

SALTO-YOUTH
EASTERN EUROPE AND CAUCASUS
RESOURCE CENTRE



Youth policy in Russia

Itchy Kamchatka



The Danes saw it coming



Friendly Youthpass meets
the world of *Вини-Пух...*




SPECIAL ISSUE
RUSSIA
No 4

YOUTH IN

armenia azerbaijan belarus
moldova russia ukraine

The SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre

Support for Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO-YOUTH) network within the YOUTH programme was created by the European Commission in the year 2000.

SALTO supports quality development in European Youth in Action projects. It organises training courses and shares resources with European youth workers on different priority areas (geographic or thematic). The SALTO Network consists of **8 SALTO Resource Centres**, based within different National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme. More information can be found on  www.salto-youth.net

The SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre was established in Warsaw, Poland, in October 2003, on the basis of a European Commission decision.

The aims of the EECA Resource Centre are:

- To raise visibility and awareness of the Youth in Action Programme opportunities within the Eastern Europe and Caucasus region;
- To provide support and expertise to National Agencies of the Youth in Action Programme by contributing to events promoting cooperation with the EECA region;
- To promote International Cooperation with EECA Partner Countries;
- To support project organisers in the development of contacts, partnerships and projects.

SALTO EECA RC organises:

- **TRAINING EVENTS** with a focus on the development of skills, project management and building up an understanding of Youth in Action Programme Actions and non-formal education;
- **DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES** – contact making seminars and study visits aimed at building long-lasting partnerships between organisations from EECA and Programme countries;
- **INFORMATION ACTIVITIES** that enable organisations from EECA Partner Countries to have easy access to the Youth in Action Programme and promote cooperation with counterparts in Programme countries.

If you would like to be regularly informed about the activities of SALTO EECA RC as well as the latest developments in the field of non-formal education within the Region, you are invited to subscribe to the bimonthly NEWSLETTER on  www.salto-youth.net/newsletter.

In addition to everything mentioned above, SALTO EECA RC also provides access to:

- **“SALTO EECA Support Service”**  www.salto-eeca.eu, which is a dynamic and attractive information tool. It has been designed to simplify the process of finding a partner organisation and to strengthen communication among EVS volunteers and youth workers. Here you can find a Contact List for future partner organisations for International Cooperation within the Youth in Action Programme, a Forum and Assistance for Communication of EVS volunteers as well as youth workers!
- **Network of Multipliers** who have been trained by the Resource Centre. This is a network of people within the EECA region who are active and experienced in the promotion of the Youth in Action Programme. For further information visit  www.salto-youth.net/eecamultipliers.
- **EECA manual** – internet links to sources about Eastern Europe and Caucasus that might help you in the preparation of your projects. More information can be found on  www.salto-youth.net/eecamanual.
- Support resources for EVS Trainers and Youth Workers, with materials for future participants of youth activities from the EU going to the EECA region:  www.salto-youth.net/eecainfo.



Dear Readers!

We are happy to bring you the next issue of *Youth in 7* magazine!

This time, you have the opportunity to explore together with our authors the different aspects of youth work reality and Youth in Action Programme development in Eastern Europe and Caucasus (EECA). Each year brings something new and adds to the development of youth cooperation, including the potential of youth workers and youth organizations involved in this process. The “Youth in 7” magazine is aimed at monitoring and describing the latter.

Non-Formal Education in the World of Winnie the Pooh? ☺

The recognition of Non-Formal Education is a key priority of the Youth in Action Programme and the YouthPass is a very efficient tool that helps youngsters as well as youth workers reflect on what Non-Formal Education is about ... a task that is quite a big challenge and requires a lot of effort from all stakeholders involved. Even translating the phrase non-formal education into other languages is no easy matter. It is often translated as “out-of-formal education” where “non-formal education” means “informal” ... Are you already lost? :-) We invite you to tackle this interesting issue together with the SALTO EECA multipliers in EECA countries and the author Nerijus Kriauciunas, spokesman of people united by sentimental memories of the old Soviet cartoon hero-Winnie the Pooh. ☺

From Russia with Love

Something rings a bell? As you may recall, this was the title of one of the Agent 007 movies. At that time-i.e. the Cold War period-the word Russia was something very abstract and mysterious to people from the so-called Western World... The absence of people-to-people contacts shaped a lot of stereotypes and prejudices on both sides. Thank God, the Cold War has been swept away by the “Wind of Change” (remember the band called Scorpions?) and now young people from Russia and other countries have the opportunity to build contacts and partnerships, in part due to the Youth in Action Programme!

How do people perceive Russia today? What do we know about contemporary Russia? Let's reflect on this together!

We invite you to read the stories of the German EVS volunteer who did EVS work in the Kamchatka region and two EVS volunteers who discovered the Baikal region! Who knows where these two locations are? Even the famous James Bond never visited these parts of Russia, or at least it's not mentioned in his files! ☺



Russia celebrates the year 2009 as the Year of Youth. For this reason we encourage you to learn about the discussion on the Russian youth policy, a topic consisting of a wide spectrum of different elements (e.g. social, economic, etc.) and levels (e.g. federal, regional, and local), where some were discussed by experts on the pages of the “Youth in 7” magazine. The youth policy of Russia has been developing very dynamically over the past few years. The governmental and institutional approach was modified quite often: First the Ministry of Education was responsible for youth issues. In September 2007, the new State Committee on Youth Policy was created. Finally, the new Ministry of Sport, Tourism, and Youth Policy was established in May 2008. However, there is a stable and important youth policy actor involved in the development and implementation of youth policy in Russia since 1992-the National Youth Council of Russia. It is recognized by both the national state authorities and by international structures: Council of Europe, UN, and INGOs (European Youth Forum, World Assembly of Youth, etc.). The National Youth Council of Russia is a very important partner of the SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre in promoting and disseminating information among Russian youth organizations about the opportunities provided by international youth cooperation within the Youth in Action Programme.

Last but not at least, we are proud to present to you the youth exchange that was awarded “Best Youth in the World Project” during European Youth Week in 2008. This award is also especially important to us because the project was implemented thanks to the “Youth Work Reality in Russia” SALTO EECA study visit, which was held in 2007. It was due to this study visit that new regions of Russia such as Chuvashia and Tatarstan became involved in the Youth in Action Programme. We are very happy that the first youth exchange that took place in Chuvashia was also the first selected by the Danish National Agency as being the best among other projects, which were financed by the Danish NA, and then awarded by the European Commission as the best project of Action 3.1 from among all programme countries! Congratulations on such a good start! Keep it up!

And now we invite everyone to go on to the next pages and discover the amazing world of youth cooperation with Eastern Europe and Caucasus! Go ahead! ☺

SALTO EECA Team

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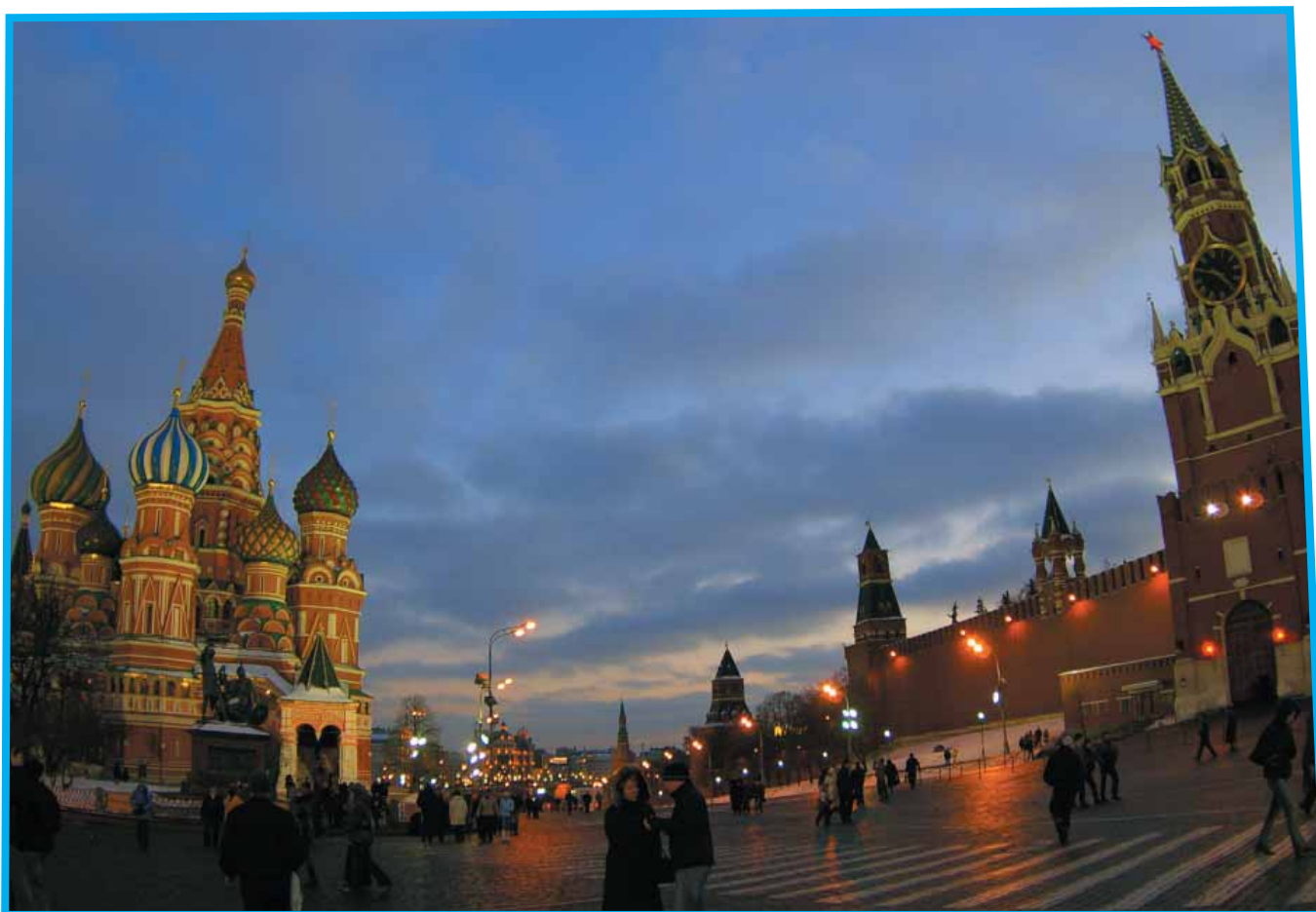
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Youth policy in Russia



BY Balbina Zygał

PHOTO: wikimedia commons




As Alan Whaites, a British political theorist, claims in one of his famous works entitled *Let's get civil society straight: NGOs and Political Theory* – “the state is seen as a precondition of civil society”. Elaborating on this thought, we could take one step further by asking what are the necessary conditions in which the civil society can be built and function? Obviously, while answering such a question, one might list numerous factors creating a possibility of civil society's establishment and development. Nevertheless, having in mind the post-modern way of understanding the notion of civil society and the topic of this article, we would do better pondering over what the development of civil society is contingent upon in today's Russia?

An unquestionable role in the formation of civil society is always played by youth. That is, individuals who are conscious of their rights and obligations as citizens, and who understand the political and social processes taking place in their country, so that they are able to effect a civic control over a power state; who have got a fair level of education and do not struggle against dire poverty and social exclusion. Meanwhile, as recent public opinion polls show, the biggest concern for young Russians today is the problem of drugs, followed by unemployment, poverty, corruption, education, crime, HIV/AIDS and ecology.¹ Moreover, the Russian youth, which is to be the first generation living in the post-Soviet era, is generally rather apathetic, lacks initiative, and just like their parents is indifferent to poli- ➔

¹ Russian youth: Stalin good, migrants must go: poll, Moscow Reuters, 25.07.2007 12:16 pm, <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL2559010520070725?feedType=RSS&rpc=22&sp=true>



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TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THIS SHORT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUTH IN TODAY'S RUSSIA, INEVITABLY ONE QUESTION ARISES: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF YOUNG RUSSIANS IN THE BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION?



PHOTO: Dariusz Bargiel

tics, perceiving it as something they cannot have impact on.

