

# ALTERNATIVE

## ALTERNATIVE

**Developing alternative understandings of security and justice through restorative justice approaches in intercultural settings within democratic societies**

### **Deliverable 4.5:**

**Follow-up materials for supporting RJ activities in intercultural settings**

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**Contact person:** Project Manager, Dr. Inge Vanfraechem

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**INSTITUT FÜR RECHTS- UND KRIMINALSOZIOLOGIE  
INSTITUTE FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF LAW AND CRIMINOLOGY**

**IRKS**

**Towards restorative circles: inspiration and guidelines for practitioners**

**Katrin Kremmel and Christa Pelikan  
Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology  
Vienna, November 2015**

## **Executive summary**

This report is part of the last of five deliverables submitted by partner IRKS within project ALTERNATIVE. It was preceded by four written reports, which entailed careful descriptions and discussions of our action research activities, both empirical and theoretical.

Our last deliverable is different in its orientation. It does not focus on the scientific community as its readership. Instead it addresses mostly practitioners and citizens interested in and engaging with restorative practices in intercultural settings. By doing so, we intend to make the lessons learnt within this project accessible to a wider public. We hope that the insights and experiences we made while experimenting with restorative circles in Viennese social housing estates may also be of support to others.

For this purpose, the central components of our last deliverable are a video, a set of recommendations or guidelines, a set of questions, and a description of two restorative circles processes we experienced within project ALTERNATIVE, focussing on practice-relevant observations. These components are meant to be inspirational sources to the viewer or reader, but also to guide his/her personal reflections on his/her own practice.

Given the substantial lack in practice-relevant material on restorative procedures in German and because we worked in a German-speaking context, we decided to both fill this gap and to provide something that would be of use first and foremost to the people and organisations we worked with in our local networks. Therefore, the main written parts of this deliverable – the guidelines, the set of questions and the description of the two circle processes we observed – are in German and will be published as an illustrated e-book on the website of project ALTERNATIVE. This report is the English translation of the e-book, which we chose to provide in order to make the guidelines, questions and descriptions accessible to English-speaking readers as well.

The video mentioned earlier on in this summary, contains an interview with a restorative circles' practitioner, during which she describes her personal approach. The video is provided on the online platform of project ALTERNATIVE (<http://alternativefilms.euforumrj.org>) and might be a further source of inspiration, also useful in teaching contexts.

Following through with the participatory logic of action research, we produced the contents included in this report jointly with the staff members of our partner-organisations, who had before participated and co-facilitated our workshops on communication capacity building and on restorative circles. Since these follow-up materials for practitioners are supposed to go beyond the specific settings we worked in, we also organised round tables where we sought exchange with other organisations working with conflicts in intercultural settings through dialogic means (namely NeuStart – the Austrian probation service, re-just – a self-organised group consisting of students, activists and practitioners promoting restorative practices in different fields, and the neighbourhood centre in the social housing estate Am Schöpfwerk).

At these round tables, we presented our activities and their outcomes, to then discuss with the participants what they thought was necessary for them to work with restorative circles in their work contexts. These discussions were important sources and contributed to the sections of this deliverable.

This much said, we want to emphasise the basic understanding underlying this deliverable once more: this deliverable is not a recipe. If you read the following sections, do not expect to find an instructions' manual on 'the method' of restorative circles. This is not going to be the case and intentionally so. Instead, we try to step on the thin line between providing inspiration and instruction. Rather than telling you what to do, we offer a careful description of what we did and to what it lead, so that you might learn from it. In the same line, you will find that our 'guidelines' are no straightforward instructions either, but together with the set of questions they will accompany you to take things into consideration, which you might not have thought of yourself, to then reflect on your own practice, your learning process in action.

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## **1. Introduction**

The content of the materials we are to present here is based on the interventions that the ALTERNATIVE team initiated and carried out at two specific sites in Vienna's social housing estates ('Gemeindebau'). These housing estates had been chosen as an intercultural setting with a high percentage of tenants with a migration background, mostly from former Yugoslavia and from Turkey; their numbers having considerably risen in the aftermath of the adoption of an EU-directive (Council Directive 2003/109/EC of 25 November 2003) banning discrimination of Third Country nationals with regard to their access to public housing in Austria. The Gemeindebau is marked by conflicts that we identified as being situated on a micro-level, predominantly neighbourhood disputes around noise, garbage and the use of public space.

