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GRUPA GROUP ГРУППА ГРУПА DIE GRUPPE GRUP GURUUB

Zine, an independent publication co-created with individuals having refugee experience, residing at a centre for foreigners.

The idea behind the innovation is to issue an independent publication prepared by a group of authors – people who have experienced migration and exile. A brochure in the form of a zine is a collection of first-person testimonials and stories, but it also serves as a platform for exchanging experience between people experiencing exile and local community (thanks to meetings with its authors and the distribution of the zine at local institutions). During the creation process, participants take part in a workshop devoted to self-development and mental empowerment.

Who is the innovation is targeted at?

The innovation is targeted at individuals who have experienced migration and exile, including those residing at places of temporary residence (open centres for foreigners), waiting for their stay in Poland to be legalised. The innovation can also be implemented everywhere where people experiencing migration or exile reside or meet.

The innovation is indirectly beneficial for the host society, namely residents of nearby towns, located by centres, as well as other zine addressees.

Who can implement the innovation?

- Organisations providing support to individuals with migrant or exile experience.
- Multicultural centres and clubs.
- Social cafés.

What problems does the innovation address?

Zine Grupa is an attempt to practically face the following problems:

- fear, anxiety and hostile approach among local residents towards people from other countries,
- the lack of reliable knowledge about people experiencing exile in the local community, and personal relationships with them,
- the lack of integration of individuals residing at open centres for foreigners,
- the lack of activities for individuals residing at open centres for foreigners, their limited contacts with the outside world.

An important aspect of the innovation is to provide its participants with mental empowerment. The workshops aim at strengthening their sense of agency and giving them an opportunity to creatively express themselves in the tangible form of a zine. Joint work on the zine is also an opportunity to get to know one another better and to exchange experience between groups that do not interact with one another on a daily basis.

The innovation creates an opportunity for its participants to be noticed and appreciated by the immediate environment but also by people from outside the centre. The monotony and boredom resulting from limited employment opportunities (no work permits granted temporarily by the Office for Foreigners) is an everyday reality for many people, which is why it is so important to break this pattern.

One of the key difficulties resulting from residing at such a centre is also poor exchange of information with the outside world and the immediate vicinity (inhabitants) as well as the lack of cooperation with other centres

in the country. Another issue is the lack of access to reading materials in residents' native language. The life at the centre is characterised by temporariness which makes planning the future and settling in the new context more difficult. Hence, it is essential to integrate people within the centre, but also – in the long run – to exchange experience between centres and individuals who have already experienced such a stay.

How was the innovation created?

Aleksander Grzybek, the author of the innovation is a brand designer, specialising in visual communication. As part of his MA thesis at the social art faculty in the Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw, he prepared a zine together with allotment holders from Warsaw family community gardens. The publication met with an enthusiastic response, and he has since then been thinking about utilising this medium as a tool of communication and integration between different groups.

The recruitment for the Idea Incubator announced soon after the breakout of the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border became an excellent occasion. Aleksander applied with his concept of a zine co-created by people experiencing exile. Finally, he decided to run the innovation pilot at a centre for foreigners in Grupa near Grudziądz. It is located far away from large cities, and there is no offer activating or empowering residents available there.



How to implement the innovation at your end, step by step?

The process of preparing a zine serves therapeutic and communication functions and opens an opportunity for democratic exchange of information or experience, providing participants with full autonomy and freedom of expression at the same time. It engages individuals with the migration and exile experience in a cycle of workshops crowned with a publication. Materials prepared are then distributed in public places and presented during meetings with entry authors.

All the stages take place respecting participants' autonomy – every person decides on their own on the extent to which they wish to participate in the project.

The innovation is made of three main components:

1. workshop,
2. collecting and editing zine entries,
3. meetings with authors.



WORKSHOP CYCLE

Open to everyone from the centre.



ENTRY PREPARATION

Individuals who have decided to prepare entries and have agreed to have them published received financial remuneration.



PUBLICATION

Available for free, in both printed and digital format.



MEETINGS WITH RESIDENTS

A premiere and a meeting with entry authors willing to participate.



PROMOTION

Zine distribution at foundations and community centres across Poland.

During the pilot, innovators decided to organise a cycle of three main workshops (each lasting for ca. four hours), an introductory meeting at the beginning of the process, and consultations after the second workshop.

However, the split can be different, e.g., six workshops, each lasting two hours. The workshops should in total last no less than 12–15 hours.

