

Eko Centar Latinovac

The primary mission of Eco Centre Latinovac is to promote and educate in:

1. Conflict resolution and community building
2. Sustainable and renewable environmental practices
3. Reviving and preserving cultural traditions and heritage

Through teaching and learning skills promoting communication, tolerance and understanding Eco Centre Latinovac provides an environment for learning and practicing skills in community building, communication, conflict resolution, dialog, and reconciliation in an atmosphere that affirms our mutual humanity. The skills and activities at Eco Centre Latinovac educate and sensitise participants and the public toward alternative and creative ways of viewing and resolving conflict.

Eco Centre Latinovac is committed to learning from nature's rhythms and systems with respect for all life. We support organic agriculture, build awareness for biodegradable materials, waste management, and renewable energy sources to utilize our delicate balance with nature. By making the connection between our environment and ourselves, we are encouraging systemic thinking and creative problem solving in all of our work.

Due to the rich tradition and culture in the region's villages, Eco Centre Latinovac serves to promote and revitalize the crafts, practices and heritage held for centuries. The rural nature of small villages, the older generations that still live in them, and the existence of the old tools and infrastructures make them an ideal place for learning and communicating the wisdom, knowledge, and crafts of the past, while exploring their relevancy and importance in the present and future. In so doing we seek to preserve, revitalise and learn from the cultural heritage of region.

While honouring the importance of traditional practices, we also acknowledge and promote new technologies and approaches that improve the quality of life while staying in harmony with individuals, communities, and nature. This systemic approach to our work is primary to our beliefs and framework for building peace and cooperation between individuals, communities, nations, our history and future, as well as our environment.

Furthermore, we encourage and support individuals and/or groups to take initiative to build similar projects and/or programs within their own communities.

"Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp"

The "**Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp**" is an annual camp held in Latinovac, a small village in Croatia, where youth from all national, religious and ethnic backgrounds of pre-war Yugoslavia come together to build relationships and learn skills in the areas of Compassionate Listening, Non-Violent Communication, mediation, creative problem solving, and cultural awareness. The rural surroundings, supportive staff, and techniques learned in listening and communicating, combine to create a "safe container" for the participating youth to express and receive each other's views and experiences. Each camp also has a volunteer work component out in the village and community. These projects foster volunteerism among the participants, provide opportunities to work and cooperate together on a common goal, and are of service to the surrounding communities. Other skills in computer science and fine arts as well as cultural crafts and environmental awareness are also important elements of the camp curriculum.

It has become clear that peace-building activities among youth in the region of pre-war Yugoslavia are critical to a lasting peace in the future. The existing situation of social divisions according to

ethnicity after the war has left segregated youth with no joint activities and little or no contact. Hatred, prejudice, and stereotypes are still very common and even growing through a lack of contact and interaction as well as from the history of violence during the war. On a social and personal level, the hopelessness and lack of perspective is the norm. These problems are especially characteristic among the younger population who often cannot find jobs, leading to depression that contributes to a lack of initiative.

The **Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp** is an extraordinary opportunity to build trust and understanding for one another, the world, and what it means to have a culture of peace.

Project History

Established in 1995, Eco Centre Latinovac and under the backdrop of the re-integration of the Vukovar region into Croatia, Eco Centre Latinovac began offering programs designed to bring both Croatian and Serbian youth living in Vukovar, (where the war began), together for workshops and educational trainings. This was a very difficult time to attempt these programs given the fear and violence that had engulfed Vukovar during the war.

Never the less in April of 1998 the first workshop was offered and had a huge impact on those attending. This led to a five-day workshop that was very well received by the youth on both sides of the war.

The first official Peace Camps in 1999 and 2000 took place in Vukovar, and were a remarkable experience and success. These camps expanded to include youth from Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia, representing all three ethnic and religious backgrounds. Some of the service activities in the Vukovar community included reclaiming a city park, planting trees, and cleaning streets and beaches from neglect and the destruction of war. It was very empowering to everyone involved and offered the people of Vukovar an example of youth from both sides of the conflict working together to create community.

The Peace Camps have continued in Latinovac since 2001. The peaceful and beautiful setting of village life in Latinovac provides a very important atmosphere for all participating. The tensions and stress of daily life in war torn surroundings are lifted, making room for emotional release and expression, and create a relaxed backdrop for the activities and skills learned at camp.

The Peace Camp program in Latinovac continues today, although often on a hope and a prayer. Funded by grants and donations, there are few projects of it's kind that go as deeply into personal and inter-personal awareness as the primary means for peace building. All manor of support are needed to continue, and we are deeply grateful for all participation.

“Beyond These Narrow Borders”

Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp in the Balkans

A video journey into reconciliation in a post war region...

TRT - 40:35 or 11:30 minutes.

Original format - Mini DV

Languages - English & Serbo/Croatian

with English, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, or German subtitles

Synopsis

"Beyond These Narrow Borders" follows the experiences of youth participating in the "Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp" in the Balkans. This project brings together youth from all sides of pre-war Yugoslavia to Latinovac, a small village in Croatia, to learn skills in the areas of communication, mediation, and creative problem solving.

It has become clear that peace-building activities among youth in the region are critical to a lasting peace in the future. Social divisions according to ethnicity, hatred, prejudice, and stereotypes after the war has left segregated youth with no joint activities and little or no contact.

Beyond These Narrow Borders is an extraordinary voyage into healing and reconciliation and reflects the spirit in this rich post-war region of South East Europe.

Director's Statement

I began this documentary project after having an unexpected and extraordinary experience as a guest and participant in the “**Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp**” in the summer of 2002. I have been involved in peace and reconciliation work for many years, both as a documentary producer, musician, and trainer in many troubled regions, but have rarely been engulfed in such beauty, heart, and dedication to healing as with this project and those who run it tirelessly and with little to no funding. The palpable feelings of pain and suffering felt by so many in the region, and the response by this small NGO and its founder **Branka Drabek Milekic**, has been and continues to be a humbling and heart opening gift in my life. It is my sincere hope that “**Beyond These Narrow Borders**” manages to express the heart and soul in the experience of this project, over information, as this is truly what is profound about this NGO, its staff, and its mission.

This video has been a labor of love, and has been produced, like the project on which it hopes to depict, with very little funding and a lot of help from many talented and skilled people who gave a great deal to make this video possible. I am very grateful to everyone who was involved in this production, and trust “**Beyond These Narrow Borders**” will at least serve as a pool to dip into for those of us who were privileged to take part in the Seedlings of Peace Summer Camp.

The Video's Mission

This video will have two major purposes:

1. As a fundraising tool for the project.

This NGO, (Non Government Organization), is in a very critical stage of its development. We are in the process of raising the seed money needed to bring the project into self-sustainability. This will be greatly aided by the existence of a strong and moving video that shows the issues from the mouths of the youth involved, and most importantly, the impact of the project on their lives and the region.

2. As a strong tool for awareness and reconciliation in the region.

The segregation and isolation facing most of the region is acute and there is little support for a program that brings youth together from all three sides of the war. The shooting has stopped, but the trauma is immense, and there is often little understanding for the work we are doing or its need. This video will illustrate what is possible; remind people of the time when they did live together, and offer an alternative to the attitudes that permeate the much of the region.