

Poverty, Wealth and Ecology

Katka Babicová

In Budapest, Hungary, between 8-12 November 2010, representatives of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) met together to contribute as Europeans to the global ecumenical discussion on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology. By the end of 2011 consultations will have been held on all continents and the context and issues of Poverty, Wealth and Ecology will be interlinked. WSCF-E, the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE) and the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (Syndesmos) were invited to be present as the associated youth organisations in Europe and to provide youth input and insights to the topics alongside with different representatives of churches and church organisations.

Lectures, discussions, presentations, workshops, even theories, and finally drafting the final statement outlining the issues explored during the consultation. All of those are usual procedures on the programme of such a meeting. But why was this consultation not just another 'talky-talky' event?

At times, this meeting did feel like many other events full of talking – it was a nice encounter with kind people and *a lot* of talking without an implementation of a recommendation – the impact just did not have a chance to make itself visible. If we take all three issues: Poverty, Wealth and Ecology, and their aspects in the European societies and churches, it was through the openness, testimonies, presentations and witnessing, which the churches and especially grassroots organisations present provided. These very deep experiences are what actually make the change in our everyday life, they make us think about the consequences of our deeds and living. They set us on the way of active involvement; help us finding courage to make such a change. The excursion to different Roma initiatives; the presentation of an activity run by a Scottish organisation, which simply brings both the poorest and the most wealthy from the parish together; or simply just to preach about the wealth in European churches were examples of this. Furthermore, an interesting question was posed: Why don't we hear more preaching more about wealth? Why do we not want to hear about global wealth or the wealthy? Why do we listen actively when we are preached to about poverty? We all can identify poverty as a problem and stand in solidarity with people suffering, but do we ever think about our wealth and opportunities, the chances and privileges we have in comparison to others?

So, what is it we, as churches and church organisations, envision? A better world only with words? The answer from this Consultation is a Statement prepared by the representatives, which calls for climate justice and just economic development. It addresses mainly churches and secular institutions, which we as youth organisations felt was a rather unreachable address. Therefore, our reply, as youth organisations, to this question was in our own part of the statement based on the already existing one from the EYCE and WSCF-E joint study session *Climate Justice Now!*, held in September. We, as an example, committed ourselves to a number of goals to be reached in our work and called upon European churches to do so as well.

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Apart from this, we were able to lead three workshops alongside other organisations at the conference. We presented and discussed the situation of the European Youth in the context of poverty and wealth in the recent years of financial crisis; here we also addressed the lack of involvement and participation of students and youth. The second workshop was an interactive contribution to the debate about the climate justice, presenting the ecological footprint calculation and consequences and the third was a presentation of the statement from the Climate Justice Now! study session and discussion about the global political and economical power relations. Throughout all workshops we were trying to highlight the question of education and in particular informal ways of learning as a crucial player in the future development and solutions of the questions of Poverty, Wealth and Ecology.

The solutions can be very simplistic and straightforward, and the only complicated or difficult side is the courage we lack. We have seen it with our own eyes during the presentations and I am sure, there are more examples. What is more, seeing that in a global, interconnected society solutions to problems need to be a joint effort, but still focused solutions to be successful and so that we have had the opportunity to learn from them.

So, where do we go from here? That is a question both for the CEC and youth organisations to answer in our near future, the future of all of us!

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