

7th annual conference of the Rainbow Cities Network

24th & 25th October 2019, Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg)

Official welcome

Welcoming the members of the Rainbow Cities Network, Mayor Georges Mischo and Pierre-Marc Knaff, Deputy Mayor in charge of Cultural Affairs and Anti-discrimination, point out that Esch, as the smallest member city, has joined the network in 2016 and has learnt a lot from the bigger cities in the meantime.

Esch prides itself on being a very open minded and tolerant city, as well as on hosting the only Pride event in Luxembourg. The small Grand Duchy as a whole is indeed an open-minded country, as gender equality is anchored in the culture and the law on same sex marriages was passed without any major complications.

In his video message, Prime Minister Xavier Bettel insists on the fact that being different is not a choice, but that the acceptance of being different is one. Knowing that tolerance is written in capital letters in your city is a circumstance that makes you feel safer. This is crucial in the context of the peace project called Europe. Europe is a place where we know that we have rights and we have to fight for these rights, as well as for a Europe of values and freedom.

First working session

1. Review by the board – what happened since Barcelona?

Chairwoman Juliane Steeger (Hannover) presents the new coordinator of the network, Manuel Rosas Vázquez, and points out that the network will have to elect a new member of the board during the conference, as Philippe Lasnier from Paris left his office without any successor.

Since the last conference in Barcelona, the board has had some major administrative tasks to fulfil:

- Found an association
- Hire a coordinator
- Create a bank account
- Invoicing and tax report

The City of Amsterdam and Rotterdam created the association in June 2019, while the bank account is still in creation, as the procedure requires a background check of all the board members.

The board has been trying to solve the Italian dilemma, i.e. the fact that, because of the creation of an association, it has become illegal for the Italian members to participate in the network unless their Mayors or a political representative represents them (cf. second working session, chapter 3, working group “politicians in the RCN”).

The new coordinator, Manuel Rosas Vázquez will take office in January 2020. The hiring process also took quite long, as finding a partner organisation (QueerNet Niedersachsen) took 5 months before the job proposal could be written. The position will consist of 30 hours a week working for the network. The board opted for this procedure, on the one hand because the Rainbow Cities Network does not want to be an employer and deal with taxes, on the other hand, because of health reasons, they do not want to have their coordinator sitting by themselves, without anyone noticing if anything should happen to them in an office. The network could also act as employer as it will get more stable and as soon as it will be able to afford it. It was also mandatory to find a person that would have their residence and a work permit in Germany.

The selection jury was composed of Juliane Steeger, Danny Jacqmot, Grace Proch from Hannover and the head of QueerNet Niedersachsen.

Rosas Vázquez is originally from Mexico but lives in Germany. He likes to do impactful work, which is why he felt drawn to the job and the work of the network does. He disposes of a 10-year experience in the public sector. He has for instance worked within the UN AIDS and has hosted the WorldMun 2008 with Harvard University.

According to Rosas Vázquez, the main challenge of the job will be to accommodate the multitude of ideas and opinions within a big network like Rainbow Cities, but he believes that being dedicated to the network full time will improve communication and structure within the network.

Election of a new board member

In order to vote a new board member, Philippe Lasnier has to be dismissed first.

The proposal gets 21 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 0 abstentions. Philippe Lasnier is hence officially dismissed.

Guillaume Mandicourt for Geneva is candidate to become a new member of the board.

The proposal of Guillaume Mandicourt becoming a new board member gets 21 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 0 abstentions. Guillaume Mandicourt is hence officially a new member of the board.

2. Communicating as a network: which acronym do we use?

Some members of the network have encountered problems explaining the work that they do, as there are many acronym options (LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQI+...), which are confusing for the outside world. The network should aim to overcome this ambiguity.

Labelling may also generate criticism that dedicated organisations only work for gay people in some cases.

The term SOGIESC (for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics) opens more possibilities but is used rather in academic contexts.

The definition of queer itself is not clear and varies heavily between countries, while it may not even exist in some countries (e.g. Norway).

Intersex people do not think they belong into any of the common acronyms, as they do not feel that their condition is related to LGBTQ issues as such.

While most cities argue that the acronym used by the network should be as inclusive and comprehensive as possible or align to the most used, Guillaume Mandicourt insists that if the network makes use of certain designations like intersex and queer, this has to be backed up by content and concrete projects, in order to avoid any gaps.

The board will make a concrete proposal, based on this discussion.

3. World café: common grounds

The members work in four groups, in order to generate ideas around four specific questions:

1. Getting global – implications for the future of the network (how to work efficiently together)?
2. Welcoming all genders – what can be done?
3. Sleeping cities, all about commitment
4. Lobbying for the good cause – being an actor of change

INSERT RESULTS OF WORKING GROUPS

Second working session

Juliane Steeger makes a call for candidates for the annual conference 2021.

