

Teacher, we want to learn from you!

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INTERNSHIP NR.: 1395838770

INTERNSHIP TITLE: Youth Development through community based education

INTERNSHIP COUNTRY: Myanmar, Karen State, Hpa An Township

PERIOD OF THE INTERNSHIP: 29/07/2015 – 29/10/2015

NAME OF THE HOSTING ORGANISATION: Tounge La Yat - Educational Gathering Group (EGG)

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*“Yesterday, I was clever,
so I wanted to change the world.
Today I am wise,
that’s why I am changing myself.”*

Summary

English

GLEN programme 2015 in Myanmar/Burma was based in Karen State and its capital city Hpa An.

The hosting organisation of GLEN internship in Myanmar is “**Tounge Lá Yat – Education Gathering Group**” (EGG), located in Hpa An Township. The school is working as an NGO, being supported from different (foreign) resources. It is an alternative school institution for students aged 16-26, providing different perspectives on global and local issues and offering a new education concept (comparing to the common schools) in Myanmar. Its philosophy is to train future leaders and active citizens of Myanmar - in English, Community Development, Social Sciences, IT, Project Management etc. The students are taught how to deliver a presentation, to speak publicly, to apply critical- and creative thinking, to solve problems actively, to communicate effectively and to express themselves in English. Apart from this, part of the education is based in the regional civic organisations and NGOs where the students spend one semester and report on their learning process consequently. Last but not least, the EGG school cooperates with the local community (e.g. in the case of waste management, or supporting a local Community-Café “Veranda”) and enjoys the Burmese multicultural reality.

The aim of the internship in Myanmar is to teach various global issues in English, to share knowledge about soft-skills, to support students’ learning process and the school-staff. As a results, the intern is delivering regular classes of English, leading workshops on soft skills, global issues and there is also space for one’s own initiative.

Czech – český

Stáž GLEN se v roce 2015 uskutečnila v Barmě v regionu Karen - v jeho hlavním městě Hpa An.

Partnerská organizace pro účastníky GLENU se jmenuje “**Tounge Lá Yat – Education Gathering Group**” (EGG) a nachází se přímo v Hpa An. Škola má statut neziskové organizace a finančně ji podporují různé zahraniční iniciativy. Poskytované vzdělání pro mladé lidi ve věku 16-26 let je alternativou k tomu státnímu a zaměřuje se na různá globální a lokální témata. Snaží se studentům nabídnout nové perspektivy na staré problem a vybavit je kompetencemi potřebnými v 21. století (to ji odlišuje od běžných škol zřizovaných barmskou vládou). Jejím cílem je vychovávat budoucí barmské leadery a aktivní občany – skrze výuku angličtiny,

komunitního rozvoje, společenských věd, IT, projektového management. Mladí lidé se učí prezentačním dovednostem, kritickému a kreativnímu myšlení, aktivnímu řešení problem, efektivní komunikaci, a vyjadřování v angličtině. Kromě stěžejních předmětů je součástí studia také semestrální stáž v regionální pobočce NNO, o jejíchž výsledcích studenti průběžně informují. Důležitou roli hraje EGG škola také ve svém bezprostředním okolí, kde se aktivně podílí na životě v místní komunitě (např. pomoc v otázce nakládání s odpady, podpora komunitní kavárny “Veranda”) a uvědomuje si pestrost a potenciál barské – multikulturní – společnosti.

Introduction

Motivation for the project

My motivation to join GLEN programme was firstly to get more pedagogical experience and to extend my teaching skills. Secondly, I wanted to experience a life outside Europe because I had never been living in any country of Global South.

That’s why I chose Myanmar internship because it combines all the factors mentioned above – education and a non-European environment.

