



## RESEARCH ARTICLES

### **Social Participation of Turkish and Arabic Immigrants in the Neighborhood: Case Study of Moabit West, Berlin**

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**Abstract.** Social participation of immigrants in district activities and local planning processes is given significance in Germany. It has become an important issue with the introduction of Neighborhood Management concept in the 1990s. This concept deals with districts which have a considerable percentage of low-income, unemployed, low-educated, immigrant population and social help beneficiaries. Immigrants are usually seen as the cause of the problems in those areas by the authorities since they are not integrated into the host society and to the other immigrant groups. Since the 1990s, they have started to be seen as potential solution to the problems by means of an active social participation in their neighborhood. Desired level of social participation, however, has not been reached due to a number of reasons although there are a few immigrants who take part in social, cultural and planning activities in their district.

The aim of this article is to outline the reasons of low participation rates, motivations of the participant immigrants and the forms of participation among Turkish and Arabic immigrants in a neighborhood of Berlin, Moabit West, based on in-dept interviews made with both non-participant and participant immigrants and with some immigrant associations. The field research was carried out in June 2005, within the framework of the project 'Immigrants in the City'. The reasons of low participation which were found as a result of this research study are language deficiency, different cultural understandings of participation, looking for concrete results of participatory actions and lack of information. The participant immigrants are motivated to solve the problems in the district and to change it, to increase integration of the immigrant youth into the society and of the immigrants, to the established society. Lastly, participant immigrants usually take part in street festivals and youth social work, and in immigrant associations instead of German ones.

**Keywords:** *Social participation, integration, neighborhood, Turkish immigrants, Arabic immigrants, Berlin*

#### **1. Introduction**

This paper is an account of a research study which I carried out in Berlin in 2005 in the framework of the project "Immigrants in the City" to find out the state of participation of Turkish and Arabic immigrants in the district activities in Moabit West which is a neighborhood of Berlin; their motivations to participate, forms of

their participation and the reasons of non-participation. I made interviews with the participants and non-participants as well and with the represents of four immigrant associations. In this paper, I tried to evaluate the interviews I made, with the help of another colleague, to find out why immigrants do not participate in decision-making processes and in district activities and if they do participate, how, where and why they choose to participate.

Firstly, I will start with a brief description of the project “Immigrants in the City” (Zuwanderer in der Stadt). Next, I will give a theoretical framework for the concept of social participation in the neighborhood; when and where it has become an important policy in immigrant issues; how it is related to the integration of immigrants into the society and democratization processes, what are the forms and methods of participation and last point in this part; what are the reasons of immigrants’ non-participation mentioned in the existent literature. After the theoretical introduction to the concept of participation, I will pass on to a short description of the study area, Moabit West and then to the evaluation of the interviews which I conducted in order to find out the answers to my concerns in the theoretical part.

## **2. The Project: Immigrants in the City (Zuwanderer in der Stadt)**

Socio-spatial integration of immigrants is the main concern of the project “Immigrants in the City” which is initiated by Schader Foundation and the partners of which are German Association of Cities (DST), German Head Federation of Housing and Real Estate Associations (GdW), German Institute of Urban Affairs (DifU) and Institute for Housing, Real Estate, Urban and Regional Development at Ruhr-University Bochum (InWIS). The project started in January 2004 and is expected to end in August 2006. It is promoted by the German Ministry of Education and Research.

Two assumptions of the project are as follows: first one is the spatial concentration of immigrants in certain districts of the cities. Second assumption is that the role of labor market as an integrating force leaves its place to the neighborhood and home.

The project is consisted of two bases: the expert forum which is a group of academics and practitioners and which give recommendations for integration policy; and a practice network which is made up of certain districts of eight cities,

namely; Essen with Altendorf and Bergmannsfeld, Frankfurt am Main with Nordweststadt, Hamburg with Mümmelmannsberg and Schiffbeker Berg, Hannover with Mittelfeld, Mannheim with Neckarstadt-West and Durlacher Straße (Rheinau), Munich with Moosach, Nuermberg with Langwasser and Südstadt and lastly Berlin-Mitte with Moabit-West ([www.zuwanderer-in-der-stadt.de](http://www.zuwanderer-in-der-stadt.de)).

The area where and on which I conducted my research study was Moabit-West in Berlin Mitte. In the following part after the theoretical introduction to the concept of social participation in the neighborhood, I will give general characteristics of the district and then I pass to the analysis of the interviews. What I mean by general characteristics should be understood in a broader perspective to comprehend both demographic and social features and also the state of the neighborhood in terms of integration and in terms of the existing associations, organizations and projects which aim to ease and accelerate the integration and participation processes in the district.

