

# European Democratic Education Community Newsletter, March 2009

## Editor's Note

After some unfortunate delays we are pleased to send out, at last, our second Community newsletter. We have a whole lot of content for you this time, although the format is somewhat simpler - we have opted to use this plain textual format to produce the newsletter more quickly and efficiently. We all hope you enjoy this edition.

*Michael Sappir*

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## EUDEC in 2009

*Martin Roberts, Sands School, England*

It is now March, but back in January, on the first day of a new year, there I was, sitting at my computer at home, nursing a mild hangover from New Year's Eve celebrations and thinking, as many of us are prone to do in a new year, about what has been achieved and what is still to come. It's always a good time to take stock.

My mind wandered over various aspects of my life and, while I'm sure many of you would love to hear about my seemingly interminable failures in the quest to find a future Mrs. Roberts, this is not what prompted me to put pen to paper. Or, I should say, fingers to keyboard. No; the common ground we all have is, of course, EUDEC: this community that we have been involved in building from the ground up over the last couple of years.

So – the important question: what has been achieved?

Well, if I try to detach myself from my own personal involvement, and look at it from an outsider's point of view, I am struck by how easy it would be to answer: not very much at all. What has changed? What impact have we had on the climate of education in Europe?

Very little.

So then I have to ask: how can this be? So many of us have put in countless hours of work – especially since the August conference in Leipzig – that it does not seem possible that not much has changed. Very frustrating, I'm sure you'll agree.

If I stop there, I have to give up. Yes, it was a good idea, a dream even, but is it really worth it? Is it possible to change a system that huge, that has existed in its present state for so long? Maybe I should just cut my losses and go back to working in my own small way, to help improve the lives of the few enlightened souls who do share my dream.

But no, I cannot give up – I have too much invested. I know – we all know – that what EUDEC is trying to achieve is right; is, in fact the only sensible option in our modern democratic world. So I go back to the aims and objectives that the community (then consisting of only about 30 people) set out a year ago:

- Collate and disseminate research that illustrates the value of democratic education to European states
- Create a database for democratic education in Europe with information on schools, education legislation and relevant research findings
- Identify and create relationships with related European organisations (e.g. related to democratic education, student voice, children's rights, educational choice)
- Develop a student and teacher exchange programme with 10 active schools
- Develop an internet forum which supports communication and exchange between schools
- Develop and disseminate one new handbook each year, in at least five languages, for teachers, students, parents, schools, academics, ministries and political decision-makers to increase awareness of democratic education
- Identify and establish contacts with policy-makers and opinion formers in 5 European states and on an EU level
- Establish regional chapters in at least 5 European countries
- Establish a voluntary body of 15 members
- Conduct outreach in all areas of Europe to achieve membership of at least 40 schools and 200 individuals

And that's when it strikes me: we have achieved an incredible amount! We have created this organization, which has grown from 11 or 12 individuals to over 100 people working together to achieve a common goal. We have shared our dream and people are beginning to see that this dream could be a reality; they are beginning to join us.

The reason it feels like we have done so little in real terms is that we have been focusing on our internal objectives – we have made the first steps into a new future, and the importance of these steps must not be overlooked.

But now it is time to make the bigger leap. We have renewed the foundations of our community; we have a clear idea of what it is that we want to achieve, what we are certainly capable of achieving. So: now is the time to go out there and take our message to people who have never dared to dream. People who have accepted that education means what it has always meant; what our governments have always told us it means.

This is where we need help. And the organization, now, is more than ready for your help.

We are in the process of setting up projects that our whole community can get involved in. It is these projects that will help us start to realize our external objectives. It is these projects that will drive our organization forward. We are also in the process of establishing regional groups that will be able to take care of immediate concerns within their own countries and communities.

Now we can really begin to make things happen.

So I am confident that I can look ahead with excitement to the coming year – we all can. I hope to meet you all in Poland this summer, and look forward to hearing about the successes and frustrations you have all experienced. I look forward to EUDEC's growth and development. I look forward to seeing some real, tangible fruits of our labours. Don't forget, we are still just starting. You and I are here at the beginning. Very exciting, indeed.

Now, back to the future Mrs Roberts ... hmm ... how about a European Democratic Education Dating Community?

