



by Luis Manuel Pinto

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A symposium with many names

► Before any name

As European Coordinator of the European Peer Training Organisation (EPTO), I was invited to take part in a symposium that would lay the guidelines for building a European youth campaign.

Ten years ago, when the first “All Different, All Equal” Campaign was gaining shape, also EPTO was taking its first steps: a first training of peer trainers in using an educational programme to combat all forms of discrimination. Ten years passed and EPTO grew as an organisation, the same way as the motto “All Different, All Equal” grew in people’s minds and hearts. Today, EPTO gathers teams of volunteer peer trainers leading interactive discussions about issues of prejudice and social exclusion in many European countries. This symposium was for EPTO, as well as many other youth organisations, an opportunity to join efforts on a common mission in what would be a new European youth campaign for diversity, human rights and participation.

► A symposium with many names

A “Yes” was declared by the Council of Europe’s Youth Summit in Warsaw in May 2005. The European Youth Forum was committed and the European Commission was willing. The institutional planets were aligned to support a youth campaign promoting diversity, inclusion and participation in society. The iron to build a campaign was hot. Ideas were needed to shape and give form to this new “All Different, All Equal” European Youth Campaign. That was the goal of the symposium that took place at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg, 26-30 October 2005 which celebrated the 10th anniversary of the previous campaign and developed thinking about the next campaign. A meeting point of people and experiences carrying the legacy of the past, analysing the present situation and thinking together

about how a new campaign could change the future. Many “children” of the 1995 campaign were present to tell their stories about how the previous campaign changed their future. To tell adventures of movements of people and hearts that initiated what are today some of the most impressive projects confronting racism, xenophobia and intolerance. Each story was a living proof of the campaign’s success in rallying people for a cause. Each story a celebration of 10



years of commitment to making a fairer society; testimonials of surprises, fears, fights and rewards. The symposium was therefore a meeting point, between the past and the future, between different generations of engaged youth workers and young people. A meeting point of different experiences, similar ideals. The symposium came at a point where people had different ideas about what such a symposium or such a campaign should highlight. That is maybe why it is a symposium with many names: “The struggle goes on...”, “All different, not indifferent”, “All

Different, All Equal”, “Committed to make a difference”...

► The struggle went on!

“The struggle goes on...” is the title of the compilation and proposals coming from the working groups. Also in the same document, the description of two highlights from the news during the symposium’s first days: “26 October 2005: A fire in a detention centre at Schipol airport, Amsterdam, kills eleven asylum seekers.” “27 October 2005: Fear, frustration and urban violence spreads in the French suburbs after the death of two young boys hiding from the police.” It was a struggle because equality in dignity is not a given in the societies into which we are born. It was a struggle because at the same



time as 120 participants from 41 countries were working to define a campaign for human rights, a contrary movement of violence and oppression was being expressed elsewhere in Europe. It was a struggle and it must go on because 10 years after the first “All Different, All Equal” campaign, there were still enough motivations and enough motivated people for another campaign.

► All different, not indifferent

Maybe the people participating were the reason why the symposium was at some point also called “All different, not indifferent”. There was a particular phenomenon about that symposium, repeated in the more recent “Diversity Youth Forum” symposium in Budapest, which made it special.

There were working groups analysing and exchanging perceptions about the realities of racism, anti-Semitism, romaphobia/anti-gypsism, islamophobia, homophobia, xenophobia, disablism, nationalism and fascism, globalisation and terrorism. As pointed out by the working groups, the choice of such themes for discussion on one hand represents a particularity of what were the concerns 10 years before, when the first campaign took place: reinforcing the difference, erasing the similarity of the other. Expressions of discrimination based on grounds of identity and belonging which could then be aggravated by social movements such as globalisation or expressions of violence such as terrorism. For many participants it was a difficult choice to make since the topics were entwined and affect each other mutually, but this was also the basis of very intense discussions.

