

Playing for Peace



The story about football reconciliation magic The Open Fun Football Schools in the Balkans

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20 Years Anniversary Book for Cross Cultures

Foreword by Anders Levinsen, Managing Director

2018 was the 20th year we organized the Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS). I believe that it is a privilege to experience how the OFFS are still living and how they keep developing and inspiring our community every day. That is motivating me in my everyday work. I would like to use our 20 Years Anniversary as an occasion to thank you all for being part of the Cross Cultures family.

Recently, I saw a very strong and intense documentary about a former Bosnian soldier sentenced to 15 years in prison by the War Crimes Tribunal in Hague, which I think puts our work in relief. In the documentary you meet the war criminal for the first time right after he has served his sentence, in a situation where he explains how much he looks forward to start a new and ordinary life with his wife, family, and work – just like everyone else. But the hopeful dreams of the war criminal were quickly hit by reality:

He could not get a job because nobody wanted to hire a war criminal. He could not immigrate to a new country because no country wanted to issue a visa to a war criminal. And he could not return to his hometown because of all the atrocities he had inflicted on innocent people during the war. At the same time, he was daily haunted by guilt and nightmares. One could feel his pain and anger when he consulted his psychiatrist and told that he could not escape from his past sins and that he felt most of all like "a dead man in a living body". On this basis, the war criminal decided to travel home to Bosnia to search for some of the many innocent victims whom he had assaulted during the war and apology. But even though the victims and the perpetrator looked each other in the eyes and even though it seemed as if the perpetrator sincerely repented his assault and apologized, none of the victims, even 25 years later, were ready to accept the war criminal's excuses and forgive him for his crimes.

Although there are no war criminals in OFFS, then the documentary describes the backdrop that forms the basis of OFFS. It illustrates how the war and the conflicts have torn the country and its population apart, by showing some of the many negative feelings and pains that still persist in people 25 years after the war ended.

OFFS is basically about creating social communities between people across different communities, because we believe that the social communities are helping to unite the communities and that they form the basis of peace, social cohesion, and democracy. Therefore, I am both proud and happy when I experience how people from all sides of the conflict still want to be part of our community and contribute to the bridging between different population groups and doing something good for others - Bosnia's children and future.

But many men in power and the country's administrative structures won't. The country is stuck in a demagogic and bureaucratic mess. Post-war Bosnia has thus developed into a so-called "split-screen-nightmare", where children and young people on one side of the road can't even imagine how the future looks like for the children and young people on the other side of the road. This is because they don't meet in school, in the football club, nor in public institutions. Neighbours from different population groups simply don't know each other. "The others" are the ones you talk about and not the people you talk with. Every year ten thousands of young people immigrate from a futile future of the post-war era's long and frozen shadows.

In Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Montenegro, young people also immigrate in high numbers because they cannot see a future in their own countries either.

I think that this whole wave of migration must call for our attention. Young people need social communities where they can meet across groups and borders and exchange experiences, and on the other hand, they need a platform that allows them to do their own activities at home in their cities - initiatives that can help to give them a stronger local "anchor" and influence their own future.

I am convinced that OFFS can be a good contribution in that context. But it requires us to find a way to involve even more young people as volunteer leaders and coaches - yes, perhaps it is time to consider how to hand over the OFFS to the young generation in the Balkans. It will, of course, require that we dare to think in a new way. It requires that we dare to invite the young people all the way into the engine room while asking our faithful friends / leaders / older generation, who have developed and driven OFFS, to step back and become mentors for the youngsters. But it also requires that we develop the concept further, so that the young people put their own hands on OFFS and on the framework of our community.

In some way it is the same challenge we face in the Middle East. Many young people feel set out of the community because they don't have access to education and work, and because they have very small influence on their own future. Therefore, it has been a great pleasure to follow my Facebook wall in the recent months. It is loaded with amazing posts, pictures, and live videos from various OFFS initiatives from our new colleagues in Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. I have never seen so many different Facebook feats on my FB-page at the same time! And it confirms how our young voluntary leaders and coaches in 2018 succeeded to bring OFFS and sport-for-all to children, youth, and females for a total of over 112,000 direct beneficiaries! I hope that we in the future will be able to consolidate and further develop these new initiatives and platforms, but also transferring these amazing experiences and know-how from the Middle Eastern and North African countries to our other partners, in particular in the Western Balkans.

Another and very successful initiative that I would also like to highlight in this foreword is our “OFFS Plus”, School + Sport + Police (SSP). The idea for this initiative was developed on an international seminar in Sarajevo in 2012. We have had many really good initiatives in this matter, but I will allow myself to say that 2018 was the year when our colleagues in respectively Ukraine and Moldova got through and it provides us with a pathway on how we can use the OFFS platform for future SSP programs in other countries.

On this background I would like to forward my sincere tribute to all the wonderful and dedicated leaders and coaches who have taken the OFFS program to their hearts and build a unique OFFS movement across the world. I am grateful for you to allow me to be part of this movement. I am grateful for all the good work and results we have achieved together during the past 20 years and for all your creativity and meaningful possibilities you have opened up for. And not least I am grateful that you have taught me that good leadership in Cross Cultures means to be a servant of what can happen in our community.

Yours in Fun Football,

Anders

Let us start by going to an Open Fun Football School

Even though we try to be at today's football school in good time, the scene remains the same as always. No matter how much time we have, the children are always there before us. With expectant faces and shy bodies, they are standing there in small groups on their lively feet. Around them luring nets with t-shirts, caps and bottles are waiting - and with a lot of brand new footballs with happy logos, waiting to be inflated and played with.

Then something happens. The headmaster calls the children dividing them into groups, which are pre-made according to age and gender. There is no noise, no trouble, and no buzz. Just quiet discipline. A few kids in the group's switches seats. Everyone is ready.

Like small dogs following their master, the children are tiptoeing out on the field following the heels of their new coach. They gather up by their station behind the magically yellow marking tape, another roll call is made when the children receive their new t-shirts.

The children quickly put on their new t-shirt and afterwards they are all standing pulling it and curiously looking at the motive. Everyone is helping inflating the footballs. There is one ball for each child. As soon as a football is ready, another child happily runs off. Full speed over the grass. All of a sudden there are footballs and kids everywhere.





The coach takes his time and makes sure to speak to all the children. Then he calls for a huddle up. They do a little name game where you must kick the ball to the person in the middle. Already the children seem to be mingled well together, and a good and nice atmosphere leaks out from the close circle.

I climb my way to the top of the battered tribune. There is a good view over all the stations. I let my eyes wander from station to station. At one place, they must throw balls aiming for a hula-hoop, and by another station some big guys are having a loud blast skipping. In one of the corners, hockey is played, and in the center 'regular' football is played. In another corner, there is technical training, and at the station next to it a wild relay race is going on with everyone cheering. Down by one of the big goals, they are shooting at hanging balloons in the corners of the goal.

It is hot and after the first rotation the children are ordered to sit down and take a break. Then the drills start again and the children are slowly trotting to a new station. By the other big goal, a very ambitious coach has started a tough technical drill; the children must volley a football that they are throwing into a trampoline. The children miss and annoyed he is giving the kids a bit of a hard time. It seems totally wrong.

By the other big goal with the balloons, some big girls start doing shooting drills, and they are having a pitiable time hitting the ball the right way. That is also too tough to be funny. A group consisting mainly of girls is playing different games with the skipping rope. The boys are definitely the team playing away. For once they are holding back. The rope is being swung like a high jump bar, and the kids are doing a big effort to climb it.

They are tumbling around in a giggling celebration. The girls are taking special care of a little boy, who is probably not more than four-five-year-old; lovingly they are carrying him over the rope.

Next to the girls, some boys are playing a tag game, where they can free each other by crawling between the legs. Most of them keep a high tempo, but there are also a few just standing and observing. When the game has finished, many of the boys are cheering wishes to the young girl coach: "Football, football!" You do not doubt for a second of what they want to do.

At another station the small children are trying to play something that looks like football, and they are clumping like crazy. It looks comical, but in the cute way. Every time one of them gets the ball, he is running with it by himself and everyone else follows. On goes the wild hunt. But they are definitely thinking they are playing football.

In the far corner, the bigger boys have started a dribbling drill where they must sprint and switch spots, when the coach claps his hands. They are focused and challenged. There is an intense and saturated atmosphere. They are on a roll, and the drill fits them perfectly.

The last station is over, and the children are sloping off from the station closest to me, but the coach calls them together. They are all standing close to each other, and everyone puts their hands towards the center of a circle. Then their battle cry is blaring out, and like always smiles rises, and you feel the energy and happiness in the air, when the kids are scattering. Like an echo you hear the battle cries from the other stations, shooting out with small delays. Thank you for today!





THE BIRTH OF THE BOOK

'This book is supposed to be a tribute. It is supposed to be a present. It is dedicated to all the incredible people, who have worked with the Open Fun Football Schools in the Balkans.'

- That was the modest task of the Managing Director, when I started working on this book.

And he told me many times. Actually, he told me each time I saw him. He looked at me with his intense eyes and his whole body language was screaming this at me. They deserved it so much and it is about time they get something back, he vigorously repeated himself.

It is not supposed to be the usual storybook with facts and a chronological timeline. In the spirit of the football schools it must be a book without all the nice, traditional and bureaucratic content. This book is going to be a vivid story that the readers can feel. It is supposed to leak out from the pages.

The spirit, the magic, and the atmosphere.

Everything that the Open Fun Football Schools are made of. It should be a book telling what the project has done. It should be the story about what is working – also, so others can learn from it...but most of all it should be A THANKS to all the volunteers and for the work that has been put into working with the children and the future of the Balkans.

I am not afraid to admit it. The challenge was huge. The expectations were heavy. In many ways, it would have been easier to write a history book from A to Z, where you did not have to live up to this man with the sparkles in his eyes. Could I capture this very sparkle in the Balkans? Would I manage to find 'that thing' some place in there?

I was calmed several times. – Just go, I was told. Go and look. Go and capture the atmosphere. Talk to the people and it will come to you automatically. The spirit will enclose you and you will know what the Open Fun Football Schools are.

And yes, I went. I travelled many times during spring and summer 2010. I visited seminars, schools, towns, politicians and experts in the Balkans. I talked to people in Denmark and I called people all over the world.

And it happened like they said. I got the Open Fun Football Schools under my skin.

It has been an incredible experience all the way. A wonderful, strong and great experience.

Many things have been moved inside me and many tears have snug out the corner of my eye. I have been in many intense situations – especially, when I had to tell others about the magic – and I have struggled with swallowing a large, warm lump in the throat and keep the revealing tears back. It is a shame that we are raised not to show if things move us. Because that is the greatest proof that the Open Fun Football Schools are so amazing. The Open Fun Football Schools is flooded with emotions.





However, now that I am in the middle of confessing, I also confess that from the beginning I had another huge problem with the project. Who am I to come waltzing in from Denmark, run around for a summer and think that I can capture a project that contains so many years of intense feelings, destinies and quality?

The humility almost knocked me down under the keyboard. However, what happened?

I was received with open arms and no reservations. I was included and entrusted with everything without a filter. When I am sitting here with the many finished pages in front of me, my humility, performance anxiety and nervousness has been replaced with deep respect, gratitude and sincere joy.

Since I wrote this, a handful of years have gone by. We are now in the year 2016. The book has rested and waited for support to be printed – however, the translation for the many languages is expensive and it has not yet been possible. All these close-written pages with the story in Danish have waited to be published. As one final little payback for all the incredible experiences the trips to the arenas of the Open Fun Football Schools have given me, I have gathered a short version and accompanied the text with Per's evocative pictures. The many snapshots never get old or grey...and the story keeps being wonderful.

It is with great pleasure that I can share it here!

READING GUIDE

Story telling carries the soul of the Open Fun Football Schools. Therefore, the book is mostly an attempt to gather all the stories that constitute the schools. At the same time, the book is written in an easily read manner, which makes it possible to jump around and pick and choose stories – depending on what you feel like reading.

Therefore, the book is filled with quotes and personal experiences. That is why the book is not filled with long factual listings and has not stringent, structured data. That is why the books paragraphs have been divided into many small sections and bites. They are served in different colours and shapes, which hopefully makes them easy to locate and pick and choose.