## EUDEC Annual Assembly Poland 2009

The EUDEC Council chose Poland to be the venue for the EUDEC Annual Assembly 2009. It will be taking place in Cieszyn, a small town on the Polish-Czech border in the south of Poland. The nearest big cities on the Polish side are Bielsko-Biała, Katowice and Krakow and, on the Czech side, Ostrava.

The organising team, headed by David French (who lives in Cieszyn), is made of people who attended last year's conference in Leipzig. One group is based in the Silesia region in the south and the other in the city of Lodz.

Cieszyn is a picturesque, compact town with a population of around 40,000. Attendees at the Assembly will soon get used to their daily route from their accommodation in a youth hostel, to the restaurant where they will be eating and then on to the school and culture centre where the work sessions and plenaries will be taking place.

Some people may choose to camp; they will be able to catch a bus into the centre or take a pleasant stroll along the banks of the river Olza and look across at the Czech Republic on the other bank. We shall probably have a campfire down at the campsite one evening.

Cieszyn's market square is charming in the summer, when you can sit outside pubs and restaurants. There are open-air swimming pools in both Cieszyn and Český Těšín. Anyone who decides to come by car can take a 25-minute drive out to Žermanice Lake.

The middle school which is offering us classrooms will almost certainly have Wi-Fi by the summer and there is a computer lab which will be made available a few hours a day.

- **The Annual Assembly will take place from 30 July to 2 August.**
- Participants should arrive on 29 July.
- An excursion day will be offered on 3 August.
- The fee (between 40 and 90 Euros) will cover accommodation and food from dinner on the 29th to breakfast on the 4th.
- After 1 May, fees will increase by 25%.
- To register, contact David French ([david.cieszyn@gmail.com](mailto:david.cieszyn@gmail.com)).
- Online registration will be available by the end of March. Check the EUDEC website (<http://www.eudec.org>) for updates.

To get to Cieszyn you can fly to Katowice or Krakow. From Katowice you have a bus ride of about 2 hours and from Krakow a three-hour trip. Some people fly to Prague and then get an express train to Český Těšín which takes from 3½ hours to about 5. Low-cost airlines flying into Poland are, for example: WizzAir, Easy Jet, CentralWings, Germanwings, BMI Baby (Ryan Air may pull out from Poland this year in protest at the high airport fees it pays).

A number of coach companies offer services to Poland from major European cities. This obviously takes a good deal longer (about 30 hours from the UK to Katowice, for example) but you will be doing your bit to minimise your carbon footprint and reduce damaging carbon dioxide emissions. Check out: Eurolines, Omnia, Comfort Lines, Globus, Becker Reisen etc. for their latest offers.

We hope to see you in Cieszyn, where you can contribute to the development of EUDEC, forge cross-European links with other schools and initiatives and get to know your fellow EUDECers better.

## The new EUDEC Forum

*"It's very blue and shiny."*

-Leonard Turton

As some of you may know, a technical error caused us to lose a lot of what we had written in the EUDEC Forum in October and November. We subsequently had to open a new Forum, with some improvements, a new, blue, shiny look, and, unfortunately, none of the old threads.

Since then we have been working on making the Forum more useful for all members of EUDEC. Here are a few of the things that have been going on in the Forum:

- We have been posting **updates about Council's work** from time to time, and shall be doing this regularly. Check out [What Council has been busy with](#) for these updates.
- We are trying out **regional/non-English forums**. So far one forum has been opened for the budding German chapter of EUDEC and for all German-language discussions. (The [EUDEC Germany forum](#)) Additional regional forums will be opened as regional groups develop and grow.
- One of Council's most important ongoing projects is the **Guidance Document restructuring proposal**. This proposal, which we are still developing, will be one of the main items on the agenda in the General Meeting in Poland this summer and will have great impact on EUDEC and its future. Make sure to read the latest draft and give us your input here: [Draft 9](#)

**You can find all of these and more in [the new EUDEC Forum](#). Come on in, [introduce yourself](#), visit the [general chat thread](#) and get in touch with your fellow EUDECers!**

## “Project-planning party” for EUDEC objectives – everyone is invited!

*Niklas Gidion, Kapriole Freiburg, Germany*

EUDEC has many objectives, many things we want to accomplish in the next years. All of those have to be carefully planned and fuelled with ideas to find out how to approach them. This is something that we can all do together online on the EUDEC Forum! We need your brain-power, your experience, your input, your point of view, to make the planning as successful as possible. We need you help to collect resources and gather people willing to work on objectives that catch their interest. We (your beloved EUDEC Council) have started the planning-process already. The method we use is:

