

My Journey to the Planet of Training

(on which the way itself became the objective)

International groups have fascinated me ever since I was first part of one. It was in 1990 that I had my first experience at a huge ecumenical meeting for young people in Prague. I found these groups very interesting and easy environments, because they allowed me for the first time to be different.

Back home, in my native Transylvania, there was little room to be different. But I (as many others in Transylvania, who were coming from an ethnically mixed background) was difficult to classify. My family is Hungarian and Romanian. In the middle of a heated nationalistic discourse, there was strong pressure to declare myself either part of one group and, as such, the enemy of the other, or vice versa. Those who didn't declare their belonging, were suspect, strange and finally caught in the middle. By contrast, I felt, the international group in accepting that I might be different, was allowing me to belong, if even just for the length of an activity.

After my first international meeting, I was so enthusiastic, that I immediately became an organiser for international and local ecumenical meetings myself. It was also not by chance that I became a youth activist within the framework of the newly established Romanian Youth Action for Peace branch: it was the only youth organisation there and then, which intended to work on bringing together Romanian and Hungarian youth. The result: most of the activists of my generation were from mixed families.

The first experiences I had with training were also in international activities. They have also invariably been strong emotional experiences. Never before had anybody asked me how did I feel or what did I think about an exercise. The first time I was asked, I was truly shocked. Then I was amazed, because this sort of education produced very strong results, gave me food for thought for weeks to come. And then, I was curious and enthusiastic, wanting to bring to other people the "Aha" experience I had gone through, and to ask them what they were thinking and feeling.

My youth organisation, back home was an ideal field to experiment. Being such a young branch, there was almost no hierarchy, nor very strong rules. Those of us who were active could initiate almost any sort of project, and if we managed to find the means, we would carry them out. We organised training events for youth from other youth organisations, we visited high schools and organised intercultural round tables. We talked about racism,

nationalism and ethnic hatred, and about why we believe what we believe and how does this make us feel.

Clearly the more training I was running, the more activities I was organising, the more I felt the necessity to get training myself. I started going to training courses, most of them organised by the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe. The training courses gave me self-confidence to continue and try to develop my own approaches.

After I moved to Germany a couple of years ago, I started to work mainly with international groups. Moving to Germany was a big step into the unknown. I felt so strange and isolated at the beginning, that going to an international activity gave me the feeling of going home, even if I hardly knew anybody there.

I volunteered to be on the team of several Youth Action for Peace activities. In the teams I worked with, most of the time I was working with people with much more experience than I had. I learned a lot from them. Training is something which can't be learned from books. I discovered that experience is very important, but does not prepare you for everything. Sometimes a fresh perspective on a topic takes you further.

I also took up the chance to work on training courses of the Council of Europe. That is indeed an opportunity to meet so many different people and get acquainted to training concepts and traditions developed in a big variety of organisations. Talking with so many people from various backgrounds, I discovered a lot about myself, my values and priorities.

Meanwhile I have worked with many different groups. Each time, I find it challenging and very often I feel the same strong emotional experiences which I had the first time. I also experience that the exchange with the participants is a continuous source of learning.

I no longer think that international groups are easier. If you try to develop really deep communication, there are cultural barriers, language barriers and barriers in the minds of the people to deal with.

And I am still fascinated by the international groups.

Contact address: nora_ganescu@hotmail.com

by Nora Ganescu

