

## **Lewes is worth a visit!**

*by Dag Lucke, Imke Wolf-Doettinchem, Romina Vianden-Prudent, SD Germany*

This summarises the feelings of all the four German participants of the European Susila Dharma (SD) meeting in Lewes at the end of January. It is four years since a similar meeting took place and there was therefore a strong wish to exchange thoughts and ideas once again, to deepen our cooperation and to think about the future of SD-International (SDI), the association which links the national SD-organisations and the projects together.

Although SD meetings take place during the yearly meetings of the World Subud Council and also during World Congresses there is usually on these occasions too little time for intense discussions because of all the other things happening. Here it was different. We are very lucky that the chairman of SD-International, Sharifin Gardiner, is one of the owners of the hotel and conference centre Pelham House in Lewes, so that we were able to stay and hold our meetings there.

There were altogether 35 participants from seven national SD organisations, most of the Board of SDI, the past and future executive directors of SDI, Rosanna Hille and Virginia Thomas, the chair of the WSA executive, Garrett Thompson, and two international helpers, Farah Czwiertnia and Andrew Holloway. We had three days time together to talk about coordinating our support for the projects, about cooperation between the SD nationals and between the SD's and SDI. Working groups were formed to discuss our work in India, Latin America and the Congo. We discussed the criteria for supporting projects, the question of the sustainability of projects and communication with Subud members.

One evening each SD organisation was given ten minutes to report about themselves – and how different we all are! How would an appeal in Germany be received which suggested that a donation to Susila Dharma would help one's progress in the Latihan? But in France it was a resounding success! Equally surprised as we were with this were the others when they learnt that we have several people on our SD Team that aren't in Subud.

It was an exciting and productive meeting – here are three personal impressions:

*Romina Vianden-Prudent:*

I am an avowed England fan – and not only since Rosamund Pilcher's novel "The Shell Seekers" came on to the German market. It was 30 years ago that I had my first holiday on the island with lots of sun, good farmyard shopping and hearty encounters in the Norfolk Broads. Further job-related trips to London followed in which I reported on the ups and downs of Lady Diana. Later I visited the Subud group at Loudwater Farm. Not to be forgotten are my family connections which an aunt and her offspring provide in Brighton.

So I travelled with a happy feeling to the SD meeting in Lewes. Pelham House fulfilled all my expectations regarding comfortable old English stately homes. The fireplace in the bathroom, the terrace overlooking the well-kept lawns, the library with its heavy armchairs and dark panelling. Only the tasty and well prepared food didn't correspond to the usual clichés. So much about the general setting!

Sharifin Gardiner had mentioned in his invitation the hope of working on important basic principles and I was very keen to experience how I would feel amongst all these SD experts. To begin with, the women did some testing. What is the meaning of true communication for each of us? A good entry point! Further tests followed about working with SDI and with the national SD teams. To make it brief: I liked the combination of intense working sessions

together with specific testing. There was an interesting tension between those mostly interested in working with the projects and the bureaucrats who evaluate, organise and put up the boundary conditions. I was impressed by the competence that everyone brought in their particular field. Virginia Thomas, our new SDI executive director, has taken the position on with great experience and with her lively personal temperament.

On Saturday evening we were invited by the Lewes Subud group for dinner and latihan and were greeted with great hospitality. My visit was rounded off on Monday with a visit to the Guerrand-Hermès-Foundation in Brighton. Lewes is most certainly worth a visit!

*Dag Lucke:*

If seven SD nationals meet after their international umbrella association has just put out a program in perfect *expert-speak* in which everything is going to be different in future – more professional, weightier, more centralistic, then one should expect to face some fairly stormy weather. To be on the safe side I flew over a day early so that I could study in nearby Portsmouth the tactics that the crafty seaman Francis Drake used against the Spanish Armada... But I won't say too much about this because this part of my preparations although amusing proved to be dispensable. The meeting was excellent. It turned out that several national SD's had come with good self-confidence and autonomy and that they were already beginning to practise the jump across the line between being a money distribution agency on the one side and the experiencing active lively partnership with small projects in the South on the other. There was a lot to exchange between us. The Dutch and the Spaniards shared their enthusiasm over new intense contacts with north-Argentinian Indios. We discussed together the difficult problems a small school in Colombia was experiencing. SD-Germany could bring in their experiences with the projects Colegio Amor, Peaby and Reintegrar. It becomes quickly apparent that the strength of our network could lie precisely in it's variety and in the lively learning opportunities it offers and that it isn't simply being a copy of the big NGO's but rather their complement.

“And how do you finance your project visits?” is a question often asked of the German Team. Then we point to you, dear friends of SD and readers of these lines. Of the roughly 32,000 Euros which our Christmas appeal brought in this year about 18,000 Euro were non-ear-marked. As you know, this is the life in the arteries of SD-Germany and a great proof of trust for our active team. It is only with these funds that the new members in our team can get local field experience and develop the necessary personal relationships with the project leaders. Only with this money can we manage to meet our share in our money multiplying measures with the German Ministry of Development. Only thus can we support a small office. Our thanks to you all!

*Imke Wolf-Doettinchem:*

It is simply this: however much we try to keep up a lively and efficient email communication and however good many of us are at this in the meantime – there is nothing above a meeting face-to-face! That is my personal summary of the European SD meeting in Lewes. The SD-Germany team had already discussed the recent developments in SDI and had reached an opinion that we were determined to argue energetically. We have of course done this and still have our basic convictions but thanks to the personal meetings the mutual perception and appreciation of each other has changed considerably. And then there was the latihan and testing together, this possibility to meet each other quite differently and to share experiences on another level. The international helpers Farah Czwiernia and Andrew Holloway were

present at the entire meeting, always prepared to help. They too have after this meeting a new and wider picture of Susila Dharma which they will carry with them on their journeys.

I have hardly been to international SD meetings in recent years and it was marvellous to see what has changed. The discussions were focussed, competent, came quickly to the point and always to tangible results. The atmosphere was relaxed and respectful although everyone was there with their full commitment. And we didn't work until we were utterly exhausted as so often in the past but there was time for private conversation, for walks and shopping in the High street.