

A Cocktail of Thoughts From the Participants of the Summer School for Young Leaders From Belarus 2010

Sviatlana Dzenisevich

What is the most important knowledge you got as a result of the meetings, internships within the program of the school?

Inessa

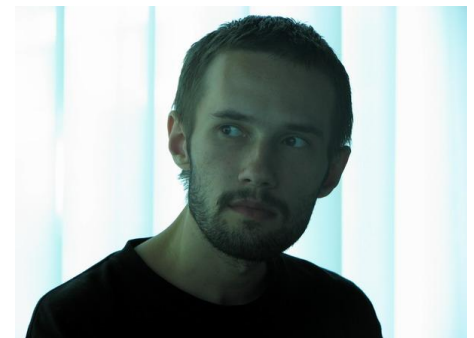
The most valuable information and experience during my participation in Berlin Summer School 2010 is mostly related to the importance of local initiatives in the process of society development. Let me put my thoughts in an ordered way:

1. Local initiative implies constant coordination and sharing of information between members of an action group, organizations, and local citizens.
2. Almost any local demand (construction, ecology protection, etc.) can be satisfied, provided the group clearly understands the area of issue and acts in accordance with best practices, paying attention however to the peculiarities of every certain case.
3. Meand of Mass Media play a dramatic role in the development of local initiatives, therefore group leaders should first of all fight for the right to freely express their ideas and plans to the public.
4. Best practices received from the German NGOs are that very priceless experience we must analyze, re-work, and finaly implement!



Uladzimir

I got that one should not wait for some sponsor or a strong person, who will teach you what and how to do, to start your own activities. You should do everything yourself, self-organize, unite with neighbours to solve your personal problems.



Alina

One of the most important things was to meet people from other organizations from Belarus, such as New Faces, Green Alliance, Belgreens and others. Also, I enjoyed a lot of our visits to BUNDjugend, Bluberry inn, AmaroDrom e.V. and Netzwerk. There you can see how people can participate on a local level and change the situation around.



Andrei

Personally, I have enjoyed how easier it is to intercommunicate with some representatives of some German NGOs in comparison with some “spokesmen” of some of the Belarusian NGOs. Impartiality, amiability and specifics – together with an aspiration to show and say as much interesting as possible (refraining from classically ridiculous stocks and clichés), and accentuating on actual problems – these are the rules and needs to be followed.



Darya

What I experienced in Berlin is the possibility to combine incompatible. I dipped into a cocktail of opposite views and life styles, nationalities and cultures. More specifically, I’ve got the vision of “green” Berlin having a chance to meet all links of the chain of environmental organisations. The organisations where I had appointments in I may divide by the spheres of influence. One acts through business, second lobbies in the government, and third talks to people. Therefore, the main lesson is that there is a place for everyone; it is important to find it and be professional.



Feel free to express yourself!

Alena Dzeravianka

When a person is young, he/she is very ambitious and creative. Imagine a group of young people who want to make a performance and exhibition of their art. These young people live in Berlin. So they decide to make this performance and start to think how to do this. Most youngsters belong to some youth clubs at schools or colleges. First, they go to their clubs to talk to members. The members like the idea and want to join the event, but need to find money for the exhibition. There are several solutions to do this: they can go to ask for local funding from Quartiersmanagement, apply for some project funding, or ask Netzwerk(www.netzwerk-selbsthilfe.de) for their advice. Netzwerk is a local based organization in Berlin that can help with finding the money for different projects. There, the young people get advice on how to write the project and apply for the funding. The people from Netzwerk also advise guys to unite into some association, so later they can apply for a project that can be funded by the Local budget. So, actually, in a month the guys can get real support for the performance and exhibition. Their exhibition can be organized in different ways; they can feel free to hold it in parks or their local school yard and to make a performance there. Thus the young people try to convince others that they represent the street culture and it's very important for them to express their ideas.



Berlin is truly the city of freedom and different kinds of expressions. There you can find all kinds of street art, performances on the street, different types of galleries and clubs. If you want to find the inspiration and creativity, it's the right place to go.



Another group of young people lives in Minsk, Belarus. It is the place where the expression of ideas and creativity is not supported at all. The young people will have a lot of troubles, not only financial, on their way of organizing exhibition. Most young people try to express themselves not openly, for example, they try to draw graffiti on the garage, where no one can catch them. Any expression of the street art is cleaned, as soon as it appears. Only some of the graffiti can be seen on the bridges or garage walls.



