

GLEN Internship Report

Georgia, Koda Community Education Centre

Barbora Nechanická



Home organisation: INEX-SDA (Czech Republic)

Internship number: 0608

Internship title: Youth development through non-formal education

Internship location: Koda, Georgia

Internship period: 15th September – 7th December 2015

Host organisation: Koda Community Education Centre (Koda CEC)

Summary

Uninteresting village with a few shops, small church, family houses and an old settlement near the highway. That is how the village of Koda could be seen by people, who are just passing through on their way from the capital to the South of Georgia. There are many attractive places in South Caucasus, but usually, this area is not on the list. What makes the place special is the fact that the settlement (former barracks) is inhabited by people, who had to leave their homes in South Ossetia during the war in 2008. These **internally displaced persons** (IDPs) are the main beneficiaries of the **Koda Community Education Centre** (Koda CEC), which offers various courses for adults, seniors and children, provides space for meetings and for the social enterprise Art-Koda. It is also a long term host organization of GLEN participants. The Czech-German tandem consisting of Barbora Nechanická and Joschka Hoffmann was already the fifth one in the place and the topic of their internship **in autumn 2015** was **Youth development through non-formal education**. They supported the regular clubs for youth and small children and the organization of community events and foreign visits. The main result was intercultural exchange with the children and motivation of new members of the youth club. The interns also helped to the develop workshops for foreign visitors and supported the daily work and strategy planning.

Shrnutí

Obyčejná vesnice, pár obchůdků, kostelík, rodinné domy a staré sídliště na dohled od hlavní silnice. Tak možná vidí Kodu lidé, kteří vesnicí jen projíždějí, když cestují z gruzínského hlavního města na jih. Jižní Kavkaz nabízí mnoho turistických lákadel, ale tato oblast na seznamech obvykle chybí. Je tu však jedna skutečnost, díky které toto místo stojí za pozornost a zastavení. Na sídlišti v bývalých kasárnách žijí lidé, kteří museli opustit své domovy v Jižní Osetii během války v roce 2008 (tzv. **vnitřně přesídlené osoby**, internally displaced persons, IDPs). Zejména pro ně tu vzniklo **Komunitní vzdělávací centrum Koda** (Koda Community Education Center, Koda CEC), které pořádá různé kurzy pro dospělé, seniory i děti, poskytuje prostor pro setkávání i pro společensky prospěšný podnik Art-Koda. Dlouhodobě také hostí účastníky programu GLEN. Česko-německý tandem složený z Barbory Nechanické a Joschky Hoffmanna byl už pátou dvojicí z GLENU, tématem jejich stáže na podzim 2015 byl **Rozvoj mládeže prostřednictvím neformálního vzdělávání**. Pomáhali organizovat pravidelné kluby pro mládež a děti, komunitní akce a program pro návštěvy. Hlavními výsledky byly interkulturní výměna s dětmi a motivace nových členek klubu pro mládež. Stážisté se také podíleli na vymýšlení workshopů pro zahraniční návštěvníky a podporovali každodenní chod Centra i strategické plánování.

Introduction: Me mokhalise var

I applied for the GLEN programme because I wanted to experience living and working in a country outside of Europe and to learn more about global education. Before that I only had lived in neighbour countries of the Czech Republic (at the time when I applied for the GLEN internship, I was doing my European Voluntary Service in Poland). I expected that the GLEN internship would offer me new perspectives and test my skills and abilities in an environment that is culturally and economically different from what I was used to. Especially, I wanted to challenge my communication skills as I only spoke basic Russian and no Georgian, obviously

I appreciated that the internship was not only an internship, but a whole educational cycle with three preparatory/review meetings. I expected to learn about topics and methods useful both for my personal and professional development.

I was happy that I could choose an internship in the field of non-formal education and youth work. For many years, I had been involved in intercultural and educational projects for youth and I volunteered in children clubs and summer camps. That is why I had experience with different age groups and methods, which I could use in Koda and try out new things.

IDPs and the situation in Koda: Kodashi

The Koda village is situated in the Tetrtskaro region, 25 km to the south of the Georgian capital Tbilisi. The main road from Tbilisi to the city of Marneuli and further to Armenia goes through Koda, that is why the connection from the capital both by car/taxi and public transport (“marshrutkas”) is relatively frequent and fast (in terms of Georgian transport). The village has about 5000 inhabitants, there are several small shops, two kindergartens, one big school (which the children attend until the age of 18), small church, public administration (police, fire department, city council) and buildings serving for culture and sport.

About 3000 people are the “original” ones mainly living in family houses and villas with gardens. The rest of almost 2000 inhabitants are so called internally displaced persons (IDPs), who had to leave their homes in South Ossetia during the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. They were resettled to Koda and other villages by the government and given a special status of IDPs. There is no reason to be optimistic about their chance to come back to their original homes. Many of the houses were destroyed and the region is not controlled by the Georgian government, but by the Ossetian one with Russian support. In 2015, there were severe concerns about the fact, that the border is constantly being moved further to Georgian territory.

