

## **BalkanKids Foundation**

### **Lingnan Partner Community Support Center**

#### **Report on 2016 EU-China NGO Twinning Program**

Antoaneta Pophlebarova, BalkanKids Foundation, Varna, Bulgaria

Yao Zhilu, Lingnan Partner Community Support Center, Guangzhou, China

#### ***Brief description of exchange purpose/projects.. (max 100 words)***

*The bilateral exchange took place in Guangzhou and Varna respectively between July and November 2016. Its aim was to create closer bonds between BalkanKids Foundation, Varna and Lingnan Partners, Guangzhou in the field of sexual education, youth work opportunities and volunteering for disadvantaged young people. The project was greatly successful due to the friendly professional link between Antoaneta and Zhilu and resulted in 15 trained peer-to-peer high school educators, lots of youth work on field, enhanced understanding of China and Europe and mostly – ideas for future projects. It was perfectly coordinated and facilitated by Stiftung Asienhaus with the financial help of Robert Bosch Foundation.*

#### **Antoaneta Pophlebarova, BalkanKids Foundation, Varna, Bulgaria**

29.7.2016 – 29.8.2016 Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, China

#### ***Introduction (Objectives, expectations)***

The main objective of this project was starting a process of exchange of experience on sexual education, health education and disadvantaged children social work between Balkankids and Lingnan Partners. The expectations of a mutual process of learning-by-doing and getting to know different cultures, structures and people mentality was outdone by the variety of experiences that I had with my partner Yao, Zhilu.

#### ***Challenges (Cultural contrasts)***

(What was the most challenging/suprising when you came to work in China? Which hurdles could be overcome/ stayed throughout your exchange period?)

The most surprising thing for me in China is how much it outdid the stereotypes and negative expectations that my mind had been boggled with. The most challenging was to leave this mesmerizing country and to say goodbye to people who I will probably not see in my life.

Except for the language barrier which was a major hinder in my professional contacts with NGO partners and made it hard to realize my part of plan connected with education done by

me in China, I did not have any cultural clashes and misunderstandings. This was mainly due to my most helpful and dedicated partner Zhilu, her colleagues, family and friends. I was feeling like a silk bug, woven in a gentle bubble of silk – love and attention and facilitated to all the meetings, locations, events and sights.

### **Activities**

(Which activities did the you participate in?)

The main activity that I was engaged in during my stay in China was getting acquainted with the network of NGOs engaged in sexual education, HIV prevention and detection, disadvantaged children and migrating children educational support and various health education and youth involvement structures in the Guangzhou region. On my side – my responsibility was to present the EU youth work support structures and EVS volunteering opportunities to Chinese youth workers.

The process of getting to know each other was very interesting and revealing to me personally. It challenged my expectations that the NGOs in China are in a freshman stage compared to the Old Continent. What I observed was a very hierarchical and stable functioning system of local government and rich companies support mainly for:

- sexual education – Guangdong YouthNet,
- involvement of city students into peer education in less economically developed regions – YU FOUNDATION,
- support of children of migratory parents in their educational and social difficulties - V LOVE IT Association,
- alienation, low self esteem and difficult relationships support work – Nurturing Relationships Foundation and
- specific attention and catering for the needs of LGBT communities – Lingnan Partners

With the guidance of my partner Yao, Zhilu, I visited the offices of all these organizations and in a friendly conversation and PowerPoint presentation presented BalkanKids Foundation, Erasmus + programme and European Voluntary Service and got a deeper insight into their activities and ideas for the future. I was deeply impressed with the professional outlook of their educational materials – abundant and appealing in design, unfortunately only in Chinese, and with the support they receive from local government and universities for their initiatives.

I was invited to a two-day large-scale conference of sexual education – a final Training of Trainers event where each speaker tackled deeply intimate topics in front of a large audience, LGBT people had confidence to speak up, men confessed their wrong ideas of sex until the age of 21 and a rich variety of questions were openly asked and answered and the name of the conference was ... “Depth and Passion”. I was constantly asking myself how would such an event be viewed in my home country where we all pretend to be widely informed about sex issues but giggle foolishly when topics like these are raised, leave our

children at the uncontrolled avalanche of media information and when it comes to unwanted pregnancy prevention in poor and disadvantaged groups are at the lowest success rate. Many things were stunning for me in China but this was one of them, too – the intensity with which a government streamlined process is processed by the population – since the lifting of the one-child policy ban, sexual education is a priority for university work and my friend Zhilu is undoubtedly one of the most professional, charismatic and experienced trainers in this area.