The action research interventions that were carried out in this setting on behalf of the ALTERNATIVE project constituted of a series of workshops at two different research sites: a 'Frauencafé' (women's café) in a big housing estate in the 21<sup>st</sup> district of Vienna and the community centre Bassena in the housing estate am Schöpfwerk in the 12<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna. At both research sites, a series of communication capacity building workshops was followed by workshops on restorative circles in the case of Bassena and by an actual conflict resolution through a restorative circles' process in the Frauencafé.

These interventions were a joint effort of the ALTERNATIVE researchers and trainers on the one side and the partner organisations 'wohnpartner' and the community centre 'Bassena am Schöpfwerk' on the other. Both partner organisations draw from substantial experience of dealing with neighbourhood disputes – in the case of wohnpartner by using various means of conflict resolution including mediation, in the case of the Bassena by actively engaging in community work.

The participants involved were residents of the Gemeindebau 'Am Schöpfwerk' who looked back on previously existing relationships with the Bassena on the one hand and members of the women's café, the 'Frauencafé', on the other hand. The Frauencafé had been established by wohnpartner as a reaction to conflicts between 'Old Austrians' and mainly 'Turkish' residents in one of the housing estates of Vienna's 21<sup>st</sup> district. In the Frauencafé, women of the two groups come together in fortnightly breakfast meetings. More than a year ago, an intra-Muslim conflict had emerged in this café. The

wohnpartner team of the 21<sup>st</sup> district invited the ALTERNATIVE team to work in the women's café since they considered the tensions there as a suitable, albeit difficult case to deal with by way of restorative circles.

Initially, we had designed our interventions as entire training days for residents, so they could become and work as some sort of 'volunteer mediators'. Our plan was to accompany both, the training of the residents and their conflict resolution practice afterwards. In cooperation with the community centre Bassena, this plan had to be re-designed into a series of workshops on capacity building in communication skills, due to very practical, organisational reasons. At the beginning of our engagement with the life-worlds of residents and with the experiences of our partner-organisations we learned that mobilising residents of different gender and age groups for the amount of time we had initially foreseen was a practical impossibility since our plans could not be reconciled with their daily schedules determined by their professional and family lives.

In the women's café, the process adopted yet another shape, due to the specific needs and interests of our partner-organisation wohnpartner, and not the least the women themselves.

Our last deliverable consists of an illustrated e-book in German and a video. Given the substantial scarcity of practice-relevant material on restorative procedures in German, and because we worked in a German-speaking context, we decided to both fill this gap and to provide something that would be of use first and foremost to the people and organisations we worked with in our local networks.

This written report is the English translation of the contents of the e-book, namely a set of recommendations or guidelines; a set of questions; and a description of two restorative circles processes we experienced within project ALTERNATIVE, focussing on practice-relevant observations. These components are designed to fit training purposes, but they are also meant to be inspirational sources to the viewer or reader, guiding his/her personal reflections on his/her own practice.

Both this entire report, as submitted to the European Commission, and the illustrated e-book <sup>1</sup> can easily be accessed through the website of project

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<sup>1</sup> In the description of work of the ALTERNATIVE project this deliverable is described as consisting of 'a video and of the script of a performance of a conflict resolution session, complemented by a simple illustrated booklet.' The content of 'the simple illustrated booklet' was not further specified. After various discussions with the practitioners of our partner-organisations, we decided to produce guidelines and the list of questions presented in this report, assuming that that these components

ALTERNATIVE. Especially the e-book is fit to be used as dissemination material for workshops and trainings. We hereby intend to reach out to practitioners and citizens interested in and working with restorative practices in intercultural settings.