According to estimations, there are about 250 000 IDPs in Georgia (out of the total population of 4.5 million) due to the conflicts in the border regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s and 2000s. Some of

them have lost their relatives and some had to leave their homes more than once. It is a heterogenous group when it comes to economical situation and living conditions. What is written in this report mainly applies to the community in Koda (and not necessarily to all the Georgian IDPs, whole Koda or Georgia), because I spent most of the time there and only had limited experience with the situation and people in other regions.

The IDPs got some support from the Georgian government – e.g. a small monthly financial contribution, cheaper public transport or studies at university without having to pay tuition. About 2 or 3 years ago, the flats in Koda, were given to the ownership of the IDP families that lived there. Formerly, it used to be a military settlement, abandoned and quickly renovated after 2008. The flats are small and the infrastructure poor, water is only running four times a day, if everything is ok. But still, this was an important change for the community. Since the people have owned their flats, they can be sure that their family will live there in long-term and they try to improve their living conditions. For example, they have built many garages in front of the houses. The IDPs represent their interests on the local level and try to solve some problems together, e.g. with water, gas or the environment. One friend told me, that there used to be unbearable air pollution in the village coming from the poultry factory, when they moved in. The IDPs raised the issue and the factory had to install new filters thanks to their pressure.

Most families have small gardens next to the blocks of flats with vegetables, fruits and sometimes a few animals (chicken, pigs, cows, dogs). As well, the IDPs were given a bigger piece of land. Unfortunately, they can't use it as fields, because it is too distant and there is no irrigation. The region is very dry and the soil is not as fruitful as in South Ossetia. Most of the families were making their living in agriculture in South Ossetia, meaning they not only lost their properties but also their way of securing food and money for the family. This is why economical problems and unemployment are the biggest challenges in the community. Of course, the psychological burden of war, lost and forced resettlement remained even after 7 years. I had a feeling that thanks to strong community and family ties and professional support, the people can cope with this quite well. Children and young people are the biggest hope for the future. Most of the families really care about their education and well-being.

Our living: Temi

Since me and my tandem partner lived directly in the settlement, we had a chance to experience the local way of life. Of course, not everything was the same for us and the locals. Some things were easier for us, we had good internet connection and could afford to buy more expensive food. Some were more difficult, we didn't have much equipment in the flat and at the beginning we didn't know where to buy some sorts of food (fruit, vegetables, milk products). Dealing with the water issues was one of the biggest challenges, but I got used to it quite fast.

We got a lot of help from our Georgian friends and colleagues and from Kim Dixon, who was an American Peace Corps volunteer already living in Koda for a year. They gave us useful advice, brought delicious Georgian food, showed us around and took us to special places and events. When it comes to social norms and traditions, people were really respectful towards us as guests and foreigners. A local boy and a girl wouldn't be allowed to live together in one flat without being married, but it was accepted in our case.



The view from our window. The building on the left is the Koda CEC

Koda Community Education Centre: Tsentri

Koda CEC (more info [here](#) and [here](#)) is an organization of non-formal education situated in the middle of the IDP settlement. It was established in 2010 to support the integration and employment of IDPs through professional advice and courses (e.g. vocational training, accounting, computer classes, handicraft, English). But as the needs of the locals and the fundraising possibilities change slowly, the programmes and activities of the CEC develop as well. During my internship period, there were several courses and programmes for various groups of people – adults, seniors, youth and children. For the adults, there were psychological, legal and medical consultations, computer classes, photo club, programme for active seniors, cooking classes and a gender project. The latter focused on problems which Georgian women often have to face, such as domestic violence. It consisted of trainings, meetings, playing Forum Theatre, photo campaign and a big community festival. The children development programme offered English classes and two clubs taking part once a week – one for the small children and one for the [youth](#). Sometimes there were special workshops (singing) or excursions (National Museum) for them in addition to that. Some rooms of the Koda CEC are reserved for the social enterprise [Art Koda](#), where women are taught the traditional Georgian techniques of enamel jewellery, felting and patchwork sewing. Their products as well as some merchandise (cups, T-shirts) are sold at various festivals or made to order.

There are only a few community education centres like this in Georgia, that is why Koda CEC often serves as an example of good practice. It cooperates with institutions both in Tbilisi and other regions and receives funding and other support from foreign donors (mainly from its German founder DVV International). During

my stay in Koda, there were several (mostly international) guest groups visiting the CEC for different reasons – to see its work and learn more about the IDPs, to run their own activities or to attend handicraft workshops.

