



**A Just Life *or just life?*
Intercultural Dialogue on Alternative Globalisation**

Around thirty students from across the Europe gathered together from 2-8 April 2008 for the WSCF Europe Solidarity conference “A Just Life *or just life?* Intercultural Dialogue on Alternative Globalisation”. The conference took place in Gödöllő, a town on the outskirts of Budapest, at the Mater Salvatoris retreat center.

The conference began on Wednesday evening with introductions to the programme, venue, and staff before dinner and an opening ecumenical worship. Ice breaker games led by the preparatory committee helped participants to become acquainted before the welcoming party.

Thursday morning began with a brainstorming session on key concepts of globalisation, social justice, trade justice and justice in Christianity. Participants spread throughout the room, sharing their thoughts and preconceptions with each other on large posters which later served as decoration for the week. The summary discussion provided a fitting introduction into the themes of the seminar.

Michael Taylor, an emeritus professor of social theology at Birmingham University and former director of Christian Aid in the UK, gave a challenging introductory lecture to the topic of globalisation. To follow-up on the lecture, participants divided into small groups for discussion before coming together in plenary. The groups examined the effects of globalisation, analysing the roles and responsibilities of groups and individuals in the process.

After lunch and siesta, participants divided into groups to join workshops, which were led by some of the participants themselves. Rosie Venner from the UK led an interactive workshop entitled “Small World”. Her workshop examined the resonating effects of our daily choices on the rest of the world, focusing especially on Africa, through discussion, illustration, and a hands-on activity simulating our interconnected world with noodles and marshmallows. Alida Ajzner from Hungary led a workshop entitled “Chosen liberty as an Imperative Choice”. Through discussion, she explored the advantages and disadvantages of the unavoidable choices and freedom given to young people today as a result of globalisation, increasing freedom of movement and access to information. Daniel Bonniot, from France but living in Hungary, led a workshop on the “Third Sector”, examining collectives as alternatives to capitalism. Stella Vatamanescu, a Moldovan living in Romania, led a workshop on “Regionalisation”, studying globalisation at the regional level and changes in national identity as a result of the process of European integration.

Each group then presented the outcomes of the workshops in plenary before dinner. In the evening, after the Protestant worship, participants presented and shared culinary traditions from their home countries together in an intercultural buffet.

On Friday, after ecumenical worship, Peter Pavlovic, from the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches in Brussels, gave a lecture about social justice in the European context. He also spoke about churches’ roles in the creation of a more just society in Europe. Following the lecture, participants participated in a time of plenary discussion. In the early afternoon, James Trewby, the coordinator of Bosco Volunteer Action in England, gave an interactive presentation on voluntary work and development education. His presentation pushed discussions of social justice from a theoretical level to practical action, giving concrete possibilities for action in response to injustices in the world.



Later in the afternoon, presentations about each voluntary option for the excursion day were given. For the first half of the excursion into Budapest on Saturday, participants would divide into three groups to do different types of voluntary work, giving the opportunity for concrete action on the theme. Following dinner and Orthodox worship, participants shared presentations of music, dance, pictures, stories, etc, from their home countries. Before ending the day, participants sat together by the campfire, enjoying music and cooking Danish bread together over the flames.

After worship on Saturday, participants traveled to Budapest and split into three groups for three different voluntary actions. One group visited residents at the Fogytékosok Intézete Órbottyán (Institute of the Disabled in Órbottyán), another group went to an orphanage, Budapest Főváros Önkormányzatának Területi Gyermekvédelmi Szakszolgálat (Budapest Regional Child Protective Services), and the third group went to the Central European University for a training session with Amnesty International about running an advocacy campaign and writing letters. Participants ate packed lunches in a park by the Danube and then had the opportunity to explore Budapest and take part in a guided tour. In the evening, participants gathered at the Lágymányosi Ökumenikus Központ, an ecumenical center, for a dinner of gulyás and for Hungarian dance lessons with a folk band.

On Sunday morning, following worship, Györgyi Ujszaszi from the Fair Trade Center in Budapest gave a presentation about the Fair Trade movement, products and the rules of fair trade. She also talked about the availability of fair trade goods within Hungary and other parts of Europe, and emphasised the need for campaigning to raise awareness about ethical consumption.

In the afternoon, Kathryn Ellis from the UK led a role play simulating how trade markets work worldwide. Participants were divided into groups to represent different countries, and given supplies to produce “goods” to sell at the world market. Supplies, group members, tools, etc, were limited. The role play involved times of trading, purchasing, and included meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The role play was intense and emotional, revealing the difficulties of the world market. Participants spent time in reflection and discussion afterwards, examining realities about fair or unfair trade and about the consequences of international trade for developing and third world countries.

In the evening, after Catholic worship, we watched the film “Amazing Grace,” telling the story of William Wilberforce and his lifelong struggle in the campaign to abolish the slavery in the British Empire. Among other things, this film revealed the importance of actions of individuals against injustice in society. After watching a short documentary further explaining the historical context of the Wilberforce’s campaign, participants gathered again around a campfire for the rest of the evening.

Following breakfast and worship on the final day, Aikaterini Pekridou, an Orthodox Theologian from Greece, lead a bible study examining social justice. In small groups and then in plenary, participants read and discussed the story of Jesus and Samaritan woman by the well in the Gospel of John, chapter 4. The text invoked much discussion about discriminated people and groups in society and the church.

In the afternoon, participants gathered for a follow-up discussion about the themes of the conference and how they apply to everyday life. In small groups, all discussed concrete ideas to address injustice and problems of globalisation in daily life. Ideas included organizing a film screening or fair trade meal to raise awareness, recycling, campaigning, volunteering at local homeless shelters, setting up a website with a database of stores in local



areas that sell free trade goods, joining a voluntary programme, etc. At the European level of WSCF Europe, participants brainstormed about organizing a t-shirt campaign for visa freedom. In addition, as a result of this and previous discussions, WSCF-E commits to the priority of having fair trade goods at all events when available.

To make these discussions tangible, participants wrote postcards to themselves, which would later serve as reminders about desired changes in lifestyle or about concrete actions they wished to plan or implement once home. Participants then joined in a time of evaluation of the seminar and Jooa Vuorinen, the regional secretary of WSCF-E, gave a presentation about upcoming activities.

Participants then divided into groups for artistic workshops, also lead by participants. Branislava Jovic, a Macedonian living in Bulgaria, led an interpretive dance workshop about the dynamics of globalisation. Hanna Kuisma, from Finland, led a workshop exploring the theme through painting. In addition, Daniel Bonniot led a singing workshop and Samuel Kunzo from Slovakia led a workshop compiling the photographs from the week. All of these workshops were presented at the final party.

In the final worship, gathered around candles shaped into a map of the world, participants also had the opportunity to share their impressions and thoughts from the conference. After dinner together, the each artistic workshop was presented to the group at the beginning of the farewell party, providing a fulfilling time of reflection on the week. In totality, conference was an intense and inspiring experience, providing a challenging forum for learning about globalisation amidst the diverse contexts within Europe. All participants left inspired, acknowledging the effects of our daily choices in the globalised world and challenged by our roles and responsibilities as Christians and young people in this interconnected world today.

A special thanks to our donors—This conference was supported by the European Youth Foundation and Diakonisches Wekr der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland - Churches helping Churches

