

A very personal experience report about 43 European Youth Weeks

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(Commemorative for the 50th European Week 2006)

If one has participated in 43 out of 50 European Youth Weeks since 1961, the Ludwigstein or the Euro Week belongs to the year in the life as the spring or the winter. As the weather warms and the summer comes, you are waiting for this week, which has offered or still offers so much, with so many sympathetic young and old people from all over Europe, over the years, getting to know each other with worries and hardships. The peers from East and West, from North and South was made familiar or even banal as a young person once in a young blonde, a black or a brunette from Poland, from France or from the former Yugoslavia has fallen in love.

What makes this European Youth Week at the Burg Ludwigstein in the Werra Valley near the small towns of Witzenhausen and Bad Sooden-Allendorf in Hessen so that it attracts young people for over 50 years to dance, to make a tinker, to make music and not to forget to talk to each other very intensively or to discuss them better?

I would like to try to prove by some examples how different the motives were and still are to travel to the EuroWeek to the Ludwigstein to meet a week under partially difficult conditions with young people from other countries.

The founder, Hella Heynmöller, influenced as a young woman very strong through the training and the policies of the Nazis before and during WW2 had to be invited very fortunate in 1951 to a meeting of European youth in Fritzlar (North Hessen). This first peaceful meeting with young people from different countries impressed her so much that she set about developing a concept for her own European encounter.

In the association Jugendburg Ludwigstein e.V., she found fellow combatants for her idea; In addition, the Ludwigstein itself appeared right on the border between the still young Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic as an ideal location for such an encounter.

She also quickly understood how enthusiastic youth organizations in Austria, France and Sweden were for her idea. The mother of the famous German-French journalist Alfred Grosser, who had to leave in the Nazi regime with their children because of their faith in Germany, State Youth Referee Fritz Frank from Styria and Rolf Leander, later CIOFF delegate of Sweden, you were at the first meeting very helpful at the castle.

Right from the start, Hella Heynmöller was also very lucky that such European meetings were fully funded by the Federal Government and the Hessian state government. However, the first setback occurred for the first time in 1960, when the European Youth Week had to be canceled for the first time for financial reasons.

This year, however, was also the year in which I first met the work of Hella Heynmöller as

a small boy (barely 12 years old). This year she used, namely, to visit a group in Marseille, which should come in 1961 to Ludwigstein.

For me, this trip was an unforgettable experience. For the first time, I met people of the same age from another country. Although I was barely able to talk to them (one year of English lessons was not enough), I found that meeting overseas was something special. After my stay in the south of France, it was clear to me that the next European Youth Week, organized by Hella Heynmöller, will not take place without me.

In the summer of 1961, for the first time, I came to Burg Ludwigstein to enjoy the atmosphere of the European Youth Week. In short, it was a wonderful week with young people from France, Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden. Although still young, I was infected by the idea of Hella Heynmöller and it took me a long time to get used to the "normal" life in the home environment.

The encounters between 1961 and 1966 were marked by the time of the "Cold War" in Europe. The Berlin Wall was erected, the border fence opposite Burg Ludwigstein became more and more impermeable. And a trip directly to the border facilities was a must for the participants of the European Youth Weeks. We were all driven to Lindewerra or Wahlhausen on lorries converted by benches of the Federal Border Police to get to know this inhuman border in the middle of Germany.

The European Youth Week on the Ludwigstein was from then on but also the yardstick for small or large changes in European politics. In 1962, for the first time a group (France Marolt from Ljubljana) from the former Yugoslavia for Euro-week. That was something special at this early stage. The group was on their return journey from Denmark to their homeland. However, they arrived two days late. For the then organizers with Hella Heynmöller at the top of a scandal; the group management admitted without hesitation namely, to have made an extensive Reeperbahn stroll in Hamburg. From now on it was certain that this group of Hella Heynmöller was not invited again.

