MURAL
Mutual Understanding,
Respect and Learning

What is MURAL?

MURAL stands for 'mutual understanding, respect and learning'. It was an international project that ran in six European countries – Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

MURAL was led by the British Council, the UK's international organisation for cultural relations, together with partner organisations in each country. It was co-funded by the European Commission and responded to its priority to counter worrying negative narratives about our rich diversity in Europe.

MURAL's goal was to support people who want to make their communities more inclusive and stand up to discrimination. It brought together people of all ages, religions, ethnicities, and gender and sexual identities. MURAL included community activists, local government representatives, teachers, students and professionals, as well as people who simply wanted to get to know their neighbours better.

Through MURAL, participants learned together about each other's identities, shared ideas and designed and ran social actions. Many of them met to gain experience from other countries, exchange learnings and tell their stories.

MURAL was enriched by the tools and expertise of partners, a network of facilitators and the participants themselves.

It aimed to inspire a long-lasting network of people empowered to create change in their communities and across Europe.

MURAL's step-by-step guide to making change happen:

We think that if you support people to have a deeper appreciation of their own identity and a stronger understanding of other cultures...

...they will be more open to living or working within diverse communities.

They will be more open to dialogue...

...and start to develop relationships with people from diverse backgrounds.

They become more likely to question assumptions made about others...

...and want to challenge factors that lead to intolerance or discrimination.

They share their stories and advocate for greater tolerance...

... and take actions to make their communities more inclusive.

They advocate change that fosters more positive relationships and strengthens community cohesion.

When we visited the mosque it was a big surprise to me how little local people knew about Islam.

* MURAL's methodology was based on the British Council's Active Citizens approach, which enables people to develop skills for intercultural dialogue.

I've got my people behind me so I dare to do it now.

What we did in MURAL

2018

Partners met for the first time in Warsaw. They planned the MURAL project and produced country analyses of who to work with and how to work with them.

FEBRUARY

Specialists in religion, belief, race and equality met in London, then online. They designed project tools and approaches and contextualised the Active Citizens learning journey to meet the goals of MURAL.

MARCH - JULY

Facilitators from the six participating countries were trained in the MURAL learning journey at an International Facilitator Development Event in Warsaw.

AUGUST

OCTOBER

Workshops for participants began in each country, led by facilitators and partners.

2019

FROM FEBRUARY

Participants started designing and running their own social actions across each partner country and beyond.

APRIL - SEPTEMBER

International study visits took place bringing a group of facilitators and participants together to find out what communities are doing in different countries and share learning transnationally.

We did these in Amsterdam, Athens, Cologne, Krakow, Lisbon and London.

OCTOBER

Partners, facilitators and participants completed learning journals to write up their experiences.

NOVEMBER

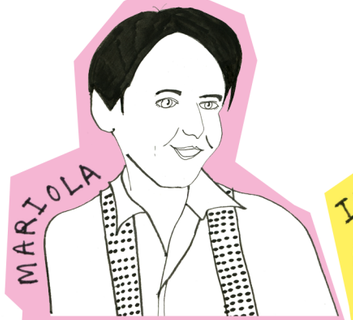
100 partners, facilitators and participants came together at an international networking event in Krakow, sharing experiences and finding ways to continue the MURAL experience.

Partners produced films and held promotional events in their countries to show what we have learned.

DECEMBER

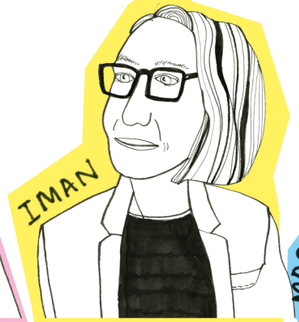
Our MURAL Partners

Intercultural dialogue is at the heart of everything at the British Council. We believe people and societies become stronger by working together. We designed MURAL to help people play a positive role in making Europe inclusive for everyone.



The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.

Celebrating our country's pluralism is a core principle shared by Faith Matters UK. MURAL promotes social diversity across communities in Europe, encouraging dialogue and using tools for positive social change



UK: Faith Matters UK works with faith-based communities and is the founder of hate crime monitoring service Tell Mama.

