

Donaufest 2024

Friday, July 12, 2024

Workshop 6:

Empowerment of Women

Moderator: Carmen Stadelhofer, ILEU, Ulm (Germany)

Some keywords:

Power of women, independent, interconnected, educated, power, retired, personality, tough inside – soft outside, honesty, kindness, knows what she wants, goes for her aims, self-confident, not afraid to speak up, equal to men, competent, struggles with everything, training, loved woman, ready to change, courage, stands up for rights, beauty inside and outside

Contributing speeches:

Ms **Andrea Laux**, Mine e.V. Stuttgart (Germany):

The International Network of Mothers' Centers and how it Strengthens Democracy in the Danube Region

Mother centers in the Danube region are building democracy from bottom up every day by creating space for peer learning, engagement and mutual support.

The mother center movement enables women to stand up here and now. They used to be quiet, uneducated – but now are empowered to find their destination.

During the Czech revolution mother centers were founded to create democracy bottom-up (as Vaclav Havel said). This started an East-West movement to help children. You need public space to do that – and we were able to do it. We knew what they needed and helped by cooking, talking, networking, going forward – walk (as activists) and talk.

Question (from the audience): How do you cheer up when you are down, confronted with such misery?

Answer: This is not a romantic undertaking, you learn the hard way. I need to find something to cheer me up, such as contemplation, going offline.

Q: How good are you at learning to be offline?

A: You need to learn that – there is always a struggle in public, what helps is self-awareness and protecting yourself. I know about too much, but am there to help.

Q: Have the needs of your women changed due to this work?

A: These are not necessarily adults. We need to talk to a woman, try to involve the government in our projects. Today, we need to modernize. In future: we want to be universal, be part of a movement, build a community. We need to address not only young women, but also those of the third age, find an intergenerational approach.

Ms **Monika Heitmann**, Head of the Bulgarian-German Social Organization St. Andreas e.V., Liebenau Foundation

Her organization has partnership projects e.g. in Romania which are among the biggest partnership projects in Europe, working with Romanian and Bulgarian people with Romanian roots. They are finding ways to integrate young members of minorities, especially Romnja and Roma, which in Bulgaria lie largely in their education. With a successful school-leaving certificate, they can find an apprenticeship, a job in their own country and thus their place in society. Before that, they need to be given advice and support in terms of language, schooling, everyday life and leisure activities, and they need to be protected from drug abuse, human trafficking and dropping out of school. Experience shows that young people accept support and guidance, especially from within their own ranks. We therefore trained young local people on site to become mobile youth and social workers.

Away from the tourist centers on the Black Sea coast, many Bulgarians live in extreme poverty without adequate health and social care. Many members of minority groups, especially Romnja and Roma, elderly, sick and disabled people, children and single parents are particularly affected.

Children learn with other Romnja and Roma children. Only 3% of Roma women can study. We want to reduce the rate of early school leavers, we have schools, doctors, nurses. When you have seven children, education money goes to rent rooms. We need to give basic support.

There are two groups: Turkish-speaking Muslims who learn the Bulgarian language, and the Romnja. Our organization is trying to break the vicious cycle at various points: by schooling, family, free-time activities.

Question (from the audience): Do you have professionals in Romania working with children?

Answer: We want to do that, too.

We have a special interest for minorities, especially Romnja. This is a small community of previously about 30 to 70 thousand. Today, it is stable at about 300 to 400 thousand. We school them in Romanian language, looking for role models, educating Romnja women by teaching them professional skills such as hairdressing or sewing. Boys we teach technical skills.

Husbands often do not allow their young wives to work. We try to reach them by working with the elders. We have been working there for 22 years now, but need funding for a longer stretch. Role models are needed, not only in Bulgarian communities but also in their own. Participants engage for their community.

The educational level is often low, so we need to address topics such as sex education, the role of women in patriarchal societies. Marrying early is a symptom of missing education. Family education means not to become pregnant early, a strategy for integrating women also means to educate Romanian women and creating role models. For example, today there are no female members of the Romanian parliament.

Ms **Carmen Stadelhofer**, ILEU, Ulm (Germany)

Ukrainians who have fled the Russian war of aggression, mostly women and children, not only need help with accommodation, care and clothing, but also mental, emotional and language support and integration opportunities. This is where ILEU e.V. started in March 2022 and organized a wide range of opportunities using the motto "Together in Ulm" to help settle them into their new everyday lives, acquire and apply German language skills by encounters and then find ways to get involved.

ILEU and the Danube networkers wanted to help, not only with homes, clothes, food, but especially help for communication – and this is why they started "Together in Ulm" in March 2022.

Ms **Galina Poliakova**, founder of the Ukrainian Charity Organization "Turbota pro Litnih v Ukraini", reported about helping "our guys" at the front by humanitarian aid for people above 70, nursing homes, sanitation and hygienic goods, sewing beddings by turning about 10 km of cloth into beddings.

There are different groups to train elders, drive them, cook hot meals, train behavior during air raids, survive... and also beware of crooks. They are all very kind and open, experiencing "I am necessary".

Ms Poliakova thanked for the support they have received up to now, but stressed that to be able to help "We Need Money!"

As an example of fundraising she told of the pig project: the organization bought piglets, raised them and could then eat them.

Ms **Lesya Loyko**, Environmental organization FORZA, Uschhorod, Ukraine:
"Protecting urban green through citizen power"

Ms Loyko spoke of the EU-funded project „Fem4Forest – Forest in women's hands“. At the international conference for forestry women on November 17, 2022 in Bled/Slovenia, forestry women from 6 European countries announced the founding of the international umbrella organization "Women in Forestry International" (WOFO). The association aims to network women in the forestry and timber industry at national and international level, act as a point of contact for politicians, the media and companies and initiate and support research and projects on women in the forestry sector.

Ms Loyko said that we need to recruit men **and** women as foresters. The project is about sharing knowledge and experience and mutual support. And it's about role models and the visibility of women in the forestry and timber industry. They want to support young women to enter forestry, to found a female ambassador program for future professionals.

Finally, Ms **Poliakova's** piglet project was supported by collecting funds from the audience to buy and raise a piglet. She thanked the supporters for their help.