

Grundtvig Learning Partnership The Grassroots Women's International Academy

SEMINAR MINUTES

15 to 19 September 2008

BARCELONA



Session 1

Monday, September 15

LEARNING PARTNERSHIP: PRESENTATION

Greeting and Welcome from Ms. Teresa Llorens, Coordinator for the Department of Equality and Citizenship of the Provincial Government of Barcelona. Ms. Llorens described the activities that foster active participation and women's empowerment conducted in the province of Barcelona. These are organised through a network of women's information and resource centers. She also explained how these actions correspond to the objectives sought by Mother Center movement, an initiative which is starting to develop in some of the municipalities in the province of Barcelona, in cities such as Badalona.

Greetings and welcome from Ms. Wandia Seaforth, head of UN-HABITAT and the Local Leadership programme. She stressed that women from different countries, despite their possible cultural differences, all share the same problems. She went on to say that through participation in projects such as GWIA, women manage to negotiate with local authorities and provide solutions to problems. They achieve this through simple and basic assumptions and break down the barriers between private and public spaces.

Participants introduce themselves, by way of an identity game, under the charge of Katherine Kamelreiter from Vienna. The aim here was to get to know the participants and who among them were active members of the Mother Centers, who came from EU countries and who came from countries outside the EU or from other continents. Another issue that was important to this session: the languages spoken by participants.

Next, Marieke Van Geldermalsen presented **the general objectives and methodology of the project:**

Objectives

- Learning about GWIA as a methodology
- To learn about Mother Centers
- To know how to combine learning with empowerment and how to establish

networks

Two Best Practices Awards for Women's movements, Dubai 2002 and Dubai 2003

How exchanges between groups that face similar issues can be used as an important learning and strengthening tool.

How the GWIA enables growth at different paces; through exchanges between existing Mother Centers and the adaptation of their methods to other national and cultural settings.



How the public living rooms of the Mother Centers allow us to break with patriarchal hierarchies, to foster transparency with respect to family problems in the community; and how men become involved in a transparent community process that encompasses personal roles and how they become a convincing method in developing gender equality and stimulate changes in power roles.

The Mother Centers constitute modern villages governed by women for child-rearing and create a setting for learning at all levels. Learning which is cooperative, informal and intercultural. The centers foster participation and responsibility among

participants and the creation of social support networks. They also add value to the act of caring for the family within the public sphere.

Next **Andrea Laux** from the Stuttgart Mother Center explained **the reasons why the people who participate in a Mother Center become experts**, how it helps them to raise children and how it changes their lives in the following ways:

- allowing women to teach and learn
- helping them discover their own strengths and to not have to excuse themselves for their weaknesses.
- helping them to learn to defend their own interests
- they provide an open space where one can seek advice; no appointment is necessary
- they facilitate assistance in an immediate manner
- they provide an opportunity to meet other people that they normally would not have an opportunity to meet
- they help people to take control of their lives
- they help people to overcome their prejudices
- they facilitate generational exchange, and finally

they help people take responsibility for community development

Next the photographs from **different countries were shown**: Albania, Argentina, Austria, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Canada, Turkey, Germany, Italy, Kenya, Nepal, Holland, Russia, Rwanda, Slovakia and the United States.

2nd Session

Tuesday, September 16

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Impact of the mother centers on women, children and society, by Monika Jaeckel.

Ideologically speaking, contemporary society has adopted a discourse on motherhood that does not correspond to the real structures and resources it makes available to mothers.

Despite the positive opinion of motherhood held by society at an ideological level, mothers are excluded at a social level. The market is oriented in such a way as to exclude those persons who are in charge of caring for children.

Of the responsibilities within the family, women normally take on the role of carer; they and their children often becoming isolated (few outside contacts). They lack contact with other mothers and children.

This makes it increasingly difficult for their children to behave appropriately and independently in public contexts. There have been some added difficulties owing to the urban changes experienced in recent years. They were once able to go out alone, now there are too many cars and traffic.

When isolated, children come to believe that they are weak, that they cannot explore their environment, they are dependent. Our cultural model rejects children on a social level. Women have very little self-confidence when it comes to handling themselves in public with their children. Their work as carers is not recognised as knowledge. Women do have a wealth of practical knowledge about how to provide care, but they are not taken into consideration. There are professionals with technical knowledge in the field of childcare; they often teach mothers how to care for their children, yet they cannot know as much as mothers do.

