

"YMCA EUROPE - OUR DREAM AND VISION"

EUROPEAN SECRETARY'S REPORT 1996/97

to the

EAY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, MAY 1997

(by Dölf Weder)

I A COMMON DREAM AND VISION

1 If somebody has a Dream...

Dear Friends

It was one of these beautiful, fresh summer mornings in the Swiss mountains, more than 20 years ago. Shining mountain peaks, dark blue skies, golden sun, and all over in the lush green meadow these thousands of small white daisies: The garden of YMCA Camp La Punt, on 1700 m, surrounded by the silent peace of the Swiss Alps. Who cannot be happy here, cannot be happy anywhere.

And amidst of this green meadow, sitting in the grass, a small group of girls, some 13, 14 years old. Having their morning devotions. Their young leader is holding a piece of cardboard in her hands. She must be around 18 years old.

And on this cardboard, she has written a sentence; - with care and with letters in a lot of different colours.

This sentence, since this very morning, has become one of the most important words for my life; and I have quoted it many times:

"If somebody has a dream, it is only a dream. But if two or three dream together, it is the beginning of something new."

The girls are talking about the problems in the World. And how powerless they are as young girls. But they do not want to give up. They tell each other the story of Martin Luther King, and of his famous speech, down there in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Alabama, on Christmas Eve of the year 1967:

"I have a dream! I have a dream that one day...!"

And then the leader takes her guitar, they join their hands, and together they sing the famous song *"We shall overcome"*.

And they know: together we are strong.

"If somebody has a dream, it is only a dream. But if two or three dream together, it is the beginning of something new."

Friends, Do you have a Dream? Do you have a Dream for Europe and for the World?

And, Friends, Do we, as European YMCAs, have a Dream? Do we have a Dream for Europe and for the World?

- It can be the beginning of something new.

2 Our Common Vision

This morning at our General Assembly, we are going to discuss and decide on our EAY Strategy for the years 1997 to 2002.

The proposal you have in your Working Documents, has made a long way: From your discussions and priority setting at our last Assembly in the Netherlands, over first drafts and intensive discussions in the EAY Executive Committee, up to your reactions, and our corrections, when we submitted the Draft for your comments in November of last year.

One element has been recognised and very positively received by several of you: Our new Strategy starts with a "Vision". Even more: with a Common Vision. With "Our Common Vision".

Only in the context of this, Our Common Vision, only if we all together have one common ground, only then, we can say what within such context the specific task of the EAY is, and what its resulting Main Objectives 1997-2002.

The Strategy Paper defines the Task of the EAY as

"To strengthen the European YMCAs to realise our common Vision".

It is not by chance that the stories of the Old Testament Prophets, and even the world-wide mission of St. Paul, do not start with a Mission Statement worked out by a committee.

Instead, they often start with a Dream, with a Vision.

A Dream, a Vision, is something holistic. It catches you in your whole being, in your spirit, in your mind, - and even in your body.

A Mission Statement, I'm afraid, is often more the result of a political-diplomatic intellectual process, than it is allowed to express deepest existential convictions, as for example Martin Luther King did in his famous Dream.

To be clear: I have nothing against Mission Statements at all. But they must be based on a common Vision.

Therefore, the question I want to ask you today - each and every one of you -, is: "Do we have a Common Vision? And are you sharing with us 'Our Common Vision'?"

Do you feel in your belly this holy fire and commitment, which only is able to move the World's mountains?

"If two or three dream together, it is the beginning of something new."

I'm deeply convinced that the Paris Basis only changed the World because it was not a political-diplomatic statement only. It came out of the deepest Dreams, Visions and holy Dedication of these 99 young men and committed Christians.

The following is, how we in the EAY Executive Committee formulate our motivation, dream and commitment:

"We dream of a European YMCA Movement

- **inspired by its Christian ecumenical Mission**
- **moved by a young, open and creative spirit**
- **playing an active and prophetic role in today's global and local realities**
- **uniting each other to realise the YMCA Mission in the diversity of national contexts**

We dream of a European YMCA Movement which is

- **relevant and attractive for young people**

a sign of God's Reign and Love on earth."

In the second part of this morning, you will have to say whether this is also your Vision, Our Common Vision.