During the ALTERNATIVE project our roles and tasks as researchers changed many times, as we described in previous deliverables (see Kremmel and Pelikan 2014a, 2014b, 2015). With this deliverable we once again arrive at a point, where we as researchers are facing a particular challenge – the challenge of developing content relevant for practice out of the scientific knowledge we produced during ALTERNATIVE. We tried our best to step into the practitioners' shoes and to develop an understanding of what we might have to offer to practitioners, who already have a wide array of diverse practical skills at hand. Nevertheless we did not rely on our individual capacities alone to meet this goal. Instead, we also invited the staff members of our partner organisations we had worked with during the last year, to contribute to the production of this deliverable. The reflective meetings with Heidrun Paschen, Johannes Polt and Wolfgang Starzinger from the community centre Bassena, Ebru Ayas and Andrea Tuckova of wohnpartner, and Gabriele Grunt, the restorative circles' practitioner we worked with, provided substantial input for this deliverable. Together we worked towards assessing the basic tenets to be included in the guidelines we intended to design. The protocols of the reflection sessions that had taken place after each of the workshops, including the preparations of the circle in the Frauencafé, were additional materials we studied while drafting the different parts of this deliverable.

Since these follow-up materials for practitioners are supposed to go beyond the specific settings we worked in, we planned and partly performed a series of 'round tables' – with people working in different organisations whose field of activity is (a) related to intercultural context, and (b) oriented towards promoting better ways of living together.

These organisations were NeuStart, the Austrian probation service; re-just, a self-organised group consisting of students, activists and practitioners promoting restorative practices in different fields; and the neighbourhood centre in the social housing estate Am Schöpfwerk (the round table with the umbrella organisation of the

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are of most value to people engaging with practice. Also, we substituted the 'script of a performance of a conflict resolution session' with the description of the two circles' processes we observed, for reasons already stated above. Rather than having a separate script of performance and a booklet, we chose to publish all material we produced in a single e-book.

community service agencies (Gebietsbetreuungen) and the Association of Vienna's Youth Centres are yet to take place).

Despite all these efforts, we remain researchers and we do not claim having the expertise of practitioners, which would allow us to come up with clear instructions for each and every step to be taken. Rather than telling you what to do, we offer a careful description of what we did and to what it led, so that you might learn from it. In the same line, you will find that our 'guidelines' are no straight-forward instructions either, but together with the set of questions they will accompany you to take things into consideration, which you might not have thought of yourself, to then reflect on your own practice, your learning process in action.

## **2. Inspiration and guidelines for restorative practitioners**

### **2.1. The purpose**

These guidelines are to provide information and orientation for all those dealing with conflicts in an intercultural setting, in other words, where- and whenever people of different ethnic or religious background or of different nationality live together. It addresses practitioners and leading staff of non-governmental as well as governmental institutions and organisations.

The project ALTERNATIVE, placed within Framework Programme 7 of the EU is carried out by seven research institutions/universities and it is located at four action research sites: in Vienna, in Hungary, Serbia and Northern Ireland. The action research was intended to try out ways of dealing with conflicts according to the principles and practices of restorative justice, i.e. based on the active participation of those affected, on dialogue and on peaceful confrontation – applied to an intercultural setting.

The research site in Vienna was social housing estates: 'der Gemeindebau'. The intercultural setting of the Gemeindebau is marked by a high percentage of residents with a migration background. The conflicts the residents experience are predominantly about noise and smells, about garbage and its disposal and about the use of public space. Partly these are 'old' conflicts that have been present for decades but they have become increasingly framed as intercultural conflicts, as problems caused by the presence of foreigners.

## **2.2. The experiences in project ALTERNATIVE**

In connection with the two partner organisations wohnpartner and the community centre Bassena am Schöpfwerk (a big social housing estate), the researchers initiated a series of communication and capacity building workshops, and also sessions that were to prepare groups of residents for the application of restorative circles to conflicts that had been prevalent and most pressing in the respective sites.

One has to stress the fact that these partner organisations disposed of a wide array of practices of conflict work and of community work. One should also be aware that we found instances of togetherness that mark life at our research sites to a remarkable degree. But – as mentioned – there are conflicts as well and they have become aggravated and more disturbing when being used in order to stir xenophobic sentiments and in the course of election campaigns.

Most prominently, in the Frauencafe (for a more detailed description and analysis see Kremmel and Pelikan 2014b, 2015), where restorative circles were introduced and finally performed in the case of intra-Muslim conflict one could see as an outcome of this experience:

- A heightened capacity of listening to the other; and therefore
  - A heightened ability to understand the ‘Other’;
  - An increased trust of a group and its members in the capacity of finding ways of dealing with conflicts; and finally
  - An increased experience and ‘feeling’ of togetherness and mutual responsibility.
- It found its ultimate expression in the whole group becoming involved in a project to assist refugees.