Another aspect of China that I was allowed to catch a glimpse of was the private education kindergarten of Zhilu's uncle, Mr Lin Qui in Hai Feng city. As I am also the director of a private language courses provider in Bulgaria, I was interested to see how this business works in China. The major difference was first the scale and second – the availability of authentic language teaching educational materials. Mr Lin's Love Kindergarten is with the size of a four-storey block of flats. The only British language teaching materials that I could find in the biggest bookstore in Guangzhou were issued decades ago. It explains the gap in language training and opens a fountain of opportunities as well.

As for my personal experiences – I survived a typhoon on the third day of my stay, had an article about it published in "China Daily" online newspaper the a few days later, experimented with all kinds of cooking styles, met amazingly friendly people with whom I had long and strange conversations with the help of an I-phone app, did not get lost getting along in enormous Guangzhou underground network, spent more than a hundred hours in cars, got to know as much as four Chinese characters, celebrated my birthday with a cake in a bowl of soup and ... had a beautiful time with beautiful people. It would not be possible without "mu Chinese daughter" Zhilu and of course without the brilliant opportunity opened to us by Stiftung Asienhaus for which I am deeply thankful!

### ***Outcome and Impact***

(What were the concrete results and accomplishments of the exchange? What "products" came out of your twinning? E.g. reports, events, studies, work models, conferences...)

The main result of our project is a stable and long-term professional and personal relationship with my partner Yao, Zhilu. She is in a transition period in her life between graduating university and starting a career and starting her own NGO so there must be a short period of adaptation before the next step but it is already decided; promotion of sexual education training and materials among high school students in Bulgaria and promotion of non-formal education and social campaigning methods among university students in China.

### ***Future Plans and Sustainability of the Partnership***

(Please describe the joint follow-up project if one has been planned and reflect on the sustainability of the collaboration. Between the two organizations, other organizations you have met through the twinning as well as twidders themselves.)

BalkanKids have started a process of sexual education to disadvantaged kids and we want to develop it. For this reason, we need to keep training our peer-to-peer educators and encourage them to spread the message. Our cooperation with Zhilu has shown her that we can learn a lot from the concise Chinese methodology and would need to get it translated at least into English. Thus, with the help of Zhilu, we will try to develop lesson plans and handouts based on Chinese tutorials.

Moreover, it is a challenge to inspire cooperation between the youngsters of the two countries and the TedX style presenter online competition sounds like a good tool for this. The big ambition is to aim is to try to fund-raise to support the travel of a young person from both countries to visit their partner but we are positive to try.

As for the Forum theatre methodology training in China, the idea came after my visit to Lingnan because I realized that these theatre based techniques can trigger a more motivated discussion and sharing. I have been trained in this theatre tools and shared them with Zhilu in Bulgaria. She was largely inspired and we are about to think it over. We would like to invite Yu Yin from the twinnings to be a partner as she said she would connect us with a NGO that practises these methods in Guangzhou. But the idea is still being born and we will develop it around mid-April to submit.

**Please add your 3 favourite pictures/media coverage of your work**

**For more information, please refer to the manual's Guidelines for documentation and evaluation**

**In case of further questions please contact Stiftung Asienhaus-China Program and request access to in-depth twinning reports.**





**Yao Zhilu, Lingnan Partner Community Support Center, Guangzhou,  
China**

October 9, 2016 - November 29, 2016

***Introduction (Objectives, expectations)***

The program was focused on sexual education of disadvantaged and foster care children, with the goal of sharing and building trust with them and attempting to educate them on sex issues through the methodology of China's Guangdong Pee-to-Peer Education. Through the training of 15 local high-school volunteers to be peer-to-peer educators in order to view closely and improve understanding of sexual education related content, the training was transferred to a foster home where the youngsters were presented with the necessary and correct sexual information. We hope that this project will enable children to realize that proper sexual knowledge is relevant to their daily life, and that they will deal more assertively with issues related to sexuality and love if confronted with sexual harassment, violence or crisis.

### ***Challenges (Cultural contrasts)***

(What was the most challenging/surprising when you came to work in Europe? Which hurdles could be overcome/ stayed throughout your exchange period?)

