

Impressions from the Training Courses

As we saw in the last issue of Coyote, SALTO-YOUTH is shorthand for Support for Advanced Learning & Training Opportunities for the YOUTH programme of the European Commission. In September 2000, four SALTO-YOUTH centres were created – within the YOUTH National Agencies of Flanders-Belgium, France, Germany and the U.K. – to increase the quality of projects developed within the YOUTH programme, through the organisation of specialised training courses and the coordination of different training efforts within the network of the National Agencies.



This year, each SALTO-YOUTH centre ran their first two training courses, both with the same objectives and the same focus. In 2002, the SALTO-YOUTH centres will organise another series of specialised training courses. Coyote has collected some impressions from trainers and participants of this year's SALTO training courses.

SALTO Training Course on “Inclusion – A Focus on European Voluntary Service”

organised by SALTO-JINT (Flanders, Belgium)

When starting to work on the SALTO Training Course on Inclusion, we bumped into some conceptual discussions which I would like to share with you. Behind this title lay the idea of a training course which aimed to increase the use of the YOUTH programme as a tool in youth or social work with ‘disadvantaged’ young people.

The first trap which we tried to avoid was defining what is ‘disadvantaged’ and what not, because it depends pretty much on the social reality a person is living in. We chose to work with a flexible notion of the target group, raising the awareness that an unemployed person, a wheelchair user or a cultural minority can be considered disadvantaged in one context (country, age, sex, place of residence, etc.) but not necessarily in a different one. Hence the need for clarifying the different views before starting up an international project with this target group.

Not only the definition of the target group provided food for discussion, but also the term used to describe it. Whereas some time ago it was fashionable to speak about ‘disadvantaged youth’, nowadays it is considered to be politically incorrect. It is some of the young people themselves that refused to be labelled this way because they feel it stigmatises them and could make people think there is something wrong with them. However it is not the young people that are at issue, but the lacking social reality surrounding them (poverty, discrimination, etc.) or society that marginalizes these young people in difficulty. To stress that the environment is at stake rather than the young people, we used more politically correct terms such as ‘socially excluded’ young people or young people ‘from disadvantaged backgrounds’ or ‘with less opportunities’.

When drawing up the profile of participants for this training course, we thought of two groups: youth workers who are working with marginalized young people and would like to use the YOUTH programme in their work on the one hand and, on the other hand, youth leaders who are using the YOUTH programme and wish to open up their activities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Since the team of trainers was convinced that it requires a lot of sensitivity, effort and resources to work with this target group in difficulty, we thought it might be risky to push a ‘generalist’ youth organisation to cater for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds if they are not ready for it and fully realise the implications. On the other hand, inclusion workers might be too stuck in their day-to-day work to take the step to an international exchange programme. Our conclusion was to cater for both: Raising awareness and providing skills for the work with young people in need (helped by the experienced participants in this field) for organisations willing to integrate some participants from this target group in their international activities. For the inclusion workers we tried to unveil all the operational secrets of the YOUTH programme (together with some good practice of other participants) and to promote it as a tool in the pathway of a young person. The YOUTH programme is not an aim in itself but an opportunity to seize in the long-term development of the young people when they are ready for it.

If you are interested to find out more, you can contact Tony Geudens at:

SALTO-YOUTH @ Jint, Flanders-Belgium



by Tony Geudens
(course coordinator and member
of the training team)



SALTO Training Course on “Project Management and Capacity-Building at the European Level”

organised by SALTO-Connect Youth International (U.K.)

by Sylvie Floris (training course participant)

I was lucky enough to be able to take part in the first SALTO training course held in West Sussex, England, from 21 to 29 April 2001. The aims were as follows:

- ✓ To highlight the crucial role of project management in youth programme activities;
- ✓ To learn to devise a project on the basis of the SMART method – i.e., building projects which are Specific, Measurable, Accepted, Realistic, and with Timetabled planning;
- ✓ To master the various stages of a project, manage the interpersonal and financial aspects, take account of risk, and evaluate projects;
- ✓ To pool participants' experiences.

The course was intended to help trainees improve their methods, knowledge and skills in order to set up European projects under the Youth Programme and then pass on to others what they learnt on the training course.

I was one of 24 trainees gathered at Dunford House, a historic, convivial place which contributed much to the quality of the course. The participants came from 16 European countries, 6 of which are already members of the European Union and 10 of which are applicants for membership.

So much ground was covered during the week, both during our formal work and in our exchanges with the other participants, that I cannot relate everything for fear of boring the reader. So I would prefer to concentrate here on one of the most striking aspects of the course, namely a method and, in particular, “Learning by doing and doing by learning”.

The two key events in the week's proceedings took place on the first day after our arrival and on the seventh day.

This meant that they were particularly well-timed because the first day, which was given over to a series of team-building, task-completion and decision-making exercises, enabled us to identify all our shortcomings in project management, while the seventh day enabled us to assess and test what we had learnt in a complete one-day project-staging simulation exercise.

