

Final report / GLEN Internship 2012

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Host organization: Koda CEC



Introduction

In this report I'd like to share my experiences from internship in Georgian NGO which provides education programs in IDPs (internal displaced people) settlement in Koda. This report is different and shorter than others because my whole internship was not only different from the very beginning, but shorter as well. Before I describe my internship, I'd like to explain my motivation to participate in GLEN program.

In 2011 I started studying master degree program in sociology. It was expected every student would take part in Erasmus program and spend some time abroad at foreign university. By that time I was working at the human rights film festival One World, where I had been a volunteer since 2007. Because of that my expectations from staying abroad were quite different than Erasmus program could offer. When I found the GLEN application for internships in the global south countries I discovered that NGO in Georgia was looking for sociologist. This was the best chance for me to use my interests, experiences and stay abroad at the same time. Since I'd like to work in some NGO in Czech republic in the future I was really happy that I was chosen for this internship. Because it promised me a lot of new and important experiences. I was quite afraid of trainings, but everything was really amazing, enriching and finally very helpful.

Koda Settlement and Koda CEC

Koda is placed 30 km southern from Georgian capital Tbilisi. The whole village is divided to two parts, the „old Koda“ and „*voennyi gorodok*“. „Old Koda“ is typical Georgian village placed along the main road to the south. There are family houses, gardens, vineyards and small fields, there are also school, some shops and the administration center. In „old Koda“ live approximately 5000 people, most of them are unemployed, they live from vegetables and fruits they grow and from the governmental supports.

„*Voennyi gorodok*“ is Russian collocation usually used for place where IDPs live, in the following text I will call *voennyi gorodok* Koda settlement. It consist of old apartment buildings on the edge of „old Koda“. It were built during the soviet period for families of Russian soldiers, which lived in barracks near these blocs. The flats and the barracks were abandoned in 1989 and were running to seed because local population didn't use them. After war in 2008 government repaired some of these building and gave them to IDPs.

Remains of some others are still standing there and IDPs use them like a stables or warehouses. Among the remains and the buildings there are also small gardens of IDPs. The whole settlement is surrounded by an old fence which is broken on many places, but it still have something like a gate on the side closer to village. Non-official center of the settlement is Koda CEC. Except an office of NGO where I worked, there is a small shop and the last stop of bus to Tbilisi. In Koda settlement live approximately 3000 people, the average number of employed people is higher than in „old Koda“, but they usually have jobs in other places mostly in Tbilisi. Living among IDPs was very strange, because their whole life situation is very strange. They were forced to leave their big houses with gardens and vineyards, their way of life, jobs and friends and they had to move to a totally different environment and living conditions. They are still in their home country, but they don't feel themselves home. From the interviews that I did it looks like they still live in the middle of some sleeping war and waiting for the end, for some real solution.

As I said, Koda Education Center is a real center of Koda settlement, where people can meet each other and spend free time together. Courses in Koda CEC are primary for adults because children have school and many other free time activities as dancing, singing etc. – in the culture house, which is also placed in Koda settlement. Some courses are for free, especially various courses of craftworks, some are paid as English lessons and personal development courses. For children there is a youth club which works on Saturday and two courses for small kids on Friday and Saturday. Koda CEC has approximately 120 former participants who got a job or started a small business thanks to courses in CEC. But the most important work of this center is connecting people from „old Koda“ with „*voennyi gorodok*“, because this is the only place where they can meet in natural and non-formal space –there is no pub or other natural meeting place in whole Koda and because of shop and small market in settlement, people from settlement and from village don't have to meet each other for whole week. Another places for meeting are just a school and church in village. Lack of school as a meeting space is obvious and about church – in spite locals and IDPs are Christians they have different religious traditions and celebrate different things. From IDPs point of view locals aren't real religious.

Six people work in Koda CEC regularly. The most important for me were Khatia Tsiramua, director of Koda CEC and contact person for GLEN, and Tako Chabukiani, my coordinator and coordinator of youth club. Both speak English and Russian very well. Another member

of office, who can speak English is Elizabeth, peace corps volunteer from USA. She is there for two years, and this year was her first. Last members of office are two IDP women - office manager and technical manager – and some days in week there is also financial manager from “old Koda”. All these members can speak Russian. Koda CEC is open from 10 am to 6 pm and it is also the reason, why the youth club works during the weekends – by this time kids are still in the school or have some regular after school activities. But in the evening most of them are in the streets, so it is a pity, that Center can't be open longer. My advantage as a GLEN volunteer was that I was living right in the settlement (Tako and Khatia live in Tbilisi), so I could work with kids also in the evening during their free time.

