

Report on my internship at Rolling Safespace e.V.

I accomplished my internship for the module „Feldstudienphase“ at „Rolling Safespace e.V.“ (ROSA) in Oropos, a village close to Athens in Greece. ROSA e.V. is an organization offering gender sensitive support to women*¹ and their children on the move, to respond to special difficulties and risks the target groups are facing. Amongst gender specific burdens are not only gender-related causes for flight. Moreover, along the flight route and in accommodations for people on the move, women* are exposed to the risk of gender-based violence, face high amounts of care work and lack access to medical care or hygiene supplies. ROSA's long-term aim is to co-create a safer space² together with the people who visit it, so that they can shape the space with their own necessities and ideas.

Preparation of my stay abroad

In advance to the stay in Greece I had already been member of the local group of ROSA in Berlin. In exchange with other group members in Germany I also got to know people, who had worked with ROSA in Greece. Because I am interested in international social work, specifically in an intercultural context with people on the move, I was strongly interested into experiencing the social and political situation around the European border. My first application to work at ROSA Greece had been in summer 2023, but there are a mainly German volunteers spending their semester break working for the organization, which is why in summertime the project had been too frequented. That is why I was really happy about the possibility to be part of the crew during February and March 2024. To facilitate my stay in Greece I also applied for ERASMUS funding and am grateful to have receive it.

For preparation an online seminar was organized. Crew-members got to know each other, responsible people were introduced and important information about the working and living conditions expecting us was shared. There was room for question as well as input about white saviorism. Additionally, there is a network of former crewmembers who can be asked about their experiences and advise.

¹I use the term „women*“ to point out that, although ROSA is principally open to all FLINTA* (female, lesbian, inter-, non-binary, trans-, asexual and other gender diverse)-persons, the majority of people visiting ROSA are cis-women.

²According to ROSA e.V. (2024) a safer space is a place where people with discrimination experiences can meet.

Prior to my internship I spent two days in Athens to accommodate to the new surroundings. As a non-Greek-speaker I found it overwhelming to be exposed to the Greek alphabet in the beginning. ROSA Greece also has established a buddy-system, which helped with orientation and made it easier to get used to the context. My buddy supported me with information about transportation, picked me up at the bus stop and introduced me to the crew and the house.

Luckily, my first time with the crew was at the weekend, so I had time to get to know the living situation and the people I would work and live with.

Working at ROSA Greece

ROSA Greece is working from Sunday until Thursday, to be in line with the Islamic calendar. The working days are usually divided into two parts: In the morning there is time for organizational or crew-related matters and in the afternoons the visits of the camps take place. Malakasa is currently visited once, while Thiva and Ritsona are each frequented twice a week.

The mobile safer space consists of three parts. First, there is the women space, offering a place to stay, drink tea and have fruit. The idea is, that the women space can be designed by all visitors of the space. People can bring ideas and exchange knowledge or skills regarding different topics (like crafting, sports, language, or culture). Depending on the weather and planned activities the women space can take place inside or outside. However, ideally there is the possibility to seek retreat inside an inflatable tent which we bring to the camps.

Second, there is the health space, offering consultation, in a room inside the truck which the organization owns. ROSA can also offer basic medical supplies and workshops.

Third, there is the kids' space, in which entertainment for children takes place. The kids' space was initially developed in order to relieve the other spaces if needed, but meanwhile has developed its standing as an equally important part of the project.

All three spaces consist of two to four crew members at a time. Crew members mainly stay in the space that they are working for, but also need to be in close exchange, during camp time and in the preparation and reflection with the rest of the team. I was mainly working in the women space.

Although there is a coordinative position that one crew member holds at the house, the organization aims for a non-hierarchical structure engaging in shared responsibilities and democratic decision making. This is supposed to be in line with the idea of enabling self-organized structures, not only at the crew-house, but also at the safer space.

