

GLEN - FINAL REPORT

Classical Indian wisdom for community outreach

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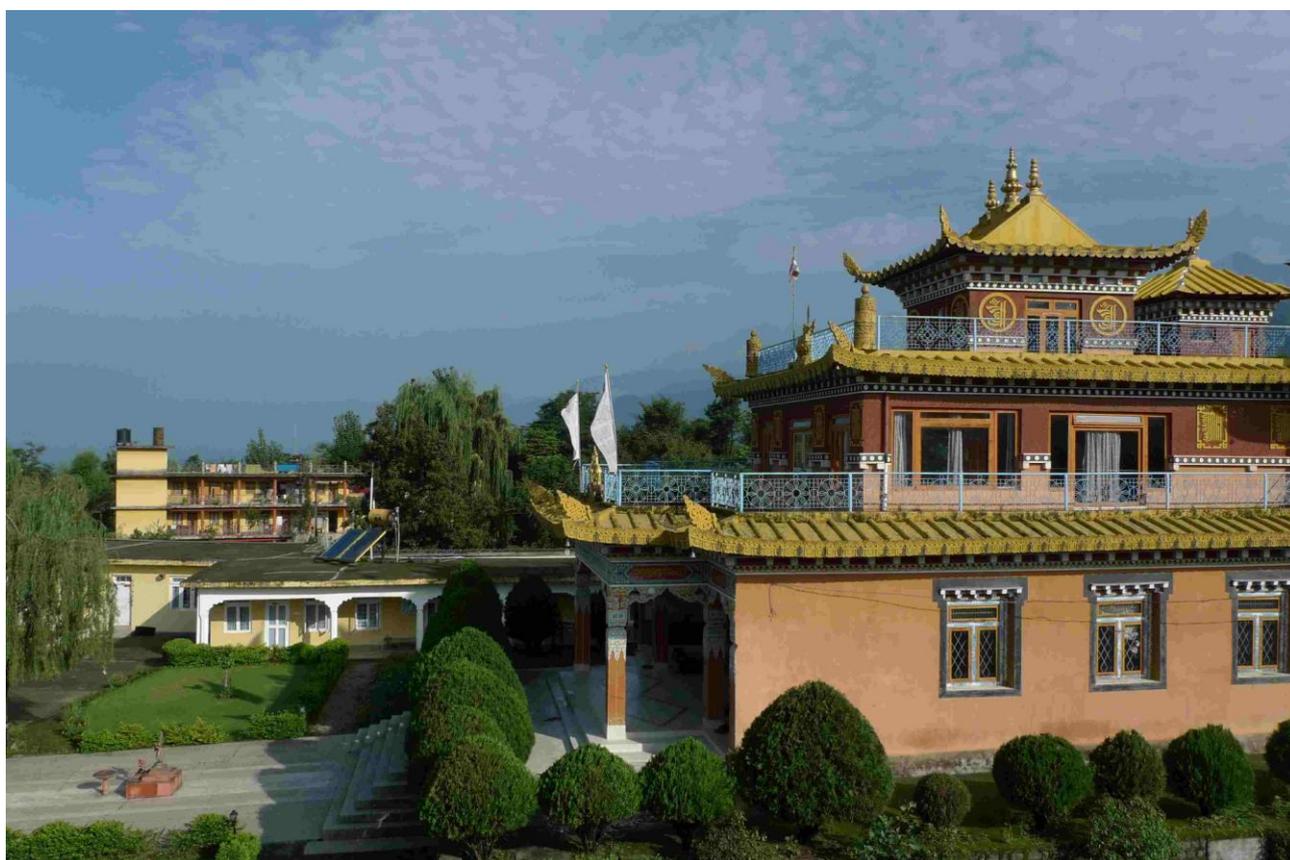
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Bir Colony, Himachal Pradesh, India

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Deer Park Institute



Deer Park Institute

Summary

The internship took place in Deer Park Institute, situated in North India at the foot of Himalaya Mountains. The institute itself is located in a small village Bir, in the state Himachal Pradesh. The institute, which was founded in 2006, is a centre for studying classical Indian wisdom traditions. It organises various conferences, workshops and teachings on spiritual as well as educational and environmental topics. It also engages with the local communities through a community projects section. Within this part of the institute's activities, several projects are going on: One core activity is the zero waste approach and its implementation in everyday life of the institute. In addition, the institute organizes local women self help group, English conversation classes for the community and runs a Deer Park shop selling art items made out of waste materials.

GLEN internship was a part of the community projects section and was targeted mainly on environmental education tackling local environmental issues. The main part of the internship consisted of developing an environmental education guidebook for local teachers. Several other tasks were completed as well: the interns participated on organisation of various conferences and wrote several reports as well as articles covering the conferences.

The main outcomes of the internship are an extensive proposal for a teaching resource on environmental education in elementary schools in rural India, several reports and articles. Due to various problems that occurred within the internship, which are described further on, the manual has not been completed yet. At the moment the guidebook is in a stage of proposal, consisting of a vision and outline of the new book, several reports on the schooling situation and the curriculum, a chapter on waste problem and a critical analysis of the former guidebook.

