

“Balkan Bytes” Facilitator Training Rome, Italy: June 9-12, 2004

Summary

The ZHABA Facilitators Collective was contacted by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) to conduct a facilitator training for trainers from alternative/environmental Balkan Internet services. This training follows from one done in February for the same organisations (but different participants), that developed business plans for these Internet providers. The participant group consisted of persons who have held training seminars in the field of electronic networking or plan to do so in the near future. The selection process favoured those people who will hold a training in the foreseeable future where they can practice/use the newly learned training techniques.

Sponsor: Italian Ministry of Environment

Organisers: Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, and Association “L’Umana Dimora Onlus” Lazio

Statistics:

Facilitator Trainees: 10

Background facilitators: 1

Male: 6

Female: 4

Leaders/non-leaders:

Average Age: 24-40

Ethnic background: AL, Serb/Montenegrin (2), BiH, BG, HR, Kosovar (1 Albanian), UK, HU, IT

Education: 8 university, 2 completing university

Geography: 7 Balkan, 1 CEE, 2 West

Training/Facilitation experience: 1 very, 1 quite, 8 low

Methodology

The transformational approach was utilised throughout the training. For more information on the transformational approach, please refer to <http://www.zhaba.cz/transformation.html> and <http://nlu.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Freire.html>

The training combined facilitation skills with skills training on organisation and management issues identified from the reports from participating NGOs. Facilitation skills included how to work with difficult people, handling conflict, timing, working with resistance, working with discomfort, the power flow, workshop preparation and planning, non-verbal communication, facilitation tools, presentation skills, group dynamics, effective meetings and consensus decision-making. In the reports, it was clear that the most common organisation and management barriers to more effective work by NGOs these internet providers service include fundraising, networking, internal communication and media/PR work (external communication). Therefore, the facilitator training incorporated skill sets on several of these areas so that the trainees could experience some interactive trainings on these issues and perhaps use them later. Since both the reports and the consequent exercises during the workshop pointed to problems with internal and external communication, and this is something that these facilitator trainees would be called upon to train others on at home, we worked on developing target groups and messages and dedicated strategies to get specific messages to specific target groups. It is not enough to have a webpage or email list or other ICT. One must learn to get people to look at your content, get the *right* people to look at the content, and most importantly, *act* on that content.

The participants also experienced what it is like to be facilitated. Moreover, by combining exercises on organisation and management issues, the participants also became familiar with a number of facilitation tools such as the brainstorm, fishbow l, straw poll, energisers, rounds, small groups, role plays, reverse role plays, body work, non-verbal exercises, theatre, etc. and had opportunities to practice them.

Since the facilitator training is tailor-made and not out of a box, it is important to estimate the expectations of the participants at the beginning of the workshop. The funders have expectations, the various organisers, the facilitator, and the people and organisations that filled out the forms (not necessarily those that result in attending). Therefore, it is essential to judge the expectations of the actual participants so that the training

ZHABA is a collective of facilitators that co-operates with NGOs, to tackle barriers that hinder them in working for a change. ZHABA translates as FROG, Facilitators Reaching Out to Grassroots.

ZHABA is an affiliate of the



International Association of Facilitators
www.iaf-world-org



meets their needs. The expectation exercise "Bodies on Paper," resulted in the following list:

- Discover. Really curious about how to train
- To have a good overview of the whole facilitation process
- New skills to train people
- Learn to become a good trainer
- NGO networking, facilitation of communication
- Learning to work with different levels of participants
- How adults learn, different techniques
- Instruments of communication
- Facilitation of hard discussions to reach consensus
- How to prepare right agenda for target groups
- How to extract best from everyone
- How to stop fighting in meetings
- Learn needs of Balkan groups and how to train them
- Facilitation techniques

All the goals of the training and the expectations of the facilitator trainees were achieved.

The Bodies on Paper exercise also generated the following information, which was later fed into the rest of the facilitator training and the workshop planning:

Among the NGOs you work with, what are their biggest organisational and management barriers?

- Experience
- Involving more volunteers
- External communication (2)
- Motivation of passive people
- \$, \$, \$
- Internal communication
- Institutional report
- Lack of planning
- Inefficient use of technology
- Conflict of ideas among staff
- Incompetence

What would you like to design a workshop on?

