



Istanbul Crossroads Establishing Mutual Understanding and Inter-Cultural Dialog through Images

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Abstract

Their Slogan is “Young Entrepreneurs Hand by Hand with Young Film Directors”. The goal of the “JCI Istanbul Crossroads” project with Junior Chamber International Istanbul is to celebrate the social, religious and cultural diversities rather than using them as a reason for conflict. This article aims to outline how short films made by young filmmakers around the world reflect and articulate the issues surrounding identities and diversity.

Key Words: Culture, Value-Systems, Conflict, Global Migration, Social Responsibility, Diversity, Inter-Cultural Dialogue.



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I. Introduction

“JCI Istanbul (JCIST) Crossroads International” themed “Meeting of Cultures” is a Short Film Festival and Contest founded in 2006 that aims to create a global awareness on the issues surrounding the experiences of the migrants (local or international) and their identity in their adopted homelands. The Festival supports the short film makers in the form of a film contest. This is the world’s only migration themed short film festival that hopes to promote the meeting of cultures. Film Topics at JCIST Crossroads is looking for interesting stories about migration and the emotional effect on one’s life. The organization is particularly interested in the following topics as they relate to their organization’s founding goals: issues surrounding globalization and migration movement, world peace, cultural awareness, family structures, cultural integration and new generation of immigrant stories. “JCIST Crossroads” is organized by JCI Istanbul, a non-profit organization affiliated to JCI, recognized as a partner organization for Global and Continental Initiatives by the UN and various other institutions including the Council of Europe and EuroChambers.

II. Meeting of Cultures

The JCI Istanbul Crossroads International Short Film Festival project explores and questions the issue of “Meeting of Cultures” with migration through short films. The city of Istanbul is the Meeting Point of Cultures. With this project through short films we aim to bring together all peoples of different religions and cultures in the promotion of lasting peace through thinking globally and acting locally. We want to inspire people with the help of cinema to respect life and to live in harmony with one another. Through migration and globalization, societies on all continents are becoming increasingly pluralistic. Different cultures, religious traditions and values meet, interact, and influence each other within nations as well as internationally. Our societies need people who have been trained to see the opportunities inherent in such a multicultural society, and who are able to solve conflicts when traditions and value-systems clash. Short films can play an important role in fostering understanding between different cultures. We hope to contribute towards more understanding and friendship with the JCIST Crossroads Short Film Festival. While political interests may at times stand in the way of understanding and accommodation, it is in the arts, music, literature, and film that mutual respect, appreciation, and friendship are more easily achieved.

III. Alliance of Civilisations

This project has deserved special attention since 2008, which has been accepted by the EU as the year of inter-cultural dialog in Europe. Additionally, this project is particularly important for Turkey since the Turkish Premier Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan together with his Spanish counterpart co-chaired an important inter-related project known as the “Alliance of Civilisations” initiated by the Secretary General of the UN in 2005, which is still in progress. JCI is a social leadership association and a non-profit organization, adopted as sibling association by international associations such as Council of Europe, Euro Chambers and the United Nations. JCI-Junior Chamber International was established in 1915, by a group of young people with the name of Young Men's Progressive Civic Association, for the aim of not only contributing to personal and professional development but

also for taking responsibility of some of the social problems. JCI Istanbul Crossroads is a short film contest and festival, the aim of which is to draw attention on migration and cultural dialog in the world, thus to create global awareness. This festival has been supported by “International Young Leaders and Initiatives Federation – JCI” Istanbul Chapter since 2006, which is an organization under the umbrella of JCI “Junior Chamber International”.

IV. Positive Change through Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Our common mission, therefore, within the JCI Istanbul and JCI Turkey is to contribute to the advancement of the global community by providing the opportunities for young people to develop their leadership skills, social responsibility and fellowship necessary to create positive change. It is apparent by now, that these duties are readily achieved by using all available visual aids; for our purpose migration and cross-cultural dialog themed short films that set the environment for the “meeting of cultures”. In this project we present our endeavors to achieve the goals set by the JCI. We hope to create better awareness on diversity and cross-cultural dialog issues and further develop assistance to our Crossroads Short Film Project. The project explores different aspects of spatial mobility and intercultural experience from both historical and contemporary perspectives.



JCI Istanbul Crossroads Theme Posters 2006-2011

Our aim is to help analyse films made by the short filmmakers around the world in order to understand how they articulate the issues surrounding immigrant identity in their adopted 'homelands', and how they portray the reactions of the host society to the question of immigrants. Together with the festival organizers we all will have the opportunity to examine the cross-cultural fertilisation that is taking place between the immigrant culture and the popular culture in their homeland. Migrant cinema, in other words, reaches the parts that transnational television does not reach.

V. A People Organization

“Business, labor and civil society organizations have skills and resources that are vital in helping to build a more robust global community” (Kofi Annan, Ghanaian diplomat, seventh secretary-general of the United Nations, 2001 Nobel Peace Prize). Junior Chamber International (JCI¹) is a people organization. People resort to violence when communication, understanding, patience, tolerance, reason and love cease to exist. Junior Chamber’s plan is to offer opportunities to the members that will reinforce these positive qualities.² “Opportunity is no more than a better way of serving and providing for humanity’s humanities needs.”³ The idea is to bring people together. Many opportunities are created when people with various social, cultural, ethnic, religious, economic, and national backgrounds meet. At national conventions, area conferences and world congresses, members come face-to-face with one another to share experiences and exchange ideas which lead to a better understanding and cooperation. “Plant kindness and gather love” - A bond of brotherhood and genuine friendship is established as Junior Chamber members seek the ways and means to improve themselves and the world in which they live.

VI. Conclusion

JCI Istanbul Crossroads International Short Film Festival explores and questions the issue of “global migration”. We hope to be diverse and present both a cross-cultural and a contemporary view on the topic of Global Migration. We are committed to World Peace by honoring the earth, honoring its people, and celebrating the unity of the people. We hope to bring together all peoples of different religions and cultures in the promotion of lasting peace through “thinking globally and acting locally”. We want to inspire people to respect life and to live in harmony with one another through short films from a variety of genres and plots addressing the common theme of global migration. We hope to celebrate our social, religious and cultural diversities rather than using them as a reason for conflict. If we are serious about ending global poverty and achieve world peace, we need to explore and question global migration. The international element of the Film Festival allows participants to be part of a truly global community and helps foster greater understanding among people of all races, creeds, cultures and backgrounds. The very real opportunity to network with people across the globe at international JCI Istanbul Crossroads International Short Film Festival can be seen as an invaluable communication tool in the increasingly inter-dependant global society we now live in.

¹ <http://www.jci.cc>

² <http://www.macauj.com.mo/>

³ <http://www.jci.cc>

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Vedat Akman (PHD) is a faculty member at Beykent University. He has been teaching at Kadir Has University, worked as a research manager in major Turkish banks and stock-exchange companies in Istanbul. He produced TV business programs and wrote columns in national newspapers.

Vedat Akman is actively involved in the Cross-Cultural Dialogue Platform in association with Turkish Grand National Assembly and Department of National Monuments and Museums. He is the founder of JCI Istanbul Crossroads (www.jciistanbulcrossroads.com), an immigration themed international short film festival, and one of the founders of CINEJ, the international refereed online cinema journal published by the University of Pittsburgh (<http://cinej.pitt.edu>).

He edited GLOBAL IMMIGRANT STORIES, a collection of immigration related information and real life stories written by immigrants and received the “Best Publication in Europe” award at the JCI European Area Conference in Maastricht in 2007.

For further information on his work please visit www.vedatakman.com.