

Sustainable Living in a Globalised World

WSCF Europe Lingua Franca Seminar

Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

1-6 August 2011

More than twenty students and young people from Ukraine, Macedonia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia gathered together to examine the theme “Building Sustainable Societies: A Europe Free from Human Trafficking.” The WSCF-E’s Lingua Franca Programme is aimed specifically providing opportunities to students and young people from central and Eastern Europe to participate in cultural exchanges and engaged in language learning.

Building a Lingua Franca

At the start of the week, Participants were introduced to the theme of social sustainability. John Delap (Roman Catholic—Ireland) led a session on the diverse understandings of “sustainability” focusing on how the very word differs in the many languages spoken by seminar participants. To ensure that all participants felt able to contribute, the group agreed on day one to use simple, clear English throughout the week and to be open to explaining differences in our understandings to each other in a respectful way. This attention to respectful dialogue lies at the heart of building sustainable communities, where participants can share and learn from each other.



Trafficking Facts and Experiences

In their applications, participants were asked to describe “social sustainability” in their own languages and to articulate the ways in which the continuance of trafficking affects the development of a united Europe. Gillian Wylie, Lecturer in International Peace Studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College, Dublin and a former SCMer (in the UK), outlined the current situation regarding human trafficking in Europe, and the various distinctions in relevant terminology. Torsten Moritz, of the Churches Commission on Migration and committed ecumenist, gave a clear overview of actions Churches and European Institutions have been taking towards addressing Trafficking.

The other side of the coin, the real-life experiences faced by victims of trafficking, were described by Romyana Doncheva from the International Catholic Aid organization, Caritas-Bulgaria. The challenges and struggles of women who are trafficked were highlighted by local parish priest, Fr Dobromir (Orthodox—Bulgaria). He shared his wealth of experience in the provision of pastoral care to trafficked peoples with all of us, which put a human face on the harrowing realities sent in Europe today.

Translating knowledge to action

Near the end of the week in Veliko Tarnovo, participants took part in a simulation of a European anti-trafficking congress. Participants were assigned roles as policy-makers, NGO-officials, Church leaders and other special interest stakeholders. After a period of preparation, the fireworks flew as we took the floor in a plenary session. In the end, this session highlighted that while small groups may share a Lingua Franca around issues of Trafficking, we can often find ourselves lost in translation on this issue when confronted with the vast array of pressures and political realities at a European-level.

Sustainable Prayers

The week featured daily prayer, themed around the topics of community-building and sustainability. Participants were encouraged to dip into their own variety of traditions to share in this prayerful space, which ranged from quiet and reflective to energetic and musical. A reflection on a passage from Genesis 31 kicked off our week at the opening prayer service. Participants were encouraged to link themes emerging from the week's activities back to this Genesis passage. Numerous approaches to prayer were represented, including readings the Bible, modern-day theologians and prayer materials from other traditions. One evening featured a guided meditation. Another featured singing in many languages in the style of Taizé. Our final worship, prepared and led by participants, featured the heavenly voices of two of our Armenian Apolostic participants singing from their own tradition, along with enthusiastic movement and dancing, highlighting the community that we had build over the course of our week together.



Brainstorming for the Future

We did not leave Veliko Tarnovo disheartened. On our final day, a lively brainstorming sessions led to the generation of many ideas that students and young people can implement to raise awareness about the nuanced issues of Human Trafficking. This was followed by a special session focused on building listening-skills, a key element of bringing about change. Before rushing to catch trains, buses and planes, the group reflected together on how we can advocate for sustainability in our own communities on a day-to-day basis. We know that to be sustainable, and to avoid burnout, we have to enjoy ourselves from time to time... and that's exactly what we did at the final farewell party!

Hospitable Hosts

No description of our week together would be complete without special mention of the remarkable hospitality shown to us by Zoran Mamuchevski (Orthodox—Macedonia) and his team on the Host Committee. The welcome they extended to all the participants was overwhelming – they met us all on arrival in Veliko Tarnovo, they translated from our many languages into to the local Lingua Franca, Bulgarian, for the whole week. They led us on a memorable excursion with a walking tour of the old city of Veliko Tarnovo, visits to two old Orthodox churches in the nearby hills, as well as a visit to see a sacred icon in an Orthodox monastery. Coffee and tea at a mountaintop coffee shop with a magnificent view over all of Veliko Tarnovo was followed by horseback riding at a local stable! None of the participants in the week's seminar will soon forget the beauty of Veliko Tarnovo or the graciousness of our Bulgarian hosts.



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