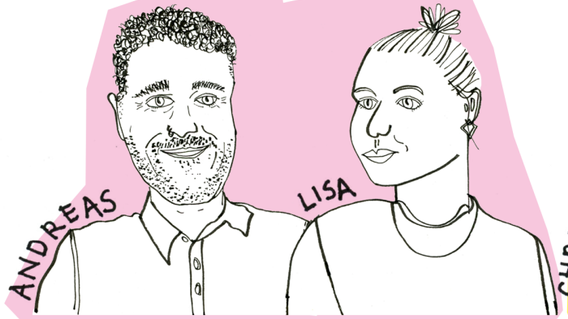
Since 2016, we have been implementing the 'Open KraKow' Program. MURAL was a perfect project for us. We want to involve leaders, who can do good for their community and new residents, and teachers, who come into contact with migrants daily.

Poland: The City Council's Open KraKow programme welcomes and supports migrants in the City of KraKow.

We are committed to the promotion of intercultural and inter-faith dialogue and to value cultural, ethnic and religious diversity amongst society. MURAL strengthened our methodologies in empowering communities to make social change.

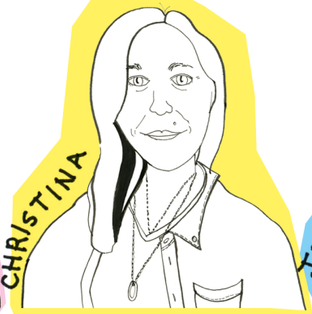
Portugal: The High Commission for Migration is a central government body leading on policies around migration and cohesion.

Creating spaces to bring people together who usually don't meet or collaborate is one of our strengths as an organisation. In MURAL we've used this competence to support dedicated people to promote cohesion in diverse communities all over Germany.



Germany: transfer e.V. – a civil society organisation working in youth participation – has partnered with Start with a Friend, a be-friending and mentoring network between residents and migrants.

We try to convey a message of equality as we encourage people to see beyond our differences. We share the MURAL goals and values and have used the project to build bridges within and between different communities in Greece.



Greece: The Hellenic Platform for Development is a civil society organisation representing 16 rights-based organisations.

ECHO focuses on facilitating processes of getting comfortable with the uncomfortable in relation to cultural diversity and inclusion in higher education and the labour market. MURAL supported participants by providing a community and tools to make change within their own context.

The Netherlands: The ECHO Foundation specialises in diversity policy, working with young people of colour, the corporate sector and higher education.

A real eye-opener

I was born in Krakow, I've always lived here. It really is my city.

But 12 years ago I spent two years in Portugal as a teacher at a university. It was a profound experience for me, my first opportunity to observe a multicultural society. I met people from all over the world, heard their languages and discovered their cultures. To be part of a group where everyone was not thinking the same way was exhilarating, a real eye-opener.

In Poland we were still very monocultural. When I got back I had an idea to create a school for equipping teachers with new skills. My idea was to reframe education in a multicultural context. But it was too early, no one understood.

Now our migrant population has grown we've started that work but, in my opinion, we're lagging behind. MURAL has confirmed to me that my ideas and our methods have been good and I feel empowered with new skills I've learned.

But I want to do even more. It's an important time for us in Krakow and I can see this process of social activism can help us become a more multicultural society.

Urszula, Poland

Respect. It's a big word

I'm a Christian Palestinian from a small village in the Galilee. I guess I'm what's called a village mouse. At home I worked in social theatre and education using an alternative approach of Holocaust education to talk about conflict and human rights and its relevance to today's challenges.