The book is not an objective story. When it comes to understanding feelings and experiences, you can only do it with feelings and empathy. That is why I have not been able to write this book according to the usual objective norms as a neutral communicator. The book you have in front of you is filled with emotions – including the impressions and experiences of the author.

You can read the book the way you want to. You can flick through it and pick and choose. However, you can also read it from beginning till end. No matter how it is read, I do hope that the stories of the book will make an impression and create both memories and pride with many – and give inspiration to ‘project professionals’ and others, who fight to create strong sports projects, which can develop people and society.

Finally, I hope that the book will be irresistible propaganda for the joy. It is thought-provoking how far and good you can go when you use joy as a weapon and have other intentions than creating good experiences for others.

For those of you who want to ‘pick and choose’ the following colour codes might be helpful.

- **All the good stories and general pages are in black**
- **All quotes from visitors in the Balkans are in green**
 - **All factual paragraphs are blue**
 - **All analyses and interpretations are in red**



A SPECIAL THANKS

Before we start, there must be one tradition for the book to keep. There must be room for a thank you.

First and foremost, thank you to Anders who started it all. Anders, who has this incredible talent of seeing opportunities and making things happen. You must keep up to following him. Thank you for the faith, the trust and the freedom.

Then, a huge thanks you to Goran, who as interpreter and faithful travel companion has given so much all the way. The human action on the way is deterrent for the final impression. Thank you for everything you taught me about the Open Fun Football Schools and the country on the way.

Thank you Per the photographer for amazing enthusiasm behind the camera and for the great glimpses of soul and life you have passed on to us all.

Thank you to the incredibly hospital people in the Balkans. Thank you for your openness and your kindness – and not at least thank you for what you taught me about joy. For many years, I have thrived to learn what makes happiness and sport compatible. The Open Fun Football Schools have been the ultimate experience and proof that joy can be used as both target and means. It has been so educational and enriching to experience how joy can be the ultimate weapon against the negative feelings of a conflict by creating relations instead of barriers.

Thank you again and happy reading from Lise.



“THAT IS HOW IT STARTED”

SCHOOL LEADER

I am the manager of a factory and salesman and I have a club in the village. I am also the leader of the football club. The club was destroyed after the war and the city-mayor asked me to try and get the club up, when I heard about the Open Fun Football Schools, which we would love to join.

SCHOOL LEADER

I read about the project in the paper – and that there was a Danish football school, who gathers children and adults despite ethnical background with the purpose to bring children to play together and establish friendships, while the Open Fun Football Schools were bringing the equipment. In my club, we only had one ball for 40 children after the war, so joining it was an ideal opportunity.

COACH

I teach at a public school and I joined for the first time last year. Our headmaster, who is also a member of a football club in the community, is my friend and he invited me to the Open Fun Football Schools, even though I have no football experience. I understood that football was fun and my approach is to make the children happy. I do not care about the football, but I want to learn something new and develop at a personal level.

COACH ASSISTANT

I participated myself at the Open Fun Football Schools last year and this year I am an assistant, even though I am only 12 years old. It was so wonderful to participate last year and the coach left such a good impression that I wanted to be a part of it.

CHILD

I heard that there was football at the schools and then I knew I wanted to go and participate no matter what. Our neighbor told us about the Open Fun Football Schools.

CHILD

My sister told me about it and I made her bring me with her.

CHILD

I heard about it on TV and I knew that it was fun and that you would gain many friends.

CHILD

Our coach told us about the Open Fun Football Schools.





10 coincidences leading to the birth of the Open Fun Football Schools

1. COINCEDENCE

Anders Levinsen broke his leg as a 23-year-old football talent and had to find something else to spend his time on.

2. COINCEDENCE

Anders knew someone who got him a student job as a doorman at the Danish Refugee Council. In time, he has hold several different positions, until they put their foot down. Finish your education or keep working here. Anders chose to finish his education in social geography and public relations.

3. COINCEDENCE

However, one day he was riding his bike home from school. He stopped at a red light at a street corner, where his old colleague from the Danish Refugee Council was standing. He complained and asked Anders if he could take a job in Iraq where they were seconded staff to UNHCR. Anders thanked yes to the offer.

4. COINCEDENCE

Anders had a sort of revelation, while he was doing what men do with their back turned. He found a solution for the UN to a very difficult refugee situation in Northern Iraq. He was a contributing factor to the UN's staff not having to be evacuated and indigent Kurds being brought to safety down from the mountains.

5. COINCEDENCE

By faith, the future UN Senior executive, Jose Maria, was present during the episode in Iraq and he saw a light in Anders. When he became UNHCR Special Envoy to the former Yugoslavia he wanted four

colleagues with him in his team. Anders was one of them. First an ordinary UNHCR-employee called him. Anders firmly rejected. Then another Chief executive of the UNHCR called. Anders still said no. Then Jose Maria called himself. Anders said yes.

6. COINCEDENCE

Anders becomes manager of the UNHCR in Bosnia and returns home with scares on his soul – but lightened by a strong desire to do something good for the people and the country.

7. COINCEDENCE

Anders watches his stepson make a so-called bike-cycle-kick kick on a mattress in his room and finds out that he has learned at a so-called summer football school in Denmark.

8. COINCEDENCE

Anders skips work two days and on day one he goes to watch the football schools and realizes the concept is brilliant and can be used for reconciliation. On day two, he goes to the Danish Football Association and asks permission to use the concept in Bosnia Herzegovina for reconciliation purposes.

9. COINCEDENCE

Even though no one wants to support the project financially, Anders goes to Bosnia and realizes that he still knows people within the UNHCR-system. They give him permission to go through their budget, and he finds a budget-line on public information and he suggests funds from this budget-line to be converted from poster commercials into football schools.

10. COINCEDENCE

The Open Fun Football schools are doing so well the first year that the project must continue...





Foto: Carsten Snebjerg

Foto: Carsten Snebjerg

FACTS ABOUT THE FOOTBALL SCHOOLS

THE BEARING PRINCIPLES

- * The Open Fun Football Schools program should be used as a tool to promote a peaceful co-existence, tolerance, integration, equality and social cohesion between children and adults, who live in societies torn apart by war and conflicts.
- * The Open Fun Football Schools should promote grassroots football for everyone. It must include playing and fun and can include exercises with and without a football working with the whole body.
- * The Open Fun Football Schools must promote women's participation in football at all levels – 40% of all participants, players, coaches, managers and people in the organization – should be girls or women.
- * The Open Fun Football Schools must facilitate social responsibility and all Open Fun Football Schools must be organized in accordance with the so-called 'twin-city' principle, where football clubs, managers, coaches and children are from at least two communities and three local football club representing different groups of population and a diversity of ethnical, social, religious and political groups.
 - * The local voluntary coaches and managers organize the Open Fun Football Schools.
- * The Open Fun Football Schools must be democratic and transparent with roots in the local community.
 - * The Open Fun Football Schools must be organized in accordance with a 'regional strategy', in which education of instructors, managers and coaches organizes in seminars with participants with the other countries of the region.

THE DEFINITION OF AN OPEN FUN FOOTBALL SCHOOL

- * **Open** – the ground principle is that everyone can participate
- * **Fun** – is the code word of how it must take place. The Open Fun Football Schools are about creating as much joy as possible
- * **Football** – is the playroom and starting point – not the goal. It is about playing with your entire body and not just your legs.
- * **School** – it is a school – it is about development, moving forward and learning!

THE PLAY RULES OUT IN THE FIELD

- * **THE CHILD AT THE CENTER** – it is about creating good experiences for everyone
 - * It should be safe- without security there is no base for building
 - * Everyone can join – everyone is equal
 - * There must be top professional preparation
 - * There must be maximum communication
 - * There must be maximum contributory influence
 - * There must be maximum human energy – energy and cheerfulness must be given always

THE OPEN FUN FOOTBALL SCHOOLS 'CLASSIC' CONTAINS

- * A local party with five days of 'music and festival spirits' on a field with

 - * 12 stations

 - * Where approximately 200 children, 15 coaches, 15 assistants, 3 managers participate

 - * And about 150 footballs, 100 cones, 1 hockey set, 10 hula hoop rings, 4 ropes, T-shirts, caps, wristbands, diplomas, CDs, foods and drinks are handed out

In addition, the Open Fun Football Schools as organization delivers other activities – such as 1-day events, street events, 'things talk' environmental workshops etc.



” THE BEST PART”

MONITOR – INSTRUCTOR

The best part is working with the children, seeing them happy, and enjoying playing

PARENTS

Seeing your child so happy – that is the best part

COACH

The best part about being a coach is getting to know so many people. At the latest seminar I was participated, I saw so and learned many things I would never have seen in other places.

INSTRUCTOR

Working with the children at the Open Fun Football Schools gives me so much energy. It is great to feel like you become a child yourself again.

ASSISTANT

The best part is playing and watching the children and their friendships. It is a great experience and working with the children is so wonderful.

INSTRUCTOR

To be at the Open Fun Football Schools is like the most beautiful color and most beautiful song. The heart feels excitement and flies. So beautiful! I feel like hugging them all.

COACH AND FORMER MANAGER

The best part is when the children form good friendships, walk hand in hand and hug each other. It reminds me of the old days, when I was a child and there was no tension.

When I watch the children, I can see things are moving in the right direction.

When we help build friendships between the children, I know we won.

BOY 10 YEARS OLD

I do not usually play football, but it is the second time I participate and I like it very much. Maybe I will play football afterwards.

The best part is the penalty kick competition.

But the very best part is all the new friends I have gained with whom I keep in touch.

GIRL 14 YEARS OLD

I like all the stations because there is solidarity everywhere,
and when I am with my friends, I feel good.

THE STORY OF THE OPEN FUN FOOTBALL SCHOOLS

Right from the beginning of the Open Fun Football Schools, stories have been told.

And right from the first idea was created the Open Fun Football Schools have been loaded with good stories.

Therefore, it only feels right to try and tell the story about the Open Fun Football Schools by letting some of the central creators of the story tell it.

Thus, here is the short and personal excerpt of the story about the Open Fun Football Schools divided into 10 epochs told by four dominant people.





INTRODUCING THE STORY TELLERS

The four tenors of the Open Fun Football School program – the four seniors – the cornerstones and the foundation. All four have been there from the very beginning.

Anders Levinsen. The founder, the originator, the principal organizer. He is the passionate man, who has carried the project forward and who keeps pushing forward, inspire and who fights a never-ending battle to provide the essential funds.

Esko – Esad Hadzijasifovic – is the first man in the Balkans, who took the project to heart, and today, Esko is the man at the Sarajevo office.

Velimir Suban is also – like Esko – from the group of the chosen ones, who came to Denmark on the first trip in 1998. He has been there all the way and the past years, he has been the man in charge of the office in Zagreb.

Ceno Aleksandrovski is the boss in FYR Macedonia, the leader of the office in Skopje and the man who has made Open Fun Football Schools his project using convincing power and energy.

UNTIL 1998

BEFORE THE OPEN FUN FOOTBALL SCHOOLS CAME TO THE BALKANS

ESKO

My story goes all the way back to the former Yugoslavia. It was a big country of sports, where sport was number one and with football as the main sport.

And then came the war. That is tough on every single person – what war can do! And what it did here in Bosnia! Ties between people are torn apart. We were separated based on ethnicity. All clubs and teams were multi-ethnic with many different people. They were torn apart and people could no longer meet.

The war also destroyed the infrastructure – buildings, houses and stadiums. Our football fields became prison camps and the locker rooms became prisons. The sports facilities were used as military camps for weapons and missiles.

For me as a human being and athlete, the war meant that I could no longer move freely and meet with other people. Furthermore, it was the end of football. I lost the sense of community and my friends. However, losing my freedom was the worst and the hardest part. The towns I lived in and came from were turned into war zones. Even though my old football friends and I lived only one kilometer apart, there was no chance of contact.



Foto: Carsten Snebjerg

That was the worst part. The thought of never seeing my old friends again, made me lose heart. I was living in a mixed marriage with a Serbian wife and much of my family had fled the country, but my heart went to the loss of the multi-ethnic sport.