### **3. Social Participation in the Neighborhood: A Theoretical Overview**

What is meant by social participation in this paper and within the framework of the project is made clear in this part. First, I will mention the conditions when and how the concept of participation in the neighborhood appeared and is discussed. Later, I will give a definition of social participation according to the aims of this project. Then, I will continue with the forms and methods of immigrant participation in the neighborhood and the motivations of the residents with an immigration background to participate with an emphasis on the relationship between social participation in the district activities and integration of the neighborhood population. Lastly, I will state the difficulties, barriers and handicaps of immigrant participation in the district level.

Participation of residents in local planning processes and in the district activities has become an important issue with the introduction of 'Neighborhood Management' which has been discussed under 'Social City' (Social City Development) concept in 1990s (Seidel, 2005, p. 221). This concept deals with districts which have a considerable percentage of low-income, unemployed, low-educated, immigrant population and social help beneficiaries. What this concept offers is that these districts seen as problem areas should be renewed in order to

be sustainable residence areas. They should be made attractive for new segments of the population and the negative image of those areas should be erased.

Immigrants, as they usually live in this kind of discriminated districts, are sometimes seen as the cause of the problems in those areas by the authorities since they are not integrated into the host society and to the other immigrant groups. Since 1990s, they have started to be seen as potential solution to the problems in the districts they live. In addition to this, immigration and immigrants started to be seen as a solution to larger economic and demographic problems of Germany because of the rising unemployment rates, decreasing qualified active workforce and aging population in the country. Germany's population is aging and this will affect the labor market and security system in the country.

Germany is an immigration country. This is a fact which German authorities and political elite and also German public had not accepted for decades until 2001 when The Independent Commission on Migration to Germany published their report. According to this report, Germany's first migration law was made in 2004. This report puts emphasis on Germany's growing dependence on immigration and importance of integration of them into the host society and their participation (2001).

In this changing framework of ideas of planning and immigration, social participation of residents in the neighborhood gained importance. This makes it crucial to explain what is meant by social participation in this paper for the purposes of the project. There are various types of participation such as political participation, participation in the labor market, social and cultural participation. What this paper deals with is social and cultural participation of immigrants at the neighborhood level. I find it also crucial to divide social participation into two categories according to the types of activities which immigrants are expected to take part. This division is necessary as the level of participation and level of difficulty to pull immigrants into the activities differ according to the type of activity and the methods used. The first of these two categories is participation in social and cultural activities in the district which can also be further divided as participation in immigrant associations and participation in associations/organizations initiated by German population or local governments. Second type of social participation is participation of the residents in decision-making processes of spatial planning in the district.

This second type of social participation is especially more difficult as it needs another and a higher level of consciousness both socio-culturally and educationally. Local governments have been complaining about low levels of participation in decision-making processes among the majority society, too. Thus, a low level of immigrant participation in planning processes in the neighborhood is not only about or determined by being an immigrant. Of course, the characteristics that are attached to being an immigrant affect this type of participation in a negative way. However, this is more importantly influenced by a loss or low level of consciousness of citizenship and feelings of belonging to the locality/space on which one lives. A little number of residents has this kind of consciousness. Moreover, methods of participation used do not address to everybody in the society. They are middle class techniques and often criticized on this ground (Hinte, 2001, p. 155).

Thus, different methods have to be applied for the participation of immigrants in planning processes. "Planning for real" is the method which is seen as a best-practice example to make immigrants involve in neighborhood activities. Through personal contacts in everyday communication points, they can be informed of participation possibilities and their ideas and views can be asked (Zuwanderer in der Stadt, 2005, p. 41). Another problem in immigrant participation is that there is little number of recruited personnel with ethnic background in participation facilities. This leads to a low level of immigrant participation, too. In order to have increased rates of participation among immigrants, there has to be an 'immigrant-mainstreaming' like gender-mainstreaming (Otman, 2004). It can seem at first as a divisive mechanism rather than an integrative one. However, in order to be integrative and to support integration, some time has to be spent on learning and evaluating the needs and interests of the immigrant population; how they respond to the methods of participation used and whether another method works better or not.

Although participation is generally seen as both an aim in itself and a method to achieve integration in the society, participation processes (I mean here participation in planning and decision-making processes) do not necessarily have to be integrative at the "first step". In fact, they end up with the integration of immigrants by adding their views and thoughts into the planning which will design the environment that immigrants share with the majority population. However, in more serious processes where the needs of the immigrants are more significant,

the methods and the forms of participation should be appropriate for immigrants to understand and evaluate. Participation and integration can be simultaneously achieved well in social and cultural activities such as street festivals or cultural associations other than need-based and more complex participation facilities.

