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"Welcome to Your Neighbourhood" – a project in Reykjavík for 'New Icelanders' with a holistic and social-space-connected approach[1]

This chapter faces a quite new challenge for Iceland: Migration to Iceland has not been a relevant topic during decades. This changed in the last years quite dramatically, more and more people arrive because of looking for a job or being forced to migrate as a refugee looking for asylum – and Iceland needs qualified workers. So, new challenges arise: It cannot be expected anymore that all parents and children while connecting to education know about the basics of the Icelandic education system and the aspirations to them. With this background, the project „Welcome to Your Neighbourhood" was founded in Reykjavík in 2014 – also with Icelandic persons in mind who lived abroad and return to the island.

It could be thought that this project is an introducing program for parents for learning the basics of the education system and for knowing how 'to do the right thing in the right way' by assimilation – but it is not like this at all. The main goal is to come into – and if necessary to stay in – contact with the families from their arrival and to find out what they need and what their interests are – holistically in their social life and especially focused on the area of afterschool activities, as it is quite common to children in Iceland. These activities play an essential role in the child's social and physical development, and over the last decades, they have become a big part of Icelandic culture. In addition, afterschool activities serve as a powerful preventative measure against anxiety, depression, isolation and other disadvantageous behaviors amongst Icelandic children and youth. It is obvious that children of the focus groups do not take part in these activities as others – connected to a lack of money, a lack of information and access, different cultures and different ways parents act. So, the Icelandic society needs to learn from new citizens and their way of living – and this is possible by participation and mutual learning in social life in Iceland.

This chapter gives a glimpse in the first part how the structure of the population changed in recent years. The second part is documenting some organizational facts and the practical procedures of this inclusion process. The third part tells about experiences on the base of two video meetings and the fourth and last part summarizes and reflects the project.

1 Changes in the Icelandic population structure

For a very long time, the population of Iceland remained quite homogeneous. Until 2005, there was a percentage of less than 4 % citizens with a foreign origin in Iceland; connected to the Balkan war, it increased until 2009 to 7,6 %, decreasing afterwards. In 2016 the immigration rate was 8 %, reaching 13,9 % in 2021 (Statistics Iceland, 2022a; Pétursdóttir, 2013). In 2021 (latest data), the biggest group of immigrants – more than 20.000 – are from Poland, followed by Scandinavian and Baltic background and a lot from Philippines and Thailand (Statistics Iceland, 2022c). Meanwhile, the emigration of Icelandic citizens is a small number, during the

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years (with exception of 2009, connected to the economic crises) below 2000 persons, but since 2020 a growing number of them is coming back – more than 800 in 2021 (Statistic Iceland, 2022b). The migration of foreign citizens into Iceland has been growing since 2009 with a peak in 2017 with almost 8000 persons (Statistic Iceland, 2022b). Now, discrimination with racism seems to be a growing topic in Iceland (Pétursdóttir, 2013; Björnsson, 2015; Kyzer, 2022).

There are three groups of immigrants coming to Iceland – with different percentages in different times: persons looking for jobs, persons being forced to emigrate from their country as a refugee and Icelanders coming back after staying abroad for a longer time. As almost two thirds of the population of Iceland (235.000 of 368.800 in 2021) live in the region of Reykjavík, it is a challenge for the capital in a special way, so it is not by incident that this project is located in the capital.

2 Organizational facts and practical procedures of the project

This part of the chapter focuses the concept and organization of the project and its practical procedures.

2.1 Structures and localisation of the project

The project was founded in 2014 and is located in a community house in Reykjavík. Primarily immigrated children and their families, refugees and asylum seekers are the focus group. It is important that it focuses on families – not just children or persons with support needs. The idea is to give these families companionship as far as needed and to connect them with the environment, so they know about how life in Iceland goes and can develop their own individual lifestyle – in social cohesion, as the Islandic society is expecting. Some years ago, the project gained permanent status and is taking the innovative lead amongst the social services provided within the central neighbourhoods of Reykjavík, called Miðborg, Vesturmiðstöð and Hlíðar.

