

From connectivity to energy – The Story of our project Comedor del Arte

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How and why I started the project Comedor del Arte

At first there was the idea to rent rooms or a house in our city for making a meeting room and an open studio. Since 30 years I am working as an artist and was part of different social and cultural projects. The dream of an open house for meetings and creativity has been growing inside me for a long time.

At the beginning of the year 2015 I've heard about a social-festival sponsored by different Foundations called Sinnstifter (sense founder) with the aim to support social projects with money and know-how.

I am living in the neighbourhood of a refugee camp and for more then ten years I am in contact with people who are waiting for the Asylum procedure.

Since 2013 I am teaching the people the German language.

I decided start a project in the context of the social festival.

During the springtime 2015 I spoke with Mika, a refugee from Russia, Karim, a refugee from Afghanistan and Alexandra my partner in life, to design a project.

In summer 2015 the refugee crisis became public and the plan for a meeting place became very topical.

I visited some hotspots like Traiskirchen or Röszke at the Serbian-Hungarian border and was horrified at the failure and the unwillingness of European responsibility.

In October 2015 we had the presentation of our project in front of a jury.

We served international food, Mika and Aida sang some songs and I told about the dream of a place where people could meet and do something together irrespective of age, sex, skin color, descent, religious belief or political attitude.

The jury supported the project and promised to pay the rent for one year.

In January 2016 we rent a business location in Hainfeld and started the renovation.

Our house is situated close to the center of Hainfeld. The house offers two rooms in the ground floor, which are used for cooking and lessons as well as for social get-together. In the first floor there are more rooms and enough space for creative workshops and computer-learning.

In February 2016 we started the operation with German lessons, Playing-afternoons for children and two days open house for meeting, playing, cooking and much more.

In the year 2016 a large number of projects were implemented.

We organized different creative workshops, different talents became visible and we spent many hours with common work, learning, playing and laughing.

What ist the Comedor del Arte?

COMEDOR DEL ARTE is a project based on diversity and solidarity. We want to show the richness and diversity of our world. This is why the COMEDOR DEL ARTE is intended as a meeting point for all kind of people, independent of their age, sex, colour, place of birth, religiose or political attitude. It is a place for meeting people and creative expression. We think that we can solve our present and future problems only in a common effort. Care, support, solidarity, humanity, compassion und charity are values, which our society urgently needs.

What happens in the COMEDOR DEL ARTE? The program depends on what people need. Everbody can propose an activity. German classes, playing board games and card games as well as artists's workshops are possible.

How does the COMEDOR DEL ARTE work? Everybody is welcome – with his or her ideas and with his or her talents. So we can learn from each other. The most important principle is voluntarism. In general, the attendance in the COMEDOR DEL ARTE as well as workshops, food and the use of the equipment are free. However, additional donations are welcome. The COMEDOR DEL ARTE is a smoke-free and alcohol-free zone.

One year later: Why we have founded an association.

We have founded an association called „Herzverband“ in order to have a legal basis for sponsors and official institutions. Furtheron we want to recruit members to get more money and morever we hope to find more motivated people in our surrounding.

Herzverband — Association for the promotion, organization and operation of the Comedor del Arte. In addition, to foster and communicate the vision of an empathic society,

Important points for a good integration:

- We need places for low-threshold encounters on the same level and we need people willing to spend time.
- Networking and collaboration with other Organizations, local authorities, entrepreneurs and citizens.
- You need a few dedicated people.
- Public relations is important. The positive and enriching stories must be told to the public.
- If you see it as an opportunity for personal development, you will become richer and more powerfull.
- Last but not least, you need love, courage, openness and the feeling for the right opportunity.

I want to finish my presentation with words from Mahatma Ghandi:

We are all connected by the bond of love !