Nonetheless, young Russians undoubtedly need their heroes. National heroes. Ones that may testify in one way or another to an everlasting grandeur of their country. It is how we can, at least partially, explain the ambivalent attitude of today's youth towards Joseph Stalin, for instance. The outcomes of all the three surveys, conducted in Russia by American scholars in cooperation with the Levada Public Opinion Research Centre starting from the year 2003, clearly show that there is no stigma associated with Stalin in the country today.² Furthermore, in the last poll conducted in spring 2007, the majority of young Russians (54% of respondents) aged 16-19, answered that Stalin did more good than bad, and 46% disagreed with the statement that Stalin was a cruel tyrant.³ This ambivalence among the Russian youth in their judgment of the dictator is also caused by the message teenagers receive at school, while studying from Russian textbooks that are less critical in their assessment of Stalin's role in Russia's

and world's history than they were during Gorbachev's times of glasnost and perestroika. The need of a traditionally strong leader in the Russian society and its young generation is perfectly reflected in the Putin's cult as well. The popularity and admiration of the former Russian president and the current Prime Minister among the youth have caused a situation when by "generation P" in Russia we do no longer mean the "generation of Pepsi" as defined in Victor Pelevin's famous book, but Putin's generation instead. It cannot come as a surprise then that, according to the poll, most of the Russians today (78% of respondents) agree with Putin's statement that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century".⁴

Taking into consideration this short characteristics of the youth in today's Russia, inevitably one question arises: What is the role of young Russians in the building and development of civil society in the Russian Federation? The first three matches in Google search when entering the phrase "Russian Youth" do not provide help in answering this question. One can only get a general idea about the complexity of young Russians from the headlines, quoting one by one:

1. Sex for the motherland: Russian youths encouraged to procreate at camp;
2. Russian youth struggle with drink and drug abuse;
3. Russian youth on political barricades.

Irrespective of the above, the youth activity in Russia is not only limited to helping a demographic crisis or defending the positions on political barricades, nor is the youth overcome by a problem of drink and drug abuse. In fact, there are numerous Russian youth movements which are currently on the rise. Thus, the question as to the role the youth activity plays in the civil society's development, and the analysis of different youth policy players in Russia, seem to be particularly topical on the eve of the 90th anniversary of the establishment of Komsomol – the youth wing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was the only Russian national youth organisation over the decades of the communist era.

Youth sector in Russia – an overview

In order to understand better the context of the youth sector in Russia, we first have to mention the history of the largest youth organisation which has ever existed in Russia. Komsomol, from *Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodiozhi* (Коммунистический союз молодёжи), in literal English translation: Communist Union of Youth, was founded on 29 October 1918. Although the organisation no longer exists after its dissolution in 1991, last year's 90th anniversary of its formation created a platform for a discussion about the current condition of the youth movement in Russia and its future. Komsomol which went down in history of Russian national youth organisations, united young Russians aged 14-28 and simultaneously was a breeding ground for staff resources of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Hence, for those young people who had political aspirations, the membership in Komsomol was very often a milestone on the road to ➔

² Mendelson Sarah E., Gerber Theodore, *Failing the Stalin Test. Russians and Their Dictator*, Foreign Affairs, January/February 2006,

³ op.cit. Russian youth: Stalin good, migrants must go: poll...

⁴ op.cit. Mendelson Sarah E., Gerber Theodore, *Failing the Stalin Test*...

Youth sector in Russia – an overview



governmental posts and accession to the ruling elite. Komsomol was the largest ever, all-national Russian organisation, and at the height of its existence in 1970s it had tens of millions of members. However, this youth wing of the Communist Party served not only as a youth movement introducing young people to politics by inseparable political indoctrination. Komsomol also constituted a perfect tool in the hands of the ruling party, since its highly mobile young members, through a social action, built numerous schools, entire new cities and played a significant role in the development of the heavy industry in the Soviet Union. Obviously, only the most active members of the organisation could count on a future promotion to a dream job position, but still, in general, most of the Komsomol's leaders enjoyed privileges beyond reach of ordinary citizens. The career of Leonid Brezhnev itself is an illustration of the machinery of this system. The future leader of the Communist Party, and its General Secretary at some time, started his political career exactly as an active member in the Komsomol of Karelia, and later used to call the youth united in the movement the "Builders of Socialism".

In today's Russia, apart from the Komsomolskaya Pravda daily (Комсомольская правда), meaning "Komsomol Truth", the official Komsomol newspaper in the years 1925-1991 and remaining until now one of the most read papers in Russia despite Komsomol's dissolution, not many things remind us of this huge youth movement. Nor does an organisation of such a scale exist today. Still, there are many others instead, mainly serving as youth wings of current political parties. However, there are voices – the Russian deputy, Josiph Kobzon⁵, is one example – calling

NASHI, WHICH MEANS "OURS" IN RUSSIAN, WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2005 BY KREMLIN'S ADMINISTRATION WITH THE OFFICIAL MISSION TO FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM. IT IS NOT A SECRET, HOWEVER, THAT THIS PRO-KREMLIN ORGANISATION WAS FOUNDED IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE CONTROL OVER THE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA.

for a change in the current situation and an establishment of one national organisation, which, similarly to Komsomol, could unite young Russians spread out in different political youth movements at the moment.

In fact, the biggest, all-Russian, non-political and non-governmental youth organisation is the Russian Union of Youth – RUY (Российский Союз Молодежи – РСМ), established in 1990 on the foundation of Russian Komsomol. RUY was one of the main initiators of the 90th anniversary celebration of Komsomol formation. In fact, RUY has inherited Komsomol's national organisational structure. It has offices in 75 regions of the Russian Federation, more than two hundred thousands individual members and more than one million participants of programmes.⁶ In today's Russia, RUY is the only organisation which, in view of the numbers of its members and the scope of its activity, may aspire to be the biggest yet still non-political actor on the youth policy scene. In addition, an increasingly significant role in Russia has been recently played by different political youth organisations both pro-Kremlin and liberal, as well as by right-wing and left-wing youth groups. However, the most famous and controversial still seems to be the activity of the Democratic Antifascist Youth Movement – Nashi for short.

Nashi, which means "Ours" in Russian, was established in 2005 by Kremlin's administration with the official mission to fight against fascism. It is not a secret, however, that this pro-Kremlin organisation was founded in order to strengthen the control over the youth movement in Russia. It is also known that Nashi is sponsored by the Kremlin, and its activists worship the national leader – Vladimir Putin. The other Nashi opponents actually ridicule the organisation as a modern version of Komsomol. The colours and symbols are similar; its members carry red books to record their participation in rallies and lectures. And, just like in Komsomol, the membership in Nashi is perceived as a stepping stone to governmental posts and positions in state corporations.⁷



⁵ России необходима единая молодёжная организация, 01 октября 2008, http://www.ruy.ru/mol_news.html?did=1800

⁶ <http://www.ruy.ru>

⁷ Myers Steven L., Youth Groups Created by Kremlin Serve Putin's Cause, The New York Times 8.07.2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/world/europe/08moscow.html>



PHOTO: wikipedia commons



Youth sector in Russia
– an overview



An excellent example of the latter is the political career of the first leader of Nashi, Vasily Yakemenko, who has recently been appointed the Chairman of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs. Nowadays, the organisation has around one hundred and twenty thousands of activists aged 17-25 and a new leader – Nikita Borovikov.

Ilya Yashin, the opposition youth leader of Yabloko, a Russian liberal party, also makes a comparison between Nashi and the Komsomol while pointing out that “it operates a similar system of incentives, including free cinema tickets and membership to swimming pools”⁸ or internships in the leading state companies offered to its members. However, within the wide range of incentives still the most famous ones are the summer camps, annual gatherings of Nashi activists and sympathizers on the shores of Lake Seliger in Russia, financed in full by the Kremlin. There, for example, Nashi members, apart from swimming and sunbathing, participate in mass weddings, where there are prepared special heart-shaped tents for the newlyweds with the aim of getting more

women pregnant – a cure of sorts for the demographic crisis in Russia. Although it sounds unbelievable, the observers of Nashi activities have already gotten used to its, often scandalous, actions and manifestations, particularly those against Kremlin’s enemies.

Last year, the whole public activity of Nashi was focused on Estonia. Since the Estonian authorities decided to relocate the monument erected to commemorate the Soviet soldiers who “saved” Estonia during World War II from the centre of Tallin to one of its cemeteries, Nashi has been calling the Estonian president, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, a fascist and accused him and the Estonian government of rewriting history. And it was not only the offensive words that focused the world’s attention on Nashi activities. There was a whole spectacle, followed by violent confrontations with the police in front of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow, during which the Estonian and British ambassadors were directly attacked by Nashi activists. The other “targets” of Nashi actions are Eduard Limonov, with its critical attitude towards the Kremlin, and Gary Kasparov – the opposition leader and former chess champion. In view of the methods used by Nashi, hardly surprising are the words of Nikolai Petrov, a scholar of the Carnegie Moscow Center, who said that “the Kremlin decided that youth organisations can be exploited and compared the youth activists to Landsknechts, medieval foot soldiers hired to carry out military campaigns”.⁹

⁸ Harding Luke, Welcome to Putin’s summer camp..., The Guardian 24.07.2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/24/russia>

⁹ op.cit. Myers Steven L., Youth Groups Created by Kremlin Serve Putin’s Cause

The role of the state and the authorities in charge of youth

Last year, the new Ministry of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy (Министерство спорта, туризма и молодёжной политики Российской Федерации) has been created, which took over the



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issue of youth from the State Committee of Youth Affairs. Thus, currently, the Minister of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy, Vitaly Mutko, is ultimately the one in charge of youth policy in Russia. Apart from establishing the new Ministry, the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, announced 2009 as the Year of the Youth in the Russian Federation. As Minister Vitaly Mutko explains, during this year, all the efforts will be focused on setting the list of priorities, necessary for the establishment and development of youth policy in Russia. Furthermore, already in 2009 there being initiated new programmes and projects for young Russians, carried out by the Ministry of Sport, Tourism and Youth Policy. Also, an infrastructure with a particular focus on youth is to be developed, as well as training schemes for staff working with youngsters. Moreover, special emphasis will be put on promoting voluntary work among young Russians, as well as on the change of social perception of volunteerism in Russia, which so far has been ambivalent. There is an idea to encourage youth to get involved in voluntary work in connection with the approaching Winter Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014, where thousands of young volunteers will be needed to support and coordinate the event. Last but not least, a postulate of incorporating the issue of youth policy into the Russia's long-run strategy of development until 2020 has already been executed by Vitaly Mutko.

Clearly, all of these, recently declared by the authorities, actions are much needed and of great importance. However, the ques-

CIVIL SOCIETY COMMONLY EMBRACES A DIVERSITY OF SPACES, ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONAL FORMS, VARYING IN THEIR DEGREE OF FORMALITY, AUTONOMY AND POWER.

tion now is to what extent they are to be accomplished, bearing in mind that in today's Russia it is more important for the Kremlin to have disciplined, loyal and patriotic young people, ready to obey orders of the power state.

The most likely attitude of the Russian authorities towards the youth issue already has its name in social sciences. When we talk about youth empowerment, we also have to be conscious of the so-called "tokenism" phenomenon. "Tokenism refers to policy or practise of limited inclusion of members of a minority group, usually creating a false appearance of inclusive practices".¹⁰ In Russia's case, the new NGO law passed in April 2006¹¹, by many independent observers and NGO's leaders called as an attack on freedom and civil society, could be one of the examples of such a false inclusive practice.

There are several post-modern definitions of civil society; the working definition of the London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society is illustrative: "Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups".¹² Certainly, the civil society in Russia, as in other countries in the Eastern Europe and the Caucasus Region, is still far from this picture. However, those who may change it are young, full of energy and of courage characteristic for the youth all around the world – and from being passive and obedient today, they may turn to active participation in the country's civil life tomorrow. It is how a civil society is born. This is the precondition. ○



PHOTO: wikimedia commons

¹⁰ In accordance with: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokenism>

¹¹ The New NGO law currently requires Russian NGO's to file reams of re-registration documents each year and to submit to the so-called spot checks throughout the year, were minor discrepancies or errors in reporting may paralyse NGOs and land them in lengthy court battles to seek reinstatement – according to: http://www.bellona.org/articles/articles_2008/ngos_andlawyers?

¹² London School of Economics, Centre for Civil Society, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/introduction.htm>

BY
Ivanyan R.G.

A Review of Balbina Zigal's Article

Balbina Zigal's article is devoted to an interesting and relevant aspect of the modern Russian reality: civil society in the context of youth policy and youth work. The content of the article identifies pressing problems related to the activities of key players from the spectrum of society and suggests that the author conducted a valuable study to pinpoint and formulate the main trends and characteristics of public and nongovernmental youth policy in the Russian Federation. The depth of analysis conducted by the author and the logical validity of many (but not all!) assessments is impressive.



PHOTO: wikimedia commons

Bearing in mind the high quality of the publication it is necessary to note a number of issues, however, issue that, in my opinion, the author considered in one-sided and biased manner. In general, when reading the article, the feeling is that it was written by a third-party, i.e. foreign national who wanted to, but never managed to understand the complexity and difficulty of the Russian reality. Let us start with the author's commentary on the political passivity of the Russian youth. In my view, this quality is inherent not only in Russians, but also in all Europeans of a similar age. The level of political participation of youth in European countries does not significantly differ from that in Russia. The recent elections to the European Parliament prove this point. Therefore, it is not entirely correct to talk about this trend as being particularly Russian.