Especially, there is a lot of attention for afterschool activities in which almost all Icelandic children are involved – may it be sports, music or whatever. For this focus, it is significant that afterschool centres are part of the school whereas the four leisure centres in Reykjavík are part of the community system and coordinate the afterschool centres in the district, this means five to ten afterschool centres and the sport clubs.

The self-conception of this project is to be a community service, not a social service; this means that it is not a service owned by state but by the people living in the community as part of the civil society. This enables families to avoid the question if they have any problems or made any mistakes which provoke the social system asking them for contact – with all potential aspects of domination and hierarchy.

The community houses are important places for a whole range of activities. They have open workshops and courses, e. g. gymnastics or something to do with hands. Participation is open and free of charge, and there are persons to ask for any questions, so community houses can be something like a safe place for families who just arrived.

The project has a strong focus on networking, so it does not need many persons working in it, just a few workers. This systemic approach – to connect existing services instead of building new ones – makes sense and does not cost too much. This also could strengthen the support of the responsible institutions financing it. In 2022, there were two (!) persons with working posts working in the project.

The systemic approach leads to a second important goal of the project – despite the companionship of families – which is to develop more efficient collaboration between

Reykjavík City council's social centres of Miðborg, Vesturmiðstöð and Hlíðar, playschools and compulsory schools, as well as local sports clubs Valur and KR. At the very core of this collaboration, there is an important work on increasing coherence of these different institutions in serving a common goal of facilitating social inclusion of the focus groups.

This has a specific background in the culture of collaboration: Every institution works in a specific and individual way, less synchronized than in other countries (see also the example of different school philosophies in Guðjónsdóttir & Hinz in this volume). And there are hierarchies in the institutional thinking between schools and leisure centres as well, also in Iceland. So, it is important to the project to work as a mediator on mutual understanding and cooperation for the quality of the services in the interest of the families. So, in every preschool, comprehensive school, leisure centre and sports club in these parts of Reykjavík, there is one person responsible and continuously in contact with the project.

2.2 Practical procedures

The procedures of the project are quite simple – and this is positive: In the first six years, there was one obligatory starting meeting with the family and with the school the children are starting to be in. Reflecting that, this is not enough for building a good and trustful contact and maybe overwhelming for the family with too much information from the perspective of school, the project decided to change to two obligatory meetings. Since 2020, there have been two meetings at the beginning, the first in the playschool or compulsory school – depending where the child starts to go to – with the agenda, needs and questions of the school, and the second in the community based on the agenda, needs and questions of the family.

The first meeting, the *school meeting*, happens before the child is starting there. The school is inviting, and the main challenge is to build a relationship between the family and the school. The participating persons are – of course – the child and the family, a 'welcoming worker' as a facilitator – a person of the project –, a translator if necessary, the class teacher of the child, the Icelandic teacher, maybe a school nurse. Mostly, there are four to five persons attending the meeting. There should not be too many persons from school because potentially the family members could turn out in a defensive mode. The two main topics of this meeting are:

- on the one hand, to learn about the history of the child, it's interests and what it loves and how much times it has been to school until then;
- on the other hand, to tell the family how the Icelandic school and health system work and in which ways support is offered.

And connected to this, the schools try to make clear that they expect participation and collaboration of the parents with a flow of information in both directions.

The approach of the meeting is to talk about strengths of the child, not about problems. And it should not be about giving information without asking what the family members think about it. Both would bring the family in a defensive role which would disable the process of mutual understanding and collaboration. Instead, in this meeting, one of the questions is often: What could be the next steps for *this* family and *this* child? Nevertheless, practices during the years showed that in a lot of cases, the families do not have enough space and time to bring in their perspectives and questions in a sufficient way (see below).

The 'welcome worker' invites to the second, the *community meeting*. Members of this meeting are the child and the whole family, the same translator if needed, a member of the preschool or compulsory school, a person from the community house, the leisure centre and a social worker if needed. Regularly, the community house is the place of the second meeting, a house with lots of activities and with a 'positive environment'. One purpose of this meeting is to deepen the

personal relationship, that is why the whole family is invited – so, up to 20 persons could be participants of this meeting, but mostly four to six persons. The social worker is just there for connecting and maybe telling how the system works, e. g. if the family needs support for money and housing. Another purpose is to give a lot of information about the environment and its resources – from meeting places and services to information systems. This often is done with a map of the environment, so the family gets a lot of information about how places and services can be achieved and how they can contact them, e. g. by registration on smartphones – in school, in sports clubs, in the health system etc.