II A LOOK BACK

1 Great Developments

Before we in the third part of my Report will look at the proposed EAY Main Objectives 1997-2002 and at this year's Assembly theme, I in a second part now want to take a look back at our last strategic period.

Did we achieve what we wanted to achieve? Can we continue our way with courage and confidence?

My last year's Report dealt in depth with these questions, with an analysis of the changing global realities, and with options for YMCA response.

If you remember, the analysis was of a confident, but rather critical and self-critical nature. I'm definitely not the person for glorification and YMCA self-celebration.

I know only too much about the weaknesses of our EAY, and of our European and world-wide YMCAs. And I believe in permanent, critical and self-critical evaluation. Sustainable progress and development comes only from permanent analysis and continuous, sensitive steering of the process.

However, being aware of all this, let me today, and as an overall statement, say very clearly:

In the Strategic Period 1990-1997, the work of the European Alliance of YMCAs, its Movements and its partners was a great success and reason for deep gratitude to our Lord.

I want to most sincerely thank here each and everyone of you, who has been and still is a part of this great development.

Let me share some facts with you:

2 The famous "Strategic Box"

Here once again and for the last time: the famous "Box" of the past strategic period.

It lists three Main Working Fields and two Main Emphases in these Working Fields:

Working Fields:

- Youth and Programme Exchange
- Intermovement Cooperation (now called Movement Development)
- European Programmes

Main Emphases:

- Christian Orientation
- Leadership Development

I would like to highlight some statistical facts related to these Working Fields and Main Emphases.

2.1 Movement Development

Let me start with Movement Development, so far called Intermovement Cooperation.

- Here is a map of the European Alliance of YMCAs in the year 1989:
- In 1991, at the beginning of the "Saphir" period, the Europe of the YMCA looked like this:
- And here the same map for today, 1997:

Some Statistics:

European YMCA Movements 1996/97

Total Number of Movements 38

- whereof EAY Members 28
 - whereof requesting MD support 22
-

Development in the new Movements 1990 - 1997

New local YMCAs 310

New formal YMCA members 16'000

New people reached 110'000

New YMCA employees 250

New YMCA volunteers of any kind 1'700

Looking at these statistics, one can only say: That is substantial. - And what a potential for further growth!

What is the secret of the EAY Movement Development philosophy?

It is no secret: It simply is "Begleitung", the philosophy behind all our Development Work; introduced in 1991. Plus the innovative EAY Field Group system; introduced in autumn 1990.

EAY "Begleitung"

"Begleitung" is a non-directive process of walking side by side, being available to accompany those with responsibilities, providing support and encouragement, enabling them to fulfil their responsibilities, identify and achieve their goals.

It is a process-oriented, interactive, participatory and non-directive approach, needing continuity over a certain period

of time.

We would never be where we are today, if the EAY hadn't developed and consequently applied this forward-leading methodology.

2.2 European Programmes

When asked what the EAY is all about and doing, some people immediately answer: Movement Development in Central and Eastern Europe.

That's not wrong. But only part of it. Have a look at the following statistics:

Participation in EAY Events and Working Platforms

Number of participants per year 750 - 1'500

Expected 1997 2'400

(Ten Sing Festival, summer 1997, application status in
March 1997 1'700)

We are one of the biggest European meeting organisers among the European youth umbrella organisations.

2.3 Youth and Programme Exchange

Our Exchange programmes "Volunteers for Europe" and "Professionals for Europe" do not quite move the number of people we had hoped for. Happily enough, a lot of direct bilateral exchanges are going on in addition and are on the increase.

However, also the following figure is still substantial, especially when considering that most of these participants take part in EAY Introduction- and Midterm-Courses and transfer a great deal of know-how from one YMCA to another:

Participation in "Volunteers for Europe (VfE)"

VfE Exchanges per year 20 - 30 volunteers

2.4 Main Emphases

Also in the two Emphasis-Fields - "Christian Orientation" and "Leadership Development" - considerable progress has been made.

a) Christian Orientation

It was our earlier Vice-President Wille Riekkinen, who introduced our annual "Christian Orientation Workshops". Often not that much visible or spectacular, they added a lot of thinking and depth to the Christian Orientation of our Movements.