1. Begin by "imagining wild success". What will have happened in five (or ten) years if things have worked out even better than expected?
2. Brainstorm possible actions that would lead towards that success.
3. Break down those brainstormed actions into a series of single, doable tasks.
4. Identify the first actions (i.e. what can be done right now).
5. Act :-)

You are most welcome to help at all stages. We started with steps 1 and 2 (and in some places partly 3) but we need more input from you. Please don't be shy. Any idea might prove to be very valuable. And this planning work is perfect for good community effort there on the forum. You find all of the respective discussion-threads in the EUDEC Forum under:  
Community business → [Working threads](#)

A few examples:

- [Develop and offer seminars and materials for teacher education](#)
- [Identify and create relationships with related European organisations](#)
- [Design Infopacks for kids, parents, teachers, decision-makers](#)
- [Identify and establish contacts with policy-makers and opinion formers](#)

## News from Ulvsund Friskole, Denmark

*Rikke Knudsen,*

Right now we have 8 kids at ages ranging from 4 to 15 years. We are having regular school meetings, and the judicial committee works once or twice a week to solve conflicts.

The kids are planning a lot of different things. In the past few days the kids have been trying to arrange a trip to an exhibition in Copenhagen. Some kids have requested English and sewing lessons. We are also trying to get a biology teacher to give some voluntary lessons for a couple of the kids.

Everyone is enjoying the company of each other, and life is beginning to flow through the rooms on a daily basis. It's really starting to feel more and more like a real school.

We have just moved the school 100km closer to Copenhagen, and we are looking for a building. If we find a place to stay within two months, we will have all the requirements for getting state support.

## News: EUDEC Teacher-Training Center Seminar, Denmark, 22 April 2009

EUDEC, in cooperation with Ulvsund Friskole and the University College Sjælland, will be holding a full-day seminar with respected Danish professor, Erik Sigsgaard. Students and teachers from EUDEC will be attending the seminar as key speakers and workshop leaders. 100 students have already signed up for the seminar.

This will be the first time that EUDEC has offered a teacher-training seminar.

## News: New school member of EUDEC

EUDEC has registered a new school member from Denmark: "Det Fri Gymnasium" (The Free Secondary School), a large secondary school in Copenhagen with 600 students and 80 employees. Visit their website at <http://www.detfri.dk>.

A few EUDEC Council members, together with a student from Sands and Niels Lawaetz from Denmark, visited Det Fri Gymnasium in November last year, and at a school meeting in early January it was decided that they would join EUDEC.

Det Fri Gymnasium was founded in 1970, and the school meeting has governed the school from the very beginning. The school has been experiencing hardships under the current government in Denmark. The latest problem was the government's request to remove the sentence "The school meeting is the highest authority" from their website. We hope that in the future, the school will write a small article about themselves, their history and the current problems which they are facing.

## Starting Out (Part 2)

*Leonard Turton, Summerhill School, England*

Waaaaay back in 1970 I founded a democratic day school in Canada, near Toronto, called Odyssey House Community School. In those days, free schools were an integral part of the 60s counter-culture movement. After the book Summerhill was published, founding one was a very much like putting together a rock band after the Beatles arrived in America.

There was something good about this innocence and sheer spontaneous drive. No one worried if they weren't completely sure about what they were doing before they did it; no one worried about visiting 'wise old dem ed people' with years of experience because there were none. Also, and thank goodness, there were no sacred free school ideologies to follow or that had to be analysed, or that you could write sacred commentaries about in order to weirdly transform yourself into some kind of child freedom guru. You could simply and very plainly get on with it, size up you own situation and have a go using your ingenuity and practical thinking. Here's my tale:

I'm from Canada. I hated high school but scraped through and then went out west in 1966 to attend university in Vancouver. I wanted to write short fiction and plays. While there I must have read Summerhill but I don't remember doing so. I do recall sitting on my bed in my small student flat saying to myself that before I was 45 I would have my own free school. (It was a relief to know that Neill was quite old when he started Summerhill . . . it gave me more time!). Making a school would be pure revenge. I thought, "I will show those f\*\*\*ing teachers who wasted my precious time that I can run a better school than they ever could." I was, as you can see, a very modest young man.