In *both meetings,* welcome workers try to create an atmosphere of open conversation, sitting in sofas and having a coffee or tea, so all attendees can ask their questions and tell about their interests and preferences. So, a process of social inclusion can grow – starting in the first weeks when families have arrived in Iceland. It is a big chance that families do not have to pay for any sports or music club etc. for the first three months of living in Iceland. The idea of the whole process is leaving any attitude of 'I tell you what you have to do' behind and changing to 'this is what we're doing, this is in the area, this way we can do, if you're interested in this, this is the area that you can be secured or safe, always come in if you have any questions, if you need some help' – at least a process of mentoring instead of leading.

After these two meetings, the process goes on in a very individual way – it just could be two meetings or a process of a year or a year and a half with a spectrum from multiple meetings to long breaks without any need for to meet until the next transition takes place (for this it is helpful to have systematic information meetings and strong personal connections with many partners). And it is depending on what the preferences of the child are, so, a third meeting could take place in a sports club, in a music school or wherever. So, the work in the project is hard to plan – it might be that there are two or three families with questions and during the next week there could be 20 or 25 for one week.

For such a networking approach, it is important to know that – compared to other countries like Germany – services are not so synchronized; each one works in its own way. This has two sides: On the one side, this is very flexible and adaptable, on the other side, it can become difficult when basic changes are needed.

If there are immigrating children older than 16, this project helps them to become part of a partner project at University called 'Sprettur' which means 'sprint'. In 2020, the university started to find a way to help them to become able to be a part of the university system. For these young people co-workers of the project Hitt Húsið (English: The Other House) attend the second meeting and support them with applying for work or school, and making a cv. The Icelandic system starts it when they are a little bit younger, being fifteen, sixteen, before they come into the university and work with them for two or three years. Their goal is to join the Icelandic university and the path is taking them two or three years. Education is the most important thing for them to be part of the community.

Because this project has such an extensive network it gets a lot of information about any kind of difficulties which turn out as problems for families – violence, alcoholism, poverty, and others. In these situations, the project helps to connect the family with the specialists for these challenges – always building bridges.

3 Experiences – "the welcome project is something like a mediator"

There were two talks by zoom in March and April 2022, the first with the founder of the project in 90 minutes and the second with two project managers and one cooperating colleague from a leisure centre in 45 minutes. In this part, the main experiences from these two talks are

represented by quotes, inductive structured by topics, starting from the texts. There is no differentiation made between the persons because it focuses not on their individual perspectives and collaboration but on the main experiences of the project.

3.1 Building bridges

In these three neighbourhoods of Reykjavík, all families of the focus group go through the process of the two meetings – irrespective of what age the children are, from playschool to university:

> "After the meetings they all can reach us, and we can reach them if something comes up. And it's so important as well to have this e-mail and have this phone number for the family to have. They use it to send their question, so the project has a connection with them until they are secured to do the steps themselves. We aim on the activity connection, where we help them, especially the children, to connect to activities, like sports activities at their choice and with a good conversation with the clubs in the neighbourhood. Also, we help the parents to connect to activities of their choice. We help them with information for getting a job, about connecting to Islandic community or clubs if they want to participate. And if there are older people in the family, we try to reach this base with all the family."

Another aspect concerning the range of activities is the summer break in schools, which is quite long – around two and a half months. So, this is an important timeframe for social inclusion, and almost every kid in Iceland gets a summer job for three weeks with additional educational offers about sustainability, queer studies etc. paid by the city – "more a social thing than hard work":

> "When the school is over we change the project to support children and teenagers especially to get summer activities and to get to work during the summer because when the school is over there is no system which catches those kids. The Icelandic kids and Icelandic families have connections, they know how it works, how the culture is for the kids and the families during the summer. But those families can get lost in the summer. But with this project we have been able to keep the conversation going. Although the school is finished we reach out to them, offer to meeting us, offer information how the summer works in Iceland and help them with all the applications and the stuff they need to fill in for their kids. We try to be on close contact to make sure that these kids are coming in and also to make sure that they understand what they are sending up to."

