

Supporting One Another: A Waldorf kindergarten and a modern housing community

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In Slovakia at the moment there are two Waldorf schools and four Waldorf kindergartens, as well as a growing number of forest kindergartens that take their inspiration from Waldorf education. In addition there are two training seminars - one for kindergarten educators and one for class teachers. Six years ago the situation was very different.



From the beginning, Waldorf education in Slovakia was carried by a small group of class teachers, who founded the first Waldorf school in 2001. For 13 years, the school had to go through an experimental evaluation process by the ministry of school education. As it was at that time, the cultural and legal context in Slovakia is relatively conservative, and it has only been possible to implement alternative impulses very slowly. The Waldorf schools (now two) are financed partly by the government; the Waldorf kindergartens are private and financed exclusively through parent contributions and donations.



In 2010 in the capital of Bratislava, there was only a single kindergarten with one group of children. My colleague Martina and I were in the second year of our Waldorf training and there was no more space for her son in the existing Waldorf kindergarten. After searching for months, she found a old house for rent with a large garden. The house needed a lot of renovations, but together with an experienced colleague, we succeeded and were able to found a kindergarten, Jablonka (Little Apple Tree). At first there were only three children. For the first two years we really worked on a voluntary basis as we had to pay back the loans we had taken out. After three years our kindergarten was full and today we have a waiting list.



After some time, we asked Brigitte Goldmann, an early childhood trainer at the Waldorf training seminar in Vienna and a former IASWECE Council member, if she could help us to found a kindergarten training seminar in



Slovakia. Interest in Waldorf education in Slovakia had been growing, in part due to the outreach and publicity work done by the existing Waldorf School. In 2013 we opened the new training seminar, with 50 students enrolled. At the moment, the first year of the second three-year cycle is running and we have 35 new students. The kindergarten is a place for our inspiration for the directorship of the Waldorf Kindergarten Seminar and offers an opportunity for practicums for our students.

Everything seemed to be going well, until problems arose - new regulations are now in force, and we were suddenly required to follow regulations regarding the space for kindergartens - and our kindergarten was suddenly declared too small and inadequate. Without support from the government or the municipality, either the rent for so many square meters would be unaffordable, or the kindergarten fees would be unaffordable for the parents. For three years we searched in vain for suitable rooms.

Our salvation came this year. In Bratislava there was a new project for ecological and community living spaces. In the Háj Park (Hain Park) Project, investors wanted to have a Waldorf kindergarten, because we live according to shared values: community, nature, and naturalness. We have received material support and a long-term rental contract and since October we have been in our new, lovely home. We want to do our part to contribute to the community idea of Háj Park. In the short time we have been here, we have organized a lantern walk, planned an Open House day, and are looking forward to more collaboration. Now after 6 years, our kindergarten has a new name: Hájanka.

It takes a lot of courage and perseverance to found a Waldorf initiative. The history of our kindergarten gives us hope for the future, that the idea that stands behind Waldorf education and Anthroposophy is strong and alive. We hope that our kindergarten will be a protected place for children and will at the same time serve as a catalyst for positive social transformation.

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