

Juan Lopez Casanava

Series: "We in the IR"



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As part of the series "Wir im IR - Der Integrationsrat stellt sich vorstellen" (We in the IR - The Integration Council introduces itself), Integration Officer Bruno Wansing spoke with Juan Lopez Casanava, the chairman of the Integration Council.

Juan Lopez Casanava was born in Bocholt in 1979 as a Spanish citizen. His parents came directly to Bocholt from Spain in 1970. Lopez Casanava is married to an Italian woman - Francesca - and has two daughters (8 + 11 years old). "Three guesses who's in charge at home," he can't help smiling. Lopez Casanava is the owner of the insurance and real estate agency Lopez & Collegen.

"Yes, but..." was his reaction to the first question whether he feels integrated in Bocholt. "Overall, of course I feel integrated in Bocholt, but there are still situations where you feel like a foreigner here." He wanted to rent a film for his children in the video shop around the corner and had to show his ID because he hadn't been there for ages. "For foreigners, however, I still need the registration certificate," the video shop employee then demanded. During a small talk with a shopkeeper in the city centre, he told him about an attempted visit to a disco: "Today only for regulars", he was told, when he wanted to enter with his southern colleagues.

Contact and social environment help

"Social contacts in the environment are important," emphasised Lopez Casanova. "If someone isolates himself, it won't work out." He does not think much of "ghettoisation" or "China Towns". "We used to have German neighbours, so my mother learned very quickly how to make boiled potatoes and roasts". No one can touch his Italian mother-in-law's cabbage rolls anyway.

"Seriousness in the council and administration are important points for me when it comes to integration and the integration council," emphasises Lopez Casanova. "The refugee concept rather bypassed us, I would have wished if we had been brought on board earlier. That has improved in recent years, "we are informed and heard when it comes to integration issues.



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Communication and language

"If I want to integrate, the only way is through communication," the almost 40-year-old is sure. "But I have to want to do it, and I can't learn it just by watching TV. When Spaniards come to Bocholt and need a place to go, it's almost always "go to Lopez"! "Just like with my parents in the past, it's mutual curiosity that brings each other closer," says Lopez Casanava. In the 1970s, he says, there was no Spanish television in Bocholt. "Today, they have hardly moved into their flat when the satellite dish is already aligned and the channel of their home country is tuned in. That's not helpful for learning the language of the place of residence!"

As far as German courses are concerned, he would like to see an even more flexible adult education centre, "but we are in talks about that. I had a Spanish fellow citizen who was on the road all week as a lorry driver and could only come to the course on Saturday."

Don't forget your own roots

Another important issue that drives Lopez Casanava is the migrants' own roots. "One must not forget these roots, I must also be allowed to be proud of my origins!" That and growing up bilingual make people more secure. "I can then accept other things more readily," Lopez-Casanava is sure. "When I'm on holiday in Spain and sit on a terrace and see four workers repairing a small hole in the road, I think German and tell myself that someone in Germany could have done it alone. He has his problems with everyday life in Spain, with doctors, offices, etc. "I believe that if you as a migrant in Germany also think in German, then you are integrated," says Lopez Casanava.

Cultural centre for exchange between all

He would also like to initiate a cultural centre with the Integration Council. "I would like all nationalities, genders and people of all ages to be able to meet and exchange there," says Lopez-Casanava. Many associations would still be much to themselves. In the medium term, that could happen on the kubaai site, "but kubaai is still so far away".

Furthermore, he would like the many associations and organisations where migrants and refugees stay to take more interest in the city and what is happening in the city.

Preach in German?

This interest is not so high, he says, as could be seen from the turnout for the integration council elections. "It was poor," says Lopez-Casanava. Many simply did not know that they were allowed to vote and what they were allowed to do. The integration council, council and administration need to do more public relations work. "It would also be helpful - and I think this is particularly important - if the mosques would open their doors and preach in German," emphasises Lopez-Casanava. Topics such as swimming and sports lessons would also have to be tackled offensively. "But the problem is often that well-intentioned criticism can quickly make these people feel backed into a corner."

Politics is fun!

Lopez-Casanava has also been a member of the Foreigners' Advisory Council and did not take long to run for the chairmanship of the Integration Council. "We always want a balanced relationship between all foreigners in Bocholt, and that must be reflected in the integration council." Personally, he sees politics as a balance to the stressful working life, "politics is fun after all." Moreover, in the Integration Council and also in sport - he is responsible for finances on the board of FC Olympia Bocholt - there are always other opinions to consider. "That's different from here in my own company, where I have to give the instructions, and then that's the good balance," says Lopez-Casanava.

Room for improvement

Among foreigners from other European countries, Spaniards, Portuguese, Italians, etc., the Integration Council is quite acceptable "as soon as they get to know it", he says. "Otherwise, there is still a lot of room for improvement. He wants to change that with actions and events. "We want to have helped people at the end of the day. We have to pick them up where they are at the moment." The IR chairman can also deal with criticism. For example, he says, there have been times when the Integration Council has been displeased when it has not been able to send a representative to events, such as Bocholt ist bunt (Bocholt is colourful). "Yes, we have to show more commitment and presence," says Lopez Casanava.

The council and administration know that the IR exists. "Sometimes we are asked for our opinion," says Lopez Casanava. But that could happen more often. "In the administration, I sometimes have the feeling that some think we have the IR because we have to have it."

"Hey Juan"

Lopez Casanava is still happy today when he greets children and friends, whom he used to greet with a handshake in the kindergarten and in the ice cream parlour, with a hearty "Hey Juan".

Contact



Bruno Wansing

Integration/Soz.Leistungen und Wohnen

Soziales



[Send e-mail](#)



+49 2871 21765-612