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Seminar: A house for everyone: Be a part of the Mosaïque! (FSL)

Examiner: Dr. Corinna Krome

Women & Children's – Day at Mosaïque

- Project Reflection -

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Index

1. Introduction and Description.....	1
2. Necessity of our project.....	2
3. Goals and target group	3
4. Results	4
5. Reflection	5
6. Conclusion.....	6
Literature	8
Eidesstattliche Erklärung.....	9

1. Introduction and Description

This reflection is about our seminar project and event „Women and Children’s - Day“ which took place at the *Mosaique – House of Cultures* June 23rd, 2018. It was an afternoon spent with women with flight background¹ from Syria, Kurdistan, Afghanistan and Iran who we invited to introduce the *Mosaique – House of Cultures* in company of other (German) women living in Lüneburg.

One part of the participating group were women, living in the community accommodation (Gemeinschaftsunterkunft) “Schaperdrift” in Oedeme², which is especially for families. After arranging everything with the accommodation’s social worker we had visited the women twice; two weeks in advance to personally introduce our event, ask for wishes and suggestions and again to remind them one day in advance. On the day of the event we picked them up personally (a group of four women and seven children between one to ten years old) and took a bus to the city center of Lüneburg. The second part of our group we met at St. Johannis Church, were women from a German-Syrian women’s group, Anna Blahaut and me visited a few weeks before, and also women from *SalinO*³. All women brought their children and when we started the “city rally” there were ten women and fourteen children/babies, as well as four female students from Leuphana University attending. On our way to Mosaique we led the city rally with several clous⁴ we put together a few days before.

When we arrived at Mosaique in the afternoon we had a cake buffet, played together and later on a few women and children left and the other women played some Arabic dance music and started to show us a dance choreography in a circle. Afterwards we sat together, talking and watching the photographs from the day on a big screen.

My role within our group was the internal communication, which implied sending out the Sunday News to keep the whole seminar group up to date to our project’s process and also the direct contact to Corinna Krome and Eva Kern from Mosaique, as well as members from the partner organizations *Welcome & Learning Center*⁵ and *amikeco Willkommensinitiative*⁶. In addition, I visited a German-Syrian women meeting together with Anna Blahaut in Rettmer and went to *SalinO* to promote our event to women attending a German language course. I was also able to have a personal meeting with a Syrian woman, who is the mother of a good friend, who gave a very honest and direct feedback in the first steps of our planning process. Furthermore I organized the Arabic translation of our promotion material like flyers and posters.

¹ This expression is used here, because the specific status of asylum has not been monitored, neither the individual reasons for flight. Furthermore the term “refugee”, which is mostly used in this context (defined in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Art.1), should not be used without reflection, because it does not imply war and violence as a reason for flight - underlined by McAdam (2014) ; Human Rights and Forced Migration; p. 1-3 – here she speaks of ‘complementary’ or ‘subsidiary’ protection.

² Address: Schaperdrift 39, 21335 Lüneburg.

³ Hansesstadt Lüneburg (2018): Salino.

⁴ see attachment of our “ Checklist”.

⁵ Amikeco Willkommensinitiative (2018): Welcome and Learning Center.

⁶ Amikeco Willkommensinitiative (2018).

At the day of the event when we arrived at Mosaique, I started with a short presentation about its cultural offers, underlining the possibilities that Mosaique offers to people from different backgrounds. I encouraged the women to visit Mosaique again and to contact me or one of the volunteers at Mosaique in case they would like to repeat this kind of events only for women, or any other kind of event they would like to realize.

2. Necessity of our project

This chapter will explain the intention and necessity of our event, based on the current situation with refugees⁷ in Lüneburg and at Mosaique.

Our project was developed based on my impression that the Mosaique “Begegnungsstätte”⁸ and other events are mainly visited and attended by young men and by less women or children. I wanted to take the opportunity to use our event for presenting the Mosaique to women with flight background who currently live in a community accommodation. The Mosaique is a place for exchange, created with the lowest possible inhibitions for participation. As I am interested in the integration of a female perspective into different topics I was looking for an opportunity, to introduce more women to Mosaique showing which benefits the cultural offers can have for them. This also implied the presentation of the underlying idea of Mosaique⁹, the current events and the perspectives it can offer to everyone, who would like to start their own event or workshop here.

Our project grew very fast with many ideas in order to achieve the goal of integrating more women to Mosaique. This should offer the security of a “safe space” and also show that we, as a female group, are personally interested in getting to know all participants. This is why we planned to introduce our events to only one group of women, living in a community accommodation which we were able to visit two times in advance, in order to build up a personal relationship. As all women were mothers it seemed very important to us, that they felt comfortable and trusted us in talking to and playing with their children.

The *Welcome & Learning Center* had a “Women café” every Friday and their experience was very helpful to realize that an event only for women may reach our goal in the first place.

⁷ migrants who have refugee status within their asylum seeking process . Vgl. Goodwin-Gill; McAdam, p. 412-416.