The Czech spring also had a positive impact on the euro weeks. From 1966 to 1968 groups from our neighboring country came to the Ludwigstein to dance and make music together with us but especially important to also discuss with us. Then the big setback: on August 21, 1968 the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Pact in Prague. The process of socialism with a human face was over. Hella Heynmöller and I were very concerned about this event because we had been in Prague shortly before and had left the city on the Vltava River on 19 August 1968 and started the journey home. In 1969, a group from Czechoslovakia came to Ludwigstein for the last time for many years. Politics had put a stop to communication.

In 1963 it came to the first meeting with Fritz Lenz, who at the time was junior staff in the still independent district Witzenhausen. He showed great interest in the European Youth Week and was first engaged as AG head folk dance and finally took part in 1965 and 1966 with a group led by him, whose members came from Witzenhausen and Borken. Fritz Lenz's great commitment to the European Youth Week has already been highlighted elsewhere; But it must not be left unmentioned on the occasion of the 50th anniversary event. He was the inspiration for many club activities, including the founding of the club's dance group in the early 90s heard in the last century, which has not only represented the European Youth Week but also the castle Ludwigstein with great success even at many performances in Germany and abroad ,

After Tito's policy towards the countries of Western Europe led to many group encounters with folklore ensembles from the former Yugoslavia, Hella Heynmöller succeeded for the first time in 1970 in welcoming a Polish group to Ludwigstein Castle as part of the European Youth Week. It must be mentioned at this point that this contact would never have been made had the former Polish forced laborer, Boleslaw Bodys, not intervened with the Polish authorities for the participation of the folklore group from Lublin.

This first contact with the Polish guests and a return visit to Lublin, which was attended by Hella Heynmöller, Heinz Limmeroth and Günther Chlolibois from the Schwalm-Eder district, had a great influence on my personal commitment to German-Polish reconciliation.

Since I was allowed to collaborate with Hella Heynmöller in the organization of the European Youth Week since 1970, I had the opportunity to achieve that in the following years many Polish groups (for example from Krakow, from Lublin, from Kosciierzyna) came to the Ludwigstein.

Jacek Dutka, singer of the Polish folklore group "Slowianki", who came to Ludwigstein for the first time in 1972, was so enthusiastic about the idea and the event that he later joined our club after moving to Germany. It is certainly exemplary that today his entire family is actively involved in the working group.

The German-Polish encounters on the Ludwigstein were supplemented by visits to Cölbe in the district of Marburg-Biedenkopf. Together with Boleslaw Bodys, I was very pleased that our cooperation, which had its roots in the encounters on the Ludwigstein, in 1991 led to the communal partnership between the municipality Cölbe (Marburg-Biedenkopf district) and the town and community Kosciierzyna in northern Poland. This was later supplemented by further community partnerships.

In 2003, the Polish state recognized the joint reconciliation work of Boleslaw Bodys and myself by awarding the Cross of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

The European Youth Week has not only developed partnerships with Poland. The friends of Hans-von-der-Au-Trachtengruppe from Erbach / Odenwald have made friends at Burg Ludwigstein with the folklore group from Jicin (then Czechoslovakia). It was followed by numerous other encounters in Erbach and Jicin, which eventually led beyond the folklore to the town twinning of the two local authorities Erbach and Jicin.

It was certainly something extraordinary that just at the interface between the two political blocs in Europe came to these conciliatory encounters between young people from both parts. And I'm glad but also proud to have been involved. In addition, one should not forget the friendships to young people of the other countries, which already exist for decades. This certainly includes the friendship with the friends from Varkaus (Finland), who were at the Ludwigstein for the first time in 1962. Until 1978 this group belonged to the family Virkki to the regular guests from Northern Europe of the European Youth Week. After the contact did not exist then for decades, it was finally the internet presentation of our association, which led to a resumption of the contact.

But I also have to mention the very good contacts to France, which have also existed for decades. Particularly noteworthy are the groups from Marseilles and Toulouse. Jean-Louis

Cabanel, the founding president of the L'Union group, will take part in 2006 as the only foreign guest attending the 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th and now 50th. European Youth Week.