Such a diverse range of topics attracted the interest of an equally diverse group of people: People that came from very

different contexts: People between whom the daily social contact would not go deeper than giving up their bus seat or saying ‘good morning’ when passing someone on the stairs. For the participants, the symposium also became an exercise of participation where identities from the whole spectrum of human diversity were gathered in the same space, sharing the belief that a better world is possible; and they were (also) the ones to do something about it. More than coexisting, the curiosity of discovering the other and seeing oneself in the other, drew the people present to realize that it is possible to live together and appreciate the differences.

► All Different, All Equal

After discussing and analysing the different realities that threaten equality in Europe, participants were then regrouped in different working groups. This time to design what could be the campaign’s shape and focus. How would the national campaign committees function? What kind of activities would there be? European? National? Local? What should be the educational approaches? Who do we want to reach?

The “Production Units”, as they were called, made many still remember the event as the “all different, all equal” symposium. All different as to their individuality and motivation, their potential, but I would dare to say all equal in the value of their contribution. All equal in the opportunity they had to participate in deciding how this campaign would take shape. The symposium became a “social laboratory” or a “safe haven” that proves that IT IS possible, that diversity works (as said by a working group on a more recent symposium) and that different people can be united for the same purpose, in this case, building a youth campaign.

► Committed to make a difference

After the production units ended on the last day, the energy in the plenary room was high. Fireworks of ideas being presented in short amounts of time, giving a glimpse of what had been a hard working day of discussions and planning. There was a general feeling of achievement for the work of the previous days and an enthusiasm for the future days of the campaign.

“Committed to make a difference” is the tag line of the official report of the symposium. Many will remember this commitment very strongly, as it was visible in the participants’ reactions to the last day’s closing session. After the speaker’s intervention, some statements indicated that there should be priority themes for this campaign, ironically enough one of the other names of this symposium: “Racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance and their impact on young people today”. It was beautiful to see the energy that was generated in the plenary room where many people felt such statements as a contradiction to the outcomes of the symposium. Four days of work defining that this would be a campaign for diversity, human rights and participation, with no priorities between causes, were not being reflected in such statements. The importance of this moment was not the contradiction between discourses, but a plenary room filled with different people being united by a message of non-conformism. A message against all attempts to destroy bridges between human beings using this campaign as a common voice.

► Diversity, Human Rights, and Participation

But what makes diversity Work, when in so many other cases it doesn’t? Will a campaign about everything end up being about nothing? What was the “gluing factor” of this event and maybe of this campaign? The previous campaign had “common enemies”. It was a campaign against racism, against

anti-Semitism, against intolerance. It was clear what the campaign needed to tackle because it was in some way easier to recognise racism or anti-Semitism: if we would see it we had to make it disappear, somehow. This time the choice was to have a campaign that was actually trying to make something appear: To create the conditions for diversity, human rights and participation to appear in our societies. But when it appears, will we be able to recognize it? Is this an achievable goal? These were some of the questions being put by participants in the plenary room or working groups, and mostly in the informal spaces. There were no answers at the time. Many questions, though.

I realize now the integration of the themes of this campaign: participation of everyone in diversity can only be achieved if there is a shared belief in human rights. Equal human dignity is the value behind this movement of the campaign and also the goal. Making values become realities. Making values become practiced values. Human Rights is therefore the “glue” that sticks diversity and participation together, like a “holy trinity” for inclusion.

And how about participation? Looking back to when the symposium took place and watching how many national campaign committees are blocked by institutional bureaucracy; how some social groups are excluded from national activities and how so many people are still lost as to the way they could get involved, one could think that the fears expressed in the symposium’s coffee breaks did come true. But then, I look at the way other national campaign committees involved a wide range of youth movements and transformed the message of the campaign in such creative ways. I see smaller initiatives bringing the logo and the message to the streets; bringing it back to peoples’ discourses. I live working diversity once more in other events for the campaign and I understand that the particular beauty of this campaign is the freedom of transforming it and making it yours. So I ask, should the title of the symposium be for you “All different, still indifferent?”

Contact :

luis.pinto@epto.org

