

# LTNews

The LTEG newsletter on Long Term Volunteering issues

Special P.O.E.M. issue  
November 2007 – N. 8

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## LTNews and LTEG

**LTNews** is a newsletter for people in SCI who are interested in long term volunteering and long term projects. It follows up developments and activities and publishes true (or almost true) stories about being a volunteer. It is edited by the Long Term Exchange Group and other helpful people.

**LTEG** The Long Term Exchange Group is an international group of LTV activists who represent different national branches of Service Civil International. We put our efforts in improving the international communication between the different M/LTV working groups, volunteers and projects.

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**Special thanks to:** Chris, Eefje, Laura, Kathrin

Editorial

## 9 participants and 11 good reasons to meet

November 11<sup>th</sup> is a special day in Cologne, Germany. This is the day when everybody can experience Carnival in its traditional form. Celebrations begin exactly at 11 hour, 11 minutes and 11 seconds in the main square. Under the severe look of the impressive gothic cathedral, joyful swarms of cheerful, colourful people dance, sing and play music on the streets of the city. As Bonn is just 25 minutes away by train from Cologne, a better venue and a better time could not have been found to organize the first Placement Officer Evaluation Meeting (was it really the first? A question for the friend Philippe Rodriguez, international SCI archive coordinator). Not to mention that november 11<sup>th</sup> is also Alena Kripet's birthday, currently LTV at SCI Germany in Bonn and coordinator of the event, with the support of Svenja Heinecke, former LTV in France. With all these incentives, ideas and stimulations (an interesting meeting, a birthday party and Carnival celebrations) it was not difficult to convince nine motivated and experienced activists from all over Europe to join the important gathering: besides former and current LTVs who worked as placement officers, former LTEG members and LTV responsible persons took part to the evaluation.

The placement season is without any doubt the most intense period of the year in SCI branches offices. Many branches "hire" LTVs to work as placement officers and for them this is a unique chance to understand how a NGO works from within. Unfortunately it may happen that the LTVs, at the end of the season, do not have any possibility to meet in order to evaluate their experience and, most of all, to share what they have learnt. Sharing this knowledge is for sure a crucial step in SCI to improve the placement procedure and the relationship with our partner organizations. Last but not least, for those who participated to the Placement Officer Training at the beginning of the season, an evaluation meeting is a good chance for a reunion.

Furthermore, the Evaluation Meeting allowed us to discuss about the future of LTEG (Long Term Exchange Group), which is facing a difficult situation due to organization problems. Should the group be dissolved? Shall LTEG survive? The answer was clear: many activists still love LTEG and the group must go on. How, this is still an open question...

Mauro Carta, LTNews editor  
Bonn, Germany, 12 November 2007

## Placement Officers Evaluation Meeting

# A p.o.e.m. written by 18 hands

An evaluation about the 2007 Placement Season has been held in Bonn (9-10 November 2007) at SCI Germany office. During the meeting many other topics have been discussed: LTV issues, placement procedure, how to boost involvement in SCI.

9 participants, 18 hands and a poem to write. It is not about a creative writing competition. We are talking about the Placement Officers Evaluation Meeting (P.O.E.M.) held in Bonn just before the beginning of Carnival.

Aim of the meeting was to discuss about the following topics:

- evaluation of the LTV experiences as Placement Officers (short form: PO) in order to compare expectations to the April PO Training (short form: POT)
- evaluation of the Placement Season
- evaluation of the experience as camp coordinator (some PO had the chance to coordinate workcamp/s)
- information about SCI international structure in order to keep former POs involved
- presentation of the current situation in LTEG in order to find possible solutions
- discussion about 2008 POT: where, when, who, with whom

9 participants from Europe had the chance to give their contribution to the event. As a matter of fact, the meeting was a pleasant reunion, as all participants took part also to the placement officer training held in Saasen, Germany (see related article in this issue) eight months earlier. Here is the list:

Name	Nat.	Sending org	PO in
James O'Sullivan	EN	IVS UK	KVT FI
Laura Baccolini	IT	not SCI org.	VSI IE
Eefje Kegelaers	BE	not SCI org	Util.HU
Alena Kripet	BY	New Group	SCI DE
Ayuna Dugarova	RU	SCG Russia	SCI DE
Mauro Carta	IT	SCI Italy	SCI IT
Svenja Heinecke	DE	SCI Germany	SCI FR

Two more activists joined the meeting:

- Kathrin Wünneman (LTEG Activist and SCI board member)
- Sandra Kowalski (LTV Responsible person at SCI Germany and LTEG activist).