After university, I headed back to my small town near Toronto and decided to enroll at teacher training college. I figured that, if I had a teaching degree, starting a school might be simpler; it might be easier to convince parents to send their children. Teacher training in 1969 was a bizarre affair. Kind of like a mental kindergarten. I met several people in the first month and over a pint of beer we decided that our aim for each day would be to come home as intelligent as we had left in the morning. Many didn't make it.

One day, about the middle of February, after a particularly effective brain sucking lecture, I wandered into the loo and approached a urinal. (I could change this part to a bus stop but that wouldn't be the truth.) At the urinal to my left was a fellow who I had noticed in several lectures looking impassively bored, slouched across seats and wearing some kind of military coat. I said, "What about this crap? Every day it's ridiculous and the next day it's even worse." He said, "Yeah," and laughed. We ended up at the coffee shop trading stories about the college.

Ed's coat actually was army issue. He was an American draft dodger. He had been in the Army Reserve and called up to serve in Vietnam. His father had been something like an army colonel in the Second World War. Ed was from Iowa. Changing planes in Chicago he stopped in the middle of the airport, looked at an Air Canada sign, bought a ticket and flew to Toronto. His wife joined him a few weeks later. She was a teacher and got a job in my small town.

Ed and I became fast friends in a matter of weeks. I hung out at his apartment and talked education with him and his wife for endless hours. We both started to think about a school; our own free school; or if not that, then about getting work at democratic school in Toronto. Rumours had it that there were dozens of schools in Toronto. This, of course, wasn't true. Finally, however, we did track one down and planned our big city visit.

It was an interesting afternoon meeting and talking with the fellow in charge of the Toronto free school . . . in the living room of his rather hip downtown house. He said his school had no money to hire anyone. He said, "Your best bet is to go back home and start your own place." He offered us a chance to see what he was doing. Oddly enough, we said no.

Instead, we went straight back to St. Catharines and started to brainstorm. We wrote up an outline for our school having no idea what we were really doing: a rational and simple



philosophy, a typical day and week. I remember pacing back and forth dictating to Ed the opening remarks of our future brochure. I stopped, laughed and said, “I feel like I’m dictating some kind of declaration of independence for kids.” It seemed right. It seemed inevitable. We seemed brilliant. We seemed to be riding destiny. And then the end of the school year rushed upon us and we had ... actually nothing but a bunch of scribbled words and ... no work of any kind.

To complicate life even further I soon got a tip from the fellow from Toronto. There was a job in an inner city state school. He had mentioned me to the principal and the principal was interested. He said it would be a great opportunity to get into the Toronto area, get some money, meet some people, and then later on pursue a democratic education agenda. I didn’t know what to do. I was broke and living with my parents. If I did go to Toronto, it would give them a break. If I didn’t, they would have to support me once again. I said to Ed, “I can’t NOT go to this interview.” Ed agreed and we set off in his very old grey boat of a station wagon one Tuesday morning in late May.

Now half way to Toronto is the steel city of Hamilton, which is on Lake Ontario and sits next to Hamilton Harbour. There is a very long bridge that passes over the opening to the harbour so that boats loaded with iron ore can reach the steel mills. Ed gunned the shaking and rusting vehicle up the endless incline of the bridge. The car shuddered and made bad noises and by the time we were on our way down the other side I knew we were in big trouble. Coming off the bridge Ed said, “I gotta pull over.” We turned off the highway and the car limped and screeched like a dying animal into a huge gravel parking lot. It belched smoke. Then it belched more smoke. Finally, the engine sort of blew up.

Ed said, “I’ve never seen a car blow up before.” We burst out laughing. “I guess,” I said, “that this means we start are own school.”

“Absolutely,” was his reply.

*Next time:* Part 3 - Odyssey House Community School

## Łódź Democratic School Project

*David French, Cieszyn, Poland*

EUDEC members might like to hear how the Łódź Democratic School Project in Poland is going. During the EUDEC Conference in Leipzig in the summer some of you came along to hear Ola Matyska, Magda Rydel, Dominika Brozynska and myself talk about the roots of democratic education in Łódź and the initiative to set up a democratic school there.

Just to recap, Ola runs the non-profit organisation PORT-Łódź, the formal body out of which the school will be set up, and was also the director of the publicly-funded High School no. 44 in Łódź which ran as a free school in the 1990s. She's a person with enormous energy, focus and determination.

