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Vienna 2014

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Newsletter

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Editorial

You Know What?

by Mariam Francq



*INSWaP's 8th annual meeting took place in beautiful Vienna from the 10th to the 12th of October 2014 under the auspices of a beautiful autumn. Before the public meeting actually started, the steering group which has been much devoted, active and happy all these years, had a pre-meeting the evening before the conference with almost 3/4s of us present. Believe it or not, in barely two hours, we managed a great MEETING in the real sense of the word! It very naturally appeared that we agreed on most everything, with the help of some the wise advice of our favourite counsellor in chief, Christopher Clouder. Our main topic of concern was: "To be or not to be... a legal structure". Not so easy at first glance, since after eight years of existence, we do feel in need of some recognition, be it from "authorities" or simple laymen... Usually this type of recognition comes as a reward after having created a formal, official entity. The question, however, was whether we felt ready for this at this point of time, or if we preferred to **function as an informal structure** during a trial period to "test"*

*our deep motivation and commitment regarding time and availability, carrying out responsibilities, devoting ourselves to all the necessary tasks, etc., **without having all the extra load of work implied by a legal structure** with formal obligations and public commitments.*

*Well, YOU KNOW WHAT? We almost automatically opted for an **informal, but more organised, structure albeit not a lazy one....** with monthly online meetings, an extra annual committee meeting beside our annual public conference, a twice-yearly newsletter, a bank account, and the usual functions of chairperson, treasurer, secretary, account manager, newsletter editor, communication, website, hosting of the annual conference, counsellor... all taken on by each of us and "en route" for an even more exciting and challenging year to come till next October in Stockholm!*

So "Skål" to INSWaP and long life to all its present and future members, participants and friends... you are all very welcome to join us indeed!

INSWaP Conference Vienna 2014

by Márta Domokos



This year's annual conference, the eighth in INSWaP's history, was held in Vienna at the Rudolf-Steiner Schule Wien-Mauer from the 10th to the 12th of October. The location was in the lovely and stately building of this school. The programme started on Friday afternoon with the registration of the participants and a warm welcome, with lovely homemade cakes and refreshments from the organisers. The 32 participants from 14 countries gave a short introduction of themselves and the situation of Waldorf schools in their respective countries. One important question was whether their countries had a national parents' association or not. At the moment eight European countries have an organised form of cooperation between Steiner Waldorf parents, and there are a few that are making attempts to organise such an association. *Anita Legzdina* gave a short summary of and showed us a film made at last year's conference in Riga. This was followed by *Gitte Lassen's* brief history of INSWaP, and a presentation of the way forward. After having met prior to the beginning of the conference, at this point in time INSWaP chooses not to

become a legal organisation, but to start working in a more structural and organised way: with a steering committee (the names of the members are listed elsewhere in this newsletter). This committee meets once a month online, and twice a year in person: once during the annual conference, and once in the spring. In the evening we were treated to a nice dinner at the school cafeteria, and there we had the chance to get new acquaintances and catch up with old ones. Next day's programme started off with a lecture from *Hilde Lengali*, head of Norway's Waldorf parents' association. She told us about her experiences of parents' role in Waldorf schools and communities. Working in smaller groups, we took an active part in the lecture, shared our own experiences. It seems that in all our experiences the most important features are: trust, which has to be earned, taking responsibility for each other and for all children, and an open communication between parents and teachers, parents and parents, and teachers and teachers. In this way we can be not only loyal to our schools and ourselves, but also loyal to

our children, which is the most important part of parenting. After *Florian Amlinger* talked to us about the great efforts taken in Austria for gaining state funding for Steiner Waldorf schools (you can find more information on this at www.waldorf.at), we visited the lovely Rudolf Steiner Landschule in Schönau, where they held their autumn fair on this day. We enjoyed their lavish hospitality, walked around the park, bought some homemade articles, and danced under the huge plane tree. On our way back to Vienna we drove through the impressive vineyards, which are really alive with harvesting, fairs and tourists at this time of year. Unfortunately, we had to be patient with the sampling of the produce, as we still had some interesting topics to discuss and listen to in the afternoon... *Monica Picchi* from the Pozzolatico project near Florence told us about their progress since last year's conference. The changes to the place are incredible, and almost solely done by parents. It is a great example how, when enough people have sufficient will, the almost impossible can be made possible.