After the war, football was nationally isolated. Croats, Serbs and Muslims had each their own league. When the football associations started working again, they were no longer under the same roof. Everything was lost. There were no traveling or solidarity left – there was nothing left of the good old football.

And then came a blond man, Anders Levinsen!

There is an urban legend in the Balkans saying that if someone were to save the Balkans, it would be a blond man. Like some old superstition or a sort of Jesus.

And Anders came to my old club in Vogosca and told me about the project. It seemed like everything opened. Finally, an opportunity presented itself of no longer living apart.

Another Bosnian Dane told me: “That man has a great vision and good ideas. This is an opportunity to make children happy. Follow him!”





1997

THE START UP

ANDERS

I am at home, building my house, and trying to find myself following my assignment in Bosnia 1992-93. I was stationed for UNHCR in Bosnia during the war and I have had a very dramatic life. I was testing myself in different job positions and ended up in a consultant company that offers negotiation techniques and conflict management.

During the war, I learned what war is and what war does to people. National war psychosis eats people from the inside and radicalizes things. I have learned that there are things more important than food, clothing, medicine and protection. You must use the emergency aid to handle the conflicts. The most important aspect is for people to communicate. Peace and stability is something civil society practice through dialogue and interaction with each other. Thus to remove images of the enemy and fear, it is very important to cross the former frontlines and “put a faces on each other” and in that way taking the tensions out of the situations. Correspondingly if you are to try and reunite a country divided into three, you must unite the people in it.

The problem is that the former frontlines keep on living inside of us. We remember, feel and know exactly what happened where and when. Those experiences live inside us. To move on, it is important to take the small step to the other side. The important thing is to make people communicate again and make people come out on the roads and cross the invisible borders and old frontlines.

Therefore, I you want to reconcile people I believe in projects and activities which is building on what people have in common in contrary to projects and activities that are projecting the conflicts.

One day I saw my son Mads make a so-called bike-cycle-kick at home on his mattress. Surprised I ask him where he learned that and he tells me that he learned it at the football school he was been attending in the summer. I was curious to hear more, so I call in sick at work and the next day I get on my bike to go to the football school with Mads.

At the football school I saw an amazing picture. Between 80 and 100 children were gathered at the facilities of my local football club. There were small and big children, boys and girls, black and white and everything was well organized and worked better than everyday training.

As I am watching the football school, it strikes me that this concept is compatible in Bosnia. The next day, I call in sick again and went to the Danish Football Association (DBU).

I knock on Mr. Jan M Hansen's door, the man who saw the concept in the Netherlands and brought it to Denmark. The DBU was ready to help me with manuals and seminars, he said, but they could not give me funds to start up the schools in Bosnia.

In this way I have got access to the concept and the idea. But my private employer wanted to make money and if I was to make the concept under the auspices of him, I had to earn my own salary three times. So, something was not adding up. Because I considered this type of action a humanitarian action rather than an income generating activity.





I was at a point in my life where I was feeling sorry for myself and I needed to move on. My wife Tine also pushed me. She told me that I had to go to Bosnia to visit my friends and the country and to reconcile with my past.

On a more practical level, I needed to have a formal organization behind me to receive any funds. A good opportunity emerged, when entrepreneur, Carsten Nielsen, who had established the charity Danish Sports Aid, contacted me. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a bad decision, because the organization was not able to gather the necessary funds.

I created a project description and contacted all the organizations that could have an interest to support the project. But the answer from the Danish Red Cross, Unicef, the Danish Refugee Council and the Danish sports organizations DIF (DK-NOC) and DGI were all the same: they thought it was an interesting project, but they did not believe in it. Since I was unable to raise the funds for such project in Denmark I decided to go to Bosnia at my own expense on fact-finding and to explore the possibilities. The Danish Refugee Council helped me by putting an interpreter and a car at my disposal.

Initially, I visited people I knew from the wartime. I went to the UNHCR and ECHO. I explained my idea and subsequently they told me they liked the idea but they did not have any funds.

The UN and the EU, however, had a declaration named the “Open City Initiative” with the purpose to pay special attention to cities that was open to reintegration of returnees and minorities. By coincidence, the head of the UNHCR was a former colleague, who had been the UNPROFOR military liaisons officer to UNHCR.

He liked the idea very much, he said, but he did not have access to a budget-line that could support such a project. Hence I asked him to show me his budget and I found a post, we could “remodel”. Thus I suggested that UNHCR instead of putting money into large outdoor signboards, which advertised for UNHCR building projects, I suggested that we could put commercials on footballs, banners and alike and see how many times we could get pictures and adverts into the local newspapers.

But the UNHCR official was afraid that the headquarters would consider this idea too creative. So, I had to call the CEO in Genève. I was so lucky to know him from my time during the war. I explained that I needed the money and I proposed the mentioned budget-line. He agreed. “Since it is you”, he said, “but please spend the money wisely”.

I got the first funds from UNHCR. In return I should use the Open Fun Football schools to bring together people across former front-lines and I should generate positive stories for the UNHCR in the local media.

Thus I had my first small amount of funding and I was hoping that the Danish Sport Aid could get me some more funds. But that working relationship ended quickly, because the Danish Sport Aid was unable to pay their bills and I had to cover up from my own pockets.





1998

THE HUNT FOR THE FIRST PEOPLE AND CITIES

ESKO

I had a meeting with the management of the Bosnian Football Association. Together we tried to identify people from divided communities we thought would like the idea. Together with Anders and the Danish Refugee Council, we travelled across Bosnia to talk to officials from the Open Cities initiative and to potential school leaders. Some said yes and some said no. We were very lucky to find people who shared our attitude and vision.

It was a huge opportunity for me personally, which I seized, when we were going to Denmark on a seminar. It was incredible suddenly to travel after living in a 500 meters' radius for five years. On that trip, I met friends from all other nationalities and leaders from all the 12 open cities that were going to hold open Fun Football Schools. We knew each other from the football world during the time before the war. And we all shared the same feeling of joy over meeting old friends again.

SPRING 1998

THE FIRST SEMINAR IN DENMARK

VELIMIR

I knew most of the other people who were going to Denmark. Anders had found participants, who knew each other already; people who would not cause trouble, if they were to work on projects together. In the group were people, who I saw for the first time since the war ended and it made me happy. I was also happy that during the war, sports athletes and football athletes had not been part of the nationalistic and extreme political fronts. During the violent events of the war, most had managed to stay 'normal'.

I was very excited about the journey and I was looking forward to learning new things. I also believed that I could go back and carry out projects in the local area. However, I was also sure that it was not going to be easy. We were poor and in poor times, it is the primitive people who dominate and govern. Just like it was those people, who had the big roles and took the big responsibility during the war.

We flew to Copenhagen via Ljubljana and it turned out to be a very unfortunate situation for me. The airport in Ljubljana was a transit zone. Since I was holding Croatian passport I didn't need a visa to get out of the transit. But the rest of the group had to stay overnight on the benches until the next day. My sister-in-law picked me up and we talked about the tragic and humiliating situation. I was no better, bigger or smarter than my colleagues. Before the war we could travel everywhere, but suddenly all these limitations had emerged. The same happened on our way back, but at that time I chose to stay at the airport with my friends.

When we arrived in Copenhagen, we met 'our' Anders and Goran. I call them and the other Danes, who we met, for 'ours', because we met so many incredible people. The Danes have spent all their means trying to help us. That is something I will never forget.

We were privately accommodated, and I was fortunate enough to live with Bosnian refugees from Trebinje. They were Muslims, but that was not a problem, and I felt welcome and as part of the family. They opened their doors to me and I am still in touch with them to this day.



Archive photo. The first seminar in Denmark. CCPA 1998



Foto: Carsten Snebjerg

I learned a lot on that seminar in Denmark. Basically, I learned that if we were to attain anything, we had to work as a team and help each other. Something I have always told my former players. However, as I came to Denmark with the rest of the group, I finally realized what a real team is and why playing together is so important.

I remember an episode when we had to co-operate on building Lego bricks. We all felt like finishing as fast as possible and we aimed at winning over each other. If someone needed a specific brick, we were hiding it from him. However, at some point we realized that winning was not important and that we all became winners by finishing.

Something else I learned was to have tolerance and respect when working with children. Children are small and equal human beings. We have not always thought of them in that way in the Balkans and not as on the same level as in Denmark. I will not say that we have been savages, but the relationship between child and coach has been very different and there has not been any specific contact.

During our stay in Denmark we also created our first manual. Esko, Goran and I were given the task by Anders.

The three of us made a six-page manual. I would be too embarrassed to show it to anyone today, because people would laugh. However, I am very proud that we made the first manual, which became predecessor for the excellent manuals we have today.

1998

PREPARATION FOR THE START-UP

ANDERS

There was one thing that was very important in the project from the beginning. I was very annoyed with how other aid organizations were trying to solve the difficult task of helping refugees from Balkan to return. They organized so-called 'Go and See trips' where the refugees could come home and cry while seeing their old houses. You must give the refugees some specific tools in their hand; otherwise, all you will get is mourning.

Thus, it was important for me to find some refugees living in Denmark who was considering repatriating to Bosnia. Instead of providing them a Go and See visit to help them make up their minds, I wanted to provide them with a mission on their Go and See visit. In this way it was my intention to offer them the possibility to Go home and See Bosnia again and evaluate the possibility to return while at the same time assisting me to interpret the "Danish" concept children's football to Bosnian – so to speak.

We identified 10 potential returnees. Among them was Goran, who stayed in the project.

Two out of ten persons returned home. That was a very high success rate compared to other repatriation-programs.





1998

THE FIRST LEADER AND COACH RECRUITMENT

ESKO

First, we had to find suitable coaches and leaders in the other communities and areas and ensure that there was a multi-ethnic distribution. This, however, was not an easy task because of several conditions.

The war was still present in many places through propaganda in media and with flags, materials, pictures and checkpoints maintained by UN. All those people, who were a part of the project of organizing the Open Fun Football Schools, were different. They were people who had refused the war and the division of our country it brought along. On the other side were people, who were only interested in nationalism and against any means to unifying the country again. They did not want the Open Fun Football Schools because they wanted to maintain the country divided.

Furthermore, in Bosnia we had to play under completely different circumstances than in Denmark. We had to play without fields, goals, and nets and with a huge lack of footballs. At first, we did not think the project was possible under those circumstances. However, it turned out that sometimes bad conditions became an advantage.

SUMMER 1998

FIRST SEMINAR

ANDERS

We were very poor. We had no funds and I realized that the Danish Sport Aid were not able to provide the promised funds. Therefore, I asked my good friend, the mayor of Tuzla to help me with the accommodation for the first seminar. He promised me to provide accommodation free of charge, but I was so foolish not to check out conditions of the accommodation.

Further the equipment came very late because the Danish Sport Aid did not pay their bill to the forwarding agency. However we managed to wake up the mayor of Tuzla and the chief of customs 5 o'clock in the morning in order for them to release the goods. My friends from the Danish Football Association helped me to unpack and distribute the goods and we just as we packed the final coach bag the participants started to arrive. Everything was lined up I the very last second.

But we had prepared a row of equipment and apparel for each town. But the distribution got out of control even before we started as the participants started to steel form each other. They took whatever was in their range, even from their friends. To me it was a completely new and unexpected attitude.





SUMMER 1998

FIRST SEMINAR

VELIMIR

When we were to receive the first equipment, it happened at a time when nobody had anything! The clubs did not have a single football. Anders and Goran and the rest of the staff had made 12 rows of equipment, one for each Open Fun Football School. While the first group received their bags the rest of the groups started to steal from each other and consequently there were no bags left for those participants that came late. I remember coming into a big room. Anders was on the rostrum. He asked us where the bags were gone, and how we should ever be able to implement this program with the purpose to build confidence and friendship with each other with? I was so embarrassed. This was not Bosnia. I was so sad that our Danish friends got the wrong impression about us.

