



Celebrating Servas 60 1949-2009

Report - Servas 60 1949-2009 – Aug 2009

Tuesday 4 August to Saturday 8 August 2009

Timetable and sessions: overview of activities

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7.45-8.15		Breakfast			Fruit and biscuits
9.00-9.15		Morning assembly			
9.15-11.30		SESSION 1 • Oikos (micro loans)	SESSION 1 • Other organisations	SESSION 1 • History of the wind mill	SESSION 1 (9-10.30) • Collecting seeds to preserve plants
11.30-11.50		Danish class	Danish class	Danish class + exam	10.30-12.00 Brunch
12.45-1.15		Lunch			
1.15-3.00		SESSION 2 • Yoga and Chi Gong • Esperanto	SESSION 2+3 • Half-day trip to local sight Afternoon snack there (wear good shoes)	SESSION 2 • Show 'n tell • Stories about Bob	Wrap up and goodbyes
3.00-3.30		Coffee/tea break	• Group photo	Coffee/tea break	Departure
3.30-5.30		Arrival Welcome at the Lecture Hall		SESSION 3 • Swim in the sea • Nonviolent peaceforce.org	
5.00					
6.00-7.00		Dinner (sign up)	Dinner		
8.00-10.00	Introductions • The Real Americans	SESSION 4 Lecturer: Jacob Holdt	SESSION 4 • Music • Tango lesson	SESSION 4 • Tango show • Party with story telling, singing and performance	

REPORT – Servas 60 1949-2009 at the International People's College, Helsingør, Denmark in August 2009

After the fact!

We had a wonderful time at the 5-day celebration of the 60th anniversary of Servas at The International People's College in Helsingør, Denmark. The above overview shows the programme as it eventually turned out. It has been five intense days but the programme still left time enough for talking and hanging out and 49 participants thoroughly enjoyed the event.

The school turned out to be a very accommodating place with perfect facilities for the activities we had planned. Being a folk high school, its own ideology is in line with that of Servas and we felt very welcome.

The first day people were gradually arriving, pulling their suitcases up to the improvised reception facilities we had made out of some tables outdoors. The weather was nice and we did not want to be stuck indoors for hours. Some were first-timers, to others it was long-time-no-see and the air hummed with anticipation. Rooms were allocated and most participants settled in before the welcome speech by Jan and the first dinner. As per school custom, everybody had to be ready in the dining hall at 6 sharp in

respect of the food and its cooks. We did not succeed very well the first day... but still spirits were high. The weather remained nice for the duration and being Danish we felt lucky.

The program had been put together to be likely to appeal to the interests of *Servas* people whom we believe to be generally open-minded. Anyway, we (the organisers) are interested in topics such as travelling, meeting people safely, cultures, other peoples' circumstances in life, peace, climate, environment and generation of energy and last but not least, *Servas*. Morning lectures had been arranged in advance and the afternoons were set up in a flexible program with contributions from the participants. Some of these included physical activities like yoga, chi gong and bicycle rides to the local village on the coast to swim in the sea. We also took a half-day trip to a local historical site.

Each of four mornings we had a lecture:

- Micro credits and sustainable banking and the bank system started by Grameen Bank as told by the founder of the Danish micro credit institution Oikos. Flemming Kramp called the small loans a ladder out of poverty for people who have little but still want to improve their standard of living and send their children to school.
- A panel discussion with representation from other organisations similar to *Servas* (Wwoof, Women World Wide, Couch Surfing, Hospitality Club). Some call them competition, other just regard them as different options when travelling. In any case it was interesting to compare and learn about the differences – some obvious like wwoofing were you offer to lend a hand, some less so like CS and HC, which may range from the superficial use of a couch when passing through to a true visit like in *Servas*.
- The history of the windmill and examples of large scale windmill project as well as wave energy generators as told by an expert led us to see that we still have many challenges in solving the issue of how to generate enough energy in the future.
- The efforts of the seed collectors who strive to preserve biodiversity by harvesting seeds and “adopting” a plants and keeping them from extinction were told by long-time *Servas* member Lila Towle who joined us on her way to a seed collectors event. We learned that garlic plants take more shapes than the ones we buy at the supermarket and that gardens and parks

should not be too orderly because strict order kills variety. The organisation has get-togethers where they eat their adopted children! We hope they don't all grow garlic!

One evening we had a talk by a Danish vagabond called Jacob Holdt about his personal journey through the American underclass and how he approaches people in a non-violence provoking way. He has an ability to see the good in anybody, even a murderer and a Ku Klux Klan member, and even though to most of us he takes it to the extreme I think we could all relate to his message that we should not assume to know things about other people before we get to know them, we should trust the good in other people and be curious and open. It is indeed the approach we take when we go out and meet fellow *Servas* people. Jacob did tire most of us out because his dedication to the cause he pursued for more than three decades led him to talk very long while showing us photos of people he had made friends with and whose lives he had photographed. Much of the proceeds from the sale of his books are put into development projects in Africa.