After the sampling – again – of some more homemade cakes (all of these were delicious), *Mariam Francq* and I told the conference briefly about our meeting with ECSWE the previous January, and their goodwill towards our organisation. Once more we discussed INSWaP's way forward. The evening's closing lecture was given by *Christopher Clouder*, INSWaP's consultant. About this lecture you can find another article in this newsletter.

And then, to finish off the day in style, we went to a typical Viennese winery, where we sampled Austrian food and some local wine. These were truly delicious, and it was a companionable night out with all participants from the conference.

On Sunday, the last day, we discussed the topic of travelling. It would be great to have a network of Steiner Waldorf parents and schools, wherein we can offer board to travelling youth, and even families. We, as parents, would feel better if we knew that our travelling children, may it be for study, work, or fun, could lodge with likeminded people. The setting up of this project on our website is seen as the best way to achieve this; more information will follow in our next newsletter.

The formal part of the conference was concluded by a discussion of next year's conference, which will be held in Stockholm, on the first weekend of October. Then we boarded a coach, and enjoyed a guided tour through the majestic city of Vienna. During and after this we said our goodbyes and it was time to return home.

I would like to thank *Karin Daurer*, the heroic main organiser of the conference, and her incredible team: whatever came their way, questions, problems, they were



always open and cheerful, and guaranteed a smoothly run, valuable and fun conference. The extra programmes, organised for teenagers, were fully appreciated and enjoyed by our youngsters, as was the conference by us, participants.

Thanks for everything.



My first INSWaP

by Maria Watzenig

I am a Waldorf parent of two boys, one in grade 2 and the other one in kindergarten. They attend a Waldorf school right outside Copenhagen in Denmark. My husband is a class teacher at the same school (grade 7) and I am educated as a Waldorf kindergarten teacher. To choose a Waldorf school for our kids felt therefore natural to us. I am currently working on a master's degree at a University in Denmark, and writing my thesis about the cooperation between parents and teachers in Waldorf schools. During some research for my study I accidentally found the invitation for INSWaP's next meeting in Vienna on a German website. It got my attention and I realized I felt curious about INSWaP. Why does it exist, what is its main need and purpose? I had never heard of it before, and when I mentioned it around our school, nobody recognised it. So I decided I needed to attend the meeting in order to help me get a wider perspective on the role of the Waldorf parent!

For me, two of the most significant keywords of the meeting in Vienna were definitely inspiration and dialogue. From the very beginning, when everybody was arriving at the beautiful Wien-Mauer Waldorf School, an intense conversation began to evolve. At first we gathered in a circle to introduce ourselves and the "Waldorf situation" in the country or at the school we were representing. This was very interesting: not only were all the participants very engaged Waldorf parents, but we also got to know the difference and the variety of traditions of how to run and organise a Waldorf school under different legal terms among the countries represented. I experienced mutual inspiration through the representations and an honest interest behind the questions. To me, it was very enriching listening to all the representations and the interesting topics discussed not only according to the meeting programme but also through the informal dialogues that took place during the whole weekend. I was particularly surprised by the variety of traditions and terms in which Waldorf schools are organised, and the difference between the countries: whether they have a national parents' association or not and how the parents' role is being seen. And I recognise some of the future worries about the lack of Waldorf teachers, because less are being educated; or how to make Waldorf parents care more about their school by being more supportive and encouraging instead of focusing on problems.

I found the whole programme very well organised, and filled with interesting topics, group work and debates. And I also loved all about the excursion to Landschule Schönau (the autumn celebration, the buildings, the lovely people, the food, the music and dancing and the drive back through the vineyards). It was not only my first INSWaP meeting, but also the very first time Denmark was represented at one of its conferences. The Danish Waldorf school association and those teachers and parents I have been in contact with since I came back from Vienna, are all positive and interested in the international cooperation and are approving of its potentials, as I am. Together we are on our way to find a proper approach introducing INSWaP to the Waldorf parents, and will discuss/focus on how to improve the cooperation between the Waldorf schools in Denmark, and between the parents and teachers. Maybe we have to develop a national Waldorf parents association?