In the mornings the crew is engaged in activities like planning and preparing activities for the spaces, supervisions, organizational plenary and maintenance of the crew house and cars, which are essential for the work of ROSA. There are also different meetings taking place, like exchange with work groups in Germany, networking with other organizations in and around Athens and workshops on legal or health matters. Additionally, there are structures for reflection and evaluation of our work and for exchange with translators at the camp.

Living Situation

The crew is living in a house rented by the organization in a village located within one hour driving distance to each of the camps and to Athens. Every crew member financially contributes to the weekly shopping and maintenance. Each day, there is one team of the crew members cooking together for the whole group.

The organizational cars can also be used for private drives, which then need to be paid for individually. This makes free time planning flexible. During my stay, we often spent our weekends together as a crew. There are a lot of natural and cultural sights around which can be visited.

I would definitely recommend visiting the nearby beach and mountain areas. Working with people on the move, who do not have clear perspectives, face repression and discrimination can be quite draining. The communal living situation of the crew is an important support structure regarding the working experiences and living realities confronted with. Anyway, taking care of many different necessities and needs in the crew can also add up to distress at times. This is why it is recommendable to engage in activities that are calming or relieving and actively seek some distraction from the work context. ROSA Greece is currently also working on a more established mental health structure to ensure sustainable engagement of crew members.

Self-Reflection

During my stay with ROSA in Greece I could deepen and learn anew a lot of personal as well as professional skills. Anyway, there are some abilities, which I still aspire to attain and experiences I would like to analyze more deeply in the future.

1. Language and intercultural skills. First of all, I was working in a highly intercultural context. Not only was I living in a foreign country. I was also working with people on the

move of diverse cultural, social, and political backgrounds. Because of this, I learned how to communicate without sharing a common language in most of the cases. This did not only happen via translational tools, but also by actively and confidently approaching people and being creative about the means of expression.

I am definitely sure that I want to further engage in learning Arabic to supplement my skills in the colonial languages English and Spanish. There is a lack of translators or translational tools for a lot of languages spoken, which creates even higher barriers for people who are not literate. Also, basic Greek knowledge would have been helpful for the orientation outside of the ROSA group. Because most of the work is taking place amongst English and German speaking people, and my stay was limited to only 6 weeks in total, I unfortunately did not engage in learning Greek.

2. Responsible decision making. As ROSA is operating as a support structure situated in an acute and constantly changing setting, I also extended my capacities in spontaneous decision making and acting, considering the effects my actions might have on a collective project.

3. Privileges. Working with people who face discrimination and repression also made me reflect on my own privileges. Easily passing borders on my way back to Germany while writing this report feels deeply contradictory, having met so many people who are restricted in their freedom of movement.

4. Collaboration. Close trans-professional exchange is crucial for the functioning of projects like Rosa. I was in exchange with lawyers, social workers, psychologists, consultants, health, and pedagogic professionals.

5. Political and organizational insights. I gained knowledge about the legal situation and thereby about the workings of the Greek and European asylum system. Additionally, I learned about structures inside the camps, organizational structures in Athens and surroundings and about the chances and challenges of a self-organized and communal FLINTA*-living project. Working and living together, requires constantly on warding information, sharing knowledge and skills, delegating tasks, taking, or giving over responsibilities and expressing thoughts and feelings to the group.

6. Implications. One concern that had been holding me back from international engagement was the continuation of postcolonial structures. I did not want to practice social work in cultural contexts outside Germany contributing to the reproduction of Eurocentric and racist power dynamics. One convincing factor to get engaged in Greece was, that its border region is

one of the doorsteps to Europe, where states like my country-of-origin Germany are successively implementing isolation policies. Working with an organization that I experienced to be self-criticist and aware of historically evolved power dynamics was a good starting point for finally gathering working experience abroad. I am looking forward to further reflecting on theoretical and practical implications of my experiences with ROSA e.V., not only in the debriefing seminar which will happen shortly after my return to Germany, but also in the module „Praxisreflexion“, in which I will write a short scientific concerning my internship report during the next semester.

References

ROSA e.V. (2024). *Safer Space*. Glossar. <https://www.rolling-safespace.org/begriffe-und-formulierungen/>