- External communication
- Communication in networks (2)
- ICT tools (2)
- Communicating with people, for example about nature conservation
- Facilitation
- Media/PR
- Software development
- Gaining new participants in Volvox
- ToT
- Strategic use of the Internet for environmental protection
- Strategic planning

An Analysis of Problems During the Training

1. Direction of the Training, and Change in Facilitators

From the beginning, it was clear that the REC was of two minds about where to go with the training – on the one hand wanting a facilitator training, while on the other, a more technical training. It was hoped that two trainers with different styles and expertise could complement each other and develop the training together. However, given that a facilitator training is normally 5 days, and we had only 3.5 days to complete a training that would incorporate both elements, this proved to be an insurmountable barrier. In addition, while the ZHABA facilitator might have been able to support the Greenet facilitator in at least process facilitation (not technical knowledge), the trainer from Greenet could not have supported him in process facilitation without being trained as a facilitator herself. In the end, the Greenet trainer was invited as a participant to be trained as a facilitator herself, and consequently, she will be able to use these skills when she conducts the follow-up training for the Balkan Bytes project. We very much appreciate her openness to the changes in the program, and hope that both REC and Greenet do not see this as a negative comment on her skills and experience – but instead, as an investment in an already highly skilled and valued person. If a face-to-face meeting had been able to be arranged well prior to the training, we both believe we could have found ways to work together and complement each other.



II. Posters thrown out by cleaning lady

On the morning of the second or third day, we discovered to our horror that someone had thrown out quite a few of our posters. In over 10 years of facilitation, this has never happened to me. Luckily, I had taken some photos of posters, which I will pass on to the organisers for their content report - but a lot of our work is missing.

III. Fewer Participants than planned

A quick review of the participant list revealed that one of the participants from Sharri.Net in Kosovo/a had attended some of my workshops in May and December of last year. I remembered him as a bright and active person –the quickest to pick up on the meanings behind exercises. However, I also remembered that he did not speak English, or if he did, not well. I checked with the REC Field Office, and in fact he does have problems with English. In any other circumstances, such as traditional lectures, or a full facilitator training for 5 or more days, translation could have been arranged for him. However, it was made perfectly clear on the application forms and to the REC Local Offices that a good knowledge of English was mandatory. There would be no lectures– people are required to interact and participate fully with each other in a common language, not just listen. Moreover, translation would have demanded half the time we had allocated to the already shortened 3.5 days (normally 5+). Gabor Heves called the participant to verify his ability to communicate in English, and the decision was made that his language ability would be insufficient for this training. Given this, calls were also made to the other participants to ensure that all had adequate English language skills.

The Italian Embassy denied the Macedonian participant her visa, even though the Italian Ministry of Environment is funding this project. There were also problems with the visas in Kosovo/a.

RESULTS

- Developed own training skills and agenda, training tools and exercises
- Learned theoretical background of efficient knowledge transfer
- Acquired tools to implement training workshops
- Absorbed facilitation techniques
- Improved presentation skills
- Participants improved their effectiveness in their work as facilitators in a way that benefits their participants;
- Participants are more conscious of the process dynamics in their work and know how to use them for increase of the effectiveness of their work;
- Participants can prepare and develop better programmes and methods;
- Participants increased their skills in dealing with the process dynamics in their work in a way that benefits their participants;
- Participants have received a basic introduction into more complicated group facilitation methods and know how to use this knowledge for their own processes, programmes, and method development.
- Participants will be well enough trained so as not to need to hire outside consultants to design and facilitate new workshops, and the skills will stay inside the country after the ZHABA consultant leaves.
- Transfer of facilitation skills included how to work with difficult people, handling conflict, timing, working with resistance, working with discomfort, the power flower, workshop preparation and planning, non-verbal communication, facilitation tools, presentation skills, group dynamics, effective meetings and consensus decision-making
- Development of 2 workshops designed that meet the needs of their constituents back home: Networking and Strategic Use of the Internet; Internet Content Management and Media Work for NGOs – one of which was fed into the programming of the October workshop by Anna Feldman (Greenet)
- Organised and drafted 2 Internet action alerts on current issues affecting Croatia and Albania/Italy
- Improvement of networking, internal communication and media/PR work (external communication)
- Analysed and came up with solutions for two major communication problems affecting most of their NGOs: communicating with the public, and conflict and lack of communication with government

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

The Balkan Bytes project is worthwhile and well developed. However, the project managers may well think about concentrating more on organisational and management issues parallel to the technical trainings in the future. For example, adding more computers and modems to the networks are not by themselves going to improve networking if the users do not have good communication skills or know how to use these tools more strategically. Some issues to look at in the future, as identified by the participants, include internal communication, external communication, networking, strategic use of ICTs, fundraising, promoting volunteerism and working with volunteers, working with local authorities, work camps, and software development. Moreover, although it has been strategic to train various members of each network in different things (business planning, facilitation, technical...), if possible, some



consistency among the training group may also be of benefit – building on the knowledge gained from one workshop to the other. The organisers should be very thankful that Anna Feldman was also able to participate as a facilitator trainee, since now she has first-hand knowledge of where the process is coming from and where it might go when she facilitates the next stage later in the year. In fact, the other participants helped her program the following workshop!

