intergenerational understanding. The participants were inspired by the programmes they visited and formulated a strong interest in the implementation of similar models in their home countries. However, considering the actual richness and diversity of existing intergenerational initiatives and the fact that we covered a relatively small area of the country, the projects and cities visited can just be a beginning of exploring German IP. There is still much more to discover in future Intergenerational Study Tours.

Evaluation

The responses of participants, collected through questionnaires, have shown that the German Study Tour to a high or even exceptional high degree:

- added to their understanding about intergenerational programs and practices in Germany;
- provided participants with some useful ideas for enhancing intergenerational work in their home countries;
- broadened their understanding about the intergenerational studies field in general; and
- helped them gain new international networking and collaboration opportunities.

Resonance

“I learned that every country is coping with this new situation (aging population trend) in the own unique ways, and Germany is really an advanced in this area.” (participant from Japan)

“It’s a great tour-- we saw different settings and programs. We were also taken care of by good meals and hotels. Enough information but not too busy.” (participant from Taiwan)

“I found the meeting to be very interesting, especially since for me the focus on specific aspects and forms of intergenerational projects was something new” (project manager in Germany of a project where IP happened rather incidentally)

“Wow!! Germany really is ‘the intergenerational country.’ The quantity and quality of the intergenerational work happening here is very impressive.” (participant from the USA)

“... an extraordinary experience and opportunity for exchange and networking for all people involved, guests and hosts.” (member of the Study Tour Planning Team)

“The visit of the participants of the Study Tour ... has been refreshing and stimulating. ... Events like this contribute to (international) exchanges and the chance to learn from each other.” (project manager)

“We were impressed by the kindness and the real interest of the Study Tour participants in our project, which we think can also be implemented in other countries.” (project manager)

Always welcome... to the Intergenerational Country!



Photo (left): The Study Tour Group, together with a students group from the University Halle, listening to a lecture from Roswitha Eisentraut, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Sociology, University of Halle (Halle, June 6, 2008).

Photo (right): Jacques Allegro, Tabea Schlimbach, and Atsuko Kusano enjoying a nice breeze on the boat ride down the river Saale on the way to dinner at the restaurant “Krug zum Grünen Kranze” (Halle, June 5, 2008).

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Local Partner Organisations:

"Dialogue of Generations" office, Berlin (Iris Marreel)

University of Halle (Dr. Roswitha Eisentraut)

Berlin

- *Projektbüro "Dialog der Generationen*, service centre promoting intergenerational practice and networking in Germany, (Iris Marreel)
<http://www.generationendialog.de/>
- *KREATIVHAUS e.V.*, a Multi-Generational Centre, (Djamila Younis)
<http://www.kreativhaus-tpz.de/>
- *ZeitZeugenBörse Berlin*, Centre for Witnesses on Contemporary History, (Eva Geffers)
<http://www.zeitzeugenboerse.de/>
- *Seniorpartner in School*, Seniors volunteering as mediators in schools, (Christiane Richter)
<http://www.seniorpartnerinschool.de/>

Dresden

- *IG "13. February 1945"*, current cooperation with schools to remember the destruction of the city with the aim to foster activities towards peace, non-violence and tolerance (Mathias Neutzner)
<http://www.dresden-1945.de/verein/index.html>
- *Media Culture Centre*, intergenerational radio feature; (Werner Jakubeit)
<http://www.medienkulturzentrum.de/index.php?id=9>

Halle

- *Voluntary Service Agency*, Intergenerational Voluntary Services, Lifeworld (Daniela Koch)
<http://www.freiwilligen-agentur.de/>
- *Arts Academy Moritzburg*, Seniors Art Project (Josef Walch)
Arts Academy: <http://www.burg-halle.de/>
Senior Project: <http://www.kunstmuseum-moritzburg.de/paedagog/paedago8.html>
- *University of Halle*, Faculty of Sociology (Roswitha Eisentraut)
Faculty of Sociology: <http://www.soziologie.uni-halle.de/>
Roswitha Eisentraut: <http://roswitha-eisentraut.de/lehre/>
- *Franckensche Stiftungen*, House of Generations (Jens Deutsch)
http://www.francke-halle.de/main/index2.php?cf=4_5