⁸ during regular opening hours of Mosaique.

⁹ Mosaique e.V. (2018): Charta.

The fundamental necessity of our event can be linked to the “de facto integration”¹⁰ named by Lucy Hovil, a senior researcher at the International Refugee Rights Initiative, Kampala, in a cultural and social context. The process of “de facto integration” describes direct, local and active ways or facilities for refugees to participate and integrate in their asylum giving country’s culture. In contrast to this, Hovil explains “de jure integration” as “a formal process of obtaining a new citizenship and is an overtly political process”¹¹. Integration means keeping one selves origin culture but adapting cultural practices, language and social structures of the new country/society¹². Institutions such as Mosaique can serve as a part of the solution for local integration and offer a space for cultural exchange within the city. The integration of refugees is one of Mosaique’s goals¹³ and our event should actively contribute to this with an emphasize on women.

3. Goals and target group

This chapter summarizes our goals and target group and how we have planned to reach them.

Our main goal was to introduce the *Mosaique – House of Cultures* to women. As Mosaique is a meeting point and place for cultural exchange, we wanted to bring together women from different ethical and cultural backgrounds. As Mosaique in cooperation with the WLC and *amikeco* offer many opportunities for people with flight background, we focused on the participation of women with flight background, living in a refugee accommodation, who might not have visited the Mosaique yet.

Currently 578 refugees are living in community accommodations in Lüneburg¹⁴. We chose “Schaperdrift” because it is an accommodation especially for families. In addition, it is the closes accommodation to Mosaique, which was a reasonable criterion.

We wanted to invite many women in order to get to know each other, find easy ways to connect via games and activities based on a low level of inhibition. Our event should function as a basis for social networking in order to start future events of this type. The “safe space” of women only and the two times the women from “Schaperdrift” met us in advance should contribute to a familiar and relaxed atmosphere. In general, the event had the goal to offer a safe environment for all participants – especially for the children and that they have fun and enjoyed themselves. Our goal was to create a day full of joy and fun, while exploring Lüneburg and getting to know the Mosaique as a place, where they can come and bring their children to a culturally and socially sensitive environment.

¹⁰ Vgl. Hovil (2014) p.2f.

¹¹ Ebd. p.3.

¹² Bundesausländerbeauftragte.de (2009): Integration.

¹³ Mosaique e.V. (2018): Charta.

¹⁴ Hansestadt Lüneburg (2018): Asyl/Flüchtlinge.

Furthermore our goal was to bring together women with and without flight background to meet each other, enjoy the experience of Mosaique together and lower the inhibition of getting in contact with each other. In order to reach out to local women from Lüneburg we promoted the event online, at Leuphana University, at Mosaique, in Kindergartens and with German-English flyers in the city center.

To conclude, our target group can be defined as: women with different cultural backgrounds from all ages, with or without children.

4. Results

The Results of our planning process and from the event itself will be portrayed in this chapter.

Our visit at the German-Syrian women meeting at Ulrike Haus' place was a wonderful opportunity to introduce our event directly to our target group. We met four women from Syria, all at a different age, with and without children who gave us very good feedback on what we've planned so far. We asked for their wishes and they told us it is most important for them, to see their children having a fun afternoon and enjoy themselves in company of other children. This afternoon was very inspiring and supportive for our event, because I met Tuka Rashed, a Syrian woman with two children. She was a huge support, because she joined us at our first visit at the community accommodation "Schaperdrift" to translate our explanation of the event to women in Arabic. Our first and second visit at the accommodation was very helpful, unless the women did not have any suggestions or wishes they told us. It was mainly helpful in order to introduce ourselves and our event in person and built a personal connection. We did not want to show up there as strangers, bringing them to a place where there have never been before.

From the beginning on we prepared a Plan A and B. Plan A was a walking tour/"Schnitzeljagd" from the accommodation to Mosaique with three stops on the way. Due to bad weather conditions we had to conduct Plan B. We were able to find a good solution for the day by picking up the women at "Schaperdrift", taking the bus to "Am Sande", meeting more women at St. Johannis Kirche and doing the city rally because it was not too rainy in the end. As planned we arrived at Mosaique around 3:30 p.m. With support by Silke, a volunteer and Martina from *amikeco* Svenja already set up the room, prepared the cake buffet and arranged the tables so we could start with sitting together, having cake and talking about the afternoon so far. As we were overwhelmed with the big number of participants we had to decide, which games we were able to play in the whole group.

We minimized the planned activities to “Orgelpfeifen”¹⁵ and “Stoptanzen”¹⁶, because most of the children wanted to do handicrafts, drawings or playing the instruments. The women were sitting together, talking to each other and the students from Leuphana. Many women were interested in the consulting offers for jobs, living and education as well as entertainment and holiday offers for their children. After playing games together the women played Arabic dance music and showed us how to do their traditional dance only for women. This was initiated by the women themselves, so we realized that we reached one of our goals – creating a safe space – where the women feel comfortable. After dancing and cleaning up from the buffet we watched the photographs from the day. As planned the event ended around 6 p.m.