There are a lot of youth clubs and local NGOs in Berlin where a young person can come with his/her ideas. They can help him/her to find the supporters, they can organize the activities or to help with funding. That means that there are possibilities for young people to put their ideas into action and to express themselves.

Comparing the situation of youth and youth organizations in Berlin with the situation in Minsk, the Berliners' advantage becomes obvious. The youth in Minsk is not used to being involved into organization activities or to asking for funding of local initiatives. Sometimes a simple action or expression of ideas can provoke punishment or arrest. So most of the youngsters hide their activities, since they don't want to be punished.

That is hard to say how the situation can be changed. Furthermore, the people's attitude doesn't really support the street art. The citizens of Minsk are used to clean and tidy streets and buildings, and are even afraid of any performance or creativity on the streets.

On the one hand, I also agree that the graffiti on the building in the centre of the city is maybe not the right place for self-expressions. On the other hand, the initiatives of youth should be expressed and seen by others.

Youth in Berlin and youth in Minsk want to express themselves and to show their creativity. Unfortunately, the Belarusian youth is forced to express the same ideas in a different way, while the freedom of creativity is an integral part of the spirit of Berlin.

Ich habe keine Angst

Dascha Slabtschanka

The Berlin Wall has become a powerful symbol and is still referred to. There are a lot of things in Berlin about the wall. Even after its fall, it is a part of the city. When in Berlin, I always think about the wall. I try to imagine it exists in my city and I cannot step to another its part, I cannot visit my friends or relatives who live on the opposite side. For me, that is unreal. But the Berlin Wall existed. And many other walls still exist. As the hugest and strongest physical one I see the border between Koreas.

But one wall I feel closer. The wall around Belarus. Some authors say that character of borders has changed, and now the European Union is surrounded not by iron curtain but is measured with tulle. However, I percept it as a wall with some holes and weak places, with some possibilities to get over.

Since “the Wall” as symbol is very attractive for me, I remember well the day spent in the East, coming back to the past with Thomas and his friend. Their personal reflections and memories were as image-bearing, as an album of documentary pictures devoted to the anniversary of the Wall fall.

Communicating with Belarusians, Germans often refer to their past experience. Indeed, one may find dozens of the similarities between the nowadays Belarus and the Berlin on the eve of the Wall fall. Though, differences, as well.

Of course, I tried to pick some tips during our voyage to the past.

There are two things I may point out: the role of church and the role of TV. In a church, a voice of protest found the shelter to become louder and via broadcasting from the West it was heard.

We visited the small church in East Berlin where oppositionists were hiding and also there they produced banners. I was surprised that the police and secret service were afraid to come in and arrest rebels.

Nowadays, Church in Belarus is still a political issue. The dispute is among confessions, but hardly any may shelter rebels. Orthodox Church blesses the regime, its patron. Traditional Belarusian confession, Union Church is persecuted by authorities and has only a couple of own buildings. Catholics are independent from the authorities and include not only people with Polish roots or inhabitants of West Belarus, but national intelligentsia, as service is in Belarusian. But during the street protests of entrepreneurs, the doors of the kostel were slammed in the face of desperate people who were arrested.

Therefore, I was amazed by the spirit of protest and solidarity I felt in a small Berlin Church.

We were told that the group of rebels wasn't numerous. But there were journalists from West Berlin in the Church. No wonder that the TV tower is the symbol of Berlin. The dictatorship from the East couldn't stop TV signals. The Berliners from the East watched on the Western channel what was going on in their part of the city. That provoked protests, woke up solidarity.

The authorities in East Berlin had no possibilities to jam broadcasting from the West, while it is now possible in Belarus. Local audience watches a range of Russian TV channels and some Western, e.g. Euronews. The TVpackage is quite wide so no need to order expensive satellites. But one will see on the TVlabels an addition-logo, “Belarus”, what means that Belarusians watch all of the entertaining programmes, news, and political programmes that are censored. Whatever the possibilities of the Internet are, TV is still the most powerful tool – and therefore, absolutely controlled.

But the differences I described don’t deprive hope. The main lesson I studied on the ruins of the Berlin past is that walls are built to be ruined.

