

WSCF at Kirchentag-Heartbeat Youth Congress
Katka Babicová

Once upon a time, from 31 May until 5 June about 60 young people from Central and Eastern Europe shared each other's presence in a city of history Dresden, Germany.

What was going on?

"Heartbeat" Youth Congress preceded the socially, politically and spiritually shaped German Protestant Kirchentag 2011. The topic was a challenging question: "What does my heart beat for?" and was directly linked to the main theme of Kirchentag – "...there your heart will be also" taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6: 21).

Intense and diverse exploring of our *raison d'heartbeat* started with a bible study on "Travelling and Migration" where we, not surprisingly, discovered that many of us do not live in our homelands anymore. This has many different implications on our identities – Christian, secular, personal features; whom we meet; where we are; who we are...

Among many of the interactive sessions on the topic to help us discover our interests was: History and my Identity – How did historical/political events shape my (Christian) identity? Answers offered by Mr. Reinhard Höppner, a German politician (SPD), with a story of how he became a politician because there simply wasn't any other choice for him in the 1980s. Is there a choice for us now? So, why don't young people participate in public life and debates? This question was asked a couple of times during the congress hopefully setting a growing idea into the participant's minds.

Even though the 30 degree heat and the river side of the wonderful Elbe tempted us to go out – we got totally caught up inside by personal story telling of the Egyptian revolution in January by Noha Adel Fahmy, Nihad Nabil Fares and Bahaa Gamil Ghobrial - three young Egyptians guest speakers present for both us and the Kirchentag. How do we as Christians participate in society?

Bahaa told us about the churches' reluctant approach to the revolution; however this did not prevent them from participating. So, sometimes to oppose means to go against a part of yourself and your spiritual community. Interestingly, their participation varied a lot – even though all were from the minority of the intelligent, middle class in Egypt, they did not have the same opinion on the positive grounds of the revolution and future. On the other hand, some positive personal experiences of readiness to help and build together across differences in their society when it was needed, especially after the revolution, has to some extent led to the breaking down of some barriers, while people fought together.

Another aspect, particularly interesting from the technological perspective, was the role of social media as Facebook and Twitter were used for collecting people to march. However, this was and is only available to a small number of Egyptian citizens from the middle and upper class, which were said to be the main actors and that is why the current situation and future development is still in the stars, as the vast majority of the Egyptian population is poor and illiterate. "We will see what happens", were the final words of the guests.

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Apart from lectures the interactive and engaging activities, which gave space for all of us, were on the programme everyday and we could reflect on the direct and indirect historical, social and political influences on our identities, the role of Christianity and other spiritual teachings and cultural backgrounds.

After we uncovered some of the background for our very deep interests, we were better able to ask ourselves what we stand up and open our mouths for in the society. Do we even do it? A voice from Belarus, Natalia Vasilevich, a religious rights activist in Belarus' hard political circumstances who has been persecuted, offered her experience as an example of a peaceful and non-violent type of resistance against the government and monopoly of church. We all, especially those of us living in free countries, could learn from her; especially how to engage in public debate and social activism.

After the Heartbeat congress, the main Kirchentag (kirchentag.de) started and we experienced a social and religious event of a format not existing in other European countries.

So, what is the outcome, you ask? Meeting, learning about ourselves and the possibilities of future social engagements. Among other organisations, WSCF and EYCE provided such space in their campaigns and activities, which our interests and investments can make our heart beat faster for the good.

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