



Das Öffentliche Wohnzimmer - ein sicherer Ort zum Lernen

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

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Grundtvig learning partnership

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Topic 10: "Inclusion, exclusion, discrimination"

**Discussions took place during 15th-19th January 2015 at the Mother and Family Center Klara in
Freiburg im Breisgau and at the Family Centre Freiburg-Hochdorf (Germany)**

This time around, the Mütterforum Baden-Württemberg invited countries taking part in the Grundtvig learning partnership "The public living room – a safe learning space" to discuss the results of Topic 10 entitled "Inklusion, Exklusion, Diskriminierung" (Inclusion, exclusion, diversity). Round 25 participants from five countries (Austria, Netherlands, Slovakia, Turkey and Germany) attended the three-day meeting at the Mother Center Klara (<http://muetterzentrum-klara.de/>) in Freiburg in January 2015.

The kick-off meeting on Friday morning, 16th of January 2015 focused on discussing diversity and exclusion and practicing inclusion. We defined **diversity** as any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups from one another; it is about empowerment. Fundamentally, diversity means respect for and appreciation of differences in age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, education, and national origin. Using diversity in conjunction with inclusion allows individuals and groups of people to be recognized as being unique while recognizing individual differences.

Each individual in a Mother Center brings with them a diverse set of perspectives, work and life experiences, as well as religious and cultural differences. The power of diversity can only be unleashed and its benefits reaped, when we recognize these differences and learn to respect and value each individual irrespective of their background.

Inclusion was defined as an organizational effort in which different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed and treated equally. "Different backgrounds" may mean differences in national origin, age, race and ethnicity, religion/belief, gender, marital status and socioeconomic status, but also educational background, training, experience, even personality.

Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are as an individual or group; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best. Inclusion is (or should be) at the heart of the Mother Center culture. The process of inclusion engages each individual and



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makes people feel valued. Individuals function at full capacity and feel more valued and included in the group. This culture assures that the center functions better and people feel well.

Both the European participants and the local organizers themselves had to deal with discrimination for instance in the following cases (with original quotes from the Friday meeting in brackets):

- discrimination against mentally-ill (e.g. schizophrenia-ill) or disabled family members,
- prejudices against certain nations (e.g. against Germans while being a foreigner in Latin America),
- discrimination against women in general and Muslim women with a scarf in particular,
- discrimination against people who do not speak a certain language or have a certain skin color: “My German is so bad that it is clear to everybody that I am an outsider, but as an outsider I am appreciated for speaking German fairly well. It is just a different category. In Burundi Africa, I was once with a group of colleagues who were so used to me that they simply did not notice I had a different skin color and did not speak their language.”
- discrimination against drug-addicts: “My mother was from Russia and love brought her to Slovakia without anybody and being discriminated turned her into an alcoholic. Through the Mother Center she found out what she can do to fight against it.”
- discrimination against work-immigrants and their children: “I was born here but my parents were from Greece. During school it was difficult to be accepted. I had international friends and only a few German friends. There was always a distance that I did not entirely understand.”
- discrimination against war refugees: „We always try to include all in the Mother Center. As a kid my mother was a refugee from Sudetenland during the Second World War and she was not accepted in this region (i.e. in the South of Germany) and that was quite difficult.”
- discrimination against relatives of inmates (i.e. wife and children) serving time in jail.

Two core statements are worth mentioning:

- **Prejudices may be passed on consciously or unconsciously to our children:** “Babies and toddlers do not discriminate, they do not have prejudices, but smile for instance at everybody on the tram.”
- „Especially in this discrimination topic **we all are victim AND perpetrator**. It is good to realize that.”

It is highly significant to mention that women who have never been to international meetings come to these discussions in Mother Centers, because the threshold is so low and the atmosphere so informal. This



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makes our Mother Centers more inclusive and very suitable for a successful learning format. **For us, learning is about relating.**

Visit to an inclusive daycare center “Kita am Seepark”

In the afternoon the participants visited the inclusive daycare center “Kita am Seepark” in Freiburg (see also the flyer at <https://www.freiburg.de/pb/site/Freiburg/get/629317/flyer-seepark-2014-web.pdf>). The visit offered insights into the structure of the kindergarten and the way they go about the topic of inclusion.