Host organisation and its work

The hosting organisation of my GLEN internship in Myanmar is “Tounge Lá Yat – Education Gathering Group” (EGG), located in Hpa An Township. The status of the school is an NGO and the financial capital comes from different resources, incl. foreign funding. It is an alternative school for students aged 16-26, providing different perspectives on global and local issues and offering a new education concept than the common schools in Myanmar. Its philosophy is to train future Burmese leaders in subjects as English, Community Development, Social Sciences, IT, Project Management etc. The students are trained in delivering presentations, applying critical and creative thinking, active problem solving, communicating in English and being active citizens. Apart from this, part of the education is based in the regional NGOs where the students spend one semester and report on their learning process consequently. Last but not least, the EGG school cooperates with the local community (e.g. in the case of waste management, or supporting a local Community-Café) and enjoys the Burmese multicultural reality.

Main part

The situation in Myanmar (political, environmental, cultural)

The GLEN programme 2015 in Myanmar/Burma was based in the Karen State (Hpa An township).

Karen state is one of the fourteen regions of the federative *“Republic of the Union of Myanmar”* which is known as a sovereign state of Southeast Asia. The Burmese society is very multiethnic, containing more than 120 ethnic- (the largest is Burmese, Shan, Karen, Rakhine, Mon, Chinese,...) and religious groups (Buddhists, Muslims, Hindu, Christians,...).

In the past, the early inhabitants of Myanmar came from the North, North-East and North-West and established firstly Pyu city-states (around Mandalay), later followed by the invasion of the Mongols, Chinese and replaced by the Pagan Kingdom (with the centre of Bagan), bringing their beliefs and traditions with them. In 19th century Burma was colonised by Britain and remained under the British rule until 1948.

Since its independence on the British Empire, Burma has experienced only a short period of stability. In 1962, the military regime has got the power through a coup d'état and the society has been controlled by the military. All the anti-government demonstrations were violently suppressed. During the biggest anti-government and pro-democratic protests in 1988, known as “8888 Uprising” (Aung San Suu Kyi as the key person), thousands of people were killed. In 1990, the first free elections took place in Burma, earning a victory for the National League for Democracy (with Aung San Suu Kyi). However, the military junta refused to cede power and ruled for more than 20 years on, putting Aung San Suu Kyi into the home prison and oppressing its opponents. After 2005, a few artificially-made conflicts have happened, making the situation in the Burmese society unstable.

Nevertheless, the political situation in Myanmar has made a significant progress since the democratic reforms have been introduced in 2011. The country has become ASEAN member state (Association of South-East Asian Countries), as well as a country attracting foreign investments. Similarly to the past, the interests are coming from different regions and neighbourhood countries (China, India, Malaysia, Thailand,...), making rich Burmese natural resources a subject of an economic pressure and pushing Myanmar high in the ranking the world's fastest growing economy (e.g. everyone has a smartphone, every family has a motorbike). Upcoming years will show how the transition to democracy is going and if the

economic growth pays not too high price (taking into account ecological background and traditions of multiethnic society).

My host organisation in Asia

My internship took place from July 2015 till October 2015 in Hpa An, Karen State. The hosting organisation “Tounge Lá Yat – Education Gathering Group” is an important stake holder in Hpa An community, supporting the capacity building of civil society in Karen State, Myanmar. As an important initiative in the region, it prepares future leaders and active citizens, it equips them with the competencies and skills needed for the modern transforming society. Concerning the local dimension, the EGG school is active player, coordinates and provides space for meetings and civil society events. As an NGO, EGG plays an important role in educating and preparing future leaders and active citizens of Myanmar. It aims to involve and examine social- and global issues not included in a formal education (provided by the government), to promote non-formal education, critical thinking, or creative problem solving. The school is closely connected with the Community Café ‘Veranda’ which provides a platform for students’ initiatives and projects. The EGG school is benefitting from its multicultural background (students and teachers are coming from different ethnic groups and regions of Myanmar), teaching them to respect the differences and enjoy the variability among the members of the society. This fact brings all the school members together and the way how they celebrate diversity within the team/community/society has made me wonder WHY is it NOT working in the same way in Europe/Czech Republic.

The process of your internship, the co-operation with your contact person during the internship and your GLEN tandem partner

During my internship the communication with the contact persons (both from INEX-SDA/CZ, or from EGG/Myanmar) was going smoothly. It happened clearly and all questions were answered promptly.