Another significant point here to be mentioned is the relationship between participation and integration and the importance of the neighborhood for this relationship to occur. As socially underprivileged groups in the city such as immigrants spend most of their everyday life in their neighborhood, importance of home and the district has become important for the integration of them (Zuwanderer in der Stadt, 2005, p. 6). If immigrants are made participate in the social and cultural activities and in planning processes in their neighborhood, once they are engaged in that kind of activities, their integration into the society and with other immigrant groups increases.

There are also difficulties in immigrant participation which are specific barriers stemming from being an immigrant. These are language deficiency, having a different understanding of participation or little tradition of participation, being socio-economically deprived so that immigrants can not participate in activities which do not bring them any material benefit, preference of immigrants to take part in their own associations. This last point becomes a barrier only when the immigrant associations deal with the country of origin and its people "back home". If the immigrant association has offers and activities in the neighborhood, then it adds also to the social participation of immigrants because what they do in their own association, in turn, affects the neighborhood and changes it.

Immigrants are usually motivated to take part in their own associations as they share common interests and needs with their co-ethnics. What are the motives of participants in district activities in general? Hoppe itemizes the motivations of voluntary work as follows and this also counts for the immigrants' motivations of participation in the neighborhood: enjoying oneself, meeting sympathetic people, helping other people, doing something good for the public, gaining and using knowledge and abilities, developing a sense of self responsibility and decision making, finding recognition in the society, representing own interests and solving own problems (2003, p. 31). There are specific motivations of immigrant to participate in addition to these more general incentives which will be mentioned in the part where I evaluate the interviews.

When we consider the forms of participation of immigrants in the neighborhood activities, we see that they usually take part in cultural activities such as music, sports or theatre events. Moreover, they join street festivals; they cook traditional foods, wear traditional costumes and show their traditional dance during these festivals. Some argue that this kind of participation is not actually social participation in the district. They claim that it is just enjoyment and do not provide the district with any good. However, they are useful in getting into contact with the neighbors and it provides the immigrants to identify themselves with the district.

In this part, I tried to clarify what is understood by social participation in the neighborhood and forms, methods and problems of social participation of immigrants in the neighborhood. Now I will pass to a description of the case study area, Moabit West.

#### **4. Moabit West (Berlin Mitte): General Characteristics**



Sources: Berlin map, Reimann, 2004; air photo of Moabit, Quartiersmanagement flyer

The study area where I conducted my research, Moabit West, is located in Berlin Mitte which is formed by three regions (Wedding, Tiergarten and Mitte). Moabit West is a part of old quarter Tiergarten. Moabit West is on the north of the district Moabit and was a traditional worker and immigrant quarter which has made Moabit West, in turn, known as an area full of social and economic problems. The southern area of Moabit is, quite contrary to Moabit West, a favorite area to live as a result of its proximity to the administrative blocks of the Federal State of

Berlin. The street “Alt-Moabit” separates these two areas from each other; not only physically but also in terms of social, cultural and economic differences of the neighborhoods.

If we have a closer look at the demographic and social structure of Moabit West, we see that a high percentage of the population is constituted by immigrants, social help beneficiaries and the unemployed. Following tables summarize social, economic and demographic structure of Moabit West by numbers.

**Table 1: Percentage of foreign population in Berlin-Mitte and Quarter Management area, Beusselkiez**

	<b>Berlin-Mitte</b>	<b>Beusselkiez (QM Gebiet)</b>
<b>% of foreign population</b>	27, 3 % (2002)	35, 4 % (2003)

Source: Reimann, Bettina. 2004. „Zwischenbericht Fallstudienstadt Berlin Untersuchungsgebiet Moabit West (Berlin Mitte)“ *Zuwanderer in der Stadt*

**Table 2: Percentage of social help beneficiaries and the unemployed in Moabit West**

<b>Moabit West</b>	<b>Foreigners</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Social help beneficiaries (2002)</b>	18,9 %	12,8 %
<b>Unemployed</b>	28, 9 %	20, 2 %

Source: Reimann, Bettina. 2004. „Zwischenbericht Fallstudienstadt Berlin Untersuchungsgebiet Moabit West (Berlin Mitte)“ *Zuwanderer in der Stadt*

Foreign population in the Quarter Management area, Beusselkiez, was 35, 4 % in 2003 and it is more than the percentage of foreign population in Berlin Mitte (Here I use the figures for Beusselkiez since data is not available for Moabit West and since Beusselkiez and Moabit West are close to each other in terms of demographic and social structure). Percentage of social help beneficiaries and the unemployed in Moabit West is higher among foreign population (18, 9% and 28, 9% respectively).