5. Reflection

This chapter will reflect the Mosaique seminar and teamwork for the project and event “Women & Children’s Day”. It will show successes and critique in order to demonstrate how a future event like ours can be improved.

The seminar offered a lot of information concerning the current situation of forced migration and refugee status. Terms have been cleared and deep insights in the active support for refugees have been given. The presented literature was very interesting and helpful, also in connection to the fundamental meaning and function of Mosaique. The seminar content has also been very emotionally touching for me – not only within my project group but also in exchange with the magazine and radio show groups. My personal connection with many people with flight background I met through Mosaique made it even more interesting for me and was an opportunity to study about political, social and cultural backgrounds more in depth.

The skype conversations were very interesting and emotional and thereby real. For our seminar topic it was important to realize that we are currently dealing with a global topic which we can only see on a very small scale out of our privileged perspective. Especially the conversation with Brandon Woodhouse showed me, how important it is to stand up for each other, take action and show solidarity.

The teamwork within the group was very interesting and inspiring because all of us had a different relation to Mosaique and more or less experience in working with refugees or in the social scope in general. It creates a strong bound between people when they are working on the same goal and for the same reason. I felt this after a very short time within the whole seminar group and within my group.

¹⁵ a German game where people stand lined up by their size, age or color of clothes.

¹⁶ dancing to music, stopping when someone stops the music.

We were constantly supporting each other, shared our experiences in our own tasks and our feelings, connected to the exchange with the women we met.

A critical point was the every first reaction we received via social media on Facebook right after publishing the event. A person responded in a very negative way to our approach of doing the event for female participants and children only. We took this critic as a chance to clarify the intention of our event. As this was a matter of Mosaique's public relation we talked to the PR team and explained that the event is happening outside of the regular opening hours and that there are still family-days which also invite men and fathers to come to Mosaique with their children.

This critic helped us to reflect and realize how important it is so describe an event and its intention as clear as possible not to exclude some people on a negative purpose – because this would display the opposite of what Mosaique stands for. We explained that there is a demand for an event like ours and were able to justify without any following respond.

Our Plan B in the case of bad weather was necessary and a few ideas led to the city rally which we did in the end. Even though it was entertaining I think the “Schnitzeljagd” through the nature would have been more interesting, because all women knew the city center and our clous have not been as demanding that they would have learned something new about the city. Another aspect which we had not considered in advance was that the rally took more time than expected because of the many children who needed a lot of attention.

Planning this event has always had the necessity to have in mind good and appropriate activities for children, mothers and also women who are not having children. We thought about activities and information which might be helpful and interesting for all participating women. On the one hand there were activities like dancing, which can support a deeper connection and also function as an icebreaker between participants and on the other hand information material distributed in the Mosaique as well as other organizations and institutions that offer support for female refugees and families.

Unfortunately the participation of Sandra Differt from feffa e.V., who offer occupational guidance for women with a migration and/or flight background, was cancelled because Sandra mixed up with the dates and had to cancel her participation and presentation of the organization a day before the events so we were not able to find a proper replacement.

6. Conclusion

This conclusion will reflect whether or not the event reached the set goals and where there is potential for improvement to plan an event more efficiently.

The event had the main goals to offer a safe environment, bring together women and children from different social and cultural backgrounds and introduce the Mosaique. In my opinion these goals have been achieved, because we had a solid number of participants and everyone was enjoying the day. I also see a sustainable success because I have seen some of the women from our event at Mosaique again in the last weeks which shows that they like to come back and use offers like Guitar lessons for children or German language courses of WLC.

Unfortunately the expected participation on (German) women from Lüneburg has not been satisfying. In the same way we had to admit, that a larger number of participants (especially children) would have been too much to coordinate for only four group members.

I see more potential in the promotion in the city center and at the University to reach more women. There have not been a balanced number of participants of both target groups and that was probably because we started the flyer/poster distribution only two weeks in advance. It could also be more purposeful to invite a group of women in Lüneburg (from a women choir, knitting course, yoga course etc.) in order to be able to contact and invite them more directly and maybe also in person to introduce the event and its intention. It could also be helpful to have a bigger project group or more volunteers/friends who are actively promoting the event and help at the day of the event with the children.

Furthermore the women were very happy about the fact that only women attended the event. They were able to justify their participants towards their husbands because there would be no foreign men. This also contributed to the fact that they were not worried about bringing their children.

As there were many children (about twenty) it was harder than expected to realize the planned games as children did not very much like these coordinated activities. They preferred to do handicrafts, drawings and playing with the instruments. Nevertheless the women were very communicative and interested in the Mosaique. In the end I hope that we will see some of them more regularly in the House of Cultures and maybe start a similar event with them soon.

Our clous from the city rally, Flyer, Poster and Pictures of our event can be found in the Project File and Checklist of our seminar group.

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