RECRUITMENT

Pilot workshops were preceded by an info visit during which a coordinator and an interpreter introduced themselves to the staff and described the project, they also invited centre residents to take part in the venture. Ideally, the timing of the workshops should be defined in advance, so that participants can plan their attendance ahead and be aware of the timeframe of the project. Another good practice is to hang a poster or distribute leaflets informing on the commencement of the initiative.

INTRODUCTORY MEETING

The objective of the introductory meeting was to get to know one another and to map topics of interest for centre residents. During the meeting, innovators described the project, defined participation principles, and then held a workshop to select several threads that were of interest for participants. Topics repeated most often included Polish culture, ecology and cuisine. Themes selected in this way were enriched with a workshop element suggested by participants.

FIRST WORKSHOP

Correct execution of the first meeting is a major challenge – the objective here is to keep balance between a factual conversation and more casual atmosphere, and to create space for participants to share their opinions and experience.

Objective: group integration, getting to know one another, offering practical knowledge.

Proposed duration of the meeting: four hours plus a break (20 minutes).

Engaged individuals: a cultural integrator and a special guest running a workshop on Polish culture and a psychological workshop on mental resilience, translator/interpreter.

SECOND WORKSHOP

The introduction to the second workshop was a short presentation of the idea of the zine and of its examples. This workshop focused on artistic expression, joint and individual manual work. It is important to come up with the first visual materials at the end of the meeting that are then used as the draft for further work, but – if someone decides so – they can also serve as the final entry. This allows participants to see the physical outcomes of their work which gives them a better idea of what their entries are to be about. During the pilot, innovators had a scanner at their disposal to present the effects on a computer.

Objective: further group integration, stimulation of creativity, preparation of first materials for the zine.

Proposed duration of the meeting: four hours plus a break (20 minutes).

Engaged individuals: creative workshop facilitator (in the pilot it was a visual artist specialising in language and visual art) and a translator/interpreter.

CONSULTATIONS

Innovators also run open consultations for everyone interested, to discuss entries individually or run a joint brainstorming with those who wanted to discuss or specify what to write about or what they could prepare for the zine. The format of the workshop was open. In this particular case, it was a group meeting during which the project coordinator along with a person responsible for preparing the zine for printing consulted with participants the stage which their zines were at. On that day, they also collected ready entries from those who had already completed them. After the consultation, participants had two weeks to send the remaining entries.

ZINE PRODUCTION

It is essential to define the appearance of the zine before the workshop to provide co-creators of the publication with the project framework (format, printing technique, or maximum number of pages). Such elements of the publication as the title, colour, page sequence and mainly the content can be featured in the second workshop devoted to discussion and making decisions together.

Technical requirements regarding individual entries:

- format – in our case it was the A5 format,
- technique – any, markers, pens, pencils, ink – but to ensure proper contrast only black colour was allowed,
- information – e-mail address that entries can be sent to, and a phone number to contact the author, in the event of any questions,
- entry submission deadline,
- proper signing of participants' entries to know who a given scan belongs to.

THIRD WORKSHOP

A summarising workshop conducted once the publication has been printed. The main objective of the workshop was to summarise the process. The printed publication was investigated, discussed, and meetings with authors were arranged (to be attended by inhabitants).

Objective: distribution of printed publications, discussing and preparing the agenda of meetings with authors.

Proposed duration of the meeting: 3.5 hours plus a break (20 minutes).

Engaged individuals: workshop facilitator and a translator/interpreter.

PROMOTION – MEETING WITH AUTHORS

From the beginning, innovators knew that zine was a pretext for getting to know centre residents and a tool offering an opportunity to meet. Zine serves yet another function that might be even more important – it is a gift, an opportunity to talk to the local community and go outside the centre.

Three promotional meetings were organised in towns located near the centre. Cooperation with local foundations or associations helping to promote the meeting is essential. It is particularly important if you do not have a network of contacts in a given area. Promotion started two weeks prior to the event – posters were hanged, a short interview on the local TV and radio was given, and the event was shared on local announcement boards. 12 centre residents and around 30 people from the outside attended the meeting (the premiere).

What is particularly noteworthy?