Svenja and Alena, enthusiastic coordinators of the event, advertised their idea through a Facebook page (the famous so-called social application), with the help of mr James O'Sullivan. All the participants managed to arrive to Bonn on time for the first session, in spite of trains and airplanes strikes and last-minute confirmation.



James, Ayuna, Svenja and Alena exchange opinions about their LTV experience

The first activity focused on the evaluation of the LTV experience: were the expectations in Saasen too high? What was positive / negative? Was it a stressful time? The discussion proved to be really interesting and it finished at 23:00, when the absorbing evaluation was stopped due to the late hour.

All participants agreed that working as Placement Officer is a tough job but, in spite of all the troubles related to change of accommodation, noisy flat mates, love problems, hard time in the office, it is for sure a valuable experience: it is possible to improve languages and social skills, to meet interesting people and new friends, to travel and take part to workcamps. And, last but not least, it is possible to understand how a branch works.



Results of the Technical Problems Session



Session about SCI International structure

The second day the matter got more „technical“: the group discussed about the problems faced during the placement procedure and suggested suitable way to solve them. An evaluation about the experience as camp coordinators followed and, after lunch, Kathrin held a session about SCI international structure.

The POs, after gaining so much in-depth knowledge of SCI are now invited to share their ideas and to keep in touch with SCI. Their contribution will be for sure more than welcome!

During the meeting the results of a questionnaire sent to branches and partner organizations was also discussed. The questionnaire focused on the relationship between SCI branches and partner organizations and on opinions regarding the volunteers exchange procedure. Branches and partners, SCI members and activists interested in receiving the result by e-mail can send a mail to [ltv@sci-italia.it](mailto:ltv@sci-italia.it). A more detailed report of the meeting is also available (5 pages).

## Updating

# Which future for LTEG?

All over the last month LTEG members and activists have shared their concern on the future of their working group. Unfortunately the current steering group has not been able to organize an annual meeting before the ICM, therefore no plan of action for 2008 has been so far developed. According to the Working Group rules, a WG needs a steering group and a plan of action (plus budget info) to be able to exist. If we strictly follow these rules, LTEG should be dissolved in 2008. An interesting debate about LTEG future

started among fans, activists and steering group members. The outcome is as follows: it will be proposed at 2007 ICM to get a 4 time month period to find new activists for the steering group, in order to „save“ the group. A run against time! But never say never: an LTEG meeting is to be set at the beginning of 2008 and this will be the right chance to give new and fresh energy to the group.

More information will be soon provided about it to branches, partners and activists. Keep in touch!

## 2007 Placement Officer Training

# A successful melting P.O.T.

*The 2007 Placement Officer Training (P.O.T., a new acronym among the plethora of SCI codes) has been held in Germany from 4<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> April. It is a meeting provided to the new long term volunteers who work in SCI branches and partner organizations as placement officers. It takes place just before the beginning of the season.*

### The place

The 2007 Placement Officer Training took place in Saasen (Germany), a small town near Frankfurt. The event was hosted by the "Projektwerkstatt Saasen" (a community/centre focused on radical environmental actions). The centre provided participants with:

- a seminar room with equipment (beamer, screen, computers, seminar room)
- beds, bathrooms
- kitchen and a place where to eat

### The participants

15 participants from all over Europe took part to the training:

