

### **It always starts with a little red wine...**

Imagine a girl, university student, a bit obsessed with such tiny things as changing the whole education system in Europe, active in the youth field and desperate to break unnecessary social bounds. But also a true critic, living in Budapest. Let's call her Bernadett.

She has this family friend, Steve, who travels around the world, explores deeply very different cultures and religions. All she sees of him is that he turns up from time to time, showing awesome pictures and sharing crazy adventures from every continent. And he has this mystical profession, which she never really understood what it was.

After the family dinner and slideshow of pictures, these two had a regular "let's solve problems of the world" conversation by sharing some fine red wine - these can go on for ages and can drive to irresponsible decisions – with the conclusion:

- *...OK, let's do something together! You know, you're interesting, something that is interesting.*
- *Hm...well, there is this thing called Action Learning, this is what I told you about I got certified in Washington. This would be great to do with students, I'm very curious how Hungarian students will approach this.*
- *Hm...okay, not sure though, sounds a bit weird.*
- *We are weird.*

This was a good enough answer to start, but she was still on the edge of being more sceptical than curious. Anyway, she started organizing this one-day introduction Action Learning workshop for students, and the deeper she got into the process, the more



questions it raised. *Is this another bullsh\*t thing, like some other training stuff? Why does it have an entrance fee? We used to make events for free. How will this fit our values? Who is this guy, Steve anyway?!* It was all written down, but still, the scepticism – curiosity balance didn't seem to be on her side. There was even a financial conflict with the hosting organization, Bernadett had to offer her own money, to reimburse the youth organization for the pre-costs if this whole thing would turn out as a disaster.

Finally the day has come on 2011 March 26<sup>th</sup>, the very first Action Learning workshop held in Budapest, Hungary. Bernadett was standing there in this beautiful, huge wooden room of the Corvinus University of Budapest, after some bad sleep and way too high adrenalin. She knew, that the room was booked in an illegal way (paid events couldn't been hosted there

only with some special permission), all the 60 chairs had to be fully rearranged, as the staff messed up the setting, the microphone didn't work, the flipchart board's leg broke as the others carried it in the room and she had no idea how many people will show up at all, all she could think of with a little rage was that *'I will kill Steve if this will be a disaster! And never more world changing talks with wine!'*



Steve arrived – a bit late - but with a huge smile on his face, full of energy and ready for action. Right after, all together 50 students showed up this day.

And, I can tell, Steve wasn't killed, it wasn't a disaster, it was incredible!

The whole workshop had a great energy, every part of it was real, practical and involving. On individual level its impact sneaked into fundamental levels and created true empathy between random people.

This is when Bernadett decided, 'This is something, which is worth to organize, this brings real impact'. And Steve assured her, he will contribute as an Action Learning coach to Hungarian students, this is the change he wants to see in his home country.

Luckily the participants discovered this too, in the same year Bernadett and Steve made 3 other AL events. Until today all together 7 one-day workshops, 5 two-day advanced workshops. 4 universities got involved – at Corvinus University of Budapest it even got in the curricula - , 2 cities and more than 300 Hungarian students got infected by Action Learning.

After all, red wine and world changing talks are not as harmful as imagined, neither Action Learning. It definitely started a movement in Hungary which will hopefully continue and infect the whole country!

Written by Bernadett Polya