Information and Communication Technologies for Social and Political Development

Inesa Bokhan

*“The only valid censorship of ideas is the right of people not to listen”,
- Tommy Smothers, an American comedian and a musician*

In Belarus, Germany, and many other countries of the world, there are a number of groups, struggling for such eternal things, as democracy, autonomy and/or improved civil and political rights, using a variety of different methods. Quite often, these non-violent groups and freedom fighters are on the margins of political main stream media and have to compete alongside with more established and resource-strong political actors for space in the public sphere. Most of the times, these groups do not have access to the financial resources and thus the components that basically can ensure media-space: media strategists, qualified and creative personnel in advertisement, and public relations. Nevertheless, these organizations have to learn how to understand and play the 21-century's mass media game and how to use the media as a channel without paying commercial rates.

After participating in Berlin Summer School 2010 and taking my internship at the Open TV and Radio Channel Alex, I can definitely state that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can potentially assist groups in a number of ways. Here I would like to describe the “practical ICT toolbox”, outlining the main points of how ICTs can be applied in social and political development. According to my observations and experience gained through knowledge sharing, ICTs can prove effective for the following activities:

1. Organizing information



ICTs provide users with excellent opportunities to organize information. Modern computer equipment is built to handle large amounts of information in systems with different levels of access. Not only does it provide sophisticated archive systems, but also search tools for the file and archive system that is stored either on the local computer or at a unit that is possible to access from the outside. Text documents, pictures, sound and video files can be both stored and accessed on demand or sent to a large group of people at a low cost.

2. Global information dissemination and publishing

ICTs provide a cost-effective way to quickly distribute press releases and newsletters, letters to the editor and opinion articles to an audience outside the organizations, as well as to the members of an active group. Many organizations have thus developed their own news/information service, covering news in their specific field. Even though creating and sustaining a news service is time-consuming and resource-demanding, it can be an effective way of spreading the organization's news. However, it is necessary to highlight the importance of proper Website management, because if the reader gets used to slow or non-existing updates, he/she will most likely choose an alternative news source in the case of larger news events.



3. Coordination



Coordination and mobilization are vital in most political activities and Internet has already proved to be an excellent tool. The world has already witnessed a number of successful large scale protest activities, all coordinated largely on the Internet, such

as WTO-Seattle in December 1999 gathering 100 000 individuals, World Bank -Washington April 2000 gathering 10 000, World Bank -Prague September 2000 gathering 7000-12 000, and other events.

4. Networking and mobilization

ICTs have emerged as an excellent tool in networking and global campaigning, as it greatly facilitates coordination and mobilization between geographically dispersed groups. The Internet's capacity in coordinating international and national movements became widely recognized when the international campaign against landmines (ICBL) was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1997; it managed to organize some 1000 organizations from all over the world, which added the weight necessary to get 122 states to sign the ban agreement in December, 1997. Jody Williams, who was personally awarded half of the Nobel Peace prize, has stressed how important the Internet was in the campaign and particularly in engaging individuals in the third world.



5. Getting diverse sources of information



The new technology makes geographical distance of lesser importance when it comes to the access to information. In fact, ICTs can be used as a substitution for more traditional media. ICTs can help underground press overcome state censorship and/or specific ownership's interests and market economy demands and still reach a large audience.

To summarize, ICT offer social and political actors both among democratic forces in Belarus and elsewhere some very valuable tools in communicating their message. Naturally, one should be aware that even the best ICTs mediated information campaigns do not automatically lead to the required action, while lack of information does not necessarily lead to action in the targeted segment. Nevertheless, ICTs are a great opportunity for creating, sharing, and putting into action innovative opinions, since they are the basis of fruitful development.

The Role of Civil Actors in Shaping the Future

Ina Klimenkova

Two thousand years ago the proudest boast was "civis Romanus sum."
Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is "Ich bin ein Berliner."

John F. Kennedy
26 June 1963, West Berlin

In June of 1963, the US President John F. Kennedy made a ground-breaking speech in Berlin offering American solidarity to the citizens of West Germany, who lived in an exclave deep inside East Germany and feared a possible East German occupation.

About two decades later, in November 1989, at the mass demonstrations in Prague's Wenceslas Square, a slogan appeared: "Poland: ten years, Hungary: ten months, East Germany: ten weeks, Czechoslovakia: ten days". These were the timescales that oppositional forces in the relevant countries had needed to remove the powers of authoritarian regimes. In all the above cases that was civil society's groups that had become investments for political transformation and had ultimately brought down the old systems.

