

Non-formal Education Festival

Has to Become a Traditional Event

Interview With Astrid Sahm and Vlad Velichko*

In one of the previous issues (№1(7), 2006) we have already published an interview with representatives of organizing committee of the Festival of non-formal education. Vlad Velichko and Irina Suhij answered questions of "Educator" about their expectations from the Festival, organization of work of the committee, specificity of preparation of the action of such a level.

Today we offer view of representatives of organizing committee on the preparation and carrying out of the Festival after its ending. **Vlad Velichko**, executive director of the Educational Center "POST" and **Astrid Sahm**, the coordinator of the Program of support of Belarus by the Federal government of Germany share their impressions and estimations.



What's your evaluation of the preparation and carrying out of the Festival?

Vlad

In spite of the fact that an attempt of the organization of such a big event with participation of a plenty of people and organizations was a debut for us, I consider it successful enough. It's not a secret, how complicated it is to organize in our today's conditions such a big frank action. I'm happy that the Festival has passed at a high organizational level and thus has set a model for the future. From my point of view, the success of the Festival was provided by the three major factors: first, the great work executed within several months by the organizing committees and its technical group; secondly – a very high level of interest of participants and their essential input in the program and a table of contents of the Festival (workshops, presentations of editions, an exhibition, etc.). And thirdly – non-realized thirst for an output to qualitatively new level of an experience exchange, professional communication, representation of the services by a wide range of Belarusian educators.

Astrid

In general, from my point of view, the Festival has been organized on a very high level. The wide spectrum of different actions has been offered to participants, from the very beginning they received all the necessary information for self-orientation and making choice on what is the most interesting for them. Therefore, the majority of participants remained satisfied with the results of the Festival.



Has the Festival reached the planned purposes?

Vlad

The basic purposes of the Festival were set in its program documents as understanding of the phenomenon of "non-



formal education" and its value for development of the personality and a society, discussion of prospects and directions of development of non-formal education for youth and adults in Belarus, and also representation of organizations, programs and projects in spheres of non-formal education, experience exchange and stimulation of cooperation between them. I think that we managed to reach them partially. Mostly we managed to go deep into process of understanding of non-formal education as a part of national and all-European educational space.

Master-classes and presentations allowed seeing originality and a variety of educational organizations and results of their work. It certainly appears a good basis and the reason for experience exchange and cooperation.

It is very important that our festival was international. Our colleagues from other European countries had an opportunity to get acquainted with lots of organizations and their activity for short period of time, and also with those prob-

* "Фестываль неформальнай адукацыі проста абавязаны стаць традыцыйнай падзеяй". Інтэрв'ю з Уладам Вялічка і Астрыд Зам // Адукатар №3(9), 2006. – С. 2-4.

lems which do not allow sleeping well Belarusian educators. Our foreign partners have noticed that some of these problems appear specific and new to them, but the majority is in the same degree actual for educational sector of their countries. Very positive statements and echoes from foreign visitors of the Festival show that we managed to present Belarusian non-formal education as an alive, exciting and active field of activity that allows counting on development of new international contacts and cooperation.

Astrid

Considering that the Festival had several different purposes, it would be simply not realistic to reach all of them during one Festival. However, it seems to me, that the overall objective is reached: for the first time all the cumulative experience in the sphere of Belarusian non-formal education has been presented within one large event. In my opinion, understanding of value of non-formal education in a modern society worked well. It became clearer for everybody that non-formal education is actually a basic form of life-long self-learning. But, unfortunately, considering absence of corresponding legislative conditions in Belarus, it was possible to define prospects of development of non-formal education in Belarus only in the limited degree. Therefore we hope that after the Festival there will be more intensively dialogue in the sphere of the legislation — especially as the law on adult education is on the agenda.



Were there any difficulties in preparation and carrying the event out? How the organizing committee has overcome it?

Vlad

There were enough difficulties; there will be no place on pages of the magazine to tell about all of them. I consider the basic problem at the organization of the Festival an adverse position of Ministry of Education, unwillingness to help and to cooperate with non-state organizations. Such a position considerably limits opportunities of interaction, mutual experience enrichment, realization of joint plans. The sector of non-formal education will be developing in any case, irrespective of a help or barriers from a side of the state, but I wish to see in representatives of state bodies real steps for searching mutual understanding, a recognition of value of our work, real desire to use experience of our work in favor of Belarusian citizens.

Astrid

As I took part only in definition of the general lines of the Festival and did not see all the daily work, it is difficult for me to estimate problems in preparation of the Festival. But the organizing committee has overcome them — it is ex fact.

In particular I wish to note realization of the idea of competition which has become a "raisin" of our holiday. Because of time limits for preparation of competition, we could offer only three nominations, but it seems this idea was to educators' liking. The competition is not only and not really much of competition, but an attempt to set the certain quality standard in our spheres of work, mark out patterns for other educators to follow. I would like this competition to become traditional, to be spent thoroughly enough and not to be limited by frameworks of the Festival, enabling each expert and the organization of the sphere of non-formal education to present on the competition their product — a book, an Internet-resource, etc. There is also element of PR for the whole sector of the educational organizations and their activity for a wide audience of Belarusian citizens.

Astrid

The most important is that it was a very good "mix" of different forms of actions: plenary sessions, round tables, presentations, master-classes, circles and other cultural elements. Therefore participants didn't get tired within 3 days of work. Especially as they had a choice of intensive active participation or — as "butterfly" in "open space" — to fly from one action to another to receive general notion. Also it was good, that participants could estimate work of the presented organizations and projects and to give a feedback this way.