The decision to limit the training to 3.5 days rather than the normal 5 was based on the experiences/feedback of the group in February rather than budget constraints. However, the group in February was not the same group in June, and did not face the same time limitations as the previous group. It was excellent that the organisers listened to the feedback in February, but it would have been useful if they had double-checked with the new participant group as well. A usual ZHABA facilitator training is 5 days, followed immediately by the delivery by the facilitator trainees of the workshop(s) they programmed during the facilitator training to another participant group. This allows for a true trial by fire of the program they designed, as well as a significant real-life facilitation experience with the ZHABA facilitator there to back them up in case of problems. (Please see final evaluation for participant comments to this effect). Project managers might also think about integrating organisation and management skills into future workshops (working with volunteers, fundraising, more work on networking, internal and external communication), or even combine these issues with an additional or advanced facilitator training for the same group.

The facilitator's push over some initial resistance by the organisers to focus the program's organisation and management skills section on media/PR/external communication was justified. Based on the reports from participating NGOs, and later confirmed by exercises during the training (Bodies on Paper, Human Treasure Hunt, Eco-mapping, workshop planning), networking, internal communication, and external communication (especially with local and national government) are the major organisation and management barriers facing both the Internet providers and their constituent NGOs. The exercises during the training, as well as the ones developed by the participants themselves and blended into two workshop plans will give the new facilitators a number of effective tools to improve their situations at home.

The group was very open to new methods, even those that had significantly more experience than the others. Nor was there any resistance by the older participants to do the interactive exercises. Everyone participated more-or-less equally with the exception of the Italians, but this was because they constantly had to leave and deal with logistical issues and other work, and could not follow the process very well. Some participants even went so far as to purposely make exercises more difficult for themselves so that they could try new facilitation methods. For example, in the consensus decision-making exercise, the group decided to have one member role play stronger opposition so that they could use a fish bowl to try to resolve the problem – a tool they had not yet used in the training.

One of the exercises involved designing an action on the Internet. Both groups chose real-life scenarios affecting one of their organisations. In the case of one group, this case involved illegal waste exports from Italy to Albania. When asked for Italian NGO support with press work and contacts to the Italian NGO community, there was complete disinterest on the side of the our Italian partners. This is extremely disappointing, since it has been proven most effective to protest in the western country exporting the waste. One must endeavour to discover the reasons behind this resistance – for example, is it true disinterest or is it a lack of capacity, lack of media skills and contacts...? Given a similar situation in other trainings, most hosts would be quick to organise a press conference or help in other ways to utilise the opportunity to help each other.

The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, and Association "L'Umana Dimora Onlus" Lazio should make a formal protest to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Environment for the denial of a visa to the Macedonian participant.

Day 1: Burek Evaluation

	Very good	Good	So-so	bad
Learning Heads/Learning Styles	4	3	2	-
Burek evaluation technique	5	3	1	-
Brainstorm on energisers	10	-	-	-
Human treasure Hunt	4	3	-	-
Bodies on Paper	9	-	-	-



Hand signs	8	1	-	-
Logistics	9	-	-	-
Eco-mapping	3	4	3	-
Networking game	3	2	1	-

Day 2: Broadsheet Evaluation

	Good	So-so	Bad
Energiser – massage	7	2	-
Energiser – simon says	7	1	-
What is news	9	-	-
If the shoe fits	5	3	-
Internet press releases intro	6	2	-
Organising on the internet	8	-	-
Effective meeting skills	4	5	-
Evaluation method	4	5	-
Energiser: Gordian knot	8	-	-

Day 3: Snoopy Evaluation

	Walking happily	Sweating	Standing on head*	Lying on back	Dancing	Running
Consensus decision-making	2	-	3	2	4	-
Programming workshops	2	4	1	1	3	-
Power flower	5	3	1	-	2	2

*for some people this represented good, and for some bad...

Consensus decision-making (9+/4 -)

Programming workshops (5+/6 -)

Power flower (6+/4-)

Day 4: Graffiti Evaluation of entire workshop

What was the most useful, and why?

Power flower (4) – “good for life in general,” it is an excellent technique to analyse possible conflicts and how to solve them,” “so good top help screening differences, problems and to help us have good workshops”

Tricks and tips how to behave in certain moments

“My worst nightmare...” exercise

Solving problems

Practicing the program we designed (2), “we could practice what we learned”

“If the shoe fits...” exercise – developing target groups

Effective meetings role-play

Consensus decision-making

Designing workshops

All the exercises

What was least useful and why?

Training should be longer (1 week)

Effective meetings (3) “it was very simple and not so useful”

Bodies on Paper (2) “insufficient introduction;” “there are better introduction methods”

Workshop preparing was too long

What would you like to see as follow-up?

Practice for what we had learned. Training should include a few days for doing trainings for somebody else

More days for the training to include video and (unreadable - outside materials from different cases?)

Case studies (? -unreadable)

Longer training

Continuous communication (via email) for some feedback questions

Hands on use of tools training

Our experience like workshops...(?)



More practice facilitation training...
After this general info we need more practical workshops with more time than three days

-Daniel Swartz, The ZHABA Facilitators Collective
June 15, 2004: Budapest, Hungary