There were several things that challenged me:

#### 1. Language communication problems

At first, I was not confident in my own spoken English and trying to teach in English was indeed a great challenge on my own. So, I was trying to use simple English expressions to the local high-school peer educators. Fortunately, the Bulgarian high-school students have a good level of English and they could understand what I presented, and eventually develop peer education skills. In addition, the children in the foster home can speak only the local language, and do not understand English. And then, after the continuous improvement, and ultimately with our high school peer-to-peer educators doing the translation for my class in the foster home, the process was successful. It let them recognize that for different age groups, peer-to-peer education needs different approaches.

2. There is a lack of resonance in viewing the topic of sexuality and gender stereotyping between China and Bulgaria. When I was sharing the sexual ideas with the Bulgarian local high school students and the French exchange group, because of different national cultural backgrounds, the result was a lack of understanding and topic of debate. Fortunately, I could learn different information from their world because of cultural differences and the essential differences with the Chinese society. Some of them became my best friends in Bulgaria.

3. There are differences in cooperation, the way and expression when the Chinese and Bulgarians do things. As the representative of Chinese organization, I would like to prepare them when they come. Sometimes it will make me worry too much. Antoaneta, as a representative of Bulgaria, she can always stay positive and enjoy herself even when confronted with problems. I was seen as pessimistic in the cooperation because I liked to be worried in these cases. But fortunately, our goal was the same all the time, both of us were trying to find a solution to solve the problem. After that Antoaneta made me know that Zhilu doesn't need to be worried so much, just relax and think how to solve problems when they come. She influenced me deeply on the time when I lived with her in Varna.

### ***Activities***

(Which activities did you participate in?)

#### 1. HIV exchange of information and sharing in a high-school classroom.

This was the first project for me when I arrived in Varna. The chance came from Antoaneta's German friend, who is a teacher. They invited me to share some necessary sexual information for a class of high-school students. I had chosen the topic of HIV, and the name of the game was Wildfire Game. It was also an adventure for me. It was the first time I made a Powerpoint in English, took the wrong bus, took extra lessons in

English. Fortunately, I managed. All the team encouraged and believed in me. This was the first time I tried to share an important topic in a peer-to-peer education way with my simple English. I told the Chinese author how I used my peer-to-peer education book after that. He was shocked and happy for me. Amazing experience for me!

2. High-school peer-to-peer educator training, 2 times a week.

This was one of the most important part of my job in my daily life in Varna. Antoaneta had a discussion with me about what could I do in their organization and I told her that the most talented thing for me in this time was peer-to-peer education training. After that, we invited the volunteers, who were interested in these topic, from Balkankids Foundation. All of them were high-school students with good English. So that we could understand each other very well. The topics I had chosen were: Sexual minorities, View of love, Sexual behavior and decision, Prevention of sexual harassment, Prevention of STD and AIDS ,Contraception and abortion. Finally, they can tried to be a peer-to-peer educators and we had a very good relationship. My students said my English became better and better at last. Antoaneta always said “Zhilu, you can manage them very well. Who is the best? Of course, you are the best!” Antoaneta encouraged me a lot in this time.

3. French youth exchange group of Love View Sharing.

This was an interesting part of my experience. There was 13 exchange teenagers from France. They came to experience the difference in the social service and activities in Bulgaria with the children with mental disability in the Daily Center and with the orphans in the Foster Home. These teenagers are very nice and passionate. Antoaneta said I could share something for them. So that I chose the topic of View of love for them. After that, I found that these teenagers were only 16 years old and they were very romantic. At the last day I met them, all of them came and hug and kiss me. That made me feel full of love. I think if I have the chance I need to go to France and visit them.

4. Foster home Classroom, every Wednesday afternoon.

This was another important part of my job in my daily life in Varna. And that was also a very important part of volunteer job for the EVS volunteers from the Balkankids Foundation. Antoaneta told me that the disadvantaged children need the sexual information most there. Some of them had sex experience in a very early age, and nobody would tell them anything about sex in their life, they try to experience and they don't know any protection methods and they didn't know they were facing high risk in these cases. So that I chose some topics which were suitable for them, like Sexual behavior and decision, Prevention of sexual harassment, Prevention of STD and AIDS, Contraception and abortion. I used some games of these topic with my volunteer translators.

5. Daily center to take care of children, once every other week.

This is a part of the volunteer job for the volunteers from Balkankids Foundation. As a

partner of Balkankids Foundation. I wanted to experience more that I can do as a normal volunteer. A friend of mine from the EVS project brought me there. All the children there had mental disability. At first, I was afraid because some children liked to slap me all the time when I was sat there. And I started to use my eyes to ask for help from my friend, she just smiled at me at that time. After that I knew that was because they liked me. I found that all of them were very pure. They will show all the emotion on their face without guess. Simple and happy life for them.