The spiritual elements in our General Assemblies became a major part of these key events, and - through their contents and methodologies - are influencing quite considerably the European YMCAs.

But even more than these two specific elements, I think we all together succeeded in uniting us in the understanding that we European YMCAs definitely want to be Christian YMCAs. The interpretation, of what this means in the different cultural contexts, varies of course widely. And that is good.

b) Leadership Development

Leadership Development is the key to any Movement Development, the key to any successful YMCA work.

The development of the EAY "Training the Trainers" scheme meant an enormous step forward in this respect.

This programme combines in an excellent way Block-Seminars on European level with a variety of Leadership Trainings on National level, complemented by intensive EAY Staff "Begleitung".

Have a look at some figures:

EAY "Training the Trainers" and related Leadership Trainings

Period: March 1996 - April 1997

Number of Training Events 17

Number of Trainees 425

National Movements involved 16

Let me quote from the feed-back of one of the "Training the Trainers" participants:

"As a professional I joined the YMCA in 1994. So far it has been especially important to me to get the grip on the three dimensions of the YMCA. And it was the EAY's Training the Trainers scheme which drew the holistic picture of the YMCA triangle in my heart. To my mind, investing in human resources development within the newly emerging YMCAs in the post-totalitarian countries has been priority number one for the EAY, and it has contributed the most towards sustainability of these movements, democratic practice and mass membership. And it is the EAY, who has also been of the most facilitation for practical solutions of different clews in my drudgery, and carries on its support without imposing any separate institutional interests of its own. I enjoy and find the collaboration with my colleagues from the EAY fertilizing in way of mapping out supplementary opportunities for effective cooperation between the YMCA of Armenia and different national movements.

Vardan Hambarzumyan, Project Director Armenian National YMCA."

2.5 EAY Staffing

Coming to the end of this look back, we certainly ask: "But who does then all that enormous amount of work?!" The answer is simple: "All of us together do that enormous amount of work!" We can cope with that enormously wide field of EAY activities only, because there are so many people involved from all over Europe and beyond. The EAY is not, and cannot be a Staff Show. And for this, I am deeply thankful.

Of course, at the core of it all, we still need professional staff on EAY level. It's number, especially in the core-functions, is on an absolute minimum. And the administrative personnel-capacity is still the same since 1991, despite the considerable growth of the EAY in this period of time.

Let's have a look at EAY Staffing:

You are certainly aware that when coming to the budget debate, you will be confronted with a very substantial deficit forecast for 1998 and the following

years. It is of a size, the EAY simply cannot cope with by its own. And it is caused by an expected finance gap on the EAY Development Initiative.

It is the task of Peter Posner, our EAY Treasurer, to present you the details and discuss with you the steps to be taken.

However, as the European Secretary, it is my duty to tell you **that the break-down of the EAY Development Initiative would mean the break-down of the EAY Movement Development work and of the EAY as a truly All-European Movement.**

Without our EAY Executive Secretary, we could no longer reasonably lead the Field Staff and the Development in the various Fields. And without the related administrative capacity, we could also administratively no longer cope with the present Development and the high number of National Movements.

This is not a reason for letting hang down our heads and cry. But a reason for continuing to have a common Dream and Vision. - And for putting it into Action.

III "BREAK THE EXCLUSION - BUILDING SOCIALLY RELEVANT YMCAs"

For the third part of my Report, I'm expected to give you an introduction into the proposed Main Objectives 1997-2002. We are going to discuss them in our next Session.

And I'm also to launch this year's General Assembly theme: **"Break the Exclusion - Building Socially Relevant YMCAs"**. It is part of the new Issue orientation of the EAY.

I could now go through the Working Document text and add some more meat to it.

However, after my Report of last year, which was quite conceptual, Tom Cusens from the Malta YMCA came to me, and complemented me on my speech. And then he added: "But to be honest, Dölf", he said, "it touches and inspires me even much more, when you draw your pictures and talk about your personal experiences."

So, who could ever resist Tom?! Thus, instead of speaking theoretically, I'm going to tell you a bit about my experiences with a local YMCA here in our host country Italy.

Looking from the perspective of this local YMCA, I then ask, what is the relevance of our EAY Objectives for this local situation.