Similar outcomes could be observed at the other research site, the Bassena am Schöpfwerk. The workshops contributed to the participants feeling encouraged to become involved in an initiative that fought for more space for the leisure activities of youngsters, e.g. for a football field.

### **3. The guidelines**

#### **3.1. Preconditions and basic requirements for establishing a restorative circle**

There are some pre-conditions to be observed whenever a restorative circle is considered as a potential way of dealing with a conflict. The core requirement of any restorative approach, namely the active participation of those affected by a conflict is further sharpened and intensified in the case of restorative circles. It becomes the goal of ‘community ownership’, more specifically, the circles should contribute to the participants becoming able to tackle ‘their’ conflicts on their own accord, trusting in their own capacities and their command of the necessary means and instruments to do so.

Notwithstanding this principle, it has proved of equal importance for the organisations and the practitioners to consider aspects of taking care and assuming responsibility for the persons that get involved in a restorative circle. Taking care can be understood as paying homage to the time-honoured social policy orientation of the ‘Red Vienna’, or more generally, of Vienna’s ‘maternalistic’ Social Democratic Regime. We deliberately adopt it here, based on the experiences we had gathered in the course of our action research in the Gemeindebau. We think that it fits the Viennese context, maybe even more so nowadays when the administration is facing a high percentage of residents with migration background.

Prospective participants of a restorative circle have to be sufficiently informed about the basic goals of the circle procedure, about its potential benefits and the risks incurred. The steps of the procedure have to be made transparent and understandable; this understanding should ground the acceptance of the procedure by the potential participants and ultimately their assuming ownership of the procedure. One could state that participation and transparency are basic preconditions of initiating a restorative circle.

### **3.2. The role of the facilitator**

This role has to be clarified. It is different from that of a mediator. At the surface it appears contradictory: on the one hand, the facilitator has to introduce the 'rules' for the circle, even practice them with participants in order to get them used to a certain set of questions that ought to be applied and followed. There she/he even acts dirigistic. On the other hand there is the declared aim for the participants to take responsibility for the circle and the communication taking place in the course of the sessions. The facilitator has to remain in the background and it is the intrinsic dynamics of the questions repeated again and again that steers the course of the session. It is increasingly to become a tool in the hands or rather in the minds of the participants; they themselves have to develop sufficient trust in these rules and in the process, they have to become the owners of the process.

The overall aim is to find a good balance between an open participatory process that allows for taking into consideration the specific situation and the needs and expectations of the participants on the one hand and a clear and well-structured process guided by well understood and well accepted rules on the other hand.

Clinging rigidly to these rules would result in a lack of authenticity of communication within the circle and thus lose its being connected to the needs and the feelings of the participants.

### **3.3. The circle**

Regarding the preparation, the rehearsal and finally the performance of a restorative circle we have derived the following recommendations:

#### *Preparation of a restorative circle*

- 1/ Facilitators of a restorative circle should become acquainted with the 'method' and with the process in the course of preparatory seminars or workshops that offer sufficient time for role-play.
- 2/ Proposals for invitations to other potential participants are put forward by those that have addressed a conflict as important and thereby initiated the circle's process.

3/ Sufficient time has to be allocated for new trainers or facilitators to build a relationship of trust with the group.

4/ Translation should be provided for participants that do not feel competent with the dominant language.

5/ It might appear advisable for the prospective facilitator and/or an additional coach/trainer to work on an individual basis with potential participants, and to make them acquainted with the circle process. This way considerations of individual preconditions, of the particularity of the person's environment and her/his specific learning pace can be attended to.

6/ On the other hand, there should be sufficient time and space for participants' concerns and for their proposals already at his preparatory stage. Some 'experimenting' should be allowed for as well as the exploration of paths that at first sight appear not immediately productive and target-oriented.

### *The formation of the restorative circle*

The tension of rule observance within a circle on the one hand and considerations of fostering the discretionary powers and competencies of the participants on the other hand will find different answers and solutions. They depend on the respective preconditions the circle is confronted with and on the needs and requirements of the participants.