The participation of the Hungarian-German groups in the events on the Ludwigstein finally led to a number of personal relationships, which also led to Hungarian-German marriages. These normal personal contacts of young people also led to German-Portuguese and German-Belgian marriages.

Of course, the political changes in Europe in 1989 and 1990 also had an impact on the European Youth Week. Through the mediation of Günther Frantz took in the summer of 1990 for the first and only time (from 03.10.1990 there was no longer the GDR) a folklore group from the GDR in the European Youth Week part; the Vogteier costume group from Oberdorla. Former members of this group belong today u.a. to the assets in our club.

Since 1990, groups from countries have come to the Ludwigstein, which did not exist until the end of 1989: we welcomed groups from Macedonia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Belarus and Latvia. Some of these groups also had very intense personal contacts. led to a German-Latvian marriage.

Today the working group European Youth Weeks e.V. plays an important role for the Stiftung Jugendburg Ludwigstein as well as for the Vereinigung Jugendburg Ludwigstein.

But there was also a time when it was not certain that there would be such an important and important event for European understanding; the autumn of 1980 was an important time for future development.

From 1953 to 1980, the European Youth Week was organized by Hella Heynmöller as commissioner of the association Jugendburg Ludwigstein e.V. Fritz Lenz and I stood by her side for different tasks. After the anniversary event "25.Europäische Jugendwoche" in 1980, the board of the association Jugendburg Ludwigstein e.V. informed us that this kind of event would not fit "into the time" anymore and the concept was outdated. In addition, the financing was uncertain and the association could not bear the financial risk.

This was a big disappointment for all of us who hung on European Youth Week. But we also had very good friends and supporters who helped us solve the problem through our own initiative. The members of the former board of the Foundation Jugendburg Ludwigstein and the Archives of the German Youth Movement, Peter Loges and Rolf Bühnemann, Wolfgang Müller from the ring Young Federations and hostels Günther and Elfi Frantz supported our work and encouraged us to found an association with the purpose to perform the European Youth Weeks at Burg Ludwigstein.

Finally, we also found the necessary seven members who founded the working group European Youth Weeks e.V. in September 1981 in Gudensberg in northern Hesse. When the statutes were adopted, Hella Heynmöller, Hartmut Reißer, Heinz-Wilhelm Wilke, Fred Möller, Rose Hilgenberg-Uhlmann and Margret Deis were elected to the founding board. In December 1981 the first ordinary general meeting with already 20 members took place at the castle Ludwigstein and the first complete board was elected: Chairwoman: Hella Heynmöller; Deputy Chairman: Hartmut Reißer; Secretary: Wiltrud Klonk; Treasurer: Rose Hilgenberg-Uhlmann; Assessors: Fritz Lenz, Margret Deis and Ward de Beer.

At the suggestion of Fritz Lenz and Heinz-Wilhelm Wilke, the first Easter market was held at Burg Ludwigstein in 1983. Together with the event ADVENT ON THE BURG (from 1985), the new club now had its own additional income to cover the costs of the European Youth Weeks.

By the participation of the national costume group from Oberrospe 1984 another personality could be won for the working group, which up to its much too early death 1994 made the association work very intensively with: Renate Vigelahn. Already in 1993, Fritz Lenz left us after a very serious illness.

Through the founding of the club's own dance group in 1990, which also appeared for the first time as a German group during the European Youth Week in 1991, many new and above all young members could be won for the club.

The club, which has been headed by a new junior board since 2002, has a big task ahead of it. But he should, I am sure, he also wants to continue this, the great task of European understanding. Because we are still far from the goal. The results of the votes on the European Constitution in France and the Netherlands have shown that there is still much room for persuasion for the common Europe. The skeptical comments on the Europe of the now 25 states show that the new member countries still have to arrive at the people.

The European Youth Week at Burg Ludwigstein has always been a small engine for the European unification. Since all those who now have responsibility in the working group European Youth Weeks e.V. from a young age have grown up with this work of understanding, I am sure that this association goal will continue to have the highest priority among those who are now responsible in the club.

As honorary chairman, I am looking forward to celebrating the 50th anniversary week together with young Europeans.