Another two decades later, in July 2010, I was like President John F. Kennedy very proud to make a visit to Berlin, so that to ascertain to what extent and in which ways society itself took part and is still taking part in changes that are the conditions of either transformation processes or contribution to functioning democracy.

Definitely, I am one hundred percent with the song writer Aldo von Pinelli because wherever I go, whatever I do I feel like: "Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin" [I still have a suitcase in Berlin]. And this is not only about Berlin being an economic, political, cultural and whatever world center, this is also about its atmosphere. Here is the time for superstition: let me forget a suitcase in Berlin so that to come back there soon! However, I would no way stick to singing odes and praises to Berlin, at least not this time, but I would rather look at the Sky over Berlin so that to see the main levers for the "authoritarian clouds" to have been cleared away and stimuli for emersion of a "democratic rift" in the clouds.

The Nobel Prize winner in Literature in 1980, Czesław Miłosz, hit the nail on the head by saying that a visitor from Imperium is shocked on coming to the West: in his contacts with others he encounters no resistance. The people he meets are completely relaxed. They lack that internal concentration which betrays itself in a lowered head or in restlessly moving eyes. They say whatever words come to their tongues; they laugh aloud.

Of course, all human behavior contains a significant amount of acting. A man reacts to his environment and is molded by it even in his gestures. Nevertheless, what we find in the people's democracies is a conscious mass play rather than automatic imitation. Conscious acting, if one practices it long enough, develops those traits which one uses most in one's role. Just like as a man who became a runner because he had good legs develops his legs even more in training. After long acquaintance with his role, a man grows into it so closely that he can no longer differentiate his true self from the self he simulates.

I was personally an eyewitness of that conscious acting during my visit to Berlin where I had a possibility to look insight of its functioning in different non-governmental organizations.

It goes without saying, that apart from democratic elections, political and civil rights, horizontal accountability between state institutions, and the effective power to govern, it is the degree of development of civic society, which assures that democracy is embedded in a given society. It determines to what extent the individuals will be protected from the government's arbitrariness, whether the society will work as a counterbalance to the state, how much the citizens will have a chance to learn democracy and corresponding civic virtues, and to what extent the prevailing political will be created and shaped through public deliberation.

It's true that farmers, managers, industrial workers, clerks, and others used to have rather different problems and corresponding needs in their lives; but in order for those needs to evolve into recognizable interests of social groups ready for action, the people in similar positions should be able to associate autonomously, and to communicate about their needs, about the difficulties they encounter, about their possible causes, and the conditions for improvement. In short, a process of socially relevant awareness-raising, without which needs do not turn into interests. Without the legal conditions of the freedom of assembly, association and public communication the awareness of the unsatisfied needs is simply suppressed or remains captured in frustration, and those who are equally affected never come to be connected.

A functioning democracy does require a functioning civil society. However, in this mutual love between democracy and civil society, there's no definite answer to how these two phenomena specifically help in establishing each other. On the one hand, building, consolidation, and functioning of democracy require a vibrant, active civil society, and the development of democracy provides conditions for such society. On the other, it can also be assumed as something that goes without saying that the development of civil society and its actors requires a framework of democracy and human rights, but if it is deficient, civil society can play a decisive role in its development.

While in the western democracies there is a concern that civil society, that is non-commercial- activity, could decline, leading to a decline in democracy, in post-/authoritarian states, on the contrary, the problem lies precisely in the fact that traditions of democratic and civil society either do not exist at all or else are very minor or long repressed. This means that task is not so much to prevent the decline of civic society engagement, nor simply to stimulate more such engagement, but actually to establish civil society action as legitimate and positive, as desirable and necessary.

However, keeping in mind how demanding a considerable social change is, regardless of whether we call it revolution or not, it is clear that in implosion of the old regime, in the general deterioration in satisfying the needs, what worked for the malcontent citizens was a principle of Baron Munchausen: the change by way of pulling out of the bad conditions by pure will, like pulling oneself out of a swamp by one's own hair, because there is no any firm footing. The unveiled "Wizard of Oz" of the former omnipotent regime was replaced by a still not unveiled phantom of "civil society".

Who will determine the future of Berlin? (City dwellers against corporations and corrupted government)

Uladzimir Valodzin

As I came to Berlin this July, I noticed colourful posters around the city. Posters announced the Megaspree demonstration with a slogan "Rette deine Stadt" ("Rescue your city").