The team

Due to the character of work with people in different psychophysical condition, it is necessary to properly select the team members that are to ensure safe framework in the first place. Our pilot experience shows that the team should be made of:

- **a coordinator** – an integrating person, arranging workshop dates, consultation and meeting timetable, and organising venues and transport logistics,
- **a person with psychological experience, running a creative workshop,**
- **a translator/interpreter.**

The following individuals might not be necessary to facilitate workshops, but it is good to include them in the team:

- **a cultural integrator** – during the pilot it was a person who used to be a refugee centre resident and now is engaged in active support for people with migration and exile experience; during the workshop, the integrator shared practical hints on where to look for help after leaving the centre and how to be active even beforehand;
- **a specialist** – in the pilot it was a person who ran a workshop on Polish culture and a psychological workshop on mental resilience (the person's specialisation must obviously be adjusted to participants' needs);
- **a person to take care of little children** that cannot take active part in the workshop, but once they are taken care of, their parents are given an opportunity to participate in the process.

Venue

An obvious first step was a visit at the centre. A consent to enter it can be obtained by applying to the Office for Foreigners in Warsaw (the innovator recommends applying for a consent for the entire period of the innovation, not for single entries). The first visit during the pilot was an opportunity to meet centre employees, see rooms and hang posters informing of the planned workshops.

The choice of the venue for the innovation is essential. A centre in Grupa near Grudziądz was selected for the pilot – because of limited offer of activities for centre participants (except Polish lessons) and contact with a foundation that facilitated interaction with the centre for the innovator.

Does it work? How does the innovation help its beneficiaries?

The innovation became a platform for expressing feelings and thoughts for the centre residents, empowering them and providing them with the sense of agency that is essential in such circumstances. Involvement in the zine creation helped participants gain new competencies and practical experience. Participation in the process was an opportunity for self-development and served as a breather from daily life in the centre, providing participants with a regular activity thanks to its cyclic nature. Joint participation in the workshop equipped them with tools helping them self-improve and better manage their emotions.

I liked absolutely everything, from the presentation to communication and support.

workshop participant

Many individuals surveyed declared that the innovation had positive impact on their wellbeing. Workshop participants stressed that they had interacted with friendly and supportive people, had been given hope for the future, had learned to manage stress more effectively, had gained confidence about their skills (writing, language, etc.)

I gained priceless experience in learning the language and culture, I was provided with support I really needed.

participant

The innovation allowed for creating at the centre a group of people who got to know each other better. The interpretation/translation allowed for including everyone in the discussion, giving each participant an opportunity to express themselves. However, the meetings with authors caused the most emotional response – both among the centre residents and the local community. And this might be the most innovative element, worth focusing on.

Such meetings should be mandatory for youths so that they can see other people who are not different in any way, who have the same problems, worries, and who struggle to find themselves in a foreign country. It was generally something new not only for inhabitants, but also for me. Because it was the opportunity for me to see such a grassroots publication which was an excellent idea. I also believe that it would be great if this experience could be repeated.

Local activist from Grudziądz

How much does it cost?

Preparation of a zine obviously generates certain costs. Here is a list of basic expenses, but it is only an estimate. The organisation of work and the division of duties can look different for various groups.

- Workshop facilitator's remuneration – PLN 150 per hour of a workshop, recommended number of workshop hours: 12.
- Cost of interpretation and translation (interpretation during sessions and translation of materials ready for publication) – PLN 120 per hour.
- Translation of texts (publication) – PLN 600.
- Graphic design of the publication – PLN 700.
- Printing of the publication – ca. PLN 4 per copy (a minimum recommended number of copies – 300).
- Cost of coordination and promotion – PLN 1,500.
- Art supplies – at least PLN 300 for a group of 30 individuals.

The total cost of workshop organisation, interpretation/translation, facilitator's remuneration and printing of 300 publication copies will amount to ca. PLN 8,000.

Who is the author of the innovation?



Aleksander Grzybek – graduate of Falmouth University and Polish Culture Institute at the University of Warsaw. He is involved in creative work, visual communication and socially engaged projects. He works in various sectors – cooperating with cultural institutions, NGOs, independent initiatives, but also as an assistant to artists, combining culture and art with activism.



Graphic design of the zine:

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Workshop facilitation:

Chawa Bugajewa, Patrycja Ziółkowska,
Ada Rączka, Zuzanna Głód

Zine translation: Oksana Kolisnyk

More information

<https://inkubatorpomyslow.org.pl/innowacja/zine-wspoltworzony-przez-osoby-przebywajace-w-osrodku-dla-cudzoziemcow>

<https://grupa-zine.pl>

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Uncommon solutions to common problems

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Design and typesetting: Kotbury, www.kotbury.pl

December 2023

