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Notes from Home 'Home away from Home: Ethnography of an EU Erasmus+ Programme'

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Home Away From Home: Ethnography of an EU Erasmus+ Program

Anthropologists look at the Middle East through different lenses. For example, they consider it from a European perspective, looking at it 'from' Europe; they explore the Middle East as it lives and is represented 'in' Europe; and they attempt to understand it as it moves and is interpreted 'across' Europe. A particularly critical focus has also been adopted, since recent refugee and migration movements from various regions of the Middle East have contributed to a policy crisis in the EU, which has been responded to in a wide range of ways, some overlapping and some contextually specific. How does the European Union respond to and tackle these socio-political issues, and how can we, as researchers, generate trustworthy and rich data from these different perspectives as they intertwine with EU processes and structures, as well as Europe's civil society, organisations and actions? We want to present an example of research which, integrated in an EU training programme for young people, is generating data from ethnographic approaches.

The *Home Away from Home* (HAFH) pilot training programme was designed as a response to the present situation across the European Union. Under the heading of the European Commission's Erasmus+ funding scheme (supporting activities in Education, Training, Sport, and Youth, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus_en), the training programme focuses on young people's contributions towards 'integration' in Europe, and

how they intervene in their local communities as volunteers, founders of organisations and as professionals. More visibility for their active involvement is a goal, as well as support for their networking, enabling them to bring together their expertise. Combined with the identification and promotion of inspirational practices, such networking is intended to stimulate further innovation.

According to the programme application:

"Over the past few years, feelings within the EU towards migration have become increasingly negative. The challenge of facilitating the inclusion of a growing number of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and enhancing their participation in the new societies has been increasingly gaining importance in many host countries." These challenges are broken down into two project aims: "to document and disseminate examples of effective and innovative community integration approaches initiated by youth or in which youth play a major role", and to "raise the capacities of young volunteers and professionals for supporting the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants" (see website http://hafh.eu/training/callforparticipants/, accessed July 31st, 2018).

The cross-national programme for young people *Home Away From Home* (*HAFH*) has been developed by five organisations: *Tumult* in Belgium*, The World of NGOs* in Austria, *Centre for Peace* in Croatia, *forumZFD* in Germany, and the *University of Westminster* in the UK. Running from 2017 to 2019, the project consists of thorough desk research, two study and research visits, a 7-day residential training activity in July 2018, follow-up

dissemination and multiplier events, publication of the results, and production of the final report.

Research Team

The project is being managed by the research team, which consists of Prof. Terry Lamb, Danila Mayer, Roos Bastiaan and Leandra Müller. Terry Lamb is a linguist and urban educationalist with significant global experience in multilinguality and inclusion; Mayer has worked extensively on migration, urbanisation processes, and multicultural society; Bastiaan is a trained Social Anthropologist; and Müller has a background in Eastern European Studies. Their varied institutional affiliations (University of Westminster; several NGOs in the EU) brings about a further diversification of approaches. Our teamwork research in and on an Erasmus+ Programme for young people is taking an ethnographic scientific approach to the above-mentioned questions. While detailed analysis and results have yet to be written up, our Notes from the Field are intended to provide an overview of the programme, the settings and the research methodology, while also highlighting some interesting outcomes.

Being a team greatly contributes to the work and its successful outcomes, as compared to one single researcher who cannot be in all places at all times. Also, we are able to engage in dialogue and feedback on processes, both regarding personal challenges and professional work, which are not separate, but rather two sides of the same coin. The ethnographer her/himself is part of the research data.

In the following we will present the components of the programme and the research, which were developed through close collaboration across the research group and in consultation with the wider project team.