After examining the social, economic and demographic structure of Moabit West, it is also important to have a closer look at the social relationships between different groups in this heterogeneous neighborhood. How is the relationship of immigrant population with the German population and how is the communication between different immigrant groups such as Turks, Arabs and former Yugoslavians? Can we talk about an integrated Moabit? It seems very difficult to talk about this



because of a two-fold process. First of all, individual immigrant groups have little contact with the German population and secondly, different immigrant groups have problems with each other's existence in the society and also in the ethnic economy which lead them to have conflicts with each other. For instance, Turkish immigrants in the ethnic economy are irritated by the high numbers of Arabs who take part in the economic structure of Moabit with their restaurants and shops. This fact has been increasing by the continuous migration of people from Middle Eastern and North African regions to Germany as a result of the ongoing wars and political instability.

Because of the intersection of low levels of integration, high density of social problems and high percentage of young immigrant population in Moabit West, we see numerous organizations, associations and projects, either initiated by the local government or by the immigrants themselves, in order to ease the integration and participation of immigrants. These efforts especially aim the integration and participation of children and teenagers with an immigration background. However, the existing organizations are still insufficient to supply the need in the district. Thus, social work concerned with youth and children is seen as a deficiency in Moabit West by experts (Reimann, *Zwischenbericht Untersuchungsgebiet Moabit West*, p. 25). Why is it important to work especially on the participation of children and teenagers in the district? Firstly, as I stated in the previous parts, participation of immigrants in the social and cultural activities in the district is important for the integration of them into the society because neighborhood and home have become the places where high percentage of socially underprivileged residents spend most of their everyday life, weekends and holidays. They have seldom opportunity to take part in social and cultural activities in the other districts. In addition to this first reason, it is particularly vital for the youth and the children as they are the ones among the whole immigrant population who stays in their neighborhood mostly and as it is easier to integrate younger generations and to have them participated.

To have a rough idea about the types of organizations, associations and projects in Moabit West, I will give a list of organizations which aim to help immigrants through their offers such as consultancy, language courses, and free time activities and also in a broader perspective, which aim the integration and participation of immigrants in the district level. I will exclude the self-help groups and country of origin oriented associations of immigrants as they are of no use for

the concerns of the project. These are not all of the associations in Moabit but the mostly known ones: Al-Tadamun e. V., Fenerbahce Berlin e. V. 1989 Türkischer Kulturverein, Bacim e. V., Beraberce e. V. Türkisch-Deutscher Mädchenverein, Al-Bayan- Islamischer Kulturverein e. V., Al-Diwan e. V., Atatürk e. V., El-Patio e. V., F. C. Karame, Dünja Mädchen Verein, Haus der Weisheit (Moschee and Kulturverein), Stadtteilplenum, Stadtschloss Moabit (Moabiter Ratschlag), Quartiersmanagement Moabit West- Stern, SOS Kinderdorf, Gangway-Straßensozialarbeit etc. (For further information [www.moabitwest.de](http://www.moabitwest.de), [www.moabiter-ratschlag.de](http://www.moabiter-ratschlag.de))

There were four of these associations, organizations and projects which I made interviews with, namely, Dünja Mädchen-Kultur-Treff (Dünja Girls' Cultural Meeting Point), F. C. Karame, Al-Diwan and Stadtteilplenum. I will be talking about the reasons why I chose to make interviews with these four organizations/associations/projects in the following part where I will describe the aims and activities of them.

## 5. Interview Partners

### ***Dünja Mädchen-Kultur-Treff:***

Dünja, as a club for girls to meet and share experiences, was the idea of an immigrant girl from Palestine. With her idea, she went to the Jugendamt (Youth Welfare Office) and asked for a place to realize her project and in 1999, Dünja was founded in Moabit in a place which was renovated by all the participant girls. It is financially supported by Jugendamt. There are two social workers who are paid through this institution and other social workers are paid through other projects. There are also interneers and voluntary workers.

