



Interview with Lone Leth Larsen

Project manager of ALTER EGO and director of The Danish Cultural Institute

April 14, 2008

The ALTER EGO project encourages young people (14–18 years old) to explore different and varied identities in their local communities by creating a double portrait.

The ALTER EGO project 2008 focuses on European intercultural dialogue, an initiative by EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture). The project involves 22 countries and encourages cross-border co-operation. Lone Leth Larsen from The Danish Cultural Institute and project manager of ALTER EGO, has been responsible for the ALTER EGO project since last year. The project was officially launched on 16 April in Brussels.

Has EUNIC made it easier to collaborate between 22 countries in Europe?

Yes, EUNIC has an extensive network in Europe. Working together in this project is both natural and easy, because all the cultural institutes involved are well embedded in the local environment.

Why has ALTER EGO based this year's project on inviting young people to express intercultural dialogue through the arts? expressing art for intercultural dialogue?

In a Europe where numerous nationalities are represented intercultural dialogue is important for the new generation. The age group we have chosen, 14-18 years, is a very important and challenging age. It is in this period that young people form their own ego and personality, and most importantly, their identity. The ALTER EGO project will hopefully encourage them to have a growing influence on how to work against racism and to have an open mind. Bullying and mocking as a result of misunderstanding is a big issue nowadays, and the project is also about learning to respect and think of others. This is an excellent project for schools and youth organisations, as it encourages youngsters to participate and break the ice – getting to know the unknown. .

What does the artistic competition consist of?

Youngsters are invited to make a portrait of themselves with their alter ego in a medium of their choice – for example with video, pictures, painting, sculpture, film or dance. They can even use their mind and body. The only restriction is that the written word should not be used. .

Is EUNIC planning other projects that are related to ALTER EGO?



There are several projects taking place in Brussels and Amsterdam in 2008. In January we had a seminar on culture and mobility, shortly we will organise a conference on writing in another language on the 24th of April, a debate about freedom of speech and a European film festival in the European Parliament from February until December 2008. In September we have a discussion on multilingualism.

What do you hope the youngsters will achieve and learn from the ALTER EGO project?

We have many goals for this project. We want the message of intercultural dialogue to reach out to as many people as possible through the website, the voting and by having youngsters talk about the project and spread the word. On another level we want the youngsters to think about the other person when they make the portrait, to learn about different cultures, backgrounds and to make them interested in someone else. We also want them to experience the intercultural dialogue by really doing it. With the workshop we want to engage the youngsters in integration dialogue on European level, integration between the indigenous Europeans and the new Europeans, so to say. We are hoping for double integration.

We also want to put a focus on languages and recognize the different languages across Europe. Multilingualism is a part of Europe's long history and still today Europe is proud of the many languages spoken, and wishes to keep the European culture of multilingualism.

What are the competition prizes?

The winners will participated in a 5 day art workshop in Denmark with well known artists. The other award is that their art will travel around Europe as a part of a touring exhibition. The winners will also travel around Europe to talk about their experience with intercultural dialogue.

If you were to give future participants any advice on European projects, what would it be?

For the youngsters: even though you are not an artist – make a portrait and be a part of Europe. For the partners I would say that it is very challenging in a positive sense. By working with other partners you learn to respect other cultures and experience cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. It is enriching and challenging.

Do the national cultural institutes have any projects planned for the year 2009, the year dedicated to creativity and innovation?

No, not yet.