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Recruiting Generation Y

Insights from the MOR

Interview with Diana Schnabel

A conversation on Jewish life in Germany

WIZO Kagan Centre

A voice for Jerusalem's youth

Meeting Germany's Jews

In an in-depth interview, WIZO Germany President Diana Schnabel discusses the emerging Jewish community in Germany – the fastest growing in the world – and how she's keeping WIZO's finger on its pulse

Zohar Friedman

"Today, my children say they are German Jews," explains Diana Schnabel, President of WIZO Germany, "whereas I used to say I am a Jew living in Germany." Diana is describing the changing identity of Jews in Germany – or German Jews – a small but significant distinction that touches at the very heart of the self-identification issue facing the community. Today, amid a host of changes – a considerable influx of post-Soviet Jews, a favourable economic climate, and the emerging infrastructure for Jewish life including schools, synagogues and communal organisations – the Jewish community does not merely exist in Germany, it is truly thriving and growing.

As the child of Polish Holocaust survivors, a German citizen and a passionate but critical Zionist, there is no better person to acquaint us with this community-in-transition, its burgeoning identity and the role WIZO does – and can – play in this revival of Jewish life.

A post-war childhood

"Growing up as a Jew in Germany was something special," Diana Schnabel says of her childhood – which although special, was not at all simple.

Before moving to Germany as a toddler, Diana lived briefly in both Poland – the country of her birth – and Israel, where her family moved in 1956, just at the outbreak of the Suez Crisis. By 1958, the young family moved to Germany after Diana's father accepted a compelling job offer.

But Israel always remained in the family's heart. Her parents were deeply haunted by the knowledge that "had Israel existed, their lives would have been different." The home was strongly Zionist, with Diana and her brother participating in the local Zionist youth movements. They were also instilled with strong Jewish values, such as *tzedaka* (charity). "No matter how little we had, my parents always gave to *tzedaka*."

As Diana speaks, a picture begins to emerge of a young Jewish family in transition: the parents raising their children to speak Polish, love Israel, value justice, have a deep understanding of Jewish values and culture, and all the while absorbing

German language and culture from their surroundings.

Growing up in this myriad of languages, cultures and often conflicting feelings did not always impact Diana and her brother positively. "When we were young, I was maybe 15 or 16, we accused our parents: 'How could you have come back here? How could you have raised us here?'"



Diana Schnabel

Today, however, Diana's perspective has changed: growing up in such close proximity – both geographically and temporally – to one of the most horrific crimes committed against the Jewish people, filled Diana and her contemporaries with a finely tuned moral compass and the conviction to speak up in the face of injustice. "We were brought up as fighters. We were told to voice our opinions. If there is injustice, we must speak up. This is very typical of my generation. I'm not afraid of anyone. I say what I think. Growing up as a Jew in Germany – it is something special."

One example stands out: "In 1986, there was a big protest about an anti-Semitic play. I was among a group that stormed the theatre, we occupied the stage, we spoke up. I was WIZO Aviv then and WIZO had an important role in activating the protest. We rallied the WIZO women to get involved. Self-dependency was – and still is – very important for Jews in Germany."

Germany's emerging Jewish community

When asked about the long-term viability of a Jewish community in Germany, Diana says, "I see a future in my children's generation. Many of the younger ones who study abroad come back. They find jobs – the economic situation



Diana attending a WIZO Berlin Gala evening. (l to r) Jaqueline Rosenkranz, Dagmar Schwarzer, Simone Graumann, Michal Gelerman, Maya Urseanu, Diana Schnabel, Annie Karolinski-Donig, Marina Polewski, Tatiana Friedberg-Semmler

here is one of the best. It's not difficult to raise a nice family – and we have all the facilities for Jewish life."

Furthermore, Diana points out, the numbers are compelling. "The Russian Jewish immigration to Germany in the 1990s raised the Jewish population from around 35,000 to around 100,000."

While the melding of the German Jewish and Russian Jewish groups wasn't seamless, there are signs that the two groups are beginning to constitute one strong, cohesive community. "It will take time, but it's happening. I think the Russian immigration is very positive. We have communities that didn't exist before – and that's thanks to the Russian Jews."

As an important institution in the Jewish community, WIZO women were involved in assisting Russian Jews integrate into Germany. One incident in particular stands out, when newly arriving Russian families, temporarily living in hotels in Frankfurt, made a plea for assistance in caring for their children during after school hours. "Within two weeks, we [WIZO chaverot] organized a hot meal for the kids in the Jewish community centre. We helped them do homework and waited with them until their parents could pick them up. This was WIZO. We continued until they had everything they needed – until the schools caught up to accommodate them and the families found apartments of their own."

