

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE LONG-TERM TRAINING COURSE

‘DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS’

Greece, 11 to 18 November 2007

Aim and Objectives

The Long-Term Training Course (LTTC) on the theme of *‘Dialogue among Civilizations’*, held in Greece in November 2007, aimed at building on the long-term strategy agreed between the Greek National Agency (NA) for THE Youth in Action (YiA) Programme and the SALTO EuroMed Resource Centre, to further strengthen and expand the network of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) projects as well as to improve the quality of such projects. Previous events with the same objectives, such as the *EVS Odyssey in EuroMed Contact Making Seminars*, also organized by SALTO in cooperation with the Greek NA and in partnership with the NAs in Denmark and Norway, were part of this strategy. A culminating event, a conference to be hosted in Greece in November 2008, will bring together all the key actors who took part in these activities together with other invited EVS volunteers, to evaluate the outcomes of the strategy.

The objectives of this thematic LTTC, with a special focus on EVS, were to:

- explore the concept of cross-fertilized civilizations and define what makes the cultural identity of the EuroMed region;
- understand the challenges of dialogue among civilizations within the EuroMed Youth III Programme;
- get acquainted with the procedures of the new Youth in Action Programme and of the new EuroMed Youth III Programme and structures;
- gain competences and skills in managing networks and cooperation strategies;
- develop, organize, run and evaluate networking projects reinforcing dialogue among civilizations within the EuroMed Youth III Programme.

Participants

The LTTC, held at Náfplio (Naùplio) in the Peloponnese region, was attended by 22 participants (12 from 9 MEDA countries¹ and 10 from 7 EU Member States²), 3 trainers, the Head of SALTO EuroMed, an observer from the Turkish NA for YiA, and a rapporteur.

Majority of the participants had either been a volunteer or had previously attended other SALTO organized training events. Participants' expectations in attending the LTTC were to learn more about dialogue among civilizations within the framework of the Youth in Action, European Voluntary Service and the Euromed Youth Programmes; to gain new tools and skills in the field of non-formal education; to meet counterparts from other cultures and backgrounds; and to develop partnerships for future projects.

Programme

Prior to attending the LTTC, participants had been requested to submit a 'home work' to outline their reasons for applying, their expectations as well as what they thought they could contribute to, and share with, the other participants during the training; they were also asked to prepare inputs on their organizations and civilizations.

The 6-day LTTC programme included various presentations and inputs in plenary sessions to understand what was meant by civilization, its role in promoting dialogue and understanding among different cultures, followed by discussions and debriefing sessions within working groups, as well as activities and exercises to motivate interaction among participants, develop team work skills and promote networking and negotiating strategies.

The participants had the opportunity to promote the aims and activities of their NGO/youth organizations and to present a brief introduction to their civilizations and cultures. During the intercultural evening they displayed their national costumes, customs and shared their local food and drinks.

Information was also provided on the 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP) as well as on the Youth in Action (YiA) Programme, with a special focus on the following Actions: **2 – EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE (EVS); 3.1 – YOUTH IN THE WORLD/COOPERATION WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES OF THE EU; 4.3 – TRAINING AND NETWORKING OF THOSE ACTIVE IN YOUTH WORK AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS**, as well as on the priorities and administrative procedures of the EuroMed Youth III Programme.

To enhance discussions held on civilizations, and especially on the Greek civilization, a visit was organized to the site of *Epidaurus*, which used to be a sanctuary for the Greek god for healing, *Asclepios*. In addition, the site's museum which exhibited statues and bits and pieces of various temples and the amphitheatre of Epidaurus, with amazing acoustics and which could accommodate over 1000 people, were also visited.

¹ ALGERIA (1), EGYPT (1), ISRAEL (1), JORDAN (1), LEBANON (1), MOROCCO (1), PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY (1), TUNISIA (2) AND TURKEY (3)

² CYPRUS (2), CZECH REPUBLIC (1), FRANCE (2), GREECE (2), LATVIA (1), LITHUANIA (1), SPAIN (1)

'Architecture is the first expression of civilization' – Jacques Ferron

Free time in the historical town of Nàfplio and Greek food at a local restaurant raised participants' appreciation of the richness of the Greek civilization, even if at a very limited scale.

Each day started with a consecutive photo presentation session, with a suitable musical background, to remind participants of the activities undertaken the previous day. Energizers, led by various participants, at different stages of the programme, helped participants relax as well as interact.

At the end of each day, participants met in small 'reflection groups', with one of the trainers, to reflect on their learning curve, express their general feeling and seek clarification for what was not clear during the day's programme. *'It was the great moment of the training...'*; *'It was great to discuss everything...in order to continue in more efficient way'*. The trainers aimed at taking into consideration comments made and, where possible, at implementing them the following day.

Methodology

Various interactive methods were implemented throughout the LTTC to facilitate dialogue, interaction, peer learning and team work, negotiation, partner finding, project development and networking. The methods aimed also to encourage active participation and reflection by individual participants. Each activity was followed by a brief debriefing session. The activities were adapted to the participants' needs, on basis of the outcomes resulting from an analysis of the submitted home works.

Getting to know you – The first day, various ice-breaking activities (such as a ball game, human bingo, and 'say hello in your language') were organized to facilitate introduction of participants and group interaction. Short presentations on NGOs helped participants to start to know their counterparts. The intercultural evening was an interesting introduction to the theme of civilization and facilitated socializing within a friendly and relaxed environment.