Shrnutí

Stáž GLEN se uskutečnila v Deer Park Institute, který se nachází v malé obci Bir, ve státě Himachal Pradesh (severní Indii). Institut byl založen v roce 2006 a je centrem pro studium indických filosofických nauk. Deer Park organizuje konference, semináře a workshopy o duchovních, vzdělávacích i environmentálních tématech. V rámci sekce komunitních projektů institut pracuje na několika projektech. Mimo jiné inicioval vznik svépomocné skupiny pro místní indické ženy, vede kurzy anglické konverzace a provozuje prodejnu uměleckých předmětů vyrobených z odpadových

materiálů. Hlavní aktivitou je propagace přístupu nulového odpadu „zero waste approach“ pomocí organizace konferencí a workshopů na toto téma i jeho uplatňování v každodenním životě institutu.

Stáž GLEN byla součástí sekce komunitních projektů a byla především zaměřena na environmentální vzdělávání s důrazem na řešení místních ekologických problémů. Hlavní náplní stáže byla práce na vytvoření příručky environmentální výchovy pro místní učitele. Zároveň se stážistky podílely na organizaci několika konferencí organizovaných institutem (zejména psaním reportů a článků týkajících se konferencí).

Mezi hlavní výsledky stáže je návrh knihy pro výuku environmentální výchovy v základních školách v indickém venkově, který byl předložen správčí radě Deer Park Institutu, zároveň několik zpráv a článků. Vzhledem k problémům, které se vyskytly v průběhu stáže, není práce na příručce dokončena. V současné době je manuál ve fázi návrhu – skládá se z vize a nástinu nové knihy, zprávy o situaci a školních osnovy, kapitoly o odpadech problém a kritické analýzy bývalého manuálu.

Introduction

Why have I applied for GLEN internship? I was very fascinated by the project at Deer Park Institute – it seemed to be a very exceptional place and the project description was in line with that. The institute works on many topics which I either was familiar or I could identify with, such as education for sustainability, organic gardening or development of education materials. Needless to say even the location of Deer Park, which is situated at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains, was fascinating. I was attracted by the view of spending 3 months at a place in Himalaya region and the idea of getting in touch with something I was quite unfamiliar with: Buddhist philosophy and other Indian wisdom traditions.



Landing field in Bir

Situation in Bir

Our internship took place in the North Indian state Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh is a state with low levels of corruption and has one of the highest literacy rates in India (second to South-Indian Kerala) even considering the rates of education among women. It is a hill state with a north-west region of western Himalayas. Bordered by Punjab on West, Jammu & Kashmir on North, Haryana on South, Uttar Pradesh on South-East and China on the East, Himachal's natural beauty is stunning with a substantial part covered by mountains. Considering the water situation, Himachal is very diverse. Some parts of the state receive very heavy rainfalls during monsoon season (Kangra valley, the district where our institute was situated, was an example of a very wet place during the

monsoon) and localities with none or almost none precipitation (e.g. Lahaul and Spiti).

Deer Park Institute is situated in a small village called Bir, which nestles at the foot of Himalaya range in district of Kangra, famous for its production of high quality tea. Bir consists of two parts: Upper Bir and Bir Conoly. While Upper Bir is the older part, populated by mainly Indian people, in Bir Conoly lives a Tibetan community. Tibetan refugees started to settle there in die sixties. Actually the first inhabitants of the place came with a first wave of Tibetans, not long after HH the Dalai Lama led his government to exile into India in 1959. So at the moment the younger population is a second generation of Tibetans living in exile.

During the main part of the year, Bir is not very touristic. That changes in the autumn, when the paragliding season starts and foreign paragliders come to Bir Colony. Altogether, Bir is a small settlement with not more the 2000 inhabitants.

As far as religion is concerned, in the surroundings are many Buddhist monasteries, some of them very big and important. All of the four lineages of Tibetan Buddhism have their monasteries in a near proximity therefore the surrounding is mainly Buddhist.

The political situation in Himachal Pradesh is calm, although conflicts tend to arise on the Northern border of India.

Deer Park Institute



Geshe Dorji Damdul teaching in
Deer Park

During our internship we worked at Deer Park Institute. Founded in 2006 by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche who transformed the former Buddhist College into a centre for learning, Deer Park wants to be an open space for education and sharing. Especially it is a centre for study of classical Indian wisdom traditions, mainly Buddhist philosophy. Therefore, Deer Park organizes different workshops and conferences, including Buddhist teachings by well-know Buddhist scholars, retreats, and many others.

Following the idea of engaged Buddhism, the institute tries to implement sustainability into its

daily routine. The campus has its own garden, where fruits and vegetables are cultivated organically.



In Bir there is no public waste management. To address this problem, Deer Park Institute implemented Zero Waste as a goal and a strategy. Within the community projects, recycling and sustainable livelihood is an important topic. Deer Park supports a local women's

self-help-group that works especially with recycled material to generate an own and independent income for the women. In addition, Deer Park has several initiatives to spread the idea of sustainability addressing the topic of education.