At mother centers, this knowledge is shared, resulting in both individual and collective empowerment. Empowerment represents a transformation in deep attitudes that seeks to create an empowered motherhood, a change in roles.

The concept of empowered motherhood originated in the U.S. It has promoted an ideal with regard to motherhood that is impossible to achieve and that results in frustration.

At mother centers, this model is called into question; it is debated. They encourage others (third parties) to become involved in raising children; they are invited to challenge the concept of "motherhood". At mother centers, being a mother is not determined by race, age or gender.

Mother centers move from the private sphere into the public sphere; fostering an empowered motherhood. They are claiming public space for mothers and motherhood.

Jamaican women speak of “communal parenting”.

These spaces enable women to believe in their power to change and develop strategies to do so. They create new ways of reconciling their public and private lives.

Women organise themselves, and not as consumers. They question the exclusion of their children from the public sphere. They develop their own personal and political agendas, as well as collective strength to attain these goals.

These centers have an impact not only on mothers but also on fathers and their children. This represents individual and collective empowerment.

They are highly regarded and are act locally as agents. They establish support networks to help them to find employment and foster domestic involvement of fathers in order to reconcile working life and family life. (To attract female workers, many German companies advertise their proximity to mother centers).

Mother centers promote changes in traditional roles. And they also offer an opportunity for children to interact with other children.

These Centers revitalise neighbourhoods and local culture. They create a fertile setting for informal learning. They also foster leadership in local and community councils.

There is a change of attitude in mothers resulting from their time at these centers. They realise that they can earn money doing the things that they do for their families. This represents a process of awakening for mothers and a way to integrate immigrant mothers. At times it is the only contact they have (language courses and creative activities that promote activities): by learning languages and working together.

The center is important to the neighbourhood and politicians often end up consulting

the center with regard to certain proposals.

Awareness is promoted through the centers and campaigns launched by mother centers. The Centers reintegrate women into the public sphere, creating channels, visibility, validation and equality for women who work within the family, encouraging their participation in community processes. Mother Centers empower women to change their environment, to become involved in the community.

One of their achievements is the allocation of resources and remuneration of women who work outside professional channels.

Mother centers have achieved success: in the form of expansion into 20 countries. They reach out to families ignored by institutions. They reinforce citizenship and integration, yet this success does not have political recognition or receive financial support. The formula that leads to success for the centers provokes institutional rejection. Their approach towards the family is holistic; this improves energies. Bureaucratic structures tend to centralise. They improve effectiveness of social welfare policies. They offer more direct channels of communication, which result in more attuned financing. They increase tax-free revenue margins originating from civic action.

They also head strategies that generate greater civic involvement and offer alternatives to unemployment situations.

Some reflections on and practical applications of communicative skills and empowerment strategies, by Estrella Montolío

Psychiatric studies show that women's brains are well-suited to language (greater number of synapses). Women speak and express themselves better than men. They are capable of distinguishing the more subtle forms of communication (tones, micro-facial expressions, etc.).

Paradox: in the public realm, women's voices are not heard in the same proportion as men's voices, and in certain contexts they are heard rarely if at all. Men and women act differently in public and private spheres.



It seems as though we do not have control over issues that concern us. This is because there is a difference between men's and women's communicative socialisation. Women receive different types of instructions: Women should not be heard in society, that they should speak in a refined manner, that they cannot yell, etc. They cannot be the focus of attention and their voices must be soft and feminine. They cannot be aggressive and should possess a certain juvenile air, shy away from confrontation, smile, giving the floor to someone else.

Instructions regarding communicative attitudes for men are quite another:

- to speak in low-pitched tones
- To speak loudly, strongly and firmly
- to be assertive
- that they're the ones who give orders (leadership qualities)
- To speak up first and to have the last word
- To use coarse language to intensify speech.

This results in two ways of speaking.

Socialisation in school is different for men and women. Women socialise and create a

group, whereas men fight for group leadership. Public spaces have been habilitated for use by men and therefore they are characterised by a male communicative style. Feminine modes of communication and values have been considered to be unsuitable and inefficient.

