

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

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Module M.EP.12b: Perspectives on the Literature and Culture Industry

Internship Report:

01.04.2020 to 31.03.2021 at the Literarisches Zentrum Göttingen e.V.

by

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1. Introduction

The cooperation between our university and the literary center of Göttingen has, inter alia, provided the students with the great chance of doing a studienbegleitendes volontariat at the center. The center runs a multitude of different cultural projects and works together with many cultural figures and institutes. Therefore, the internship, which takes one full year, gives the intern the opportunity to get engaged in most various tasks and gain invaluable first-hand experience of the cultural scene and the industry. For April 2020, the literary center was looking for two interns, and after I handed in my written application and was invited for an interview, I was lucky to be accepted as one. Perhaps, for me and my peer, the volontariat was totally different than for any of our predecessors: it was from 01.04.2020 to 31.03.2021, starting with the first lock-down and ending in the middle of the third, with the whole cultural scene and the work being altered by the Covid pandemic. Regardless, our team modified its programmes accordingly and so managed to stay in touch with the public one way or another all through.

2. The institution

Das literarische Zentrum Göttingen e.V. was founded in 2000 to be a meeting point for the literary forces of Göttingen, the university, as well as publishers, authors, and institutes across Germany and, above all, all those interested in literature. From 2000 to 2010, Hauke Hückstädt was the business and program manager of the center. Since May 2010, Anja Johannsen has taken over the job.

The center wants to present literature in its contemporary manifestations and put it up for discussion. Hence, its core work includes planning and organizing literary events, primarily readings, a few times a months, whereby prominent cultural figures of the day are invited as guests. More often than not, the topics have to do with current scientific, social, or philosophical issues like the environment and Feminism. Besides, the literary center of Göttingen engages itself internationally as a member of a network of 15 literary houses from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

Another main project of the center is “Literatur macht Schule”, wherein about 20 events per school-semester are planned for children, in and out of school, to set them in contact with

authors and literature. Another is named “Weltenschreiber” and is a part of a programme in several states funded by Robert-Bosch Stiftung, which mediates an 18-month writing training course for children and teenagers through offering writing workshops by well-known authors during regular German lessons at schools, aimed at provoking the young’s enthusiasm about literary writing.

3. Components of the job

The literary center works self-sufficiently. That means, A to Z of programmes is planned within the team and carried out by the members without external help. Thus, the tasks are very diverse and are divided among members in a way that each gets to experience the different tasks.

3.1. Promotion

By the start of my internship, in April 2020, the literary center had to cancel its events altogether due to the sudden lock-down. Hence, my first team meetings included trying to come up with alternatives to stay in touch with the public. For one thing, the center replaced some of the public readings with podcasts in cooperation with StadtRadio Göttingen. Moreover, we decided to create posters that would relate to the time and hang them around the city. We started to search for literary quotations that would somehow scatter some life and color around the suddenly-emptied-of-livelihood streets. We collected a file of many quotations and discussed their relevance. Eventually, the chosen ones were printed in pink and yellow, and we distributed them all around Göttingen. As we had received great feedback and there were still many posters left, we invited the interested students and other people to come by the center and pick up some for free. We repeated the same campaign again in autumn with the colors orange and green. Additionally, we did two similar rounds of postcards, one in summer and one in winter, the one in winter being a part of the campaign “Göttingen sagt Danke!” by the whole city.

The promotion work also included writing programme texts. By the end of summer, we were able to resume with our events (with the hygiene concept and everything, as discussed later). After the events and guests were decided on, the task of writing the texts for the season-programme flyers was divided between the team members, so each would prepare the text for one event. Later, we had an editing meeting to proofread the texts together and prepare the final versions for the flyers. We would then gather again in the team to pack flyers into some hundred envelopes, label

them with addresses out of our contact list, and send them out. Other practices in the field of promotion are comprised of website work and social media, on which the next section will elaborate.

3.2. Public relations

In addition to holding on to traditional ways of keeping in touch with the audience, such as hanging posters around, sending programmes per post, and distributing postcards to the bookstores, the literary center of Göttingen runs its own website as well as social media pages on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, whose significance was now more than ever because of the pandemic. Thus, often, parts of our team meetings were dedicated to discussing what we were going to post and how, in order to more effectively interact with our audience during the lock-downs. For instance, by the end of 2020, we decided to create a short video clip of everything we had done in the year, including the digital stuff as well as children and adult events in the summer and early autumn (which will be discussed later), a “Jahresrückblick”. I took on the task. I collected all our photos and sorted them into thematic and chronological folders. Afterwards, I picked out the ones I wanted to use for the video, and simultaneously, searched for suitable pieces of royalty-free music. I then did the editing using different video-editing software, shared the first version with my team, and then edited the video some more times according to the feedback. The final version, though made in a haste before the winter holidays, was a very nice piece, which we published on our social-media pages. This task was a particularly interesting and useful experience for me.