1/ In any case it is helpful to visualise, i.e. have a graphic representation of the circle process and keep it available throughout the process. (This might also be used for the individual talks in the preparatory phase).

2/ It might prove useful to provide coaching for individual participants throughout the process and even for some time afterwards. Such coaching should be done by persons that have sufficient knowledge of the restorative circle approach and can at the same time rely on a good basis of trust in relation to the individual participant.

3/ A restorative circle is first and foremost carried by its process-quality and less so by outcome-orientation. The outcome is derived from the quality of the process. It is about changes and transformations of communication that take place within the circle, about an increased experience and feeling of togetherness and ultimately about strengthening the capacity of the participants to deal with their own conflicts through confrontation and through dialogue.

4/ Oftentimes, an agreement, an action plan will be reached at the end of a restorative circle. It should be acceptable for all participants, it has to be realistic and practically feasible.

#### *Follow-up*

1/ The implementation of the action plan might afford additional coaching for individual participants.

2/ This should be checked after a reasonable period of time, preferably involving the participants of the original circle.

3/ If necessary, or desirable, additional sessions should be performed in order to arrive at adaptations, changes or additions of and to the action plan.

### **3.4. Recommendation for the leading staff of organisations**

Both the introduction, the planning and the operation of restorative circles affords intensive preparation. At the level of the leading staff this amounts to the requirement of providing for repeated sessions that are to accompany the activity of the practitioners. It affords reflection and discussion and an on-going process of adapting the process of the restorative circle according to the requirements of the situation, and the changing and fluctuating needs and demands of the participants.

All in all, we are confronted with the problem that we cannot – and, in fact, will not – offer ‘recipes’ for doing restorative circles in intercultural settings. Applying restorative circles to the intercultural field affords a high amount of flexibility and openness. On the side of the staff of an organisation it requires courage and patience. We might therefore ask in which way and by which means courage and patience can be evoked and promoted.

We know that these are the qualities that can emerge and grow through the experience of getting involved in a restorative circle. Thus, what we want to achieve would contribute to the establishment of its preconditions. Whilst this could be regarded a ‘Catch 22’ predicament, we conclude that when setting up something new, in that case a restorative circle, this is also the best way to transform stakeholders’ attitudes.

The history of the project ALTERNATIVE and its realisation in the Gemeindebau in Vienna serves to support this point of view. We have been confronted

with difficulties and with obstacles, we have experienced set-backs. The option of just giving in was there a few times. Our partner organisations did not capitulate. The researchers depended on this perseverance and this courage. It was their part to provide encouragement based on their international connections and their knowledge of the international scene. Finally, it was the concrete experiences gained within the project that provided the decisive encouragement and served as reward for the courage displayed.

#### **4. The questions**

The following catalogue of questions is to complement the guidelines presented above. The questions presented here pertain mainly to the preparatory phase of the process. They are to give guidance to the practitioners/facilitators when they are preparing and conducting a restorative circle. Different from the instructions listed in a manual they should rather stimulate reflection and they should leave room for individual and case-specific configuration of each restorative circle.

##### **4.1. The context**

In what kind of social field, what kind of social environment did the conflict occur?

Who is to be informed about the circle taking place?

Are there other organisations active in this field that have to take responsibility?

Are there persons within these organisations that have decision-making competence and should therefore be included in the circle?

##### **4.2. The participants**

Who has been invited?

Has each of these persons received sufficient information about the circle and has she/he been prepared for participating in a circle?

Has there been sufficient clarification regarding the 'event', the conflict case, from which the initiative for a circle started?

Has each person invited been asked whether she/he wants additional participants to be invited?

Has the voluntary participation of each one been ascertained?

Regarding persons who have been asked and do not want to participate: What would this person need in order to be ready to participate?

What is the relationship between the participants?

Do the participants perceive and 'feel' themselves as a group?

What kind of interests, needs, desires or other common grounds are shared by the participants of a group?

Are they aware of these connections and the sharing of interests and needs?

What can be done in order to make participants aware of their commonalities?

What can be done in order to make participants aware of the importance of each individual participating?