Zigal writes that **“young Russians undoubtedly need their heroes. National heroes. Ones that may testify in one way or another to an everlasting grandeur of their country.”** Firstly, when does pride in the motherland, its victories and achievements become a negative phenomenon to be mocked? Why do Russians have to be silent about the role of their country in the victory over Nazi Germany and not cultivate their young people's responsibility for their country based on this example? Why, when talking about the need to par-

ticipate in the life of their community and in promoting volunteer work, should we ignore the fact that it was the participation of millions of volunteers that liberated the country from invaders? Secondly, there exists a substitution of concepts. It is no secret that national idols and the heroic legacy of the historical baggage of any country (not just Russia) contribute to the formation of the current generation of national identity, patriotism, citizenship, and responsibility for the community. For example, are Norwegians not proud of Nansen and Amundsen, their stars and pioneer explorers?

Various exercises associated with the study of the biographies of historical figures are provided in many publications of the Council of Europe on youth work. In doing so, as adults, we must accept the fact that the image of a hero is far different from his living prototype. That image is an artificial creation. It is molded on the basis of a real person to meet the needs of society at a particular historical juncture. The image of a man is never a reflection of his real essence.

Therefore, the conscious creation and maintenance of heroic images is neither something fundamentally new nor specifically Russian. It is inherent in all people, countries, epochs, and societies. Heroes are needed as examples of a positive model of behaviour. In some cases this is actively used by various actors, in others, it exists at the level of the collective subconscious. I do not understand why Zigal believes that the search for heroes is exclusively a Russian trend. With regard to the role of Stalin in the country's history, it seems to me that the conclu-



A Review of Balbina Zigal's Article

sions reached by the author on the basis of surveys are incorrect. As often happens, the same issues can be interpreted in different ways. Moreover, the surveys that the author relies on may not be considered as being independent if they were funded from specific sources.

In my opinion, young Russians consider Stalin in approximately the same way as Peter the Great or even Ivan the Terrible. This can be formulated as follows: "It was a long time ago. No one now knows the precise details. The story is controversial. There are different assessments, but it is enough to dwell for a moment in the past!" The perestroika of the 1990s led to the rise of public opinion and brought the hidden pages of history to the surface. Revealing articles, programmes, and secret archives crowded the public space. Apathy followed as a backlash. As often happens, a strong emotional surge led to emotional downfall and fatigue of equal strength.

I do not agree with Zigal that young Russians consider Stalin a positive figure. According to my experience in working with young people, they consider him as one of the influential leaders involved in the creation of the country where they

THE PERESTROIKA OF THE 1990S LED TO THE RISE OF PUBLIC OPINION AND BROUGHT THE HIDDEN PAGES OF HISTORY TO THE SURFACE. REVEALING ARTICLES, PROGRAMMES, AND SECRET ARCHIVES CROWDED THE PUBLIC SPACE. APATHY FOLLOWED AS A BACKLASH. AS OFTEN HAPPENS, A STRONG EMOTIONAL SURGE LED TO EMOTIONAL DOWNFALL AND FATIGUE OF EQUAL STRENGTH.

live now. This premise is difficult to argue with. Young people do not have any specific emotional attitude towards Stalin that might wrongly lead to his positive assessment. In the case of Zigal's article this happens.

Now we turn to the no less controversial premise on the assessment of Putin. The author speaks about "the need of a traditionally strong leader in the Russian society." In my opinion, this is one of the most common myths about Russia—i.e. if a country is accustomed to a strong centralized management, kings, etc., any discussion about democracy is meaningless. I fundamentally disagree with this assertion and believe that it is used by those who have not been able to understand the Russian mentality. Reigning monarchs were the case in almost all European countries. In some countries, taxpayers are still paying huge sums for the maintenance of the royal family.

Perhaps many will agree with me that it is psychologically much more comfortable for everyone to live in an environment of social protection and security, rather than in one of constant threats. Historically, the 1990s and the perestroika period brought more frustration, bitterness, and resentment than positive change. Unfortunately, the concept of "democracy" in Russia was transformed into notions of powerlessness, injustice, and dishonesty. Public property was in the hands of a few oligarchs. The majority of the population had lost almost everything. It was on the brink of poverty. Can we blame people for the fact that in an effort to live comfortably, in a non-formed state, they are sympathetic to those political leaders who offer them relative peace and social security? Leaders who respect their promises? What is there surprising about this or what is so typically Russian in it? Faced with such a situation the citizens of any country would behave in exactly the same way.

Zigal's conclusions about the non-formed civil area in Russia are based on relatively weak arguments. First of all, when talking about political youth organizations the author focuses on two or three examples. A Western reader might have the impression that there is only the Russian Youth Union, the "Nashi" Movement, and the youth wing of the "Yabloko" Party among youth NGOs in Russia. Why are other political youth organizations such as the "Defense" Movement, "Young Guards," "The Union of Social Democrats," "National Democratic Youth Union," "Red Youth Van-



PHOTO: Yaroslav Ushakov



guard,” “SPS Youth Alliance,” “Youth Center LDPR Party,” and others not mentioned? This remains unclear.

Secondly, in the author's view there are only a few non-governmental youth organizations that work locally and only a few youth initiatives undertaken at various levels. In some regions, the activities of the youth NGOs are supported by the state. For example, the St. Petersburg regional law on youth policy prescribes, in detail, the possible forms of support for youth NGOs, including rent payment, etc.

When describing the activities of civil society in Russia, why does Balbina Zigal fail to mention a single word about sport, recreational, cultural, educational, and other non-governmental youth organizations established in the 1990s that are successfully functioning up to today? Why does the author not speak of a major breakthrough in the field of voluntary service? Here, I would like to include

an example from my native city. St. Petersburg recently adopted the concept of voluntary service development and it plays host to the annual “Good Peter” Festival, during which funds are raised to help those in need. How is it possible to trust conclusions that are built on one-sided arguments?

I would like to conclude this review with the following statement: **“It is impossible to examine different socio-political situations with the same measure.”** We have long tried to avoid unified and standardized approaches. Now, when assessing civil society, we again return to them. Or is this a situation of double standards where the same can be recognized as the elements of civil society in one situation, while this is not so in another one. One has the feeling that there is an ultimate list of features of civil society and that all that is necessary is to match them. This approach, however, contradicts the very essence of freedom and democracy. It is impossible to use the same parameters to judge countries where an ideology of paternalism was dominant for more than seventy years with those developed according to the other models. Perhaps, it is necessary to recognize that civil society may be different and that a single model does not exist. ○

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO USE THE SAME PARAMETERS TO JUDGE COUNTRIES WHERE AN IDEOLOGY OF PATERNALISM WAS DOMINANT FOR MORE THAN SEVENTY YEARS WITH THOSE DEVELOPED ACCORDING TO THE OTHER MODELS.



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Will the “Eastern Partnership” Create New Opportunities for Cooperation among Young People?



The launching of the new European Union “Eastern Partnership” initiative took place in Prague on 7 May 2009. The initiative is a result of a process that started in Brussels. During the EU’s General Affairs and External Relations Council on 26 May 2008, the Polish and Swedish governments presented a joint draft proposal for the “Eastern Partnership.” Subsequently, the European Council adopted the draft proposal on 19–20 June 2008.

The “Eastern Partnership” is aimed at improving the political and economic relationships of the six post-Soviet states: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia—with the European Union. The word partnership means that this initiative promotes the equal involvement of all partners. It is important to keep the sense of joint ownership as an essential element of the partnership building process. Only a strong, expressed interest on both sides of the “Eastern Partnership” guarantees the achievement of objectives. The challenge is enormous as projects within the “Eastern Partnership” should be even more ambitious than those within existing EU policies. New qualities of partnership must be even tighter and offer new opportunities as well as new tools for cooperation. The “Eastern Partnership” should be based on mutual commitments to common European values such as the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, and the principles of the market economy.

The youth issue is included in the social area of cooperation in the context of people-to-people contacts. It should promote and support interaction between the citizens of the EU and partner countries, particularly young people. The recognition of the value of cultural cooperation and intercultural dialogue in the youth field as an integral part of all external policies should be specifically emphasized. The Youth in Action Programme can play a very important role in this context and serve as a basis for additional tools and windows that can provide youth

organizations and youngsters with additional opportunities. The Polish National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme was involved in the consultation meetings with the Polish government together with the SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre. These meetings looked at the youth dimension of the “Eastern Partnership.” As shown by statistics, the capacity of youth cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Europe and Caucasus region is enormous. In its current format, the Youth in Action Programme cannot support it sufficiently. The most important barriers are financial limits resulting in large numbers of rejected interesting youth projects. Another important problem is the lack of funds open for direct applications by beneficiaries from the Eastern Europe and Caucasus countries. For this reason, we hope that the creation of the “Eastern Partnership” will create new funds and opportunities for the youth field. There can be no doubt that it will be a good investment! Active and efficient youth cooperation today means better understanding and partnerships in political and economical spheres in the future!

Let’s hope that the “Eastern Partnership” will strengthen youth partnership as well! ○

THE WORD PARTNERSHIP MEANS THAT THIS INITIATIVE PROMOTES THE EQUAL INVOLVEMENT OF ALL PARTNERS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP THE SENSE OF JOINT OWNERSHIP AS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF THE PARTNERSHIP BUILDING PROCESS.



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by Nerijus Kriauciunas

Friendly Youthpass meets the world of *Вини-Пух*: discovering and recognising the learning in Eastern Europe and Caucasus

A few months ago I was asked to share my impressions about the non-formal education in the region of Eastern Europe and Caucasus (EECA region¹). Luckily, a couple of weeks after I had received this request there was an annual meeting of SALTO EECA Resource Centre Multipliers Network² in Tbilisi held. I instantly realised that this meeting provided a perfect opportunity for me to talk with people actively participating in the Youth in Action programme. Plus they would still be in touch with other organisations and collaborators from the region. This article is based on three group interviews with multipliers from different countries on the subject of non-formal education and learning within Youth in Action activities.

My personal connection with the region, its countries and cultures comes growing up watching Vinnie Pukh (*Вини-Пух*³ – the Russian version of Winnie the Pooh), learning the Russian language as my first foreign language, travelling from time to time to the countries in the region and also from actively cooperating with colleagues from organisations in the Eastern countries. The main objective of this article is to establish the links between the understanding of and experience with non-formal education shared by multipliers and my knowledge of the Youthpass process and my personal experience. Why exactly Youthpass? Maybe because in 2009 the decision was made to introduce Youthpass for Youth Exchanges and Training Courses organised in cooperation with Partner Countries, while Youthpass for EVS projects has already been available in the region since 2007.

I hope you enjoy reading the below impressions about non-formal education and learning in the region.



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Thinking non-formal education? Think twice.

We started our conversation with the multipliers with a general question: “What do people from the region think of non-formal education?” The answer, as anywhere else, proved that the perception of non-formal education differs depending on the experience of individuals and organisations. Those who have not come across it, appear to know nothing on the subject. If they hear about “non-formal education”, their first impression is strongly influenced by the notion of “non-formals⁴”. This breeds further misconceptions that non-formal education consists in a series of not-quite-serious activities, a perception that ➡

¹ Hereinafter the term “region” refers to the group of countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine

² For more information about the Network of Multipliers in the EECA region see <http://www.salto-youth.net/eecamultipliers/>

³ For the original of the Вини-Пух cartoon see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGIIHolPZ_A

⁴ “Non-formals” (in Russian, «неформаллы») – the term that is used to refer to groups of people that differ from the commonly accepted norms in the way they dress, express themselves, behave or live; generally the term is associated with the subcultures or groups with unusual interests/hobbies; in general use, the term has double connotation – a positive one, when one wants to underline their exceptionality and strength to challenge the “norms”; and a more negative one used to stress the destructive attitude towards the existing norms. See more in the discussion on „non-formals“ at <http://www.lovehate.ru/Non-formals/1> (Google translator option is available)

most probably comes from abroad and often refers to the “playground” of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). No matter if these are young people, teachers or people from NGOs, when they first come in touch with a non-formal learning experience, their initial reaction is often scepticism. But with time people get interested and change their attitude, and often they literally fall in love with non-formal education. Of course, not everybody, as some find the non-formal learning experience challenging due to their limited competence so to speak in certain areas or their preference to rely on the knowledge written in books and passed down through traditional education. When asked, people also mention the impact of the hierarchical education practice inherited from the past, where the only recognised way of learning is the teacher bringing what s/he knows (or thinks s/he knows) to the student. It was emphasised that this way of learning does not encourage people to think for themselves. Contrary to this scheme, in the non-formal education setting, using interactive techniques, people simply need to think and act. Summing up, it appears that there is no “non-formal learning culture” existing on a large scale in the region.