Which forms within the Festival were more successful, and which — less?

Vlad

In my opinion, the most successful forms at Festival were an exhibition of educational organizations and products of their activity, and also presentation of printed editions. As I can judge, these parts of our festival were the most visited and intensive. At the same time master-classes were very important, even the key elements of the Festival which provided an originality and active involvement of the participants.



What wasn't successful?

Vlad

It's a pity we did not see representatives of our neighbor countries as participants of the Festival. Our colleagues from Germany, Sweden and Denmark have arrived to take part in the Festival, also there were by one representative from the Ukraine and Russia. We counted on more active participation of colleagues from non-formal education from the Baltic countries, Poland, the Ukraine, but this time this idea was not realized. I think, in the future we we'll pay more attention to this aspect.





Пропаганда экологически
 целесообразного образа жизни и
 идей устойчивого развития.

Astrid

The most pleasant unexpectedness for me personally was that I have received new ideas for carrying out of actions in our International educational center. In other words, I have received the certain informal education during the Festival.

As for the coordinator of the Program of support of Belarus by the Federal government of Germany, for me the most important was that the majority of the educational projects carrying out within the limits of the program used the Festival for presentation of results of their projects. Though it's already planned result, it's pleasant to be realized.



Will the Festival of non-formal education become a traditional event?

Vlad

Positive enough experience of the organization and leading the first Festival of non-formal education encourages us to make this event traditional. The majority of our colleagues also incline to such a decision. There are different versions on regularity we need to organize such a Festival. Now the majority of the friends of the organizing committee of the first Festival consider that the right frequency of making such an action is every two years. Thus, we will think over opportunities to organize the second Belarusian Festival of non-formal education in autumn of 2008.

Astrid

In my opinion, the Festival had a very great value for formation of feeling of unity of everyone who is involved in sphere of non-formal education in Belarus. Without such a common platform successful development of this sector seems to me practically impossible. Therefore the Festival of non-formal education is simply obliged to become a traditional event.

Translated by Alena Lugovtsova

Secondly, we didn't manage to interest in participation in the Festival in a high degree a wide range of representatives of non-formal education who have no direct link to civic education. As a result our colleagues from business-education and the state educational institutions were almost not present on our festival. At the same time we understand those lacks which were present during the organization of the Festival and have already started to think how to come into more dense working contacts with colleagues from adjacent educational spheres.

Astrid

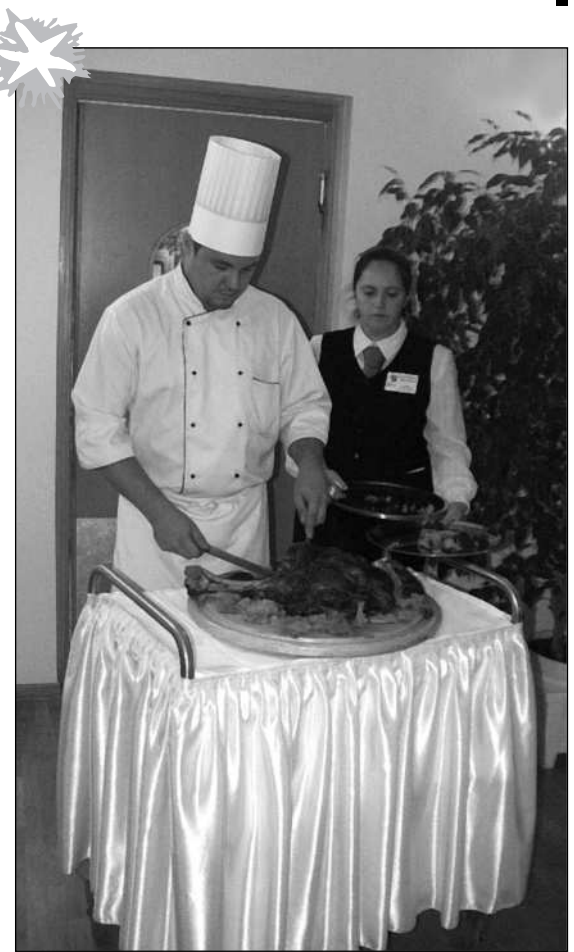
I consider that round tables were less successful. It partially can be explained by the fact that it was the most complex form during the festival, considering a different degree of readiness of participants. Hence, round tables had informational function, but couldn't reach any concrete results or arrangements. Sometimes they turned out to be discussions of "knowing minority", and the other participants simply played a role of spectators. It, certainly, is not desirable.



What were not planned positive results?

Vlad

For me an unexpected positive result was discussion and acceptance of the general resolution of the Festival by its participants. Generally resolutions are not of a festival genre, making such documents is more typical for conferences, forums and other more official actions. We had the Festival, moreover. The Festival of non-formal education. The idea of acceptance of the joint statement was born in organizing committee only two days before the Festival started, but it was me who had to develop and put it into practice. I consider it a correct step, without it the cost of our action would be cheaper. The fact of occurrence of the resolution shows that there is such a phenomenon as non-formal education, there are working organizations and institutions, there are experts and authorities, and also there are comprehended joint interests (to be exact, the interests which are being thought over now), requirements to the state and offers to a society.



All photos: A.Lugovtsova, Vlad Velichko.