The hosting organisation provided us with some tips and hints about the accommodation capacities in the town, and issued a welcome letter for us that helped us when applying for Visa in Europe. Once on the site we were in touch and planned our schedule and work together. In Myanmar, I also cooperated directly with “my” partner teacher who has become my contact person for my classes. The director of the school was also open for discussion, friendly and helpful all the time, and gave us a large space for our (tandem) initiatives.

My sending organisation equipped me with a contact of the former intern in Myanmar from whom I obtained more details before the departure to Asia. Moreover, the contact person from INEX-SDA has been reacting quickly to any correspondence and offered us help when needed. Dealing with some financial insecurity, they always updated us with the situation and guided us patiently on the way to our internship.

The communication with my tandem partner was very effective. The biggest crisis I see was the fact, that my first tandem partner (Slovenia) cancelled her participation only a couple of days before the first seminar in Germany took place. That was quite an uncomfortable moment in my GLEN because all other tandems had already been working on the “team-building” (tandem tasks, getting in touch and getting to know each other) but my tandem partner did not let me know about her absence. So it happened that I arrived to Germany and did not know who my partner is. It made somehow a barrier for our communication when we meet with my new tandem there. The intensive programme of the MTC trainings and the presence of 60 other people did not also allowed us to get closer to each other. After the MTCs I was still confused and could not imagine a non-conflict work together. In my opinion, the MTCs could have provided more space for tandem “ice-breaking”, tandem “team-building”, sharing.

Fortunately, the internship went really great and together with my tandem partner we discovered how much do we have in common. We shared our impressions, communicated openly and solved the problems with a smile. Always. Luckily, we also succeed to synchronise our flights which was very important because no one of us had an “advantage” of getting to know the environment first. For the future tandems I would suggest to travel to the host country together – to be able to start working in one time. The beginning does really matter, a lot!

From my perspective, the communication was very friendly, helpful and open (in all three cases).

Problems, challenges and solutions

The biggest problems that occurred during my internship in Myanmar were health issues (caused probably by the air conditioning and due to the changeable weather). It did not allow me to work for a couple of days and resulted in the medical visit (antibiotics).

What did surprise me a lot was the fact that I realised how challenging for me the change of environment was. Before going to the Global South I had been working in a successful project which I was quite personally and emotionally into. Leaving Europe behind and with all the good memories and feelings from an intensive work, it made me – to me surprisingly often – homesick and nostalgic. However, the great conditions in my host organisation EGG and the enthusiasm of

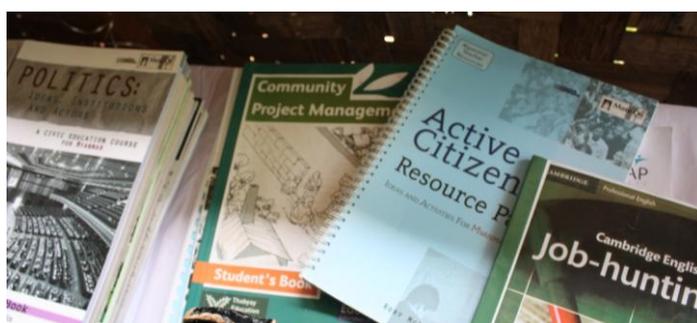
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Myanmar students (*“Teacher, stay with us and share your experience. We want to learn from you!”* – that is a powerful expression with a lot of magic inside and I am sure that, in case of Europe, it will be impossible to hear it again.) and people did not allow me to feel down and I could enjoy the satisfaction in my work and activities there, too.

Results, learning effects and experiences

The aim of the internship in Myanmar is to teach various global issues in English, to share knowledge about soft-skills, to support students’ learning process and the school-staff. As a results, we were delivering regular classes of English, extra English sessions for under-intermediate students, leading workshops on soft skills (e.g. effective time management, writing a CV and a cover letter), global issues (globalisation and the world interconnected, child labour, fair trade, world trade), handcraft activities (how to re-use “waste”), or raising awareness on global issues (Cultural evenings with a movie screening and a discussion).

