

Ecotourism, regional product development and marketing for a Biosphere Reserve - Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

GLEN 2015 Final report

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Internship title: Ecotourism, regional product development and marketing for a Biosphere Reserve

Internship reference number: 0603

Internship period: 28 September 2015 – 25 December 2015

Internship location: Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Host organisation: The Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU)

Sending organisation: INEX-SDA

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The NABU conducted the project which main aim was establishment of the new biosphere reserve on Lake Tana. The project duration was from the beginning of the year 2012 until the end of the year 2015. My specific internship tasks was development of a Lake Tana Biosphere Reserve travel guide. I was supposed to serve as a pilot tourist, go to the restaurants/hotels/attractions to research prices, bus routes, etc. to develop a small guide book. Another task was assistance with the preparation of the inauguration ceremony for the newly established biosphere reserve on the lake Tana.

HOST ORGANIZATION

NABU or the The Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union is a German NGO which runs the nature conservation development projects in several countries of the global south. It is absolutely crucial to distinguish between NABU head office in Berlin which consists of German workers and NABU office in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia which consists of Ethiopian workers (Bahir Dar team). The cooperation on the professional level with head office in Berlin was very good. We had a meeting before the start of the internship in Berlin, where we discussed the possible tasks and got a lot of support with formal aspects of the internship (e.g. business, visa issuance, getting in touch with the Bahir Dar team, etc.). We also cooperated with this part of the organization via emails during the internship. The role of this part of the team was the tasks distribution and e-mail consultation of the tasks.

The Bahir Dar team played the role of the supporter and played its role very well. As interns, we had always the full support of the Bahir Dar team not only work-wise, but also on personal level which was very important for me. In short time after the beginning of the internship, I established good relationships with workers in Bahir Dar office. The relationships last until now which I perceive as a great gift.

The third element of the work was Ellen Kalmbach. The external international backstopper from Germany who spent some six weeks with us. This "element" was a key part in understanding the clashes between German and Ethiopian mentality. With numerous experiences in backstopping from various projects in African countries, it was the person, who was able to explain very well the meaning of the working approach of the Bahir Dar team and demands on work outcomes of the Berlin team. On top of that, she was very friendly, open and we could establish connections which last. The work was much more realistic, meaningful and so to speak sober with her close supervision. I wish every tandem or trinomial had this kind of tutor. The internships would run much smoother with higher effectivity at work.

WORK

From the originally planned booklet designing, I spent maybe 3 weeks working on the task. Then Ellen came and I was assisting her with evaluation of project outcomes. This was being done by studying the project proposal, lot of travelling, gathering and working on field data. This stage was an excellent intro to understanding the way of work in Ethiopia when I started to realize that some things, or perhaps everything works differently from what I knew before. For the second half of the internship the assistance on the project final report took the priority and we started with the neverending dull job of gathering and scanning particular interim or final reports. It was quite boring task, but this way we could compare the project proposal with the partial final reports and the reality from the field which turned out to be a great insight in intercultural clashes and very different perception of the very same things. The most significant fact that the local NGO was not concerned so much of the global learning was the days of the preparation and implementation of the inauguration ceremony. The way some people from NABU head office used finances, treated local people, Bahir Dar team, interns, but also each other just made me gasp and rethink my nationality. On the other hand it was one of the most intense lesson of global learning which made me realize my own behavioral patterns and values, reflect and relearn. *#Judgement, arrogance, irony, sarcasm, putdowns, disconnectoin, critique, shame, feeling of not being enough, worthiness issues, inappropriate reactions, expressing anger.*

The work outcomes can be divided into three categories. First is designing the booklet for tourists which was finished only partially, as the second task – final report base data gathering took over this priority. The second task on the other hand was finished successfully. The third task – preperation and implementation of inauguration ceremony was finished successfully as well.



