

ESPEZ
SS2016
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Reflection

- *what did you learn from the experience with the new comers?*

It showed me that you have to feel comfortable in order to make others feel comfortable as well.

- *how did you create dialogues, which tools did you use? are objects necessary?*

First, objects were a very good way to start something together, for example the plastic bottles. Even doe it was a very simple work with no real use, all ages of people participated very motivated. This showed me that refugees are very motivated to do something. I can imagine that if I would ask an Austrian friend of mine if we would recycle plastic bottle, most of them would see it as a strange and meaningless activity.

Second, sports also connected us. We used a football and basketball to play. It proved that there are no barriers with sports. We didn't speak the same language, but we did speak the same sports language. Everybody knew how the game worked and we were connected through the ball by passing to each other.

Third, the weekly buffet was a good way to create a atmosphere that made us feel comfortable. Morning time, everybody was hungry, everybody likes to eat.

- *how did you deal with verbal/ non verbal forms of dialogue? what is the role of language?*

As already mentioned we used objects in order to get connected (ball, bootles, etc.). Language is something that makes you feel more comfortable at the beginning. When you don't understand what the others were talking you easily get into that feeling: hopefully they're not talking about me or us. But the more time we spent together and the reactions you got proved you that its just not always about you. You are not the center of the world and not everybody thinks and cares about you. It showed me that its time to step back a little bit and expand your horizon to realize that its not you or me, its us.

In case of the buffet, food and eating is something that connects all human beings, everybody needs it, everybody uses it/cooks different. Its just another way to express yourself or to show where you're from, while being proud of it, because you're the expert on this kind of food (especially the refugees on their specific food).

- *can you identify ways of keeping on a fruitful exchange?*

Meeting on a weekly basis is important for a fruitful exchange. The more you see each other, the easier it is to build a relation. Also for our future classes.

Rituals that the people already know are an easy way to exchange right away. It would make sense to hand out a program to everybody beforehand.

- *what are the necessary features/ designs for creating a multicultural/ multigenerational gathering space?*

There's a big difference in where you meet each other. Everybody has his „home base“, like a football or basketball team, where you're used to the atmosphere and where you feel comfortable right away. For us it was the university facilities. For the refugees it was their home. It always takes time for the visitors to get used to everything, but you or especially me are always a little bit more defensive when you're a visitor. In Austria this behavior is somehow seen as polite if you're not that noticeable. So how in the world should there be some comfortable atmosphere for everybody?

This problem didn't occur when we all met at the Gallerie Rondo the first time. Everybody was on a neutral ground and brought in what he had (music, craftsmanship, food, dances, etc.). It doesn't matter how friendly you are or how big your buffet is, the best way to have a fruitful exchange is a neutral place where everybody's the same. Nature is the best „place“ to meet, no one owns nature, it's everybody's homebase.

I was often asked by my colleagues what we're doing in ESPEZ and I told them all the things of having a good time with the refugees. Most of the reactions in the beginning were what's going on? You guys are having a good time and that's it? We are developing this and that and so on. I always tell them how happy I am for them to create another cool project, parallel to two others we have every semester. I never judge and say this is good and this is better, I just mention how grateful I am that this kind of course is offered at our university and that I've chosen it for my personality. I would have never gotten into contact with refugees, I would have never widened my horizon, I would have never known that there's no difference in age, gender, education and wealth when it comes to people who have to flee in order to stay alive. I would have never known that much about the political situation in Europe and Syria, I would have never followed the Austrian president's elections that much, I would have never known how much potential Austria can offer in order to help others.

Now I know.