When a group of women are speaking, communicative mechanisms are different than when men are present. In the public sphere, women act in opposition to our own achievements. We tend to flee from public spaces, we feel we must conceal what we know and be modest. But modesty is dangerous in an inherited world.

It is publicly dangerous when communicative patterns are not shared.

In the public arena, a woman with an opinion of her own must start from a series of assumptions, in order to feel legitimised to speak and to also be trained to not feel fear when she hears her own voice in the group. She must also be convinced that she will still be liked and even more respected if she does so.

She must be prepared to listen and deal with communicative styles that are different to, that oppose or are aggressive with respect to her own. And to not gloss over her opinions or her achievements.

Ritual self-deprecation and flattery are other elements of feminine communicative parameters, but here the danger lies in that mixed settings this ritual self-deprecation can be interpreted literally, and as a consequence, men tend to monopolise the turn-taking when speaking. When they do not understand the patterns that come into play, this game turns against women.

Yet, does this mean that we should copy male communicative characteristics? Many women who copy these male patterns ultimately fail, as it generates a feeling of rejection and exclusion from their own team.

To conclude, we should be aware of which mechanisms are characteristic of gender and how to administer them wisely. We have to manage interruptions well, and to weigh all options...



There are feminine communicative patterns in opposition to male patterns, but we can't believe that male patterns are the best. When we copy those models, we can only fail.

There is a need to adopt new communicative patterns and use them in such a way that is most strategically suited to us at any given moment.

Workshop 3

Tuesday, September 16 (afternoon)

HOW DO WE SET UP A MOTHER CENTER IN SPAIN?

City councils in the province of Barcelona

Chaired by: Monika Jaeckel, Amsterdam and Andrea Laux, Stuttgart

What issues should Mother Centers address in the local context?

- Steps to implementing a mother center
- Issues, challenges, obstacles: answers and solutions

The session began with a presentation by Ms. Monica Jaeckel on the concept of

Mother Centers and their functioning in the local context.

Mother centers are not only a tool for women's empowerment, as explained by Ms. Jaeckel in the previous day's session, but they also give women new opportunities wherever they are found.

Many centers have managed to transform neighbourhoods, creating a network based on participation around them. They constitute a means to participate in decision-making at the local level, forming lobbies and act as vehicles to communication between citizens and political representatives.

Moreover, a mother center is thought of as being a space for exchange within the municipality, a meeting place for women from different cultural and economic backgrounds, and a place that revitalises the community, a stimulus for citizens to organise themselves and a channel which they can use to present their demands to public powers.

The centers are now also in charge of addressing the needs of those who are ignored by the public administration—immigrants for the most part—by receiving them and helping them with child-rearing. Here, the immigrant will find a space for cross-cultural exchange and civic participation.

Next, the municipal heads of the Badalona Center made a presentation on their Mother and Father Center set to open the following week. Run by the municipality, the center will house a nursery with professionals in charge of all the tasks needed to run a center of this type.

This center has some differences with respect to other mother centers. The first and foremost being funding and management, which prompted some debate among the workshop participants, as this conference was particularly directed to municipalities. Yet at the conference, both political and technical experts have participated, along with women's associations, breastfeeding support groups, and individual women-

The suitability of municipal management versus self-management by mother groups was discussed. Both options carry advantages and disadvantages, either with regard to accountability of activities—whether they are undertaken or not—or to being

independent from institutions. One must also take into account the difficulties in finding financial support from institutions. Another option is that of a mixed management with support or subsidies from public administration.

A participant stated that freedom is greater if centers are self-managed, yet public resources are still needed because mother centers often carry out some of the functions that should be fulfilled by the welfare state.



There is mention that different realities exist in different countries. Spanish government policies are orientated towards covering services that free women from tasks that involve care. This especially true after the period of the dictatorship—a time when women's entry into the labour market was difficult, their role limited to child rearing. In Spain, women have been a part of the labour market ever since.

3rd Session

Wednesday, September 17

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND INTEGRATION

Intercultural dialogue and integration at Mother Centers, by Emilia Hernández Pedrero. Utrecht.