Because it also goes for Objectives on EAY level: "Nothing is real until it is local", or in free translation: "No EAY Objective is relevant until it is of local relevance down in Italy."

And, Tom, doing this, I hope I'll qualify for another bite of my beloved Maltese pepper cheese...

1 Catania: "Break the Exclusion - Building a socially relevant YMCA"

When I first was there, two years ago, I somehow had a Wild West feeling. I don't know why. Because it's definitely in Southern Italy: Valverde, a village slightly above the half million city of Catania, Sicily. Valverde means "green valley", and lies on the soft slopes of Mount Etna, the huge, still active volcano.

The island of Sicily belongs to the "Mezzogiorno", the deep South of Italy. The same is true for Calabria, where we have Siderno, another of the YMCAs I'm in love with.

Wonderful landscape, delicious food and very warm people. - Places to be happy.

But economically far behind, youth unemployment up to 50%, Mafia problems, and omni-present all kinds of inefficiencies and sinister manoeuvring. Catania itself is the city which, after Palermo, probably makes the second-most headlines on Mafia fights and killings.

It was afternoon, when I first came to Valverde. School lessons all over at midday, as usual. The children and young people - the *bambini* and *ragazzi* as they call them here in Italy - hanging around the street corners, chatting, flirting - deadly bored.

Except a football club for a small elite, no provisions for young people at all. No room, no organisation, nothing. But good perspectives for drugs and delinquency.

Not unusual for Italy. I know myself hundreds of Italian villages and towns like that. Enormous needs. And an enormous challenge and potential for the YMCA.

But the Italian YMCA, as several other YMCAs in Europe, lives in permanent crises since many years. Catania used to have a YMCA. A typical middle-class YMCA. As a young leader, I was even leading exchange activities myself between Catania and the YMCA of St. Gallen. However, the Catania YMCA closed down in the early eighties. No more vision, no more dreams, no programmes - dead.

But then, two years ago, Angelo, who lives in Valverde, and Alessandro, later joined by Basile and other friends, were caught by a new YMCA vision: A YMCA of social relevance!

They started with football activities. On the run-down and mostly unused football-pitch a bit outside Valverde.

And they found Melo as a football leader. A man with love and an enormous heart for disadvantaged children, for difficult youth, and for all other kinds of socially excluded young people. He himself from simple background and not having an easy life either.

And then Valverde's *bambini* and *ragazzi* started to stream to the YMCA. Two or three hundreds of them. The success is such that even a home for delinquent youth allows some of its inhabitants to join the YMCA activities. And with a minibus, the YMCA started to pick up children on rough squares down in Catania, bringing them for afternoons of YMCA activities to Valverde.

These street contacts then in turn, became the start of a second YMCA Section, right down in the city.

On two or three tours, I was taken to these old districts of Catania. A very deprived area. Old, run-down buildings. Plenty of children of all ages. Many of them with parents in prison, or the father killed in Mafia fights, not seldom even in front of their own children. They themselves excluded from mainstream life, often not attending school, or having left school after three, four years. Most of them still sleep in some kind of home. But during the days, they live on the streets: Catania's street children.

In the middle of this neighbourhood, a rather big Piazza, a square. Based on the contacts with the children living here, last summer the YMCA decided to announce a YMCA football tournament; playground: this stony Piazza. And again they came in big crowds.

There was only one problem: Right in the middle of the Piazza, - which means: right in the middle of the football field -, there is a big fountain. However, after some discussion, it was found out, that the handicap is the same for both teams. So the YMCA in Catania uses the probably only football field in Europe with a big fountain right in the middle of it.

But let's now move to the parish of Padre Pennataro, covering several of these deprived Catanian neighbourhoods.

Padre Pennataro is a catholic priest in his mid-seventies. And he is quite a character. He joined this parish soon after leaving the priest seminary, - and remained for his whole life.

When asked by his superiors what kind of parish he would like to work in, he said, there was only one thing he wanted: To work in a really poor parish, so poor it would not even have a church. And that's how Padre Pennataro landed in this part of Catania.

When he arrived, there was only some ground, not even empty, and on it, a very small Chapel with some few benches.

But then the Padre encountered some young people who wanted to meet with each other. So, together they built a small youth meeting room, around the size of a garage.

