



The Public Living Room - a safe learning place

*Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg e.V. - Landesverband der unabhängigen
Mütterzentren, Familienzentren und Mehrgenerationenhäuser*

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Grundtvig learning partnership

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Topic 5: „Beginning of parenthood“

**from 19th to 23rd of March 2014 at the multigenerational house Eltern-Kind-Zentrum Stuttgart-West (EKIZ)
and Family Center MüZe-Süd, Stuttgart Heslach**

From March 19th to 23rd, 2014 Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg invited its European partners from Austria, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey (International Children Center, ICC, in Ankara) to have an exchange meeting between leaders of family support groups in Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg.

About 30 participants from different centers focusing on working with parents and children attended this meeting. Slovakia, Germany and Austria are well-known for their long tradition of Mother Centers or Parent-Child Centers. These centers also offer different opportunities for volunteering with outstanding success. In Poland so-called Parent Clubs - founded in disaccord to professional family state care - are on the way of forming a common network themselves.

The ICC, a Turkish institution, is focused on child protection. Dr. Aysegül Esin, attending the meeting on behalf of the ICC, was interested in getting information about establishments strengthening mothers and contributing to a successful growing up of our children.

In Stuttgart, countries taking part in the Grundtvig learning partnership “The public living room – a safe learning space” discussed the results of Topic 5 entitled “Wie unterstützen Mütterzentren Mütter/Eltern zu Beginn der Elternschaft” (How do Mother Centers support mothers/parents at the beginning of their parenthood?).

Questions like:

- 1) How were or are your first experiences with the baby?
- 2) Do professionals like midwives or doctors provide a feeling of safety for young mothers?
- 3) Who can help/assist parents during this time of incertitude?
- 4) Which information do young mothers need at the beginning of their parenthood?
- 5) Do fathers need other support or help than mothers do?
- 6) According to your own experience, which tips could be given to young couples in order for them not to neglect their partnership?

dealt with

- Experiences at the beginning of parenthood
- Obstacles and help at the beginning of parenthood
- Fathers’ situation as well as situation of couples at the beginning of parenthood



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These topics were about parental experiences during the first 12 months with the child, but also about how Mother Centres can provide help and support for mothers and fathers during this period in their lives, when everything is so wonderful but also unfamiliar and insecure.

Some answers came from different moderated discussion groups in the Mother Centre, others from informal talks over a cup of coffee. Some answers were given privately at home, in self-reflection or with friends. Public events like Babycafé, women's breakfast, parent-child play groups, personal meetings e.g. in second-hand shops or during get-together lunches, gave additional opportunities to exchange, talk about personal experiences or find answers. Moderated discussions have been the ideal ground for reflection of own experiences. They generated ideas and results which could be handed on easily.

Depending on the capacity of the Mother Centres or parent clubs (this is the name of public meeting places in Poland), the attendance in discussion rounds was different. But summed up, all participants agreed with nearly the same answers resulting in the conclusion that parenthood is in many ways a challenge that needs sensitive and relieving care.

All participating countries prepared a summary in English for the meeting in Stuttgart. Obviously, the interviewed parents loved being asked about their experiences, especially about the first months with their babies. This time very often brings about the feeling of living in a parallel universe in which all life experiences and competences acquired so far seem useless, and parenthood and family life cannot be learned ahead. Therefore, the most important things are supporting networks and people who accompany and help parents at the beginning of parenthood until they familiarize with the new situation.

The agenda of the three-day meeting in two mother centres in Stuttgart, the multigenerational Eltern-Kind-Zentrum in Stuttgart-West (on Thursday and Friday) and the Familienzentrum Müze Süd (on Saturday) provided presentations and evaluation of topic 5 "Beginning of parenthood" and other learning topics. These will be explained in the following:

- Experiencing family education during "Babycafé with guests®" in the Public Living Room,
- Fathers show involvement: EKIZ fatherhood film and book,
- Workshop about hosting and its role in a public café,
- Political involvement of Mütterforum with international guests by participating at the Equal Pay Day,
- Experiencing togetherness while planning a transport of donations to the Mother Centre Plamen in Zavidovici,
- Networking can be experienced at the network meeting of Mother Centres from Baden-Württemberg,
- Experiencing local colour by means of a city tour and local food.