The 2020 conference will take place on November 5th & 6th in Bergen, Bergen and Leuven is offering to host the preparatory meeting.

Rotterdam and Mannheim volunteer to host the annual conference in 2021. **With 18 votes, Rotterdam is selected to organise the 2021 edition.**

1. Presentation “Results Seniors Conference Amsterdam 2019”

Although not being granted any funding for a conference on neither youth nor LGBTQI+ 50+, the network still organised a conference in Amsterdam on issues of LGBTQI communities who are 50+ (see video).

Those members of the community encounter situations of social isolation in care homes, as they may be confronted to hostile people in these environments.

The pink 50+ communities take care of each other and fight the stigma of being older and LGBTQI+.

2. Connection to other networks

Several networks are presented to the member cities, in order to analyse potential cooperation:

EGIDES

EGIDES is a network for NGOs and operates in French-speaking countries. Cities can be associated members. In the context of the Quebec international policy of LGBTQ rights, the founding of a network was recommended at the first conference in Montréal. EGIDES fights for the rights of the community in French-speaking countries and tries to ensure more resources, funding and capacity building.

They offer two different kinds of memberships, i.e. active membership and associate membership. The membership fee is quite low, as the network wants to remain accessible.

Its first conference will be held from July 2nd to July 4th 2020 in Geneva.

A way to connect with this network could be via French-speaking twin cities of RCN member cities.

Rainbow Cities structure in the Netherlands (also called RCN)

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture & Science launched the initiative in 2007 and every city having a significant policy can join. Member cities should have at least 100,000 inhabitants to join or submit joint applications if they are smaller cities. The network meets four times a year and supports the Rainbow Cities Network.

Focal Point Network

Focal Point Network is a network of the Council of Europe countries and meets twice a year. It is interesting to point out that this network has many members from Central and Eastern Europe.

Fast Track cities network

This is a network of 300 member cities, which focuses on the AIDS theme.

Global Equality Network

The Global Equality Network is a network of LGBTQ politicians.

Pulse of Europe

Pulse of Europe focuses on EU policies for LGBTQ rights. They are interested in working with the Rainbow Cities Network.

Global Parliament of Mayors

The Global Parliament of Mayors is a governance body of, by and for mayors all over the globe, for instance in Africa, which is very interesting because Africa is still very LGBTQ hostile. The idea is that global challenges cannot be solved without cities and that national policies are not sufficient. The network aims at driving urban solutions, increasing city connectedness and solidarity and sharing best practices. It also has a virtual platform for sharing best practices.

The annual summit 2019 will take place in Durban.

Bundesnetzwerk kommunaler LSBTIQ-Stellen

The Bundesnetzwerk kommunaler LSBTIQ-Stellen is an informal network of German cities which has 23 members and meets once a year.

Even if the capacities and resources may differ in each individual city, the situations in these situations are very similar.

The goals of this national network are also very similar to those of the Rainbow Cities network. The network is also looking to connect with the German Städtetag.

Latin American RCN

There is also a very new Latin American network, funded by Sao Paolo and Mexico City. It will be set up as an association. The secretariat turns every 3 years. The network is meeting for the 3rd time in 2019.

ECCAR

Some cities are also members of ECCAR (member of ICCAR).

ECCAR seems to have some problems at this point, as it is trying to refresh and has moved offices to Heidelberg.

Since Heidelberg will join the Rainbow Cities Network, the colleagues in Heidelberg might be able to set up contact with ECCAR.

Other networks mentioned are **Eurocities** and **Femcities Network**.

Juliane Steeger invites cities to resubmit their one pagers, mentioning all the networks of which they are members.

3. Working group “politicians in the RCN”

Further to the Italian dilemma already discussed in Barcelona, a specific working group has been set up, and Bergen and Berlin have suggested integrating the political level to RCN.

In Italian law, it is the Mayor or Deputy Mayor that have to represent their cities in the network, however, RCN is a network of municipal employees who are in charge of LGBTQI+ issues.

Some cities suggest that every 4 years (taking political cycles into consideration), a parallel meeting for elected politicians could be held at the same time as the annual conference. Integrating the political level could be beneficial to the network in certain ways:

- Stronger political commitment and potentially more resources
- Reinforced visibility and prestige of the network and its work

However, the hosting of parallel meetings or the changing of the MOU would not solve the Italian problem and would double or triple the coordination work. In addition, taking the network to the political level does not comply with the goals of the network to work at a technical level.

Manuel Rosas Vázquez suggests leaving the option of parallel political meetings open to the hosting city.

As for the MOU, cities agree, with 20 votes, on the following resolution:

“We do not want formal integration at political level and keep the RCN annual meeting a peer-to-peer network, with the option of a parallel event.”

Mannheim abstained because, in their opinion, this decision could already pave the way and exclude some options that could be helpful.