3.2 Experiences with the change to two meetings

Until 2020, when the project had only one meeting in the beginning, the whole process was quite school-oriented:

> "You are coming to the school, you are part of the crowd in the school culture, and the school culture is a bit strict, everybody is used to give the most important information in the shortest possible time. It's about time tables, it's about signing up for the lunch, it's about the teacher, who is the teacher, so we expect the kid to have in the school and all kinds of these questions."

There was very little time for topics outside of school, e. g. for the afterschool centre:

> "You are giving the same information: We are open from then and we are closing at that time, there is the after school centre, we are going to pick them up here. It is very squared and just hard facts that you can give to the parents."

So, obviously, the two aspects of the first meeting were not really balanced in practice; the aspect of giving information was quite dominant and the aspect of learning about the child was subordinated.

Since 2020, the structure in the second meeting allows much more "to give space to the parent's concerns, emotions and just to feel and to see what's really going on".

> "Maybe talking about what is important for them and then coming back to this program and I think these second meetings are a little bit more like that. We try to have it relaxed as we possibly can, and we have the flexibility, we can read the family. If there are some other issues or they want to take things slow. So, we just go to their rhythm."

Also, the content of the second meeting is more about the families' agenda: "What they are worried about, what they need, what is really happening for them, are they ready to fully step in or do they still not trust the system." This gives the chance to build trust:

> "We have seen actually that we often become that people who they turn to. We are not the system, we do not come as the system. And then, when they have a question even about school, they actually ask us: 'Hey, what about this? I got some e-mails from school I don't understand.'"

The function of building bridges also includes to build trust to others:

> "'Hey, I can give you that contact, you can ask that person there directly. And if there is anything else, let me know.' It is just like open conversation with a personal touch. We are not there to solve their problems or remind them that they have problems. But we are just there to listen and to help them in the best way we can and provide those problem-solvers which will be the most sufficient."

Also, for the afterschool centre, the second meeting gives more space:

> "What is important to us, to give them both, the opportunity just to find out themselves what they want to play with but also to have some offers to courses or workshops where we put in our emphasis."

This can work concretely like this:

> "We had a quite interesting meeting last week with a father from Syria and obviously this meeting was basically the first or the only meeting he got where he could ask questions. So, the first 15 minutes just went into questions about services that were supposed to be provided by the service centre about health services, about social services, about all these kinds of things. That were the first 15 minutes. And then we could go and talk a bit about the hobbies of the kids and what they would like to do and about the afterschool centre. And the afterschool centre is just next to place where we met, to the community centre, and the entire thing ended by checking out the afterschool centre. And kids were staying with us in the afterschool centre because they found some friends there and the father went home by himself. When the meeting started he was really in a bad mental state and when he went out of the afterschool centre he was lucky because he was listened and there were some solutions."

One professional challenge is to balance nearness and distance. It is really on an individual "base, how much they want to engage with us. But we didn't have any family saying like: No." In the beginning, this was a bit more difficult, being a bit too close to the style of the social services: "In the search of the professional role maybe we said the wrong words, but there was a learning in the project." Asked about 'loosing families' – they are "a very few, maybe it is harder to reach Vietnamese families". But also, "sometimes it is useful to keep the boundaries: 'Hey, my Facebook account, can I have yours?' It gets sometimes very personal, so it is our task to manage that."

3.3 Perspective of the children

It is important to the project to have the perspective of the children in view: "They are there. And we want them there." Their influence depends on the age of the children:

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> "With the younger kids the conversation is more through the parents but as they grow older we have made connections with teenagers, especially teenage girls which have a big impact in building their self-esteem during the first steps of being in Iceland."

But the systemic approach of the project makes the relationship to the parents very important: "The parents trust us there and the parents to be the ones who take them to gymnastic practices for example."

