

Gestaltcommunity in corona time

It seems decades ago, when I booked the hotel and my train to Leiden for the General Board Meeting and the meeting of the Ethics Committee of the EAGT. It was the last week in February 2020, where people from Berlin were leaving for skiing holidays in Tirol, trips to Africa or other places around the world, while in China the virus changed life. And of course, the situation was different in the European countries, as it still is. And in this situation the Executive Committee of the EAGT made the decision not to meet personally in Leiden and to transform the meeting into an online space. Knowing the way in which the European community skipped into the online communication structure we started last year, this was really megalomaniac.

It was an absolute marathon, the way Thomas Reistadt the Administrator and Wilma Trip in the EAGT Office provided the technical possibilities and include all of us in such an open and inviting process. And even more, how Beatrix Wimmer, our President managed to be present and connected while sitting at home and talking to a screen without seeing us for hours.

I do not belong to the people who think online meetings are nearly as good as personal meetings. Not at all. But online meetings are much better than no meetings. And realizing the early awareness and clarity in the upcoming crisis, I felt really proud and remembered something I read in Bernd Bocians "Fritz Perls in Berlin 1893-1933", that was mentioned at the Inauguration of the memorial Plaque for Fritz Perls in Berlin 2012. Something we talked a lot about in Germany.

Lore and Fritz Perls had a sensitive feeling for the surrounding context, the political and social development and the danger. They left Germany very early, when the Nazis took over the government, leaving behind practice, family, psychoanalysis community, colleagues. And the same happened in their exile in the Netherlands, they left in time and went to South Africa, starting a new life and developing the ideas of Gestalttherapy while Lore watched the way her son introjected food. I felt proud that my organization was so aware of what was happening. It helped that different people from different countries put together their thoughts in order to take this decision, thanks to the Italian colleagues, who were so clear in their minds, that they would not travel.

The corona virus reduces the experiences of groups. In the most parts of Germany at the moment you are allowed to meet one person (apart from the people you live with). In the day clinic for mentally ill people where I work as supervisor, all groups are cancelled and there are only one-to-one-contacts. Many people are losing the feeling of their group identity. So I am really thankful for the efforts of our organization to assemble us still as a part of a community, with the meeting and the letter and the ongoing meeting spaces in Microsoft teams for all of us. We as EEC have meetings just to say hello and to see how we are, which is really important for me.

We experience the differences between the countries, I am so impressed by my Italian colleague sitting in the house with her family, including two adolescent daughters, for five weeks, with almost no possibility of going outside to recover in nature and instead writing articles about Corona. We can share the situation, realize the differences, be aware of the communication structures in difficult times and remain connected in times of imposed national borders that we have not experienced for years.(thanks to my colleagues Elpida, Helene, Liz, Silvia). For us as Gestaltists the situation is of course a challenge, to work with masks and miss an important part of the face, to work online and miss a lot of channels of perception. And I think we bring a lot with us to this situation that is helpful: We can work with polarities, which is very important in Germany at the moment:

- people staying at home, cut off from normal daily life and others working more than ever, being stressed and almost no time to breath,
- people working in hospitals, no distancing possible, missing personal protective equipment and needing to socially distance, when they leave the hospital.
- people losing their income from one day to the next without any idea when and how to earn money, and others expanding their business.
- Sitting here and caring for ourselves while the refugees in Lesbos have no possibility of doing so
- Continuing with the Lock down while the violence behind closed doors arises

I can go on with polarities in these weeks. We as Gestaltists can work with existential questions we have to face in these times. We trust the process and at the moment I do not see any other solution, only a process and it seems nobody (apart from Donald Trump) knows, where it will take us. We will need a lot of discussions and connections during the next years about these issues. And until that time, I hope we can remain connected through this process. And I do not know how life will be, when this is published in four weeks' time. Maybe we will be at a totally different point, knowing more about corona, changing the strategy, finding a vaccine and so on.

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Chair of Ethics Committee June 2020