25.10.2019

Third working session

1. Fishbowl Creating and running local LGBTQI+ Centres

The topic of running a local LGBTQI+ centre was submitted by Esch as it is planning to set up such a centre and wants to learn from cities having already made the experience. The discussion focuses on a set of very specific questions:

Should it be a city initiative or civil society?

In most cities, the centres are run by a dedicated association or even host different associations working on inclusion themes.

Mostly, centres get funding by the City, but in some cases, there are public private partnerships (Barcelona).

Centres run by multiple associations can provoke power fights among the associations in some cases. It can also be difficult to find a balance between centres being municipal and still having to fulfil an active role.

In Belgium, centres are run by the region but located in a specific city, for instance in Ghent. Investments by cities in local LGBTQI+ centres can be helpful to make things happen.

Funding and ownership?

Most existing centres get funds from the cities, for instance via formal agreements and via subsidies for specific projects. Some are co-funded at regional or federal level.

Open space or sheltered? How to create a safe space while still being open?

It is difficult to find a balance between being visible and creating safe spaces for communities that do not want to feel judged or attacked by outsiders. In some cities that have different dedicated spaces, they are more or less visible, some even very visible.

Creating mixed spaces with many different uses (e.g. different NGOs, cafés) can give shelter and protect from judgment and hate. While creating safe spaces is a priority, it is true that the bigger centres with more means are more powerful and can speak to the outside communities, while the smaller less visible centres are unknown to anyone from the outside communities.

Some members argue that visibility gets lost with only one centre and that different places across the city would be a better option.

If a City wants to create a centre in order to deliver services to the community, it has to be thoughtful of the question whether it is ready to meet the requirements and special adaptations of services, for instance concerning health, social issues etc.

If you provide funding as a City, how do you make sure the less visible and most vulnerable get addressed?

One way to address the more vulnerable groups of the LGBTQI+ community can be to facilitate access via combining a centre with different uses, hence creating different reasons to go there. Separate spaces for women can also be considered.

It is difficult to find the balance between steering a centre as a city and leaving the organisation to the associations.

On the other hand, it might be difficult to have associations working together. It might not even be possible to have one centre for everybody's needs. Some associations do not want interferences or collaboration with other groups. Organisation and thematic focus of dedicated centres vary from city to city. There is a need to have dedicated infrastructures but where to start is a bit of a chicken and egg question of offer and supply.

2. Input by independent expert followed by Q&A “Supporting Global Change for Equality through Local Actions”: Paul Dillaine, David Davies of Llandinam Fellow in International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science

Dillaine specialises on human rights issues, specifically LGBT issues in the context of migration and the refugee crisis.

Dillaine is a refugee lawyer and used to run an NGO providing services to LGBT asylum seekers. He currently runs the NGO Kaleidoscope Trust, which works for the rights of LGBT communities in countries where these communities are criminalised (Africa, Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific).

Human rights having become the predominant vocabulary in international affairs, the Rainbow Cities Network could play a certain role in responding to global challenges touching the LGBT communities (e.g. in Uganda or Syria) by increasing pressure and desire to address human rights in domestic policies.

There is currently a split within the EU on LGBT issues, while the EU would have been expected to act as a block. For instance, Hungary voted against a mechanism dedicated to LGBT rights at UN level.

While NGOs have proliferated the needs of the different communities, who are very diverse (transgender, intersex migrants...), and municipal policies increasingly have international components, special rapporteurs would argue that LGBT activism got their foot in the door only in the 1990s at UN level, as, in the history of international law, needs of the LGBT communities used to be silenced or side-lined. In addition, a corresponding international treaty is still lacking and violence and discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation and gender identity is not yet a fundamental ingredient of the concept of human rights.

A universal framework should set the extreme diversity of the communities and analyse how international human rights law responds to needs of LGBT people (access to housing, employment, health...). There have been significant gaps in the past, transgender and intersex issues not being considered.

The Yogyakarta Principles¹ (State Obligations on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics) are a very powerful tool to respond to these issues.

Because LGBT communities get physically attacked or detained, and 36 countries among the Commonwealth still criminalise LGBT communities, NGOs like Kaleidoscope Trust have a great share of responsibility.

It is important that local authorities step up via their services and the accommodation of the needs of migrating LGBT communities. More and more people will be coming to Europe to find sanctuaries, which obliges European countries to be inclusive. However, people fleeing their countries because of their sexual orientation or gender identities are sometimes disbelieved. Local authorities can urge and engage national politicians to take responsibilities.

The Pride event in London for instance has been very active in international work. They have managed to wake up local authorities as well as the national level to take interest in the cause.

¹ <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/>

Britain has more LGBT parliamentarians than any other country. Those parliamentarians lobby cross-parties for the LGBT cause. RCN should urge London to join the network.