Later on, he realised that many of the children in this neighbourhood never attended school. So he added another building, and started a primary school.

But his pupils often came hungry and couldn't study properly, because the parents were in prison or killed, or simply did not care. So Padre Pennataro added a kitchen to his school.

Then he found out that many older people in his parish didn't have a proper place to live and rarely got a decent meal. He built a small home for elderly people.

And then the school became too small, and he wanted to add higher classes. So he convinced the City Administration to give him the use of a big unused building nearby.

And finally, and after many years only, he built a Church, a big and modern church. It is full of remarkable and very symbolic works of Art. All of them made by people of his parish.

Last year, Padre Pennataro got in contact with the Catania YMCA leaders. And now the YMCA is organising afternoon programmes for the children in his school.

There is also quite some ground around the school building. And it is close to the beach. So Padre Pennataro got old Army tents. And this summer, the YMCA is going to organise summer camping programmes here.

When I was down there again some weeks ago, there were literally tens and hundreds of young people all around the various YMCA places. The Valverde football pitch in reconstruction, a run-down basketball field nearby already restored. With money of the political Commune, by the way. It seems they start to understand what the YMCA can mean for their village.

I myself happened to be witness of the beginnings of this new Catania YMCA. I handed out some victory trophies for successful football teams. And we discussed together with the leaders the visions and ideas of this young YMCA. I really did not do anything big.

But when I recently re-appeared on the Valverde football field, a wild crowd with tens of young arms and hands wanted to shake hands with me, wanted to exchange some words, welcoming me back to Catania. And when we had to leave Valverde, our car could hardly move because all these young people were simply hanging around the machine, laughing and waving their hands with happy smiles and enormous enthusiasm.

I was puzzled and couldn't understand why this happened. I don't feel myself so important or exceptional.

Then, 10 days ago, I received an Italian, hand-written letter from Melo, the football leader. In a very personal way, he tries to explain me, why it is so important that I come to Catania more often.

Some sentences of his letter: *"Probably you don't believe it, but when you come, these young people experience really moments of happiness. That much, that they even during the weekly trainings talk about you. The most important for you to understand is that almost all of the children which you got to know and with which you talked, have very serious family problems at home. They are for example sons of prisoners, or sons who's father has been killed. Many are children of city districts full of risk and permanent fights. And, therefore, only to see your presence is already enough to make them happy. In fact, they experience in these moments real joy.*

Dear Dölf, I always worked with children, with young people. But I did never find a solid base for it and an organisation so strong as the one I have found in these two years in the YMCA..."

That's Melo's very personal message to Dölf, the European Secretary.

And it explains while the simple presence of this European Secretary as a symbolic representative of Europe and of the World, for a small moment breaks these children's Social Exclusion and makes them feel that they are of value, too. Of value even for Europe. Because Europe and the European YMCA cares for them.

Friends, Do I have to say more about what it means and takes to "Break Social Exclusion - and build socially relevant YMCAs"?

Go, open your eyes, and do likewise in your local YMCAs!

And as EAY? Go, and care for this YMCA Movement!

2 Catania and the Objectives of the EAY

Having heard about this local situation in Catania, let us now make the big step and ask what does this mean for the Main Objectives of our European Alliance.

Stories like that are of course very emotional and touching, and easily lead to naive YMCA romanticism.

Let us be honest: The Catania development stands on very fragile ground.

Many YMCAs started with such great enthusiasm and great programmes - and disappeared some few years later.

And one, of course, must also ask what is the quality of the concepts behind such programmes.

Let's have a look at some of the most crucial elements:

Point 1 Leadership Development

Can you imagine what it means to be suddenly confronted with hundreds of children and teenagers who want to take part in your activities - but so far you have almost no leaders? Not to speak of trained leaders, with sound experience in group-work or even in YMCA programmes.

How do you find them? How do you train them? How do you even know in what subjects to train them? And how do you make sure they work in the YMCA spirit?

In a first step, even the awareness that such leadership development is necessary, has to be developed.

This means, Catania needs outside support for a long-term Movement Development and Leadership Development approach.

Point 2 YMCA Professionals

In such fast growing situations and leadership development needs, you can almost not do without qualified YMCA Professionals. You also need them to guarantee the professional quality of the development concepts you are applying.