“At the moment there are 55 people who want to have one of the six places that will be free in September. For these places we want to let chance decide in a 'lottery', in which handicapped children have the same opportunities as the others. It is inclusive and all children have the same chances,” said the manager of the inclusive daycare. She continued: “We have 26 teachers (3 men, 23 women) specialised for the blind, deaf and various other disabilities. The building is barrier-free. We fit all legal regulations without having a single m² more than normal. We have generous staff space, which is good because it is hard to find staff. The number of professionals lags behind German laws. The municipality supports our work.”

The daycare „Kita am Seepark“ is inclusive both in the baby and kindergarten groups and there is a variety of children. At the moment there are 9 with real heavy handicaps and special needs, two children in a wheelchair, children with Down syndrome and in the baby group there are children in warming beds. In addition, there are children of 16 different nationalities and the educational background of the parents is very mixed. It is especially the well-educated who use the inclusive daycare facility. In the MC the educational background is mixed, and well-educated does not necessarily imply being rich. One thing applies to both the inclusive daycare and the MC: parent participation is high, they help each other by picking up the children in turns, by cooking international dishes and reading to the children.

The conclusion of our Grundtvig visit at the inclusive daycare was that **“The society only functions if we work all together. We should not separate groups, but keep everybody together.”**

Visit to an inclusive guesthouse: Hofgut Himmelreich (www.hofgut-himmelreich.de)

The owner and initiator had the idea 10 years ago to have a completely normal restaurant with an inclusive workforce. At the time it was a new idea. Right now, the business extended to a travel agency and a railway station kiosk. There are about 28 employees with or without special needs, all having normal work hours (most of them work part-time) as well as normal wages.



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In addition, the guesthouse has an indoor inclusive academy offering 18-month-long professional trainings for people with special needs and helps them find jobs later on (80-90% find jobs in normal restaurants, hotels, etc.). The work agency pays for the trainings that involve teaching, internship in Himmelreich and other internships in companies. Every trainee gets a coach to build the bridge to the normal work. The 8th generation of trainees started their education in September 2014.

All Grundtvig participants were taught how to fold napkins and the different kinds of cutlery.

Visit to the Mother Center in Freiburg-Hochdorf (<http://www.familien-treff-hochdorf.de/>)

The Mother Centre celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2015. It is very popular due to its family mensa, that reunites once a week both the young and the elderly at the same table. During the Grundtvig meeting the project entitled the “Wool Mile” was officially launched on January 17th 2015 (see <http://www.hochdorfer-wollmeile.de/>). There are an inclusive idea behind this project, namely to make visible how social institutions in the neighborhood such as the Youth House, the Mother Center, the Seniors’ Center, the kindergarten and the school are linked. The visible outcome are the beautifully knitted wool emblems, patchwork, symbols and so on, which will be hanged on street lamps, fences, trees and other city properties.

“We are just starting now and collect donations of wool. We have some money as well to buy materials, but rely on donated wool for the most of it,” said one woman involved in the “Wool Mile” project.

Urban knitting is mostly done anonymously, like graffiti. This is not how the Wool Mile project wants to proceed. “We initiated this project and it has changed our position in the neighborhood. We have been going around and are in contact with other local organizations and that was new for us.”

The conclusion: Mother Centers are good at organizing the public living room. But things are changing and this has an effect on Mother Centers, too. We need to keep on going and renew constantly, with various social and intergenerational projects, in order to survive as a network and as a movement.

Brunch dialogue session in the Klara MC with guests

The Klara Mother Center celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2015 (see <http://muetterzentrum-klara.de>). Its active engagement and involvement in local municipal policy makes the Klara MC one of the most successful in the region. However, one big problem remains: the Klara MC has been looking for new rooms for the past 10 years, because they are now in a 150 m² flat on the second floor of a building, and they would need around



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300 m² with outdoor space such as a terrace or a garden. Efforts to find a new location have remained without success so far.