The following parts were accompanied by photo projections

The current Program

German course for beginners (vocabulary, ABC, grammar, reading and understanding)

Monday, 9am to 12am Teacher: Alexandra Eichenauer-Knoll

Tuesday, 10am to 12am Teacher: Franz Witzmann

Wednesday, 9am to 12am Teacher: Alexandra Eichenauer-Knoll

Franz opens the door. Thursday: from 1pm to 6pm Friday: from 10am to 6pm Saturday: from 4pm to 7pm For local people and foreigners! Free of charge, no registration required.

Playing guitar Teacher: Mario Schagerl Thursday: from 2pm to 4pm Everybody is invited to learn some guitar chords and play together.

Arabian Language Course for Beginners Teacher: Ghazi Hares Thursday: from 5pm to 6pm Everybody is invited to learn the Arab language – for holidays, for the job or to deepen friendships with Arab speaking people! Free of charge, no registration required.

ABC-course Saturday, from 2pm to 3.30 pm Teacher: Alexandra Eichenauer-Knoll

Sewing room We sew various items to be sold, in order to raise funds for Comedor del Arte operations. In addition, we also sew items for our own use.

Every first Saturday of the month: from 2pm – open end Coach: Cornelia Fuchs

PS: Everybody can come and sew in our sewing room free of charge during opening hours. Requirements are familiarity with sewing machine, and registration.

Play games + learn Children and all adults, who like to play games, are always welcome! We play mainly board games and card games – offline!

Activities in the past

- sewing workshop for puppet clothes, in cooperation with the local sewing café
- sewing workshop for making shopping bags, in cooperation with the local sewing café
- collage workshop with Julia Dossi
- theater workshop for children with Emina Eppensteiner
- upcycling workshop for children with Marianne Plaimer, an art teacher
- installing a small garage for bicycle repair and repair-training
- we were part of a film project, organized by Villa Kreativ in Neulengbach and coached by the German media artist Sonja Wessel. („Fremd bin ich eingezogen“, an event during the Viertelfestivals NÖ). We established contacts to refugees, organized several caterings and presented the films during a summer night party in the Comedor del Arte.
- Lebensgut Miteinander vegetable boxes: we got one box a week for free and we established contacts to refugees interested to help them on their farm.
- Ferienspiel Hainfeld: we offered the designing of a play and 2 times a puppet cloth sewing for local children in the Comedor
- Book reading with 3 young refugees: „Das Mädchen mit dem Fingerhut“, a novel written by the famous Austrian author Michael Köhlmeier, we read the book once a week for about 3 months, afterwards discussion in the library in Traisen in a reading circle with other readers
- 2 times we had a barrow on the Christmas market in Hainfeld and sold tea, soup, international sweets and food from Afghanistan
- the cooking and catering team worked for several music and art festivals and we had a stand on the church festival in Rohrbach

- stand on the flea market in Hainfeld in order to make money
- 2 times we had a concert in the backyard of the Comedor, in summer and in autumn
- memory celebration for the victims of a bombing blast in Kabul, most of them Hazara
- we recommended artist for festivals (e.g. Mohammad, a professional actor was on our party and then on the Tuwas-Festival and now he will work together with a musician playing accordion; Mika was singing on the Human Rights Stage at the Viennes Donaufestival and will work together with a local pop group)
- we got carpet weaving frames from the ground school, Ramazan is a professional weaver, he made 2 small carpets
- we made 100 paper stars in the Origami technique for a social project of the city Hainfeld and were also involved in a star sewing project during the Christmas time

Plans for the future

- 3 day summer festival with music and food and discussions, open air
- workshop with Emina Eppensteiner, learning German by acting
- An Iranian designer draws at the moment illustrations for a memory-card-game (to learn German in the setting of an ABC-course)
- Reading newspapers together, at least the headlines
- An Iranian Computer specialist will install the Computers and take care of the EDV-room
- Our own sewing room with more than 6 machines is open since April 1st. We want to design bags and jewelry for making money to run the house
- We want to organize a basket weaving workshop. Willow trees are growing everywhere, so the material is cheap or for free.