STEP 4: FACING THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE SCENES

Aims
- To focus the group’s attention on the actual phenomena behind the image surface
- To engage with stereotyped perceptions “encapsulated” in the images
- To face real people from the country being explored through showing and discussing the cartoons with them

The work on the cartoon is likely to touch on sensitive or puzzling issues from the learners’ point of view. These perceptions need to be expressed and depicted in the comic in a way inviting a response from the peers from the other country. In the case of our workshop this was possible due to the Grundtvig learning partnership grant which created opportunities for both face to face and on-line discussions among the learners. In the case of workshops which cannot benefit from such a scheme, publishing the comic on-line and inviting comments might also bring meaningful response. The language barrier can be a problem which we also faced with our group. In such cases translating and interpreting is necessary to help the learners fully benefit from the exchange.

Octoberfest and Berlin Love Parade were chosen by the learners as two puzzling cases. The first one as clashing with a stereotyped perception of German “ordnung” and provoking jokes: “What beer!”, “What order!”. And the other one as a point of departure for facing shifts in social norms: “Shall we join them?” – “But we’re not properly undressed”.

The nature of work on a comic is likely to elicit humor and fun in the classroom rather than sober exchange of monologues. And here lies the main challenge for the facilitator – to be able to engage in the lively group interactions and channel them into creative and meaningful expression. The prospect of showing the work to the partners from “out there” has a certain limiting function by itself. The jokes have to touch on valid issues and cannot be offensive to the others. They also need to be understood in order to bring a meaningful response. Thus the very context of the work on the comic requires the learners to practice the skills of communication, right from the beginning of formulating the initial speech bubbles.