

5th Stuttgart Open Fair

29th January til 31st January 2010



In the spirit of the World Social Forum an open platform for Civil Society was created in a "Tent-city" in the central square of Stuttgart on Saturday 30th January. Already 180 people gathered on Friday evening the 29th to begin the festival in the youth and cultural centre Forum 3 in the middle of Stuttgart, with inspiring guest speakers, Irish Pater Shay Cullen, an internationally acclaimed human rights activist and fair trade initiator who works untiringly to help sexually abused and jailed children in the Philippines, and the 24 year old Hanna Poddig, a full-time activist who is causing quite a stir in the German media through her own acts of peaceful civil disobedience and the call to make radical changes in our system, beginning by radically challenging ones own lifestyle!

Two fine South American musicians, Nena Eckelmann and Raphael Titomaya accompanied the evening which included an interactive exchange amongst the audience on their own encounters with courage and contributions from 4 local activists, whose inputs ranged from ten years of Civil Society's activity in the region, climate and environmental work, protecting the rain forests in Brasil, to preventing a corporate-oriented re-make of the main railway station in the town.

Saturday the 30th, the main day of the Festival, with 30 workshops in Forum 3 drawing around 600 participants and saw more than 12,000 visitors to the 50 information stands plus a "world-stage" in a Tent-city in the central square of Stuttgart.

From 10 in the morning until 7 in the evening the main square was buzzing. Local citizens' alternative energy projects, Mexican peace-puppets shows for children, regional organic farming initiatives, micro-credit and Ecological banking, fair trade- and gentech.-free-europe initiatives, independent Radio, campaigns for developing local currency, clean clothes, peace- and human right groups, and many others offered information, nourishment and discussion at their stalls.

We had a large Tent with a stage on which for over 6 hours live programme with short informative inputs from a wide variety of workshop and info. stand holders, live music, Forro dance, youth theatre sketches connecting the lives of children in Manila and Cairo and highlights of the day involving live transmissions from East to West. Beginning with Manila, where the sun had already set, from where the youth choir of Shay Cullens organisation Preda sang for us. Then to Davos where folks from Culture of Peace joined young demonstrators in minus 15 °C in the "locked-down" ski resort during the world economic Forum. And then as the sun got close to setting on a snowy stuttgart we went to midday in Porto Alegre where it was an honour and a pleasure to hear Chico and Stella Whitaker telling us of the developments of the WSF over the past decade since its inauguration and the hopes for its future in the coming years.

In a certain sense Stuttgart is pretty unique in trying to carry the impulse of the WSF directly to the towns' street-public and Saturday shoppers. By holding the festival in the main square of the town, and neither asking financial contributions to enter the "Tent-city" or any of the offered workshops, it is hoped to reach an audience which would otherwise have no exposure to all the activities of the civil society groups in and around Stuttgart apart from perhaps taking note of demonstrations against something. The preparation for the Stuttgart Open Fair is also in itself an attempt at a non-hierarchical method of self-organisation, responsibility sharing, and active participation in the forming and carrying of the festival. It is a slow process requiring much trust and patience on all sides -- but I believe we are moving, and now it will be important to keep up the momentum and not sit back on what has already been achieved.

C.Bergin