

# Welcome to COYOTE 0

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## TRAINER'S REALITIES Aliens on the Balkans

**Trainer?!!**  
**What on earth is that!**  
*by Lucija Popovska*

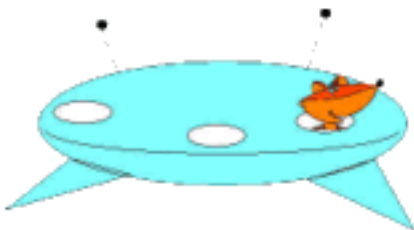
- What do you do?
- I am a trainer.
- A trainer?!?! What on earth is that! You don't look exactly sporty, excuse me for saying...

A transcript of a very typical conversation, practically a daily conversation, whenever I get asked about my job. Apart from the non-diplomatic referring to my... well, rounded figure, it also refers to a state of almost complete ignorance about the line of work that "a few good people" and myself are conducting on the sunny side of the Balkans. In an era of private businessmen and "gray" trade specialists, it does make one feel like an alien from time to time...

"Over the last decade in development circles a common view has taken shape which perceives the question of development in terms of launching a training process. The key terms in this are the adaptation and transfer of technology, and its assimilation and application by the target population concerned...

In our view, development can not proceed if individuals, however confident and well-motivated, lack either the knowledge or the appropriate skills and attitudes needed to do their jobs better, and subsequently to serve as multipliers in the development process...

The chief objective for an organisation carrying out a programme of integrated staff training is to ensure the best utilisation of existing human resources..." (Training, Management for Development Foundations, Netherlands, 1999)



**Training**, the key word in the fragments and the title of the above quoted article. And the one who prepares and delivers it, **the trainer**... Would anyone care to know about this?

Living in the Balkans at this time (perhaps at any time?) is a challenge in itself. And a big one. Long-term thinking and sustainable strategies are imaginary terms or a luxury in general, just as peace and good-will are in some parts of this region. Therefore the minds are focused on very short-term, pragmatic goals. Life, money, safety...

Still, somewhere in that circle, there are people who struggle for more than bare existence, bare life. Those who speak a strange language, the language of civilisation, and mention words such as: civil society, human rights, equal participation, sustainability, development, integration.... And transfer of know-how. Learning how to do it. Those have a very difficult but certainly challenging task.

The first thing a trainer, or to generalise, a promoter of the idea of development (of society) has to face and to struggle to overcome in an "exotic" country in this region, is the set-up of people's minds. The long years of communist brain discipline have left a heavy burden to lift - the centralisation of the system in people's minds. The expectation that "someone" should take care of the problems. The state, the government, God, Lenin, Tito... whoever but me, I mean, why me?

This is perhaps the most demanding barrier, the highest mountain to climb. Convincing people to ACT, to take responsibility, to care and to express care and concern, to PARTICIPATE. For development without true participation is as impossible as constructing a perpetual mobile. And as ridiculous.

The barriers that follow are maybe less abstract to grasp but nevertheless challenging. The resistance to ideas and practices "imported from the West" (we like the design of their cigarettes and shoes, but do not let them sell us brains!), the typical inertia of the Balkans (what you can leave to be done until tomorrow, never bother with doing today...), the fear of the unknown (do we really need this?!)... An endless list of smaller or bigger obstacles.

One of the biggest challenges is the multicultural reality that all of us in this region (in this world?) face, burdened excessively with the inter-ethnic and, sometimes, inter-religious tensions. Delivering a training course on health education for women or organising a youth event to raise awareness about AIDS could turn one not only into an alien, but in an outcast in some areas of the country. The valuable experience gathered in the Council of Europe's trainings or in some of the excellent Western European training institutions often confronts a wall of fear, resistance and even hostility. Overcoming this wall demands not only a vast expertise and knowledge on the subject itself but also an armful of good facilitation, negotiation and communication skills and techniques.

To win people's trust and relate to their potentials and capacities for self-development often turn out to be the key instruments. And to be able not only to level with one's participants but also to enter fully their reality and cultural identity. One develops many of these skills intuitively and on the spot. The capacity to adjust, and this quickly, becomes essential in a trainer's daily life in the Balkans.

Therefore, a person who is determined to do his or her job, to train people, to transfer knowledge, skills and attitudes, to assist the development process and promote certain ideas, values and beliefs has to prepare him- or herself for a very long journey. For this is what it is. A journey through areas that have never been explored before. As some of the South American and some of the Balkans' forests.

Loads of patience, good-will, positive energy and empathy along with very few days off, lots of circling around before getting to the job, negotiation, convincing... and some good results once in a while, comprise the regular life of the professionals in development. Still there are results in the end, and they even start to show...

**Being an alien in the Balkans these days is not such a bad thing after all. Perhaps not much worse than being an alien anywhere on this little, green, silly planet that, for some reason keeps spinning around the sun and makes us all search for our little place on it...**