The aims of Dünja are to provide the girls in the neighborhood a place where they can spend their free time with the other girls and where they can get help with their school work, psychological problems or problems in their families. The services offered by Dünja are as follows: homework help, help with computer and internet use, consultancy in university and job applications, free time activities, consultancy in all kinds of difficulties in life, discussions about integration, intercultural and inter-religious differences and differences in one's own culture and religion. Dünja, with its broader perspective on integration and participation, is one of the successful examples of district projects in Moabit and also in Berlin. It is an open place to all cultures and there are Arabic, Turkish, German, Asians girls

participating in it. In 2004, Dünja was given Berliner Integrations-Sonderpreis (Berlin Special Integration Prize). (For further information [www.moabiter-ratschlag.de](http://www.moabiter-ratschlag.de))

***F. C. Karame:***

F. C. Karame was founded in 1978 first as a sports club for the Arabic teenagers, who migrated to Germany because of security and economic reasons from Lebanon and Palestine without their parents. The aim of the club was to provide those teenagers with a free time activity and by this way to prevent them from the dangers in the “streets”. In 1990, the association was moved to Moabit where its concern had changed from just being a sports club to a migrant association which started to deal with youth and family social work. F. C. Karame works mainly on honorary basis and partly gets financial support from Bezirksamt Mitte (Borough of Mitte). There are eleven people working in the association only one of whom gets salary. All of the others are voluntary social workers. What is offered by F. C. Karame is nearly the same with what Dünja offers: language and computer courses, free time activities for the teenagers, homework help, consultancy for families, theatre and folklore groups. They organize discussion panels about integration, immigrants’ problems, conflicts between different cultures and religions, too, especially on the conflict between the Jewish and the Muslim in Israel and Palestine.

***Al-Diwan e. V.:***

Al-Diwan e. V. was founded in 2001 as a family association. However, instead of being called as an Arabic family association, it prefers to be called as a German-Arabic cultural association as its aim is the integration of different groups of immigrants and also integration of German and immigrant groups. They get personal (labor) help from Bezirksamt and the founder of the association, Mr. El-Said, supports his association himself with some support from his relatives. He and a German social pedagogue work voluntarily for Al-Diwan. Services offered by Al-Diwan are consultancy in bureaucratic processes, help with official letter writing, German and Arabic language courses, free time activities for children and teenagers.

***Stadtteilplenum:***

Stadtteilplenum is a modified form of citizen participation organized by Moabiter Ratschlag (Moabit Council) and Quartiersmanagement Moabit West.

It takes place every third Tuesday of the month and it is open to everybody who is interested in joining the discussions about planning Moabit West. The aim of Stadtteilplenum is to achieve something good and useful for Moabit together with the politicians and residents. Discussions are usually in the form of round table discussion and moderated by two social workers from the Moabiter Ratschlag and Quartiersmanagement. The topics to be discussed are usually determined according to the wishes of the residents who participate. A bureaucrat or a politician who is responsible for that certain topic is invited and residents ask questions to her/him and share their concerns and ideas about the topic. The profile of the participants varies. There are not only intellectuals but also people who live in Moabit without high educational level. However, people who participate regularly are those for whom their district is important and who want to change something in their neighborhood. There are also participants who are interested in politics. This means participation in a citizen forum such as Stadtteilplenum is determined mostly by interest. What is lacking in the Stadtteilplenum and what is disturbing the organizers of this discussion panel is the low levels of immigrants participating. I will be dealing with the reasons of low participation rates in Stadtteilplenum in the evaluation of the interviews part.

Why I chose to make interviews with these immigrant associations depends on the popularity of them among immigrant population in Moabit West. The other reason is that they display successful examples for the participation of the immigrants and they try to achieve social participation of immigrants in Moabit. They attempt to do useful organizations and activities both for Moabit West and for the integration of immigrants and the majority society. Later, I chose to make interviews with these associations because they were the most open organizations to answer my questions and to talk about their activities.

The reason why I chose Stadtteilplenum is that it is the mostly used discussion forum of Moabit residents and it is necessary to compare the answers of immigrant associations with a German organization which tries to build connections with immigrants. Additionally, it was one of the main concerns of this research study to find out why immigrants do not get involved in decision making processes such as the Stadtteilplenum. That's why it was important to know the organization closely.

## **6. Evaluation of the interviews**

In order to find out the motivations of the immigrant participants in social activities in Moabit West and the forms and methods of participation used and more importantly, the reasons of non-participation of the majority of the immigrants, I did interviews with both immigrants who actively take part in the activities in the district and who do not participate in any of the activities. To be able to reach the first group of interviewees, who were the participants, I contacted the four associations I mentioned above. I made interviews with the responsible people and also with the people who take part in the activities of those associations. Firstly, I talked to Hatice Ciftci, who is a social worker in Dünja. After this first contact with her, I attended discussion groups of the girls in Dünja. The themes were Moabit, its problems and girls' motivations to take part in Dünja. Moreover, I attended Mother's Breakfast twice, which is a project organized by Dünja to make the mothers' of the participant girls get in contact with each other and share their experiences. The themes were again motivations to participate and Moabit West in general.