There was a chance to use a fully-equipped school library with plenty of inspirational materials in English.



After a couple of weeks we succeed in finding “our” topic, too. Because of lack of the waste-management (the municipality has got only one car to collect rubbish in the township) and no **recycling** opportunity, we started to **re-use** things people normally give away (chop sticks from noodles, plastic bottles from water, aluminium cans from sweet drinks, juice cartons). Starting with a **re-thinking** phase and a student-challenge, we offered another way to deal with the problem. The solution coming from the students’ team work was breathtaking and many of them have



continued with **re-using** waste later on. Moreover, some our ideas were adopted by the Community Café “Veranda” which produce a significant amount of rubbish on a daily basis.

During our internship we were also participating at newly-born “school” providing

English lessons only. It welcomes international volunteers (*Workaway*) and focus on practical language skills. So, we had a chance to cooperate with active local citizens, as well as with interns from Hong Kong and Norway.



What was one of the challenging moments of our stay in Myanmar, was the “wish” of our director do deliver a workshop on multiculturalism and intercultural tolerance in her “weekend school”. Without knowing the age, language skills, students’ interests and family backgrounds,



we were fighting to prepare a two-hour-lesson that will make sense to all participants and would not sound like a cliché from someone coming from a totally homogenous country with fewer tolerance towards minorities. Finally, a workshop was born – not too challenging for the participants but still full of “aha” moments and opening new horizons. At the end it was more about respect, discussing the differences among people and finding similarities. A methodology used seemed to work well and activities were

logically flowing from the beginning till the end. The participants were involved actively and worked together in dynamic groups, discovering the danger of labelling and judging people and examining stereotypes. Surprisingly, the lesson went smoothly and participants’ feedback was very positive.



Thinking about the internship, we had also the chance to experience Burmese multicultural reality and variety of the Burmese nature. In the “semester break” there was a time to travel and visit some *must-see* places, including a former capital city (Yangon), the ancient town of Bagan, the Indian ocean’s coast and beaches of Ngwe Saung, or the Inle Lake and its temperate climate with wine yards, and to taste different local dishes and drinks. Benefiting

from the “insiders’ view” during the school trips, we also explored the caves, temples and mountains around Hpa An which have been waiting for the mass tourism to be discovered yet.



Conclusion & perspective

To conclude, I would like to express my gratefulness for taking part in such a project. I highly appreciate the possibility to learn from an inspiring group of people, to examine my personal motivation and abilities, to experience life in the Global South and get in touch with the local community. Only through the similar projects one can understand the nature and conditions of people there. While teaching others, I also learnt a lot about myself. I would say that the feeling of my GLEN participation could be summarize with the following quote:

“Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, that’s why I am changing myself.”

Coming back to Europe, I am bringing with me an inspiration from the Burmese society – how such a multicultural mixture works together, with knowing and respecting each other, with celebrating the variability among people. Moreover, I am bringing back the feeling to be grateful, lowly and joyful for the opportunities that are given to me. To pay respect to teachers, parents, monks, or foreigners - to enjoy their company and get inspired from them. To be enthusiastic about learning, to feel inspired by the teacher and co-students, to praise highly the value of education. To get inspired by the “wrong” aspects of our society and to take action to change it by myself.

My further involvement in Europe will be definitely influenced by the GLEN experience. For the Global Education Action I am planning to present the internship and Myanmar country (slideshow/discussion - <https://vimeo.com/user45183283>), both in CZE and GER, and to develop a “global” project week for high school students (on global issues and our GLEN experiences) – in cooperation with my GLEN tutorial group. There is also a blog from my time in Myanmar (<https://findbutterflyeffect.wordpress.com/>) and a collection presenting the variety of the “HUMANS OF MYANMAR” (<https://findbutterflyeffect.wordpress.com/2015/10/27/humans-of-myanmar-menschen-in-birma-lide-barmy/>). A radio-interview and a newspaper report to be done yet.