From theory to practice

A visit of the Mütterforum registered brand "Babycafé with guests®" in the Eltern-Kind-Zentrum (EKIZ) in Stuttgart gave an impression of how family education works. Mothers have been informed about the



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European guests. They started with a motto given by the Babycafé team leader, namely spring. Everyone talked about his feelings related to spring and what they planned for themselves and their children.

We asked questions like “What are you looking for when coming to EKIZ?”, “What do you think is important for your child?”, “What information could you pass on to other mothers?”, “Can you imagine joining in?”, but also “Do you miss anything in EKIZ?”. These questions started a vivid and very personal discussion involving all mothers.

Guests were able to see how the Babycafé works: mothers benefit from mutual exchange in a closed atmosphere with openness, giving self-affirmation to motherhood by asking them instead of instructing them, and without implying that motherhood is a deficit. Mothers are asked what they need and they support each other in their new role as mothers. The program is reliable, the participation is voluntarily. No mother has to register and participate regularly, but most of them do, because they enjoy it and see the benefits.

Some learning partners do not have these very useful, however informal and needed ways of family education for young mothers in their countries. Being able to experience the Babycafé on their own made them realize what a valuable source of knowledge, support and exchange it is.

Background of “Babycafé with guests®”

“Babycafé with guests®” evolved in 2009 in line with Mütterforum’s parental education of Baden-Württemberg. The main goal of Babycafés was and is the exchange between mothers/fathers, by supporting peer learning in a helpful, welcoming atmosphere of open meetings in contrast to other parental educational programs that also have cognitive contents.

Babycafés are recognized in Baden-Württemberg as a low-threshold service and supported as a part of the community program “STÄRKE” (=strength), since “STÄRKE” finances the open meetings since June 2014. Mother Centres and Mütterforum are very proud that they finally managed to get funding after having tried to gain acceptance for open meeting places. “Babycafé with guests®” is a registered trademark of Mütterforum. It is based on a new conception developed for Mother Centres including public quality standards: professional leadership.

Quality through qualification

Knowing about early infant development and bonding, trained experts and mothers themselves from Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg train hosts to become Babycafé leaders. 23 Mother Centres in Baden-Württemberg are qualified by now to host “Babycafés with guests®”.

Qualified hosts offer “Babycafé with guests®” from the beginning of parenthood up to 12 months. About two times a week for 1,5 hours’ time they provide the opportunity to have functional supported discussions getting useful information about family education and family togetherness. Tips to manage everyday life are given from mother to mother, together with useful information about support and ongoing helpful offers at the Mother Centre or elsewhere.



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Guests can either be experts invited on mothers' wishes to give a lecture on special topics, or everyday life experts of all generations reporting about experiences they had themselves when raising their children. "Babycafés with guests®" reach numerous mothers from various nations who get here exactly what they need: a reliable opportunity for (knowledge) exchange, time for themselves and their babies in an open but nevertheless safe place fitting in their individual family rhythm. Thus the mothers remain flexible in using this open meeting place. In addition to German Babycafés, there are also Turkish spoken cafés, led by Turkish women. They take into account cultural differences and individual preferences of Turkish mothers regarding sharing and privacy.

More educational content about the meeting from March 20th -22nd 2014

Workshop "Gastgeberin im Offenen Treff" (Host in a public living room)

This workshop created a deeper understanding for methodical networking. Different criteria about openness have been worked on and hosts where given main skills.

The first exercise worked on the following topics:

1. What motivates us to travel during the Grundtvig meetings?
2. What do you expect/what is the benefit for yourself and for your centre?
3. What role do you play in your centre or in the international network?
4. And what connects us?

We worked on these questions with the following method: Every woman was allowed to throw a ball of wool three times to another woman. We created a net visualising the network we are in. Everyone took part as much and as actively as she could: regional, national, and international. "I could physically feel what a network means," said one of the participants.

The second exercise was about openness, what it means and whether we all understand it the same way. The answers of the participants were written down on a flipchart. The next question discussed was about how openness in Mother Centres arises and what one does to express it. These answers again were written on a second flipchart and confronted with the first note board. The conclusion was that openness in Mother Centres depends on the hosting person and how that person practises being open. This is a learnable skill and Mütterforum offers qualifying trainings on this topic. (See photos of the flipcharts).