The center is located in a neighbourhood where conflicts exist between natives and foreign population. This problem was such that the two groups did not jointly use

the center for some months. The principal issue was poverty in the neighbourhood and lack of communication between the different communities. Nevertheless, it was the women of the area who solved the matter. This is why the center can be considered a place for intercultural exchange:

- 32% are immigrants from the eastern countries
- 140 nationalities
- A total of 80% of the population are immigrants
- There is a high unemployment rate, high attrition rates and criminal behaviour
- The neighbourhood has been selected as an area of the city that needs improvement.

Its objectives

- To establish a safe setting for women and children
- To provide information
- To insert women into the labour market
- To provide work-experience in the labour market
- To foster intergenerational dialogue through three generations working together

Allowing women to decide which services and courses they would like

In order to achieve the first and fundamental objective of distancing women and children from the violence of the streets, various labour market insertion programmes were put into place. These come about from the volunteering work undertaken by the women; if their work at the center is satisfactory, then they are offered a regular job:

- through the childcare services offered at the center, these divided into two groups: from 0 to 4 years of age and from 4 to 12 years of age. The carers receive training, allowing them to enter accredited training later on.
- through the center's kitchen service. Here, a catering service is offered to businesses: part of this revenue goes to the cooks and another portion is used for kitchen implements and food safety courses given by the

companies.

- the center also offers conflict management programmes. (The center works closely with the neighbourhood church). An education specialist teaches women how to treat children so that they in turn learn their limits and how to treat their parents.

Funding

- The project has been co-financed by:
- The ministry in charge of social affairs
- The city of Utrecht
- The patrons' social network
- Doenja Dienstverlening
- Mitro, a housing corporation
- Rabo Bank and others (the work done by volunteers)

Services

- Activities for children
- Activities for seniors
- Activities that foster intergenerational participation
- Activities and courses for integration into Dutch society
- Training courses and employment
- Opportunities for volunteering work

Skills developed (in no particular order)

- Tolerance and respect among people of different backgrounds and their integration
- Learning among equals and appropriate to the participant's reality and level
- Creation of a social network based on mutual support
- Improving the self-esteem of the participants
- Establishing cordial relationships among groups
- Works as a lobby for securing backing for projects.
- Fosters independence and develops negotiation skills.

Other achievements

- Starting to receive recognition from local authorities
- Obtaining support from various groups for educational programmes
- It has turned into a family center
- It can address needs that arise from the closing of integrated centers in schools (due to budget cuts)
- Collaboration from all types of professionals from the education and health fields, in addition to help from parents in managing and carrying out services offered at the center.

Report on visits to Bulgaria and Turkey



The two visits were described, as well as the differences between them.

In the case of Bulgaria, the steps taken to organise the center were explained. The following was described:

- the willingness of the organisation
- the need to maintain independence
- the opportunity to learn from experience of other countries
- the collaboration between centers
- the opportunity to learn from Holland with regard to immigrants
- the opportunity to participate in the partnership

- In the case of Turkey:
- public institutions began this initiative, for the following reasons:
- the limited participation of women in the labour market
- the patriarchal nature of its society
- the fact that women that are illiterate often have many children, whereas more educated women have fewer children
- Maternity leave is 8 weeks—paid—and up to 16 weeks unpaid for women
- importance is placed on the gestation period, for the development of the human foetus
- the influence of International Children's centers.

Reports on visits to Germany and Austria

What was learned:

- Located in a densely populated neighbourhood: 52,000 inhabitants within the city of Stuttgart (600,000 inhabitants).
- The Mother Centers are a social enterprise
- they are the result of cooperation and are also businesses
- They offer care services for families
- The Living room is the heart of the centers
- The environment is inviting
- Expert answers are provided for day-to-day issues
- The kitchen offers the opportunity to further discuss topics

It is located in a rural area of 12,000 inhabitants:

At Mother Centers:

- they learn how to take care of their children
- substantial changes are seen in people
- a women's clothing museum is organised here
- the center breaks down barriers between people; those in smaller cities often being more difficult
- Debate is fostered, as is change; to improve the center

- This debate in a small city is important, because communities here tend to be more isolated. The center on the other hand promotes exchange of cultures and religious beliefs among others.