INTERNS

From the originally planned trinom, we ended up as a tandem. This way we spent our internship in really close proximity at work as well as in our accommodation and during our leisure time. My tandem was Ana Novakovic from Serbia. If I was to write, how valuable was our mutual support, learning and the connection we established, my final report would consist of a hundred pages at least. Ana helped me to realize one of the most crucial thing in my life. It is the paradox to write now, but the best parts of our internship were our interpersonal crises. Those shattered with my previous patterns in my behaviour and perception of the world. Then, when I could rebuild it again I came as a new person. Very suprising is a fact, that I have done something similar for her without knowing it. Our friendship continues in the way we share closely the important life events and seek each others support in difficult times. As she told me in the end "It is strange how sometimes we choose people in our lives that teach us nothing, and than the others are just randomly given to us and change us for better forver" *#Self value, honesty, desire to grow, connection, empathy, acceptance, openness, friendship, mutual support...*

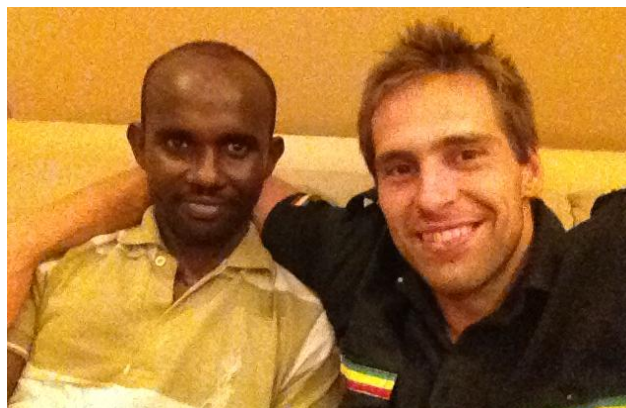


PERSONAL BENEFIT

Europeans live in their heads, Africans in their hearts...

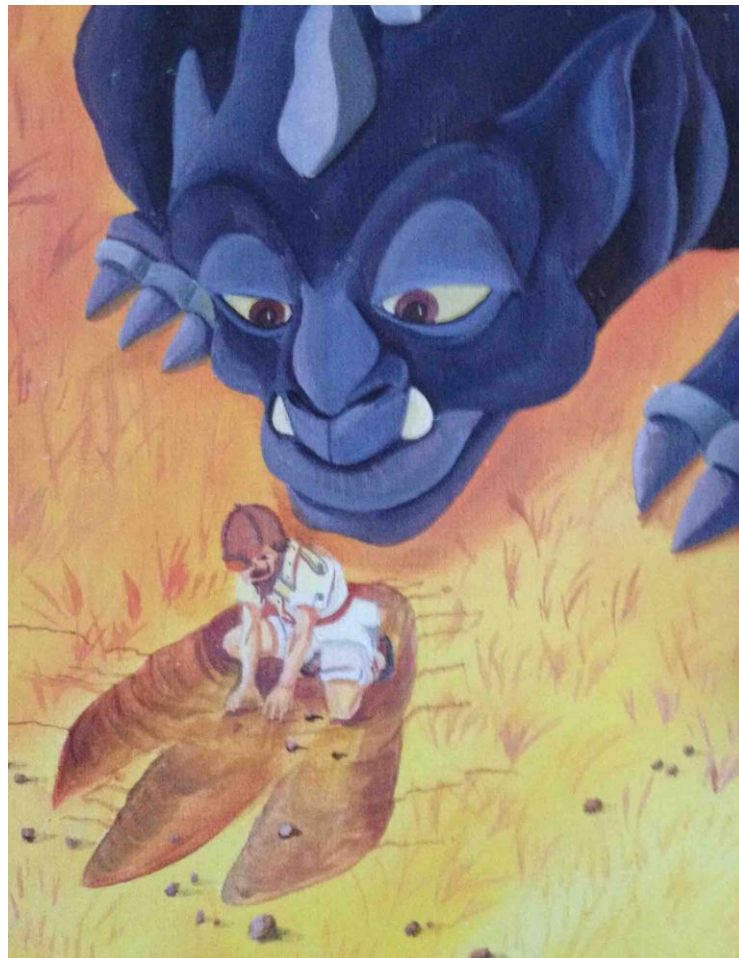
Putting it straight, the work turned out to be not as important for me as I thought. What was really important were people I worked with, friends I made in Ethiopia. The connections I established with them and what we learned from each other. *NABU Natural resources manager Alemayew, NABU driver Tadesse, night keeper of our guesthouse Derb, Addis Abbeba officer Selamawit, ...* I was extremely lucky with people. The luck so vast I keep thinking it cannot have been only a good luck. I realized that the global learning is not only understanding the interconnections of our world (economical, ecological, etc.) it is also about feeling and maintaining interconnections with others. Finding the common ground with people who come from completely different backgrounds is surely a good beginning.