The Megaspree demonstration was held on July 10. It was a sternmarsch (star-march). People from six districts (Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg, Mitte, Moabit, Prenzlauer Berg, Treptow) were marching from different starting points to the single final place. They met in front of Rotes Rathaus (where Landtag of Berlin sits) to have a rally combined with concert. Although it was extremely hot in the city, around 5 thousand people came to participate.

What were they marching for and against?

The main object to be criticized was Mediaspree. Mediaspree is a huge project to build on the both banks of Spree river in Berlin's districts Mitte, Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain and Alt-Treptow more luxurious hotels, office buildings, lofts for rich, parkings, bridges, etc. Mediaspree got such a name, because huge media concerns (like MTV) are going to invest into it. Implementation of the project will create concrete desert on the Spree banks instead of lively and green space for walking and playing as it is today.

Wagenburg Schwarzer Kanal already had to leave its former place on the bank of Spree, because this place is going to become part of Mediaspree, and a hotel may appear there.

In Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain the local referendum was held, and 87% of local residents voted against the Mediaspree project. Citizens want river banks to be open for everybody and not to become private territories closed for "ordinary people."

But Mediaspree is not the only problem for Berlin inhabitants. Generally speaking, neoliberalism is a problem. Nowadays in European Union (and Germany is not an exclusion), the authorities give more and more freedom for capital and less and less freedom and social guarantees for citizens. In cities, it means selling everything which used to be public (or communal) to private firms, creating the environment for the rich and destroying places of the poor.

One of the examples of selling everything into corporate hands is privatization of Berliner Wasserbetriebe (Berlin water service). In 1999 49,9% of actions of Berliner Wasserbetriebe were sold to the private corporations RWE and Veolia. Many people were fired, some enterprises closed down, and now Berlin has one of the highest water prices in Europe. People of Berlin demand re-communalisation of water service and lower water prices. Campaigners aim to collect 170 000 signatures from July till October 2010 and pass this signatures to the authorities to prevent further privatisation of water.

Many collective housing projects now face danger of being thrown out onto the street, also because of privatization. City sells their houses to private firms (of course, without consent of those people who live inside), and those firms usually want people to pay much more rent or simply don't want social and political activists to live in the house. On November 24, 2009, collective of Brunnenstraße 183 (Prenzlauer Berg) was thrown out onto the street during special operation with 600 policemen. Up to now, the house stays empty, and following spaces are not functioning any more: freeshop, place for presentations and discussions, place for rehearsals, artists' studio, photostudio, gallery and guest room for artists in residence.

Even widely known around Europe Kunsthaus Tacheles can face Räumung (cleansing). Opened in 1990 in historical building (originally part of a shopping mall), Tacheles is a huge alternative art center with galleries, artist studios, theatre stage, cinema, nightclub, and cafe. Now, because of property owner's development plans, artists have to leave the house. Of course, artists from Tacheles also were present on Megaspreet demonstration, defending their right to stay in the place they created. Later, they took different actions against the bank which ordered them to leave and for their right to use the Tacheles building further. Räumung was scheduled to happen on 21-28 July (different days for different parts of the building). Tacheles still stays, but in extremely unstable position.

Not only groups of citizens, but a number of well-known and huge non-governmental organizations (including BUND) protest against the continuation of A100 ring Autobahn through Neukölln, Treptow and Friedrichshain districts. Proposed inner-city highway will destroy many green and quiet places, drastically increase levels of noise, increase pollution of environment. And it promises to be extremely costly. Three kilometers of highway would cost 420 million Euro! It is well-known that building more roads inside the city makes no sense: it will not shorten average time of journey (because of more traffic jams and longer distances for destinations), but definitely will increase environmental problems. Officials have their own logic (it is almost evident that this logic is supported financially by road-building industry)...

But people of Berlin are not just defending their city. Sometimes they try to be offensive and to take initiative in their own hands.