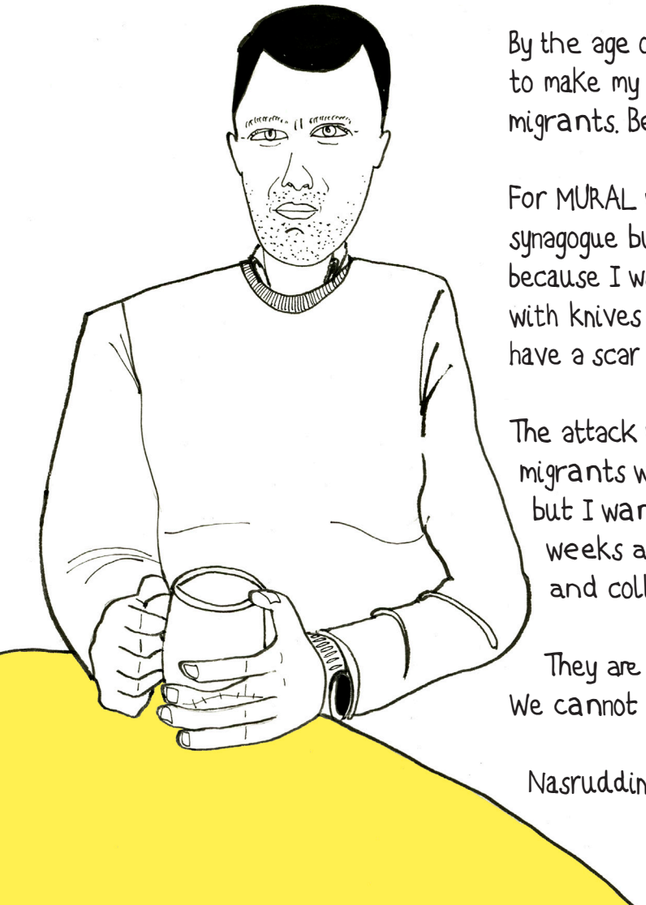
When I first read about MURAL the word 'respect' jumped out at me. In my culture it's a big word. It's not about status or prestige. When you respect someone it means you put them before yourself. In the West – I'm now a drama therapist living in London – I don't feel it has the same meaning, so that immediately attracted me to the project.

Many of the themes we talk about in MURAL are well known to me. I grew up in conflict and I had to think about my identity daily. You'd look at the next person and try and work out whether they will accept you. I think you become old quicker when you have to think about your existence every day.

So to facilitate on MURAL was very familiar. Sometimes I think my role in life is as a facilitator. I've been in my element, let's say.

Elias, Uk

We cannot Keep silent



I was born in Afghanistan but grew up in Pakistan before coming to Europe, to Greece. I tried to get to the UK to be with my cousin and, hopefully, to study. But I was sent back to Greece after nine months.

Later I tried again, this time taking the Balkan route, but was arrested on two occasions and spent weeks in jail and in detention before being sent back to Greece again.

By the age of 22 I was tired and disappointed. I decided to make my life in Greece where I now work helping new migrants. Because of my past, I know how they are feeling.

For MURAL we organised trips to the mosque and the synagogue but I didn't make it to all our social actions because I was attacked. A group of Greek anti-migrant yobs with knives targeted me because of the work I do. I still have a scar on my hand.

The attack was reported on TV and in the papers. Most migrants who are attacked are scared of reporting it but I wanted it to be high profile. I was off work for six weeks and got a lot of support from my Greek friends and colleagues. I became stronger.

They are a few, we are many. We should not be scared. We cannot Keep silent.

Nasruddin, Greece

Our facilitators come together to share their MURAL experiences

What was scary was this responsibility that you were delivering something that people would take on and use themselves.

So you had to be true to yourself, use your skills and know your limitations.

Creating an atmosphere of trust and openness was very special.

There could have been a greater understanding of how to adapt the tools to our local contexts.

Some groups I facilitated weren't ready. They needed to know who they were themselves before they could help others.

We struggled with helping people convert their ideas into a plan for a social action.

Being able to mend a fractured group was a highlight. That was a big moment of growth for me.

I enjoyed being able to empower the participants we worked with.

The MURAL learning journey

Our learning journey was based on the British Council's Active Citizens learning journey. This enables people to develop and practise skills for intercultural dialogue and take action together on issues they care about. We reimagined it so people could work on themes relating to religion and belief and ethnicity and race. We looked at how they intersect with each other and with other areas of equality and rights.

I'm not a religious person but our project has made me think more deeply about that.

Once you've created that safe space then we can talk about the challenging stuff.

You feel so small against a big system but then you see other people fighting the system too and that gives you hope.