Name	Nationality	Destination
Hermine Mkrtschan	Armenian	SCI Switzerl.
Ayuna Dugarova	Russian	SCI Germany
Alena Kripet	Belorussian	SCI Germany
Vanya Karmadzhieva	Bulgarian	SCI Germany
Slavik Sosnovy	Ukrainian	SCI Germany
Svenja Heinecke	German	SCI France
Eefje Kegelaers	Belgian	Utilapu HU
Pascal Bonneau	French	Utilapu HU
Plamen Zafirvo	Bulgarian	IAL Sweden
Stefania Rigillo	Italian	IVS Scotland
Laura Baccolini	Italian	VSI Ireland
Manuela Murgia	Italian	VIA NL
Anola Bracaj	Albanian	PVN Albania
Karolina Oczkovicz	Polish	VIA Belgium
James O'Sullivan	English	KVT Finland

The two trainers (Mauro Carta, Italian, from SCI Italy; Erika Buchmayer, Hungarian, former EVS at IAL Sweden) were supported by a five-members prep team (Sandra and Kathrin, who organized the arrival of participants, Paul, Merle, Olga). The training was powered by SCI Germany and LTEG working group.

### The educational approach

An "informal education" approach was used during the whole training. The information were provided through different activities: role play games, power point presentations, group activities, crossword puzzles, quiz, exercises with computers. The trainers and the prep team (that prepared also some activities) paid attention on the "socialization process" (games, energizers, ice-breaking games, after-dinner activities, final party)

The language of the training was English, but also Russian, German and Italian were sometimes spoken to give more detailed explanations, according to the needs of the participants.

### The contents

Most of the participants arrived to Saasen in the late afternoon and in the evening, therefore it was decided to start the training on the 5<sup>th</sup>. The first evening (4<sup>th</sup>) was dedicated to reception and welcoming of the participants, besides to general information about the place and getting-to-know-each-other games.

The first day of the training focused on general information about SCI: Pierre Ceresole, SCI History (“Living Museum” activity), International Structure; LTEG presentation; information about rights and duties of an LTV.

During the second day the participants were provided with information about workcamps: what an SCI workcamps is, how it is structured (work, study part, free time). They worked on activities about Application Forms and volunteers counseling. In the afternoon they took part in an activity to understand the “logic” of the placement procedure.



*Activity under the mild April sun...*

The most important sessions were held on the third day: the trainers explained the procedure step by step (what to do in case of acceptance, rejection, volunteer cancellation, camp cancellation). The group was split into two smaller groups that worked in the afternoon with the computers, to get a deeper understanding of the procedure through role play games. They had the chance to get more familiar with the Admin Site and the website tools. In the mean time, the other group supported the prep team with manual activities in the place.

During the fourth day more details were given about: mails programme, office work, visa issues. The training ended with a recap of the whole procedure and a quiz. Certificated were handed to each participants and a final party was organized in the evening

The participants, the trainers and the prep team cleaned the place on the fifth day, before leaving to their different destinations.

### **The evaluation**

A final “water evaluation” helped the trainers and the prep team understand the positive and negative aspects of the training:

Positive: information provided about SCI and procedure were good, even if some participants already knew much about it; free time was enough (it was a problem last year); food and organization was appreciated

Negative: the accommodation was nice but basic; it is tiring for participants to take part to a training before directly starting the LTV/EVS project, as many of them did not know almost anything about their accommodations and duty in the offices.



*Phone call simulation: how to deal with volunteers' mothers' attack*

## Interviews

## My PO experience

**Alena Kripets, Bielorrussian  
PO in Bonn, SCI Germany**

**Alena, I would like to ask you some questions. First of all, what was your first impression when you arrived here in Bonn?**

I was really happy to come here. I have to say that being a placement officer was a bit different than I imagined at the beginning. We had a great training in Saasen (Germany) and afterwards everything became quite clear.

I really enjoyed the placement season and I enjoyed staying in Germany, I would suggest this experience to everybody.

**Do you like Bonn?**

Definitely! Even if it's a bit too calm for me, I expected something more exciting, but it's quite good and Cologne it's nearby.