The third exercise began with studying different portraits (newspapers clippings) and answering questions in groups on the following items:

- Why do people visit us, what do they like to find? (Sensibility was tested here)
- What skills could the guests have and what could they contribute to the centre (Knowledge of human nature was tested here)
- How would you encourage the guests to participate? (Testing how good participants could motivate guests)



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The exercises evaluated that Mother Centres and parents clubs have to keep in mind to reflect on their offers and their approach in reaching people, no matter whether centres are very popular and highly frequented or not. Being open, sensible, enthusiastic and able to manage conflicts are competences needed by women and men being part of the family education self-help group, to convert open meetings into places with relationship, identification, responsibility and dedication. Hosts have to be educated accordingly as core figures for successful contacts, exchange, growing and merging.

Film and book about fathers: EKIZ Väterfilm (Fathers' movie) and Väterbuch (Fathers' Book)

A few years ago young fathers in EKIZ were given the opportunity to present themselves by making a short film, called "Daddy Rocks". This was a first step to listen to and catch sight of fathers' feelings. The film is available at: www.eltern-kind-zentrum.de > Wir sind > Filme übers EKIZ.

The corresponding book "Väter - Pioniere unserer Zeit" (Fathers – Pioneers of our time) published in February 2014 was another step ahead. EKIZ wanted to know what fathers are like and interviewed 15 daddies and shot photos. The answers of the Stuttgart's fathers resulted in a baseline study about modern fathers in the context of family, profession and volunteering. Single portraits, statistics and an exemplary suggestion of how to combine family and profession elaborated the wishes and realities for fathers.

EKIZ found out what fathers want and what they miss, which kind of participation they like and what they could supply in matters of time. Now fathers can be involved in a more directive way, being a part of cooperation and being together. The book reveals competences and impact of fathers as well as defines fatherhood in a prevailing common way. The film, the book and the fact that we had a father in our Grundtvig discussion group revealed that fathers indeed feel comfortable about going to Mother Centres and starting their own initiatives.

Equal Pay Day (Smart Mob) in Stuttgart City: Having fun and being solidly united while engaging for equal payment of women and men.

Action background: In Germany women earn about 22% less than men, in Baden-Württemberg even 28%. Equal Pay Day emphasizes the fact of different payment of wages between men and women. It takes place at the date, when women reach the same payment as their male colleagues achieved by the end of the prior year. International women taking part in the Grundtvig mobility as well as the Stuttgart organizers actively participated at the smart mob by wearing red accessories (shoes, handbags, scarfs, hats, etc.) (See also photos from Stuttgart).



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Packing up transport goods on the occasion of a fundraising campaign supporting the Plamen Mother Centre in Bosnia: experiencing solidarity and social ethics / public spirit.

Background of the transportation of fundraised goods: Demonstrations of civilian population wanting to defend the country against corruption and political despotism led to riots in Bosnia. On the one hand, it was important to start reforms and do something against the essential misery families where in, on the other hand terrified people that lost their sense of physical safety. Many of them still remember the Balkan wars and their traumatic experiences. In that case, more solidary cooperation was needed!

This was the reason behind the fundraising action led by the Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg at the beginning of 2014. We wanted to support the Plamen Mother Centre in Zavidovici with fundraised goods and money. Senada Dzankic, the person in charge of the Plamen centre was carefully listened by many women on the occasion of the Mütterforum's Jubilee on October 25th, 2013. In her speech, she reported emphatically and thankfully about the chances of survival that could be given to many families in her centre and that everybody's help to preserve it will be welcome. During the fundraising action, the Mütterforum collected nearly 2,000 € for the transportation of a whole truck filled with goods for both children and adults.

Annual meeting of Mütterforum member centres on the 22nd of March 2013 in MüZe Süd, Stuttgart

Tangible networking, national and international

A workshop conducted on the principles of leadership support led to the question "How do our international partnerships effect our work". During the English/German dialogues in the afternoon, Andrea Laux, leading member of "mine e.V." and Helga Hinse, member of Mütterforum's managing board reported on network chances in connection with the Grundtvig educational partnership. Using this method, the European Union enables the exchange as well as the on-site work between social and public-based organisations.