What can be done in order to strengthen each participant's trust in her/his voice being raised and being heard?

Will it be necessary to make provisions for interpretation/translation to achieve understanding on a linguistic level?

### **4.3. Space and time**

Where is the circle to take place? How can sufficient space for all participants be guaranteed?

Will this space be accessible for everybody? Are there provisions for handicapped persons?

Does this place carry a specific (symbolic) meaning for any of the participants?

Could this meaning be supportive or rather detrimental to carry out a circle?

Is the acoustics of the room favourable for talking in a circle?

Will there be a sufficient number of chairs?

Is a definitive seating order desirable and should it be decided upon beforehand?

What will be the time frame for the circle to enable everybody to participate?

Would a talking piece be helpful? In this case – would a suitable gadget be available?

Will the setting of the circle be open to the public and will it be possible for people from outside to join spontaneously? As listeners only or participating actively?

#### **4.4. The work of the facilitator**

What kind of expectations do I, as a facilitator, have regarding the process and its outcome?

Could these expectations become hindering the process?

Do I have everything I need for the next step to introduce – materially and in my mind?

Am I prepared to take this step?

If not: what preconditions ought to be fulfilled?

What is going to happen if my expectations are not fulfilled?

Do I need any kind of a back-up or safeguard?

### **5. Case-studies as an illustration of the application of different 'models' of restorative circles**

Instead of providing detailed instructions for conducting a restorative circle we will in this place present descriptions of two restorative circles that have taken place in the context of the social housing estates (Gemeindebau) in Vienna. This way we hope to spread both the knowledge that there are different paths towards designing and conducting a restorative circle and stimulate the readiness to further develop, adapt and innovate existing circle models.

We have deliberately selected two different examples. The first one is a narration of a role play trying out the circle approach of Dominik Barter as it is applied by the trainer we worked with in project ALTERNATIVE. It is characterised by a set of questions that are continuously repeated and that the trainer used as her most important instrument of facilitating the circle. Dominik Barter's approach was also used as a point of departure in the Frauencafé mentioned previously. There it became further adapted to the social conditions of the Frauencafé by wohnpartner; the researchers of the IRKS were involved in this process of adaptation. They have decided to name this process 'Gemeinschaftskreis' or 'community-circle'.

The second story is based on the peacemaking circles approach as introduced and described by our Hungarian partner, the NGO Foresee in the 'Handbook for Facilitating Peacemaking Circles' (Fellegi and Szegö 2013). This Handbook was

prepared within the framework of an action research project that was conducted between 2011 and 2013, involving Belgium, Germany and Hungary with the Financial Support of the European Commission's Criminal Justice Programme 2010.

Both case studies deal with everyday conflicts where there is no clear role division of 'offender' and 'victim'. Instead it is about different interests and conflicting needs of the participants, also about nuisances and about hurts experienced. The circle procedure offers an easily accessible way to tackle these conflicts and to work towards a new understanding and ultimately a basis for acting together.

### **5.1. Case-study: What did you hear? – Is this what you wanted to say and convey?**

This role-play happened within a workshop in the community centre Bassena. It was facilitated by Gerda<sup>2</sup>, the trainer who has experience in conducting restorative circles in various setting (schools, NGOs) using the approach of Dominik Barter. It was intended to apply the circle procedure to a conflict that had really occurred and that had affected one of the participants, Laura. According to Laura, she has experienced repeated conflicts and severe nuisance from two children living at the same stairway as herself in the Gemeindebau, using this stairway for their noisy games and fooling around. The other participants could easily refer to similar experiences and were therefore quite ready to take on various roles: that of the children (Amir and Ingrid) and their mothers (Rabia and Hanna) whilst Laura stayed with her actual role. Sabine, a practitioner/social worker of the Bassena who had some knowledge of Dominik Barter's approach did the facilitating.

In order to get into the role-play the participants leave the room to prepare for the roles assigned. On re-entering the room they are welcomed by Sabine and invited to sit down in a circle. Sabine has not defined any seating order beforehand, thus it happens by mere chance that on the left of Sabine Rabia and her son Amir take place, next to her sit Ingrid and her mother Hanna; finally Laura takes a seat on the right side of Sabine.

