



## KULToUR – an interaction project

### - because dialogue matters for successful co-existence

*A bus carrying a library from town to town is quite common in Denmark. But in the KULToUR (an acronym for 'culture on tour')-bus the books to be borrowed are 20 young people. Originally, they are all from other countries than Denmark. The purpose of KULToUR is to foster dialogue between people of different origins and to bring this dialogue to the daily lives of the people of Denmark. At festivals, in the square, the market place, or the town hall square.*

KULToUR is quite simply a human library. It facilitates intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding between young Danish people with other ethnic backgrounds than Danish ("the books") and the average Dane ("the borrower"). The loan is free. It is intended to create a focus on differences as well as similarities - mine, yours and our world. The aim of the dialogue is to put prejudices into perspective and satisfy your curiosity about the other side of the cultural divides. KULToUR aims for room for diversity, respect, and tolerance in Denmark. By offering an inviting reading area, workshops (e.g. an open-to-join kitchen of world food and music sessions), ethic rules for the library, and assistance from real librarians, KULToUR facilitates truly inspiring dialogues for both "books" and "borrowers".

We, as the organisers of the project, believe that the debate about immigrants and refugees in Denmark has taken a very problematic form. We do not talk *to* each other, but *about* each other. The very limited knowledge of people from other countries that the average Dane holds is one of the reasons for this unfortunate tendency. By creating the mobile human library we are hoping to provide the Danish population with an opportunity to meet people who origin from Iraq, Iran, Bosnia, India, Turkey, Palestine, Somalia, Greece or Lebanon: To listen to their stories, understand why these individuals are in Denmark and find out who is really hidden behind their different faces. Integration in Denmark has to be taken to the street-level, where people go about. We believe that we do that by bringing 20 young people with various stories and opinions to different city centres of Denmark. That is our contribution to the making of greater understanding between people in Denmark.

KULToUR has been a tremendous success. On its tour around seven main cities in five days in Denmark in August 2007 it had more than 700 officially reported book borrows. It had impressive media coverage in the Danish news (more than 25 stories reported). Influential persons in Denmark such as Rikke Hvilshøj (MP and Minister of Integration at the time of the project), Nhaser Khader (MP), Lars Kolind (debater of societal issues), Rushi Rashid (debater of societal issues), and Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen (MP) commented positively on the project. 40,000 post cards and 1500 posters were distributed at cafés, cinemas etc. in Denmark. The official homepage ([www.kul-tour.com](http://www.kul-tour.com)) including a discussion forum and a blog has until now been visited by more than 5000 people. Organisations from Belgium, Norway and Sweden is interested in copying the concept of KULToUR to similar national projects in their countries. Finally, the 25 deeply involved volunteers in the library brought together from very diverse ethnic background have been united in strong bonds of friendship.

KULToUR has a clear European dimension as well. It addresses one of the core challenges of today's Europe: the successful integration of newcomers in existing, European societies. This is achieved by bringing the fundamental principle of all-equal-all-different to the fore. Thus, KULToUR emphasises European values such as equal opportunities, co-existence, and the respect for other cultures than





your own. The volunteers engaged in KULToUR is brought together from a diverse origin of countries in and around Europe. Consequently, on one hand, the project empowers the volunteers to become truly European citizens. They get a feeling of satisfaction by contributing positively to the society. And maybe most importantly, KULToUR makes strong bonds of friendship across European cultures between the volunteers involved. On the other hand, it broadens the horizon for citizens of Denmark borrowing the books. Indeed, the project improves their understanding of the culture and values of other European citizens. It prepares Danes for the increasing freedom of movement in general and the Eastern enlargement of the EU in particular. Moreover, KULToUR has a great potential to be transformed into a human library serving citizens all around Europe. In a time of significant enlargements, citizens of Europe need inter-cultural dialogue and interaction across borders more than anytime before.

The project has been organised by two members of the Danish YMCA Scout Movement, Henrik and Michael Seeberg. They study political science at respectively London School of Economics, UK and Aarhus University, Denmark. The project originates from an initiative by The Danish YMCA Scout Movement, *Scout Academy*. The project has been build up in cooperation with and with financial support from The Danish YMCA Scout Movement, "Hallo Danmark07" by Red Cross Asylum, The Danish Youth Council, The Ministry of Integration, The Y'Mens Club in Marselisborg, and Aarhus Public Library as well as the Public Libraries in Aalborg, Esbjerg, Odense, Kolding, Randers, and Copenhagen.