There have been so many great ideas... and we've learnt to steal the best ones!

I'm using my research skills to make a simple toolkit on how to counter online racism.

Seeing different perspectives made me notice that good is relative. What's good for me can be different for others, even if we all have good will.

I've just got a new job and I'm now planning how to bring MURAL into my workplace.

We're using street art to counteract all the negative graffiti.

ME

Our own identity and culture

Understanding ourselves and our own sense of identity, improving self-awareness, self-confidence, recognising different perspectives, unconscious bias, and thinking about how cultures are formed and their meaning.

ME and YOU

Tools for dialogue

Building relationships with others, learning how to use dialogue as a tool, listening actively, developing shared values, gaining confidence that it's OK to encounter difference without this creating conflict.

WE

Connecting with communities

Looking deeply at how our communities work and how people interact, understanding power and decision-making, using dialogue skills to surface issues that matter to people, considering the role you and others can play and how change might be possible.

SOCIAL ACTION

Putting plans into action

Generating ideas, planning practical ways to bring a positive effect, designing and running social actions which reflect the MURAL goals, using tools for dialogue, working with others in your community and across the MURAL network.

REFLECTION

Holding our assumptions lightly

Reflecting on your own learning from MURAL at every stage of the learning journey. Reflecting on how you behave, interact with others, and how your social actions are supporting people.

SHARING

Communicating the change

Talking about the MURAL project and its impact, building networks and momentum for change, championing the MURAL goal and themes, sharing our stories through social media and in our organisations.

It starts within us

I'm new to MURAL. I've only just attended a workshop in Leeds, where I live. It was very interesting and I became curious, I wanted to know more. We talked about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and, of course, as a Muslim I'm affected.

My family, originally Algerian, moved from Italy to the UK four years ago. In Italy I didn't wear the scarf, people didn't know I was Muslim, there was no problem. Since we've moved, and I've started wearing the scarf, it's obvious I'm Muslim and you can get hate just by walking down the street.

In less diverse areas I'm more conscious. For example, recently I completed my end-of-school exams in a school with little diversity. Me and my sister were the only ones with scarves. My school friends would all go out at the weekends but not invite me because they thought, as a Muslim, I wasn't allowed. Yes, there are stereotypes.

I have hope things will change. The change has to start within us, and then our communities, and then we can spread it worldwide.

Ferial, UK

Giving back

I was born in Guinea-Bissau, a small but very poor country in West Africa. At 18 I moved to Portugal where I've had the privilege to study to postgraduate level.

I'm passionate about building a safe society and I do my best every day to be useful to others. I've had this opportunity to learn, to evolve and, because of my background, I feel a responsibility to give back.

Before MURAL I was working with the Festival of Politics in Lisbon, an event focussed on human rights and democracy. But I thought I could learn even more and extend my social actions.

Through the MURAL workshops we developed a series of visits to religious communities in Lisbon. It's a simple action really. We contacted each community and a group of 30 or so of us were invited to hear about the Islamic, Hindu, Baha'i and Ismaili religions.

I found the visits very interesting and sometimes challenging, because every contact with a different religion is a new experience. It reinforced my belief in promoting dialogue and religious freedoms.

For me MURAL is a symbol of connection. Even though we don't know each other personally, I know there is someone in London or Cologne working towards the same goals. I am not alone. It's a good feeling.

Djau, Portugal

Their history is my history

My parents raised me to be vocal and visible. Thirty years ago they fled Afghanistan after the Russian invasion. At the time they were completing their studies and had saved enough to open a pharmacy but instead used that money to get to the Netherlands with my older sister.

It was hard for them, there was no support, but they volunteered and tried to learn the language as quickly as they could. Even though I was born in the Netherlands I feel as if I carry their story in everything I do. Their history is my history. And now I can't just sit back, I need to make my own life relevant to society.

When I first started MURAL, I can't really explain it, my life changed a lot. I found a community I had not felt for a long time. Here was a group I could completely identify with. Through the facilitator training I found the confidence to deliver workshops – I gave an LGBTQAI+ showcase to the group – and continue to do that in my student-led project at university.