Most people think about the handicapped, when they hear about inclusion. During this brunch, we invited a more varied set of guests, who represent various marginalized groups: relatives of those who are addicted to gambling or legal/illegal drugs, relatives of inmates, parents of children with special needs, single raising parents, Christians and Muslims, well-educated and less educated people.

In all these cases, we concluded that the Mother Center has the fundamental role of a big anchor, where all participants get support and can contribute with their own skills, knowledge, time and goodwill. That way, they enlarge their spectrum of knowledge, learn new things, expand their social network by meeting new people, and in turn enormously enrich the Mother Center with their presence and expertise.

Results

- How can I / our Mother Center contribute to inclusion and prevent exclusion and discrimination?
 - There should generally be a positive, respectful attitude towards people
 - Inviting people to celebrate together, to plan projects together
 - Common events: literary, culturally, food...
- Which strategies, processes, methods and formats do Mothers' Centers already practice?
 - Using a culture of openness: approaching it at work and in team meetings again and again
 - Abolishing prejudices by information and reflection
 - Best Practice: projects to prepare for later jobs for pupils with little learning capacities. Hereby involving trained hostesses of the centers
 - Cooperation with other clubs and groups
 - No events at the same time on the same topic, better networks
 - By advertisements, public relations
 - Involving different talents, more courses, passing knowledge to others
 - Courses in needlework, etc.
 - Taking part in events of the local mosque, showing interest in Muslim activities
 - More options on how to spend free time together
 - Games and events for children with special needs



The bottom line with original quotes about

Mother Centers as a value-free learning space

- “I have noticed how often I do discriminate without realizing by just using general categories. It does have a function to be able to sort and make categories to understand the world. We have very varied groups of Muslims with and without scarf, gay couples, fathers in our Mother Center and the direct contact to all those groups helps me to accept and tolerate and integrate. Shaping this every day in live contact is what a Mother Center brings.”
- „The Mother Center is open and teaches people new things, languages, skills and we feel part of it, it becomes a part of the family.”
- “I never met so many different cultures and nationalities ever. All with such an open heart. Thanks to people who told their personal story.”
- “Exchanges are wonderful: discussing the being different. I came to the Mother Center, because here you always find somebody to talk to and that is different from a café. People come up to me and I can go up to others. This is important for a society.”
- “I got more of a view on all the backgrounds and contact with foreign guests was interesting. Going up to people and speaking up in an open and value-free way is important”

Social discrimination

- „ONLY people who are willing to understand are important to us. I do not let the social stigmas make me feel bad.”
- “I feel safe and at home here. This meeting was one of our best. The question gave space for discussions, which was important. We did not avoid the difficult questions about Islam and we could do so in a safe circle. This is how a learning community should work. From this meeting we can distil the indicators for learning. How can we learn, have enough time also to relax a bit, stay inclusive. It was a joy to have people from my own region. We could support the people of Hochdorf and you all participated. We met many people and everybody helped. There was much wisdom in our circle.”



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- “Wonderful meeting and I felt at home with family. We discussed everything, including the Islam phobia in a very confidential and personal way. This will stay with me.”

Grundtvig meeting in Freiburg

- “Personal and touching experience. Nice to meet and let’s stay in touch. This bounds us and we remember it.”
- “My appreciation for the work of all the volunteers and organisers. The food was great, which opens up the atmosphere for sharing and discussing freely. We will find a way to continue in the future.”
- “The food also is a metaphor, I take the recipes as inspiration with me. I have never been abroad and everything was new. I never met so many cultures, I live in a village and do not know many people.”
- “This town is friendly and kind and soft and the meeting was friendly.”
- “These three days were lovely. I am tired and proud, it was an honour to have you all here. The team was lovely and that makes me happy. I am proud that we can do this and it makes me happy that you felt comfortable.”