Sometimes, both can get in conflict, what one example shows:

> "I have been in a situation when I had to say to the mother: Sorry – to pause her a little bit. It had been a kid living two or three years in Iceland, he didn't engage in any afterschool activities and he was 12 or 11. And the mother said: Try this, try this, try this, and so I gently asked her to pause and asked him: If there would not be any limitation and if he didn't have to please the mother – what would you do with your time? And he said: Computer games. And the mother said: My god, he is already too much in computers. But it was really his talent. And he got to e-sports and after one semester the mom was texting: 'He wants to try this, he wants to try that, the kid bursted all these kinds of excitements open for him.' If I can through computer games do e-sports I also can fulfil my dreams. So, sometimes it is also putting a pause to parents and asking the kid directly. It is about conversation and the human touch for all these challenges to come through."

So, there is not only the challenge of balancing nearness and distance but also the processes between the participants.

3.4 Finding ways together, even at start

Another aspect of the project is to make its service accessible to everyone. Sometimes, this can happen on quite indirect ways, as the experience with families from India shows:

> "We just let them know about us, we give them the phone number, we give them information through the playschool, because all of those families were with a young child. And then the workplace almost all of those men were working in, they ask: 'Hey, we have those families here, they're working here, they all moved to Reykjavík – can we do something together?' So, we did that."

The project knows that different ways of working are needed: "What is good for Arabic family, is not working with Polish family or Lithuania family." But the core of the work is this:

> "We are reading all those families. The main thing is trying to give them a platform that they know about and are secured. They know about the system, it's not the welfare system, it's not the social system, it's something that is just a community service for them to be independent."

The project is sometimes confronted with hierarchical or conflict constellations in families, connected to multicultural contexts.

> "Of course, the project cares about this, and there was a development: A couple of years ago, they didn't even want to talk to us or shake our hands. Okay, we are women, and they just said it, in our culture we don't look to women – other women in their eyes, and then we said 'okay, what are we going to do about it? Are we going to accept that? That this is something that is in their culture?' Or are we saying: 'Now you are in Iceland, you have to do this and that.' This is the big question, oh my god, it's so big, only about this…"

Instead of these two unacceptable alternatives – not to be accepted as partners or not accepting the culture of the families – the project starts its own reflection: "'Okay, what does that mean?' Is it affecting that we can provide the service to them?" One prominent example in this discussion is about girls taking part in swim lessons:

"We decided to say: 'Okay, this is something that is in our Icelandic culture, and it's just a part of the Icelandic school system.' And then we just have to find a way to do it as gently as we can, provide them not to be a part of their changing system where everybody is changing clothes. So, they can have a part where they can be by themselves."

For the project, it is crucial to initiate a common reflection with the families:

"That's why we are trying to talk about how it is to be a young student in Iceland. What is important? Why are we doing it? And as well as the time goes, the child is more involved in the school system, and getting to know other children, then they support a little bit finding themselves to wanting to do something after schools."

Also here, it is a challenge of finding an individual way:

"When you talk about it and when you decide which way you are going and which not – this is it, and the box is very small, and you have to fit into that. But you have to talk about why we are doing it, why is it important to be a part of this in the Icelandic community, you know – what does it give the family or the children? That is what we are trying to talk about and trying to do in this project. Not: 'this is how it is, and you should be a part of it' – just asking those question and just saying: 'Okay, how can we work together on it?'"

3.5 Working with a systemic approach – with peer-systems, prevention effects and support by others

The project favours to have peers for children and families in mind:

"If a nine-year old girl comes into the school, they get a friend with another nine-year old girl in the class. So, they are connecting it together – like we do that system. We have the same system about the families: We're trying to find a family who have children in the same age and they are friends – families, you know, working together. And we are always asking: 'What do you think? What can you do to support those 'new Icelanders' into the school system?'"

Strong bridges between many partners bring prevention effects:

"So, I go to the big staff meetings, to the schools and the playschools. They ask me if they have, they send me an e-mail if there is something. It is just a child who has been in the playschool for two or three years and then they say: 'I'm worried about the mother, she is not working yet, she is not socially active, she does not have any friends, can we make a community meeting?' And we just do it, okay, of course, we can. And then we're just trying to find a way."