At the time I was in Koda CEC, there were only two full time employees (a director and programme manager), plus several part timers – accountant, cleaning lady and consultants/trainers. A big part of the activities and daily business could only be organized thanks to priceless help of local volunteers. Furthermore, there was an American Peace Corps volunteer, whose main task was the organizational development of Koda CEC and Art Koda. She was a great support not only for the CEC but also for us personally, because she explained to us how everything works, helped us to find our place and to socialize.

I was impressed by the abilities and engagement of the young people who volunteered in Koda CEC. They were much younger than me, but they already had a lot of experience with non-formal education and acted like professional project managers, community workers and trainers. It was a pleasure for me to learn from them.



At the end of November, Koda CEC organized a trip for its beneficiaries to the Kakheti region and to an allied education centre in Leliani. It was a great experience for me to see how Georgians celebrate, with a lot of food (which was being prepared outside), wine, singing, dancing and poetry.

My involvement: Chemi mushaoba

I had a general idea about my tasks before the internship thanks to the reports from the past and a talk with the intern from the previous year. Also, we had a skype call together with my tandem, Ilia, our contact person from Koda CEC, and Kim. Nevertheless, we only specified our tasks and goals after several weeks of the internship, after we got to know the daily work of the CEC and some of their plans.

Our main task was to support the children and youth development programme. This included two regular clubs and activities for children during some extra events. The children club met once a week for one hour and was attended by small children (most of them 6-8 years old). I was surprised how well-behaved and enthusiastic they were. We played simple games, sung English songs, painted and did some paper handicrafts. The programme manager Nunu suggested that we could prepare a theatre performance in English, based on a good experience from the previous year. But after a few weeks, this seemed to be unrealistic with this year's group, because the majority was very young, couldn't speak any English yet and didn't attend the club regularly (and every time, new children showed up). I liked the idea of inviting parents and families to show them what the children do in the club. Finally, we managed to organize at least a short performance at the beginning of December. We sang English and Georgian songs, danced Polish and Finnish dances and at the end did some handicrafts together. I was a bit disappointed, that the parents didn't come (probably it was not a good time), but still there were some people watching it, the children seemed to enjoy it and it was a nice Goodbye meeting for me as well.



The meetings of the youth club took place every Saturday afternoon and lasted usually for about two hours. At the beginning, we found out, that there was a period of transition in the club. Most of the "old" members didn't continue after the summer holiday (literally, no one came to the first meeting). Therefore, we wanted to form a new group of motivated members, do some teambuilding and support their ideas. With the help of our colleagues, we achieved this goal. There was a group of about 14 girls (unfortunately, no boys attended the club regularly), most of them 12-13 years old, plus a few 16-18 years old. The "experienced ones" sometimes led their own workshops (e.g. about volunteering or tolerance) and translated from English to Georgian. We made our input as short as possible and let them discuss in Georgian, because it was more effective and they managed a lot on their own. We facilitated planning sessions and made them think about

what they would like to do in the club. The biggest wish was to have a Halloween party. They made decorations, costumes, brought food and it was a huge success. As well, we enjoyed funny energizers and sometimes we played outside (especially, when there was no free room for us inside and I didn't want to cancel the club).

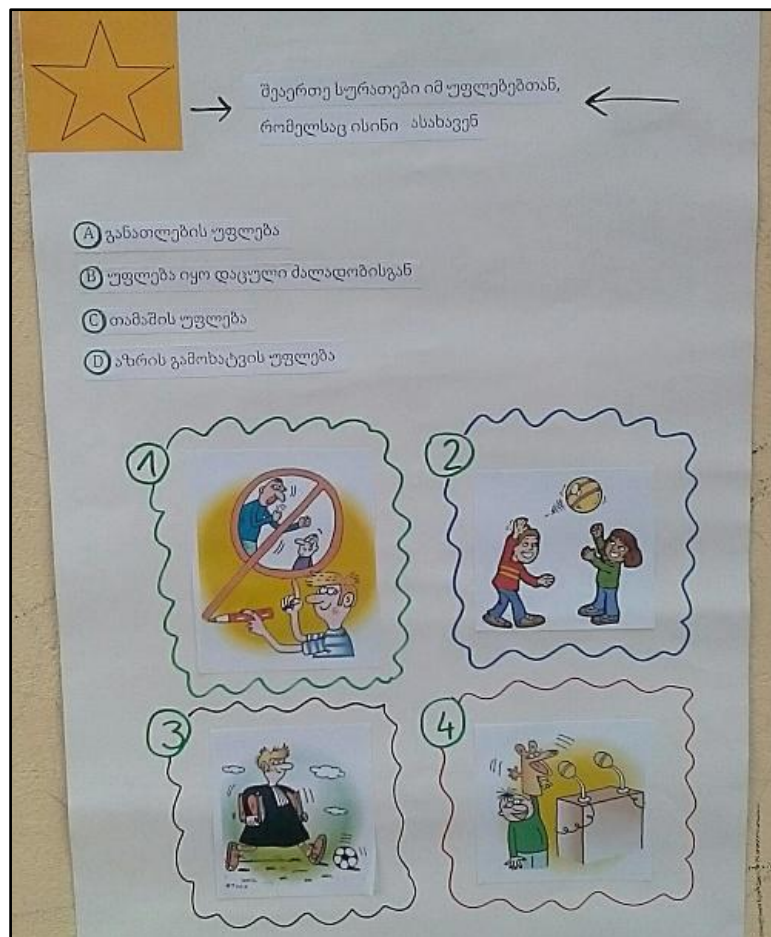
Besides these two clubs, I had many diverse tasks in the Center. With my tandem partner and with the support of local volunteers, we prepared programme for children for a big community festival, as well as for the children of foreign visitors, who came for workshops or for the Open House. I contributed to the development of the workshop offer and designed a flyer for that. At the end of our internship, we helped to prepare a questionnaire for the Koda inhabitants about what they (would like to) do in the Koda CEC and we collected the answers.

