



# How to run a diplomatic club IN TIMES OF CORONA....

by Anjana Das-Hasper

How to plan a schedule of activities for the coming club year when the future of the usual club format is uncertain, due to the ongoing pandemic?

The Executive Board of “Willkommen in Berlin” used the last few months for introspection and consulted with WiB members to assess how the club will emerge from the Corona crisis. What shape and form can a meaningful club life have when physical proximity and larger meetings are not possible? One factor has, definitely, helped the club so far: many WiB members - both from the diplomatic community as well as Berliners – lead highly mobile lives and are used to weathering uncertainties, new beginnings and to developing resilience in the face of difficulty.

From March onwards, WiB group leaders took the challenge of contact restrictions head-on and started devising new formats for group meetings. It was, definitely, a phase of experimentation, everyone had to be creative and find solutions for the new circumstances.

Some groups had “Zoom” meetings instead of physical events. Webinars were held – e.g. a virtual talk about the architecture of I.M.Pei. Another group sent out a list of places for a self-guided tour through the neighbourhood of Charlottenburg. Once the restrictions were somewhat lifted, a few outdoor group walks and guided tours took place – of course, always respecting Corona hygiene rules and codes of conduct.

During the summer break, members of the Executive Board held a number of informal meetings in a small setting for newly arrived diplomats. These meetings allowed for personal introductions to be made, a first glimpse of the club and its activities for the newly arrived and an opportunity to voice some questions about Berlin life.

What lessons were learned after the last few months? How does WiB see itself operating in the coming year?

Many members expressed a wish to conduct face to face meetings and not only virtual conferences. Here, one way forward can be smaller meetings with fewer participants in order to provide opportunities for personal contact and still follow all safety guidelines which are prescribed by the Berlin senate. The groups which can operate outside should plan walks and guided tours as long as the weather allows for it. The Executive Board, after much deliberation and consultation with members, has decided to hold special events outdoors in order to somewhat increase the possible number of participants. For all these formats the club will abide by the rules of the “Auswärtiges Amt”.

However, for a club of more than 300 members a number of digital events will also have to be offered in order to enable everyone to take part in some form of club life. This requires a keen commitment of the organizers and group leaders to inspire the same kind of interest and engagement as in person club events. We are optimistic that WiB will manage to have an interesting calendar of events, despite the challenges that, surely, lie ahead.

**ANJANA  
DAS-HASPER**

is member of the WiB  
Executive Board and  
responsible für press