Questions & Answers

Q: There is a range of economic studies that LGBT friendly businesses are more sustainable and successful than those who are not. Could that be something to use for the purposes of the network or would there be an underlying danger that inclusion would only happen for economic reasons?

A: It can be an excellent entry point trying to quantify how much GDP a country is losing due to discrimination. At a very basic level, it does make sense.

Q: Is there a specific treatment for LGBT refugees in the UK? What kind of support is given?

A: The situation in the UK is similar to the rest of Europe. A report of 2018 shows that few countries have formal guidelines or specific training for civil servants or safe and inclusive accommodation. There are many creative things that local governments can do, reaching from inclusive accommodation to the funding of interpreters.

Q: Is it possible to connect Sustainable Development Goals and LGBT activism?

A: The SDGs cannot be reached if discriminating laws keep existing. Economic growth goals and discrimination are not compatible, for instance in terms of tourism and big business. Poverty is very high among LGBT communities, because of exclusion from families and school, as well as work place discrimination. The SDGs are a powerful tool for the LGBT cause, because countries have committed to them. The SDG 11 – creating sustainable cities and communities & safe housing and services – is definitely an LGBT issue. There is a need for anti-discrimination policies in housing and employment. In addition, there cannot be any grip on HIV if people are left behind.

An Equal Rights Coalition Conference will be held next year. RCN should consider access to those kinds of events as a practical point for its plan of action for 2020.

Fourth working session

1. VIP Discussion Marc Angel, Member of European Parliament

Marc Angel, Member of the European Parliament states that there are 2 LGBT people among the 6 Luxembourg MEPs .

It is a privilege in some countries to be able to live so freely and openly, thanks to the fights that people fought earlier for the cause. In Luxembourg, civil partnerships were created when gay marriage did not yet exist.

When the Luxembourg Parliament adopted the law on same sex marriage, it obtained a clear majority and Luxembourg was spared from the struggles that other countries like France experienced.

Other achievements in Luxembourg have been:

- A new law on self-determination for transgender people, meaning no medical interference anymore, an administrative procedure as opposed to a legal procedure in the past,
- A national LGBTQI+ action plan,

- The Luxembourg Pride event gets political and diplomatic attention
- Screening of school books with regard to discriminatory content
- A regulation concerning children of same sex couples using surrogate mothers. Luxembourg is not intending to allow surrogate mothers but is willing to see it from the children's perspective and give equal rights to these children
- A law protecting sex workers: prohibiting sex with underage people or people that are illegally on the territory, also taking a passport away from a person is heavily punished
- A "Drop in" centre for medical treatment of sex workers
- Ongoing works on a new intersex legislation, for instance forbidding operations on children before they can decide for themselves which sex they want to choose, information platform intersexe.lu

Leaving the registration of the gender of a new born child open would also be an important step. The potential introduction of a third gender has not been decided upon yet. The question of the age to define gender for a child as well as the appropriate age for starting hormone treatment is also a relevant part of this discussion.

Mr. Dillaine says Luxembourg could play a major role internationally through displaying their progress and setting the example. There are other courageous examples such as Serbia.

Luxembourg is also in the good position that its society is quite open-minded and hate crime is rather rare.

2. We are Part of Culture Project presentation

The German NGO 100% human is a project born out of a collaboration of artists from Germany performing a specific song at Pride events. The NGO is based in Stuttgart and works all over Germany, under the slogan: "Gemeinsam Vielfalt erleben" and believing that culture can open up many possibilities.

Their missions include:

- Information and information desks
- Campaigning songs
- Exhibitions, rallies
- Petitions

Right wing politics in Germany often state "gays and lesbians do not contribute to society", so the NGO is working on ways to communicate to people outside of the community that gays and lesbians do contribute to society.

This is why the exhibition on popular and famous gay people throughout history was born (cf. corresponding presentation).

The exhibition is easy to export to other countries and the exhibition can thus be created in the RCN member cities.

3. Rainbow Cities Network exhibition in Vienna

Vienna is planning to organise an RCN exhibition.

Suggested topics and votes, first round:

Topic	Votes
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People of colour in LGBTQI	11
Sexual orientation and gender identity	0
Intersectionality	6
Lesbian visibility	16
Women visibility	16
Intersex	7
LGBTQI in sports	3

Suggested topics and votes, second round:

Topic	Votes
Lesbian visibility	9
Women visibility	8

Conclusion

The working group on the Italian dilemma will be renewed. Berlin and Vienna are willing to join the working group. The Host of the Group is Mannheim.

Cities shall give their billing addresses to the board for the invoicing.

The network is expecting big changes in 2020, with the new coordinator and the new website.

Juliane thanks Dominique, the person taking the minutes, the technicians for their work.

The network representatives thank Dominique and the board for the organisation.

Juliane closes the meeting on behalf of the board.