The Grundtvig program, due to its lean structure, offers easy and ideal application modalities to join into the peer level and to be able to develop common networking. Applying for and reporting to the system are not such a great barrier as with other EU applications. The Nest Foundation based in the Netherlands acts as the applicant body. Mother Centres come together, work together and exchange also under the roof of "mine e.V." as an association with active leaders of countries, as well as international everyday life experts. Nowadays, "mine e.V." represents more than 1,000 Mother Centres located in 24 countries worldwide as an umbrella organisation.

During exchange meetings, depending on the local general frameworks (political, infrastructural and cultural) differences were evaluated. But first and foremost, commonalities are uncovered because the protagonists of the Grundtvig learning partnership are (mainly) motivated and dedicated mothers working together to create good conditions for neighbourhood families.



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This again demonstrates that knowledge transfer on general conditions and offers in different countries not only contributes to profiting from everyday life ideas, but also helps to create mutual understanding between nations within Europe.

Results:

1. good starting conditions for mothers are:

Being accompanied from the beginning of pregnancy. As far as this is concerned, midwives play a tremendous role because they create a trustful relationship with mothers before and after the childbirth. Midwives cover a key role regarding the first sensitive perception in individual situations of mothers. Their professional and emotional involvement relieves mothers' pressures, which may result due to their changed life situation after childbirth (see also no. 2 below). A close contact and communication between Mother Centres and midwives is wise and reasonable, considering the fact that both parts have the best interest at heart and can offer the best piece of advice both for the mother and the child.

Mothers and fathers being in the same life situation have the opportunity to meet and talk about their everyday life experiences without being judged (e.g. like in open meetings of Mother Centres).

The more time mothers and fathers have to cope with the challenges together as partners, the more time they will have for required changes and for each other.

Creating a better general framework (regarding being in contact with Mother Centres and/or other institutions as well as with midwives, doctors, family, relatives, friends, etc.).

2. Agreement about the importance of midwives

A common resolution to strengthen the profession of midwives on the background of Germany's new insurance conditions highly endangers the profession of midwives. We decided to collect signatures within the international network to preserve the profession of midwives. In addition, we want to find out and list the local working conditions of midwives in every country of the network in order to adopt a resolution in this regard.

3. Differences in the validation of motherhood

Turkish mothers get 40 days of maternity leave after childbirth. Withdrawal from everyday life is culturally accepted and supported by the family. In Poland, mothers will be glad not to be confronted with ruling stereotypes. Polish mothers do not really have a chance: if they choose to live a life of combining profession with having a child, they will be seen as uncaring mothers. If they choose to stay at home with their child, they are considered to be professionally unmotivated and lazy. On the other hand "Matka polska", i.e. the Polish super-mother, became an obsolete model, thus helping Polish mothers to feel better. Young mothers in Poland range within this area of conflict. Mother Centres (so called Parents Clubs) contribute by taking stress away with offers of family activities and the possibility



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to communicate. Polish Mother Centres do not have a lobby until now. Being not really connected may contribute to the problem.

4. Discussion about family education in open meetings on the example of the Babycafé and its development on the background of financial promotion criteria in Baden-Württemberg.
5. Changing generations on the example of the Austrian participant Traudl Heylik. Twenty years ago, she started up a Mother Centre in Mödling near Vienna and is preparing her replacement by introducing Susanne Pichler as the new leader. She dedicated 3 years of time to passing on her enthusiasm.
6. Being a guest in the Multigenerational house Eltern-Kind-Zentrum Stuttgart-West Experience the meaning of creating and developing a Mother Center in the context of social development. Feel and see what it means to be a host.

The bottom line with original quotes on the following:

Knowledge transfer:

- „We are aware that we cannot copy everything, but due to different basic conditions we know that we have to pass it along to our partners and local politicians”
- „You (in Baden-Württemberg) are inspiring us.”
- „It was great sharing one’s knowledge and getting so much back via mutual personal contacts”
- „I have been looking for new inspirations and I can say that I will take good ideas back home from our exchange meeting in Baden-Württemberg.”
- “My visit to the Mother Center EKIZ, Mehrgenerationenhaus Stuttgart-West and MüZe Süd opened my mind towards the common spirit of being a host in the open café. The workshop contributed to a better understanding of the deeper meaning of being a host.”