Focus on civilization – During the first couple of days the focus was on providing an introduction to different civilizations. Participants had 20 minutes each to present their own civilization, and where possible, to identify similarities with others. Due to time restriction, presentations had to be organized in 4-rotating sessions of 4 presentations per session.

Following the presentations, discussion focused on a definition of civilization: ... culture, development, education, progress, community, nation, people, society, customs, way of life... There was some confusion in differentiating between *culture* and *civilization*. The following definitions were given by one of the participants, a lecturer in sociology:

Culture is *'a way of life for an entire society'*; it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, and norms of behaviour such as laws, morality and systems of belief. Culture is manifested in arts, music, literature, painting and sculpture.

Civilization prescribes ‘*a particular society at a particular time*’.

‘*Civilizations follow each other; they are born, they wane [develop, improve] and are replaced by others; but they never die out completely*’ – Philippe Beaussant

A video presentation on the *Viking Civilization in Greenland* was given as an example on how civilizations develop and then perish due to different factors. This was followed by an interactive group exercise to reflect on questions based on the 5 elements relevant to the presentation, to motivate thought and discussion on why civilizations do collapse and how the same issues do affect modern civilizations. This exercise was much appreciated by participants as “... an excellent method...” and “...a good technique which we can use for our own training”.

What is Dialogue – Following definitions were discussed and agreed:

Conversation: Communication between two or more people, often on a particular topic. It allows people, with different views on a specific theme, to learn from each other.

Dialogue: An exchange of ideas, views or opinions on a topic through the means of conversation between two or more people, with the purpose of reaching an agreement.

Negotiation: An interaction of influences – such interactions could include the process of resolving disputes, or agreeing upon a course of action, bargaining for individual or collective advantage, or reaching outcomes to satisfy various interests.

A game of cards (*Banga*) within 5 separate groups, based on specific rules given to each group and unknown to the others, helped to highlight the process leading to these definitions as well as address the barriers to communication due to language problems and customs.

Team Building and Networking Strategies – An interactive game (*Baguette*) gave participants the opportunity to undertake, within two teams, an outdoors activity which highlighted principles of dialogue and communication as well as working together and supporting each other within a team. Debriefing on the activity focused on strategies implemented by each team in their role as ‘attackers’ and ‘defenders’.

This was followed by a more intensive project (*Trip to Dictio*) within 4 groups (each group identified by a descriptive title: Waves; Bells; Drums; Horns). With the help of some basic materials provided by the trainers, each group had to build a boat with a torch, and a lighthouse for the final sailing session. The exercise involved an exchange of information among groups within two bilateral, and one multilateral, meetings involving one representative nominated by each group. The trainers acted as the communicators among the groups for the call for invitations to meetings. The objective of these encounters was to identify and negotiate an exchange of spare parts for the torches retained by some groups and needed by others. The eventual successful team efforts were celebrated with each group sailing their boats (each of a different shape!) in the hotel’s swimming pool, to the tune of a well-known song!

The learning process for this exercise was to identify strategies for the division of tasks within teams and teamwork as well as approaches to networking. The debriefing gave participants the opportunity to recognize the strong and weak points which were identified during their team work and to reflect on how they could have better made use of their strengths and avoid the weaknesses. The trainers' advice was to keep in mind the experiences gained as a result of the exercise for implementation during preparation and implementation of real projects.

Developing Networking Projects – To build on the learning points resulting from the various activities and exercises, as well as from the presentations on the two European Youth Programmes (YiA and Euromed Youth III), participants had to develop networking project proposals based on the Programmes' various activities: youth exchanges, seminars, study visits and voluntary service. After consultation and division into project teams, the selected themes were: * cultural activities; *promoting quality; * protection of the environment.

Partner groups were given time to work out the activities, technicalities and substance of their projects together with a time-table and to determine each partner's commitment. They had also the opportunity to start drafting their application forms for submission to a relevant NA (for projects to be hosted within an EU Member State or to an EMYU for those to be hosted in a MEDA partner country). When presenting their projects to the others, teams were asked to focus on the following points:

- ✓ WHAT? – title of the project
- ✓ WHO? – partners; applicant
- ✓ WHEN? – application deadline; project dates
- ✓ WHERE? – in applicant's host country

A table summarizing the three identified projects is attached as Annex I.

Evaluation

The participants' assessment of the LTTC programme was in general positive. For the majority, it had achieved their expectations. Those who had been unclear, at the start, on the aims of the LTTC, had been surprised to realize how much they had learnt from, and enjoyed, the experience. Some of the participants had felt that they had gained more than they had contributed. New skills had been learnt, new friends gained and partnerships developed. The team of trainers also confirmed that the learning process had been as important to them as to the participants. However, it was agreed that the real success of the training course would be measured on basis of the approval of the three projects and their implementation during phase II of the LTTC, the outcomes of which would be evaluated during phase III.

Phase I of the LTTC was closed with a video projection of a selection of the highlights of the week at Nàfplio.

'It was just perfect – so creative; we learnt through enjoying...'

Next Steps...

Information was provided on the forthcoming SALTO events, a full calendar of which will be available on the SALTO website. Participants were reminded that they would be invited to the conference on EVS to be hosted by the Greek NA in November 2008 and of their participation to the last phase of the LTTC to be hosted in Cyprus, from 8 to 14 December 2008.

Enc: Annex I

LTTC/GK/Dec 07