**What can you tell me about the office?**

The staff in the office is really great, very open minded, very easy going and professional at the same time, a thing which I did not expect in SCI.

**What is the most important thing that you have learnt during your job as placement officer?**

I started believing that everything is possible, nobody believed at the beginning that we could send more than 200 outgoing volunteers and I said „yes, it's possible!“. We had just to change the way to get volunteers. I am quite proud of myself!

**Thank you Alena!**

**Svenja Heineke, German  
PO in Paris, SCI France**

**Svenja, you worked in France...**

Yes, I have been to France, six months in Paris.

**How do you judge your experience as placement officer?**

I think it helped me to get to know other professional opportunities, I think that I will look for a job in the social field and that I will stay in SCI.

**What is the most important thing that you learnt?**

I learnt to cope with crises in life... to handle many different things at the same time, to switch from one language to another very fast...to integrate people, to coordinate people in a workcamp



*James ponders about difficult questions...*

**James O'Sullivan, English  
PO in Helsinki, KVT Finland**

**I would like to ask you a comment about this meeting.**

[silence]

**Are you of the opinion that such evaluation meetings are useful?**

[silence]

**A comment about the placement officer training in Saasen.**

[silence]

**Thank you mr. O'Sullivan**

**Eefje Kegelaers, Belgium  
PO in Budapest, Utilapu Hungary**

**How was living in Hungary?**

It was really nice

**How did you like Budapest?**

It was a really great city!

**How did you like spicy Hungarian food?**

I don't eat meat, so it was not a big problem. But I like paprika!

**What do you think about the Hungarian language?**

It's difficult...

**Can you tell me something in Hungarian?**

Es nadsja nadkja neisch (this is what the journalist understood...)

# Happy hour Viva Colonia!



*The barbecue masters*



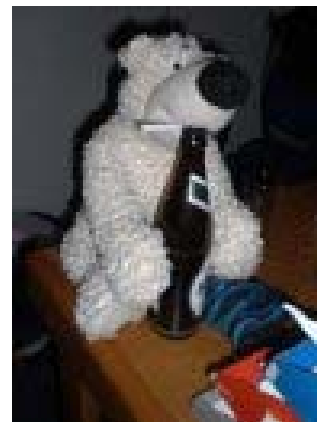
*Party in Bonn*



*Dancing Fever*



*Alena's birthday*



*Our PO mascot*



*11.11 Carnival in Cologne*

Sam van Vliet

## Six months in Palestine

*Sam van Vliet, a Dutch volunteer from VIA Netherland, spent 6 months (from January to June 2007) as long term volunteer in three different projects in Palestine. Here is his interesting report.*

### Motivation

Last winter I spent a half year in the West Bank, Palestine. I am a student Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. During my courses, I have been interesting in the Middle East, Islam and the Arabic language. In the summer of 2005 I followed an Arabic summer course in Damascus, Syria. But I learned that the only way to learn this language well is to spend a longer time in an Arabic country. Apart from this, I looked for an opportunity to go abroad and do some psychical work in a different environment. Some years ago I also did a voluntary service abroad, in Croatia, which I very much enjoyed. Unfortunately, voluntary work in the Middle East is very rare, so very hard to find. Therefore I got in contact with VIA, the Dutch SCI, and they informed me about some projects in Palestine. So to be honest, it wasn't my intention to go and to voluntary work in Palestine in the first place, but more the opportunity that came on my path.

### Preparation

Lokien Holleman from VIA is a very enthusiastic person herself, so she made me enthusiastic as well. With her I handled more practical things, like visa, transport, insurance, work and

accommodation. In the meantime I read a lot of books about Palestine, the history and the geo-political situation and read the newspapers very closely.



### Projects

In Palestine I visited three projects, of which I will write my tasks, the accommodation, the support I got from my environment, my social contacts and a personal evaluation of my voluntary service.