Another detail at the first seminar was the accommodation. We were all accommodated in military barracks! Can you imagine that Muslims, Croats and Serbs were accommodated in the same military barracks only a few years after the way has stopped? We could not imagine how this decision was ever taken and furthermore Croats, Serbs and Muslims were separated. We – the Croats – were accommodated in the barracks next to the military police. Of course some people did not feel comfortable. However, I tried to use my sense of humor and make fun out of the situation. I tried cheering and tell my colleagues that they should take it easy as that we were living at the safest place in Tuzla.

1998 SUMMER

THE FIRST SCHOOL

ESKO

I was the headmaster at the first Open Fun Football School in Vogosca. The fact that we had been in Copenhagen and were now establishing a school was a big thing. It was like when you are having visitors, who you are very fond of. You decorate, clean and prepare all the best you have. You take everything from the refrigerator and serve them. It was so huge that this was happening. We needed help from the local community and so many donors showed up and supported us. Serbs, Croats and Muslims, who used to fight each other, had showed up. The coaches brought food from home. There was fruit and bananas and so much more that the sponsors had provided. People from the community and the mayor came to the Open Fun Football School to speak with the children.

First, we had had to find the children. Some had fled the community; some had stayed and some had returned. We had walked the streets and found old friends. This area contained most Muslims. I had to go to other areas to find Croats and Serbs, who wanted to participate. In the beginning, things did not go so well in a term of show-rate – but that was ok. There were not any girls either. We had to talk with the parents and break down prejudice. In some places, they called it the game of the devil.

In the beginning, we made the deal that there was not to be any national flags or other nationalistic symbols. Only the flag of the football school was allowed. In general, we were very careful not to talk about politics or the war. At the same time, we had a feeling that we as athletes were not the ones who had wanted the war or wanted to separate people.





SUMMER 1998

THE FIRST SCHOOL

VELIMIR

At first, I had announced the plans of the Open Fun Football Schools in public and then I tried to find a coach-leader and a technical leader, who were respectively Muslim and Serb. The two would coordinate and choose the coaches. They made sure to choose coaches, who had not been involved in the cruelties during the war.

I had made a small office, where all the information material about the Open Fun Football School was available. Here, you could get the registration forms that the parents could sign. At that time, there were 50 per cent Croats and 50 per cent Muslims in the area. There were not many Serbs or other minorities. That was a problem. Another problem was space related: we only had room for 192 children, but there were more than 500 children that signed up. The worst part was seeing all the tears from the children, who could not be part of the Open Fun Football School. Who should we pick and choose? I talked to Anders and we established a school with 236 children, in this way remedying some of the problem without solving it.

The football field was divided into two. There was an invisible line from the war, splitting the field. There was a Croatian and a Muslim stand on each side. On the same playground, one team played for the Croatian championship the other team played for the Muslim championship.

Also the training was separated. Thus the training took place on each half of the field. If the ball was kicked to the other side, no one dared to take it back.



Since we came with our Open Fun Football School, the invisible separation line was erased. We established stadiums on each sides of the field, we distributed the equipment everywhere and we used both stands. The field was like the most beautiful flower. All you could see was happiness and joy.

I did not see any Serbian, Croatian or Muslim children. They were all Bosnian children. That is the way it was the first year and the separation just decreased each year.

Further I had been looking for sponsors and donors and I came in touch with the manager of the post service in Central Bosnia. He donated some money, but he also gave us some plastic tape that they used when marking areas in the workplace. He said that we might be able to use it...

We needed the tape on the third day at the school. It had been raining in the afternoon and all the lines had been washed away. I used the yellow tape to mark the playing field. And from this very day we have always used the marker tape to divide the field into stations across the whole world.

1998 /1999

AFTER THE FIRST YEAR

ANDERS

When I came home from Bosnia after our first season, I knew that we had made unique project for children and their voluntary coaches and we had delivered good equipment. Thus we had proved that the Open Fun Football Schools could be a unique platform that could bring people together after the war. We had children and coaches with Serb background in the town of Gorazde. This was the first time that Serb children were in Gorazde after the war, and it was the first multiethnic event post war. We had Muslim children playing together with Croatian children in Central Bosnia. We had children from Mostar-East playing with children from Mostar-West. And I am sure that based on this experience it would be easier for them to cross the line next time.

Hence when I came home I wrote a letter to all the school leaders thanking them for their efforts and telling them that it was now up to them to continue the good work and make the good initiative sustain as I would resume my ordinary work again. However in December 1998 I receive the Michael Laudrup-Award for the initiative and at the same time Esko called me crying and begging: Please do not shut this project down. It is too good.

After consultations with Tine, my wife, it would be a shame to stop now. A combination of two factors decided the matter. It had been an incredible experience and I had enjoyed appreciation for my efforts. Furthermore, I realized that this project contained tools that were needed and that others could not deliver.

Overnight, I quit my well-paying job. There I was. I had no job or no funds for another season. I knew nothing about what was going to happen after that.



Once again, I went on a tour to all the big organizations. Save the Children, Danchurchaid, the Danish Red Cross, the Danish Refugee Council, DIF, and DGI. They all praised what I had done. However, none of them wanted to host the program even though I promised them that I would rise the necessary funding.

Finally, I went to the priest in Taarbaek – my residence community – and asked him for the advice: What can we do?

Torkild Grosbøll proposed me to initiate an association, and we started brainstorming over people we could invite for a founding meeting at the vicarage in February 1999.

We were 8-10 good persons at the meeting and together we established the association CCPA, Cross Cultures Project Association. Jens Christensen, a very unique person, attended the meeting. He was a retired ambassador, former Chief of Department in the Danish ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was considered the grey eminence in the Danish diplomacy and within the political system, but I did not know him beforehand. He commented the articles of the proposed association statutes and was the one who spoke the most. I do not know exactly what tricked him, but he went into the organization without hesitating, and luckily for us he accepted to be the chairman of our new association.

Jens is incredibly acute and have a great way of seeing future perspectives and there is no doubt what so ever that without Jens we would never have been able to take the Open Fun Football Schools to this stage.



On top: Jens Christensen anno 2014.

Left: Jens Christensen between the Danish Prime Minister J.O.Krag and the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, P.Hækkerup

Right: PM J.O. Krag and MoT I. Nørgaard sign the EEC Rome Treaty 1972. Jens is carefully overlooking their signatures



1999

THE SECOND YEAR WITH THE OPEN FUN FOOTBALL SCHOOLS

ANDERS

To major things happened: we went back to ECHO that had a very talented Swedish official, Carl Hallergaard, in Brussels, who gave a lot of support in favor of the project. However, we had to go through country representative, Richard Lewartowski, who was ECHO's man in Bosnia. At first, he was very difficult to read because during our conversation we went from establishing 30 to 9 to 16 Open Fun Football Schools. Finally we agreed 23 Open Fun Football Schools to be financed by ECHO. However, Lewartowski turned out to be not as bad as he was painted. We established all the Open Fun Football Schools, and he suddenly realized what the schools might accomplish. He took the Open Fun Football Schools to his heart as the ECHO flagship and he showed up, as we later received the Danish Peace Award.

1999 was an incredible year. First, I went back to Bosnia and arrived during the Ramadan. At this occasion Velimir informed me that he did not want to participate anymore. Then I went to Esko's meet with Esko at his home, but he did not want to be a part of it either.

Esko's wife yelled at Esko and called him a coward. "You tell Anders to come back and establish Open Fun Football Schools here. Anders gives up his job to get here, and when he asking for your assistance you say no. That is not fair". Later Esko called me back. He would like to be a part of it after his coming hip surgery.

We received approx. 2 million DKK from ECHO and we got a small office in Sarajevo.

1999
ESTABLISHMENT
ESKO

During the period, when I started working with the Open Fun Football Schools, I become ill in the hips. In February 1999, I had my first surgery. I said I could not participate in the operation, but my wife convinced me to continue.

I was going to establish an Open Fun Football Schools in my birthplace area and where the Serbs were the majority. They told me that there were no Muslims left and that they all had fled the area. Previously, 90 per cent of the area had consisted of Muslims. I walked the streets, knocked on doors and found former teammates and children.

In 1999, we established more than 20 schools together with 80 communities and I travelled all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was a huge milestone for our country. Suddenly, the Open Fun Football Schools had become acceptable; something which brought people together. It was a miracle!

1999 was also the year we had a seminar in Maglaj and when the multi-ethnic football schools had their breakthrough. It was the seminar where Anders brought his daughter Amalie, who slept under the table during the seminar, and when she was awake, we had to work on our own.





1999

SEMINAR MAGLAJ

ANDERS

I was ready for the annual leader seminar and I felt well equipped as an expert. I could use my own background as player and coach and my knowledge of Bosnia.

Christian Bordinggaard from the Danish FA was to assist me as instructor on the seminar, but his plane could not land, so he got there on time. Concurrently, private circumstances meant that I had to bring my one-year-old daughter Amalie.

There I was! Alone with 34 men and a child in her diapers. I could either cancel the event or make the best of it. I had prepared everything with content and games. The good part was that my daughter had fixed nap times. So when she was sleeping I put her under the desk and then I could talk for half an hour. Afterwards, I delegated tasks and exercises for the participants and when Amalie woke up I took care of her.

When I came out on the field, I noticed that no one had done as I have requested them to do. Either they thought that the exercises I had prepared were not any fun or they were too advanced for the children. Instead they had made their own exercises that were much better. Following the first rotation we went back in the class room, talked for half an hour and then we went back on the field.

The same thing happened again. Okay, I laid flat down. I was no longer the expert. There was no reason for me to come and teach them anything. That was when the concept of the instructor seminar occurred. Our Bosnian leaders should coach the coaches and develop the concept.

It was also during this seminar that Radovan Zdrle from Pale was there. We sat in rows heading to the ball, when he by accident broke his nose. He was a very important and central person with many good contacts in the Serb entity, so I was afraid he would disappear from the project. Zdrle was afraid to go to the hospital because of his past during the war, so I gave him a bottle of Whisky to soothe the pains until he got home. After that episode, I hired him on my own account, because he was so important for the project.

1999

COACH SEMINAR IN PALE

ANDERS

I remember it as if it was yesterday, how we were sitting in our small office in Sarajevo. I knew that if we were to move on, we had to do something huge and significant, and I wanted to conduct a seminar in Pale. Muslims had not been living there since the war. A big international summit meeting was taking place in Sarajevo, including the most important world leaders. Thus my plan was to conduct a multi-ethnic seminar during the same period to show the world (and the entire world press) how we stimulated reconciliation and peaceful coexistence through the Open Fun Football Schools. We were sitting at the office wondering. I asked more than once: "Esko, dare we go to Pale?" Esko looked down. I asked for the third time: "Esko, dare we go to Pale?" Finally, I sliced the silence. "Yes, we will do it". Esko looked up. "Yes, we will do it."

All three groups of Bosnians, Croats and Serbs were invited to the seminar, but as we drove to Pale in the morning, we were sure that not everyone dared showing up. However, they were all there, and the Muslims from Gorazde were waiting for us, when we arrived. All the coaches arrived, and only the ones from Mostar were short of people, since a car bomb had blown up. We started the Bon Bon Cup, when someone suddenly shut into the air close by. We all duck, but Radovan Zdrale from Pale told us to keep calm, since it was just a wedding taking place. But I have no doubt that it came from people trying to scare us.

However, the seminar was on and I had brought my son Morten, so I was busy. But against all my expectations no one from the press showed up at all! Finally, the last day a journalist from the Danish broadsheet paper Politiken showed up together with a Finnish journalist and a TV crew. Even though Pale was only 16 kilometers away from the centre of Sarajevo; no taxi driver would take them. They even tried bribing the taxi drivers with an amount equaling a full month's salary. So, they ended up taking three taxis and walk across the borders, even though it had taken them 2 ½ hours. They arrived, just as we were finishing on the third day, so we did a round more in honor of Finnish TV.



“TO BE THERE ON THE FIELDS”

COACH – THE SECOND YEAR

That feeling of joy is indescribable. The heart is filled with strength. I get so happy, when I see hundreds of children, who are happy.

COACH

It is almost like winning a price in the lottery. It makes me younger. When I see the children happy and smiling, it is contagious. It is good for a 62-year-old senior citizen.