Furthermore, during the second lock-down, which was going on in early 2021, we started a small series on our social media titled “Was (wir) lessen”, whereby each of the three volos (Volontär/in) authored a text explaining if and how their reading habits have changed in the Covid time. This, too, was a very fruitful practice in writing for social media, i.e. texts that are very concise, yet creative, entertaining, and intellectual enough for our audience. We even had small editing meetings among us volos to give each other feedback on the texts and debate the best ways to present the texts on each channel, e.g. with what photos, public polls, captions, etc. Another constructive task for me was writing a Buchtipp. In the afore-mentioned network of literary houses, each month, one house publishes a book tip, so each house gets to do that twice a year. Our house’s turn came up in August, and I chose to write the tip. All this was not only a great practice for me

in writing in German, but also writing journalistically in German, which I find very beneficial for my future career here in journalism and the cultural field. In addition, whenever we had a new programme, we put the info up different online platforms like Kulturkurrier, Reservix, and Kulturkalender Göttingen, whereby I got to learn about these platforms as means of promotion and how to work with them.

3.3. Office work

Another part of our assignments was described as office work. Each volo was supposed to do two part-time shifts of office work per week. With the pandemic, a large part of this was done in home office. However, when the regulations allowed for it, we did the shifts in the center, but planned them in a way that at each time, only one or maximum two people be there so as to reduce contact as much as possible. This was necessary, but inevitably reduced our interactions as a team. Nevertheless, all of us met at least once a week digitally for a meeting, and during summer, we arranged a few outdoor gatherings which were nice and boosted the efficiency of our teamwork. In brief, the office work consisted of typical paper work, like preparing templates, printing and copying, sorting out folders, and managing the Honorarliste. Everybody was responsible for cleaning the office, too, so we did that in turn whenever we did a shift.

3.4. Veranstaltungsabends

By the end of summer, the lock-down was loosened and we had the chance to organize events non-digitally. This was, however, very different than it would have been without Covid-19. A big proportion of our preparation was affected accordingly. For example, before each event, we needed to discuss our hygiene concept, as sometimes the regulations changed so frequently. We put disinfection material around the place, prepared visitor-information forms, distributed them along with disinfected pens to the audience at the entrance, informed them of the regulations in the salon (e.g. when to pull up masks, etc.) and then led them to their seats. We had to monitor seating in a way that there would be 2-3 seats empty between each two persons. We also had to buy a Spuckschutz to put up before the authors so they can sign books for the audience.

In fact, in each event evening, we, together, did everything that needed to be done before and after a public event. The venue would have normally been the center itself or the altes Rathaus,

but now we could not use the center's hall anymore because it did not have enough space for the distanced seating. Therefore, for each event, we prepared a list of the things we would need in the venue, which was usually the altes Rathaus, and then transported them there with a cart. Arriving there, we took care of every detail in the hall, from setting up and controlling the sound and visual facilities to decorating the stage and providing each guest table with a glass of water. Without Corona, these events would also include us *volos* making coffee and serving drinks to the audience, but this one had to be dropped now, of course. After each event, we cleaned up the venue and transported the stuff back to the center, and sometimes, picked up food from a restaurant and had dinner with the guests back in the center, which could even go over 11 p.m. The latter was an amazing opportunity to closely interact with the authors, get to know them and their experiences in a friendly setting, and have individual conversations with them. One or two times, we had the chance of organizing the events in a big Café in the city center, which created a very cozy atmosphere.

3.5. "Fenster auf! Spektakel gegen die Vereinzelung"

One of the highlights of the whole year and of my experience was an outdoor happening called "Fenster auf! Spektakel gegen die Vereinzelung" at the end of summer in cooperation with the theater group "boat people project". The event took place in the area between the Albani church, the Boccardo Italian restaurant, and the Minimax school. Out of the open windows of the school, actors spoke manifestos, outbursts of anger, and courageous exclamations from international authors. There were texts to be heard against closure and isolation from and in different languages, along with live music. The planning procedure for this happening was long and elaborate, yet very enjoyable. We had several meetings to find, read out, and choose the texts. There were arrangements to be made with the restaurant, the school, the church, the Ordnungsamt, and the Rathaus. The final texts were from Ilse Aichinger, Nora Amin, Albert Camus, Daniil Charms, Thea Dorn, Forough Farrokhzad, Berit Glanz, Theo Herghelegiu, Bonn Park, Erich Maria Remarque, Luise Rist, Christian Schulteisz, and Saša Stanišić.

