



Notes from the Conference reporters

ILGA-Europe's 21st Annual Conference - Warsaw, 1-4 November 2017

CHANGE!

Communities Mobilising, Movements Rising

Introduction

This year ILGA-Europe introduced a new feature to the conference: conference reporters from LGBTI organisations were asked to create a thread through the Conference, by bringing together the different discussions taking place. At various moments during the Conference the Reporters reflected on the programme. This year Tawseef Khan, Jay Postic and Dani Prisacariu took on this job. Their notes below give a good impression about what happened at this year's conference.

Day 1 – Reflections by Tawseef Khan

We are all too aware that we're all organizing in a time of great unpredictability. But at the same time, there is a consciousness and understanding that the conditions of today will help us to find the solutions for tomorrow.

One thing that struck the conference reporters was the role of money in all this organizing. We acknowledge this to some extent, but maybe we aren't thinking about the finer details – its wider implications. For example:

- We think about the way that poverty limits choice. As Luca Stevenson from the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe stated, we should be organising around government-imposed austerity measures. These are measures that cut across identity boundaries, and provide a great example of how we can think and act intersectionally. An issue like poverty stops the most marginalised in our communities from joining the privileged in the journey forward.
- We think of Alice Coffin's words in the morning plenary. Half of the budget for the European Lesbian Conference was spent on ensuring diverse attendance and representation. This is a radical measure that we need to unpick, examine and learn from.
- We also think of the way that fundraising is a crucial part of community building and mobilising. This is not because making money allows us to spend money, but rather that fundraising can help to secure the buy-in and engagement of one's supporters.



And so from this, we're thinking about how communities mobilise, how they rise inclusively, and we heard up with a number of prescient ideas:

1. We find creative solutions. Alice's diversity budget is a radical strategy for the crucial issue of representation. Even as Urszula Kuchynska, organiser of the 'Black Protest' said, sometimes you have to do the things that you wouldn't normally do. They can prove the most fruitful.
2. We must encourage and nurture separate spaces. There should always be more spaces available along identity lines, not fewer. Shutting down a lesbian space, a trans space, bisexual, intersex, ethnic or religious space cannot foster unity. But creating and protecting separate spaces can not only help us to cultivate healthier bodies and minds, but it can also help towards securing the participation of these minority communities within the collective.
3. We must recognise that our work has the most traction when we organize around a single cause, when we engage people within that cause, and when we celebrate and share its inevitable success.
4. We think about power. We hold it to account.
5. We remember that things take time. Although we all have an idea of what liberation looks like, community organising itself is not the destination, but a process. So we don't need to have the answers immediately, we just need to keep looking for them. That can be frustrating, frightening even, but it's okay, because our work and our conversations are already richer, deeper and more nuanced than before – if we are doing it right, that is!

And so, ultimately, we are at our healthiest when we move from the individual to the multiple:

- When our organisations do not revolve around one person;
- When our advocacy isn't constructed around the needs of single groups, but intersectional thinking; and
- When we divest power from the single to the communal.

Day 2 - Reflections by Dani Prisacariu

Does anybody remember the community led hashtag from the first evening we got together in the theatre?

It seems that these 2 days brought up various new perspectives to #letuseat. We have been noticing different types of hunger emerging in our common spaces and I want to use these minutes to explore this together.

First of all it looks like we have a great hunger of healing, of Understanding and loving oneself and of exploring our own stories. Of taking back control of how our story is told, of our bodies and our identities. We want to bring our magic to the table and make it seen and recognized as valuable. And for that we need safe spaces, where we can build a sense of unity and from where commonly strategies can emerge.



We also have a hunger of learning and of understanding those realities whom we label as *others*. But in order to do this we need to shift from a perspective of observer, of us and them, and move towards learning about us, about *we*. About our vision towards a shared world, how can we make it real and also be there to live it.

Last but definitely not least we have a hunger of shared power. Of recognition of our different lived experiences. Of shared resources.

Of shifting the perspectives of what is recognized as valuable, what do we believe that brings about change. I had this revelation while listening to the first panel. It is my second time here in the conference, first time i was representing IGLYO an european queer youth organisation which people know and perceive as valuable. Now i am here representing my own initiative group called Gender Talk- we are a bunch of trans, non binary and gender questioning people coming together to build a so needed community. As I met some of you these days and you asked me about what is it that i am doing back home in Romania, i timidly explained about my work using words like a “oh, we are a small group of people”, we are just a year and a half old... we do monthly meetings, talk about gender and queering romanian language. We are at the intersection of a book club and a support group. You know.. those kind of things. And while looking back at myself i couldnt shake the feeling of minimisation. I was making my work, in which i put so much love and energy and that is of great value for my community, seem not so important, disposable- it’s not the serious stuff, you know, policy change, advocacy. But now i reflect back, is my activism not as valuable?