COACH

Just imagine being there with 350 children, so innocent and with no evil thoughts. That makes you relax. You know they have no intend of cheating you or doing bad things. I am particularly happy when I can make a child laugh. Or when someone gives me a cap.

COACH

Those happy faces that dance around with no prejudice are incredible. Everyone is equal. It is so wonderful to be there.

INSTRUCTOR

It is like the most beautiful color and the most beautiful song. The heart feels the excitement and flies. I want to hug them all.

A SMALL SELECTION OF THE CHILDREN ARE ASKED ON THE WAY OUT OF THE FIELD WHICH GRADE THEY WOULD GIVE THE SCHOOL TODAY ON A 1-10 SCALE?

1. A SCHOOL IN KOSOVO

The first child we ask is a little beefy fellow. He says “5”. Then a big group comes along, who all enthusiastically shouts: “10”.

2. A SCHOOL IN MACEDONIA

Here, the enthusiasm is big: “10 ½, 10 – 10 – 10 – 10 – 10 – and about 10 ½...”

3. A SCHOOL IN BOSNIA/CROATIA

Also, big enthusiasm here: “9 – 10 – 10 – 10 – 100! – 15 – 10”. “Good” says a young guy, who still does not know the numbers.

4. A SCHOOL IN TUZLA, BOSNIA

The positive attitude has no end: “10 – 10 – 10 – 20 – super”.

5. A SCHOOL IN PALE, BOSNIA

A boy who has attended the schools the past three years gives the following judgement: “10 years for this year and perhaps 9 ½ for the previous years...”

1999

SEARCHING FOR MORE FUNDS

ANDERS

As we reached winter 1999, we once again were short of funds. I approached the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who thought it was an incredible project. However, they were working in accordance with the EU Peace and Stability Pact facilitating Peace and Stability through cross border collaboration. I politely thanked 'no' to develop a regional model for the Open Fun Football Schools, as my focus was on Bosnia – and I did not have other countries on my mind.

Lewartowski from ECHO, on the other hand, had come to realize how influential the project was. We had proved very successful in getting access to the hot spots he wanted to reach. Hence, Lewartowski offered us a very huge contract on behalf of ECHO, and among other things we agreed on making an event in Srebrenica to celebrate our achievements and future cooperation.

Thus, we managed to organize the first ever multi-ethnic event in Srebrenica. At that time Srebrenica was a town with only Serbian citizens – mainly Serbs who had been expelled from other parts of Bosnia. Out of the 60 Muslim children we managed to bring to the event, 16 had lost their fathers during the genocide. Most had lost family members and friends, and 40 of them had been besieged in Srebrenica during the war. It was very difficult and it demanded huge persuasiveness to convince the parents to let their children go. First, we told them, we found it important that they considered the initiative meaningful. Secondly, the parents had to have complete faith in our organization and everything had to be planned down to the last detail. Third, it had to be so attractive for the children to participate that they would insist or even cry, if they were not allowed.





It took three meetings with all the parents of the children. First, we had a joint meeting where we told them that we would like their children to participate and that it was important, because it was their country as well. It meant a lot to the children to experience that Bosnia was a country, where everyone could live together in peace.

After the meeting, Esko visited all the families at their homes and emphasized that he specially wanted the son or daughter of that family to participate. On the last joint meeting, we had a specific agenda. We agreed that there should be a telephone hotline where everyone could call home and tell how it went. Everyone joint.

In addition, we needed to include 13 different international and local organizations to negotiate the festival. There were lots of meetings and we made a detailed script. We did not want the military involved at all. I insisted that we would only like the local authorities to oversee and monitor the security.

Fall 1999

STREET EVENT IN SREBRENICA

ESKO

Realistically, we had nothing to do in Srebrenica because of the general atmosphere. Nothing was working and there was nothing. It was difficult to organize anything at all. I visited the town together with representatives from the Danish Refugee Council. They assessed how the situation was and they noticed that there was no roof on the houses. I also noticed that there was not a single football in town. The school was mostly a ruin and the field was overgrown with all kinds of stuff.

The most important thing was that the children from Vogosca were going to return. There were many refugees from Srebrenica living in Vogosca.

As agreed, SFOR provided transport for the children and escort within the Federation area. However, against all agreements they also escorted the busses from the air as they had several soldiers present to monitor the security. Thus, there were soldiers around the field, in personal carriers, in other vehicles, in military busses, and a helicopter circled above the area.

The SFOR was in a state of alert. We wondered why, because we had prepared the event in details and agreed with SFOR that they should not be visible during the event.

Anders came from Copenhagen. There were many journalists, including the BBC and CNN. We came to the school before the children from Vogosca. Everyone was eagerly waiting if they were going to arrive. It turned out that they were late because of the cold and snow on the roads.

It was wonderful to see the local children, as the bus came out of the fog on the road. Everyone got up and applauded.



...OSTACINAMA
KOJI NIJE KONAČAN

BRATUNAC
BIJELINA
FOČA
HAN PIJESAK
ROGATICA
SARAJEVO
SOKOLAC
SREBRENICA
SREBRENİK
UGLJEVIK
VIŠEGRAD
VLAŠENICA
ZVORNIK

8372...
UKUPAN BROJ ŽRTAVA
KOJI NIJE KONAČAN

FALL 1999

STREET EVENT IN SREBRENICA

ANDERS

I was waiting on the spot by the school – the spot where children and women were separated from the men during the massacre in 1995 – and 400-500 people were eagerly waiting together with me. I made a bet with Lewartowski. He did not believe that the children were going to arrive. Then suddenly, we heard helicopters and armored personal carriers. This could not be happening. It was against all agreements. It was a written agreement that the locals were going to oversee security and that the SFOR was to stay far away. I was very upset. How could the SFOR do this to us? But then the bus arrived with the children from Vogosca and I had to shed a tear. The children got out of the bus and people started clapping their hands. It was so amazing. It was huge. That's how we opened the town.

Soon we realized that it had to go well. The children were mixed according to size and town with each other. Music was playing and by rotation number two, everything had found its own rhythm. After that, we agreed that there should always be music. And Srebrenica was the place where the word RHYTM found its meaning.

Impatiently I looked at my watch and waited for us to finish the event in good faith. Just as we were finally ready to go home again after a successful day, we discovered that we were missing some children. There was great panic just until we found them in the process of exchanging phone numbers.

As I left with Lewartowski, he told me that this was the best project in Bosnia that he had ever sponsored, and that he would like to offer us a three-year agreement. All I had to do was to tell him what we wanted and how much money we needed.

FALL 1999

STREET EVENT IN SREBRENICA

ESKO

After we finished the sport activities, we went to the school to have a sandwich. The spirit was good. Many people saw each other for the first time since the war. Refugees met old friends. There was a group of parents, who had joined us from Vogosca to watch and to visit their native town, and it was incredible to watch them greet each other. The children were singing and it created a promise that this could happen all over Bosnia. Anders had to decide if we were going to continue with the project. However, we wanted to continue.

2000

NEW PROBLEMS WITH FUNDS

ANDERS

Everything was going so well, and we were extremely happy. We had negotiated a settlement with the EU to support us financially the next three years in the Balkans, and we received the Peace Award. However, the EU Commissioner was forced to step down due to corruption and a new commissioner was appointed. It was the Dane, Poul Nilsson, who Jens Christensen knew very well. But due to strategic reasons he refused to support us.





So. There we were once again with no funding. I had to walk with a heavy heart to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and tell them that we wanted to work on a regional basis. We got one year to develop our strategy, and we agreed that we were to include one new country every fifth year.

We had first agreed that the mission in Bosnia drove this project, but we needed the necessary size to pull it through. So, if the money came from this regional road, this would be the one we chose. At the same time, UEFA came into the picture, which is a very important part of the story.

Jim Stjerne Hansen from the Danish FA had said that they would give us the concept but not the funds. The Danish FA was created for Danish football. Other countries were the focus and task for UEFA and FIFA. Fair enough. However, what I did not know was that Jim had brought the project to UEFA without telling me. He showed it to Patrick Gasser, who was the responsible person of UEFA in Bosnia, and he thought UEFA should support the project. Patrick Gasser called me and said “Jim Stjerne has told me to ask about your project”. Even though many people ask where the Danish FA has been during our project, I must emphasize that they gave us the concept and UEFA who has sponsored the project with millions of Euros!

At that time, we were the only organization using grassroots football with peace as its goal. There were no others. We developed our concept so that children’s football was a place for children to meet and a place for football to develop in the country.

When we started in Bosnia, there were only 16 teams for children nationwide. Until 2004, the number had grown to 524 clubs and about 70-80 per cent of the children under 10 years came as a spin off from our Open Fun Football Schools. The numbers were the same in the other countries. We brought the equipment and the children and we brought people together at the Open Fun Football Schools.

2000

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

ANDERS

We started working on the concept by developing 'Fun' and the pedagogical part. We established a joint seminar with four Bosnian instructors. They were given the task to make rotations, so that the exercises were half football, half playing games, and we realized that it was a good balance. Max Rasmussen from the DGI (the Danish Sports Association) participated as instructor and he helped showing how the football exercises could be both fun and play without separating them into two categories. We came closer to what we call 'Fun Football'. We realized that there are many different things you can do to make exercises with quality.

At the same time, the regional aspect was falling into place and we had almost finished the strategic plan together with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Then there was a change in the government and all means were frozen. There we were again; without funding. We went to UEFA for help and we had to promise to involve the Caucasus to get their support.

At that time, we realized that only depending on support from Denmark was too risky. We made a joint Nordic focus. It was incredible and brought along great results. With the Nordic approach we succeeded to raise more sponsors and more funding.



2000 / 2001

NEW COUNTRIES

ESKO

In 2000 FYR Macedonia became involved. My work took a different direction. Together with Anders, I travelled to FYR Macedonia to get Albanian and Macedonians to establish joined schools. We maintained the simple principles. Children were supposed to play together, make friends, play fun football and we wanted to keep it multi-ethnic. We brought a lot of accessories and they were well spent. Our ultimate success criteria was still that once the Open Fun Football Schools had ended, we wanted to see happy children dance around with diplomas and their hands up asking: When is the next school? When can we come back?

2000

START-UP FYR MACEDONIA

CENO

I had been a professional football player and I was at a time in my career, where I had to figure out what to do next. I wanted to stay in the football world. In the area where I lived, children were playing, but it was not organized and they were fighting.

So I went to the market, bought 15 footballs and invited the children to the park. 70-100 children showed up. I created stations and organized the training almost according to the same principles as used at the Open Fun Football Schools. I brought the children on trips and excursions and it was children from Skopje of different nationalities.





Some children did not want to play with gypsies or other ethnicities, but I told them: It does not matter. We need to play together and help each other. I developed my own concept with everything I had been taught in Germany, Greece, and the former Yugoslavia with lots of technical training etc.

At the same time, I tried to negotiate with the football association about establishing an academy with departments all over the country. By coincidence it happened when I was organizing a tournament in Skopje that the president called and told me that representatives from Denmark were coming to organize something like my idea. The Danes wanted to establish multi-ethnic schools and Anders came with Esko explaining their idea. It was like my concept in many ways.

The first year, we established 13 Open Fun Football Schools in accordance to the concept involving 200 children, 12 coaches and 2 leaders. The next couple of years, we started the 'twin-city concept' with 100 children from each town and the Open Fun Football Schools were distributed with a few days in each town.

The first years were incredible, and more and more children joined. During this time an Open Fun t-shirt was in high demand. All the children wanted one. However, it was not about the t-shirts. It was games and socializing, and the seminars were very important. The Bosnians taught us a lot and it was incredible to meet new friends and share experiences. A unique and large network was built.

2001

FYR MACEDONIA AND SERBIA

ANDERS

In 2001 we invited our Serbian friends for a seminar for the first time. However, while we were doing the seminar in FYR Macedonia, war broke out between the Albanians and the Macedonians.

While the Serbian coaches were checking in their passports, three helicopters attacked the town 800 meters from the boarder. However, we pulled the Serbian participants through and brought them to the host town. They did not have anything to eat or drink on the trip and they were very nervous and angry. We really had to work on creating a good atmosphere.