The MURAL method should, I believe, be implemented into the school curriculum. There's not enough emphasis on taking individual responsibility.

Simone Zalla, The Netherlands

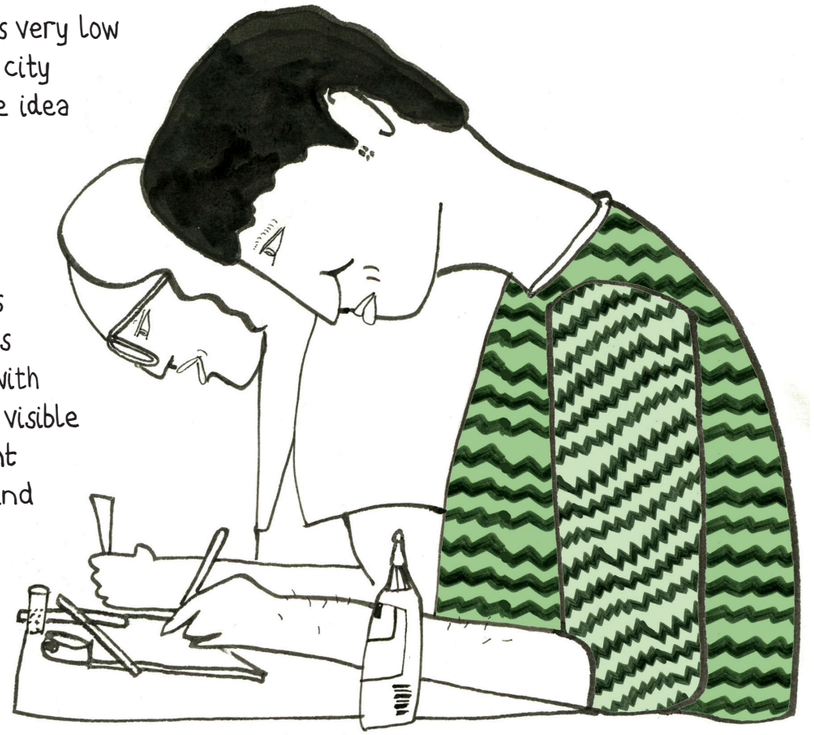
My people to go to

As an anthropologist I was trained to put my own opinions aside and openly listen to other perspectives. That's why I was so attracted to MURAL. No, you cannot change the world in a day but I like the idea of starting change with small actions from the bottom up.

In Cologne we invited visitors to a local neighbourhood event to participate in a creative activity. We asked them, What makes you happy? People from different backgrounds got creative around the same table and, during the day, we made our Mosaic of Happiness. People talked to each other about their contributions. It was very low tech but had a big impact – the city government is keen to repeat the idea in other neighbourhoods.

MURAL has empowered me. It's empowered this wish, this need, to do something about the issues that we face every day. And it's made other people in Cologne – with the same mindset and desire – visible to me. That's the most important impact. We have a network now and when I need someone to support a new idea I know my people to go to.

Corinna, Germany



Breaking open my bubble

When I was younger I wanted to stay safe and I'd always say no. Nowadays I always try to do things out of my comfort zone because nothing's going to happen unless I do. That's why I'm with MURAL.

I'm working on a project to encourage higher education institutions to become more inclusive. In the Netherlands racism is hidden. It's not in your face but there are jokes and micro aggressions which make you feel unwelcome. If you're from a migrant background you're well aware of that.

Visibility is a big issue. Do the teachers who stand in front of you look like you? Do they know your experiences? Are you visible in the curriculum? I think that's missing a lot in education.

Through MURAL I now know a lot of people I can work with in the future. It's been so valuable to have different perspectives that I can take with me and that will broaden my vision.