#### Tent of Nations

*Bethlehem: February- April 2007*

The first week and about three months later on, I worked at the Tent of Nations project.

This project was meant to be my core project and my 'base' in Palestine. It's located between Bethlehem and Hebron, in the south of the West Bank. Here a Palestinian family owns a huge area of land, which is theirs for generations long. During all the succeeding occupiers or controllers of the country (the Ottoman Empire, England, Jordan and Israel)

this family managed to keep their land. Since the seizure of the West Bank by Israel in 1967 Jewish settlements have been built, which are threatening the land.

The land mainly covers a hill, which oversees the Palestinian village of Nahalin in the valley.

Although the family lives in Bethlehem now, there have been a lot of efforts to cultivate the land. In the end, the family wants to move back and live on the land again, when the infrastructure and accommodation are sufficient. Because of Israeli legislation it has been very hard to fulfil this goal, but the family members are very optimistic.

I first arrived on the land in January, when it was very cold and windy. I slept in a small and simple house. There was no running water, electricity or central heating on the land. Water is collected in cisterns and electricity is produced occasionally by a generator. Because of the cold temperature in evenings, we used to make a fire to keep warm.

Every morning I woke up at 7:00 AM to take the animals (donkeys, chickens, goats, dogs, rabbits and pigeons) outside and clean their sleeping accommodation. After this, around 10:00 AM, I used to feed myself, together with the other German volunteer and the farmer, the family member,

who used to stay on the land most of the week. After breakfast, the farmer instructed us what to do during the day.

We usually ate a lunch at midday and dinner after work, around 7:00 PM. The food was mostly the same, consisting of humus, salad and bread. Sometimes we ate rice, pasta, eggs or meat. The food and accommodation was simple, but sufficient.

Our work consisted of improving the infrastructure of the land, cultivating the land, planting trees and plants, caring for the animals and building new accommodations for visitors and animals.

Before I left, I knew that there is less work in the winter, because of the outside conditions. Therefore I chose to work first in a school in Al Khadr, near Bethlehem and to come back to this project later on. The Tent of Nations was mostly organised by one member of the family, who acts like the manager and another member, who serves as the farmer. Both are very friendly and are showing the warmness of the typical Palestinian hospitality. I spend most of the time with one other volunteer and the farmer, who taught me some Arabic during work. One or two days a week I went travelling in the region and came back in the evening. This proved a welcome change in the daily working conditions. During these trips I met a lot of people and I was invited to their houses. At the end of my stay at this project I felt freer to visit the nearby village as well. In the winter, not so many people visited the land, which was sometimes rather boring. I always liked it very much when Palestinian neighbours came to chat. Some times

also Israeli settlers came for unclear reasons, which made us all very nervous, because they were always armed. One time, I accompanied them to their settlement, where they were surprisingly friendly to me.

The isolated location of the land, made me sometimes feel like living on an island. But, on the other hand, I also enjoyed the quietness and nature on the land. The family was mostly very open to my suggestions, although my co-worker was frustrated in the end, that he didn't have more opportunities to travel freely and work more independently. The family has a certain way of working, which may indeed be confronting in the long term for some foreigners. Though one must keep in mind the complex and insecure situation they have to live in.

### **Hope Flowers School**

*Al Khader: January-February 2007*

After one week at the Tent of Nations Project, I spent about six weeks in a school nearby. This school is located in Al Khader, in the Bethlehem District. The school stresses to have a unique philosophy of 'peace, tolerance and democracy teaching', in which contacts between Israeli and Palestinian children, non violence education and interreligious dialogue are the main goals. Beforehand, it wasn't clear what my tasks would be in the school, and it never was later on. When I arrived for the first time at the school I noticed a very 'cold' ambiance, in contrast with what I was used to from Palestinian people. Nobody greeted me, I was not informed enthusiastically and no one guided me through the school. I didn't feel welcome at all and didn't get the notion