In 2008 the old Tempelhof airport was closed. Now there are plans to hold International Garden Construction Exhibition (Internationale Gartenbauausstellung) in 2017 on the Tempelhof field. This means that the bigger part of the field will be transformed into quarters of luxurious flats (which will stay almost empty – Senat of Berlin decided that these flats will be inhabited by 2 persons as average) and maybe hotels to host international guests. Most part of the rest will be closed to general public and only those who can afford to pay ticket price (16 EUR as estimated) can go inside. Most probably, private company “Grün Berlin” will try to transform this place into the private park, surrounded by a high fence, closed at night, with security and with entrance fee. Democratic rights at this kind of parks do not exist (for example, no demonstrations are allowed). “Grün Berlin” already runs several parks in Berlin (for example, Britzer Garten), and city pays this company to maintain those green places. Only small bit of land is planned to become a real public park. In June 2009 and May 2010 there were actions «Reclaim Tempelhof» directed against these plans and for opening of former airport field for everyone (probably making a park out of it). Protests were silenced by heavy police presence, but in May 2010, authorities opened Tempelhof field for the public (only at daytime and with some security personnel inside).

Another famous place of Berlin is Mauerpark. It was created in Prenzlauer Berg after the fall of Berlin Wall on part of former “death strip”. Actually, once it was a terrain of train station (Alt Nordbahnhof). The Western part of the former train station is still occupied by storage facilities. Autumn of this year will show whether Mauerpark will expand to the West or western part will be transformed into something else. Local dwellers demand extension of Mauerpark, and it seems like they will succeed.

Let's get back to Megaspreet. It was not a boring political march but a festival of wonderful Berlin - city of different and interesting people, city of lively street culture. Different bands were singing songs about their districts and people who live there. Demonstrators were making performances, poured water over others, people from sound trucks were making funny comments. Those people don't want some bribed officials to tell them how to behave and in which conditions to live.

The way Berlin dwellers treat their city is an example of how local community can stand for its' interests. For active inhabitants it is possible to define terms of city development in spite of will of corrupted government and greedy corporations.

Sources and further reading

LiS. Kleine Geschichte der Brunnenstrasse // Libertäres Stadtmagazin. No Eins. 1/3 10. S. 6.

Nehmen wir uns die Stadt zurück?! Kiez-Broschüre. Aussichten, Interviews, Tipps, Erfahrungen und Informationen zum Tempelhofer Feld und dem Bezirk Neukölln. [Berlin, 2010.] - 32 s.

Spreeufer für alle! Bilanz der Verhandlungen im Sonderausschuss Spreeraum von Oktober 2008 bis Dezember 2009. Hintergründe, Vorschläge, Ergebnisse / Initiativkreis Mediaspree versenken! AG Spreeufer. - 16 s.

Wir bleiben alle. Eine Broschüre gegen steigende Mieten, die Verdrängung von Menschen mit geringen Einkommen und die Vertreibung alternativer Projekte. Eine Broschüre für das gute und selbstbestimmte Leben für alle und überall. Sommer 2009. - 36 s.

<http://www.berliner-wassertisch.net/>

<http://www.mauerpark.info/>

<http://www.megaspree.de/>

<http://www.ms-versenken.org/>

<http://www.tacheles.de/>

Places of Alternative Culture in Berlin As Examples of Local Initiatives

Alina Novik

HBF Summer School has become an excellent survey of local initiatives existing in the city of Berlin. We had seen and had understood, as they say, what that is and what it is for. For instance how an initiative could be started, how it should be leaded, how people are getting know about it, how and why they are joining such a kind of organizations... However I am sure that the most important aspect we had learnt is how different these initiatives can be.

In my judgment the most impressive event in the frames of the School was our meeting with representatives of the house project called NewYorck59 (at number 59 Yorck Street) in Bethanien. The idea of Yorck59 project came in 1988 when more about 60 people accommodated the building in the west of Kreuzberg. At the end of 2003 the rent required the house was doubled because of the decision of Marc Walter – the businessman who had bought the Yorck street. All the attempts to find a compromise from the side of Yorck59 members led to nothing.

‘NewYorck59’ project has been started in June 2005 when its participants has squatted two floors of the southern wing of the Bathanien after they had been evicted by the police from the Yorck Street 59. Since then a great many of new individual members and groups including ‘Future of Bethanien Initiative’ have joined the project. By June 2006 members of above mentioned group had collected more than 14.000 signatures in support of the opening of cultural, artistic, political and social centre in the district. To prevent the buildings from privatization and to embody their idea, the initiative representatives applied to the district authorities.

