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An Evaluation of the Diaconia ČCE Language Cafes in Prague, with a Special Focus on Belonging and Recognition

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Introduction

This evaluation focuses on the attendees' sense of belonging and recognition in the language café and how coming to the language café support their integration.

The evaluation concentrates on the following:

- Attendees' sense of belonging in the language café and what influences this including:
 - Space and time,
 - Relationships,
 - Dealing with differences.
- Attendees' sense of recognition in the language café and what influences this including:
 - Feeling competent, confident, needed and valued,
 - Treating everybody equally and democratic decision-making.
- Attendees' sense of support with integration in the following areas:
 - Cultural integration,
 - Economic integration,
 - Political integration,
 - Religious integration,
 - Social integration.

The evaluation is based on 10 research interviews and 23 questionnaire responses with people that attended the language café in the Summer and Autumn of 2023.

Key Findings

How is the Language Café Currently Supporting Attendees' Sense of Belonging?

All interviewees expressed a sense of belonging and/or feeling at home in the language café.

These are the most prevalent factors that made attendees feel they belong and/or at home in the language cafe:

Space and Time

- The language café is in a convenient location that is easy to get to by public transportation.
- The regular opening hours at varied times across the week enable attendees to attend classes, when it is convenient for them.
- The language café provides a welcoming and safe space, where attendees feel at home, this atmosphere is mainly facilitated by the friendly staff. Attendees feel cared for because they receive help and advice.
- For most interviewees it is important that the language café is not in a public place, because they do not have to worry about being too noisy or negative public reactions to their language learning and identity.
- Attendees appreciate the comfortable and relaxed space to converse without worrying about grammar and to learn vocabulary they can use in their daily life.
- For some participants, it is important that the language café welcome and provide space for their children, while they attend their language learning.
- For some participants, it is important that the language café has space for other activities.

Key Findings

How is the Language Café Currently Supporting Attendees' Sense of Belonging?

Building Relationships

- Most interviewees had made new friends through the language café.
- Participants see the language café as a friendly, open and welcoming space, where they can be introduced to and get to know other people in similar circumstances.
- Participants feel that the atmosphere in the language café enables them to share their personal pre- and post migration experiences and concerns and that they have a shared understanding and appreciation of each other.
- Participants argued that the language café provides a space, where they can learn and ask questions about each other's countries and cultures.
- Interviewees found it helpful that staff in the language café sees them as friends more than students.
- Interviewees appreciate opportunities to share each other's food and do activities such as yoga and music together in the language café.
- Participants value opportunities for them to spend time together outside the language café through organised walks and cultural activities enabling attendees to talk informally with each other and create shared memories together.
- Interviewees highlighted the WhatsApp group, where attendees can stay updated about the language café's activities and stay connected with each other outside the language café.
- Similar pre- and post migration experiences and the common purpose of learning a new language together help attendees develop a shared group identity that supports the building of relationships.

Key Findings

How is the Language Café Currently Supporting Attendees' Sense of Belonging?

Dealing with Differences

- Interviewees generally felt that differences were addressed respectfully.
- Interviewees reported that differences between them and their religious and cultural backgrounds, traditions and celebrations are talked about openly and respectfully in ways that does not cause conflict.
- Interviewees stated that they feel they can openly and honestly ask questions about differences in each other's religion and culture.
- Interviewees declared that they feel they can talk about stereotyping.
- Interviewees recognised that they can freely talk about anything they want and that they can voice different opinions without causing conflict.
- Interviewees mentioned that if a topic makes an attendee visibly uncomfortable, staff change to another topic.

Key Findings

How is the Language Café Currently Supporting Attendees' Sense of Recognition?

Feeling Competent, Confident, Needed and Valued

- Interviewees generally felt competent, confident, needed and valued in the language café.
- Interviewees argued that the friendly atmosphere in the language café, where it is okay to make mistakes, enables them to comfortably practise speaking Czech, which help them feel confident in speaking Czech in their everyday life.
- Some interviewees pointed out the importance of new attendees being warmly welcomed by staff, of no-one sitting alone for longer periods of time without being approached and of staff facilitating the conversations in ways that made sure to include all attendees in the conversations.
- Interviewees highlighted that the sessions focus on issues, they are interested in and that it is appreciated, when they share their personal backgrounds, cultures, experiences, feelings, knowledge and opinions about the issues.
- Some interviewees also acknowledged the significance of the workshops as spaces where they can showcase and develop their skills.
- Some interviewees also felt that their competences were recognised, when staff helped them find employment.

Key Findings

How is the Language Café Currently Supporting Attendees' Sense of Recognition?

Treating Everybody Equally and Democratic Decision-Making

- Interviewees stated that everybody is equally welcomed in the language café and that everybody is treated equally.
- Some interviewees pointed out that everybody can share their culture and religion and that they are all equally appreciated.
- Some interviewees highlighted that everybody can voice their opinions and that they are all equally valued.
- It was also pointed out that staff makes sure everybody contributes to the conversations and that they try to ensure that though some sessions are especially organised to help certain attendees with their language test, all attendees still benefit from the conversations.
- Interviewees argued that though staff often decide on what topics are discussed in the sessions, attendees can change the agenda and talk about what they want.
- Interviewees felt they can influence what activities are being organised.

Quotes from the Research Interviews

- *It was difficult when we came to Prague because we did not know the language it was stressful, we came to Diakonie first and we started to feel that we belong to one country and have one language as we are learning Czech.*
- *It was not easy but I started to feel that I belong and that I fit here because of those people who helped me to feel safe and to face the situation of life here.*
- *There is a really good atmosphere here and Lucie and Petr are very welcoming hosts and also I feel like they are my family, we are very close.*
- *It is not only about conversation in this club it is about the whole spirit of the place and we just come here and spend some nice time.*
- *I do not feel any danger I feel I can share things. This place is safe.*
- *We do not just speak about good things, but we are there for each other, everyone has individual private problems and individual situations and we speak about it all the same.*
- *All of us are different, but we have this understanding.*
- *It is easy to talk about difference within countries and cultures and also we can ask questions about this.*
- *I think it's support. It's therapy. It's very nice to talk and very helpful.*
- *All are respecting each other's opinions and everybody can say their opinion.*
- *When you meet a new friend you also meet a new experience and you can share this experience.*
- *I feel my confidence is growing because of these meetings and I can speak freely in a coffee shop or in a shop to buy food and I understand more local people when they talk with me.*

Key Findings

How can the Language Café Improve the Ways it is Supporting Attendees' Sense of Belonging and Recognition?

- Support relationship building between attendees from different countries.
- Pay extra attention to attendees who come from countries where no other attendees are from.
- A larger room that will make it more comfortable for attendees, when the language café is busy and a separate space, where children can play while their parents participate in the language learning.
- Always announce in advance, what the theme that will be discussed is, so that attendees can prepare for the conversations.
- Support relationship building between attendees and the local community, this would help attendees feel they belong in the local community.
- Organise more workshops where attendees can use, showcase and develop their skills.

Key Findings

How does the Language Café Support the Integration of Attendees?

- 91% either agree or strongly agree that attending the language café has improved their local language skills.
- 95% either agree or strongly agree that attending the language café has helped their cultural integration.
- 86% either agree or strongly agree that attending the language café has helped their economic integration.
- 57% either agree or strongly agree that attending the language café has helped their political integration.
- 52% either agree or strongly agree that attending the language café has helped their religious integration.
- 91% either agree or strongly agree that attending the language café has helped their social integration.

Key Findings

Which 3 words best describe this language café?