The changing face of WIZO Germany

Similar to the changes facing the larger community, the attitudes of WIZO Germany chaverot have also undergone something of a revolution – both in how they fit into the larger WIZO family and how they self-identify.

"In 1961, after WIZO Germany was re-established after the Second World War, the federation's first executives were not officially introduced at WIZO conferences, and were

not given official name tags or placements," Diana explains, underlining early discomfort in the WIZO establishment that a federation in Germany would exist at all.

Similarly, WIZO Germany chaverot struggled with their connection to Germany. "When I came to the Aviv seminar in 1993 with my friend Mirjam Kon, we refused to hold the German flag and to represent Germany – and that was typical. Instead, we composed a song for the Aviv Seminar to the tune of Hallelujah and we held the WIZO flag."

Before becoming WIZO Germany President in 2011, Diana served as vice president for eight years – during which she credits her predecessor, Rachel Singer, for involving her extensively. By 2012, as president of WIZO Germany, Diana, whose term ends in 2015, recalls: "It was very emotional but it felt alright for me to stand in front of the German flag at the 2012 EGM."

But if Diana, as the daughter of Holocaust survivors internalizes some of the complicated symbolism at work in identifying as German, emerging Avivs are much less affected by such inner qualms. "Our Aviv representatives nowadays hold the German flag as all the other Avivs do with their own national flags. This is what happens with the course of time. But you can imagine how emotional I get about this issue. Being a daughter of Holocaust survivors has made my life very special living in Germany, and it's also one of the reasons for my love and dedication to both Israel and WIZO."

WIZO for me

Diana was 'brought in' to WIZO through her late sister-in-law, who was a member of WIZO Aviv at the time. Diana quickly joined the WIZO Aviv board, and in 1993 she attended the Aviv Seminar where she "was caught" by current World WIZO Chairperson Professor Rivka Lazovsky. "From then on," Diana explains, "I always had WIZO leadership positions; my Aviv

seminar experience impacted me for the rest of my life."

During her years in leadership positions, Diana has had time to reflect on both the meaning and potential of WIZO for advancing women. "I am very much impressed by the female power of WIZO – not only in Germany but all over the world. WIZO is a very good example of women being able to work together as a team."

"[In Germany] we don't feel the competition about positions and influence – here it's working together for a common cause. It's the experience of togetherness as a group of women who like each other – a sisterhood."

Challenges for WIZO Germany today

And yet, as is the case in much of the world, in Germany, "involving the younger ones" in the sisterhood is a lingering and complicated challenge. "There's nothing worse than building something so wonderful and not finding younger women to follow up and take up the helm," says Diana.

Part of the difficulty in recruiting new members is a reluctance to be registered members. "They'll give the money [that membership would cost], but they don't want to be registered. They are afraid of the obligations, they want their boundaries respected."

Part of Diana's strategy to counter this, is to take the pressure off new recruits and give them a lot of freedom "to do things the way they think things should be done," and the strategy seems to be working. "Typically, their initial involvement is the appeal of joining a social peer group. We must start with the social aspects of joining. It becomes successful once it turns into a giving group – a group that has purpose and meaning."

After they're hooked, Diana makes every effort to give them opportunities to experience WIZO. "Whenever they come to Israel for a vacation, we try to arrange a visiting day for them. One Aviv member visited projects on her three most recent visits to Israel; she doesn't need any more motivation because she's seen what WIZO is."

"The Aviv seminars are also crucial – we approach our young women individually and tell them it's an honour – a special opportunity for leadership training and experiencing WIZO. We see tangible results after they return."

Another thing Diana emphasizes to potential new members is that WIZO means opportunity – and that opportunity exists beyond supporting social welfare projects in Israel. "Germany is a member of the European Council of WIZO Federations [ECWF] – the German delegate is a delegate to the European Women's Lobby for all of Europe. Being involved in lobby work is a good way to involve the younger ones – appealing to their political sides. We send members to meetings at local, national and international women's organisations – Jewish and non-Jewish."

Looking forward

Within the emerging and fast growing community of Jews in Germany, Diana along with all WIZO Germany chaverot have big dreams about what future role WIZO will play in Germany.

"For me," says Diana, "the sky is the limit. I'd like to see every Jewish woman in Germany a passionate WIZO supporter, proud to be part of this extraordinary international organization, committed and to show her solidarity with Israeli society."

Beit Heuss, a centre for support workshops for all elements of Israeli society, WIZO Germany's flagship project in Herzlia Pituach



and a delicious buffet prepared by Jewish community chef Avi Hovav. Lottery tickets for a chance to win a number of wonderful prizes sold out quickly. In addition to being great fun, the event emphasized the importance of providing bonding time for Finnish Jewish ladies of all ages.