My internship and work in Koda

My internship started unexpectedly. First I had to postpone my arrival by a month because of family reasons and second I lost my tandem partner. Before my internship me and Khatia had agreed on sociological research which supposed to be the main part of my work in Koda except my work in the youth club. From former participants I had had some information and ideas what I could do in youth club, but after my arrival I discovered that youth club didn't have the financial support that it had had in previous years, so I was forced to change my plans and try to find some other sources. I also came in inconvenient time, it was less then three weeks to parliament elections, and whole Georgia including Koda CEC was upside down. I suppose If I had a tandem partner, this period before election could be more productive, however I was alone and could rely only on Koda CEC stuff which was very nice and helpful, but also very busy at that time.

In the first weeks I prepared in cooperation with Khatia questionnaire for the research of needs and arranged cooperation with People in Need – I gained 10 documentary films for public screening. With the leader of local community I arranged material for building a fence around small place in front of the Center, which had been clean up last year. Building a fence was supposed to be part of clean up action and would to prepare the place for another volunteer activity in spring – the Earth day. We wanted to prepare the place for a small garden.

So, a lot of preparation work was done in these weeks, but anything really visible. Unfortunately that was almost everything I could do during my internship, because on the

1st of October, in election day, I was run over by a car. This was the end of my internship. Next week I spent in hospital in Tbilisi. After that I tried to finish some projects, because insurance company said that I had to go home. In the last week I took part in preparation of peace corps event "Girls day" and arranged two film screenings with discussion one for youth and one for small kids. At this time I was also making some interviews with IDPs about their life situation, which I wanted to use for my thesis.

I'd like to say that in spite of Georgia is almost European country the society could be very traditional. Not so much in Tbilisi, but definitely in villages. It means that to be there as a lonely young girl was quite difficult and suspicious from beginning. It made difficulties also in my personal anthropological project, because it made difficult to get closer to ordinary people in certain age. Regardless of disadvantages which my accident caused to me, it opened me the door to the community, so I could get to know them, their life and problems better and finally I could talk with them more openly about things which worry them.

Conclusion

My work in Koda was very interesting, especially due to the fact that almost everything was possible, if you didn't need a money. I tried to connect some actions of youth club with the peace corps events because there was opportunity to get some money for a trip or small feast etc., I hope this will work in next years. As a GLEN volunteer I lived right in Koda settlement which had a huge benefit for me. First I was in close touch with local people all the time and I had similar life conditions like them, I had the same troubles with water, with electricity and so on. These reasons and also the fact that I was alone and wounded there caused that I could make closer relationships easier. Most of the evenings and some weekends I spent with the kids from the settlement. It was fun and inspirational as well.

I got more from my internship than I could give because of short time I was there. From later communication with Khatia and Tako I know that nothing I had prepared was realized. In spite sociological research, which was planned to quite details and I supposed I could help them with analysis from Czech republic. Although I left all films with description in the office there was no other film screening. I know that nobody can do my job instead of me, but I am sad that my presence in Koda didn't leave any trace there anyway.

In the end it sounds that I am quite disappointed with my internship, but I think it is mostly due to strange circumstances, I was facing me from the beginning. I am really glad I got this opportunity because it was very enlightening and rewarding in many ways. I knew before that I live in more rich and stable part of the world, but now my awareness is more deep because of real experience. I hope I can use it in my life practically. I also learned some new things about myself that can be useful in future. I discovered my limits, how much strength I have and also that not everything I consider important is really important is. I can't say I am full of new energy after my internship, because way of living in Georgia showed me, that you can be calm and stress-free and still do interesting things. I am more idealistic about new project now, which I consider as positive change. Before my accident I was quite self-reliant and independent there. After that I had to rely on strange people with very basics which was also new and rewarding for me.

After my return to Czech republic I asked for a grant to get money to go back to Georgia and finish some projects there, but I wasn't successful. I'm working now on thesis which is based on my experiences there and on interviews I made with the locals. I hope that outcome of this work will not be just an another forgotten text in university library, but also an article somewhere else. I was writing a blog as well and post about Georgian elections saw around 60 people. In my global education activity I am preparing film screenings at public space on the north of Czech republic. This screenings aren't based on my Georgia trip but their topic is debate about human rights in general.