Programme Components

a) Desk Research

The purpose of the desk research was firstly to identify policy documents, academic articles and reports which could provide insights into approaches to integrating refugees, asylum seekers and migrants ('R/AS/M'). Secondly, we searched for a range of examples of 'inspirational practice' in relation to working with refugees, using the following criteria: small projects, charities or organisations working with a focus on youth (up to age 30), preferably with young people leading the project or organisation; involvement at a local level; a variety of practices, some focusing on one activity only (e.g. football, cooking, arts, guided tours, language tutoring), and others slightly broader and more established, which in some cases had started to become sustainable through, for example, accessing project funding. The desk research fed into the training activities and resources, both on-line and 'live', during the training week.

b) Study Visits

The study visits allow the team to learn about a specific context in greater depth through a series of visits to official institutions as well as smaller projects or organisations that fit the same criteria as the examples of inspirational practice (and which may indeed already have been identified and explored through the desk research as described above). During the study visits, the participating staff and researchers visit and interview key

stakeholders in this area, and analyse the unique context, success factors and processes that led to the integration.

Study Visit to Berlin

In Berlin, for example, case study research was conducted with one small association called 'Schüler helfen Flüchtlinge' ('pupils help refugees') that had been set up by students in a high school. The aim of this association is to promote cultural understanding between refugees and students and to increase the participation of students in engaging with refugees. In order to realise these goals, the association initiates projects, in which students and refugees are able to into contact with each other. These projects are all organised by young people, some of whom have experience of being refugees themselves.

Study Visit to Belgium

In Mechelen, Antwerp and Brussels, the team met with five groundbreaking and/or inspirational practice initiatives and their spokespersons. To present the full spectrum of initiatives, we share one participant's mini-report.

'23/11/2018 - Mechelen

We spent the first day of the study visit in Mechelen, at *Tumult'*s office, and met 4 different projects. The first was *Voice of Afghans in Belgium*, an organisation that offers support to the Afghan community in Belgium. Among other initiatives they organise cricket games where they bring together the youth of Flanders and newcomers, including Afghan youth.

Zijde gij ook van Sinnekloas was an event organised by Ilse in the town of Sint-Niklaas,

aimed at bringing together newcomers and locals in a public space, to share food, music, local traditions and folk games, and to swap clothes, thereby exposing the different cultures and benefiting the community as a whole.

A talk with volunteers from *Tumult*'s youth summer camps followed and they identified fun, a sense of belonging and a multicultural environment as key factors in their long-term involvement with *Tumult*.

We then met a volunteer from the *Youth on the Run* project by the Red Cross Youth. They organise a rather unconventional 24h role-play game where participants are invited to put themselves in the shoes of refugees and face situations that illustrate the many hardships refugees encounter during their journeys. Empathy and deeper understanding are the goals.

24/11/2018 - Antwerp

After a reflection meeting in Mechelen, the rest of the second day was spent in Antwerp were we met Yara, the founder of the catering company *From Syria with Love,* and two of the cooks. This a social for-profit business that sells Syrian food cooked by Syrian housewives, usually a rather difficult group to integrate. We had a lovely meal while hearing about how the company grew in a very organic way, acting on the advice from customers, and how the founder's background influenced the success.

In the evening we met a group of youngsters from the *Road of Change* project, who were having their first gathering and training in a youth hostel in Antwerp. This project is aimed at taking a select group of high-school students to some of the significant places in migration routes within Europe, such as Calais or the Balkans. The focus is on the

students becoming multipliers of their experiences and the knowledge they have gained.

25/10/2018 - Mechelen & Gent

On the third day we met *Project X* in Mechelen, formerly *Altochtonen van de Toekomst*. This project brings together newcomers for fun and cultural activities, informal learning and also has a focus on advocacy, having made policy recommendations to the Minister of Youth. We discussed members' involvement with both organisers and participants and how, for the latter, this project was a valuable stepping-stone.

In Gent we met with a community worker from the *Niemo* project that accompanies vulnerable people by organising outreach actions and going directly to people, as well as organising leisure activities and support, that bring people in. The importance of needing time for, and not trying to rush, integration, in a fast-paced society was an important issue discussed.