At a Mother Center in a university town:

People learn from and with families

- Women are empowered
- Relationships are restored to normal
- Information about feminism is offeredA culture based on child-rearing is established
- Interests can be defended before public authorities as part of a movement
- The Mother Centers become intergenerational homes; motherhood and jobs are protected; women who have suffered domestic violence are tended to; pro-child communities are promoted
- With regard to Mother Centers as intergenerational homes:
 - they address issues arising from an aging population,
 - they foster community child rearing
 - they make it possible for citizens to have children (young people also learn that this is possible)
 - they help to reconcile work and motherhood
 - they work as a lobby for maternity laws (insufficient vacancies in nurseries)
 - poverty is an important issue in Holland
 - they provide care throughout the day (as opposed to schools)
 - they provide care for women as victims of domestic violence
 - they establish mechanisms necessary for skills in diverse fields of employment or family
 - they promote an improved quality of life for people

With regard to their name: Mother's or Parent's Centers, it is agreed that in essence, they do not show differences with regard to services offered. In fact, despite its name, few fathers attend these centers in Austria, as they feel excluded.

Integration is not an objective; it should occur naturally

Resources

- Living room
- Services
- Entrepreneurial initiatives
- Integration
- Open meetings
- Everybody cares for everybody
- Family education

For children

- Parent groups
- Spaces for dialogue
- Child's book
- Nursery offering longer stays

Funding: public funds, from businesses and self-financing

Differences between Germany and Austria

	Germany	Austria
Name	Mother's centers	Parent's centers
Target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mothers, fathers, women, men, children - Disabled persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the same, + grandfathers and grandmothers - People interested in education
Organisation	Not-for-profit	Not-for-profit
Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - employees or freelance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only 1 or 2 employees - Remaining workers

		are volunteers
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subsidies - Second hand shops - Cafeteria 	- Depends on center
Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Depends on target group Starts from exchange of ideas - Many services - Legal consultancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents can ask for what they want - Not as many services

What are play groups?

For children: Parents and children interact and play, groups last for six months. Parents must pay a fee. What is gained:

- establish contacts
- reduce isolation
- learn how to care for children
- learn from other parents
- prepare children for nursery

In the final debate on intercultural dialogue and integration

the Mother Centers show public authorities that they represent a movement.

With regard to the different communities, the centers show that:

"All of us have the same needs. Outside, we feel like foreigners. But when we sit down, we start speaking among equals."

4th Session Thursday, September 18

CIVIC COMMITMENT AND WOMEN'S GOVERNANCE

Report on the Czech Republic

Contributions are made to mothers, children and families as a whole; through their satisfaction, their empowerment, their self-esteem, self-confidence and their freedom to act as citizens. Mother Centers give people the opportunity to grow personally, and to also see the world through children's eyes; they offer a global vision of human condition.

To create a Mother Center, it is not necessary to wait for an impulse from "above", that is, from public administration. Mothers must also realise that they too are able to do the same. This is true for various reasons:

- because they are experts in day-to-day living
- because they represent the voice of the citizenry
- because they can contribute new ideas
- because they are capable of finding solutions to their problems
- because they are capable of cooperating

When done in this way, citizens adopt civic commitment; they become responsible for the decisions taken and learn how to negotiate with different institutions or groups.

They also learn how to work through problems. They discover how all human problems can be solved; all they need to do is delimit them, find the appropriate people, establish dialogue, prepare the pertinent arguments and lastly, to believe in themselves and know how to be patient.

In fact, working for better care in the community constitutes the best way to establish a bridge between citizenry and those who hold political office. This idea is backed by 16 years of experience and successes in the Czech Republic:

- Mother Centers receive support from city councils, regions and the State.
- Mother Centers are included in the EU project
- The Mother Center network constitutes a civic space
- They foster a balance between professional and family lives
- They create friendly communities

- They promote improvement of quality of life
- They exert influence for legislative change.
- It is clear that Mother Centers are influential spaces that promote dialogue and foster decision-making that benefits the community and the common good.

Report on Spain



The Barcelona Provincial Government's involvement in the project is due to its possible application in the *Centers d'Informació i Recursos per a dones* (Information and Resource Centers for Women) in various municipalities in the province of Barcelona. These centers receive human, technical and financial support from this government institution. There are 42 centers

This report concentrates on the description of these centers, their operation, objectives and how these are similar to Mother Centers.