Since the project is a small one – by numbers of two persons working there – up to now, there is no professional supervision or something like that. But this does not mean that there is no support. First, there is the opportunity to talk internally about challenges with the founder of the project, who "is really a master of that. Most of the harder cases go through her. And when we feel that the line is getting thinner than we have always her to reflect." Second, there is the network structure – also for the project itself:

"Of course, we are in connection with the service centre. We are next door to the service centre, so there are social workers who have a lot of experiences in working with foreign people. So, this is also a good option to mirror the cases we are working on. And getting assist."

4   Summary and reflection

The last part of the paper focuses on two aspects: First, it asks for the main aspects of the concept of this project – guided by the question why it works, what it obviously does. And second, it reflects about the project – in the direction how human-rights based programs are evaluated, and in the direction how it could be justified by theoretical approaches why it works.

4.1 Summary

Summing up the experiences leads to several points of importance.

- The most critical thing, especially at the beginning, is to reach the families and to build a bridge – in both directions.
- This applies to the whole range of age, from kindergarten to elderly people, in a 'non-specialized' way.
- The first meeting is much more oriented to the school-agenda, with masses of information in a structured way – which also shows power structures.
- The second meeting is much more relaxed, orientated to the family-agenda, in combination to their questions. Obviously, it works better to have two meetings.
- Balancing the relation is a challenge, in both directions – having a lot of distance or being quite close.
- The perspective of kids is extremely important; it depends on their age how far they are directly involved in the conversation.
- Finding an individual way with each and every family is essential, connected to their culture. Therefore, to be part of the community system (instead the social system of the state) is helpful.
- In view of divergences or conflicts in families, it is even more necessary not trying to colonize the children but to find a way together – in loyalty to the parents.
- It is helpful to use peer strategies for linking with others – students, workers, sports(wo)men, musicians, families, …
- Networking with all relevant institutions and services is a condition to get preventive effects – starting with knowing each other and their way of acting.
- Internal reflection and support by professionals from the system are essential for the quality in this project.

These aspects seem to be the main factors for the success of the project. Their base can be seen in empathy, an ability to deal with diversity (including the limits of the own influence), sovereignty in thinking and acting and internal (and if necessary external) self-reflection, and a good knowledge about the neighbourhood.

4.2 Reflection of the welcoming-project

Very often, the "four-A-scheme" (Tomasevski, 2006) is used for the reflection of human rights-based programs. It is also used for the analysis of the implementation of the human right of education (Gummich & Hinz, 2017, 21f.):

- *A*vailability, which means that programs in education are based on necessary resources, so they can reach to everyone.
- *A*ccessibility, which means that physical, financial and conceptional access to programs is secured without discrimination.
- *A*cceptability, which means that the form and content of programs are adapted to the needs and situation of the people they work with in a way that they can accept the programs.
- *A*daptability, which means that programs are adapted to changes in society and are just to the people they work with.

These four criteria in mind, a quite impressive result can be recorded:

- Focusing on availability, this project has obviously the necessary resources, and because of the holistic networking concept there are not so many resources necessary; so, it is available for every immigrant family in these neighbourhoods.

- Many of the efforts of the project are focused on accessibility, of building trust and personal relationship. And it seems that the project is able to reach them; the recent examples shown in the chapter about experiences show this.
- The project members talk a lot about how to find an acceptable way with and for *this* family in *this* situation – having a wide range of ways in mind how to find this way, according to the situation, the culture, the social situation, etc., from kindergarten up to elderly people.
- The project is a reaction to the changing situation in society with more and more people coming (back) from abroad. Its main purpose is to connect people socially to the Islandic community. In this sense, it is important to have in mind that the project's self-definition is not being a part of the social system (owned by the state) but being a part of the community system. This is a prevention against labelling the families 'having problems' in society or even 'being a problem'.

So, this view from the distance shows that obviously the project "Welcome to the Neighbourhood" seems to be an inspiring example of social inclusion. This can be founded theoretically in different directions.

It works in a "partnership mode" (Eisler, 2017; Eisler & Fry, 2019) with families and existing services, building bridges in a way that everyone can feel accepted and trying to avoid any tendencies to dominate families with the norms of the Islandic society forcing them to an 'appropriate' way of thinking and acting. This does not mean that everything is up to the family but trying to find a common way for *this* family and *this* situation in *this* society.