Working at Deer Park Institute

We worked with the community projects of Deer Park institute, lead by Pia Lindstrom. Due to our previous experiences and the main focus of Deer Park Institute, we agreed on the main task of our internship which was to work on a manual for environmental education. A previous workshop guidebook on the topic was the starting point of our work. This workshop guide needed to be restructured and revised because Deer Park planned to publish a manual for environmental education which should be useful not just within but outside the institute too.

We worked closely together not just with Pia Lindstrom, but also with a local methodologist Tripta Batra. Tripta had long-time experiences within the Indian education sector and outside, working as a self development coach and giving workshops and seminars for teachers. With her help we wanted to create a concept for a manual which would be useful for teachers and could fit into the curriculum of the local primary schools.

We started with a critical analysis of the former workshop guide to develop the concept. Besides, we visited local primary schools (private ones as well as public schools) to learn about the class room situation in India, the material used and the topics in the curriculum.

Additionally, we were involved in the Deer Park programme. This included assisting some of the teachings, writing minutes for the conference reports and helping with everyday organisation of conferences Deer Park organised. During our stay Deer Park organised for example a conference on alternative education in various wisdom traditions. Additionally, Deer Park was the co-organiser of

a conference on engaged Buddhism in Bodh Gaya, Bihar. We could attend the conference and visit one of the most important Buddhist places in India.



Butter lamps in the Buddhist temple in Bodh Gaya

This was a great opportunity for us to get an insight into the Deer Park activities and learn more about topics such as alternative education and climate change in the Himalayas.

Problems, challenges and solutions

Due to the absence of the Deer Park management during our stay, we could not get a final approval for our manual concept. The board meeting that was supposed to decide about the future of the manual, its extent, content and target group, was postponed several times and just happened after we left the institute. We were not quite sure whether our concept was supported by the management or would be discarded or postponed. In this situation we got a lot of support from Pia, who helped us to deal with this situation. The uncertainty made it at the beginning very difficult for us to work on the proposal because we had to take many decisions, concerning content, structure, target group and methodology. At the end, we decided to work on the project considering our ideas and our knowledge by making our presumptions transparent. That would make it understandable for others so that the work can be continued. At the end, we handed in a critical analysis of the workshop guidebook, a detailed proposal for the manual, reports on our school visits and one chapter we wrote as an example for the rest of the book. This chapter focuses on waste; it provides background information for the teachers as well as material and a



Library in Deer Park

methodological approach for awareness rising on waste.

Our work was even more complicated by the fact that the internet was usually not working. Deer Park Institute has its own library that proved not to be very helpful. Therefore it was quite challenging to do research and find the information needed for the background information.

Another problem was far more practical and less connected to our work. The monsoon was very

long and heavy so that everything got mouldy, our clothes, our backpacks. It was so cloudy that we couldn't even dry the clothes we put outside after washing. Due to the rain, electricity failed sometimes even for 4 days - so that we were sitting in the dark or in the candle light, listening to the rain...

Results, learning effects and experiences

The stay abroad was definitely a valuable learning experience on various levels. We were exposed to a truly intercultural environment. The regular Deer Park staff consisted of different nationalities. Additionally, many interns are working in the institute. Apart from us there were three other interns coming from different Asian countries. This gave us the opportunity to get to learn more about others.

On a personal level I think I might say the internship brought me a better understanding of how I work under pressure of different managerial and hierarchical structures. It showed to me how important is flexibility in working and living conditions. I can say that even my knowledge base has been improved - be it the zero waste approach and implementing it on an institutional policy level, getting a glimpse on organising and financing self-help groups in Indian context or getting familiar with various alternative educational approaches. There has been a lot!



Teddy bear made in Deer Park out of recycled material

I also learned how hard it is to prepare participants for all the problems and challenges they might experience while working and living in a country of major world. Even though the first two GLEN seminars were trying hard to prepare us on various scenarios, the situation is always different and much more fluid than in a game "Imagine that this or that happens to you...".

One of my challenges during the internship was to prevent frustration steaming from my impatience. When we found out that the goals we identified at the beginning of the internship wouldn't be reached, we had to fight a tendency to be impatient and annoyed. But further reflection on the process as well as a huge support we were given by our coordinator Pia, helped a lot.

Very important part of the internship therefore was a close cooperation, with our coordinator, my tandem partner and some other people who work in Deer Park. I think I might say we worked, lived and laughed together effortlessly. GLEN preparation seminars were great in introducing the person that was to spend three months with. With a distance of few months after the seminars I might say it did the trick and I was very happy. I had a person to share with and to moan about world with.

Conclusion & perspective

I believe I can easily claim that GLEN experience was one of the very moving and influential parts of my life. The whole GLEN cycle has been a great opportunity for learning as well as networking within Europe and outside. It brought together many socially and environmentally engaged young people and will hopefully lead to closer cooperation - as far as my tandem partnership stands we intend to further our cooperation.

We have already started with one part of our global education activity and organised a debate at the beginning of January in a spa city Poděbrady in the Czech Republic. Furthermore we plan to repeat it in Berlin as well.

Second part of our GEA is still a vision at the moment. The idea is to build on the environmental education guidebook we were working on during the internship and transform our ideas into a comprehensive workshop on art and waste in our respective countries.