Self-confidence/self-esteem:

- „Now we know how important we are and that we are more than just a coffee party.”
- „Again I realized that there is nearly no other safer place than a mother center – emotionally and being a learner.”

Public spirit:

- „Everywhere we have the same problems rising our children in our families. There are no specific problems. That unites us.”



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- „I am totally moved by the common spirit. I want to do everything in my power to pass my Grundtvig experiences onto women in my Mother Center in Biberach.“

Lobby:

- „Grundtvig showed to me that feeling comfortable is no criteria for an exclusion of high quality results. While discussing the “start into parenthood”, we came to the conclusion that work done by midwives is very important. Now we will look at it from different points of view and systems. Then, we will elaborate a common resolution. Grundtvig enables us to do that.“
- “It is good that a common resolution is planned to preserve the profession of midwives. Without midwives, parenthood will not succeed.“

Lifelong learning:

- „I drew the conclusion that if you found out the problem, you will have the chance to solve it and something new will arise. I will take that home.“
- „I have made so many experiences in international networks so far and I still go on learning.“
- „Other people retire. But I will go on with the Grundtvig principle and always be keen on learning my whole life, because I think it is important. During the last 6 years I’ve been involved in Grundtvig, I met so many people and went to Mother Centers always experiencing friendliness. That really moves me.“
- “Keeping the fire going, confidence, changing positions.“
- Traudl Heylik, Austria: „Now I’m sure that I found a good follower. I wasn’t sure if she could also warm up with Grundtvig, but she does.“
- „From Traudl we can learn how to alternate generations.“
- „We are always mothers and will always be mothers, no matter how old we or our children are. We will always care about and look after them. That became clear to me again today. Now I’m proud to return to the Mother Center as a grandma.“
- „I do not want to give up visiting my Mother Center only because I’m getting older. Therefore we need to offer a program combining all generations. We can learn about that a lot from Grundtvig.“

Networking:

- „We always have to work a lot at our Centers, but we like to join in Grundtvig, because we all have the same focus, will grow and get more importance. It’s not easy to explain to people without children what moves us. But it is possible by having a good network behind it. That was what we were able to experience in Stuttgart.“
- „Integrating the Grundtvig meeting into the annual general meeting was a good idea. Guests could experience how networking is being practiced.“



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- „This meeting encouraged me again to see how important it is to have chosen “open get-togethers” with all different perspectives as the topic of our partnership. Again this meeting showed me the importance of discussing the topic of public living rooms and realizing they are safe learning spaces.”

Goodwill of the learning partnership:

- „Having the same basic ideas unites us!”
- „Despite different languages, we can feel the common sense!”
- „Our heart beating for our Mother Centers is the most essential thing we have. This is our common engine to create and offer places for women and families.”
- „I always get new motivation being in the process.”
- „It is very much profitable! But you have to seek and desire exchanges in person.”
- „It needs courage to join in without knowing English. Because we all wanted the same I managed to understand, it gives me a good feeling. I will recommend it to all of you. You can feel that you are strong inside and outside.”
- „Grundtvig gets you out of the daily routine, although its topic is about everyday life. I makes you feel good, and you get rich by realizing that the work of your daily routine is a gift.”
- „Grundtvig means: draw conclusions from a great treasure of experiences and feel life coming through mother center’s doors, no matter which country you are from.”

What else do Grundtvig mutual meetings cause?

- “Getting to know and appreciate people behind emails, create common mutuality, realize cultural differences and see them melt on common basics and wishes.”
- “Clearing off disaccord and insecurity, while interacting and meeting in person.”
- “Making clear where we stand and where we could be. Showing that it is always worthwhile travelling and making your way to join in and discuss. Even if it is a great effort to take time out from your daily routine for the sake of willingness to help and contribute to the future of Mother Centers. Join in personal discussions about merit, subject matters and ambitions.”
- “Having fun acting for political reasons and the feeling of local color.”
- “Taking time to meet people, listen what they say and internalize it.”
- “Sharing and passing on knowledge in general, exchanging with other people and letting them tell you what they want to share.”
- “Not reinventing the wheel again and again, but profiting from each other and being more successful.”

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