That was not easy. There was a great skepticism among the participants. Especially among the established football men. They did not think that they could implement this concept at home.

“Arrrgghh”, I told them. You are all tall and big guys. And I have seen that you are all competent and skilled football players. Then I pointed to four girls from gymnastics, folk dancing and handball. Oh, well. The guys realized that if the girls could establish a good school, so could they. The next day, they sat in front of the station led by the female gymnastic leader. During a relay race, a boy cheated. A classic situation. How do you handle it? Jagoda, the coach, stepped in and challenged the boy who cheated. She told him to run against her; she rolls out and exposes him in an elegant manner making everyone cheer. Afterwards, the participants discussed what makes a good coach, and when I asked the big Serbian coaches, they all pointed to Jagoda. She was the best coach at this particular school, they said. They had learned a lot about how everyone can establish an Open Fun Football School.



2001

CONFLICT IN FYR MACEDONIA

CENO

While the conflict between ethnic Albanians and Macedonians occurred in 2001, we had to make the tough decision if we should suspend the Open Fun Football Schools that summer. Soldiers were getting killed and Anders and I had many discussions.

However, I stood by my argument that we were not afraid to run the schools. Anders was not very enthusiastic and wanted us to suspend the season. But we accomplished all Open Fun Football Schools but one.

As our 200 children all walked through the town, people first thought it was a demonstration. However, they soon realized it was happy children on their way to Open Fun Football Schools.

Everything went well, and journalists documented that everything worked.



2002

BANJA VRUJCI SEMINAR

ANDERS

In 2002 I realized that it was an illusion to convince some of the well-established NGOs to host our project. Consequently we needed to develop and build the capacity of our organization.

We had a very epoch-making seminar in 2002. Poul Gilling, the head of education from the Danish FA, participated as external consultant, helping us build the organization. I did not have all the solutions, and it was our first seminar discussing visions, missions and values. We played the Bon Bon Cup, I welcomed everyone, and after that Poul demanded me to keep quiet the next day. I was not allowed to interfere or to say anything at all.

That came as quite a surprise to me. I had been the mainstay of the project; I knew everything about how things worked and I did like to hear myself talk. However, I promised Poul to do my very best to keep quiet. It was very strange and very difficult for me to keep my mouth shut. When we got to the part of creating the vision of the organization, I was sent out of the room. I was not even allowed to overhear the discussions!

After 20 minutes I was called back in, even though they had an hour to develop the vision. That meant to define what one can see- but not reach. Their vision was that 'we - Open Fun Football Schools - should be a movement in the region and in the world'. I thought: "What the hell are they up to?" My workdays were spent struggling to apply for funding so we could continue just another year. How the hell could they even think that big? What were they thinking? But we took their proposed mission and visions to heart.

Poul Gilling had prepared one more thing. Everyone was to prepare a story in advance about what made them proud of working with the Open Fun Football Schools. Everyone had an incredible story to tell and we were all crying. One story was better than the next.

Finally, we were to try and build our organization in LEGO bricks. It was so much fun, as none of the grown up men had ever built anything in LEGO before. There was a house with windows open to the world. Another model was a 'mobile' boat with two men on the bridge. One man had a large antenna on his head. It symbolized how our instructors kept their attention open to communicate with everyone and transform good fun football ideas into action. The other man was a character with a tall hat and a suitcase full of money. That was me.

In other words, I was the man with the hat, who was supposed to bring the funds, and then the instructors were the persons to bring the good ideas and turn them into meaningful action. If only they had enough money, they could ensure that we became a movement in the region, and with extensions every year, we could conquer the world.

The seminar in Banja Vrujci 1 was groundbreaking as we developed our joined mission and vision.



2003

SUSTAINABILITY

ESKO

In 2003 Anders insisted to discuss how we could make the Open Fun Football Schools sustainable, i.e. independent and without any help from outside. After World War II, the United States helped Germany. They gave people shoes and tools and then they had to start working. Here, we had been very spoiled with presents. We expected that help came from abroad. It was difficult to accept that it could not continue and we asked the question: Why could Scandinavia not continue helping and supporting us? However, older Bosnians acknowledged that things get better when you contribute yourself and have your own things. You need to be appreciative, when you need help and receive it. But you need to become self-sufficient. Anders worked with a great social responsibility, when he focused on sustainability. He did it to help us.

2003

EVALUATION METHOD

ANDERS

In 2003 we agreed that the donor funding did not last forever and I organized our first sustainability seminar for our instructors in Ohrid, FYR Macedonia. Before the seminar, a vice-president of the Danish medical company Novo Nordisk spontaneously invited me for a meeting. He would like to sponsor the project, and he would also like to introduce me to the concept of the “triple bottom-line” which was invented first time by Novo Nordisk.



Mike Rulis introduced me to the threefold bottom line including the blue bottom-line: Financial accounts, the red bottom-line: Social accounts and the green bottom-line: Environmental accounts. He thought such an approach could also be useful for us.

At the instructor seminar, I asked the Sida (the Swedish International development Agency) if they wanted to send an official, who could teach us about Sida's perception of "sustainability". They sent a young but very skilled person, Peeter Kaaman, and while he explained about sustainability in the short and long term, I realized how the three-fold bottom line was relevant for our project.

If our project was to become sustainable, it was not a matter of sufficient financial funding alone. Our mission was to use the Open Fun Football Schools in a social context, and if they did not include girls, if they were not multi-ethnic, nor reached out to marginalize groups, it would not be an Open Fun Football Schools in my opinion. Thus the social values – or the red bottom-line - were carrying the project. The green account in our framework was our effort to mobilize the civil society in our work. And the blue account was built on our organizational work and our financial performance.

Right from the beginning our focus was primarily on the red account. With the new inspiration in mind, we focused on the green and finally the blue account. Not until we could balance all three bottom-lines, the projects would become sustainable.

For me the three bottom lines were very important development tools to us. We used it in our annual reports, we pursued it and we used it in our conceptual perception.

In 2003 Norway and Sweden became new donors.

2003
INSTRUCTOR CORPS
ESKO

Anders had a mission to create instructor corps that could teach our voluntary coaches at the seminars. We had a lot to do with 80 planned Open Fun Football Schools and 20,000 children all over the Balkans. We had many active communities as well; towns and children and the education of the coaches and leaders took place according to our concept and theory, with Anders giving inputs and bringing teachers from Denmark for inspiration.

At our first vision seminar in Banja Vrujci we learned that the local fireballs were going to take over. We had become independent and were ready to be on our own. Previously, we had been lacking on support around us. Now we experienced a large attraction and we could reach way more parents.

In 2003 Croatia was next, and that was huge. Croatia had a well-working Football Association and was a much richer country, and it was in Croatia the war had started. There were good conditions within the organization with good traditions, but at the same time a great need for multi-ethnic activities, especially activities reaching out to both Croats and Serbs. At our first meeting with the football association the Secretary General pounded the table with his fist and said: “Yes, we need this project here.”





2003
START-UP IN CROATIA
VELIMIR

The instructor corps wanted Croatia to be part of the project from the very beginning. They had frequently asked Anders when Croatia would be included. However, a delegation was working on it and in 2002, Anders said that Croatia would like to join, which happened the following year in 2003.

Anders sometimes acts very fast, and he made a mistake in Croatia, when he appointed a young man to lead the project. However, he could not handle the job. When Anders and Esko visited in Zagreb, he was living in a very expensive hotel in the city instead of finding an office. When they realized that, Anders was very disappointed. Esko urged Anders to make me take the job instead.

So Esko called me in the middle of the night and said that he and Anders were in Zagreb comforting each other, because nothing had worked out here. He prepared me for a question which they needed a direct answer on: "Are you ready to spend 2-3 months here in Croatia establishing the office?" I could imagine how Anders must have felt, so I said: "Yes!" I could hear Anders yelling a loud "super" in the background. They asked when I could come by. "Right away", I said, and I asked them to disappear and let me handle things.

I went to Zagreb with an office assistant and less than a week later Esko visited our office in a rented building. We had bought computers and telephones, and everything had been designed for less money than our predecessor had spent the first two weeks.

We registered as a business and the football association, the Olympic Committee, and the Ministry of Culture all gave their blessings for the project, both written and oral. The project was in progress. I was in Zagreb for the appointed three months, and the agreement expired before the first Open Fun Football Schools were to start. I was asked if I could stay until the end of the year, finish the season and do the reports. That was eight years ago, and I am still here.

I moved into a small room at the office and that was not a good idea, because I worked 24/7. Two employees were hired, and they understood and supported each other and we became a good team. Everyone was very satisfied.

Croatia entered the project last, but at a time when the task from the very beginning was about sustainability. Even in the second year my employees and I had secured all the necessary means – except for a regional educational platform and the equipment paid by the office in Denmark. We ran the office and the Open Fun Football Schools.



2004

DEVELOPING A SATELITE MODEL

ANDERS

We decided that once again it was time to evaluate our organisation and we made a Banja Vrujci seminar II.

Unfortunately, that was the first time we put the larger perspective into words. However, the satellite model we came up with was the right solution. If you are to work in communities divided by conflict, there is typically no civil society. Like the case of Central Bosnia where communities, police, and government were divided along ethnic lines. In such cases there are two of everything and no interaction between them. In other words, if you want a stable society, you need an active civil society. The more social capital you establish, the richer and happier society becomes.

2005 / 2006

UNFOLDING THE SATELITE MODEL

ANDERS

During 2005 and 2006, we systemized the satellite model and sustainability. We had clarified why all stakeholders were important and necessary for our Open Fun Football Schools and we knew why we wanted them. We had visions and a strategy. And we developed strategies and activities with the purpose of actively involving all stakeholders in our Open Fun Football Schools.

Children's Grassroots Football Universe



"The Child in the centre"



1. Galaxy: The children's environment
 Football Clubs
 Leaders and coaches
 Parents
 School

2. Galaxy: The local community
 Municipality
 Local Partners
 Local Media
 Local Sponsors

3. Galaxy: Important institutions
 National Football Association
 Regional Football Association
 Ministry of Youth and Sports
 International Partners

2007
SUSTAINABILITY
ANDERS

In the beginning we thought it was important for all communities to be included, and they just paid a little money for transport and provision of the children. However, with fair balances on the red and green accounts we still needed to develop and enhance our blue accounts. Thus we developed a financial plan in which we wanted to ask the municipalities to cover 1/3 of the local cost.

To our big surprise we succeeded in receiving the municipality money from all the participating municipalities in the Balkans. Can you imagine that the municipalities of Srebrenica and Bratunac were paying a fee to us, to bring their children to play together at an Open Fun Football School! No one else could afford that!

We had talked about this initiative for years, and my Balkan colleagues had always turned my proposals down. But at a leaders meeting in my summer cottage in Croatia I insisted that we gave it a try, and if anyone had problems I/CCPA would cover up. Luckily, they all succeeded to raise the requested funds by the local municipalities!

2009 / 2010

THE LAST MOVES

ANDERS

The process of involving the new countries had continually been very simple. We had two or three leaders coming from the neighboring countries to the new country, staying there for about a month, making it all work. In this way we took our new colleagues by the hand from the beginning and after two or three years, everything was working smooth. It developed into a system with its own procedure.

Further, it was crucial for the future of the association in the Balkans and Caucasus that we invented the Open Fun Football Schools PLUS and started including other kinds of focus areas.

As an example we were working in Croatia in 2009 – 2010, funded by Novo Nordisk, on preventing chronic diseases and diabetes. They established an extra station, where the children could watch PowerPoint presentations, measure their BMI, and get knowledge about the food pyramid, which the children have to build from ordinary food on their plates themselves. So, Croatia's PLUS was a healthy lifestyle.

Another example is FYR Macedonia where they work with the environment through the "Things Talk"- project (an environmental learning program) where the children play football in the morning and work with our "Things Talk"-concept in the afternoon.

Once we have built the platform through the classic Open Fun Football Schools, we can also use the network to e.g. cooperate with the police, to facilitate cross sector cooperation between Sport + School + Police (Serbia and Bosnia). Likewise, many of our local leaders have used the Open Fun Football Schools as platform to initiate different kinds of educational add-on's to disseminate an information about healthcare, anti-racism, football for children with special needs etc.