26/11/2018 - Brussels

We started the fourth day with the Tour *Tochten van Hoop* (Tour of Hope) in Brussels. A guide took us through some of the main spots that R/AS/M have to go to when arriving in Brussels, such as Brussels North Station, the General Commission for Refugees and Stateless Persons, a local church and soup kitchen, and Maximilian park, among other significant places. It became apparent to us that the crisis of migration policies had a very visible and unavoidable aspect in Brussels.

In the evening we met some volunteers of the project *Burgerplatform*, who host R/AS/M in their homes for short periods of time. They have a Facebook group where people can

offer a room in their home and are put in contact with volunteers that work in the field to match hosts with people that need a place to stay for the night. Matters of safety, motivation and shared responsibility were some of the main issues discussed.

27/11/2018 - Brussels

On the last day we met with staff from the *Minor-Ndako* project in Brussels. They offer accommodation and counseling to unaccompanied minors in Belgium and have a programme to match volunteers, after appropriate background checks, with children and youngsters in the hope of establishing a long-term, stable and supportive relationship with local people. This requires a very strong commitment from volunteers and is a very sensitive process.

A final meeting was held where we discussed the study visit in general and specificities of the Belgian context.'

c) Training Week in Paklenica Starigrad

In between the two study visits - Berlin in February and Belgium in November 2018 - the week-long pilot training course took place on the Croatian coast.

The meeting took place in Starigrad Paklenica in Croatia, which is one of the programme's partner countries, and the 'youngest' (the 28th) member state of the EU. The training in Croatia brought together 25 young participants, aged 18 to 28 years, from several EU member states. The trainees were a mix of volunteers from a range of mostly

NGO organisations, founders and co-founders of refugee-related initiatives, as well as professionals working in the field of refugee support in European countries. Together they contributed to a substantial discourse concerning their experiences of engagement, inclusion/exclusion, and the (im)possible demarcations between overlapping and multiple occupations and political activism, both paid and non-paid.

During the training, people often had to choose the perspective they wished to speak from, because many of the trainees, trainers and researchers have been involved in activities in more than one role, and are continuing to do so. For example, some refugees were also active as volunteers, professionals and founders; and some (co-)founders of support groups, organisations and structures were doing so as volunteers, eventually raising funding and becoming 'professionals'.

The *Home away from Home* coordinating team from the partner organisation in the host country was responsible for bringing all participants to the training site, providing accommodation and catering, facilitating the training sessions as well as enabling the researchers to observe, occasionally as participant observers, and take notes, and collecting material for the programme report. The team took part in many sessions, working groups, discussions, and feedback rounds, thereby further enhancing project diversity in terms of age, biographies, and professional background, as well as contributing facts and figures on local/regional/national conditions, political processes, and the current situation and structure of 'integration' in Croatia and its neighbouring EU- and non-EU countries.

The trainers' team consisted of five professionals sent by the partner organisations in the UK, Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Croatia, who were widely experienced in guiding such learning processes. Led by the Belgian partner organisation, they planned, prepared, and facilitated the programme, employing a courageous and sophisticated methodology, which drew on non-formal and informal learning approaches. The learning process was designed to take the whole group through a journey, from first getting to know each other to the drawing-up of concrete ideas and project planning. As the training programme was a pilot, evaluation and feedback were fully integrated into the process, with the aim of producing inspirational practices and guidelines for future Erasmus+ programmes.

The full training course involved participants, trainers and researchers working together in a varied range of sessions, which included large group and small group work, individual and group reflection, evaluation and feedback. By sharing premises and meals, there was a special focus on informal learning, which especially grew out of the diverse approaches and the mutual trust and responsibility nurtured throughout the whole process. The atmosphere enabled all participants to speak from their various perspectives and to learn from one another, as well as providing ample material for research: taped interviews (individual and group talks, focus groups), artefacts (photographs of flip charts, posters, notes, etc. - see photograph), personal notes and observation protocols, input texts and other contributions. Data analysis, according to the overall programme's research questions, aims at drawing on critical conceptual, theoretical and substantive insights to distill "inspirational practices and guidelines for future training programmes".

d) The Multiplier Events

Each of the five partner organisations will prepare and carry out a multiplier event in 2019. Each event will promote different aspects of Home away from Home, and will be used to inform a wider audience about the programme and its results and outcomes, as well as to disseminate the guidelines and inspirational practices. The titles of the events are as follows: "Integration success stories" (Croatia) and "Innovative community building" (Germany) in May 2019, "Empowering youth for integration" (Austria) and "Working together in diversity" (Belgium), both in June 2019, and "Home away from home" (United Kingdom) in July 2019.

