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FINAL REPORT / GLEN INTERNSHIP 2011

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GLEN home organization: INEX-SDA, Czech Republic

Title of the Internship: SHOOTBACK

Country of the Internship: KENYA

Period: July – September 2011

Host organization: MYSА, Kenya

SUMMARY:

2011 GLEN internship project „Shootback“ was performed between July 2011 and September 2011. It took place in Nairobi, Kenya. The GLEN team was composed of 3 participants from Germany, Poland and Czech Republic. Participants worked on Shootback project, which was run as a part of large and renowned MYSA organization focusing on linking sports and community services in slums and their surroundings in eastern Nairobi. Shootback started in 1997 and its purpose was to teach kids about photography to provide them with opportunities and experience and make them perceive and share the world around them. During the years participants decided to shift in filmmaking, and GLEN participants took part in this transformation, as they prepared a first year of a youth film festival. They also taught in two classes, one for small children about basics of photography, film and creativity, and the other in a form of discussion with members of Shootback about fields each of interns specialized in.

Shrnutí

Stáž Glenu pro rok 2011 s názvem “Shootback” se uskutečnila v době od června 2011 do září 2011 v keňském Nairobi. Tým GLENU se skládal ze tří účastníků původem z Německa, Polska a České republiky. Ti pracovali na projektu Shootback, fungujícím v rámci rozsáhlé a známé neziskové organizace MYSA, která se zaměřuje na práci s dětmi a spojuje sportovní aktivity s komunitními službami ve slumech a v jejich okolí. Samotný Shootback vznikl v roce 1997 a zabýval se výukou dětí v oblasti fotografie, a zprostředkováním příležitostí a zkušeností jim umožnil vytvořit a sdílet jejich pohled na svět kolem. Později se projekt začal zaměřovat více na film a tým GLENU se na této transformaci přímo podílel. Jejich úkolem bylo připravit první ročník filmového festivalu pro mládež a vyučovat ve dvou třídách, v jedné pro malé děti o základech fotografie a filmu zatímco ve druhé rozebírat s dalšími členy Shootbacku především formou diskuse oblasti, na které se každý z trojice zaměřoval.

INTRODUCTION

I must admit I don't even remember when I first read or heard about GLEN. But I clicked, once, twice... And it started to shape. And thus, not long after, I have landed. Twice, I would say. First among the global citizens and all the interesting people and topics during the seminars, and then straight onto Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta's airport.

Before, I was finishing bachelor studies of directing and screenwriting, and that altogether with my love for photography and travelling across cultures made it an easy decision. Especially in the time, I started to doubt the social value of contemporary cinema, and I was thinking what its edges are, and what cultural boundaries are. Project Shootback, dealing with all the media I mentioned, seemed perfect.

MYSA AND SHOOTBACK

Shootback project is run by MYSA (Mathare Youth Sports Association). MYSA is a renowned self-help youth organisation from Nairobi which is successfully combining sports with AIDS prevention, environmental cleanups and other community service activities. It started in 1987 and managed to get and sustain a major position among Kenyan NGO's, with over 20,000 people involved in its activities.

Shootback was introduced 10 years later, in 1997, as one of its projects, focusing on photography. In the beginning about 30 children in age from 12 to 17 were taught the basics and given cameras to document their everyday life in slums as well as issues they found important or interesting. It didn't take long and Shootback with its main initiator Lana Wong scored its largest success – publication of a book of these kids' photos, which has been republished and sold out several times.

But many challenges occurred for Shootback since then, and its face is still changing. It is many years since Lana Wong has left the leadership to someone from the first generation of kids, and from then on, there have been many successors. One of their most crucial challenges was to adapt to new technologies. Photography (and everything) became digital meanwhile, which meant buying new sufficient equipment – task not quite finished until now. Due to digital revolution and

internet, photography per se also became less valuable, and partly because of the cooperation with Norwegian sponsor – NUFF film festival, it was decided to step into film/video production.

OUR WORK

We - GLEN interns - were supposed to be a part of this transformation, as one may notice from our professions or fields of study. Kinga Krzeminska was a screenwriter, working for polish HBO, I was studying directing and screenwriting and David Wischerhoff was studying media production.

By our “boss” Peter Ndolo we were given an objective to settle preparations for a youth film festival which would run under the shield of NUFF. This Norwegian festival is sending volunteers to Shootback, as well as Glen, therefore two people came to continue in our work for next three months and to actually lead the festival which took place.

Therefore I would divide one Shootback cycle into two half-years – one with volunteers from GLEN and NUFF, and the other totally self-supporting. To describe Shootback’s goals or activities, it is important to consider this division, as one cannot know anything about working of Shootback in the period without volunteers, which current chief himself once called in a joke as “*holidays*”.

And what did we do in our three-months time? Concerning the work on the festival, we prepared a schedule, budget and proposals for the upcoming festival, which we agreed to name MYFF – Mathare Youth Film Festival. I spent a lot of time making its posters, design and website¹, but our main task was to make films in our classes, that can be screened there.

We had two classes each week. One – we had in a distant zones of eastern Nairobi, mine was in a MYSA library in Githurai, where about 10 local kids in the age from 9-14 came each Sunday. They were far younger than I had expected, and because they had never even touched a camera, we decided to provide them with the basics of photography through variety of games, in which we tried to provoke their imagination and critical thinking.