With this thought in mind, I wanna ask you if you can close your eyes and take a deep breath in. What were the discussions that made you feel uncomfortable in the discussions today? Stay a bit with this feeling and let it speak to you: what kind of deep listening do you still need to do? What steps can you make to be proactive in tackling this feeling?

Day 3 – Final reflections

Jay Postic

We have been having a very intense conversations and discussions among ourselves as well as with ourselves for the past two days.

We have been challenged to explore different ways that we can mobilize our communities and rise as movements. We saw examples of movements effecting change in these unfavorable times. And we talked a lot about importance of allies in transforming our realities. We also asked ourselves how do we make sure we are respectful and inclusive of each other’s experiences and identities. How do we combat hierarchies and inequalities within our communities.

The role of allies seems to be one of the central aspects of our joint struggle. We stressed the importance of safe spaces, and this environment fostered safe spaces for various groups to unite around common issues. As reporters, we visited some of these spaces and witnessed our struggles and challenges of unification. We heard very often the concept “nothing about us without us”, and we asked ourselves what does it mean to be an ally? What is the interplay between us here as a community and us as allies of each other? How can we be each other’s allies? What is it that we are supposed to do or not do in order to support each other? What are we supposed to ask or say? How do we develop language, and take a responsibility to make it inclusive.



As was addressed in yesterday's panel, how do we need to shift what 'room' looks like, and I would add, how does it feel as this room continues to shift?

My first ILGA-Europe conference was in 2002, and having a perspective of a 15 year span, I can testify to increasing inclusion of our community. And immense changes 'this room' has underwent. Whereas back then I felt completely invisible and marginalized, whether because of geographical origin (room didn't really know where Croatia or Balkans were) or because of lack of understanding of trans identities and experiences, I feel some of the aspects of my experience are understood more today. I don't feel like I walked into the wrong room anymore, I do feel a sense of belonging to a certain degree but I often wonder how many of us here do. So let's talk to each other more.

How comfortable, or uncomfortable, are we, with each other? How do we support each other here internally? What type of language do we use to communicate with each other?

The community empowerment is at the core of our work. We as a community here become mobilized by empowering each other. This is where it begins. So, I encourage us to be curious, to ask each other about each other's lives and experiences and discover what our potential could be. And remember, we have more in common than what sets us apart.

Tawseef Khan

1. My personal takeaway from this conference is the recognition that, whilst we feel divided, frustrated, disengaged, discontent about where we are at as a movement, about the ability for others to understand us, there is also an unprecedented desire amongst us all to connect, to learn, to feel, to educate ourselves and to bridge these divides. We should take heart from that.
2. As a collective takeaway, I think we should recognise that the unique challenges of today mean that we have to go beyond what we did yesterday. What we did yesterday is no longer enough. It won't help us get closer to liberation. The idea of 'going beyond' incorporates several different threads:
 - Building a network of allies is important. But once we have done that, we need to give our allies direction on what we need from them, and listen to what they need from us.
 - Leadership is important. But at the same time, we need to dismantle hierarchies of power to make sure that our spaces are inclusive and egalitarian.
 - We need to get our language right. Language is important. But then we must move beyond language, so that we are thinking and acting in ways that are consistent with the language and the concepts that have helped us identify oppression, e.g. intersectionality.
 - We need to build trust amongst one another, and then start our work and our interactions from places of love, empathy and compassion.
 - We need to be radical, innovative and creative in our work. We should consider taken the route that seems counterproductive, as these may be the most important roads in our journey towards creating a Europe and Central Asia that doesn't erase an identity or experience, and doesn't leave anyone behind.



Dani Prisacariu

What do you take away from here?

I take away, cherish and value all the feelings which developed in me during all these workshops.. It comes from my personal and our collective experience of pain, of suffering, of lost. Of having to explain oneself and our communities humanity over and over again.

It also comes from so much that you have offered, so much learning and so much shared vulnerability.

I take away from here the fact that prioritising being in contact with my feelings and letting them lead might not be so bad after all. Even if it is uncomfortable sometimes.

What do you wish to be the key takeaway for us collectively?

For us as a community i want us to take away at home the essence of our collective magic. We are so beautiful, so resourceful, so important! You have shared so much of yourselves, and i felt i had space to share myself. I have learned so much from you so thank you and let's continue doing this back home.

And in order to best make use of this beauty we need to develop and rethink our politics of consent. Consent should be the guide in our interactions. It can direct how we interact, how we behave as allies, how we communicate, how we live, the language we use. Innovation and common ground can flourish if we look at each other as us, with empathy, community love, deep listening and trust. With this in mind i wanna ask you to take the rest of the day to listen to even more people with different realities than yours and see what this brings up to you.

With this in mind i would like to turn the attention back to our room. Our constantly shifting room, comprised of all of us here. I would like to ask you to also reflect on the 2 questions that we have also tackled

what do you take away from here

and

what do you wish to be key takeaways for us collectively moving forward?