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<sup>2</sup> All names used in the description of the case studies are fictitious.

Sabine opens the conversation: “We are here because Laura wants to talk with the children about this occurrence when the children were playing football in the stairway. Laura, what do you want to tell the group?”

Laura: “During the last weeks you were playing repeatedly in the stairway. Why do you play there? To play football one goes outside! The ball dirties the walls and if you throw down the ball from the highest floor to the ground floor it is terribly loud, too loud for me! Please, don’t do that!”

Sabine now takes over and addresses Amir: “Amir, what did you hear?”

Amir: “I heard that she accuses me - she says that I must not be there!”

Sabine addressing Laura: “Is this what you wanted to say, Laura?”

Laura: “No, this is not what I intended to say. I wanted to say that they should not play football in the stairway, in order not to dirty the walls und that they should not throw the ball, because this causes a lot of noise.”

Sabine asks Amir once again, what he has heard and following his reply asks Laura once more whether this is, what she wanted to say. When Laura keeps saying ‘no’, Sabine turns to Ingrid and asks: “Ingrid, what did you hear?”

Ingrid: ‘I hear that I cause noise and dirt.’

Sabine now turning back to Laura: “Is this what you wanted to say?”

Laura: “Yes, this is what I wanted to say.”

Through this statement Laura makes clear that so far she feels understood. Sabine then asks Ingrid how she feels about what she has heard (from Laura). Ingrid takes this opportunity to explain to the others her situation. Sabine turns to Laura and now she asks her what she has heard. Alternating between Ingrid and Laura she establishes rapport and understanding between the two of them by using the questions: “What did you hear?” and “Is this, what you wanted to say?” This goes on until to the point where Laura answers the question in the positive: “Yes”, and only then Sabine turns to the next person sitting in the circle and asks: “How do you feel about what you have heard now?” Sabine follows through with this strategy until every participant had an opportunity to say how she/he feels or what she/he wants to say and has found understanding for what she wanted to say from at least one person sitting in the circle.

After some time the participants start to comprehend that the question ‘What did you hear?’ does not imply a request or even demand to enter into directly replying to the

statement heard, but a request to repeat as closely as possible what the other person has said.

Amir: "I want Laura to admit that she has scolded and upbraided me."

Sabine: "Laura, what did you hear?"

Laura: "I did not scold you."

Sabine: "Laura. What did you hear *now*?"

Sabine addressing Amir: "Is this what you wanted to say?"

Amir: "Yes!"

The group starts to adapt to this procedure and even anticipates it in a way.

Sabine addressing Rabia: "How do you feel about the things you have heard?"

Rabia: "I do not really know. I am still not quite sure what really has happened. Amir, I would like you to explain this to me from your side."

Amir takes over anticipating Sabine: "My mother does not yet quite understand what has happened und she would like me to tell her." Turning to Sabine: "Should I now tell her what happened?"

Sabine answers: "Exactly so, Amir, just go ahead!"

Amir in this way takes on a facilitating function but keeps his rapport with Sabine to make sure that he has really understood the course the conversation within the circle is intended to take. Sabine expresses her acceptance and confirms that he has indeed understood the procedure. That way she also conveys the message to all participants of the circle that each of them has the competence to shape and to configure the course the circle takes. It affords only to consider the rules of the circle, namely the sequence of questions to be posed and the care and attention to be paid to the overriding principle of each one to have a chance to be heard and understood.

It is therefore not the facilitator's task to ask the questions throughout the whole session, rather she will do this only in a subsidiary manner – in case nobody else comes up with these questions; and she is to insist on answering the questions in case the participants do not do this.

The role-play described has ended at this point and did not proceed to jointly elaborating an action plan. Proposals for an action were already there. Hanna had asked Laura to directly talk to her in case the children should become too noisy once more. Laura agreed to do this but she had to admit that she did not even know the

apartment Amir and his mother were living. This kind of proposals would have afforded to become more concrete and to be worked out in more detail in order to become both clear and ‘realistic’ for the participants.

