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Integration Council

"More Than Meets the Eye": An evening celebrating diversity, new perspectives and untapped potential

An event at the Lernwerk Bocholt highlighted the strengths of people with an international family history // Expert insights and a cabaret performance by Fatih Çevikkollu provided food for thought

Not to judge people by first impressions, but to look beyond the façade and recognise their individual abilities, experiences and potential - this was the message of the event "More Than Meets the Eye - a colourful evening exploring the potential of people with an international family history", held on Tuesday evening at the LernWerk Bocholt.

The Integration Council of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the Integration Commissioner Bruno Wansing and the Committee for Equal Opportunities and Integration (ACI) of the City of Bocholt had jointly organised this special evening.

Following the preceding ACI meeting, Bocholt's Deputy Mayor, Michael Wiesmann, opened the event with a welcoming address. He welcomed the numerous guests and emphasised the importance of diversity for the city's community. Around 30 per cent of Bocholt's residents have an international family background. This diversity is a valuable asset that must be recognised, promoted and harnessed as a strength.

At the same time, Wiesmann made it clear that the existing potential is still far from being realised in all areas. Whether in the labour market, the education system or the housing market, people with an international family background continue to face prejudice and structural barriers. As a town, he said, the shared goal must be to provide equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their background, religion or skin colour. "Together, we are all Bocholt - and together we shape our town", emphasised the deputy mayor.

Juan Lopez Casanava, Chair of the Committee for Equal Opportunities and Integration, also welcomed the guests and, in his opening address, highlighted the central message of the evening: "More than meets the eye!" is far more than just the title of a campaign - it is an invitation to change one's own perspective. People are often judged by their name, their appearance, their language or their background. All too often, this means that the stories, experiences, skills and talents they actually possess remain hidden.

Diversity is part of everyday life

Lopez Casanava emphasised that diversity has long been part of everyday life in Bocholt and represents a great strength of society. However, he said, it is crucial to recognise this potential and give it space to flourish. This requires encounters, mutual respect and, above all, dialogue. ""When we stop talking to one another, we start talking about one another,"" he told the guests as they left. It must be possible to tolerate differing opinions and engage in discussion - the important thing is to listen to one another and treat one another with respect.

In the subsequent expert session, Gülay Gürbüz from the North Rhine-Westphalia State Integration Council introduced the "More than you see!" campaign. Together with Tayfun Keltek, Chair of the North Rhine-Westphalia State Integration Council, she outlined the objectives and messages behind the initiative. The focus was on the question of how the potential of people with an international family background can be made more visible and better utilised by society.

The campaign advocates against reducing people to outwardly recognisable characteristics or their origins, but rather perceiving them in terms of their whole personality. In particular, multilingualism, intercultural competence, cognitive flexibility and resilience were highlighted as valuable resources that are of great importance for social cohesion and the development of North Rhine-Westphalia. At the same time, the focus was on breaking down prejudice and discrimination, as well as on equal opportunities, a sense of belonging and equal social and political participation.

The cabaret artist Fatih Çevikkollu provided a finale that was as entertaining as it was thought-provoking. With plenty of humour, wordplay and a keen sense of social clichés, he took a light-hearted look at topics such as background, identity and living together in a diverse society. In doing so, he succeeded in challenging conventional views and, in a humorous way, inviting the audience to see things from a different perspective. His performance impressively demonstrated that humour can not only entertain, but also provide food for thought and change the way we view social contexts.

Ultimately, the evening centred on a shared message: people are more than what is visible at first glance. Their abilities, experiences and life stories deserve recognition and appreciation. A diverse society can only realise its strengths if everyone is given the opportunity to contribute their potential. During the informal discussion that followed, accompanied by drinks and light refreshments, the guests took the opportunity to engage in conversation with one another and build on the ideas sparked by the evening's programme.



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