On the first day, everything was centred on a full-scale role-playing game entitled the “Dunford Fling”. The aim was to save Dunford House and the surrounding countryside from an imaginary environmental threat by gathering material and constructing a kind of infernal contraption designed to fling a detector into the nearby marshes to analyse the toxic gases they might contain. We were given a series of tasks to be done within certain time limits and a number of responsibilities which we were to distribute among ourselves. And it was in this way, working partly outside (and frequently in the rain!), that all the participants got to know one another. We worked in small teams which were rearranged several times and there were quarrels, frequent misunderstandings and much laughter

but we also learnt a great deal. About what? Well, mostly about our own failings. The outcome was rather pessimistic for all these youth professionals who thought they knew at least a little about how to manage a project, even though we did finally get our infernal contraption working. It was on the basis of this first day that the organisers set the course priorities with the participants. Three intense days of theory and workshops followed, along with a visit to London centring on the key factors in project management of risk management and security.

In the Bible the seventh day was a day of rest, but this was not the case at Dunford House, for it was on that day that we were expected to carry out a simulated “mission impossible”, namely to set up youth exchanges in one day without actually meeting our partners; we were only allowed to use mail to communicate. I am sure you can imagine the panic as we had to choose the theme, prepare the Gantt Chart breaking down the project into stages and planning tasks from conception through to evaluation, organise a preparatory visit, calculate budgets, draw up application forms, arrange contacts with parents, etc, all of this accompanied by numerous gaffes, errors, and misunderstandings in the written exchanges between the coordinating team and the partners. It was panic stations all round even among the programme experts, and we were exhausted by the end of the day, but we rose to the challenge.

This was an extremely worthwhile exercise because it tested what we had learnt, revealed all our weaknesses, impatience, failings, energy and lethargy, and was, in short, a demanding but highly informative case of being put on the spot. The organisers acted as couriers between the teams and, at the end of the day, as assessors of the projects submitted. Their analyses and their advice completed this process of learning in a virtual real-life situation. However stressful it was for everyone, participants and organisers included, I would also like to say how useful this exercise was in terms of revealing potential future partnerships, because we were putting each other to the test and we soon found out which of our foreign colleagues we would like to work with again on our return from this outstanding week away.

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SALTO Training Course on “European Voluntary Service in and with Pre-Accession Countries”

organised by SALTO-JUGEND für Europa (Germany)

“EVS in and with pre-accession countries – all different, all the same”?

by Peter Hofmann (member of the training team)

This SALTO training course aimed to support the implementation of EVS in the pre-accession countries. The participants were youth leaders and youth workers involved in EVS, mostly as hosting or sending organisations; about two thirds came from pre-accession countries, one third from EU countries. The course aimed to make them acquainted with the philosophy, quality standards and technical aspects of EVS, and to prepare them to identify and develop specific information, promotion or training activities after the training, and to support the implementation of EVS in their own countries. One main aspect of the training was to create a process of communication among participants from pre-accession and EU countries about their views on differences and similarities concerning voluntary service in each of their countries.

Training course II, day 7, around midnight, in the trainers' team room. What started off this evening as a short meeting, just to run through the programme of the next and last day of the training once more, ended in a lengthy theoretical discussion on: What should participants from pre-accession countries ideally learn and take with them from this training course? A discussion marked by a high degree of fatigue and hence misunderstandings among the team members and by the feeling that this topic had popped up already in one way or the other in several – too long – nightly team meetings before. Our evaluation of the training course did not only allow us to resolve some atmospheric disturbances from these discussions but also to reflect upon the origin and background of these discussions and come up with some thoughts which we found interesting and relevant enough to share with you.

We started our evaluation by asking ourselves one question: What is the specificity of running the EVS Programme in the pre-accession countries in comparison to the EU countries? We soon agreed that the term “pre-accession countries” is a purely technical one which does not lend any relevance to the actual training programme. The only real similarity between Malta and Estonia, for instance, is their status towards the EU – apart from that they do not have anything in common which would justify seeing them through the same lenses.

Consequently, we asked ourselves the next question: Is there any specificity of running EVS in Estonia, Latvia, ... and Malta? Well, we think Yes, considering that a programme such as EVS cannot be implemented in a vacuum, but has to be seen in relation to the political preconditions of voluntary work as well as youth work in the respective countries. Relevant questions are for instance: How does EVS link in with other existing national programmes or policies in the youth field? What is the political aim behind the implementation of EVS? What kinds of young people participate in EVS in a given country, for what reasons, and what consequences does this have in terms of the effects of the EVS programme for the development of this country?

When designing the programme, we thought that since we were training youth workers and youth leaders who should take an active role in the implementation of EVS in their countries, they should be



aware of these questions and come up with some answers to them during the training. But what kind of answers?