Today ‘NewYorck59’ stands for art, culture, left politics. Inside the building there are separate private places where people are living as well as public spaces where it is possible to organize cultural and political meetings, theatre and film evenings and discussions on them or even dinner engagement. For many people it has become an opportunity “to live and to work in self-determined and self-organized structures”.

‘NewYorck59’ is interesting three times as much: it is a local initiative itself, than it is a part of ‘Future of Bethanien Initiative’ and finally it is a place where new initiatives such as ‘the anti-racist initiative’ (ARI), ‘the Nomadi anti-war café’, ‘the Dt. - African culture association Solidarite’, ‘the internationalist group of Libertad!’ and a great many of others have come into being.

However ‘New Yorck59’ is not the only project of this nature in Berlin. The Art-Centre Tacheles is maybe the most well-known. Fortunately or not visiting it was not included in our program. However we had an opportunity to do it ourselves (thanks to our last year alumni who suggested an idea!)

At the beginning the building of ‘Tacheles’ was the entrance of the Friedrichstadt-Passage, a shopping mall built in 1907. During the wartime it was damaged, but not completely destroyed. After 1948, one side the building was still used for many different purposes, when the other one was gradually going down as far as the East Berlin government had no means to mend it.

Finally it had to be demolished in April 1990. However in February of the same year the building was taken over by a group of young artists from all over the world. It was the beginning of 'Tacheles'. At the moment 'Tacheles' is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Berlin.

But currently Tacheles is under threat of closure for commercial reasons. However its supporters invite everybody all over the world to make pictures with the "I Support Tacheles" card which is possible to download from <http://super.tacheles.de/> and to publish it on the website.

Finally I have to say that I do not try to compel to fight for the Art-Centre or to squat the first building you will see. What about 'NewYorck59' and 'Tacheles' – you can appreciate these projects or not, but regardless of your attitude they are real examples of what the democracy can be. My idea was just to show that local initiatives are not only about rather abstract things which most people are not really interested in. The word 'local' itself means that it is about what particularly you and maybe people in your surrounding would like to start.

The Story of Resistance...

Andrei Bezruchonak

Where: the neighborhood of Berlin-Brandenburg airport
Who: local folks, who care not only about the noise
Current situation: the battle rages on...
Perspectives: any?

Once upon a time, referring back to the early 1990's, the official case study, initiated by the transportation authorities, was held in Berlin. The aim of that study was to specify the new location of new (at that time – possible) airport, which gonna serve the capital of the country, when other 3 airports will start to operate beyond their maximum planned capacity. Among different existing sites considered (Shönefeld, Sperenberg and Fütterborg) the only *second* one, ex-DDR airport Sperenberg, located pretty far from the city, was approved as the *best* location for the possible construction. Many officials from the federal land administration and the ministry of transportation have supported the conclusions and claimed that there would be certain “no” to the expansion of the existing Shönefeld...

...The first court decision – allowance of the airport's construction (in reality – the expansion of the existing one) in Shönefeld area – was made in 2002. “*What the hell?*” - you may delicately express a surprise on this senseless fact – and that's what the locals promptly did – the decision was immediately appealed by the local community initiative *The Bürgerverein Brandenburg-Berlin e.V.*, which till now represents the interests of local residents. With *no luck*, actually – the resolution for the spatial planning of the airport was made in August 2004, and the second court decision, which finally gave the go-ahead for the project, came into force in March 2006 (construction work began on September 5th, 2006).

The whole story of the BBI construction from the very beginning raised controversial debates. Why the Shönefeld, and not Sperenberg, as it was expected? Some worth-to-think-about points were explained by the *The Bürgerverein Brandenburg-Berlin e.V.* members...



1. Thus and thus, the final “wrong” decision was approved by the federal transport authorities (those, who totally agreed with the case study in 1994). One of the deputies, mr. XXX, originally used to be from the Munich airport CEO board. Theoretically, the question of airport night flights competence could matter there (Sperenberg, located outside the city, could operate 24/7, which is more than Munich could afford), but now it doesn't really matter.

2. Connection aspect today is a significant point for the public criticism and a subject of debate. Experts for traffic and environmental issues both criticize the fact that S-Bahn and ICE are forced into making a several kilometers long detour to the west before reaching the station underneath the new terminal.