And now she has a mission. Having retired from full-time teaching she's throwing all her energies into setting up a democratic school in Łódź with the help of a team of teachers and students, several of whom either worked at or attended High School no. 44.

It looks like this: The new school has a written statute, a team of teachers waiting in the wings and a director (which a democratic school in Poland must have by law).

Unfortunately we don't have a suitable building yet. If PORT-Łódź was better off financially that wouldn't be a problem . . . we could find a building now, and start paying rent in anticipation of the school's opening in September of this year. So we are hoping for a lucky break which means finding a place which would be kept available for us without paying any rent, and only start paying rent in about August when we move in. So far a situation like that hasn't emerged. So fingers crossed, out there!

As you all know, setting up democratic schools is not always an easy road. Another issue is that all the potential teachers have full-time jobs elsewhere and are wary of throwing everything up for a project like this.

Ola said to me recently, "Democracy is a wonderful management style but it demands a great deal of patience and time – two commodities which are in short supply." She went on to say that she's been wondering about opening a private school (rather than a publicly-funded school) – like Summerhill. "It may sound funny," Ola said, "but things can start, move and develop quicker when one, or at most two, people are managing the process – at least at the beginning. At one stage, I was seriously thinking about closing down the organisation and setting up a private company called The Democratic School. I didn't do it, but I'm getting closer and closer to it. I've applied for an EU project where you can receive € 40,000 to start a business – and a school is also a business, after all."

Some more facts about the situation on the ground in Poland: Educational law permits a school to be opened if it is registered and has received the go-ahead from the local authorities, but that is only possible once it has suitable premises for the school. This means, of course, it has to fulfil health and safety and fire requirements. Łódź Town Council has recently prohibited the directors of publicly-funded schools from renting rooms to independent and private schools, and renting buildings in Łódź at free-market rates is extremely costly.

So some practical issues are standing in the way at present. But maybe we'll finish with some words from Ola's most recent e-mail to me. "The way ahead is hard, but I've got a lot of support behind me. I just need to regroup and then 'fly ahead once more'" (as they say in Polish). Let's finish with the image of Ola as Superman, "Up, up and away!"

## Interview with Mertxe Blanco and Mikel González from Tximeleta

*Izaskun Azueta*

MERTXE BLANCO is one of the four people involved in the so-called pedagogic team of Tximeleta. She is a certified teacher, a specialist on relational psychomotricity and a gestalt therapist. She is currently in training at the Reichian School. Mertxe has been active in this education initiative for six years now. She is still as eager and as enthusiastic about the project as she was on her very first day. In fact, as she herself states, “This is a place for growth which is being built day by day by everyone: children and adults alike.”

MIKEL GONZÁLEZ, a teacher and a psychologist, is one of the founding members of Tximeleta. His son was about to turn three when he realised he wanted to offer him an education that would be respectful towards his needs, in a place where he could follow his own path and learn according to his own interests and natural sense of curiosity. Since Mikel knows the educational system in the Spanish State ‘from within’, he and his partner were both certain that they did not want their son to attend a mainstream school. At the time, there was no option in the area they lived in that satisfied their requirements, and so they decided to join other families to create Tximeleta.

*IZASKUN: Can you explain what Tximeleta is about?*

MIKEL: Tximeleta is a Basque word that means butterfly. This is the name that was given to this experience of ours that is constantly being built and rebuilt, ever since we kicked it off seven years ago. Tximeleta is not only a place for children, it’s also a non-partisan and non-religious network of very diverse people – children, mothers, fathers and educators – who nevertheless share a similar way of understanding learning and learning relationships, which is certainly different from the mainstream society we live in. And that is precisely one of its main features: it was created, managed and funded by mothers and fathers. The learning space itself is at the heart of this community. It’s located in a small village close to Pamplona and is attended by 30 boys and girls aged 3 to 9, as well as by four adults from the pedagogical team.

At the same time, the Tximeleta Association for Education Innovation was created as a means to facilitate a critical approach and a reflection on the mainstream education model and to promote other ways of addressing the learning experience. Courses, seminars and training workshops are offered to anyone who wants to participate.