The second person interviewed was Mr. Zaher from F. C. Karame where two interviews with two participant boys were made. Next, Mr. Said from Al-Diwan was interviewed and lastly, Susanna Torke, who is one of the moderators of Stadtteilplenum, was spoken to.

It was easier to reach the participant immigrants than the non-participant immigrants. Although the participants are less in number, they can be reached through associations and organizations and this makes the communication with them easier. However, I had great difficulty when I tried to make interviews with the non-participants. The only way to reach them was to make interviews with the people on the street. Thus, I could make thirteen interviews with the people who do not participate in any kind of social activities in their district, other than street festivals. I should state that non-response rate was very high when we consider the people who could not speak German, who misunderstood what I asked and who had no interest in what I was asking.

In this part, I will try to analyze the interviews while keeping the following questions in my mind as tools to structure the evaluation of the interviews: how do immigrants conceive Moabit as their neighborhood area? What are the problems in

Moabit from the point of view of the immigrants? How do these problems affect, motivate or hinder immigrants to participate? What are the motivations of participant immigrants and what are forms and methods of their participation? How can the methods of participation be improved in order to activate the immigrants who do not take part in any kind of social or decision-making activity in their neighborhood? What are the reasons why immigrants do not participate in the district activities? What is the importance of participation of immigrants in the district activities, for the immigrants themselves, or the neighborhood and for the majority society?

### ***Problems in Moabit***

As I stated in the part where I gave a short description of Moabit West, Moabit is seen as a problem area by the experts. With its high percentage of immigrant, unemployed and social help beneficiary population, the district has to face social and economic problems. What the residents of Moabit West uttered during the interviews was not different from the expert views. They also see their neighborhood as a problem area. However, here I must point out that there was a difference between the views of the immigrants who participate and who do not participate. While the participant immigrants talked about integration problems, social and economic problems in the area, non-participants stated that they do not see any problems in Moabit or that although there are problems-however they did not name any-they are obliged to live in Moabit. There were also paradoxical answers given by some of the interviewees such as “I do not like living in Moabit at all but everything is OK” or “There are no problems in our district. Life is here very bad”.

When we look at the answers given by the immigrants who participate, we see that they are mostly problems of integration and difference. I tried to categorize the most commonly stated problems in Moabit West by the immigrant participants in the following:

“There is little contact and communication between the residents of Moabit; both between different immigrant groups and between immigrant population and Germans. There are different immigrant groups living together but they have contacts only with their co-ethnics; Turks with Turks and Arabs with Arabs”

“The district is very crowded and there is a high rate of foreign population composed of many different nationalities. There is the feeling that you do not live in Germany and that Moabit is a deported district”

Social problems and conflicts within the immigrant families; High crime rates and fights in the district; Discomfort, uneasiness in the neighborhood; High unemployment rates; High flat rents; Drug dealers and drug users; Pollution and lack of maintenance of the infrastructure. These problems, which were mentioned by the immigrants who take part in social activities in Moabit, are, in fact, the factors which lead the participant immigrants take part; which lead them go into action and do something against these problems. Thus, there is a strong connection between the problems stated and the motivations of participants to participate. Before building the connection between the two areas, it is significant to look deeper into the motivations of the participants.

### ***Motivations of participants***

Immigrants who participate in the neighborhood activities are motivated to solve and to better the problems which they see in their district. All of the participants I talked to believe that low levels of integration can be increased through participation. To quote Mr. El Said from Al-Diwan:

“When people are engaged in activities together, differences disappear”

In order to achieve integration, many of the participants are engaged in youth social work because they believe that and also experience has shown that, it is more difficult to work with the first generation immigrants in the field of integration. The efforts in integrating the first generation immigrants who are not capable of the language, who are generally low-educated and who have a totally different socio-cultural background, are tempted to give negative results. Thus, participants prefer to work with the teenagers. Their motivation to participate in the district activities is their attempts to integrate the youth into the society and to keep them away from the problems in the neighborhood such as crime, drug addiction, by offering them something to do in their free time. For instance, one of the voluntary workers in F. C. Karame, Fouad, stated that he wants to help children because when he was young he always created problems and now he wants them to keep away from problems.

Participants who pointed out the problems of contact and communication between different immigrant groups take part in intercultural projects to increase the level of communication and to improve the quality of contact between immigrant groups and between immigrants and Germans. For instance, the women who take part in Mother’s Breakfast, which is an offer from Dünja, stated their

concerns about the little contact between the residents of Moabit. As a result of their concern, they participate in this activity of Dünja and as I learned from them during the interviews that they also participate in other activities in their district such as the activities of Nachbarschaftshaus and Diakonie. They try to get into contact with other immigrants and with Germans by participating in street festivals, too.