2010
THE FUTURE AHEAD
ESKO

Our vision, which we made in Banja Vrujci, is to become a movement in the world. It suddenly starts to become a reality. Our instructors travel and come from all over the world visiting us. Anders has just come back from Africa. It is a sign that anything is possible and that things are happening. The reconciliation is soon done here. Now we are going to travel the world.

The next chapter regarding developing sustainability is a further cooperation with football associations and sponsors, where we also establish other activities. We are going to sell know-how to companies and we are going to create company events involving disabled children, mentally challenged persons, and other minorities.

That is the story I see ahead of us. It is growth of grassroots football. We need to find a new way of organizing and merging – and in that way continue our work. The future will also take place in a whole new manner now.

“THE PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCHOOLS”

COACH

I have joined the project, because you learn until you die.

I thought I knew a lot, but my eyes have been opened. I used to be a little skeptical.

However, when I met people from other cultures and countries and received feedback, all the new things and the new perspectives surprised me.

INSTRUCTOR AND MONITOR

Football has been a part of my whole life, but I did not experience complete satisfaction until I joined this project and the football schools. I have played on the highest level, and still I did not feel this as a player. I have participated in more than 100 seminars and have gained thousands of new friends. I have been to Scandinavia, the Middle East and Caucasus. I have seen so many different cultures and met so many interesting people. It is huge.

COUNTRY COORDINATOR

I was going through a very tough time in my life, and this came as a sort of redemption – perhaps it was God who had a hand in it somehow? I have found myself through working with the children. The project showed me the way and told me that I have lots to say and communicate to the children.

Through this project, I can make them believe in life and gain good experiences.

It is a huge joy being here today, where my life has become meaningful. I am in the autumn of my life – but it is a beautiful autumn.

The project has given me many friends and acquaintances back and it has given me many new friends, who I love and who has accepted me as a friend. That is all I need.

COUNTRY COORDINATOR

Money is not what makes you rich. Friends, connections and people make you rich. If I look at how much money I have, I am very poor. But if you measure it in friends and contacts, I am among the richest people in the world.

INSTRUCTOR

“This is my life!” I live for the smiles. That is the most important gift.

INSTRUCTOR

I feel like I get so much personal joy and so many experiences back for everything I have invested in football. To be part of this project is the best thing that has happened in my life.

SCHOOL LEADER

Even though I am old, I can contribute through my work and I live for that. The children and the project keep me alive. I am happy that I have contributed and created development with my knowledge and experience. Now I know that I have not lived and worked in vain. I have dedicated a part of my life to a good cause.

THE PERSONAL STORIES IN THE STORY

FIRST AND FOREMOST

THE LEADING FIREBALL, INITIATOR AND DIRECTOR

ANDERS LEVINSEN

THE FIRE HAS ALWAYS BEEN BURNING

I have never for a second doubted that this is what I wanted. I started it mostly with my own money and by starting things up. When you are a social entrepreneur, it is about passion and it matters how much you are willing to invest.

There were many things I had to prove with this project, many personal things involved, and a great deal of pride. I had been stationed in Bosnia, I had been a central person organizing the UN emergency response to Bosnia and I thought I was one hell of a guy. But I experienced a few times that people within the NGO-sector told me that I did not understand the conflicts in Bosnia right, and that I didn't know how to work with the Bosnians in a Danish context.

I needed to show those people that I could do this and that I could do it better than their projects. I wanted to show that we could help the refugees in a less expensive, better, and more efficient and impacting way than they did. “The competitive man” got into me.

The mission was also to show that you can use sport as mean in humanitarian actions. I was among the first in our sector and even though others have emerged since, we are still very big in the world arena. However the size of our organization is not decisive to me. Today I am curious to learn how we can use our program for different social purposes. Maybe the size mattered back in the old days, but today our performance is important to me.

The key is to share a view of humanity. The more I work with that the better our project becomes. At the same time, it bothers me that you cannot work the same way in Denmark. That acknowledgement bothers me. In Denmark we need to go through a lot of male jargons and it is more about exercising power to get room.

In many ways, you can say that we run an impossible kind of management. However, the idea is good and the way we do things is good. We try to be decent people. We try to be happy, motivated and excited. We try to show that football is much more than glamour and winning.



MEDICINE AGAINST TUNNEL VISION

When I came back from the war in Bosnia, I suffered from serious tunnel vision (today some call it PTSD). Everything was boiling inside me and I withdrew from the outside world. I was confused because it was my experience that we – the international community – could foresee and report on all the disasters that happened during the war in time. But we were unable to prevent the disasters because the international community could not agree on the relevant intervention timely. Can you imagine that in the spring 1993 I personally negotiated a humanitarian corridor out of Srebrenica. If the French general Morillon had not misinterpreted the situation, we would have prevented the big massacre in 1995 and saved over 8,000 lives because people would have been evacuated in time! Further when I came back to Sarajevo in 1998 I could not walk on the streets without imagining how the civilians would look like in a uniform.

In this way I can honestly say that I feel that the Open Fun Football Schools have helped me open up my tunnel vision. When I walk the streets today, I look at people and instead of imagining the civilians as soldiers I wonder what capacity each individual have, because it is my experience that every person is good at something. I have also become completely color blind in this project. I cannot see any difference between persons from the different ethnic groups. To me they are all friends and good colleagues. That is a gift and that is amazing.

I also recall a day in 2000 when I was going to Maglaj to visit an Open Fun Football School. Suddenly my memories hit me and I found myself crying at the opening ceremony in front of all the children. Morten, my son, did not understand the situation. But it came naturally to the Bosnian children, fortunately. Now everything is far away. It is not forgotten. But I have put it away and carry the memories within my personal baggage.

We have much lower administration costs than other NGOs. You might say that we do impossible management. We are 3-4 people in Copenhagen who coordinate activities for 125,000 children a year and educate thousands of leaders all over the world.

The Danish company LEGO has built an organization that is known for listening to their consumers and adapting to the wishes from bottom-up. We try to do the same. When we have a good idea, we facilitate workshops and ask our stakeholders to give us inputs to this idea. We are the experts looking at them. We are organizers, network builders, and facilitators and we consider our volunteers as the experts.

Today my management style has grown. The management philosophy behind our work – ‘to manage through relations’ – was finished only last year. Once I phrased and saved it, the line of thought has created understanding throughout the organization.

Remember that you cannot run volunteers from the top. People who work as volunteers must find a need. They need to make sense of the voluntary work and feel like they get something in return. My main task is to lead them into the cause and make them stay.

The difficult schism for me is to lead an organization where people have different goals and missions. In a networking organization people typically join to exchange knowledge or even for the physical community. In our organization agendas are mixed. Some are in for the overall mission, while others are there because of football.





A CRITICISED MANAGEMENT STYLE – OR A LACK OF IT

Sometimes, people criticize me for being a bad leader. However, I commit leadership more than management. The fact that I am not a “conventional leader” is both strength and a weakness. I do not coach or conduct staff development interviews, but I help and support the employees as much as I possibly can.

During my assignment with UNHCR in Bosnia I worked very close with the local staff. They were the ones who knew people and the situation on the ground. Hence I considered them my key colleagues and I considered it my role as leader to agree what we would like to achieve, and hereafter to cover my local colleagues so they did not get involved in difficult political situations, when they distributed blankets and food at the frontlines. That is also how we work in Cross Cultures. We spend a lot of time to discuss the meaning of our operation, because, in my opinion, it is the *meaning* that is the key to our organization. And when we have agreed on the meaning I try to give them as good working conditions as possible. I engage in the political battles and cover their backs, and I am not afraid to take the blame for any mistakes that may occur, as long as it is done in a good meaning – so to speak.

When I worked with emergency aid for the UN, water, sanitation, food, and non-food items were our toolbox. Today, children’s football and our workshops are our tools.

One thing has been central to my leadership in the Balkans: Balance. In particular balance. When you work in these post-conflict areas you must always keep your promises and you need to involve everyone. You must also be extremely careful to treat both sides equal. E.g. I had to hire a person from each of the three people from the different entities in Bosnia when we began our operation, even though 1.5 staff member would have been sufficient.

DANISH DEMOCRACY

I don't consider myself a tough leader. But I expect people around me to be dedicated and contribute to our action. Or to put it differently, at the end of the day, I don't consider it 'my' action. It is to my opinion 'their' action because I am living in Denmark and when our seminars and activities are well done I will return to my family in Denmark while they will stay behind in their local communities where the action is needed.

We can talk for long hours about the management terms, vision and goals. But 'the meaning' – which in my opinion is the key to our organization - will to my experience emerge in the action itself. So what I try to stimulate through my leadership is first of all that they take ownership and they take action. If they are driven by such an active and responsible approach it is incredible to witness what they can achieve together. And therefore it is very important to me to give my colleagues and volunteers space to form and influence their Open Fun Football Schools as long as their activities serve our meaningful purpose – to bring people together across divides and to make them interact and have fun.

I don't like entering into conflicts and battles. During the first years our local coordinators sometimes had some tough discussions with each other. They were having stupid discussions about who performed best etc. But the outcome of all these discussions was only bad energy. I remember one time when three of my colleagues had a very loud discussion with each other. I put my foot down and said that we had to stop talking to each other like that. It was a paradox to me how we could speak to each other in this way while at the same time asking our colleagues from the antagonistic entities to co-exist.

Further they proposed an internal management-term we call 'Danish Democracy'. That is when countries fight and cannot agree on something. Then I must conduct 'Danish Democracy', i.e. that I put my foot down, remind them that we are in this operation to have fun and finally decide what needs to be decided. In this way, when negative energy emerges we need to throw it out. So, today we have a tradition that if there is trouble on the horizon, we say: 'Positive energy' or 'Danish Democracy'. It has become a law. We do not need more than these words for it to stop. It is like an invisible hand carrying our culture.

INSPIRATION OVER MONEY

I become restless if I spend more than a couple of weeks in Denmark. At the same time, I am fully aware that I must get inspiration and impulses from outside. The ideas come to you, when you get out.

It annoys me that we do not have a bottom line and a measurable mechanism to run the project the way it is done in ordinary companies. However, that is not the type of project we conduct.

The project could go on without me today. It might become something else, but the schools could continue. The organization would have a difficult time and that is a huge weakness. But I hang on to the work for selfish reasons.



WHEN YOU GROW FROM THE CLOSE THINGS

When I look at things from a selfish perspective, I ask myself why the hell I am conducting schools in so many countries. That means I cannot be with them all – and I cannot reach them all. I can only be in two chosen areas. The first 4-5 years everything was about Anders. When I came out there, there was a party. I was applauded when I entered and left a room. The past two years, I have not gotten the same attention. It is better balanced, and I feel good about it, because I did not like it.

The healthy aspect of the program is the part where I get out. I need to be with the people long enough to get a sense of the activities there. I love coming to the villages. This week, I am going to Bryssel Thursday, Beirut in the Weekend, Croatia, and then Sarajevo, before I go back home.

My greatest fear in this program is regarding myself, to be honest. Will things still be the same, if the Balkans is not part of it?



THE JOY OF BEING THE BEST

When I go to a school and watch the children play, I sometimes think – who the hell got this idea? Who put it into play? Where did it come from? My feelings cannot recognize the idea in me. But then my head joins and I think it is brilliant and I become very proud, when I see the dedication.

The schools are wonderful and they are the biggest achievement in the program. Personally, what I like the most is spending time with the voluntary coaches. Beyond compare! To visit all these wonderful people, play and spend time together and just being there. To me, that is the most important.

When I feel best and do my best is when a challenge triggers me. When I must handle a difficult situation or a negotiation. I find a way and rise to the occasion. I find great pleasure in performing and compare myself in my struggle of being the best. I would be lying if I did not admit that recognition is important. Even though it is not so much about the awards. It is to know that you are good. What interests me is how we can establish a good life for people out there.

However, you grow older, and I feel that my passion is not what it used to be. I have spent a lot of effort building the organization, but my enthusiasm is not the same. Sometimes I look at myself and ask: Is this what I want?

FRIENDSHIP AND FUN TIME TOGETHER

Then I think about what Ceno so worldly said.

