

**Volunteering in the fight against poverty and  
social exclusion**

**Broad Based Community Organizing –  
Volunteering makes for better Communities!  
An overview of the three-year Model Project**

**CEV Conference; Brussels, 7 December, 2010**

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# **Broad Based Community Organizing – Volunteering makes for better communities!**

- 1. The basics of Community Organizing explained**
- 2. *Caritas* Model Project sites in Berlin, Hamburg, Böblingen and Bruchsal**
- 3. An overview of results**
- 4. Discussion points, questions and answers**

# Volunteering makes for better communities!

## 1. The Basics of Community Organizing

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### **What is Civil Society?**

- Civil Society is a product of human civilization – not a product of the wild. Its specific characteristics are plurality, autonomy, civility (status as a citizen), and public sociality. [Lord Ralf Dahrendorf, +2009]

### **Civil Society in the form of a vital democracy**

- A functioning civil society does not spontaneously generate – it must be proactively organized. Seldom has a similar model occurred in nature that impels mankind to coningle for the common good. Rather it is a work of immense subtlety. [Alexis de Tocqueville:+1859]

## How to bring diverse peoples, groups and institutions to function conjointly in the public sphere?

- a. Systematic citizens' initiatives on a broad, societal basis.**
- b. Public awareness of correlating common interests.**
- c. Successful projects emerge from dedicated campaign implementation.**

## 1a. Systematic citizen initiatives on a broad, societal basis.

- **Assimilation of disparate groups, organizations, institutions and individual citizens as a common polity.**
- **Ideological; party political; financially independent; long term.**
- **Minimal infrastructure: fewer professionals, more volunteers.**

## **1b. Public awareness of common interests is the foundation stone of workable citizen initiatives.**

- **Establish relationships and seek out individuals and/or groups who will team up to help implement citizen initiatives.**
- **Individual and group interests are the essential crux of the matter. Numerous neighborhood discussions show that there is significant interest in doing something.**
- **Motivating people to visualize a better community, set their priorities and strive toward achievable goals.**

## 1c. Successful projects emerge from well-implemented action campaigns.

- Establish a strong, “workable we”. Recognize that a significant number of active individuals actually form the “face of the community”.
- Actively engaged individuals implement initiatives in the public eye and they collaborate openly with state and economic entities.
- Positive neighborhood improvements can be achieved with dedicated action and effective campaigns.

## 2. Caritas Project Models at 4 Diverse Locations

- Establish workable objectives by which Caritas, parishes and church communities may operate within the social sphere.
  - New approaches are necessary to help citizens shape their social environment, giving due consideration to the development of the neighborhood as a whole.
  - Social flashpoints call for new concepts and approaches that involve the citizens themselves in the broadest possible manner.
  - Development of initiatives within the civil infrastructure. The role to be taken by Caritas and religious communities in that process.
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## 2. Caritas Project Models at 4 Diverse Locations

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### **Implementation of the Project Models (2006-08)**

- Berlin Catholic High School: Project Leader = Prof. Dr. Leo Penta with the generous support of “London Citizens” and US.
- The Institute for Christian Ethics (ICEP): Socio-ethical Assessment and Evaluation.
- German diocesan Caritas Societies and Pastoral Centers: Consultation and support in selected locations.
- Financing: Unser Foundation; Checkpoint Charlie Foundation.
- Coordination: Dr. Eugen Baldas German Caritas

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## 2. Caritas Project Models at 4 Diverse Locations

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### **Caritas Project Locations (2006-2008):**

- **Berlin:** There was an existing project in Berlin-Schoeneweide. Another project in Berlin-Moabit/Wedding is in the development stage.
  - **Hamburg:** There is significant experience among citizens' action groups in the St. George district. New initiatives are underway in Hamm and Horn.
  - **Rottenburg-Stuttgart Diocese:** Initially in Esslingen, then Boeblingen.
  - **Bruchsal:** An initiative is in the throes of development south of town.
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## 2. Caritas Project Models at 4 Diverse Locations

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### **Modus Operandi**

- Getting down to business: Individuals and groups relate what they think should change in their districts to benefit the public good. They decide on initiatives that will eventually need an organizer.
- After two years, the Initiative establishes a working network that promotes trust and promotes common objectives. In the process, inquiries and interviews are conducted among the citizenry.
- The citizens' initiative is partially financed by the citizens themselves.