On the first day it turned out that one of the regular teachers at the school, Juan Carlos, a photographer, had been a host in Mexico for 20 years and he was excited to get a chance to meet *Servas* people. Juan Carlos offered to contribute to the program with a 30 min slide show called *The Real Americans*. We enjoyed the ride through the entire length of the Americas from Alaska to Patagonia on motorcycle with visits to the Indians of all nationalities along the way.

Two Esperantists came by to tell us about the language they use as a bridge-building means to communicate across all languages. Esperanto is supposed to be very quickly learned and their inspiring introduction should set us all going.

Ann Frisch, *Servas* member and former peacekeeper with Nonviolent Peaceforce showed us a film about unarmed peacekeeping. Nonviolent Peaceforce is an unarmed professional civilian peacekeeping force that is invited to work in conflict zones worldwide. With international headquarters in Brussels, Nonviolent Peaceforce has worked in the conflict areas of Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Guatemala. Among other activities, it works with

local groups to foster dialogue among parties in conflict, provide a proactive presence and safe spaces for civilians, and develop local capacity to prevent violence.

Our half-day trip was an excursion to Hamtermøllen (a museum hammer mill) and the area in Hellebæk near the town of Helsingør to learn how water was used to start industrial production with water mills. Some of us went by bus and train along the coast, others through the woods on bicycle. It was a great way to get out and enjoy a beautiful day and our guided tour took us through the history of the king's guns and cannons production from 1500. We saw the water wheel of the hammer mill operate the giant bellows of the black smith's workshop. Weapons, yes, but the watermills set off the industrial development, which turned into textile industry and much approved the standard of living in the area. As an extra treat we walked past the little house by the curved road, which is said to have inspired Hans Christian Andersen who wrote a famous song about it. What a photo opportunity! And it is indeed a nice spot by the road along a lake in the woods. We sang the song in the evening competently accompanied by our band formed by participants who brought their instruments.

Gudmund from Ribe, Denmark told us about his stay with Bob in the 1970s and how he helped out with the work on the potter's wheels Bob made. Bob had a way of just walking up to people and to involve people. Other participant also told about meeting Bob. Some of us had the pleasure of speaking a little Danish with him. He learned the language in the 1940s when he was inspired by the situation in Europe after WW2 to establish Servas and he still remembered when he was in his 80s and participated in the SI conference in Barcelona, Spain. Speaking of Bob led to a discussion of how to develop Servas and how we perceive Servas compared to the other organisations we had met in another session. Questions like how we see the elements of just meeting people (host-traveller) as compared to the wider aspect of Servas as a peace-building effort. How to expand Servas. How to reach more young people. It is a discussion we would like to see continue at the SI GA 2009 in Mal del Plata, Argentina.

We do not know how many participants are used to bicycling on a regular basis but in Denmark riding a bicycle is considered a means of

transportation and it is used in everyday life by a large number of people. We wanted to show this part of Danish society to the participants and the school's blue bicycles were put into use when we needed transport to the beach, to go sight-seeing, to run errands or go to the bank or downtown for a look at the famous Kronborg Castle. One Servas member from Korea was brave and rode a bicycle after learning it many years ago and then not getting any practice till now.

At the school, another group were practicing tango and they offered to teach us the basics. Piece of cake, we thought and threw ourselves in the arms of the tango group – only to find out that it takes a lot of practice to master the delicate steps and moves. We enjoyed it and we were all the more impressed when we attended their closing show of “work in progress” the last evening.

After the last dinner Friday evening and the tango show everybody gathered in the Common Room for a round of singing, story-telling and talking. Participants in the next course at the school (climate) were already arriving and they were curious about us. A lady from Nigeria joined us. Maybe she will help develop Nigeria and spread the Servas idea in her network of climate issue activists. Maybe some of the tango group will take an interest in Servas after sharing the dining hall with us for five days. And by the way, we made it into the local newspaper. Who knows what will come of that kind of publicity!

So, this is how we celebrated the 60th anniversary of Servas in Denmark. The group photo shows a big group of happy people on the lawn in front of the Lecture Hall, some in our purple T-shirt with the logo modified for the occasion.

We would like to thank all for coming to Denmark and helping us make this occasion special. We hope to see all of you again some other time.

(Report by Sus, Servas Denmark, 20 August 2009)

Find links to the newspaper article (with translation), photos, information shared etc. at www.servas.dk as it develops. Share yours if you like.