to be very useful. The director of the school, who later appeared to be the son of the founder of the school, instructed me very short and in a hurry, before going abroad for some weeks. I was instructed to do some administrative work in the office of the school. He showed me the volunteer's accommodation, on the highest floor of the school, where I would be sleeping. This accommodation was fine, but too big for one volunteer alone. Food for cooking and gas had to be paid by the volunteer and the director also asked a small amount of money for every month staying in the school. When the school was off, I was all alone and had to rely on myself. The village of Al Khader didn't seem very attracting by night and I therefore went to bed very early. Because the director left, he installed a woman, who later appeared to be his sister, as temporary supervisor. This woman seemed to be reluctant to inform or guide me anyhow and wasn't present most of the time. I waited for a week to see if this situation would improve, but when it didn't, I asked if it would be possible to be of any assistance in the education. I therefore approached the head manager of education, who appeared to be the mother of the two described above. Finally I got in contact with an older female teacher in English. Apart from the director, all teachers and all staff, were female. This teacher invited me to be an assistant in her class, helping her with the reading, writing and speaking in English. All the children really enjoyed and felt honoured with the presence of me as a foreigner. I also

enjoyed these classes. At the end, I decided not to go to the office anymore, but only attend the classes. I was connected with another younger teacher as well, which was also very interesting. All the teachers seemed to know everything about me and I felt them watching. Later on, I realised that they kept this distance, because of the general conservative attitude towards contacts between unmarried men and women in Palestinian society. The director and other staff members of the school have been living in western countries and are in regular contact with foreigners, but they failed to inform me about these 'intercultural miscommunications'.

After some weeks sleeping in the school alone, I decided to change my program. I went back sleeping on the farm land and worked in the school three days a week. The rest of the time I worked on the land, where I was welcomed again. This situation worked very well.

Later on, I also learned that the Hope Flowers School is a private school and therefore not accessible for everyone. Moreover, I noticed a lot of criticism about their 'peace and democracy' approach. Does this imply that regular Palestinian education is violent and anti-democratic? Concretely, this school isn't really what it seems to be on first sight.

#### **Farmer's house**

*Yayyous: April- May 2007*

Being three months in Palestine, I had to renew my (Israeli) visa. I travelled to Jordan for a week and came back with a new one in Bethlehem. With my improved Arabic, a little understanding of the general

situation and a confident attitude towards travelling in this region, it was time for a new project. Lokien had informed me about a farmer in the north of the West Bank, between Qalqilya and Nablus. This farmer lives in the small village of Yayyous and owns land in the countryside. Sadly, with the building of the wall and the location of an Israeli settlement nearby, his land is on the Israeli side now. Consequently, he needs Israeli approval to enter his land. Every day, at 6:30 AM, I joined the farmer to work and at the gate we showed special permits to enter the land. The Israeli soldiers at the gate didn't like a foreigner to pass, so they presented different obstacles, to make my passing insecure.

When we finally entered the land, the farmer was happy to tell me everything and handled me as a prince. In the same time, I insisted on working as hard as all the other workers. This was very hard and long work, but gave a wonderful satisfying feeling at the end of the day.

Living in a small town like Yayyous was very interesting. The social contacts are very strong and as the guest of a respected person, I felt very welcome. I was invited every day, met a lot of people and learned to experience the solidarity among Palestinians, which I didn't notice in the region of Bethlehem. The farmer I worked with was a very interesting and wise man. He welcomed me in his house and taught me his daily life routine in this unbelievable unjust situation.

#### **Evaluation**

The above described projects were all interesting in a different way and I learned a

lot. I think the variety of the projects gave me to possibility to grasp a little of the complex situation of Palestine. I like the way VIA/SCI operates: Providing great possibilities with a clear responsibility for the volunteer and opportunities for own initiatives. One never knows what a project will be in reality, so the only option is to go and try. For me personally, the voluntary work gave my contacts with 'ordinary' people; not the one who are usually in contact with tourists or expatriates.

I will follow the Palestinian situation closely in the news and hope to use my Arabic skills when conducting anthropological fieldwork in Damascus, Syria.