Young WIZO members Avital and Galith Nadbornik and Ita Wolff

FRANCE

Opera the WIZO France Way

WIZO France held a music and humour evening with David Serero, the famous French baritone, who treated all to a wonderful opera evening in the "WIZO France Way" – with plenty of joy and laughter.



David Serero opera event flier

Book Fair

WIZO France organised their 60th Book Fair at the magnificent halls of the 3rd arrondissement Hôtel de Ville (Municipality) in Paris. Large numbers of curious visitors and an impressive group of 80 writers who had recently published books attended. The event also included a special writing workshop for children, led by WIZO members.

International Women's Day

On International Women's Day, WIZO France organised an event on 'Women and the Sciences, a Look at France and Israel.' A large audience of 300 men and women filled the amphitheatre at the French Parliament, which showcased Israeli innovations in the sciences, as well as offered WIZO France the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to women's advancement.

Movie Première

With everyone talking about the latest movie by internationally-known director Claude Lelouch, *Salaud, On T'aime*, WIZO France was delighted to receive an invitation from the esteemed director to the film première. Together with the actresses who appear in the film and Lelouch, the chaverot enjoyed a special evening of happiness and friendship. Agnès Soral moved everyone to laughter and captured hearts. WIZO France especially thanks Nadine Feingold and the Events Committee who worked so hard to organise this activity, as well as many others.



(l to r) Actress Agnès Soral, Suzy Sayag, Actress Sylvia Cazan, WIZO France President Joelle Lezmi, Claude Lelouch, Nadine Feingold, Sonia Cohen-Scali

GERMANY

WIZO Cologne's Ball

The traditional WIZO Ball in Cologne took place at a very 'cool location' in the heart of the city. With Andrea Kiewel, a very popular television moderator, entertaining the guests throughout the evening, the sold-out event saw 230 impeccably dressed ladies and gentlemen dancing until late into the night. Orly Licht, a member of WIZO Germany Executive, spoke about WIZO's goals and the federation's solidarity with Israel. Entertainment was provided by the band ORIGINALS from Brussels and the local Jewish community's cantor, who stunned everyone with his performance. With top-notch giveaways provided by a very well-known jeweller, the evening was a remarkable financial success and saw many guests commit to sponsorships.



The invitation to the Cologne WIZO Ball

WIZO Germany's Biggest Bazaar

WIZO Germany's annual bazaar, which took place at the Frankfurt Jewish Community Centre, was visited by over 5000 shoppers. After opening remarks from WIZO Germany Honorary Secretary Nicole Faktor and Frankfurt's mayor, the 'Big Bazaar' officially opened. With over 12000 pieces of new and second hand clothing for sale, 2500 raffle prizes, 1000 pieces on offer in the flea market, this year's bazaar lived up to previous years as a local highlight. In the evening, Young WIZO's cocktail bar – which included delicious drinks and music from a popular DJ – created a wonderful atmosphere. As the second day of the Bazaar happened to be a nationwide "Mitzvah Day," elderly residents of the Jewish Old Age Home were brought to join the festivities, where they were treated with coffee and cake. As with previous years, proceeds went to the benefit of Beit Heuss in Herzliya.



Shoppers gathered at the WIZO Frankfurt Bazaar

Afternoon Fashion Tea

WIZO Frankfurt hosted a classy afternoon of both fashion and English tea-time, held in cooperation with a five-star hotel and designer label Escada. While the luxury hotel

provided the premises and delicacies, Escada contributed spring fashion items. In her remarks, WIZO Germany President Diana Schnabel pointed out that WIZO once again proved that it can bring people together, with Jewish and non-Jewish women enjoying tea and discussing fashion. She added that WIZO is an international organisation and she hopes that the younger generation of WIZO women perceives themselves as part of this great adventure. Proceeds were dedicated to the Marie Sternberg Day Care Centre in Bat Yam.



Glamorous models presenting ESCADA fashion

Fall Market Hannover

For the fourth time WIZO Hannover hosted its popular Fall Market at the Liberal Jewish Community in Hannover. The visitors indulged in the goods on sale at various booths, including Israeli food and wine, salad, soups, drinks and books. The market's most popular booth sold Israeli jewellery, craftwork, games, candleholders and many other beautiful items. Visitors also had the option of touring the synagogue and the library – which is always a big attraction for WIZO's non-Jewish friends and the citizens of Hannover. Musical entertainment was provided by a piano player, a violinist and two young singers. The event organisers and volunteers saw their hard work pay off when the event's total revenue was announced, which increased considerably since last year and will support WIZO Germany's flagship project Beit Heuss in Herzliya.