In spite of rather reluctant first impressions with non-formal education, if people continue learning in the non-formal way, they often develop an interest in understanding more what is happening with them. As one of the multipliers explained drawing from her practice of working with youth: “At the beginning, they do not know what non-formal education is. For them, it is a school activity that gives a lot of possibilities. And when they really start to think that for example [international youth] exchange is not only for fun, they realise that there are possibilities to meet people from another country, but as a means of education. And at the end they find out that actually they have gained a lot. So, they might start to think that it is more than just plain fun.”

Another multiplier shared her observation that, during the first three days of a training course, people usually experience a sort of “click in their minds”. They start to understand that taking part in a training course is not about being a passive listener “one who comes to *read the training*”⁵. Only by the fourth or fifth day people learn to learn from each other and not from the trainer alone.

The two examples are illustrative of what people start to associate within non-formal education after having a bit of experience. The first statement shows that non-formal education is often confused with after-school or extra-curricular activities; and the second – that there still exists a perception that a real training course is the only way of doing non-formal education. Both attitudes have their own implications in the context of the region.

Who are the “pioneers” of non-formal education?

Non-formal education as after-school activities has strong associations with the past. In the words of one of the multipliers: “The concept [of non-formal education] is not new to the region at all, because even in the Soviet Union they used it quite actively

with all those *pioneers*⁶ and camps. But of course the logic was a bit of different... Anyway, I think it was a sort of non-formal education, so now, if you explained to people in a very simple way what does non-formal education mean, they would for sure get interested in it.”



“We are gathering everyone for the youth exchange ‘Scrap metal!’”⁷

Making references to the past is like two sides of the coin. On the one hand, people and NGOs do not want to be associated with the past political system. On the other hand, it is helpful to start from the existing perceptions in order to build up a new understanding.

Taking into account that the NGO sector in the region is relatively young, most of the youth work activities take place in schools or in close cooperation with schools. According to multipliers, the positive impact of such an experience is that not only the young people recognise the positive ben-

⁵ “Reading the training” is an expression in Russian that is used to describe the situation when people are attending the training course expecting to receive lectures as they are used to have it in the formal education setting.

⁶ Interesting that people who are at the forefront of Youthpass and recognition are sometimes called the “pioneers”. In the context of the EECA region, a Pioneer movement is typically associated with an organization for children operated by the Communist party in the Soviet Union times. For more see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer_Movement.

⁷ A scene from a well-known cartoon “Тена и кульварстукас” (in Russian, «Гена и чебурашка») about the early attempts in the region to use non-formal education for inclusion. For more, see Youtube under “cheburashka”

Who are the
"pioneers" of non-
formal education?



efits of non-formal education. Moreover, it is possible "to talk seriously with teachers, because they do understand what it all means, and most of the teachers support non-formal education, especially when it comes to very tricky topics, like tolerance or conflict management, something that is very hard to explain so you need to experience that". In other countries, teachers receive encouragement and attend training courses run by people with non-formal education background. There are more examples in the region of schools and educators participating in collaborative networks. Schools use the project-based learning to support the formal curricular activities. But, at the same time, multipliers acknowledge that teachers are lacking a better understanding of the non-formal education. They have limited possibilities to develop their competences, and the contribution of NGOs to the formal education lacks the recognition on the higher institutional level.

The close association of non-formal education with training activities has its own history and consequences. When asked "Where does the understanding of non-formal education come from?" multipliers identify a number of sources, but mainly they refer to training courses and seminars offered by the *Council of Europe*⁸, *SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centres*⁹ or through international cooperation with partners and, in some cases, to the internal training system within the organisation.

Before the Youth in Action programme came to the region, people could take part only in training courses and seminars, which in their nature and structure differ from the long-term non-formal education opportunities provided by, for example, youth exchanges or EVS within the Youth in Action programme. Of course, there have been other funding, structural and organisational systems in the region, but their priorities were directed primary at democracy building, conflict resolution or other issues, leaving the long-term youth work and non-formal learning at the second place at the best.

Multipliers say drawing from their experience: "people know the methods and it seems that non-formal education is most often associated with trainings and with trainings combined with lec-

tures... it actually is just like formal education". This clearly identifies the limits of training activities in providing a long-term, relation-based, non-formal learning experience and, in a way, in revealing the complexity and resource-demanding nature of non-formal education. One multiplier brought an interesting insight from own country experience, where in the formal education sector "[teachers] try to use non-formal education as an extra-curricular activity for children and young people, but unfortunately they do not want to use this approach anymore in a formal learning system. They use better lectures, regular classes... and I can understand, because it is more work for them."

In general, people feel that the understanding and recognition of non-formal education is slowly changing for the better, of course taking into account its various pathways in different countries of the region. It might be concluded that, to some extent, people and organisations involved in youth work and non-formal education manage to facilitate the understanding of non-formal learning on the individual level and, in some countries, also on the institutional one. This helps to create, to some extent, social recognition within the limited circle of influence, particularly when cooperating with schools. But still it is far from the situation that would allow NGOs to access the much-needed resources, to offer long-term non-formal education opportunities for young people in the region. Better institutional recognition on the political level is needed in order to support the development of non-formal education. But the challenge in the region is that the official institutions may be quick in formalising the non-formal education without preserving many of its essential qualities. Multipliers gave examples of how in some countries the governmental regulations changed, demanding from organisations implementing educational activities to obtain a license. The requirements needed to qualify in order to possess a licence are more suitable for the nature and practice of formal education and is difficult to apply in the non-formal education setting.

People from NGOs feel that promoting non-formal education thinking in the region is a pioneering activity (in another sense of its meaning). In practice, they meet with a different understanding of the notion "learning in a non-formal way". However, Youth in Action activities open new opportunities to experience non-formal learning in the region.

Understanding non-formal education. Learning in action.

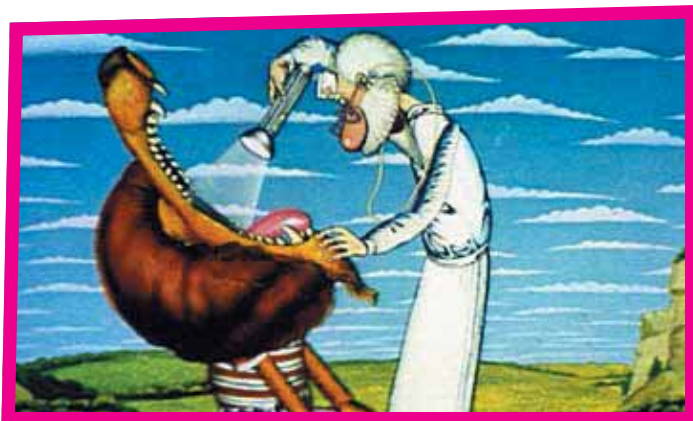
We continued the conversation, focussing more on: "What do people understand by the term 'non-formal education'?" and "What does it entail, for example, within the Youth in Action programme?" One of the first answers was the metaphorical explanation of parallels between the non-formal education and the non-traditional medicine: "There is the traditional medicine where everything is prescribed with caution and in full seriousness, there is the case management conference of doctors who have expertise in specific fields, there are plenty of books written on the subject, qualifica-



⁸ For more information see at <http://youth-partnership.co.ee/int/youth-partnership/training/europeancitizenship.html>

⁹ For more information see at <http://www.salto-youth.net/courses/>

tions are gained at universities, and there are standards according to which people are treated. And then there is the non-traditional medicine that approaches the treatment of people – patients – in a different way than traditional medicine does; it is not as much about curing people as about a healthy way of living. So, for me, non-formal education is like a healthy way of living, an approach to life that in principle does not hinder the formal education.”



“Reaching the most challenging young people with the non-formal education approach”¹⁰

The immediate next question was: “What point of view should we take when speaking about the understanding of non-formal education?” There are various actors involved: governmental structures, NGOs, general population, youth, and all of them in a different way perceive and understand – or don’t understand – the concept of non-formal education. We decided to continue on the subject from the perspective of NGOs and, where appropriate, making reference to other stakeholders in the field.

Drawing from their organisational practice, multipliers mentioned a variety of activities that are covered by non-formal education: work camps, debate clubs, competitions, workshops, information and communication technology (ICT) projects, journalists’ clubs, peer education programmes, simulation games, meetings, video making, theatre forms, training courses and seminars, coaching groups in developing local and international initiatives, sports activities, youth exchanges and EVS projects. But the list of activities by itself still does not say much about the deeper understanding of non-formal education: “What characteristics does the non-formal possess? How do organisations in the region describe their non-formal education practice?”

It is interesting that people often do not use the term itself but they practise non-formal education in everyday life. In one way or another organisations recognise the importance of learning

that takes place outside of the formal education system. But, because people in organisations up until now have had limited possibilities to develop their competences in non-formal education, the internal recognition in the organisation is missing. More often they learn through practice, by networking with colleagues or attending trainings and seminars. When it comes to the work with youth, people immediately think that the non-formal education comes down to the specific methods used. But, apart from the methodology itself, multipliers also underline the importance of implementing the essential principles of non-formal education: voluntary participation, interest from the youth, decisions and responsibility taken by the young people, learning by acting and from experience, focus on the integrity in learning. In the context of the region, many organisations perceive the non-formal education as a way of learning that “teaches to think. Especially taking into consideration the present education system in the region, [the non-formal education] is an alternative that teaches to think, teaches to exchange ideas, teaches to analyse things, and teaches to search independently for something. This alternative education is needed in the region”.

In a similar spirit, but more on a personal level, one of the participants in the conversation described the non-formal education as “a dialogue, because young people and educators speak the same language and they reflect together on different issues, on values. In order to speak about tolerance it is not enough to have classes and lectures, you need to find a common solution at least in this particular group. And of course, it is the way of life”.

With all this positive understanding and practice, multipliers regret that non-formal education experience often stays within the NGO sector. Although they also gave some positive examples of how formal education is attempting to remodel itself. Mostly from the experience in different countries, multipliers mentioned that “there are attempts to set up a new methodology, something unconventional, learning by doing, turning theoretical into practical. With a national education reform, the new objectives are set and guidelines are introduced, but it is not clearly said, in particular for the teachers, how to achieve what is decided.” Or: “the head of the parliamentary commission on education acknowledges the need to take into consideration the different ways of learning and education.” Indeed, it is possible to talk to official institutions about the non-formal

¹⁰ A scene from a well-known cartoon “Доктор Айболит” (in English: “Doctor Aibolit”) about the early attempts to integrate the non-formal education approach within the international youth activities. For more, see Youtube under “doctor aibolit”

Understanding non-
formal education.
Learning in action.



education, especially if addressing the social concerns. Changes are slowly approaching.

Non-formal education? Of course, I know about it and I can even say where it comes from!

“What happened with the understanding of non-formal education in the NGOs sector? Where does it come from? How did it develop in the minds and hearts of people?” In tracing the different influences, multipliers were explaining that the understanding of non-formal education in the region has developed in stages:

1) With the collapse of the dominant education system in the 1990s, alternatives became available, similarly like in other European countries, starting in the late 1960s/early 1970s, when other practices of education were developed, nowadays called non-formal education;

2) In parallel, mostly with the support and active programmes of the Council of Europe, opportunities have been developed and opened for people from the region to participate in. Through different training activities and seminars on non-formal education, as well as international youth work and youth policy development, a new youth policy movement has started

3) With the launching of the YOUTH programme in 2000, and later with the Youth in Action programme, people had real opportunities to apply in practice what they have learnt on non-formal education during the trainings and seminars, by organising youth exchanges and EVS.

As mentioned above, it is important to take into account the influence of the other contributing institutions and international participants present in the region, for example human rights organisations, humanitarian organisations, peace- and democracy-building institutions. But, on the subject of the Youth in Action programme, we asked: “What options of non-formal learning have been offered young people and organisations in the region?”

In line with what has already been said, the Youth in Action programme provides organisations and people with the resources to broaden their experience, knowledge and skills gained during the training activities. Organisations were given the possibility to send participants to other training courses organised by SALTO-YOUTH Resource

Centres, National Agencies or the organisations themselves. This scheme provides the necessary experience and motivates members of organisations to take a more active role in the organisation or to initiate international projects including non-formal learning as one of the quality components.



Boniface goes to the intercultural training course to learn about youth exchanges!¹¹

When asked about their Youth in Action experiences, multipliers shared the good practices applied in their own organisations or those they know from successful stories of EVS volunteers. They referred to cases where personal development encouraged volunteers to take an active role in their lives and in the society. From the conversations held, it transpires that learning really happens in projects. And the recognition of learning often takes place in a very individual way. Still, some common trends may be seen, such as that the participants in youth exchanges or EVS often gain the understanding of non-formal learning and education along the way. In most of the cases, they start without being aware that what they do is non-formal education, because at the beginning they are interested in other things. But often, not for all, but for some of them, it happens that they develop an interest in it and stay with the organisation.

