

## Monika Jaeckel

**The elements of success in the Mother Center experience and what has been the researchers role and contribution. What lessons, methods and tools can be derived from the "miracle of the spreading of the Mother Centers" and transferred to other areas and issues?**

### Process:

- 1) The start of the Mother Center model was **careful listening to and bringing out the authentic voices and ideas of the "target group", the people concerned** (in this case working class families). The issue was framed according to the understanding and self interpretation of the target group themselves, versus preconceived professional ideas about them. One of the publications that came out of this approach was titled: "Familien sind anders" , different from the way they are perceived in public debate. Although the assignment we had from the government (Auftraggeber) was to find out why parent education programs were not being frequented by working class families, we did not ask the parents we interviewed what they thought about parent education. We asked a more open question: What would you consider support for your family situation? With this approach we could make visible what was really going on with families, what issues THEY were raising and what THEY were considering to be solutions.
- 2) Another element was shifting from the usual "deficit orientation" (families have problems and need professional help) to a "**resource orientation**", that identifies the resources and capacities of the groups concerned as well as **enabling conditions** under which these capacities can be activated and made productive for society (families have skills and competencies that need enabling structures to be applied).

### **Our Role:** Good listening and interviewing skills

Being able to identify resources and capacities

Being able to identify enabling and empowering conditions for self-help

Being able to link grassroots perspectives to mainstream debates (the role of cultural translators)

Being able to put together ideas into a model project.

- 3) The next element was creating **reflective space** for the participants in the Mother Centers to understand and **learn from their experience**. This involved organising regular weekend workshops where participants were taken out of their daily doings to reflect on what was happening in the centers and extract the implications and lessons learned.
- 4) Documenting the Mother Center experience in a **story-telling format**, capturing the experience in the authentic voices of the participants and relating it to public debates.

### **Our Role:** Organising workshops to collectively learn from experience.

Support telling the story by asking the right questions.

Helping to name, claim, analyse and conceptualise the experience, what issues it addresses, what it contributes to public debates, without losing the direct voice.

- 5) An important element was challenging business as usual, **lobbying for innovation** identifying **non-negotiables** and not backing down on them.
- 6) It was crucial to **identify allies** in this process, from grassroots groups, from ministries, from foundations.

This involved a year long process of explaining the concept to many stakeholders. First of all the ministry needed to be convinced to broaden and lengthen the assignment to include a model project and a pilot phase.

Then we needed to find grassroots groups who identified with the model and wanted to implement the project. This involved negotiating with grassroots women's organisations like the German Housewives Organisation and identifying informal leaders in neighborhoods. It also involved negotiating with sponsors like SOS Kinderdorf, who had experience with acknowledging grassroots expertise.

**Our Role:** Convincing and negotiating with potential allies and partners

Lobbying

(There were others in our team that were stronger in these roles than Monika)

- 7) The Mother Centers spread from 3 model centers to a movement through the publication of the "Story Book" and through many lectures, articles, study visits and local negotiations with municipalities and local authorities.

**Our Role:** Identifying a publisher

Spreading the word, both in verbal and written form

Opening doors and contacts for the grassroots groups

Supporting local negotiations

- 8) The next important element was that the Mother Centers organised themselves and built their **Mother Center networks**, nationally, regionally and internationally. Internationally they Mother Centers spread through linking to other grassroots women's networks.

**Our Role:** Encouraging self-organisation

Identifying similar grassroots groups internationally and making the links

### **Success Elements of the Mother Center Concept**

- 1) Creating **neighborhood meeting spaces**
- 2) Creating public space that is **structured informally** (public living rooms)
- 3) **Self management** of project, **collective leadership**.
- 4) Creating enabling conditions for participants to bond and develop friendships, break through what segregates and separates, develop **solidarity and cooperation** across all aspects of their lives, meet each other not in roles, but as whole people, **bridge the gap between private and public**.
- 5) **Inclusive approach**, all are welcome, all are included.
- 6) Remuneration and **validation of care work**.

**Our Role:** Identifying the innovative elements that make the Mother Centers work.

Developing support structures for leadership development and conflict resolution.

### **Strategies:**

- 1) **Creating partnerships** and linking skills between different worlds (the grassroots world and the academic world)
- 2) Linking the **informal and formal**
- 3) **Explaining well:** why Mother Centers work, how they work, what are the benefits for all involved, why they need to be supported, what their contributions are.
- 4) Defining and lobbying for **Action Research:** The proof of scientific results is if they work in practice.
- 5) Weighing in **the legitimacy of science**.
- 6) Making use of **institutional resources and credibility** for the support of grassroots movements.
- 7) **Linking** the project **to overall concepts** like "preventive family policy"
- 8) Proving the **cost efficiency** of the project (self help cheaper than professionals).
- 9) Understanding how to create **equitable partnerships** between "uneven" partners.