We wanted the event to have an international stance, so we needed actors to read out in different languages. The Persian text was chosen and translated into German by me, and also, acted out by me in both languages together with a co-actress who read out some of the German

translation. This is why this event became double-important for me; I was in the preparation team as part of the literary center and in the acting team as part of the boat people project managed by Nina de la Chevallerie. Since much prior to the event, we had meetings in the center to discuss the organizational matters, and I had additional meetings with the actors from boat people project to rehearse the pieces. On the day of the event, we prepared the outside scene for the audiences to arrive and did some more rehearsing inside the school building, where we had additional support for sound and lighting. It was a very long, challenging day for all of us, but everything went greatly and it ended up being a very unique experience. For me, this experience was multi-faceted, an experience in organizing a cultural event in a large scope, in collaborating with different teams and partners, in engaging with many international texts and commissioning them for a specific purpose, in dealing with haste and stress, and in acting.

3.6. For the younger ones

Back in summer, when we could not have our usual events for adults, we still had the opportunity of organizing something for kids, so we made the most out of it. For the summer holidays, we prepared workshops for different age groups with various topics like story reading, story illustrating, game creating, poetry slam, audio plays, and nonsense-poem writing. We called the whole programme “Sommer Sonne selber machen”, and it took from July 20 to August 21 and took place in different venues like the literary center to a café to the yard outside the center. In addition to the regular organizational tasks, we had to develop and maintain specific hygiene measures for kids, like encouraging frequent hand-washing. We also prepared snacks for the pauses and served them according to our hygiene concept. I was not present at all workshops, as we divided the dates between us. I chose one with children aged around 5 and another around 14 because I wanted to have the chance to interact with two completely different groups. The interaction with children and teenagers and reading, drawing, etc. with them were a very enjoyable experience for me, as well as comfortable, as I have many years of experience in teaching (English) to children and teenagers.

When schools were open in autumn, we continued with the programme “Literatur macht Schule”, which involved planning readings for children in schools. The guest authors were often very sociable and we had interesting conversations to and back from schools. During most children

and adult events, I volunteered to do the photography and upload the photos to our server, so we could later use them for our social-media pages.

3.7. Online streams

In the early 2021, the possibility to organize analogue events was again shattered by the worsened statistics of the Covid pandemic. Hence, we planned to have the same events as digital streams. Whereas digital events cannot have the same atmosphere of the old ones, they do have their own merits: more people and even people out of Göttingen and Germany can visit, and they do not even have to pay! By the end of March, my last task as an intern was to help with the Litkit project in cooperation with the University of Hildesheim as technical support. My task was to pack and sort the videos into our Vimeo channel and create quercodes for them.

4. The other element of the module: the seminar

In the winter semester 2020/21, I attended a seminar corresponding to the module M.EP.12b named “The American Studies Journal and the American Studies Blog: A Seminar on Editing, Writing, Publishing and Advertising” instructed by Dr. Martina Kohl. This course was very fulfilling for me; it was a real experience in journalism in the context of a university class. Each session was structured like a very interactive workshop. Different guests, who were active in journalism as editor-in-chiefs or executives, were invited to the sessions to share their experience and participate in a question-and-answer conversation with the students. In other sessions, we read and reviewed journal articles, abstracts, and blog entries like in a real editorial meeting. For most sessions, we had to submit a short written assignment, and then we reviewed each other’s work. By the end of the course, each of us finished a blog entry and received feedback from the whole class, to revise it and later submit it to the American Studies Blog.

The course by Dr. Kohl gave me excellent insights into the workings of the press, into what fits as a journalistic piece and how to differentiate it from an academic piece of writing as well as a journalistic piece from a blog entry, how to attract readers and meet the expectations of each journal, how to review and edit works of others, and even how to think creatively. Doing the course at the same time as my internship spoke to the part of the latter that had to do with writing texts for the social media, as explained before. Even though the course was in English and the internship

in German, the parallel experience taught me a great deal about how to write creatively, minimalistically, and for different groups of audience.

5. Last word

Altogether, the one year internship at the literarisches Zentrum Göttingen was a remarkable experience for me. I got to know the different workings of a cultural institute, from its finances to its public relations to its creative work to all the challenges around the organization of events. It gave me the opportunity to help in different creative projects, interact with diverse audience groups and literary enthusiasts, and converse with the notable figures of the contemporary literary scene of Germany. The tasks helped me solidify my writing and editing skills, organizational and teamwork skills, and IT and technological competence. In different occasions, I practiced how to be resourceful and do things on my own initiative, when needed, and spontaneously deal with the challenges and problems that came up. Even though the pandemic conditions limited our activities in some ways, it enabled us in others: we had to devise novel alternatives that we would not have thought of otherwise, and we could address a much larger group of audience through digital events. At times, the work was much more and demanded a lot of time and energy, but when I look back, it was all worth it. The multi-dimensional work at the center together with the seminar specialized on journalism considerably contributed to my understanding of the literary industry and my competence in the field. What I got out of M.EP.12b will always be an asset to my career in the future.