*IZASKUN: What is the pedagogical approach of the learning centre?*

MERTXE: We try to keep ourselves away from too much conceptual baggage in Tximeleta. In our view, that gives us a more open perception about what’s going on around us on a daily basis and a much more laid back approach to children, who have the opportunity to enjoy a direct and rich life experience. We don’t follow any particular pedagogic model. Instead we create and we experiment, we develop our own way, making it up as we go along by observing and listening to children. This is not to say that we haven’t inherited certain influences from authors such as A.S. Neill, Rebeca and Mauricio Wild, Piaget or Arno Stern, among others.

Tximeleta is a learning place, for both adults and children. Behind the apparent simplicity of the daily reality there is a hidden, intense and ongoing personal work done by adults as well as a thorough preparation of the physical environment (materials, spaces, etc.) and of the conditions that allow natural learning to happen.

We understand learning in a very broad sense. We believe that it includes different dimensions of being human and does not just involve the cognitive side. Our goal is to allow the development of magnificent learners. We also highly value the involvement of all people in the decision-making process.

IZASKUN: *Where did the idea of creating this project come from?*

MIKEL: There was a meeting about education in Pamplona in 2000, and many free schools and collectives such as Growing Up Without School joined in. After that meeting it was obvious to us that we counted on an adequate background to get started with a similar project in our land. After some preparation time, a few meetings and a search for people who wanted to be part of the adventure we kicked off the project in 2002 in our home – a house with a garden in a village close to the city. When we started it, there were two girls and a boy and then some more children showed up during the school year.

Tximeleta grew bigger, and we were faced with the need for a larger space. In 2007 we decided to get together with another group of mothers and fathers who had promoted a similar project in a small village. That's how we started the next stage, with a larger group of children and adults, a great place in nature and a better organisation.

IZASKUN: *What is its legal status? Is the learning centre acknowledged by education authorities?*

MERTXE: No; our situation could be considered as a-legal. As it is now, the Spanish legal system doesn't acknowledge any model other than the official mainstream school. On the one hand, the Spanish bill of rights acknowledges the right of parents to choose the type of education they want for their children, without mentioning the word 'schooling'. However, on the other hand, current legislation in the education field establishes schooling for children over 6 to be compulsory. Home schooling is not acknowledged either. Nevertheless, cases that end up in court usually end up with no legal sanctions, as long as it can be proven that the children are not being neglected.

Our current challenge is to make education experiences like ours acknowledged by the administration so that the values that education laws themselves put forward (at least in theory) are put into practice: respect towards diversity, development of a critical mindset, autonomy, self-directed learning, etc. We firmly believe that due to the growing social demand, the Spanish government will need to acknowledge the existence of all these centres that are based on different pedagogical and learning approaches. The birth of a new consciousness is really needed. The shift of paradigm that is already taking place in other fields should also be manifested in the education field.

IZASKUN: *What are the main problems that Tximeleta is currently faced with?*

MIKEL: Finances are one of the major difficulties. In fact, Tximeleta is a self-managed project wholly supported by fees paid by families. In addition the organisation and maintenance of a project made up by 30 families turns out to be quite a complicated task: there are a whole lot of practical problems that require attention, such as organising the meals at school and the means of transport for commuting; accepting and constructively approaching the inevitable differences in terms of criteria that come up between families; establishing management structures and decision-making mechanisms so that everything is run smoothly, etc.

We are also worried about legal issues. In 2008 various alternative education projects were closed by education authorities. These projects had been running for several years. There are also some other initiatives that have faced obstacles when they tried to have their legal status regularised (something which is in any case really difficult in economic terms). All these issues make new educational initiatives fragile, although there are new projects coming up each year, either promoted by parents themselves or by educators.

IZASKUN: *Are you in contact with any other similar schools or organisations?*

MERTXE: We informally keep in touch with some other schools and groups related to free education. We participated in the conference organised by Xell in Barcelona. We are related to Amapola, a Spanish network of free schools, and we have also attended democratic education workshops and seminars. However, it is true that each project heads its own way. This is a good time to renew contacts, to join forces and to claim our right to pursue different ways of learning that are more respectful to the needs of children.