It was a great pleasure to be a part of a wider Waldorf community and to learn and exchange ideas through the interesting conversations, and also a great experience to be in such beautiful and impressive surroundings provided by the two schools. I will also mention that I was lucky to stay with a local Waldorf family living nearby. This was not only a lovely and beautiful way of accommodation because of the pleasant hosts, but also because it gave me the feel for and an understanding of the daily life lived in Austria. This kind of accommodation is maybe something to consider for the future meetings at some level? To summarise: the meeting was wonderful but also overwhelming for me. I found the energy of the group inspiring, and this opportunity of immersion in the parent's role at a Waldorf school through INSWaP is something every participant is able to co-create. Therefore I am very much looking forward to follow the further work and discussions on how to find a sustainable and meaningful way to develop INSWaP! I will take this opportunity to say thank you to Karin Daurer in Austria and all her companions for the wonderful meeting.

A Button as Hot as Our Hearts

by Anita Legzdina

Dear Steiner Waldorf parents and friends all over the world!

You have already read in this Newsletter about INSWaP's steering committee's monthly online meetings, which have started this autumn and will go on till the next INSWaP conference in 2015 in Sweden. It was decided in Vienna to have this kind of regular online meetings, because of some begun-but-not-yet-worked-out ideas and plans our steering committee started to discuss in Vienna. And thanks to modern technology, our communications can be quite productive via internet as well!

There have been different themes to discuss and solve on our agenda till now – we have already had two online meetings since our conference in Vienna. Some clear issues which should be dealt with have come up. As my personal responsibility in the committee is keeping an eye on INSWaP's till now empty treasure box, in this capacity I am addressing all Waldorf friends and advocates of Waldorf education. Since we have decided not to become a legal organization yet, at least for a couple of years, and as an organisation starting to build also our *physical body*, we do need some money to cover a few expenses. But our priority, however, is to support those parents who would like to come to our annual INSWaP conferences but simply cannot afford it. We will be looking for ways to lower the participation fee in order to be open for more and more Waldorf parents from different countries, because this is the way we see INSWaP growing larger and stronger every year.

So, the soon coming news is: please, look for a **donation button on INSWaP's website** - www.waldorfparnets.net - which will appear shortly. And let your hearts be hot for the sake of solidarity within the Waldorf community! We are also planning to appeal for larger donations, as a support fund for our actions and for the registration fee for the annual conference as explained above.

We have a couple of other interesting, useful and practical ideas which have to be developed till the next annual INSWaP conference. As we have started the information and idea exchange about Waldorf couchsurfing, summer camps and student exchanges between different countries, we are planning to create a database including families interested in these activities. Access to this database will be for a small fee.

Dear Waldorf parents and friends! Let our hearts be open for supporting and strengthening the Waldorf parents' community, thus helping the Waldorf idea spread further and stronger in the world! Let the support buttons be as hot as our hearts!



"Insieme" by Marina Sagramora

An Impression of a Lecture of Christopher Clouder's

by Márta Domokos

Luckily, this year Christopher Clouder was again able and willing to give a lecture at our conference, titled ***How Can Parents Help Move Waldorf into the 21st Century***. For me this was a highlight of our programme as Christopher is not only an inspiring but also an entertaining speaker. I will try my best to give a summary of his talk below, as heard and interpreted by me. All eventual mistakes and misunderstandings are entirely mine.

"Above all we want to see the fundamental impulse behind our activity in the school, namely deep, inner human honesty and openness, take full effect in these details in the interaction between parents and teachers." (Rudolf Steiner, *Address at a Parents' Evening*, June 22, 1923)

Parents and teachers are co-educators with an element of "future". How can we make that future better for the children? The key words are "devotion" and "interest". Devotion is usually not a problem for either parties, but interest is somewhat more difficult to find, as we all have busy lives and our own personal problems.

What matters in any institution is the kind of people that it's comprised of. We shouldn't

try to change others around us, but we should work on ourselves. Working on the future also means looking into the past, as they are linked. We live in turbulent times; there are lots of parallels between the first (also turbulent) decades of the 20th and the 21st century. Rudolf Steiner lived in those changing times; he looked around himself and made something new.

Rudolf Steiner says in his 1923 lecture *Address at a Parents' Evening: Issues of School and Home*: we need "understanding of those on whom so much depends, of those who trust their children to this school". We sometimes hear in Steiner Waldorf schools that "we need to educate parents", which is a terribly arrogant notion. It is about parents and teachers **LEARNING TOGETHER** as social beings. This example shows how important it is to translate anthroposophy's words in ourselves, and tell it in today's words and understandings. This healthy connection between parents and teachers is not based on authority: we should try to work on this in all modesty.