When we look at the motivations of immigrant girls who take part in Dünja, we see that they are also motivated to get rid of the problems they utter, namely, problems of restricted freedom by living in an ethnic community and patriarchal oppression in general. What they try to achieve with Dünja is to create a private sphere for themselves in the public, outside home, which is the traditional private sphere. They want to be visible in the society through their participation in the neighborhood. They want to show that they are also residents of Moabit West; they want to stress their existence as immigrant girls. Moreover, they want to have a say in the processes about Moabit, they want to change their environment and play a role in its development. There are also motivations like enjoying themselves, knowing other people, told by the participants.



Waldstrassenfest in Moabit West and the participants of Dünja  
Photograph taken by F. Uzar

Unfortunately, not all of the immigrants are motivated to participate. On the contrary, number of immigrants who do not involve in the neighborhood activities is higher than the number of participants. In the next section, I will



emphasize the reasons of low immigrant participation in social activities in the district.

### ***Reasons of low participation among immigrant groups***

The reasons of low participation of immigrants in district activities, which were told by the interviewees, share some common points with the reasons we see in the previous research studies. For instance, some of the people whom I talked to also mentioned language deficiency as the primary barrier in front of immigrant participation. When they are asked about their non-participation in the Stadtteilplenum, for instance, their answer is “We do not participate because we understand nothing”. What needs closer attention here is that it is not only a problem of German language; a language deficiency problem but also a problem of lack of an expert language or to put it in other words, difficulty in understanding the language used in the discussions in Stadtteilplenum or in any kind of planning discussion about the neighborhood. To quote Mr. Zaher here:

“The elderly immigrants are not confident enough to go to the Stadtteilplenum as they think that they do not understand the themes discussed. Moreover, Germans use complicated vocabulary related to the specific area they are discussing about, so immigrants do not understand the points which are put forward. Germans themselves do not understand that kind of complex definitions, either. I am sorry, but it is like this. Then, they start discussing certain paragraphs of certain laws. Immigrants sit there and say ‘aha’”

There were also immigrants who mentioned immigrants’ having a different cultural background as a reason of non-participation. According to Mr. Zaher from F. C. Karame, the reasons of low participation rates among immigrants are strongly related to the different understanding of participation which stems from their culture. He stated that immigrants have not learned in their culture to make their neighborhood clean or to initiate an action. Elderly Germans try to do something for their district or want to help others because they do not have anything to do. They have free time and they are motivated to participate. However, it does not mean that immigrants do not like helping others or that they do not want to participate. On the contrary, they are ready to help

others or work for their districts' good. They are willing to take part not only in cultural or social activities in their neighborhood but also in decision making processes about their district. However, they are not used to the German way of citizen participation. Immigrants have a different understanding of participation or working for public good. What Mr. Zaher means by lack of immigrant knowledge of participation is these different understandings in participatory styles of different cultures. As many of the interviewees stated, immigrants take part in activities when they are asked. This is one of the differences between German way and immigrant way of participation. It carries the danger of putting different cultures of participation into one heading when I use "immigrant culture of participation". However, in order to highlight the differences between the way Germans and the immigrants participate, I find this division necessary. As most of the first generation immigrants came from countries where there was a different understanding of democracy and citizenship when they first migrated to Germany at the end of 60s and 70s, they usually obey the authority. They do not have the understanding of initiating a project. It should not be forgotten here that the group of immigrants mentioned here are first generation immigrants and difficulties experienced in their participation and difficulties faced in the participation of second and third generation immigrants are different from each other.

Some time has to be spent in order to make immigrants used to the way participation is realized in German cities. Some argue that immigrants have been living in German cities for more than thirty five years now and they have to get used to this way of citizen participation. However, immigrants were not asked to participate from the beginning of participatory activities in Germany. As I have stated before the views of immigrants have begun to be taken into consideration from the 1990s onwards together with a growing interest in disadvantaged districts which have a high number of immigrant population.