Similarly, many of the services (documentation or training...) as well as target users are same as that of the other Mother Centers.

Nevertheless, the great difference lies in the fact that this is a public initiative instead of a citizen's movement as in the case of Mother Centers.

The *Centers d'Informació i Recursos per a dones* foster:

- leadership that comes naturally to women
- visibility of the tasks that they carry out, domestic or otherwise
- overcoming of vulnerability felt by women/mothers
- women's ability to exert influence for social change
- policies that protect the diversity of contemporary families

Report on Poland

The initiative in Poland began with the Astrid Lindgren Institute (ALI), a non-governmental organisation, composed of a team of professionals from the fields of psychology, sociology and education. Their work centers on childhood development, their aim being the creation of a more democratic society.

To do so, they offer support to families, promote an educational setting and carry out various activities and innovative projects.

They believe that Mother Centers help to achieve the institute's objectives and that is why they have become part of the network.

From their visit to the Czech Republic, they were able to learn the following: how women can become involved in their communities, how this can have a positive impact on their environment and how they can organise themselves in the management of a Mother Center. They also learned how to exert influence on the political decisions that affect them.

They also highlighted the differences attributed to their relatively new experience as a democratic country. After 44 years under a Communist regime, the influence of the Catholic Church and more specifically the conservation of gender roles and stereotypes, short maternity leaves and insufficient support from public institutions.

The most pressing issues they face are the following:

- poverty, especially in the case of single mothers
- a labour market that is difficult for women, especially with regard to flexibility and reconciliation of working and personal lives
- insufficient childcare: only 51% of this population have access to it

- persistence of masculine roles and as a consequence there is little male involvement in childcare
- lack of suitable spaces for children

Report on Bulgaria

Integro Association is an NGO founded in Bulgaria in 2002. It is composed of five Roma NGOs that work to grant visibility and improve the social and economic environment of the Roma population.

The aim is for women to develop effective leadership, based on the following: education, business, employment, the Mother Center network, access to resources, activities and community development.

To do so, the association offers advice, campaigns, fosters debate, grants financial aid for education, assists in integration into the labour market and volunteering work.

Roma women are victims of double sided discrimination: both because they are women and because they are of another ethnic group. As women, especially in this community which is characterised by male dominance, and also as Roma, as they are not given the same opportunities as other citizens.

To overcome the problem it was necessary to find women that accepted the challenge in going beyond the limits imposed by their communities, and to then form a group: a learning process was necessary, both in the emotional realm as in the professional realm. They must first feel that they are able to take on this challenge, they must be motivated. A climate of trust must be created, free of pressure. Objectives must be clear.

Report on Germany

Germany titled their report using the following motto, which is expressed from a mother's point of view: we, mothers, are experts on day-to-day living. This perspective explains how a mother at a Mother Center feels:

- A Mother Center is a place for learning and teaching
- the Mother Center is a place where you will discover your strengths, and

you do not need to make excuses for your weaknesses

- a place where they learn to defend their own interests
- it is a space open to everyone
- you do not need to request an appointment to receive advice
- assistance is given whenever it's needed
- it's a place to learn things that cannot be learned elsewhere
- I am welcomed in moments of crisis
- my work is appreciated
- I'm improving everyday
- it helps to overcome prejudice
- my ideas are taken into consideration
- children are included
- children have many mothers
- generations coexist
- community is developed

5th Session

Friday, September 19

LOOKING INTO THE REARVIEW MIRROR, LOOKING FORWARD

About the new centers

The countries that are new to Mother Centers all have had different experiences, yet they are all want to adopt the model for Mother Centers developed in Germany.

The difficulty lies in the fact that not all have the benefit of an underlying Mother Center movement; instead, they are promoted by public institutions: as in the case of Turkey (in a rural setting) and Spain, for example. The Polish experience is quite different as it arose from an educational project.

The Mother Center network, however, can offer them support and contacts. Mother Centers provide a space for integration of immigrant women into the societies that receive them.

How these projects evolve in the new countries is an unknown that sparked interest. Nevertheless, the participants stressed the importance of building up centers from

the initiative itself; and the difficulties that must be overcome in societies that are accustomed to relying on state to solve all issues. The participants recognised, however, that public funding is helpful.