Challenges: Ar vitsi kartuli

Going to Georgia was a good opportunity to improve my Russian, so I took language lesson before I left. Even limited Russian knowledge (plus a lot of gestures) proved to be really helpful for my communication with some colleagues and when travelling in Georgia because many people didn't speak English.

But still, communication was the main challenge for me during the internship, because the environment was really multicultural and multilingual. With some of my colleagues and friends I spoke in Russian, with some in English, with my tandem partner and one local friend in German and with most of the children and other people using my hands, a smile and short Georgian words. My tandem partner did not understand Russian very well, and often, I was not able to translate for him, because I had difficulties with just following and understanding the message. So I felt bad because of excluding him and overwhelmed because it was me who mostly had to communicate with the Georgian colleagues.

At the same time, the communication brought a lot of funny moments and in fact, it was a positive and encouraging experience for me. I managed to set up good relations with the children without having a common language. I was pleased that they tried to communicate with me and that they worked on improving their English. I enjoyed learning Georgian, which, in my opinion, is a beautiful language with almost artistic letters and unique sound. Of course, it is difficult and I only managed to learn the alphabet and a few simple words. But still, I was using it quite often. It gave me a good feeling of communicating with the locals. Moreover, it was a good brain and creativity training, when I was trying to remember the letters and to find ways of translation with online tools (if you want to get an impression of that, you can try to translate the Georgian parts of the headings in this report). It was a special experience full of discoveries and obstacles. I felt like a 5-years old girl that identifies letters and reads all outdoor signs very slowly. And finally, when she can read it, she finds out, that handwritten letters differ too much!



A children's quiz about children's rights which we prepared for the community festival, completely in Georgian. Before the internship, I couldn't imagine working with a foreign language (with a different script) without knowing it.

Besides the language barrier, there were other difficult issues for me. Often, I was confused, didn't understand what was going on or why the things were done the way they were done. This caused ambivalent feelings, but I tried to get used to living in a culture with different values and rules and to working in an organization that was new to me. Slowly, I accepted the fact that I didn't have things under my control and I learned to be open to what comes, adapt and enjoy it even if it was different from what I expected or planned. The possibility to speak about it with my tandem partner and other volunteers helped me a lot to overcome my frustration.

Sometimes, we had to deal with technical problems – slow or no internet connection at work, malware, non-functional speakers, power failures, etc. Luckily, we were able to do a part of our work without internet or computer (preparing the activities for children) and we were allowed to go to our flat, where we had good internet connection and a laptop. Usually, it was not difficult to solve the technical problems, it just cost a lot of time and nerves.

Conclusion: Perspektiva

In my opinion, the internship period of three months is really short to make a difference or to learn something thoroughly. Despite this fact, I feel like it had a considerable impact on me, my way of seeing things and even my values. I learned to be creative, improvise and find new ways in an environment, where the available possibilities and means were limited. It encouraged me not to be afraid of mistakes, implement my ideas and try new things.

It made me think about intercultural and gender issues, about volunteering and development (on the local, global and organisational level). I really appreciate, that I could see the Georgian culture and life-style of IDPs in Koda "from the inside". The experience of living in a strong village community was new to me and very inspiring for my future life.

I only feel bad about one thing. I can't host the Georgian friends in my country and repay them for their hospitality. For economical, political and other reason, it is much more difficult for them to travel to the Czech Republic, being it for an internship or just for sightseeing.

მადლობა!

Contact:

barbora.nechanicka@gmail.com

My photos from Georgia:

<https://goo.gl/photos/A4FpQ3cWvGddw9M67>