But if you are not in a country with a YMCA school or with a tradition of trained social workers?

The whole Italian YMCA at present has exactly one experienced professional YMCA Secretary: Diego. He is in retirement. And then, there are three young Secretaries: Stefano, Roberto and Carlo. They still need a lot of training and experience. Two of them work for more or less a pocket money. And all the three's long-term future is not secured.

In such circumstances, the inclusion in European training schemes is of absolute necessity.

All three young Secretaries, therefore, are part of the EAY "Training the Trainers" scheme. To make this possible and overcome the language barrier, the EAY facilitated a cooperation with the Malta YMCA and helped to finance the necessary language courses.

Point 3 Board Members

Functioning YMCA Boards are most critical elements for the institutional long-term stability of a YMCA. However, they are also one of the most difficult elements in the YMCA methodology.

The YMCA philosophy as a volunteer and lay movement, is based on a delicate balance between volunteer Board Members, professional Secretaries and activity Leaders.

Especially in the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, there is often not much tradition for this typical YMCA way of sharing power and responsibilities. The societies in these countries follow other patterns of social cooperation and leadership. In YMCAs, this not seldom results in serious internal conflicts.

So, what is needed is a systematic approach to Board Members training and Institutional Development.

Reason, why our Johan Vilhelm Eltvik was down here in Italy already twice, to run Leadership and Board Member trainings.

- With enormous success, by the way. So much that some people now call him "Johan il magico": "Magic Johan".

Point 4 YMCA Know-How and Cooperation

Where do the Catania people get to know what other YMCAs are doing in similar situations? How can they make sure that their activities meet the necessary quality level of YMCA and social work in Europe and the World? Where do they get new programme ideas from? And what should they do regarding the spiritual dimension of their work?

Or another dimension: Catania realised that they must develop a fund-raising campaign with corporate companies. They wrote letters asking for know-how from abroad. Who is going to respond them positively?

What they need, is extensive Communication and Networking with and among the YMCAs in Europe.

(By the way: It is not by chance that I was convinced down there in Catania that the EAY needs an Internet presence!)

But Communication and Networking not only with and in Europe.

As an example, just think of the enormous know-how which is available in the Latinamerican or Asian YMCAs in the field of work with street-children.

Thus, we are talking about the need for Global Cooperation.

And finally, the Italian young people want to meet and be together with young people from other countries. That is breaking their geographical and language separation from Europe.

This year's EAY Camp Philia is going to take place down in Southern Italy.

3 EAY Main Objectives 1997-2002

Friends, Did you recognise that I, at the example of Catania, already covered the whole list of our EAY Main Objectives 1997-2002?

You know them:

- Movement Development (incl. Leadership Development)
- Communication and Networking
- Youth Spirituality · Social Exclusion
- European Programmes
- Global Cooperation
- Representation
- Finances

If we are serious about being one European YMCA family, if we are serious about caring for each other, then there is no other way for the EAY than to be present in countries like Italy. Not with token talking, not with a quick isolated workshop and some imported so called "experts", but with long-term walking side-by-side, with true EAY "Begleitung" over several years.

And don't forget: I talked about Italy only as an example, and because this year's General Assembly is taking place here. We all could tell similar stories about so many other places all over Europe.

We all belong together, we all need each other!

IV CONCLUSION

This leads me back to the beginning of my Report: To the group of young girls up there in the Swiss mountains, 20 years ago.

You remember:

"If somebody has a dream, it is only a dream. But if two or three dream together, it is the beginning of something new."

And, Friends, I repeat my question: Do you have a Dream? A Dream for Europe? A Dream for the World?

Do you want to care for our YMCA family? Are you ready to break all kinds of Exclusion and Separation?

But above all: Are you willing to join us in Our Common Vision:

"We dream of a European YMCA Movement

- inspired by its Christian ecumenical Mission
- moved by a young, open and creative spirit
- playing an active and prophetic role in today's global and local realities
- uniting each other to realise the YMCA Mission in the diversity of national contexts

We dream of a European YMCA Movement which is

- relevant and attractive for young people

a sign of God's Reign and Love on earth."

Thank you!