It depends on the experience of the organisation, the people and the quality of the project, how wide and large the practice of non-formal education is. Multipliers voiced their awareness of projects not quite up to a standard, ones in which the youth exchange programme is not clear, people are bored as they have nothing to do, visits are frequent and the only thing left is to party. They also noted that many of the EVS projects are hard for volunteers due to their different mentalities and expectations. In particular, the following issues were mentioned: different perceptions of the activity programme, the balance between the process and the results, or difficulties with cultural learning and adaptation. But, by stressing



¹¹ A scene from a well-known cartoon “Kanikuly Bonifacia” (in English, “Boniface’s holiday”) about the (early) understandings of what it means to go and learn in a training course. For more, see Youtube under “boniface’s holiday”

the importance of proper preparation and follow-up, multipliers suggested ways to ensure that the participation in the programme becomes a non-formal learning experience for people. As quoted by one of the colleagues: “it doesn’t matter if the experience is good or bad, what matters is what you do with it afterwards, no?”

When talking to multipliers about the understanding of non-formal learning and its implementation in practice, there are no doubts that there is knowledge and experience in the region. The understanding does not differ from the common European sense of non-formal education. Youth in Action and other European undertakings play an important role contributing to the better understanding of the subject. In future, there are still many minds and hearts to win with non-formal education and its philosophy.

Next, we looked more closely at what happens when people meet with the non-formal education “thinking” and methodology.

Meeting “the others”. Non-formal education and learning.

The word “others” evokes a feeling of not familiar, not known, but still not as different and distant as the word “aliens”. This is the underlying idea when exploring people’s reactions towards the non-formal education and learning in a different way. Undoubtedly, for many people, taking part in a youth exchange, EVS or a training course is usually their first contact with non-formal education. This new experience involves obstacles people need to overcome. So: “What are the important aspects to take into consideration when implementing non-formal education in such projects?”

When talking to multipliers, it seems that there are two groups having different attitudes towards non-formal education. On the one hand, there are young people participating in projects, and on the other hand there are educators from various backgrounds and educational settings. It is common for both groups that through the non-formal education they change their understanding of learning. During the process, people start to realise that learning happens not only in the teacher-to-student setting, but also through an exchange of ideas with others and by learning from own experience. This process is rather challenging due to a number of reasons. In formal education, people expect to get marks or feedback, they expect to be evaluated. The second difficulty people face in the process of non-formal learning is the reflection on and sharing of their own learning experience. People are not used to it and it is not easy for them to start talking about themselves and not about the others. According to those we asked, this is related to the people’s fear of unknown and of openness. Non-formal education changes the perception of what learning is and how people learn. One of the multipliers reflects on both the negative and positive consequences of discovering non-formal learning: “When I was participating in the non-formal activities, like trainings and seminars for the first time, and then went back to the university, I understood that life is not perfect and I was thinking that this formal education is not so great after all. I think that sometimes it is a problem when people get to participate in some non-formal activities and they think that

non-formal education is the key, but real life shows that it is not the only key. So, that is why it is very important to keep balance, because people are people and everybody is different”.

Drawing from their own experiences, multipliers suggested the establishment of a “supporting and encouraging learning environment”, creating the feeling of safety for people to improve their self-confidence. This is a long-term process, one that requires commitment, involvement and responsibility from the educators.

Now, from the focus on learners as participants we turn to the learners as educators.

Non-formal education means methods! Is it really as simple as that?

The non-formal education methodology may sometimes seem tricky to teachers, youth leaders, trainers or educators. Multipliers draw the difference between the notions of “methods of activation in learning” and “non-formal education”: “Currently, we observe the trend that, even in formal education, there are many methods of activation in learning used, such as different games, role games, quizzes and workshops... And many teachers begin to say: ‘we also practise non-formal education, just by using the methods of activation in learning’”.

But, in the above-described practice, the learning content comes mostly from the teacher. Another participant in the conversation added that “it is the lack of experience what makes people believe the methods of non-formal education are simple and easy. Often people think ‘I can do this too’, and so they just take a set of games, a set of exercises and run them with the young people or with the elderly... but they don’t really understand what to do with the process”. The danger here is that, without processing the experience through reflection and sharing, people might not become conscious of their own learning. They might make the experience meaningless and reduce the possibilities of translating it into real life. Multipliers admitted that the lack of knowledge of the methodology among the educators is caused by limited opportunities to develop competences needed to implement non-formal education. National or regional resources for that are not available or are scarce. Another problem is that non-English-speaking persons are not able to attend the training courses or seminars in the international context. The lack of a deeper understanding of the methodology leads to the misuse of non-formal education. Learning is accidental, not



Non-formal education means methods! Is it really as simple as that?



planned, not facilitated and not processed. This is rather more like informal learning – there, learning happens without the intention neither from the learner's nor from the educator's perspective.

This brings us to the Youth in Action activities, where it is expected that planned learning would take place in a more or less structured way, including individual reflection and sharing of your learning experience with others. From practice, multipliers see the difficulties when, for example, group leaders from different educational backgrounds meet on a youth exchange and have individual approaches to planning and implementing the learning activities. There are also many cultural differences involved in the understanding of what planning is, what learning is and what the role of an educator is. As one person stressed, Youth in Action activities “are possibilities to see the different approaches, because when we work on the youth exchanges, sometimes we think that our approach is the best one and [the one of] the others is different. But when we start to work with the others we see different perspectives”.

This statement triggered a discussion among the multipliers on the need of and the dilemmas involving the standards of the non-formal education in general, and of the Youth in Action programme in particular. On the one hand, without clear standards the practice of non-formal education is more free, allowing for various ways of learning and possibilities for unexpected results. On the other hand, standards are needed to provide a reference for quality in non-formal education, enabling the evaluation not only from the properly prepared documentation and reports, but also during the implementation of youth exchange or an EVS project. The aspect of quality in non-formal learning depends on the experience and the existing understanding. For a multiplier active in the field, the Youth in Action programme “is actually a ‘visa’ for practising non-formal education, for my own and the participants’ development, for expanding the skills of my organisation. So, this truly is a learning process – and this is a clue for doing the projects. Because, and especially in the case of a Youth in Action project, it will not bring you a lot of income, it will not provide resources for your organisation... But this is an absolutely good way to learn, to learn about different cultures, countries, communication, whatever. If you don’t want to learn anything, don’t do a Youth in Action project”.

Summing up, for most people the first experience with non-formal education is a journey of discovering a new way of learning. This process is both

challenging and rewarding. Non-formal educators have a role to support people in their learning-to-learn process by empowering them to recognise the value of non-formal learning.

Let’s see what opportunities and challenges the introduction of Youthpass to the Youth in Action activities will bring to the region.


Meet the Youthpass. Where do we go?



The land of Vinni Pukh – where to go with Youthpass?

In this section, I would like to draw some conclusions from the conversations about non-formal education recognition in the region. But firstly: “What is Youthpass?” To start, Youthpass is a process and an instrument for the recognition of the value of non-formal learning and its benefits on the individual and social level, and for the employability of young people and those involved in the youth sector. Introducing Youthpass into the Youth in Action programme opens opportunities in different areas:

- ▶ strengthening the learning component in the project experience;
- ▶ raising the awareness of cultural differences encountered during education and learning;
- ▶ fostering the institutional recognition of non-formal education on the political level;
- ▶ offering a more formal document confirming the participation in a non-formal education activity.

The Youthpass process puts emphasis on the benefits of personal reflection on learning, the importance of dialogue and support for learning to learn. The multipliers during the interviews addressed most of the elements when speaking about the non-formal education in the region. The Youthpass process also introduces the Key 

¹² For more information, see the official document on Key Competences at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/keycomp_en.pdf

*Competences*¹² to support the participants when describing individually what they have learnt. The formal education, vocational education and training sectors are already implementing changes in line with the recommendations of a common reference framework of Key Competences for life-long learning.

Finally, I would like to share some of the insights on what benefits or challenges the introduction of Youthpass into the Youth in Action activities might bring to the region:

1) Learning to learn is a key element in the Youthpass process, through which participants are encouraged and empowered to reflect on their personal learning process – and to recognise that above all they are the owners of their learning experience. This should also involve the shift in the balance between the input (non-formal education) and outcome (non-formal learning);

2) The long-term approach and the large diversity of non-formal education activities mean that empowering the learners to learn is a long-term process and often subjective in nature. It is necessary to recognise it not only outside the non-formal education sector but also inside the NGO sector, in order to see other forms and means of non-formal learning apart from the widely-used trainings and seminars;

3) Thinking of non-formal education means thinking strategically – it seems that many organisations in the region implement non-formal education activities but not necessarily are aware or name it like that. Encouraging NGOs to reflect on the non-formal education in their work would foster internal recognition and should enable an organisation to demonstrate the educational value of its activities. Organisations might benefit not only from the use of Youthpass as a tool in their activities but also from using the *European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders*¹³;

4) The non-formal education experience and knowledge are present in the region but lacking a wider recognition. The situation is somewhat similar to other European countries. International cooperation and networking could contribute to an undertaking aiming at a wider recognition of non-formal learning, particularly through the exchange of good practice and consolidation of the resources;

5) Formal education in the region, at schools or universities, sees the “signs of change” and sometimes acknowledges the need to develop. In some cases, institutions turn for consultations, trainings or good practice to the NGO sector active in the non-formal education field. Youthpass in the Youth in Action programme could provide good examples of benefits and value of non-formal learning;

6) In terms of cooperation with governmental structures, it is important to maintain good relations with them, as there is a trend observed that some of the European solutions reach the key decision-makers in the countries of the region. Awareness of the wider context of Youthpass and its links with other education and training policies would be beneficial. Also, common policy

events, where different players meet and discuss the educational developments, should be encouraged. Considering that sometimes there is a governmental practice of over-formalisation, Youthpass could become a “safe practice” protecting the NGOs and maintaining the essential qualities of non-formal education.

7) Quality and standards – being aware that non-formal learning is one of the quality areas and priorities in the Youth in Action programme brings up the question of quality standards. Standards involve both positive implications, such as raising the awareness of the importance of non-formal learning, but also negative consequences related to the fear of formalisation and excessively high entrance barriers.

Clearly, the above-posed conclusions need more reflection and discussion amongst the people concerned about the recognition of non-formal education and learning. I believe that it is a good reason to focus on non-formal education and learning, starting from the Youth in Action activities.

I am grateful for the contribution of thoughts, opinions and experience of all the multipliers who agreed to talk with me. Through the conversations we held, I have learnt much more than I have ever expected. I became more aware of the non-formal education in the EECA region, all the very positive practices and the key aspects of the important role of non-formal education in the process of developing youth sector in different countries. ○

п.с. «...внеформальное образование, юф эхчейн-жи, ивиес, юфпас...», дорогие мультипликаторы, перестанте жрать ЛСД!!!!¹⁴

¹³ In 2007, the Council of Europe introduced the European Portfolio for Youth Workers and Youth Leaders to support the people and organisations working in the youth sector in gaining:

a) an internal recognition; b) organisational recognition; and c) wider recognition for non-formal education and learning.

This instrument combined with the Youthpass opens opportunities for this process. For more information, see http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Resources/Portfolio/Portfolio_en.asp

¹⁴ p.s. “...non-formal education, youth exchanges, EVS, Youthpass...”, dear multipliers (if translated to Russian directly the word “multiplier” means cartoon-maker) stop eating LSD! LSD stands for Learning Space Dynamics. For more, see http://www.salto-youth.net/find-a-tool/662.html?&date_from=2003-03-01&date_to=2009-03-31&search=LSD+Pre-departure+Panic&pagerCurrentOffset=3

ITCHY KAMCHATKA

EVS in the very Far East Russia



by Carsten Heuer

So itchy! All over my body! My hands and legs, my back and face, everything is itching. I would need ten hands to cope with it. But yes, you are right, I should not scratch, it makes it even worse. That is why I try to concentrate on this article.



My name is Carsten Heuer or, because Russian people always look a bit surprised when they hear my name, just call me Kostya. I am 23 years old and have been working for the European Voluntary Service in Far East Russia, on the Kamchatka Peninsula, since October 2007. My new home is the Bystrinsky Nature Park, the largest nature park on Kamchatka, covering 1.325 million hectares, or more football pitches than could ever be counted. The Park is located in the very heart of the Peninsula and its administration office is situated in the village of Esso in the centre of the Park.