During their teacher's training aspiring Waldorf teachers have to work really hard, they are supposed to know and learn everything. Unfortunately it is usually not part of their curriculum to learn how to interact with parents. (During the conference I was happy to hear that in some countries this lack is now being addressed.) But even sympathy between these co-educators is not fully enough: we also need a

profound understanding of the times that we live in and the children that we live with.

Why do we choose a Steiner school? Our children choose it for us. This can be done in many different, direct or indirect ways, but in whichever way we get there, this choice is very much a social act of some consequence. By choosing a Steiner Waldorf school we also say that we do not choose state education. We help the schools to change the social climate. We may also consider this as a small act of changing the world.

This is where INSWaP's responsibilities lie: we can empower and strengthen each other in this choice. As the old saying goes: it takes a whole village to raise a child. In older times this was possible, as there was a strong feeling of belonging in the close-knit communities of the times. Later this function of belonging and education became the task of the church and then the state. We do not live in these old communities any longer, so we try to create our own communities. By choosing Steiner Waldorf education we create our own place of belonging and education. Keeping the doors of these communities open requires tremendous courage. We need each other, parents and teachers, equally to achieve this: teachers cannot carry this burden alone.

It is also a Steinerian notion that "it is not necessary for teachers to judge parents in any indiscrete way, they simply want to meet parents in a friendly manner". This would mean no closed doors to the

classrooms. If a parent wants to sit in a lesson, the teacher could say: yes, please. And afterwards the teacher asks how the parent thought the lesson went, and they thank each other.

The parents could also be the most important people in encouraging and strengthening the friendship between teacher and child. The best way of education is based on love. Last year Christopher quoted Tomas Tanströmer's Romanesque Arches. In this poem, the poet gives us the comforting thought, that we can make mistakes and we don't have to worry, we do not have to be complete. There are endless places in all of us.

This year Christopher chose an altogether different poem: D.H. Lawrence's *Walk Warily*. This almost a hundred year old poem gives an accurate impression of our turbulent times.

***Walk Warily, walk warily, be careful what you say:
because now the Sunderers
are hovering round,
the Dividers are close upon
us, dogging our every breath
and watching our every step,
and beating their great
wings in our panting faces.***

***The angels are standing
back, the angels of the kiss.
They wait, they give way
now
to the Sunderers, to the swift
ones
the ones with the sharp
black wings
and the drumming of
pinions of thunder
and hands like salt
and the sudden dripping
down of the knife-edge
cleavage of the lightning***

cleaving, cleaving.

***Lo, we are in the midst of the
Sunderers the Cleavers,
that cleave us forever apart
from one another
and separate heart from
heart, and cut away all
caresses
with the white triumphance
of lightning and electric
delight
the Dividers, the Thunderers,
the Swift ones, blind with
speed
who put salt in our mouths
and excitement in our limbs
and hotness, and then more
crusted brine in our hearts.***

***It is the day of the Sunderers
and the angels are standing
back***

We analyse things so long that we pull them apart. That is what we also tend to do in conventional education. Meanwhile, the solution or even prevention of problems can be found in normal human dialogue. But how do we talk to each other?

Below you can find the five processes of dialogue according to Paolo Friere.

When you apply these, make sure that the words you use are not empty, as by naming the world we transform it.

Dialogue cannot exist without (1) profound love for the world and humanity (we are all born loving the world) (2) humility, then we become inclusive (3) intense faith in human kind (4) hope (we are incomplete, so we keep looking) (5) engaging in critical thinking.

I would like to close this article with my thanks to Christopher, and with the poem that he shared with us at the end of his talk.

I Cultivate a White Rose

José Martí,

***I cultivate a white rose
In July as in January
For the sincere friend
Who gives me his hand frankly
And for the cruel person who
tears
Out the heart with which I live,
I cultivate neither nettles nor
thorns:
I cultivate a white rose***

INSWaP's steering committee

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next year's organiser

Christopher Clouder, UK/Italy
consultant

Karin Daurer, Austria
organiser conference 2014

Márti Domokos, Hungary
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**You can find more information
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