Another barrier why immigrants are not motivated in spite of their willingness is that, they are looking for concrete results of participatory activities; when they experience that the activities or planning discussions do any good for the district and for themselves, they are motivated to take part. In Mr. El-Said's terms from the association Al-Diwan, "immigrants take part when there is an action". When they see something concrete then they are interested in it and motivated to participate. They do not stand on the corner without doing anything

as long as the activity is announced and immigrants are asked to join. For example, when Moabiter Ratschlag organizes an activity to clean Moabit, people realize that it is doing something good for the district and thus for the residents of the district. Then, they become interested in the activities of Moabiter Ratschlag. What Susanna Torka from Stadtteilplenum also claims is that immigrants come and join the discussions in Stadtteilplenum when there are concrete offers. Some can think that there is a pragmatic approach to the discussion forums such as Stadtteilplenum when immigrants mostly take part when there is a concrete help or offer or activity. For instance, as Ms. Torka states immigrants take part in Stadtteilplenum but they ask for a place or financial support for their own associations or for their own projects. I agree that it seems pragmatic but in turn, those associations try to achieve something useful for their co-ethnics who are also the residents of the same neighborhood and most of those associations also try to improve the quality of their neighborhood through their activities. This is also an important part of social participation in the district. Another reason for the motivation of immigrant associations to work on their own without cooperating with institutions such as Stadtteilplenum is that immigrants feel some Germans do not accept them as foreigners in the citizen forums such as Stadtteilplenum. Thus, they want to show that they are also the residents of the same district and citizens of this country as Germans. The best place to realize their aims is not Stadtteilplenum but their own associations or organizations. That is why they insist on participating in their own associations where they can also enjoy a higher number of participation rates of their co-ethnics.

Another reason for low levels of participation among immigrants is that they do not have information about the possibilities of participation in the district. Most of the non-participants I made interviews with have never heard of Stadtteilplenum. This may be because they are not interested in taking part in discussion forums about the spatial needs or development of Moabit. However, if the authorities want immigrants to be interested in this kind of forums or organizations, they have to advertise themselves in order to make people participate. Not all the German residents are aware of the fact that there is a Stadtteilplenum in Moabit West and thus not all of them join to the discussions. Lack of information is related to a general problem more than just being an immigrant and being no interested in decision making processes in their

neighborhood. First, it is a matter of inefficient advertisement and informing. As Mr. El-Said claims, in the flyers of Stadtteilplenum it is only written when and where the forum will take place but there is no information about what Stadtteilplenum is and what it tries to achieve. Secondly it is a problem of the methods used in the discussion process. They are middle class oriented moderation methods which are not appealing to the most sections of the society.

In addition to the methods which hinder immigrant participation, the contents of the discussion forums or activities can either hinder or ease the immigrant participation. This is because participation mostly depends on the interests and needs of the people. For instance, as Mr. Zaher, Mr. El-Said and Ms. Torka stated, immigrants take part when topics like integration, problems of immigrants, immigration policies are discussed. This can be used in a fruitful way by combining the interests of immigrants with other participation facilities or possibilities. On the contrary, when certain topics about immigrants' problems are not discussed deeply and thoroughly, they hinder the participation of them.

The other reasons of non-participation which were mentioned by non-participants are inappropriate times of the meetings, which hinder especially women's participation since they are one of the vulnerable groups to the 'dangerous streets' of Moabit. Moreover, most of the immigrants who do not participate stated that they don't have time to take part in social activities in their district and others complained about lack of activities in Moabit.

What can be done in order to make immigrants participate in social activities and in decision making processes in the district? The answers of participants and non-participants share some common features. Both of these two groups offered organizing street festivals or cultural activities to make people know each other and to have a consciousness of being neighbors. It would be more interesting for immigrants when they start with activities like festivals. When different immigrant groups and the Germans organize and take part in various activities together, they get to know each other and then this eases the way to participation in the neighborhood. There were also suggestions of organization of Stadtteilplenum by immigrants themselves, when they could invite the other immigrants and also feel themselves engaged in the process.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this study, I tried to understand, explain and evaluate social participation of Turkish and Arabic immigrants in a neighborhood of Berlin; Moabit West which is perceived as a problem area with high percentage of poor, social beneficiary, unemployed and immigrant population, high crime rates and uneasiness. The interviews I made indicate that immigrants do not participate in local decision making processes and do take part rarely in social and cultural activities in the neighborhood. When they participate, they prefer immigrant associations and street festivals. They are motivated to take part in order to solve the problems in their neighborhood which must be given priority in their points of view. Immigrants who do not participate give reasons of language problems- both problem of German and an expert language-, different understanding of participation and economic and social integration problems which prevent a social participation. Although less in numbers, there are immigrants who do participate in local planning processes related to the neighborhood problems and decisions and in social and cultural activities in the district. They usually take part in immigrant associations or intercultural organizations in order to ease the communication and integration of different groups.

Social participation in the neighborhood can be instrumental for the integration of immigrant groups into the established society and for the increase in communication between different groups who live in the neighborhood. Thus, social and cultural activities such as street festivals, which may seem as ordinary activities, may increase the integration level in the society by bringing different immigrant groups and the members of the established society together as residents of the same neighborhood.

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