*IZASKUN: Tximeleta has recently joined EUDEC and is involved into promoting the creation of a EUDEC regional chapter in the Spanish State. Can you explain what's being done in practical terms and what's expected from the steps taken in this sense?*

MIKEL: As you know, all the people involved in the creation of the regional chapter clearly see the need to join forces and to share our problems with people in similar projects to ours, both in the Spanish State and in the rest of Europe. In this sense, we believe the creation of EUDEC to be a great chance to start this process and to move forward in the promotion of public understanding about democratic education as well as to expand the already existing initiatives and to support new projects so that we can all work on their social and institutional acceptance. In this sense, we would like to put out a call to all those people and groups who are interested to join us in this endeavour. I think it is good to mention the work we are all doing together with people from other projects in the creation of a website that can function as the online headquarters of the regional chapter of EUDEC in the Spanish State. We are also developing an online social network that can work as a meeting place, a site for debate and for mutual help. We'll send some more news about it soon. For the time being we can be reached at: [educaciondemocratica@ymail.com](mailto:educaciondemocratica@ymail.com)

## A Sands School Diary

*Zsa-Zsa Shea, Devon, England*

MONDAY: A Monday morning frost coats the Sands School garden; I arrive early enough to look across the front lawn and to see no one but our signature canvas elephant. This is my fourth year at Sands. Through the big glass windows, looking through into the office, there is an unusual gaggle of students huddled off to one corner. Usually, all the early birds are tucked into the kitchen for their first cup of tea. Once inside, it soon becomes clear what all this morning's excitement is about. One of Sands' original founders has come back after being away for a term. Each person who pops their head around the door, marking their attendance, wants to speak to him. He's looking all too chuffed, sitting at his table surrounded by newspapers.

In the Kitchen, older students are ranting about the weekend's events, the caretaker is complaining that he's lost his beret and when someone comes in the room bearing fresh milk there is a rush to the sink to fill kettles and wash mugs.

I arrive at my first lesson to find that Martin, the English teacher, is doing his Academic tutorials today and so I'm told I can come back in half an hour to have my tutorial. A half hour later I lean around the door only to be told to come back in another 10 minutes. Finally, Martin and I are sitting at his table with two steaming cups of tea and my brunch of leftover cold baked beans. I don't really mind the lateness that so often comes hand in hand with these tutorial days and besides the maths room is right across from Martin's so I can squeeze in a little bit of 'Fractions' while I wait.

When you first arrive at Sands, you are asked to choose the teacher who you most connect with and they help to look after you throughout the year and are around to talk over any concerns you may be having. I think having the right tutor who you get on with can make a huge difference, not only to your academics but right across the spectrum. Martin talks me through my upcoming exams and we look at my timetable and how best to slot in some extra revision.

One of my favorite things about Sands is being able to tailor my timetable to my needs. Lessons are not compulsory but should be about making a positive choice, another thing tutors are good at advising on. We also get around to discussing my class (containing about 14 people) and how we're doing as a group. It feels refreshing to lay everything out and put it in the right places. And it's not just about academics; we can talk about any aspect of my school life, from socially to the teachers; it's all about how comfortable you feel. In the end I manage to steal a good hour of Martin's time, and by then interesting lunch smells are coming up the stairs.

Down into the kitchen and some of the youngest new girls are dressed in saris with sequins. They have rustled up a surprise Indian feast as part of their geography project. The tables have been set into two long columns, lined with curries, rice and handmade spicy things. Even the walls are draped in coloured fabrics. The spontaneity of it all makes it taste better than it already is. Even the washing up team seem happier than usual about emptying the compost bins.

The rest of the afternoon passes quickly, mainly in the art room. But as I'm going upstairs to fetch paper to re-stock the photocopier, I walk in on a Gaza discussion meeting. About 16 people are clustered in the maths room, debating, whilst someone is drawing a map of Israel on the board. There are not only older students there, but also staff and the younger ones. I find out that they are trying to conclude on where to send our saved up charity money and trying to make everybody aware that this is not a one-sided conflict. At 4:15 'Useful Work' begins. Hoovers are lugged about the school and useful workers check that the cleaning is done properly. Part of being at Sands is taking responsibility for your surroundings. All too fast, our two yellow buses, (Bio-diesel might I add) are taking everyone home.

To be continued next newsletter!

## A letter from Croatia

Dear EUDEC,

We are pleased to write to you on our official letterhead [removed for technical reasons -M.S.] and to let you know that we also have a web page: <http://www.slobodnaskola.hr>. Our name translates into Free School-Association for Promotion of Democratic Education. The web page is in Croatian, but go and check it out anyhow, you might see some familiar faces. There is a link to the EUDEC page and a list of democratic/free schools.