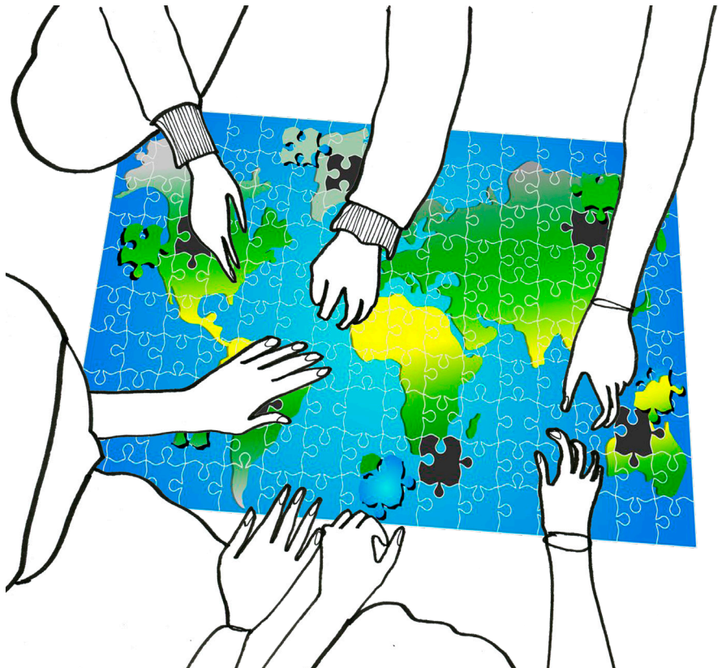
Farilyann, The Netherlands

I feel better equipped

I'm a part-time teacher of ethics in a Polish primary school in Poznan. Because there are only a few non-Polish students in our school they are very visible. We talk about diversity – exchanging ideas and learning from each other – which is a softer approach than talking about inclusion.

This is a good age to educate children in these topics – there is often a conflict between what they hear from us teachers and what they take from their parents. We can show them there are people who think differently and you have to respect their point of view.

My MURAL workshop was fascinating. I got lots of new tools on how to work with children from different cultures, and lots of new contacts. The first thing I did was organise a multicultural week in my school, five days of social action.

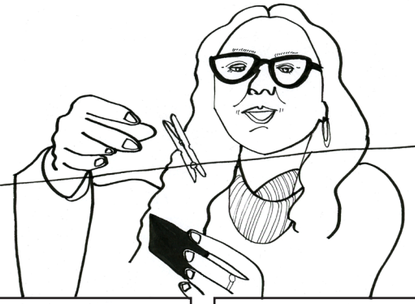


Afterwards I noticed the students became more open, the Polish students made more effort to talk to migrant students during the breaks, for example. Attitudes don't change overnight but it had an impact on the students... and the teachers.

Through MURAL I feel better equipped now. I feel safer with new knowledge.

Ala, Poland

Some of the numbers



7 Partner organisations	**22** Facilitators trained	**335** Participants	**33** Regional and national government bodies
6 International Study Visits			**146** Community groups
135 Social actions	**7,199** Community members touched by social actions	**1.19m** Scoial media reach of MURAL	**16** Media outlets involved

*Some figures indicative at time of publication (19th December 2019)

We learned a lot from the people involved in MURAL

Be clear about your position on religion and belief

We explained that we respect religious diversity and people's rights to hold and practise their religion or belief. We are committed to international human rights principles and to social justice.

The power is in our stories

Stories about people's lived experiences help us to make sense of what's happening, what we can do and what needs to change.

Get comfortable with the uncomfortable

Often the most challenging conversations are the most important ones. People need to feel safe to express their opinions and appreciate other perspectives.

We are stronger together

In troubled times for Europe, knowing we are an international community spurs us into action.

Thank you

The British Council would like to thank everyone who supported us with this project, and send our particular thanks to:

Our partners in the MURAL project – ECHO Foundation, Faith Matters UK, Hellenic Platform for Development, High Commission for Migration, Krakow City Council and transfer e.V. – as well as all the partners they worked with.

All the organisations, youth centres, cultural centres, speakers and NGOs who have inspired us, helped us, fed us and housed us in all the countries we have worked in throughout the MURAL project.

All our facilitators and participants. We couldn't have done this without you. We hope this experience has changed the way you work, helped you find the confidence to transform the world for the better, and given you the tools to inspire others.

And special thank you to the European Commission for funding and supporting important programmes such as this.

#MURALinAction

Drawn and compiled by Len Grant

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Working Globally, Impacting Locally
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