

Young People in Eastern Europe
and Central Asia:

From Policy to Action

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The story of Scouting is now a long story, it's a hundred years old. We're just entering our second centenary; which we will celebrate on the 1st of August: a hundred years of building citizens of the world. And the story started with 20 boys taken from different social environments, the richest and the poorest of London, brought to a 'Scout Camp' on small island in the Channel by Lord Baden Powell, on August 1, 1907. Just one year later the founder made this experience available to young people in a handbook, and by chance this book was called 'Scouting for Boys, a Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship'. We understand that this book, after the Bible, is possibly the most translated book in the world.

So what is scouting? It's a non-formal educational process. It's based on a value system. It's not just educating towards something, but it's educating inside the framework of a value system, a value-based framework. But you cannot propose education if you don't offer a vision. And scouts have a very clear vision for creating a better world. And it's not just about a richer world, it's about a world where human beings can live better together, everywhere and with everybody.

Recent studies show the importance in non-formal education of having a method. This 2003 study says: “The most relevant implication for the development of citizenship education projects is that action can be a powerful learning tool, but only if it is intentionally designed and systematically supported. It means not just a project for once, you need a process, a lifelong process, just like education is on the long term”.

And this is what we have in scouting. We have a method which is unique. There is no other organization in world which bases its method on a strong personal lifelong commitment, a promise and a promise.

Among the values which are included in our educational offer to young people in Scouting, we feature duty to others; the other two being duty to your spiritual development and to bettering yourself as a citizen. Duty to others involves loyalty to one's country, promoting local, national and international peace, understanding, cooperation and participation.

Over the past decade we have sought to establish scouting in ECA countries, but have met – and continue to meet - with a number of difficulties. But there should be no reason why it shouldn't work there, as it worked in Europe and the rest of the world.

We submit that the young must face up to the challenges of our present times, and we act on that via our Global World Project, debated at both local and world levels. Project management is not our work, however. Our work is the project of life, and it lies with turning young people into committed, adult citizens. Our core business is lifelong education. We do conduct projects,



however, some of which are devoted to building citizenship.

From a global perspective we could look at the Hong Kong's jail Scouts: we train Scouts in prison, promoting offenders' reintegration. In El Salvador we work towards bringing together rival gangs leading to a demonstrable 80 percent reduction in student-related violence. We carry out similar projects in Bulgaria.

The World Scout Jamboree is a gathering of thousands of young people, who don't just come together for a rock concert, they come together to live together for ten days, bringing together all the cultures, all the religions, where they really talk, and learn how to live together. We like to see diverse people and bring them together because we like a world where we are all different but all equals.

This year's Jamboree will be the Centenary World Jamboree: young girls and boys, with their leaders, come to live together, a unique experience where they will pray together in their different languages, in exchanging their different faiths, learning how their food tastes are different and how they do the same things in a different way, sleeping in the same camp, singing the same songs, marching together, taking part in activities, adventures and challenges together. And each one of these young people, when she or he will be back in his country, in his community, will be the best ambassador of the importance of diversity and the importance of scouting to becoming committed citizens.

But then we face the problem of evidence. We had a long discussion with the World Bank, when we started to discuss our participation in this interesting conference, and they say, okay but where is the evidence for non-formal education? After a hundred years you must have proven evidence. We know it works, unfortunately we're not researchers, and unfortunately Scouts have a kind of a private saying: "don't tell the good you do, the good turn you do everyday, you keep it to yourself", this is the good part of scouting - and that's why we never show off how good we are, but we realize that society today wants us to put forward evidence.

So let me tell you an old story of an African girl called Korbia. Korbia once – eleven years old, twelve years old – was facing the big decision of making the scout promise. So she prepared for a long time, her patrol leader – we work in small groups – so an older peer of hers – fifteen years old – was telling her how important this moment in her life was. So Korbia studied, prepared for her scout promise. And at one point she goes to her Troop Leader, Victoria, a member of the African regional council, and said, "Victoria, I will not make my promise." And Victoria, surprised, "Why, it's the most important thing in your life?" Korbia said, "I thought things through, I read carefully, and you know, it says I have to be loyal, I have to be trusted, I should always be optimistic; I have to always help others", enumerating all the values of scouting. "I cannot do it. I live in the street and I'm a thief. I take from others to live. I cannot be trusted." But scouting works miracles. Her leader, Victoria, said "You see, Korbia, scouting is not about obeying a law, you have to do your best, your promise is to do your best to obey the law. You make your own project of life. It's a challenge." Korbia made her promise the very same day and today is a group leader in scouting, fully integrated into society. That is the measure of scouting. That is our evidence.



In education, symbols, belonging, are important. You learn, you are part of the educational process. But then, all at once, you stop education, you become an adult. You are supposed to be ready to contribute as a fully committed citizen. You have to make decisions, and choose whether to put your learning into practice. It is very important moment, a time of departure. In Scouting, you may leave your group, but you are always a Scout. You may remember a man called Neil Armstrong who landed on the moon: he was a scout. The scouting badge in my office sits beside a picture of Armstrong; that badge was on the moon. Need I mention that President Chirac, or President Clinton, and a number of parliamentarians, including Minister Melandri, were also scouts?

So this is also evidence for us. Now let me conclude with a proposal: the pursuit of evidence will be part of our centenary World Congress. The World Congress will be held in Geneva, and will tackle the issues of non-formal education and scouting's contribution to non-formal education, and we will try to put together all the available studies, and submit the evidence that demonstrates the importance of non-formal education to our societies.