It aims at "resonance" (Rosa, 2017) for the families and the existing services, including – as a key point – that both partners find a way together in a way which is emerging in the situation, based on the living exchange and knowing that there always will be some unavailability on all sides. No one of the partners can change the other 'to the better' – whatever this could mean.

It is an example of 'expansive experiencing' (Holzkamp, 1995; Boban & Hinz, 2012) by encouraging and enabling new experiences, in which the project avoids any tendencies of bringing the family into a 'defensive mode' (ibid.) standing in front of a bunch of experts who all know what is good for the family – and this is a sharp contrast to efforts undertaken in Canada for 'new Canadians' (Boban & Hinz, 2022, 218f.) in a quite behaviourist way (Guðjónsdóttir & Hinz in this volume).

The methods of the project remind a lot to the approach of person-centred planning (O'Brien & O'Brien, 2000; O'Brien, Pearpoint & Kahn, 2010; Kruschel & Hinz, 2015). Persons, families, initiatives, or other groups are going on a journey to find out how they can bring their dreams – with an inclusive 'north star' as orientation – to reality step by step, how they can find out about their dreams and how to come closer to them. This happens in support circles with diverse and peer members.

The project could also be seen as favouring processes in which the social capital of the family is tried to increase – following the capital-theory of the French sociologist Bourdieu (1997) who says that social relations (as well as money and certifications) are sorts of capital which can help to find the place in society. This is connected to a strong social space orientation focusing not only on the person or family but also on the environment (Fürst & Hinte, 2020).

There is also one theory in which this project does not fit: The systems theory says that social systems have the tendency to differentiate in functional subsystems (Luhmann, 1977). So, in many countries social, systems build new services or institutions, at least new subsystems with new specialists for newly uprising challenges – e.g. special classes in Germany for Ukrainian students during the Russian aggression war there, called 'welcome classes'. Even there is a whole school with Ukrainian teachers and students in Dresden – probably pushed by the Ukrainian government. This project does not work this way: It builds bridges between families

and existing services – holistic, systemic and 'non-specialized' – and strengthens the cohesion in the existing social system. Maybe this is one of the most fascinating aspects of it.

Nevertheless, there are also some questions. One of them is whether the project strengthens the thinking and acting in a way of a "two-group-theory" (Hinz, 2004, 45) when it focuses on persons or families who immigrated recently to Iceland. This 'focus group' could be connected to a thinking of 'othering' 'these families', making them totally different from the Icelandic ones – and after constructing them being totally different they have to be socially included. This would follow a domination understanding (see above), a colonial tradition of exclusion or assimilation. But – in this case, it is not like that. Focusing on 'these families' is an answer to the *situation* and the experiences of the families, not seeing them as a *group* being different.

A second one is about the following aspect. Even if the aims are clear, it is a difficult path to build bridges in a situation where the society with its services and the environment is in a strong position and the immigrant families are in a much weaker position. So, imbalances of power are not the exception but the rule. And the project cannot resolve these objections, but it can shape the contradictions with care and solidarity. Exaggerated it could be said that sometimes maybe the mediators are in a position where they only have the choice between 'democratic colonialism' and 'undemocratic acceptance' seen from the perspective of Icelandic norms. Accepting every (hierarchic) solution a family would favour could include the danger 'to leave the democratic sector' and any press to families to come closer to democratic ways of acting could include the danger to be a (western, northern) 'democratic colonialist' and to limit acceptance of and solidarity with the family. This could be grasped theoretically with the discourse about cultural relativism and cultural universalism – both have their strong and weak sides (Prengel, 1993). Just to give a glimpse: Cultural relativism acknowledges the uniqueness of every culture and avoids colonialist tendencies of pressing them by foreign norms, universalism favours common norms worldwide like the human rights. Prengel (1993, 91) says: „It cannot be decided from one side about norms, they always only can produce themselves – and often they don't. Such dissent is not to smooth harmoniously but to sustain!" This dilemma will always be part of the project – and its answer is pragmatic, holistic and social-space-oriented: What can *we* offer *this* family in *this* situation and what works for *them*?

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