## **5.2. Case-study: An orange facilitating talks in a circle**

This case-study describes circle talks taking place within the group ‘Cultural Exchange’, a group consisting of residents of ‘The Schöpfwerk’, meeting regularly about once a month. They do so for quite some time, a couple of years already. In the beginning of these meetings the participants had agreed to use the time they spent together to talk about topics relating to culture. After some time the focus changed and they decided to discuss not just theatre, music, fine arts, but to try to learn more about their different countries of origin, the daily lives of people and the role of religion and of tradition in shaping the lives of people. There was no specific practical purpose associated with these meetings but they served as ‘story-telling gatherings’. Eventually these stories centred on a certain theme that was proposed by one of the group members.

In one of the meetings, Jakob, the social worker of Bassena accompanying the group, proposed to deal with the theme of ‘the role of religion in everyday life’. At that time there was a graffiti sign ‘STOP ISLAM’ that had appeared on walls in the Schöpfwerk (Kremmel and Pelikan 2014b). Jakob had also proposed to use a talking piece for structuring discussions of this theme. In order to illustrate in which way such a talking piece would work, he just took hold of an orange lying there on the table, declared it to be the talking piece and explained that only the person holding the orange was supposed to talk.

During this and the following meetings the participants got used to ‘playing’ with the tool of the talking piece. They used it repeatedly especially when a situation or a specific (sub)topic made it especially difficult to listen to the other. The orange served as a reminder that only the one holding it was ‘allowed’ to speak while the others were supposed to listen. They understood that this talking piece had to move and had to be handed on to another person and that this way they could be sure to get ‘their’ chance to speak when the talking piece would eventually arrive to be held in their hands. This certainty relieved them from the need to fight for their turn and the fight to get the word. They could concentrate on listening to each other. Apart from that, those

members that had been more restrained and reluctant to speak up, now took the opportunity to speak when the talking piece was in their hands.

In the course of one of these meetings, Jakob informed the group members of the possibility to take part in a capacity building workshop that was planned to take place within the framework of project ALTERNATIVE: “You could come to this meeting when you have problems with your neighbours, because he/she is very loud – and you can practice how to talk with your neighbour about this kind of problem.”

Ahmet responded to this proposal that he would rather be interested to know how to respond when the neighbour is knocking at one’s door ranting and accusing one because one is too loud. And he added: “I do not understand these Austrians – they want everything to be quiet at 10 pm. That’s when life begins for us!” Everyone reacted with laughter to this statement – except Magdalena. Magdalena looked at the ceiling and then uttered full of suppressed fury: “I just do not understand. How can you be so indifferent and so inconsiderate?”

All of a sudden the mood in the room changed: from hilarious laughter to depressed silence. Then one of the group members took an orange out of the fruit bowl and gave it to Magdalena, signalling: ‘here’s your talking piece’.

Then Magdalena started to talk about her anger regarding her neighbours sitting outside her window until late at night talking loudly and preventing Magdalena from falling asleep. She said that she had several times tried to talk to them, explaining that she had to get up very early in the morning to arrive at her workplace in time. These attempts had proved useless and now, being utterly desperate, she had resorted to calling the police. “Now I am the one neighbours talk about because I am always calling the police!” In the long run this did not prove helpful either and Magdalena sees herself trapped in a hopeless situation.

When she had ended, she handed the orange over to Ahmet who was highly embarrassed; he expressed his understanding for Magdalena. And he added that he was sure that not one of the Arabic women living in the Schöpfwerk would act as inconsiderate as Magdalena’s neighbours.

Then Mahmud took the orange directly from Ahmet and he addressed him thus: “I do not like the way you talk about ‘Arabic’ women! Those living here are Austrians!” Then addressing Magdalena he said: “I understand your predicament, but you have to also understand your neighbours. They are probably not in paid work. But they are at

home all day, taking care of the children and the household. In the evening when the children are asleep this is their chance to leave the apartment to meet each other and to get a bit of distance from the drudgery of the day's work.”

Jakob was the next to receive the talking piece and he suggested to Magdalena to prepare tea after the next meeting, to go through the Schöpfwerk and to remind those people who were still outside in the parks and the yards of the Gemeindebau of the requirement to keep the ‘peace at night’.

Magdalena was the one to close the circle thanking Mahmut for his statement, which, she said, helped her to understand the situation of her neighbours and she thanked Jakob for his suggestion.

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