

# Come\_IN@Palestine: Adapting a German Computer Club Concept to a Palestinian Refugee Camp

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## Introduction

The **intercultural computer clubs**, called **come\_IN**, offer a place to share practices among children and adults of diverse ethnical backgrounds. Once a week the participants voluntarily gather in the computer club, work on joint projects, study, play, or realize individual ideas supported by the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Since 2003 we have built a **network** of come\_IN intercultural computer clubs in Germany (Schubert et al. 2011). The main goal of this work is to investigate into the **transfer of our experiences** from the German context and adapt it to the specific needs of Palestinian refugee camps and their inhabitants.

## State of the Art

The concept of come\_IN follows the tradition of **computer clubhouses** in the US. The principles of situated, collaborative learning and constructionist thinking offered underprivileged youth opportunities to express themselves with the use of ICT (Kafai 2009). The pedagogical concept behind the clubhouses is an extension of the constructivist-learning paradigm, known as **constructionism** (Papert 1980). The come\_IN approach developed this concept further, applying it to issues of **inter-generational learning** and the **integration of migrant communities** in Germany. The computer clubs were based in schools, which serve a central point of exchange among the people of the city district, to provide opportunities for elementary school kids and their parents.

## Jalazone: A Palestinian Refugee Camp



Jalazone's location in the West Bank (Source: openstreetmap.org)

Jalazone is a Palestinian refugee camp in the **West Bank** approx. 7 km north of Ramallah. Like most of the other refugee camps Jalazone was **established in 1949**. The inhabitants of the camp were expelled or fled from their homes in nowadays Israel. A high population density as well as crowded and **precarious living conditions** characterizes the camp. The unemployment rate is at a very high level (40% compared to the average of 20 % in the entire West Bank). The council running the camp estimates that approx. 30% of the families have Internet access at home. There are also some Internet cafés. These places have a bad reputation since they were rarely controlled by adults and considered to be used for computer gaming, gambling, and pornography watching.



Some impressions from the computer club "come\_IN" in Jalazone: learning Scratch, playing with programmable bricks, working and gaming together

## Research Methods

**Grounded Theory** (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was chosen as a theoretical framework to be grounded in the field. Also we adhere to principles of **Participatory Action Research** by Kemmis & McTaggart (2004) regarding the question "how to act in the field".

A short overview about our empirical data:

- collected over a period of **28 months**
- from **May 2010 to September 2012**
- documented via **field notes** and **photos**
- with extensive daily written **documentations**
- held **workshops** and interviews in Arabic with the tutors, the children and inhabitants of the refugee camp with an accredited translator as part of the research team
- collected **7 semi-structured interviews** (with durations between 30 minutes and 3 hours) and **more than 10 informal interviews**
- analyzed **protocols** from the weekly computer club sessions written by the tutors
- collected and analyzed other materials like **artefacts** from the projects

## Discussion and Conclusion

While the come\_IN approach itself was inspired by Resnick's (1996) work, it was yet another stretch to move this socio-technical approach to learning and social integration to a Palestinian context. The challenge was to share insights gained in Germany while adapting the socio-technical concept to the different context. We assumed that our publications and written materials would only provide limited insights into our experiences made during almost ten years of project work. Therefore, we very much believed in an **exchange of expertise** among the partners at different points in time. Different members of the German project team spent substantial amounts of time in understanding the local context and preparing for the clubs opening. Moreover, we invited the Palestinian project manager for one week to Germany to make him see the computer clubs in action. In the West Bank, we have decided to **work with a local university**, Birzeit, to build the club, which adds a second university player into the support structure. While they coordinate the local activities and engage undergraduate students to tutor the club, their social attribution in the camp is quite distinct.

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