The second class was for actual members of Shootback, our colleagues, themselves teaching in other classes. They were about 15 more people, in the age from 15-27. For all of them, each week one of us prepared a lecture in his field. Unfortunately, because of alleged lack of money needed to support their transport to the Shootback office, we managed to organize only about 7 sessions in all 3 months of our stay. In these lectures we discussed our goals and tried to share our crucial

¹ URL: <http://myff.atspace.tv> (It has changed a lot from august 2011 when I launched it, and it could be very different or mal-functioning in the time you are reading this.)

knowledge and experiences of film preproduction (provided by Kinga), production (by me) and postproduction (by David). We structured it so as we could start to make films, but because the lack of finances was sometimes joined with lack of initiative and enthusiasm, any feature films were not realized during our presence. More about the problems we faced later.

Apart from festival preparations, we produced a film about one MYSA library for sponsors, and also supervised production of documentary about a football tournament in a distant part of Kenya. And at last but not least our work consisted of diverse office-related issues. From assisting our colleagues who had time to spend all weeks there and documenting some events of MYSA, to administrating software and equipment.

PROBLEMS

Above all challenges we encountered meanwhile, one of the hardest to deal with was possibly lack of authentic interest. We were trying not to be directive in any way, but it eventually didn't quite bear fruits in form of individual activity, as our students/colleagues mostly approached it submissively and often with an inner fear. Despite of this, I don't think clear and severe deadlines would solve it at all. If I had a chance again, I would try to motivate and encourage them more and in a different way, because this is what I think us as a team might have partially failed in. And as they were maybe afraid of doing it wrong they often avoided it. What I think is that the media and aesthetic concept is often very different to ours and thus one must be careful not to oppress creative freedom with knowledge or skills even more than in Europe. And one should do his best to make them aware of anything like creative freedom, let them create firstly, however abstract and seemingly impossible, especially in interracial dialogue, it is.

Unfortunately we ourselves rarely felt sufficient encouragement or support from the top as well. I do admire our chief as a person, but truth is that our goals and goals of Shootback were quite blurry at the time. The issues and values that Shootback used to raise were somehow slowly being forgotten and there was not much of interest in actual classes for kids from slums or distant zones. Even though the lack of basic equipment was so obvious with only 2 functional digital cameras on 4 classes (60-80 kids), nearly no initiative of any kind was taken. Our Chief's main objective was to get a european and media experience to a one or two most talented members of Shootback, which is meritable, but at the expense of wider social contribution.

Insufficient finances influenced us not only because of the equipment but also by cancelling some of the lectures and sessions. Nairobi is a large city, and without the money offered by

Shootback, basically nobody could afford to come several weeks. During the three months, there had been a burglary and some financial discrepancies in the management of MYSA. There was sometimes also an air of insincerity and laziness.

Naturally the conception of work was quite different from ours, no matter how “European” MYSA was. Each of us managed to adapt in his/her own way, and it raised disagreements also within our trinom. Nevertheless I consider solving them a valuable lesson.

LIFE APART FROM WORK

Concerning our every-day lives apart from work I find only words of gratitude and happiness. We have stayed with our chief’s neighbor who was one of the nicest men I have ever met, and we lived in a quarter called Komarock, small but very beautiful and colorful part of eastern Nairobi. There we made a lot of diverse relationships while we didn’t miss much comfort at all. I felt like at home there, mainly because people there accepted me nearly as one of them.

Everywhere else the white skin meant feigned interest, slowly resolving into money requests, or concealed hatred. And to be honest, if I were to choose, I’d probably prefer the latter, considering the white man’s historical role with all of its consequences. Unfortunately money was the most common reason to talk with us, and probably the saddest challenge of all was to tell this interest apart of the real one, as even some of our best friendships eventually got to the edge. Now I know, it is not their fault, and I understand, but it was rather disappointing there.

Nairobi, with all its western motivations, values and rush must seem somehow crazy, and I actually found some of the best moments when I travelled out of the town and out of touristic destination as well, where humble people still respected nature and vice versa. During these few travels I found out how is Kenya immensely diverse and magnificent. And once I would definitely want to go back, although I fear how much will be left.

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CONCLUSIONS

I brought a lot out of this internship. On one hand some of my questions, e.g. these about the social potential of film in Global South remained unanswered, on the other – many more questions, and I believe that is most important, raised in my head meanwhile. My world’s perspective has

slightly shifted, and because it includes quite a critical approach towards some aspects of development and aid, I will try to stay active here, in whatever field I may once be valuable even to them. Pathological adoption of western pseudo motivations, and material values with the north-south unequal inferior relation made me partially blame the ones who, even unwittingly, spread it, and thus in political, economical, media and even personal level.

Of course, it is a very complicated and ambiguous matter, but that is also why I would like to get into this intercultural dialogue more, especially that I started to study psychology after I came back. This interest concerns also dialogue with local minorities. And also in general, this experience has helped me to adopt the phrase “Act locally, think globally.”

I have posted a photo gallery with articles about some aspects of globalization – jrenza.php5.cz (But the URL is temporary). There are few “lectures” ahead of me and a talk in a radio. I would like to start a project to sponsor old digital cameras to shootback, and I will participate in the GEA activity, which we are doing together in the Czech group. And there will be hopefully more.

But back to the internship, because I forgot to mention something very important – that I enjoyed it. I would like to thank our chief Peter Ndolo, his wife Nash, our host Charles Thega and our closest Shootback member Daniel Kamau for their help. And I can’t forget to mention all the kids we worked with and we had fun with.