For those who have no idea what Kamchatka is like, let's listen to a female voice speaking as if it were a modern navigation system (point of departure: Petropavlovsk, capital of Kamchatka, located in the south) "Follow the road 400 km north – seven hours of silence – now turn left, follow the road 100 km until the end – two hours of silence – you have arrived at your destination, Esso." Taking the bus to Esso will take nine hours; it is a long journey on a dirt road, and with all the shaking going on it becomes difficult to think.

After two years of hard work studying engineering and natural sciences, I got itchy feet and wanted to get to know the world. I had been dreaming of leaving the university for some time and wanted to dive into another world, to learn a new language, to get to know a new culture, to meet other people – and all of this should be connected with the idea of voluntary service. That was what I wanted, and that is exactly what I found. Thanks to the Manfred-Hermesen Foundation (Bremen/Germany) and the European Union programme "Youth in Action", I had the opportunity to experience for myself how it is to drive on this dusty road to Esso! (I have to admit that for most of my journey from Berlin to Petropavlovsk, via Moscow, I had a comfortable seat on a plane).

I work for the Park administration. In brief, the main task of the Park is to combine the different interests of human beings and the surrounding nature for the benefit of all. I try to make my contribution by hiking with the children's club "Green Rangers" into the wilderness, showing them how to live in and with the nature, demonstrating to them the jewel they live in, and convincing them that this apparently isolated and neglected place at the end of the world is of global importance.

Last weekend, for example, we went on a hike for three days, to a lake 25 km away from the nearest village. We walked ➡



along parched brooks, through dense bushes of pines (called stlanik), over tundra meadows, always accompanied by brown bears' tracks, millions of mosquitoes (responsible for the itching), and, unfortunately, by the traces of people – rubbish and devastating wildfires. Eventually, we approached the beautiful Lake Ilmagan. This was the first, long-awaited hike after the wintertime.

The winter lasts six months from the beginning of November until the end of April. The temperatures in January and February oscillate around minus 40 degrees Celsius (-40°F) and the snow is in abundance. This raises several questions: why does the village still exist, and why do people and even volunteers move to this place? The answer is simple: hot springs!

Kamchatka is famous for its volcanic activity. Due to the collision of the Eurasian and Pacific plates and the enormous amount of energy generated in this process, the volcanoes are brewing and bubbling on Kamchatka. This creates not only magma, but hot water – a true elixir of life for the village of Esso. These hot springs supply the whole town; even the toilet water is heated. The public swimming pool, filled with the water from hot springs, even at minus 20 degrees Celsius seems to beckon you to take a bath. And it is a strange feeling indeed, to be close to the water's surface and feel your beard freezing...

In fact, Esso has its own, and a very pleasant one, microclimate. The wintertime is cold but sunny and mainly windless. That is why you can easily have a walk even during deep sub-zero temperatures. For example, you might visit the reindeer herds. The Evens, one of several indigenous ethnic groups in our Nature Park, live like nomads moving with their reindeer herds from one place to another. Each year, in November, one herd settles near Esso for the slaughter. As they use the land itself for cold storage, they rely on the temperatures being consistently below -25°C. Once the mercury has plunged enough, the traditional slaughter, unchanged since the beginning of breeding of reindeers, starts. From among 1000 reindeers which the herder knows individually, 400 are picked out for slaughter. In groups of 50 reindeers, the animals are forced



through a sluice. At the end of the sluice, a door either opens to the left – and freedom, or to the right – and death. They single out old animals and those bad-tempered. The reindeers selected for death are caught with a lasso and killed with a stab of a knife. The meat is sold and the profits earned have to support the whole family throughout the next year.

Once the snow gets too deep for hiking, you can change to skis, to the more comfortable and often preferred snowmobile, or to the dog sled. The reindeer herders have their own modified form of a reindeer sled. In days gone by the dog sled was a common means of transport on Kamchatka, but nowadays it is almost replaced by snowmobiles, airplanes, helicopters and caterpillar tracks. Nevertheless, the mushers (known here as Kayurs) have still found a niche. They are either offering adventure tours for tourists, or they are training for dogsled races, especially the annual Beringia – the most famous dogsled race on Kamchatka. In 1991, the race was recognised in the Guinness Book of Records as the longest dogsled race on earth at 2000 km. This year, 13 mushers took ➡



Follow the road 400 km north – seven hours of silence – now turn left, follow the road 100 km until the end – two hours of silence – you have arrived at your destination, Esso.



part in the 18th Beringia which, of course, had its starting line in Esso.

I was given the chance to accompany Beringia, as a volunteer, into the wilderness of northern Kamchatka – 950 km across ice and snow. For two weeks we travelled with thirteen sleds and accompanying vehicles through remote villages, carrying with us some humanitarian aid goods such as exercise books, books for schools and libraries, and vitamins. Our presence offered them, even if for just one night, some change from the monotonous cold days. Most of the villages of northern Kamchatka depend on external supplies. It takes a great effort to transport foodstuffs and coal into these areas, which makes food and energy very expensive. Due to a lack of filters in the power plants, the snow is black. The climate is unfavourable, with freezing weather, winds and

snow persisting from October until May. In contrast, Esso appears a charming place.

This charm also draws many tourists to Esso. At the end of the winter, the brown bears creep out from their holes and attract hunters from all over the world to Esso. Wanting big trophies for their living rooms, the hunters fly from Esso into hunt camps. From there, they are carried by snowmobiles to the next trail, follow the trail until they catch up with a bear, prepare their weapon, move their forefinger – and boast afterwards about the fight between man and bear. Once, I have accompanied two American hunters as a translator on the hunt. It sounds contradictory: working for a nature park and supporting a bear hunt at the same time. However, it makes sense, as licensed hunting prohibits the far worse crime of poaching. Of course, each hunting company is interested in having their area free of poachers.

Furthermore, the money I earned enabled the park to buy a cash register. Now, we are allowed to offer our own services to tourists for a fee. Neglected by the state, the Nature Park depends on various money sources, for example on the sale of souvenirs and adventure tours to tourists. This is the issue I work on, when I am not hiking with children, the dogs are waiting in their pen for the next winter season, and the hunt for bears is discontinued. While sitting at the computer, I design brochures, posters and small exhibitions for a visitor centre. It is a contact point for all tourists and offers answers to questions like: What sightseeing attractions do we have? Where are the hiking trails? How should you behave in the forest? What should you do when you meet a bear?

By the way, the distraction has worked – the itch has abated. But now another itch is developing, which is the allure of Kamchatka, its people and its nature.

I would like to thank the Bystrinsky Nature Park, the Manfred-Hermesen Foundation and the “Youth in Action” programme for supporting the European Voluntary Service on Kamchatka. I hope that more young people will be offered the same chance I was. ○

For two weeks we travelled with thirteen sleds and accompanying vehicles through remote villages, carrying with us some humanitarian aid goods such as exercise books, books for schools and libraries, and vitamins



My EVS experience in the “Baikal Environmental Wave”, a non-governmental organisation in Irkutsk:

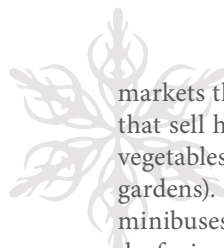
by Johanna Manges



My name is Johanna, I am 23 and come from Austria. I have been an EVS volunteer in the Baikal Environmental Wave for the last 5 months and I will be staying here, in Siberia, for one more month. I had known about EVS for some time, since many of my friends were involved in EVS projects in several countries in Europe. A year ago, I decided that I should move and started considering different places to go to. I was particularly interested in Eastern Europe, as I have studied some Russian and the region itself still remains relatively unknown. When I found out it would be possible to go even further East, I knew it was what I wanted to do. I learned about the Baikal Wave from their website, its English version to be precise (www.baikalwave.eu.org), where volunteers describe their experiences. I contacted some of them and wrote an e-mail to Natasha who is the volunteer coordinator in the Baikal Wave. InfoEck, the Austrian organisation that sent me here, supported me in applying for EVS, obtaining the visa and in contacts with the Wave.

Why did I choose Baikal Wave? Because environmental protection is a subject very close to my heart and I believe it is of particular importance in this region, as Lake Baikal is such a major body of water (it is the largest freshwater lake in the world by volume). Also, I wanted to learn more about how this organisation operates, since it appeared to me that there is not much support provided from the state. Plus, Siberia itself attracted me as well, as it seemed so mysterious. I did not know much about this vast region and I had many different pictures of it in my head: -50°C and below, people wearing fur coats, lots of vodka, small villages far away from any signs of civilization, shamanism, taiga and tundra all around, the Trans-Siberian railway... Generally, people were a bit shocked when I told them I was going to Siberia. I think that the older generation still sees it as a place you get exiled to, and that there are still plenty of stereotypes about the place prevailing among the younger generations.

When I arrived at Irkutsk, I thought of it as a place where Europe meets Asia. On the one hand, it feels very much like Europe, with its shops (United Colors of Benetton), its banks (Raiffeisen Bank) and all the things I liked to eat back in Austria (apart from *tahini* – a type of sesame paste) easily found on supermarket shelves. On the other hand, there are many Asian faces in the streets, and at the ➞



markets there are *babushkas* (old Russian women) that sell home-made products as well as fruit and vegetables from their *dachas* (small houses with gardens). Then, there is public transport using minibuses from Korea – *marshrutkas* – filled with deafening music. At the beginning, it was quite stressful for me to have to shout when I wanted to get off. I also ended up doing quite a lot of what I call “active discovering of Irkutsk” – getting on the wrong bus and landing somewhere I didn’t intend to go in the first place (and in 80% of cases it would be the Pervomaiskiy area). And I was surprised to see how differently the people acted in their public life to what I had gotten used to. I remember that in the first month of my stay here I often found the faces of people in the streets really cold, ice-cold even. And I would see those girls walking in their high-heeled shoes, all high-fashion and style from tip to toe... And those first few days I used to ask myself: What am I doing here? Why did I ever wanted to come to Siberia for half a year? What exactly do I want to learn here? I truly felt lost. But when I saw Lake Baikal for the first time, I knew exactly what I was doing in this particular place.

And those first few days I used to ask myself: What am I doing here? Why did I ever wanted to come to Siberia for half a year? What exactly do I want to learn here?

Natasha conducted our on-arrival training at Lake Baikal. We had a great time: we swam, ate omul (a fish endemic to Lake Baikal and considered a delicacy) we walked around and just spend the time outside, close to the nature. I met two other EVS volunteers here: Julie from France and Jesse from England. Jesse has already left Irkutsk but Julie is still here and we have become quite good friends. I think it is great fun and makes the whole experience easier to have another volunteer here with me. Me and Julie have worked on several projects and, during the holidays, we travelled to Altai together. I truly feel we have become mentors for each other.

During the first month I stayed with an old Russian lady named Nina and her 50-year-old son.

This worked quite well at the beginning, as I had to speak Russian and really got to know the way people live here. Often, we would cook together or sit in the kitchen and drink chai in the evenings. But we also had some major misunderstandings. For example: I like to whistle when I am happy, but when I did it once Nina and her son started shouting “No, don’t do that! We will lose our money if you whistle in the house!” Some of these situations were quite funny and didn’t bother me much, but sometimes I found them hard to cope with, especially when I felt I had no real privacy and was controlled. One evening, the flat was robbed and both my mobile phone and my camera were stolen. Nina and Sasha were afraid the robbers would come back, knowing I was from Europe and must have money. The situation and atmosphere grew quite heavy, so I decided to move out. Natasha let me stay at her place for a few days and soon I found a new flat. I am still living in it today, together with Dima and Dan from Canada. I enjoy it immensely, as they are both my age and quite interesting people.

The work itself in the organisation is varied. During the first few weeks, Natasha was explaining to us what exactly they do, I did some translations from Russian into German, and we went to Lake Baikal with volunteers from the Great Baikal Trail (GBT) organisation to build a trail and support the ecological tourism. GBT is an international group of young people and we all lived together in tents put up right next to the Lake. In the mornings, we had to prepare the breakfast ourselves. I would get up at 6 am, make fire, and enjoy watching the sun coming up. I was amazed by how the water of the Lake changes all the time. Its colour grows from rose through orange to red, then to light blue, dark blue, green, shimmering grey, turquoise or black. The water stays perfectly calm or there are high waves churning it up...

After we went back to Irkutsk, we were involved in the preparation of an exhibition about Baikal Wave to be held at the Museum of Nature.

The next task was to do research on energy and finish the exhibition other volunteers had already started to prepare. We presented it at universities and schools and conducted workshops for students on the subject of energy saving.

The latest undertaking is the “Natural Step” project – creating an ecological footprint of the Wave, to find out how much energy, water, waste, CO₂, etc. they have used and generated in a time of 3 years. This made me think of my own way of living. The message of this project is “practice what you preach”, but is my lifestyle really environmentally friendly? For example, I flew on a plane to come here to work in an environmental organisation – isn’t it a contradiction? And what about the waste? Why don’t I use my canvas bag when I do shopping, instead of taking a new plastic bag every time? There are lots of things to think about... Yesterday, we had a presentation on our project – and we prepared our own play talking about it.





We have also put forward our own ideas for projects. We made advertisements criticising some social and environmental behaviours, we plan to put up a poster with pictures of all the volunteers that had worked here, and we want to make a film about the old and young generation and their different lifestyles. For our midterm training, we went to the Olkhon Island. There were people from the office and some children with us, and we spend the time talking about alternative energy sources and going on excursions.

I feel really good being a part of the Baikal Wave organisation. People are close to each other and help out whenever they can. Every day one person cooks and we eat together. When I need something, I can turn to any of my colleagues for help – especially Natasha, she really cares about the volunteers. Still, I think that the EVS experience depends on the person signing up for it. You have to realise that coming to a new place, not knowing people there, not knowing the places to visit or things to see, is like a new beginning. It takes initiative to do it and you have to be prepared for all the ups and downs coming with it. But you get the opportunity to have many new experiences, to see your own culture from a different perspective, to be more self-reliant. And in the end, it actually makes you stronger inside.

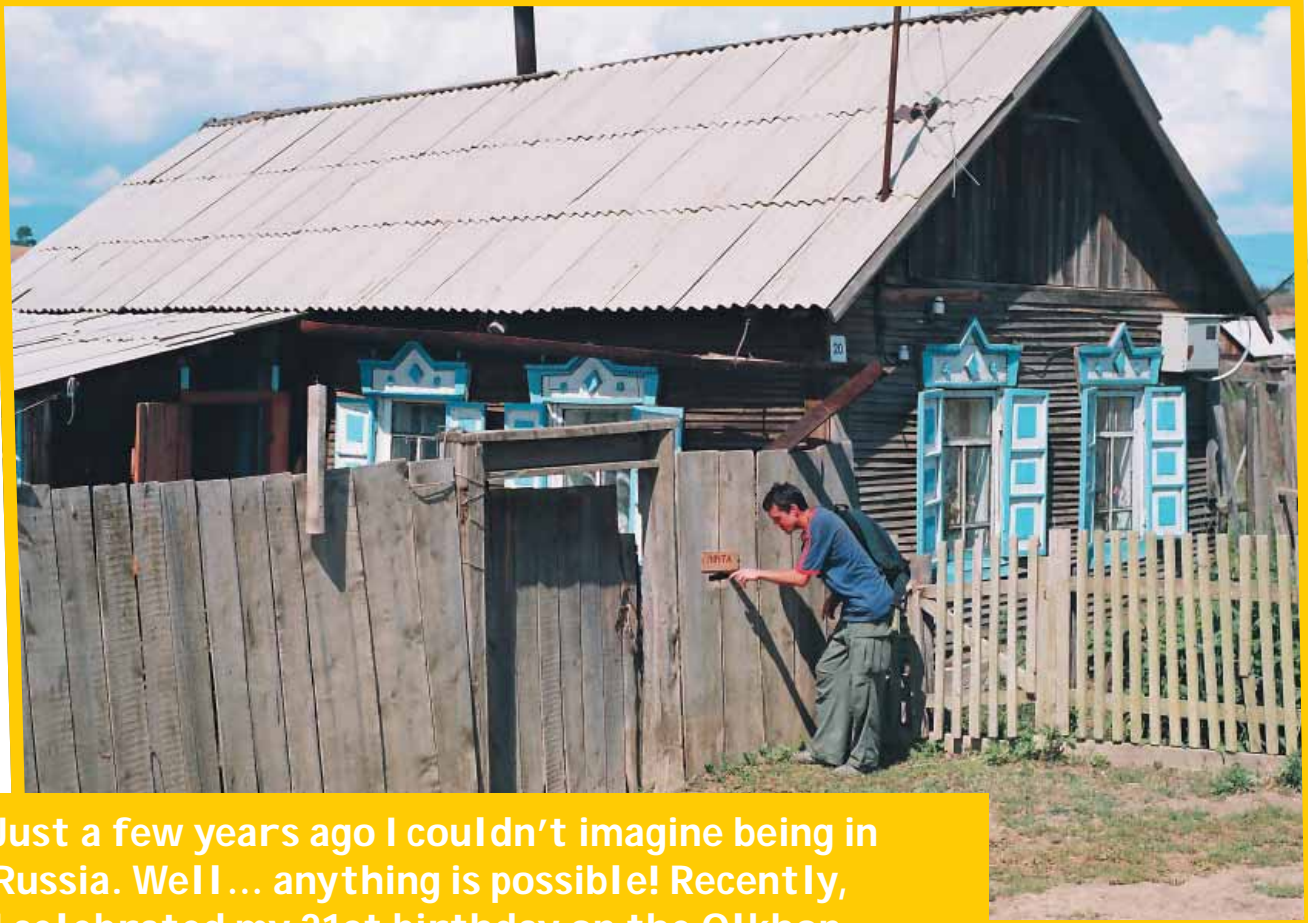
And finally some tips for people going to Russia:

- ▶ you should always have a copy of your passport with you, and if you want to stay in a hotel – you need your immigration card
- ▶ in most WCs, you do not throw toilet paper into the toilet, but into a bucket next to it
- ▶ in towns and cities you pay your bus or marshrutka fare at the end of your trip, when you get off
- ▶ in marshrutkas, you have to shout before you get off, like: "Stop at the next station, please!" (*Na sleduiuschei, paschal'sta!*)
- ▶ the timetable of trains is given in Moscow time, so if you have a train at 12 noon, and you are in Irkutsk, it means 5 pm local time.

Paka, paka!

My EVS time...

by Julie Bourillon



Just a few years ago I couldn't imagine being in Russia. Well... anything is possible! Recently, I celebrated my 21st birthday on the Olkhon Island – the largest island in Lake Baikal.

I was actually looking for an environmental project in one of the Scandinavian countries. Meanwhile, the EVS representative for my region has met with Natasha, working for EVS in Siberia and involved in several environmental projects. This is how I found out about the Baikal Environmental Wave and decided it was exactly what I was looking for. Thus, a really great adventure started...

People around me were really surprised by my decision to go to Russia:

It is so far away! It is so cold! Why do you even want to go there?

And what I actually wanted was to open myself to other cultures. Because, in fact, I didn't know anything about Russia or Siberia – just the stuff we learn at school. And like many other people I had this picture in my head: vodka, snow, bears...

Before I left for Irkutsk (located in the South-West of Lake Baikal) I didn't have to worry about things like finding a place to stay or looking for a bus to get me there. Everything was organized! But in Moscow, where I had to change flights, they lost my luggage and I had to wait for hours. And then, the transfer between the terminals was not easy either, because I had absolutely no idea where to go. Still, putting that bad experience aside, my arrival at Irkutsk went smoothly. There were people from my organisation coming to pick me up from the airport and show me the place I would be staying at. They were very nice and I knew I was off to a good start.

It wasn't so hard to start my new life here. The first impressions: *Lots of cars in the traffic – oh, how am I to cross the road? Lots of small things were new, but overall – it was not so different than Europe after all!*

I enjoyed my first glimpse of Siberia very much. It was a time to discover, a time to meet people, a time to have a party – and to speak Russian, of course. My Russian was really bad when

I arrived here, but after two months it has improved noticeably. I have been here 5 months already and really want to speak Russian much better – but it is not as easy as it seems!

I had put away my old idea of Russia – no, it is not just vodka, snow and bears... there are also seals! ;-) Being able to actually live here, I have gotten a completely new picture of this vast country and its people. Now I see how Irkutsk is similar to other European cities. Now I realize that many aspects of life, customs and human reactions derive from the culture and the history of the country. This experience allowed me to look at my own country, its culture and customs from a different perspective. Usually, certain things seem normal just because we don't know anything else.

Often, people ask me which country is better to live in. And I really cannot answer that – they are just two different countries, that's all. For example, what I like here is that if the boat or bus does not arrive on time it is not a big deal – I will either get where I want on time or take the next one, as simple as that. In France, people get really irritated when their means of transport is late, and they instantly start to stress and worry that they will be late for work. On the other hand, there are some things here that are hard for me to cope with. In France, I would be meeting my friends in a pub, in a sports club or at their place – I would be going out a lot. And here, there aren't many places in the city to meet friends, ones that are inexpensive that is. It is easier in

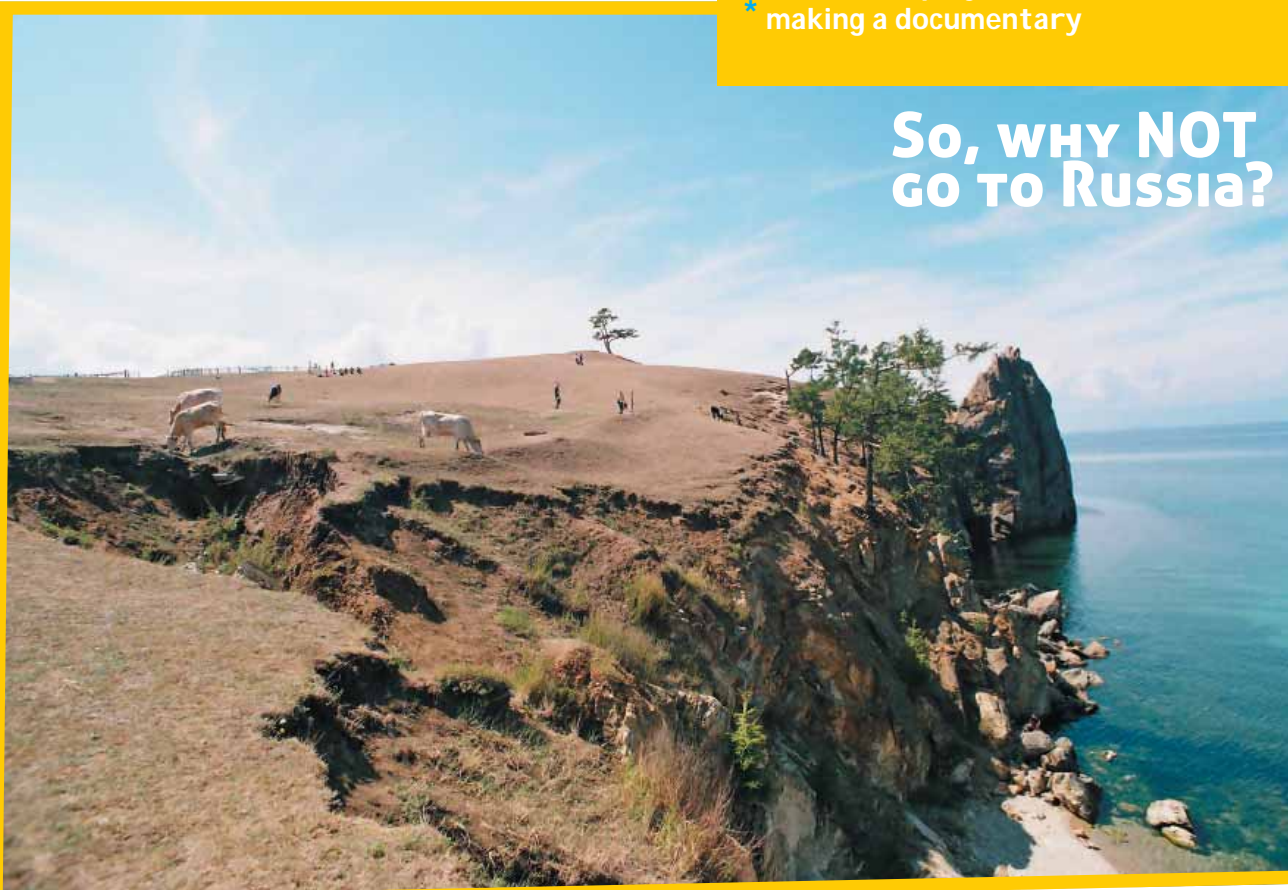
summer, when it is warm, but in winter, when the temperature drops to 20 below zero – no, thanks! And so, the whole rhythm of life is quite different in Siberia.

I have been here for 5 months now. My Russian is better but still not good enough for me. I have developed some habits, practice sports and have gotten to know many new people. I can't say they are all my friends, because it is hard to get really close to someone here, but yes, I do have some good friends as well!!!

Life goes on. The work as volunteer is really interesting. I have been paired up with Johanna, a volunteer from Austria. Some of our projects involved:

- ★ help in the preparation of an exhibition about our organisation,
- ★ preparing an exhibition on energy in a Russian language,
- ★ executing a project for our organisation about the "natural step", presenting it as a small theatrical play,
- ★ making a documentary

So, WHY NOT GO TO Russia?



The Danes saw it coming



by Anders Haar Rasmussen

Promoting volunteer work in Russia is not just a good idea. It is a whole new concept of cooperation whose success reached a new level as it received the award for „Best Youth in the World Project“ at the Youth Week in Brussels.



In between the beatbox, the break dancers and the high-climbing acrobat, it was time to hand out the award for „Best Youth in the World Project“ at the Halles de Schaerbeek in downtown Brussels. Hundreds of participants from the European Youth Week, as well as young journalists, organisers and even the European Commissioner, Ján Figel, were present when the Danes were called out along with the other nominees.

They stepped onto the stage with confidence. *“I mean, it is a cool project, so the closer we came to the award ceremony the more I believed we were going to win”*, says Malene Frosch Langvad, one of three representatives from the Danish project.

While Langvad was impressed with the grand ceremony, she remained calm as she became the centre of attention. Being a singer, she said, has made her used to being in the limelight. Receiving the award from none other than Commissioner Ján Figel did not make her tremble either.

“He is just an ordinary person. I didn’t think much of it, other than that he has the same first name as my dad, which is kind of funny. And that his palms were sweaty”, added Langvad.

Her fellow participant from Esbjerg Ungdomsskole, Mette Knoth Sørensen, was very happy to see them win – albeit a little surprised. *“Others have been working with people with disabilities and that kind of stuff. We’ve just been social”*, she

said, only to add *“of course, we did go into the local communities and made a difference. I guess that counts for something.”*

Sørensen took pride in the award, which made the week a whole lot better in her eyes. The organiser of the Danish project, Flemming Jørgensen, was also very proud, even if he saw it coming.

“I was expecting us to win. Not because of the topic itself but because of our cooperation with the Russians”, he said.

“It is nice to have your work recognized. Many people were sceptical when they heard about our project. They thought it would be impossible to work with the Russians. This award goes to show that not only it is possible to work with the Russians, it is even possible to make a great project with them”, said Jørgensen, who took the opportunity to hand out the business cards of his Russian counterpart to anyone interested.

And what was the project about....

Fighting powerlessness 12 hours east of Moscow

Ten young people from Esbjerg in Denmark travelled deep into Russia hoping to inspire locals to make a difference in their community. It turned out to be quite a challenge.

The Volga River flows right through the Russian city of Cheboksary. Floating bars line the river’s edge, serving local delicacies of dried fish and fermented horse milk. The shoreline has many spectacular scenic lookouts and Volga is often called the Cheboksary’s main asset. It is, however, an asset that often receives rough treatment, as nearby factories pollute the water and visitors scatter their rubbish along the shore.

Combating the pollution of Volga was one of the four projects to be focused on by Esbjerg Ungdomsskole, a youth centre from Denmark, which visited Cheboksary in May 2007. Their mission was to promote community activism and voluntary work, in cooperation with the Warwickshire Association of Youth Clubs from England and the Social Committee from Pavlovsky



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Posad outside Moscow. Aside from cleaning up Volga, the projects involved work at three locations – a local orphanage, a public school and an institution for juvenile delinquents.

19-year-old Eldina Janganjac was one of the ten young people from Esbjerg Ungdomsskole, and she vividly remembers working with the local young people in an effort to clean up the river. She has previously been active in the organisation „Save the Children” in Esbjerg. However, working with young Russians was something quite different.

“Some were very sceptical to begin with”, she recalls. “Others just remained silent.”

“They seemed to have a feeling of powerlessness; a feeling of not being able to make a difference. They didn’t believe that their actions would matter.”

Nevertheless, the group got to work. They removed litter from the beaches and woods, made signs to remind people to clean up after themselves, worked on information brochures and started a petition. They even got a local TV station to do a report on their work. Slowly but surely, the attitude among the local participants changed.

“When they realized that all of this was possible, they became very involved, putting up signs, emptying the trash bins. It all turned up to be quite a success”, says Janganjac.

“The best feeling was that we were making a difference. I know it sounds like a cliché, but it meant a lot to me, seeing the river becoming a little cleaner, seeing the locals get motivated to make an effort.”

One of the organisers of the Danish group, Flemming Jørgensen from Esbjerg Ungdomsskole, emphasizes the importance of working with voluntary community activism in remote Russian areas like Cheboksary. **“Everybody seems to think that someone else will take care of things. That someone else will pick up the fallen branches from the street, paint the fence, take care of the kids. So we wanted to work with them and bring in our experience in voluntary work from Denmark”,** says Jørgensen.

He recalls how some of the basic teambuilding and brainstorming exercises were totally new to most of the Russian participants. Solving problems by bouncing around ideas without saying “no” took some getting used to. *“They’re used to being very critical, so every time someone came up with a suggestion they would say, ‘well, is that really possible’, and we would have to say, ‘of course it is, keep going’”,* says Jørgensen.

He was thrilled to find out that the project has been selected to represent Denmark during the European Youth Week in Brussels in early November.



“We were very surprised to be even nominated in the first place. So when they picked us to go to Brussels ... wow, that was fantastic!” says Jørgensen, who believes that the success will make his colleagues realize that the projects are more than just an excuse to travel. *“People don’t always understand how much hard work it takes.”*

Esbjerg Ungdomsskole has completed three projects of this kind so far, and they intend to keep going.

“It’s a great concept,” Jørgensen says. **“It helps the local organisers put the young people in the area into some use. It makes the young people believe in making a difference, even with limited resources. And it gives our participants an experience and insight into the Russian way of life and culture that they cannot learn in the classroom.”**

Eldina Janganjac certainly learned a lot from her trip to Cheboksary. It was not all fun and games, though. *“I was very shocked to see the huge gulf between the rich and the poor. I’m not used to that in Denmark. You would see a grand and pompous building and then right in front of it an old woman with a small child would be rummaging through the trash looking for anything useful”,* she recalls. *“All in all, it was a great experience, but it also left me with a feeling of guilt, as we have such good living conditions in Denmark.”*

FACTS:

Cheboksary is the capital of the Chuvash Republic in Russia. It is a port on the Volga River, about 675 kilometres away from Moscow, with the population of approx. 450,000.

And how it happened...

by Flemming Jørgensen

Is it possible to convince young people that it pays off to do voluntary work in their local community? With this idea in mind, four organisations met at a youth exchange on 5-12 May 2007.



The event took place about 675 km east of Moscow, in the city of Cheboksary in the autonomous Chuvash Republic. Cheboksary was part of a youth exchange programme for the first time, and it was a result of a study trip in the summer of 2006, arranged by SALTO EECA. Their focus is youth work in localities along the Volga River. Apart from the local organizers, also the collaborators from the Social Committee of Pavlovsky Posad (60 km away from Moscow), the Youth Initiative from Gothenburg, Sweden, and the Esbjerg

Youth School, Denmark, took part in the exchange. All in all: 40 youth and 8 leaders.

On the preparatory visit, we went to several places, among others a sanatorium outside the town. It was undergoing a renovation and they could not promise us that it would be finished for our exchange. Therefore, we chose a hotel on the outskirts of the town as our quarters. This solution had both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, we were close to everything and we did not have to spend a lot of money on transport. On the other hand, the other guests in the hotel were bothered by the youth as it socialised mostly in the hallways. In addition, we had to make arrangements with the local school to rent some rooms concurrently with classes held in it. This was not perfect. A sanatorium, with everything located under one roof, would be much more preferable.

It must be said that we deliberately chose to divide the participants by their nationality when allocating the rooms. The idea was to give them some space in the intercultural environment. Was that a brilliant move? No, rather naive, as most of the socialisation took place in the hallways, and because it is in human nature to always seek others with whom we believe we share common interests.

After an uneventful 12-hour trip on the night train from Moscow to Cheboksary, we were met at the station by local representatives dressed in national costumes, who welcomed us warmly, extending wishes of good health and long life. The first couple of days of the youth exchange were spent on encouraging the participants to get to know each other, through cooperation exercises, so they would feel more comfortable between the groups. It quickly became transparent that the participants from Cheboksary found it difficult to get fully involved in this social process. Firstly, their Eng-

"My English got better and I made many new friends from Russia, Belarus and England. I was happy to see one of them visit us here, in Esbjerg. People were nice and friendly towards us in Russia and you could talk to everyone there. I also found out a lot about myself and I learned to appreciate the food we eat in Denmark". Daniel Vilslev



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lish was not as good as their leader had declared. Secondly, the three other groups had a certain head start, as they had already spent 12 hours together on the train and became almost a closed circle happy to spend time only in each other's company.

After a couple of days of cooperation exercises and games, we got to the business – so to speak. On the preparatory visit, we had selected 4 issues to work on within local projects. The participants could choose from working with socially excluded children, work in a hospital or at a school, or an environmental project concerning the rising pollution along the banks and in the forests of Volga (here, it was not the waste water from big factories, but the carelessness of average people that was in focus). We divided the participants in a certain – quite ingenious in our opinion – way, and during the next few days we were introducing them to the concept of a model project, which would take them from developing ideas to working out concrete solutions. Soon it became obvious that the Swedes and some of the participants from Pavlovsky Posad had taken part in earlier youth exchanges. Therefore, we decided to split the four groups into eight, so we could have two different groups working together on the same project and jointly creating even more ideas.

Excerpts from the projects: Campaign against the pollution of the Volga River

The group developed a brochure and planned the collection of supporters' signatures. This was made for the local group of Cheboksary to work with afterwards. Furthermore, they went to a popular recreation area and started the cleanup and removal of litter from the forest and the beach. A good idea was to contact a local TV-station in order to put more focus on the problem.

The huge cultural difference probably made the biggest impression on me, yet in spite of that we got along really well. I grew a lot on this trip, more than I have ever expected. I am much more outgoing now and I have a better picture and understanding of many situations. I feel like seeing more of the world after being to Russia. *Mark Møller Hansen*



"It takes a lot of patience to work despite cultural and language barriers. What you can explain in just a few minutes to a person thinking and speaking Danish may take up to half an hour to explain in an intercultural setting. But afterwards, it is a really good and rewarding feeling when you finally reach a consensus and work out a common goal or conclusion. Personally, I gained further teamwork skills in working with different people and I made new experiences, memories and fantastic friends for life". *Malene Langvad*

A cultural presentation to socially excluded children in a sanatorium

The goal of this group was to teach the youngsters something – and to learn from them as well. The participants brought with them a book on the most beautiful cities in the world and talked to the children about different cities and countries. They sang songs and listened to the children singing their national anthem. They shared stories about each other's lives and played a game with numbers in English so the children could learn this language a little. Finally, the participants and the children made a big drawing on a huge piece of paper. The day finished with a lunch they enjoyed together.

A cultural presentation to children at school

The participants conducted an English class and taught the children some words in Danish and Swedish as well. Some of the youngsters proved quite talented in learning English. The group taught the children a song in English and, in return, the children taught them a Russian dance. The children were very disciplined and stood up every time they spoke.





The contrast between tumbledown houses and architectural wonders had a great impact on me, while my relations with the Russian participants made me re-examine my prejudice about Russia. I gained a whole new understanding of the country and its inhabitants. Since I took part in the youth exchange, the world doesn't seem so vast anymore, as I had a chance to get to know many unknown things and places and I now have a network of friendly people in Russia maintained via Facebook. *Dennis Shik Christensen*

A project in a hospital

Unfortunately, the group forgot some of the presents in the hotel due to communication problems. Nevertheless, they spend 3 enjoyable hours with the children. They split the children up into smaller groups in order to do different things at the same time, such as playing games and singing songs together. They also tried to teach the youngsters some simple English, e.g. by counting to 10. The children were happy and had fun – “we made them smile”. They were also thrilled by the toys the group brought them.

General observations and the positive outcome of the exchange

The idea of young people taking part in voluntary work proved really good. The participants got to work together across national and cultural barriers, they had a chance to test the model project in practice, and through most of their undertakings

they could get an insight into the reality of Russian schools, children's homes etc.

Both of the Russian groups have continued some of the projects afterwards. The group from Cheboksary has put environment in focus and the group from Pavlovsky Posad outside of Moscow visits a children's home once every month. The English group has already worked together again, while the Danish group has been split up into different projects and different associations.

All the partners in the event have unanimously agreed that the concept of doing voluntary work in the local community was meaningful and that it also supported intercultural understanding and learning. Youth exchange is first of all an opportunity for young people to experience the cultural clash with other young people and, hopefully, to overcome some of the existing prejudice and put their own lives into perspective.

Because VOLUNTARY WORK IS NECESSARY!

“I learned to meet new people regardless of their various backgrounds and to function in an intercultural community. I found out for myself how to solve problems and work non-verbally and, last but not least, I gained an understanding of a different culture. Youth exchange made me want to work with people from other countries on practical projects”.

Mikkel Nielsen





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