Research Methodology

The methodology employed in all aspects of the Home away from Home research has drawn on ethnographic approaches. The focus of this paper is the research conducted during the training programme, so the methodology described in this section relates to that week, during which the four trainers took the innovative step of participating in the full training. Headed by Terry Lamb, the research team aimed at generating data from ethnographic research, which included participant observation, and Action Research. Breaking up the 'observer' / 'observed' dichotomy was a defined goal, as was developing the focus and methodology as we went along in a responsive manner. The training's content and structure, and all participants' contributions could blend in with the research, all parts feeding into each other and therefore providing in-depth insights for the whole

group and, as intended, for the *Home Away From Home* programme in general.

Throughout the whole programme, the researchers acted as participant observers. This meant that the research was conducted collaboratively, including at time with the trainers and participants. Such research approaches are very much person-centered and therefore need a specific set of conventions/rules as well as instruments. An appropriate level of research training and experience, as well as certain personal/individual dispositions are necessary to be able to 'jump into the water and to stay in that water' during the research process.

A significant feature of the methodology was the researchers' inputs scheduled in the training week's programme; we each led sessions related to our own research as appropriate and from our professional experience in teaching, in social work and youth work (see Mayer 2011). For example, we offered a contribution about multilingualism, which involved a fascinating colouring exercise that enabled participants to reflect on the significance of plurilingual repertoires and their relationships with identities (see, for example, Busch 2012; Chik et al. 2018). In addition, each morning a "morning starter" was prepared by the research team, in which we shared some insights from the previous day, and which also contributed to community-building and establishing a sense of whole-group solidarity and the feeling of true co-operation, indeed co-production. It was transparent from the start that we all had our roles to play in the programme and, moreover, that everybody was engaged also from a political perspective.

The research team took time to regularly re-commit to the notion of 'generating data' rather than 'collecting' or even 'harvesting' them. There were focus groups, two-on-two, two-on-one and one-on-one interviews, and classic participant observation, which were all further facilitated by the fact that we were sharing the same premises, meals, breaks and free time, thus enabling relationship-building and a very positive and easy-going atmosphere. A further data source was the 'artefacts' that were produced in the course of the training: flip chart posters, memos of group discussions, outcomes of action planning, project proposals etc. The two field studies as well as documents from the programme, such as the application texts, evaluation forms etc. will also contribute to a full and rich analysis.

It was important for our integration within the group that we participated in several sessions not as researchers, but on the same terms as the others: without taking notes, speaking from our own hearts, and sharing our personal experiences. This afforded a mutual feeling of candour, openness and trust.

Furthermore, it was also a constitutive feature of the training that the whole group, as well as the respective teams in themselves, were plurilingual and culturally diverse, with multifaceted biographies, varied nationalities, multiple professional experiences and (academic) disciplines, as well as a mix of long-term involvement vs. newcomers (to their first large research project, first experience with EU programmes, first multi-national cooperation, etc). This further enriched the research as it provided a multiplicity of perspectives and voices.

Generally, there was great interest in our research and discourse, and the way in which we planned, discussed and carried out the data generation. This was stimulated to a significant degree by our transparency from the outset. Crucially, the first day of the training event included a presentation and discussion of the overall research and the role of the researchers in the training week. A key aspect of this was a clarification of the many complex ethical issues that had been considered prior to the training, such as confidentiality, anonymity, data protection and the right to withdraw. This culminated in the researchers gaining the informed consent of the participants to be involved in the research. Because of the various academic backgrounds and aspirations of many participants, this interest in the research dimension of the training week may lead to their (further) involvement in scientific work on the topic from within the fields of refugee studies, international relations and political sciences, multilingualism, social work, social and cultural anthropology, and more; certainly a number of the participants expressed that aspiration.