Since the Leipzig Conference, we have been working hard on getting the interest group started and planning our activities for the near and far future. The Web page was the first thing we did and we have also been working on a project that is scheduled to take place in March (16.-20. March) 2009. This will be a Mini conference called Days of democratic education in Croatia. Leonard, Martin, Zsa-Zsa and Anna have agreed to come and help us present the idea to the Croatian public. The event includes lectures/talks/discussions in Zagreb, Rijeka, Karlovac, Varazdin and Cakovec. Marc Lucycx has also agreed to come and open the Conference with his inspiring talk on the future of education.

To our delight, our ideas were met with enthusiastic interest by the lecturers of the Teacher Training College in Zagreb who have been closely following the alternative school movement throughout the world and were eager to welcome our guests. This will give our guest speakers and democratic school students a chance to address future generations of teachers at Teacher training institutions as well as the general public in the evening sessions that are scheduled to take place at different venues.

An artist and a member of our Association is putting together a brochure that will present our mission and aims. We are currently addressing potential sponsors and are asking for grants towards funding of our Mini conference. At this unfortunate time of financial crisis, we feel that it is important not to get too consumed with material stuff and money, and allow this temporary and passing event to cast a shadow over the idea of promoting democratic education which is part of a much bigger picture. So, we are not calling off the event, we are actively seeking support and are planning to organise a concert to raise money, as some members are musicians and singers. We also have friends who are actors and who will work with students on a role play of school life.

We have given an interview for a major Croatian daily paper, following the Leipzig Conference but intent to engage more with the media to promote the upcoming events. We approached the City authorities in Karlovac regarding the idea of starting a democratic school and were well received by the Mayor of Karlovac, a former teacher himself. We would like to thank EUDEC Council members for ongoing support.

Best regards,

Dragana Boljesic Knezevic

Free School-Association for promotion of democratic education

Karlovac, Croatia, January 2009

## A Few Words about Turkey: Education, Politics, etc.

*Lerna Babikyan*

For many people in Europe, Turkey is a relatively familiar country in many different ways: through the immigrants who live in Europe, through the history or in terms of tourism. However, from the viewpoint of the local Istanbulites, it is only the superficial part of the country's reality.

How can we have an objective perspective of Turkey by being freed from all kind of orientalist judgments? Of course, first, we need to be informed about the social dynamics, history, culture, economy as well as the educational system of the country. Then we have to observe and try to understand how and why people behave or react the way they do.

In Turkey, our lives are the reflection of all the unbalanced dynamics in a country where many authorities choose to use soft/hard ways of racism with the general excuse of keeping people together and motivated and consciously or unconsciously supporting a violent culture through the concept of the "others" - "others" created by them. . .

In spite of this, each day more and more people who use their common sense are realizing the importance of a change . . . with the wish of living in a better world. Many young people and women are especially very active in this process. They are choosing to be part of the more democratic approaches in politics where we can also see respect for human rights practices. We want peace; we want respect for and acceptance of any kind of language, belief and race, also justice in every level of society. Maybe we are luckier than in the past because we can talk about all this, and we have some alternative media that can put out news in an objective way.

Like in many other counties, our traditional education system does not serve to create free minds or free people but only people for the system, although the original aim was more positive at the beginning. . .

Here in Turkey we do not have any kind of alternative schools yet. We do not have the luxury to choose this or that alternative education system; we basically need one to begin. Maybe that is why we have started to have new associations about different pedagogic approaches; we are collaborating and helping each other. I am a part of the Waldorf Initiative Turkey and Alternative Education Association, supporting both of them as much as possible. In the days to come, we will talk about EUDEC 2008 in one of the Teachers' Labor Associations where many people will meet with the idea of democratic education. I consider these meetings very important because here we all know that spreading the information, letting people get influenced by it and informing as many people about other alternatives of education is the first step for us.

Furthermore, in May 2009 we will publish our first "Alternative Education Magazine" in Turkey, which will be both in English and Turkish. If you want to support us with your articles, send them to us by mid-March the latest.

It is more and more obvious that it is not possible to resist change. . . In the summer of 2008 we came together with many people from all over the world with the same dream of democratic education. This is more than education: It is the lifestyle which consists of human rights practices and better-world intentions for all humanity.

I am sure now in many different countries, we are all dealing with different difficulties but bravely we keep walking on our way at the same time.

Greetings to all from Istanbul!