This is probably the matter of the difference between lifestyle in global north and global south in general, but the people I worked with in Ethiopia did not live and work as I used to. They might not have had the best sense for planning, logical or strategical thinking, etc., but they had something else comparte to my culture. I would say that Africans live in their hearts more. At work the atmosphere was different. Rather than *competence, competition, hierarchy, critique, efectivity or productivity* I was experiencing *curiosity, compassion, understanding, tolerance, sense of life and mainly humanity*. I simply started to feel like a human being again. I started to realize the values I used to have long time before and sort of forgot. I didn't feel like I need to "earn" acceptance from others by the quality of my work or how I perform. This finding led me to *understanding and embracing differences, values sharing, and mainly MUTUAL LEARNING*. It would be destructive for both sides to percieve the country of global south as a reciever of "help" and the global north country as its provider. I really went to learn there. Therefore the work in the office was not important for me. I feel in 3 months of the internship I just started to understand the culture, the mentality, values, etc. I have to admit, that I think I would be really helpful perhaps after another 5 months there. This is the reason that this part of my final report is the longest. I was also thinking a lot how to keep learning after the end of the internship. One way is for sure by staying in touch. This way the experience will never die and I can continue my "internship" after its formal end.



... There was something I had lost. I found it again in the world that is being called “underdeveloped”...

My internship was a great journey. But I started to realize recently, that I travelled deep into my soul as much as I travelled out to a foreign country. But instead of “great new” what I discovered in Ethiopia, there was “the great old” what I rediscovered inside. I was dreaming about Africa since my childhood and when I came there, something happened. But something completely different than I expected. It was like if I happened to be on the right place at the right time, meeting the right people. Was I there, living my childhood dream that made my heart open? I do not know. What I know is, that I started to hear my inner voice and connected with myself once again and.. Gosh! It feels so great. I realized that there is something more to global learning. Apart of global interdependencies, inequalities, racism, sexism and other isms. It is great to discover the world. But it is equally great to discover your real self and getting to know yourself better. I think that the natural tendency of every human being is also **understanding oneself and ones role in the world** better during the whole life.



FUTURE PLANS

You cannot change Africa... Africa will change you!

It is difficult to say now, what exactly is my global education activity going to look like. With my new perspective on old stuff about the life. With my “newly acquired old values”, I clearly feel I want to continue my journey of gratitude and happiness in simplicity. I want to work with people, now also more with people with disabilities and/or children (me and my tandem partner now work on a book about our experience in Ethiopia for European kids). To “pay of” my great experience I work on so called Reverse GLEN, so that interns from global south can come and fulfil their internship in the NGO I work for in the Czech Republic.

But when I get back to the core again I simply think, that one of the biggest problems in globalised world is lost connection. Not only with others, but also with ourselves. Lack of acceptance (again also of ourselves) and honour follows. I don't know, which strand of global education that is. I don't even know how to define it properly, how to put it in words. Maybe the best, simplest and probably the most pathetic way to explain it is that I want to open hearts of other people. It is not that opening minds would be less important, but firstly some of us do it greatly already and then, I simply think I am built for something else.

Something in me changed to better thanks to my experience in Africa. I can distinguish much easier, what in life is important. I am more grateful and happy in general and I can clearly feel how it affects my relationships with others. My internship helped me to define what I really want to put my energy into. I simply wish I could make other people feel this way as well and thus change the social climate first around myself, later perhaps on different scale. Finding the way how it can become my profession will be my complete victory.

#Will to understand. Happiness, simplicity

Self-acceptance, self-love > Acceptance, love.

Opening to others > Connection > Mutual learnin.

Heart > Hearts