Of importance as well are the problems that arise from having both employees and volunteers working side by side.

Participants also stressed the importance of involving women right from the start of the development process.

Participants from Turkey stated the following:

Although the initiative is publicly backed, the aim of institutions is not to control the centers but to assist them, as the following must be taken into account:

- the women do not understand English and therefore they cannot communicate with the women that belong to the network of centers, they must translate all concepts pertaining to the organisation and its operation.
- women are not permitted by their husbands to travel to other countries to learn about the experiences in situ.
- They obtain premises needed to start up the center only through public channels.
- having a publicly controlled center prevents religious groups from intervening

A good start would be to integrate women's groups in the project—groups that are currently involved in childcare in their homes.

Participants from Czech Republic stressed the need for women to be the owners of the premises; if ownership is shared with NGOs, etc. then problems may arise in how activities are carried out. It is also necessary to investigate and translate familiar concepts such as "empowerment" into everyday language.

Participants from Holland explain that their centers arose from women who had undertaken community work. It is important that they have examples to follow and that the project is seen as being viable. It is also important to identify any potential

leaders and that suitable learning methods be proposed. This is what is involved when one builds society.

Participants from Slovakia explained that it started with a report in a magazine. Women who read it reacted and asked to organise a Mother Center. They stressed the importance of using the media to publicise the experience, and that women be the owners, "the ones who hold the keys".

Bulgarian participants stated that these centers are places where people can learn about public services.

A representative from the Spanish group of women stated that they would like to establish a Mother Center. They spoke about how difficult it is to be heard and to get the funding necessary for full independence. Someone suggested that in cases of conflict, being respectful always helps to solve problems.

German participants stated that Mother Centers have become places that dispense services and that ownership of the premises makes independence possible.

On empowerment

This comes about on two levels: individually and collectively. This also allows them to develop their own abilities and to learn how to give and receive support. This is obtained through debate, social representation, lobbies and stakeholders, all defending the interests of the community. This also provides additional motivation. It's a complete process.

This occurs in different spheres at the national level—social, economic and cultural. Mothers therefore become a model of participation for their children, who in turn are further reinforced.

Emancipation versus empowerment?

They must participate in the public sphere without losing sight of their condition as mothers.

Participants acknowledged that Mother Centers have inherited the rights won and the achievements obtained by the feminist movement.

Intercultural dialogue

The difference between integration and interculturalism is identified. They are not synonyms.

In interculturalism, behaviours of both the origin and destination societies are modified and are ultimately mutually enriched. Integration on the other hand is a process by which the immigrant accepts the destination culture and loses their original culture.

Participants highlighted the idea that they must be treated as people, and not as immigrants.

They offered some advice in this regard:

- Progress must be made one step at a time
- Educational activities (as children do not hold prejudiced beliefs) with mothers participating
- Foster dialogue between the children's fathers and mothers, as this is how children will learn to be a part of society, based on the integration they see among adults.
- Offer a space that is an alternative to schools, as many native parents avoid schools which have a large proportion of immigrant pupils.

To establish a Mother Center, one must understand the norms of the country. The exception is the case of Belgium, which was started by a Moroccan woman.

In Bulgaria, members of the Romani community want to be citizens without assimilation, that is, without losing their culture. They believe that minorities can also contribute to the development of a society as a whole.

Civic commitment and governance

The project aims to make cities liveable for children. Sustainable cities. And Mother Centers offer accompaniment, a formal and informal space for learning; a comforting space for dialogue and exchange of knowledge.

Although one must always pay attention to the assessment of projects in progress,

and be willing to rethink them in order to adapt them to the proposed aims.

Principles of the partnership

To ensure the project's independence, we must make sure that the administration does not take over. Yet we must cooperate; funding is needed.

For a partnership to exist, the relationship among its members must be that of equals. A compilation of best practices in this regard was made available.

But in theory, we are sure of what is important: to know exactly what our intentions are, to establish a climate of mutual trust at all levels, to ensure continuity...

Aid is acquired only by establishing allies. It is not necessary for people to share the same ideas as us; it is only necessary to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. And to be sure about each party's strengths and their ultimate goals.