The results from the whole programme, especially from the training, will be used to formulate guidelines for inspirational practice. These will include guidance on the following: developing and growing a project idea; recruiting, involving and training volunteers; reaching out to specific communities which are sometimes hard to reach; developing coping strategies, including by means of a burn-out prevention tool-box; informal learning techniques; and, in the further course of the programme, effective dissemination and multiplier strategies. The target groups are young people actively

engaged in work with migrants, refugees and/or asylum seekers, those interested in starting an organisation themselves, and trainers, researchers, and practitioners.

Highlighting Some Outcomes

As with all ethnographic research, further themes and questions emerged that require follow-up exploration, of which the following are but a few:

1. It seems that work in this field can be positioned in different ways regarding the 'communities' it is engaging with, such as working 'with' or 'for' communities. What are the implications of these different conceptualisations? For example, if the intention is to work 'with' communities, then strategies need to be developed for reaching out to all the community for volunteers. It is the same in relation to establishing an organisation: How can you ensure you have people from the communities (if that is the goal)? Should the volunteer force be diverse or doesn't it matter?

2. As use of terminology, such as integration and assimilation, can be described as 'slippery', it can also be misused for different purposes (including to label, to fire up hate etc.). Further critical discourse analysis would be of value to unearth some of these hidden meanings and implications. It would also be useful to explore how this has changed over time and how this relates to broader socio-political contexts and 'altered moods'.

3. In the same context, the acute relevance and implications for people's lives of concepts

such as integration, migration, refugee, asylum, war, democracy, human rights, social justice and more, came to the surface, as expected, through the training week, especially when considering media coverage and looking critically at controversial issues in policy-making. We found that our definitions and interpretations of these terms were diverse, highly contested and in dire need of much more in-depth discussion. This expectation has been voiced by all participants irrespective of their background, their role in the programme, and their country.

4. Ethical issues had a strong presence in various facets: self-care, responsible research, topics of anonymity vs. the visibility of organisations are amongst the list of related points. In which ways does work in this field relate to political and philosophical debates around ethics?

5. Regarding identification with the EU, one participant from Croatia said in her feedback that, for the first time, she felt like a 'European' (rather than as someone from the Balkans) as a result of the training and the opportunity to get to know other activists invested in work with migrants, refugees and/or asylum seekers from the various partner countries. It is interesting to see how engagement in this field, whether transnational or not, relates to identity, including shifting identities.

It emerged in discussions about the follow-up dissemination events of *Home Away From Home*, that critique of EU policies regarding migration, refugees and asylum seekers should not be seen as contradictory to the work of EU institutions and the EU's original aim as a peace-keeping mission. This was effectively demonstrated by the content and

structure of the EU-funded programme itself. The participants regard the multiplier events scheduled for 2019 as an opportunity to influence stakeholders, media, and politicians, and ideally to *change* opinions. Furthermore, we agreed that stakeholders and politicians can and actually must be provided with much-needed arguments from the grassroots level of activists, volunteers and professionals, with or without migrant, refugee and/or asylum seekers' backgrounds.

… In Lieu of a Conclusion

One young participant said in the final feedback that, because the research team was there, they all felt they were *listened to* - and this is a very beautiful thing indeed that can be said about research.

Photographs from artefacts of the training week, Paklenica/Croatia, July 2018.
c Danila Mayer
More pictures, infos and a map of Europe showing initiatives on the website:
http://www.hafh.eu

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Danila Mayer, The World of NGOs (Vienna, Austria), Social Anthropologist, (founding) member of several IUAES Commissions, including Anthropology of the Middle East. She has contributed to migration research with various articles about the state of multicultural Austrian society and its discontents, publication of *Park Youth in Vienna* (2011). Cultural studies of contemporary art, biennials, and museums.

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