

“Bridging our differences. Learning skills of intercultural dialogue together!” conference Report



A Group Photo taken by Daniel Error

In our increasingly diverse societies it is now more common than ever to meet and work with people who are different from us, in culture, religion or social worldview. Sometimes it can be difficult to get into contact and dialogue with somebody that differs from us. At other times, we might think we are open to others, but at the same time we may lack certain communication skills for being sensitive in encounters with different cultures or religions.

Students from all over Europe came to Wrocław, Poland to learn about how best to communicate with others and to equip themselves with the knowledge to engage in others in intercultural dialogue. It was a week full of lectures, workshops, role-plays and discussions. People from different faiths to help one another and about how in their differences they could be strong. The conference was a strong hold for the message we wish to spread from the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) General Assembly “We are many, we are one. Sent to build Gods peace”

An opening prayer and a theological overview of intercultural dialogue led by the Participants and Panelists (Dr. Dagmar Heller, Jerzy Kichler and Remona Aly)

The week started with a participant from each faith community (Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism,) giving an opening prayer and explaining how their religion asserts that they should welcome the other. We learnt about the focus on equality in Sikhism and how all religions agreed acceptance of the others should be of utmost importance regardless of differences. On Thursday religious experts came to the conference to proceed over a panel discussion where we learnt about the reasoning for each religions differing opinion on the other.



The Panel Discussion taken by Daniel Error

An Introduction to the topic led by Rachel Power.

Rachel gave context to the conference by leading an introduction about intercultural dialogue. She used experiences close to her on the use on intercultural dialogue in Iraq to explain how intercultural dialogue can make change and how dialogue should be used to create and strengthen relationships instead of to reach conflict resolution.

Team Building Led by Thomas Gilet

We spent a good amount of time at the conference engaged in team building activities. A unique thing about this conference was the variety of participants from different faiths. Team building activities included acting out information about ourselves and making collages about our identity there was also an intercultural evening (where participants brought food and music from their own culture) which allowed the team to see that intercultural/interfaith peace could be achieved if on a small scale then also on a larger scale.

The placement of self in culture led by Anna Kudarewska

An important part of understanding intercultural dialogue is understanding your own cultural lens and how this affects the way you look at society and how and the way you react to people from different cultures. Anna from Poland led a workshop on this in which she used world maps from around the world and showed us how each country placed itself in the middle of the world map therefore valuing itself as the most important country this allowed us to see how we all implicitly taught to value our own culture above others and how we all see society/ people through our own cultural lens.



Intercultural dialogue led by Christiane Seehausen

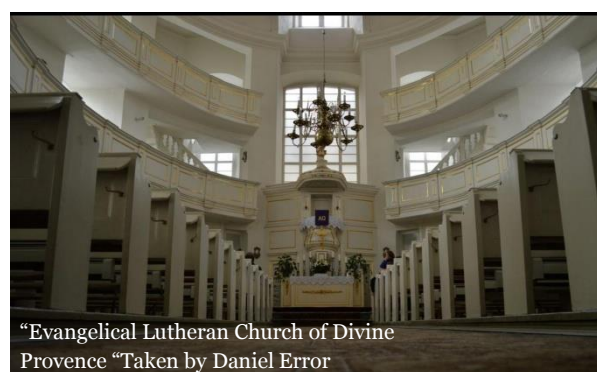
Intercultural dialogue can be a very intimidating phrase so we were taught about what intercultural dialogue is, through this we also learnt the process for creating intercultural dialogue, what is necessary to do whilst facilitating intercultural dialogue that intercultural is a long term process that will not be achieved overnight and that dialogue takes talking and listening to things that you may not want to hear or speak. Ultimately we learnt that intercultural dialogue is essentially a way to create empathy and to allow compromise.

Exploring the local context. Excursion day!

An excursion day gave everyone another opportunity to see how an example of interfaith and intercultural relationships could work. We went to the neighborhood of mutual respect where we were given guided tours and talks on four different religious places. We went to a Lutheran Church, a Catholic Church, an Orthodox Church and the Jewish Orthodox Synagogue, in these places we were again taught the importance of respecting difference and celebrating our shared values. We could all see the similarities in our faiths.



St Anthony's Catholic Church" Taken by Daniel Error



"Evangelical Lutheran Church of Divine Providence "Taken by Daniel Error

Conflict Navigation led by Vjekoslav Saje and Christiane Seehausen

When we were learning about intercultural dialogue we saw how others has used this knowledge and applied it to different situations. We learnt from two examples native Norwegian Women's right organizations working with Immigrant Norwegian women's rights organizations and the Bosnian war.



In the Norwegian example led by Christiane We learnt about how there was an apartheid between native and nonnative Norwegians that was played out in with many areas but especially between NGO's which often had two NGO's to serve the same purpose. For these women's rights organizations in this situation intercultural dialogue was used slowly to bring people together to build trust and to eventually form one NGO's for women's right in Norway.

In the Bosnian example led by Vjekoslav we learnt that one of major problems after the war was the destruction of what had been a successful interfaith society. We learnt about how intercultural dialogue had been used to bring religious leaders together to create an interfaith organization and that this organization now works to condemn faith based violence in Bosnia.

Participant led workshops led by Pip Sides.

The thematic content of the conference was considered to be quite intense so to split up the thematic learning we had two workshops led by Pip. One of these was a drumming workshop where we created songs that described our time at the conference and another workshop in which we were given a basic introduction to photography and then instructed to use our new skills to create album covers.



Workshops on dialogue led by the Preparatory Committee and Anna Kudarewska

We also had workshops on using intercultural dialogue. We had three workshops on the topic. Two were about respecting culture and the third was a practical example of dialogue.



The first workshop involved having stickers with words that describe stigmatized people stuck our head so that we could not see them , we were then asked to move about a room and react how we would to people who actually had these stigmas attached to them. After we had removed the stickers we discussed how it felt to be judged due to the stigma attached to us and thus how it was important to respect one another regardless of how we felt about the stigma attached to the people.



The second workshop involved “meeting” people from an entirely different culture and working out the best way to respond to them. Two participants left the group and when they returned they acted out different cultural introductions and beliefs. The two participants culture could be seen as offensive to most of the group so it was interesting to see how far people would sacrifice their own culture to make another comfortable from this workshop we learn the important on not only respecting another’s culture but respecting our own culture so that true comprise can be created.

The third workshop involved playing out a dialogue between parent and teenager. The group was split into two groups parents and teenagers and then the teenagers had to proposition their parents with an idea the parent not want them to do. Slowly the participants were told to change their position on the conflict by the workshop leader. Each change in position showed one stop in successful dialogue process. The workshop taught us what steps to look out for and what to avoid in successful intercultural dialogue process.

This conference was run by European Interfaith Youth Network (EIYN) and World Student Christian Federation Europe (WSCF-E) we are very grateful the volunteers (Preparatory Committee) for all their hard work to create a success full conference.

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