6. Exchange of the Varna Prevention Center.

Varna Prevention Center invited Antoaneta and me to visit them. I was there to exchange information about the differences in the job in HIV prevention between Lingnan Partners and Varna Prevention Center. We found the most different thing was the numbers of the HIV infected. China has about 40 million and Bulgaria has about 2 thousand. The same things are, both of us will have a group for service for people, and both of us will use peer-to-peer way in sexual education. That was a great talk with the expert and the social worker in the Varna Prevention Center.

7. The most important part was my daily living in Bulgaria.

I was living with Antoaneta(Toni), who taught me everything in Varna, encouraged me and worried about me everyday when I was along . Bobi (Toni's husband), bought a rice cooker before I came ,smiling all the time and cooked for me daily. and Fisyo (their lovely cat), who lived in the same room with me and slept on my body everyday. All of them treated me as their own children.

Otherwise, Antoaneta helped me meet four girls from BalkanKids EVS project, Jessi, Hanna, Paula, Marta. They are from different countries, came to Varna as volunteers of BalkanKids Foundation. We would gather together when we had time, for volunteer work, they helped me not to get lost, went to the supermarket for meals, tried to teach me to drink alcohol but failed, watched movies with me, sang songs and so on. They would like to use my pet phrases when they found something interesting.

The most deepest was when the date came and I had to come back to China, they came to the airport for accompanying me until I went over the security of the airplane.

Thanks, BalkanKids Foundation for making me meet so much love in this experience. And thanks, Asienhaus for supporting me to have this kind of chance which changed me a lot.

**Outcome and Impact**

(What were the concrete results and accomplishments of the exchange? What “products” came out of your twinning? E.g. reports, events, studies, work models, conferences,...)

From the exchange of different countries, organizations and teams, you can observe the different cultures, different age groups with different needs of sexual information and understanding. The children under the age of 14 are the same – in the exploratory process of sexual information which they were interested in, there is no way to distinguish between



right and wrong. They lack someone to give them the right guidance. At the same time, many young children are already facing the threat of sexual violence, but they do not know. From this short time, evaluating all aspects of understanding and practice, it is a positive effect for me to continue to have reflection and improvement in the peer –to- peer education process.

On the Bulgarian side, for almost two months, I did my best to develop 15 peer educators from Bulgarian high-schools from Balkankids Foundation. Through the last few lessons of the pilot and peer-to- peer assessment training, these young people had intensive teamwork, with a curriculum, did coursework, and trial, and fulfilled the step-by-step practice to become a peer-to-peer educator. These young people also shared their talent of presenting, although attempting to teach without their mother language increased their challenge. In their own efforts, the volunteers used their style to try to teach in English.

Finally, they received a certificate of completion jointly issued by our two organizations. In addition, when I taught the disadvantaged children in the foster home, we solved the problem of language barrier by giving volunteers the opportunity to translate for us. We discussed the topic of sexual decisions and preventing sexual violence. Eventually, I gave the disadvantaged children notes that they can do the feedback for me, and I received a lot of love from them.

Finally, Antoaneta and I also used the way of the Powerpoint show and rap the project to report in Germany , and get the project work popularised.

### ***Future Plans and Sustainability of the Partnership***

(Please describe the joint follow-up project if one has been planned and reflect on the sustainability of the collaboration. Between the two organizations, other organizations you have met through the twinning as well as twinningers themselves.)

Our organization and Balkankids Foundation went through a consultation process and took the following decision for follow-up cooperation.

My organization will join the Balkankids Foundation in the first half year of 2017 to use the TedX Talk way to realize a Peer-to-peer Sexual education Lecturer Contest. We will try to apply for a fund-raising project for the winning players and their counterparts to have a travel exchange opportunity.

At the same time, we will invite Antoaneta to China to expand new forms of peer-to-peer education - Forum Theater, which will add to the development of sexual education in a new more attractive form in China.

On the Bulgarian side, we will work together to develop peer-to- peer educators in high schools, to share their sexual education with disadvantaged youngsters regularly, and to invite their friends on Facebook to do a monthly sex-related workshop in the Balkankids Foundation's office. Promote the exchange and sympathy.

Please add your 3 favourite pictures/media coverage of your work



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