## 2. Caritas Project Models at 4 Diverse Locations

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### **Modus Operandi**

- **The Caritas Society and church parishes actively assist.**
- **Those individuals who actively speak on behalf of the Initiative receive training at home and abroad.**
- **Certain individuals are actively recruited to implement action campaigns.**

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# What the Citizen Initiatives aim to achieve:

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**Berlin-Wedding – “WE ARE HERE”:** The park in front of the church should serve as a children’s playground and recreation area for everyone, rather than as a rendezvous for drug addicts.



What the Citizen Initiatives aim to achieve:

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**ImPuls, Central Hamburg: Remove the barriers that block the Subway exit to the city so that wheelchairs and strollers (push-chairs) may gain access without assistance.**



## 2. Caritas Project Models at 4 Diverse Locations

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### **Socio-ethical Assessment and Evaluation**

- **High standards and ethics are core principles of the endeavor.**
- **Prime socio-ethical concepts emerging from broad practical experience are independent co-operation and liberal participation.**
- **Foster energetic volunteers as anchor persons, project motivators and consultants.**

### **Pastoral/Theological Consultation and Support**

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### 3. An Overview of Results: Project Implementation

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- Prof Penta began with exhaustive consultations to set the founding principles at all Project Model sites. Public confidence was an indispensable precursor to actual project implementation.
- Vibrant Citizen's Initiatives in Berlin and Hamburg were marked by persistently strong public interest.
- No initiatives were created in Bruchsal and Böblingen, as such. However, the experience gained in community organizing was significant and invaluable.
- 100 Key Personnel were instructed in weekend seminars and 2 new organizers were trained. Seminars were held in Berlin, Esslingen, London, and the United States.

# 3. An Overview of Results

- **Approx. 15 institutions with a complement of 200 persons founded “ImPuls-Mitte”, the citizens’ initiative in Hamburg.**
- **Many residents helped identify the issues for the initiative. 50 discussions, each with a “panel” of 10, produced 7 issues in 3 weeks.**
- **In an evaluation session 20 persons reached agreement on how to begin the initiative with 3 key issues.**



# 3. An Overview of Results

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## Citizen's Initiative

**“Wir Sind Da” – “We Are Here” – in Berlin Moabit**

■ **Approx. 40 institutions**

■ **a complement  
of 1,000 persons  
founded the  
Berlin-Wedding  
initiative.**



# 3. An Overview of Results

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## **Observations from interviews with active participants.**

- Motivator: Formulate the plan – not just help with it. Enhance personal interest. “I want to be proactive, and work with like-minded persons to formulate ideas!”
  - People who are interested in the concepts will get involved: immigrants, newly moved, natives, unemployed.
  - Faith-based: Active Christians (and other altruistic faiths); combat the root problems; open-door religious communities in urban districts; lively ecumenism.
  - Active participants are members of religious communities and other associations.
  - Values: Mutual objectives • liberal participation • independent
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## Who are the participants in the Citizen's Initiative?

- Residents, immigrants, the newly moved, locals – all have a voice, and anyone can join. Social classes and social strata are irrelevant.
- Institutions: parishes, mosques, schools, companies, stores, building cooperatives, etc. can join.
- Associations: not just their “representatives” – their actual members are far more important. It can be difficult to motivate and mobilize associations.

## What binds divergent interest groups together?

- A common purpose.

## **The National Integration Plan in Germany:**

People with an immigrant background need support to integrate properly. The CO Project engages people in districts where they live, regardless of color, religion, ethnicity or their tenure in Germany. Christians and Moslems work side by side.

## **Empowerment Initiative:**

■ Qualifying people to talk with civil servants, the mayor or council members in order to represent their own or other citizen's causes and/or petitions with confidence.

## **Partnership Initiative:**

■ Involve the actual residents in the districts they call home.

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# 4. Points for Discussion

## Main discussion points

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- What experiences can workshop participants from other countries offer to illustrate the effectiveness of volunteerism in fostering better communities?
- How effective are volunteer centers, parishes and other religious and social communities in motivating and training neighborhood residents? How do you involve the socially or economically disadvantaged to become proactive in their own behalf?
- How about getting people motivated to use their spare time? Instead of watching TV, getting people to come up with constructive ideas and devoting free time to the improvement of their own, local environment?

**Many thanks for your participation!**

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■ **In print:**

***Community Organizing – People Designing Their Own Environment.* [Editor: Dr. Eugen Baldas]  
Lambertus Publishing, Freiburg, Germany, 2010.**



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