When I was recently divorced and sad, he called me and told me to become the happiest man on earth. I have so many people and friends that make me the richest man in the world.

Today, when you settle your social capital, the saying goes that if you have 12 friends, you are rich. If you have 24 friends, you are twice as rich.



WHAT WORKING WITH ANDERS IS LIKE

ESKO – Esad Hadzijasifovic – THE CLOSEST COLLABORATOR

Anders is blond, he does not speak our language and we cannot communicate. However, for 13 years we understood each other perfectly – even though we have had our conflicts. Anders is the greatest humanitarian worker and a huge socialist, and even though he works for us to be sustainable, I believe that he will always be there to help us. Anders is a miracle worker!

VELIMIR SUBAN – ONE OF THE LOYAL DISCIPLES

Anders is an amazing person. We have a hard time following him and that has been a challenge from the beginning. He looks very far ahead compared to the rest of us. We do not understand what he sees on the other side of the mountain. Anders has a big ego. He is very direct and says things straightforward. He is a human being with many incredible abilities. He is good at motivating people and has great visions.

JENS CHRISTENSEN – CENTRAL SUPPORTER AND MENTOR

Anders has the ability to talk to people. When we met the Danish politicians, he could talk to them in a way where they saw his talent. Anders exudes that things will succeed and things have proceeded everywhere. Contrary to other creative people, Anders manages to keep a budget. He is good at moving the funds around and keeps a sense of perspective and control. When I talk to Anders, I always cheer up. Anders focuses on the things that succeed. He is rarely in a bad mood. When things have gone wrong a few times, it only takes him a day or two to get back into spirit.

FINN BERGGREN – DAILY PARTNER FOR DISCUSSION

Anders has become chubbier throughout the years. He has developed his ability to listen and sense what others are saying. But he has not lost his drive and creativity. Anders has an incredible ability to believe in his own idea. He may easily look like the bull – but not in the china shop – rather with the attitude “this is my thing”. In the countries and areas where we work, you can easily be knocked out. But it takes more than a common storm to knock him over. I am not trying to be neat and positive but just realistic.

THE NEXT PERSONAL STORY...

THE FIRST CHAIRMAN

JENS CHRISTENSEN

It all started when I was approached by the local priest asking me if I was interested in joining a meeting at the vicarage. I do not know exactly why I was invited, and to be honest, I did not want to go. But once I was there and saw the draft for the articles of associations for CCPA, I realized that it was not very good, so I corrected them. However, I should not have done that, as they suggested me as chairman, a post I held for 7 years until I was 85 and thought it was time to quit. I had previously worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and doing nothing was no fun.

I remember being skeptical about the success of the project in February 1999 – the following year, the school had made it through with private donations during the summer of 1998. Yet, I optimistically threw myself into the project, as my thought was that no harm was done in trying. The worst that could happen was nothing happening at all.

I had established developmental projects for Danida once – but that was 40-50 years ago and I knew nothing about football – however, when it all started, Anders had experience from the Balkans and Bosnia as our take-off.

When he wanted to move on to Macedonia, I was skeptical. Things were working in Bosnia now, so why not just stick to that? Eventually, I gained confidence that things would work out, and gradually we have activated hundred thousands of children and almost 30,000 leaders.

In the board, my job was to get funding and contact to sponsors. In the beginning, we received money from the Danish Neighborhood Program, the Democracy Foundation and later UEFA entered the picture with a 5 million DKK check in 2002. The problem when working with the political establishment is that not many government servants are willing to take a risk. They do not want any trouble and if they make the wrong decisions, they will get into trouble with their superiors. Therefore, it took a lot of convincing to gain their trust and support, so we had the funding to do the things we wanted to do.

All things considered, things have turned out a lot better than I had imagined in the beginning. Mostly because the need has been so big. Still, there is an enormous amount of hatred at the political top in the Balkans and this hate goes all the way down the system. There is a lot to smooth. Sport is a good tool to remove the thoughts from fighting. Football as a team sport is also perfect, when you work with reconciliation and democracy. We have impacted a need and had the right idea. And we have been lucky to get in touch with key persons within UEFA and the Foreign Ministries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Even though we are facing a cost cutting, I hope that after 10-11 years we are established and what we do is so much better than the rest of the projects that funding could have been spend on.

We have worked at the lowest level possible. Evidently at grassroots level and at the most primitive level. The Balkans covers a large area, but we have been where the games took place. We have competed with other NGOs but they have not been as successful. We have tried to help them, but most have been separated and isolated.

A great part of the success is due to Anders. His dynamics, optimism, and his drive. It is about the activities he has initiated, the people he has engaged, and the spirit he puts into the project. His faith in things has carried the project forward.

Anders has been the right man for the job, and he has been very good at finding the right local leaders. I do not know if this is due to the people who are engaged, or if it is due to Anders' ability to find them. Every time we started up in a new country, the local leaders needed large amounts of 100-200,000 DKK in advance and I was very unsure about that. However, the chosen leaders never ran with the money. We never paid corruption at the borders. We still made it through and we gained a reputation of not being corrupt.

The work in the board has generally been very relaxed. We never had any great discussions or problems. However, the organization is characterized by Anders wanting to do everything by himself and he does not want anyone else to be involved. We are very vulnerable if something happens to him. We tried getting a deputy manager, but we never succeeded. We have come to realize that Anders is the center of the project. The challenge is to control him and find a future direction.

Sometimes, I am afraid about the future. We started small and have grown, but our strength was maybe to be small. When we look ahead, money is a problem, but Anders' capacity is something else. In this kind of structure of the organization, we have reached our maximum.

If you ask what the project has meant for me personally, I have been retired and had nothing to do but look after my houses. However, meeting Anders has been essential.



**THE STORY FROM
ONE OF THE FIRST DONORS
FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OF NORWAY**

JO SLETBAK

I was working as deputy director at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for Western Balkan, when Anders Levinsen contacted me in 2000 asking me if Norway was interested in supporting the OFFS. For a while I was looking at the material. Our focus areas in the Balkans were children, youth, reconciliation and building of institutions and the project reached these areas.

IT SOUNDED GOOD – BUT WHAT WAS IT?

My reservations concerned what kind of organization we were to donate money to, and I looked at the project for six months, before I moved on looking for an association with another organization. I approached the Norwegian Football Association, which was interested right away, since they saw opportunities in building grassroots football and institutions.

I set up a meeting with the football association and Anders and I told them that if the two could cooperate, we were in. The chairman of the association and I were each fan of two rivals in Norwegian football and he showed up with tattoos and I in my nice dress. However, I told him: “I know who you are fan of, but we need to do this project together. It is a really good project.”

The corporation between the association and Anders went smoothly. They wanted the same things and could work without interference from us. All we did was praise them and support them with quite a lot of money – 5-6 million DKK annually.



PRIDE OF BEING A PART

The project has enjoyed a great amount of political support all the way. The Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke highly of the project on TV and the political management and Secretary of State visited the schools. The foreign policy motives of Norway fit like a glove the way the project did with the activities and as I said, we never interfered. It was model project to support and we would do it again, after seeing how much the project has done for the children and reconciliation.

It is incredible how the football schools have worked with the multi-ethnic aspects and the various towns and communities. The Norwegian Football Association succeeded in contacting other associations and the children have joined the clubs. Furthermore, reaching a participation rate of 30 per cent girls have been an impressive success. That rate is higher than at the Norwegian football schools. You can see that the instructor corps often consisted of teachers and policemen and they often brought experience and knowledge from the project into their everyday work. The line and 'food of chain' in the project was a win/win situation. We did not only support the project, because it looked good on paper – but because it was spot on regarding the political goal.

THE SCHOOL'S 'LIFE' GIVE YOU THE GOOSEBUMPS

On several occasions, I have seen the schools and it does not happen often that you get the goosebumps when seeing a project. However, seeing 200 children running around without knowing their ethnicity was huge.

The parents at the stands got closer together during the week. Being Norwegian it was impressive to see 200 children act so casually together.

It would not work the same uncomplicated way here in Norway. The professional point of departure reached the goal perfectly, both theoretically and practically.

THE ILLUSTRATOR BEHIND THE OFFS MATERIAL

MIRSAD AGIC

The first job I got was to design the first t-shirt. I got the job through a contact, and I knew nothing about the schools, just that I needed to do it like it was a children's drawing. I then tried to draw some children in the fields in a 'loose and naïve' way. When I later visited the office, I realize that the project was so much more.

MOUTAINS OF DRAWINGS

Since then, every year I have made many drawings for the manual, t-shirts, posters, small pamphlets, and brochures. Some years, the manual contained 50 drawings and other years there have been fewer or we have reused some. It is difficult to say how much time I use, but I would estimate a month a year. Sometimes, the deadline is very short and I must hurry. Once, I only had 24 hours for a larger project and while drawing my arm started cramping, so my colleague got the drawings once they were finished, scanned them and mailed them.

The official drawing is the most time consuming. Sometimes, I receive ideas from Anders, Esko, and others, and I try to put together everyone's input. There are often many corrections and Goran translates on the phone, while comments go back and forth. I continuously collect all the old drawings and if I put them on top of each other, the pile would be very high.

THE ART OF DRAWING PRIMITIVELY LIKE A CHILD

You can see a development in my drawings and from an artistic perspective I like that even though my personal taste is more in the direction of comics and a more realistic style. I particularly like the drawing of the football planet and the metaphor in the drawing. I also like the two black and white footballs that we made in 2005-06, but there are many other years I hardly remember, because things happen so fast. Once I see the finished manual, I am usually satisfied with the many drawings and I am often surprised when I see them again.

From the beginning, Esko told me to draw like a child, and I tried to do that. However, the problem is that children do not draw with style and details. When I was to further develop the drawings, I felt like I had to put more feelings and expression into the drawings and that required more details. When I drew the bus, I had to put more excitement and joy into the drawing.

So, I drew confetti, flags, and other things to pep up the style. And when I draw illustrations for exercises in the manual, I also try to put more in the background – children cheering during the shooting exercise or children drinking water. It is fun using your imagination, getting into children's world, developing the drawings from there. I never slob and I always make sure to get all the details.





A SUPRISING SUCCESS

I like the intense colors in the drawings, but the expression very much depend on the technique I use. The first years, I drew 'free hand' using a pencil and the drawings were not as intense. Later, I used the watercolors and the past two years I have worked digitally, which has given me several practical advantages. It is much easier; I can change the colors and create lots of interaction and variation.

The Open Fun Football Schools are not very famous, so when I meet colleagues and artists, they are very surprised that I made the illustrations. Many of them recognize the t-shirts. I feel good when I see the t-shirts show up in other contexts – either in the streets or when people are interviewed on TV. When Anders and Esko made a big model of the satellite drawing for a UEFA grassroots meeting, I was proud and thought that it is huge for such a small country.

Personally, it is weird to be successful drawing childish drawings, when I like the serious motives. However, I get a good feeling and personal satisfaction by participating in such a positive project with a mission. Through the project, I have gained many good relations and I wish I had more customers like the football schools. You cannot avoid becoming passionated, when you meet a man like Esko.

THE PERSONAL STORY FROM COUNTRY COORDINATOR AND MONITOR

ESKO – ESAD HADZIJJUSIFOVIC

'I look at the mountains over the fields and when I open the gate to the stadium, I always look at how many kids there are. I hear the music, and I see how the arena is organized. I look for footballs and equipment. I look at the coaches and what they are doing. A joint picture of movement and rhythm emerges. Because everything has a rhythm. When everything is settled, the school finds a rhythm and then you know it is a good school.'

The speaking like a monitor expert – is an expert. Esko, the country coordinator from Bosnia, has been in the project from the beginning, is the one who created the manual for monitors when exploring if the school works or if something can be better. The energy in a good project is being critical and spending resources on evaluation and moving on. Therefore, we have monitors at every school, reporting and registering. However, not everything can be registered so simple and easy. Much of the evaluation is built on intuition and catching the spirit and atmosphere, Esko makes clear. It is about the indefinable but central rhythm.

'Rhythm...is when you close your eyes and feel that people are together, but constantly change direction and pace. