

Peace, Democracy and Human Rights

Multilateral Youth Exchange at Lemböte, Åland
July 15-23rd, 2006-10-05



In the head of the camp leader

I have said the most central things in the official final report to our National Agency. This is a summary of my own reflections about the peace camp.



Mickis – one of my volunteers.

The logistics worked rather well thanks to my volunteers, who helped me to transport the groups from the port of Mariehamn. All groups arrived in the middle of the night or at 4.30 in the morning. Most of the groups left in the morning or in the middle of night. There were some very short nights, but this was a matter we couldn't help. Everything worked well anyway. We were a few people from Åland who had our own cars and a rented van for the transports. An important logistical problem was telephones. There were no telephones available for the participants' long-distance calls at Lemböte. There was only one computer at Lemböte for internet contacts, which could be used during some evenings. We were aware about this, and we didn't mind, as we didn't want participants to sit surfing too much during the camp. You really don't need to read your e-mail every day! ☺

Lodgings and meals at Lemböte are very good. The staff is excellent and flexible. The most popular place proved to be the SAUNA. We had sauna in the daily program, but we said before the camp, that we can do something else if participants are not interested. But they were. We bathed sauna every evening, and some evenings twice. The canoes, boats and other sport equipment were frequently used during the pauses.

Program was planned in cooperation with the partners. We started in October 2005, when the first application was prepared. Unfortunately there were no possibilities for an advance planning meeting, but e-mail, fax and telephone calls helped us in the planning work. It is difficult to point out any special highlights from the program. For me everything was highlight.

The public presentation at the market place in Mariehamn was really a success and a very important part of the camp. We wanted the camp to be a part of the 150th anniversary of the demilitarisation of Åland. This helped us with the financing as the Local Government co-financed the camp within the 150-celebration budget. Without that funding we should have been forced to take a participation fee of 100 euros/person.



The Tsar of Russia and the Queen of Great Britain discussing the peace in Paris 1856 with some wounded and dead soldiers in the background.

The national presentations were very well prepared. It was easy to see that almost all groups had been working a lot with the themes and were well prepared. We had some problems with our own group. Most of the participants from Åland had not been involved from the beginning. We had unfortunately many changes in the list of participants, some of them very late. This seems to me as a problem, as they hadn't followed the process from the beginning. They seemed not to know the whys and wherefores in the same way than many of the other participants did.

The intercultural parties were excellent. Every group had planned their food and music well. They didn't only buy some candy and cakes, but made real cooking and served national food, cakes, bread, jam, candy...

The working groups

The working groups were an experiment, which was rather successful with some exceptions. First of all, we should have informed more about the idea. We sent the descriptions in forward to our partners and asked them to discuss the topic with the whole group. I had a short presentation in the beginning, and as there were not many questions I supposed that everything was clear. I ought to have asked questions to make sure that everyone had understood what they were supposed to do. Next time I'll know better. ☺

Activity group worked very well. They had understood the idea and didn't have any problems to organise themselves. All their arrangements were very good and popular.



Daily evaluation

Evaluation group seemed to get lost in the beginning, but only for a short time. They were very creative and made good non-verbal daily evaluations and a good final evaluation form. But the problem was that they didn't document the daily evaluations and they didn't organise daily meetings to discuss the evaluations in cooperation with the program group.

Media group did an excellent job by daily diaries and interviews with all participants and leaders. They also initiated the work with the website, but couldn't finish it because of the short of the time. One of participants from Åland in the Media group promised to fulfil the job afterwards, but she couldn't, unfortunately, keep her promise. The worst thing was that half of the diary and most of the interviews have disappeared and nobody seems to know where and how. I succeeded in saving the photos mostly thanks to good luck and plenty of job!

Program group worked rather well. They organised the national presentations and did their best to organise the other events in the frame program. They also tried to make people to hold to the schedule, which indeed wasn't very easy ☺! They arranged a film evening, which was one of the highlights. It was a pity that they had to cancel the Nordic evening for that, as it had been planned in cooperation with another NGO on Åland. The Peace Institute is all the time trying to stimulate cooperation with other local NGOs especially in the youth work.

During the public presentation-day the program group wasn't very successful in organising the daily schedule. The participants were told to go for sight-seeing after the visit to the Local Parliament, when they should have been preparing the performance and the exhibition. More cooperation between the program group and the public presentation group!

Public presentation group seemed to have some minor problems in the beginning, but after the confusion in the beginning they managed to organise the job, share the participants into different groups to work with costumes, music, theatre, exhibition. They did an excellent work by finding the talents and putting everybody on the right niche. The final presentations were really very good. The exhibition was first at the Library of Mariehamn and now it is at the Youth Club in Novi Sad, Serbia. As mentioned above, the public presentation group ought to have cooperated more with the program group.



Demilitarisation: Let's go to Sauna!

Leaders had part of the time their own group. We worked with the planning of next exchanges. We talked about the problems in recruiting and finding participants. All partners had had problems and many of us had youth, who cancelled their participation very late. We worked also with the economics and discussed the funding problems. There were not only problems with participants but also with the leaders: several countries had changed the leader rather late, which meant that the new leader hadn't been working with the group and the topics. The new leaders had also missed most of the discussion by e-mail we had had during the year. Most of the leaders, both the new ones and the old ones, were however engaged in the job with the working groups.

We tried to share the working groups between us and give the groups support when needed. I worked so intensively with several groups, and also with the practical matters (economy, finding synthesizer and microphones, transporting people here and there...) that I didn't have a possibility to follow how this worked. I have some indications that in some cases it didn't work so well. One of the leaders seemed to prefer walks in the woods and didn't work so much with the actual topics.

The participants were fine, nice, active, creative and very engaged in the topics. The age structure varied a lot. Our aim was that the participants should be 18-25 years, but there were some exceptions. We had 8 participants who were 16-17 yrs and one over 25 yrs. The background of the participants differed also a lot from school kids to university students and young people who were working.

The meaning of this exchange was not to be an "academic" discussion forum, as that kinds of events should be arranged within other than EU's Youth Program. I'm aware that some of the elder participants were disappointed, but the main goal was to make a program, which suited for the whole group. It is really not an easy task. Paradoxically, the youngest group (Macedonians) was one of the groups, who had worked most with the topics and was very well prepared. ☺

There were many things I should have done better. There were many things I didn't have time to do at all. There were many things I wasn't able to do. Most of the things would not have worked without my invaluable staff and volunteers. Those who helped me most were: Jennika, Özgür, Andreea, Mickis, Johanna and Lenita. Naturally the whole arrangement depended on our partners in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and United Kingdom. Without the participants there would not have been a camp at all.

THOUSANDS OF THANKS TO YOU ALL!! 😊 😊 😊

...AND HUGS

Marja Leena