3 & 4. Birds' death rates (the highest in the country) and neutral position of the Green party also bother activists from the locals. Those lucky flying creatures, which somehow

survived or escaped aircrafts' engines, have been forced to change their breeding area. That obviously led to some environmental changes within the ecosystems. Those birds, which refused to change their place, will continue suffer from jet engines, noise and locals. And at that time the Green party struggles for stopping the exploitation of Tegel and Tempelhoff (already closed in 2008) airports, and don't really care, as local residents think, about their (and birds') problems.

5. One more interesting detail – another deputy, let it be mr. YYY, was widely discussed in the early 1990-s in the media for the relations with Stazi. By incredible coincidence, right after Shönefeld site was chosen, the media had literally shut up. O tempora, o more, one can say, but some activists still remember that curious trifle.

6. Finally, as it's well known, low fare carriers have almost occupied Europe (not considering such countries, as Belarus or Moldova). As estimated, 60% of all flights in Shönefeld (the platform for BBI) are currently operated by LFC. And while the first side claims about financial benefits for airports and local communities' development, caused by increased passenger flow, *The Bürgerverein Brandenburg-Berlin e.V.* adduces a counter plea – airport's debt of 200 million euro and a doubt, that a person, who paid 5 euro for a ticket, will have a wish to pay 2 euro for a coffee. Debatable assertion.

*“There is too much sh*t about the construction of that airport”* – the representative of the named above local initiative makes a sad conclusion. And it is not only about the noise – the major aim (since the 2006 court decision) of their struggle with the authorities, as you could have noticed. But the noise still matters. In case the first phase of BBI opens as it was scheduled (in 2012, or, as “optimistically” re-forecasted – in 2030), it will have an initial capacity for up to 30 million passengers. And according to calculations, every 2 minutes an aircraft will take-off or land there. The final capacity after the completion of all expansions (additional terminals have also been considered by the plan), is claimed as 50 million passengers per year. That's why it's easy to see and understand the concern of local residents, who wanna, at least, win the right to live in silence from 22.00 to 6.00 (at present there is a flexible restriction from 0.00 to 5.00 with 10-12 flights operating nightly).

You can't please everybody, that's the reality. But the example of that local initiative is an evidence of how the legal fight for the compromise between both sides can be held – a good example for others... New regulations regarding night flights were introduced in 2009, and they were, according to the experts, as bad, as they were before. The next phase is a trial in 2011, and only time will show the result...

PS.

The following question suddenly has risen: what if the similar situation gonna occur in Belarusian reality? What acts of locals are possible, if any? And the answer appeared – at the moment it's so utopian, that it's even unimaginable. On the one hand, we can refer to the current situation with air transportation, and claim with confidence, that hypothetically that problem is the matter of a distant future only. At present, airport Minsk 1 serves couple of rare day flights (no night flights at all), so the locals don't care at all about the noise. And Minsk-2 International, located far from the capital, serves not that much flights and passengers, so sometimes it reminds the abandoned airport from Stephen King's “The Langoliers” movie. People simply don't use air transport, so *blo*dy* expensive it is! The lowest fare offered by the state monopolist “Belavia” starts from 90-100 EUR per one-way flight (the average student's (probably, the most “mobile” part of the society) scholarship is about 40-45 EUR). Incidentally, their average fare is 247,5 EUR. Due to the complicated socio-economical environment of the last 15 years (together with EU visa regulations), many people a) have never heard about Low-Fare Carriers, offering 5 (10, 15, 30) EUR tickets and b) still believe that traveling by air is like an out-of-reach dream. The

lack of opportunities to fly regarding Belarus may be simply presented by the figures of carried passengers at Belarusian largest airport, which serves over 90% of all flights in the country: in 2008 almost 1 million passengers passed via the Minsk-2 airport gates. Not that much for the country with the population of 9,648,533. And it's not to be compared with Lithuania, the country which has a population of around 3.4 million (2,8 times *less* than in BY), and which capital, Vilnius (served by Vilnius International Airport), handled over 2 million passengers in 2008 (2 times *more* than in Minsk).

Well, the comparison of BBI airport with 24 million passengers per year (according to the forecast) and Minsk-2 International with its "millions" makes no sense in that case. *But what if...* What if Belarus somehow turns into a "frequent-flying" country? What if several (at the moment unimaginable) changes within the society gonna help to simulate air travel demand to and from the country (like in fellow former soviet Baltic States, for instance)? In that case many things may become possible, as far as local initiative's development is concerned. But, being the question of futurology, that's another story...