Partially for lack of time, but maybe also for lack of awareness, we did not discuss these questions within the trainers' team during the whole preparation phase. We did not exchange our views and thoughts about the policy level of EVS and about the potential of such a programme to develop the voluntary sector generally or the youth work field in particular in Poland, Hungary, Cyprus, etc. We did not discuss among ourselves, if there are specific aims concerning the implementation of EVS in these countries ... but only during the training courses, when we were somehow stuck with programme parts which referred to those questions or when we were unsatisfied with answers or conclusions that the participants – or the training team – could define at the end of a session. Only then did we start to discuss the topic ourselves. A rather late and inefficient occasion, at nightly team meetings after long training days.

Additionally, we complicated our discussion with the more methodological question: How far can you “lead” participants to come up with certain learning outcomes or understandings? Is everything OK which participants come up with during an exercise or discussion? Or rather, when do you as a trainer need to provide, or suggest, certain conclusions? We found that the answers to these questions depend to a large extent on the trainers' understanding of training and on their involvement in the topic at stake. One colleague in the team, for instance, was more concerned about the level of political awareness that the participants should reach during the training than the other two trainers in the team, who focused more on the methodological aspects.

We concluded that it is vital to leave some time during the preparatory meeting to discuss the theoretical or political background of the topic of the training, to have an exchange within the trainers' team on everyone's understanding of the topic and to see, if there is any particular point that one wants to highlight during the course in terms of learning outcomes. This is particularly important, if you cooperate for the first time in a particular team composition and if you want to deal with policy-related issues with the participants during the training. Once you have discussed these questions within the team and become aware of your own open questions and disagreements, it is much easier to take them into account when designing the programme. Clearly, it is rather difficult and tiring when you start this discussion only during the training course. But it was a great learning experience for all of us!

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SALTO Training Course on “Euro-Med Cooperation”

organised by SALTO-INJEP (France)

by Giulio ‘Mac’ Maistrelli (member of the training team)

In theory there shouldn't be any link between the attacks in USA and the EuroMed Youth Action Programme. The first are acts of terrorism and the second is a programme which supports international youth activities between the countries of the EU-EFTA and the so-called “Mediterranean” countries. (The “Mediterranean Countries” referred to here are most of the Arab countries of the Maghreb and Mashreq regions, plus Malta, Turkey, Cyprus and Israel. For a complete list see the Users' Guide to the YOUTH Programme at

www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/youthprogram.html)

In practice it is a matter of fact that the concepts of ‘terrorism’, ‘Islam’ and ‘Arabic country’ are perceived as nearly synonyms by a vast part of the population in ‘Western countries’, and such perceptions are heavily affecting all the work within the framework of EuroMed. One example of this misconstruction (the most pertinent, but for sure not the scariest) could be the answer I got from two youngsters who declined an invitation to join an exchange project. They refused to participate because - in their opinion - there was “the risk to be attacked by Muslims and even be killed simply because of being Western people” (By the way: the project was in Ankara...).

However: the request of the Coyote editorial team was to tell about my feelings in being a trainer in the SALTO EuroMed training course, so I will stop to tell facts and I will begin to tell you how I feel now.

- **First of all I feel *disappointed*.**

I feel disappointed because all at once my work has assumed an enormous political “taste”, and I need time (and teamwork with my colleagues) to understand how and to which extent this fact could or should affect future training events. I feel disappointed because most people I know now perceive the normality of my job as something strange, maybe risky, possibly absurd. Even some of my relatives talk to me as if I were engaged in a mission of peace in a dangerous place.

- **Secondly, I feel *little*.**

I feel little these days, faced with the huge media mechanism around us. But I also felt “little” before, when I happened to speak about tolerance with participants who spent years in prison for political reasons, or who lost a relative or a friend in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- **Then I feel *lucky*.**

Because I have the chance to do something tangible for supporting young people in making up their OWN ideas about the civilisations “on the other side of the sea”.

- **And I feel *confident*.**

Because the experience of the past year taught me that the participants in these training courses are strongly motivated and they have plenty of resources and the will to act. But also because the stories I heard about former participants in EuroMed projects and their reactions to the 11th of September confirmed to me how much

an exchange can affect someone's perception.

- **And finally I feel *grateful*.**

Because the experience at SALTO-YOUTH INJEP has been one of the most intensive learning experiences for me in recent years. Thanks to all the colleagues and participants who made this possible.

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Where to find more information about SALTO-YOUTH and the YOUTH Programme?

For more details about the SALTO Training Courses 2001 and information about SALTO-YOUTH, have a look at Spiffy's Spots in this magazine.

In its last issue (Coyote #4, June 2001), Coyote reported about the training strategy of the European Commission and the tasks of the SALTO-YOUTH centres (articles by Frank Marx and Bernard Abrignani). To read the articles, visit Coyote at

www.training-youth.net.