

Ivan Mihalj

"No chance without language!"



© Bruno Wansing

Ivan Mihalj is a deputy member of the integration council of the city of Bocholt. Bruno Wansing, the city's integration officer, spoke to him and would like to introduce him here.

When Ivan Mihalj starts talking about integration and acceptance, things can get quite emotional. Born in 1959 in Beška, Vojvodina province, then Yugoslavia, now part of Serbia, Mihalj has lived in Germany since 1991. He is widowed and has two children, Marko from 1994 and Ana from 1996. He has been caring for his severely disabled daughter since the death of his wife Marina, who died in 1999 at the age of only 37.

He has been a member of the Integration Council since 2009. At first he stood as a candidate on the European list, then he was also active as an individual candidate, in this period he is - as a deputy - again part of the European list, "they asked me to come back".

Ivan Mihalj feels fully integrated. " He answers the question with a fat **YES**. "I notice that when I return to the "homeland". Then they say to me, 'You are another, no longer the Ivan we know' ". "I bought a house, I have a German and a Croatian passport". This came about when his parents swapped houses during the Balkan War and he "ended up" in Croatia. "My parents registered me, anything was possible there during the war. That's when I got a Croatian passport."

He was 32 years old when he came to Germany. He had already gained his first experience as a student, when he worked at FLENDER.

He first noticed the punctuality and accuracy and sometimes wondered. "I was a guest at the Kolpinghaus and was totally surprised that a couple each had a lid for themselves at the counter. That doesn't happen here, the man pays".

Language, language, language!

One thing in particular is important for integration: language! "I always recommend to anyone who comes to me from the former Yugoslavia to learn the language. You have no chance without the language," Mihalj is sure.

Young people are quicker. "It is difficult for older people to learn the German language. It is always important to make clear to yourself why you are coming to Germany. If you want to learn the language, you can," says Ivan Mihalj. When he visited his birthplace for the first time in twenty years, he says, the mayor asked him, "Ivan are you coming back?" The answer was clear: "NO, and I'll tell you why: because of their common history, Serbs and Croats don't fit together, they just don't understand each other. The language is also different. Moreover, they are no longer the people who used to be there. And, most importantly, no one took our side when there was a war. That still hurts me today."

Acceptance

For true integration, a lot of acceptance is needed. On the one hand, all people who come to Germany must be accepted. On the other hand, the people who have come to Germany should also accept the language, accept the free democratic basic order. "I have to get to know the culture, accept that they celebrate differently, for example. That is a long process, but it is possible." The person with an international family history must also learn and understand German history. This should also be a topic in school and subsequent education.

For people with an international family history, Mihalj would like it to be easier for them to get housing.

Ivan Mihalj came to the Integration Council through Emanuele Mascolo. "He asked me and in the end convinced me that things are democratic in Germany. Now - in the 'second' row, so to speak - I let the young people (he means Ivica Mazar in this case) take the lead, let them push it forward."

He believes that the cooperation between the city council and the integration council could be improved, but that it is currently on the right track. For the integration council, he

demands more rights and more participation.

A real culture of welcome

Ivan Mihalj wants people with international family histories to be truly welcomed. "This starts with the individual citizen, but also in the administration. The person with intern. Family history, however, must also accept the "bio-Germans". We are like this, I show you how I am and how I live and you show me how you live and we find a way together," Mihalj knows how it can work and is sure that mutual exchange makes everyone richer.

"This is what the world must look like: In front of me is a person with worries, with questions, with wishes... When I help a person, I myself gain. I like to help and win friends with my help."

Contact