



Title

Israel-Palestine: for improved understanding **Brussels raises awareness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among secondary education students**

Basic data

City: Brussels

Country: Belgium

Number of inhabitants: 176,124

Topics: civics and living together, culture, personal development, dialog, education for peace, education on values, prevention of violence, tolerance.

Principles of the Charter of Educating Cities: 1, 2, 4, 13, 20

Summary

The City Council of Brussels, the regional Brussels authorities, the Walloon-Brussels Federation and the Action in the Mediterranean association, this latter being the driver behind the experience, are collaborating in order to fight against the stereotypes deriving from the importation of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict and to reduce the radical positions that this conflict generates in Belgium and Brussels.

Action in the Mediterranean is a Belgian association that generates initiatives that foster dialogue, conflict resolution and the galvanizing of human rights between Europe and the Mediterranean. One of the pillars of its activity is to support the peace process and reconciliation in the Middle East and dialogue between Jews and Arabs in Europe and the Mediterranean.

The Israel-Palestine Project: for improved understanding was created in order to make secondary students in Brussels (16-18 years old) aware of the complexity of the Israel-Palestine conflict and thus build greater social harmony in the city. As part of this project, young people carry out an exhaustive study, divided into two parts, during two years, in order to better comprehend this situation and fight against the stereotypes and lack of knowlwdgwe that accompany it.

During the first year the young people from very different socio-economic and cultural environments receive training and participate in debates, conferences and meetings with people from Israeli and Palestinian civil society. This work culminates in a study trip to Israel and Palestine in order to learn first-hand about the environment in which this conflict is occurring. In the second year, the students receive training to act as "awareness ambassadors" in the schools of their city by reporting back what they have learned from their own experience.



Weaving networks

Objectives

- To fight against stereotypes related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at schools in the city, in order to reduce tension between the different communities in Brussels.
- To help young people form a more knowledgeable opinion regarding the complexity of the conflict.
- To provide them with the tools so that they can transmit and share their experiences with other young people in Brussels.

Methodology

In the first phase the students participate in meetings, debates and cultural events in order to better understand the history and complexity of the Israel-Palestine conflict and work on the stereotypes related to Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The young people have the opportunity to come into contact with active representatives of Palestinian and Israeli organizations linked to the defence of human rights, who share with the students the actions that they carry out in their quest for peace and struggle against violence. All of this helps them forge critical thinking, reach their own conclusions and form their own opinions regarding this situation.

After this a study trip is made to Israel and Palestine for one week accompanied by their teachers, during which the young people exchange experiences, ask question, pose doubts and listen to the arguments mainly of young Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, the young people have the chance to meet and exchange opinions with people committed to peace, as well as representatives of social entities and the cultural world. During the visit the young people participate in filming a documentary that they will use as a resource during the second stage of the project, in order to present their experience to other students their own age.

In the second year of the project, the young people receive training to become "awareness ambassadors", capable of leading discussions and expressing their own experience to other young people in Brussels. Part of this training comprises preparing an activity to consolidate what has been learned, using different communication tools, such as, for example, putting on a play that poses the issue of reconciliation, under the supervision of a director.

During the experience, the young people propose activities such as visits to places of worship, exhibitions of photographs in the schools, participation in a Jewish Sabbath or in a breaking fast during the Ramadan in order to reinforce the understanding of the different cultures.

The experience is now in its third year.



Social and urban context

Since Brussels became Europe's capital city, it has been surrounded by an urban agglomeration that has greatly surpassed the territory of the old city, and has expanded into many others nearby municipalities, creating a city that now numbers 1,150,000 inhabitants. As the capital of the European Union, Brussels hosts 150 different communities who speak approximately 120 languages.



Grand-Place of Brussels

The young people who participate in the project, between 40 and 45 at three different schools each year come from very different socio-cultural and socio-economic environments and have very different ideas about this conflict.

Assessment

The young people who participate in this transformative initiative show themselves to be less radical in their ideas about this conflict. What has impacted them the most has been the visit to Israel and Palestine, places where the conflict takes place. The encounter with the youth of both peoples involved in non-violent civil struggle for the rights of their people and for local democracy and the fact that they can listen to their testimonies and share free time together, allows them to forge links of friendship that foster understanding of the situation.



Furthermore, the young people have new tools to let them observe the distorted treatment that is often given by the media of the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Moments of conviviality

Strengths:

-The young people have the chance to act as social harmony ambassadors by explaining their experience in different schools in Brussels. Thus, the first group of students who participated the first year shared their experience with around 2,000 young people during the year after their trip. The second group, who at this time are in the second phase of the project, have already exceeded this number.

-The young people act as awareness agents in their families and amongst others in their environment, which strengthens them as responsible citizens, multipliers and promoters of peace.

Future projects:

We plan to work jointly with Jewish and Moslem youth associations and movements as well as youth centres in Brussels in order to foster understanding and peace.

Contact

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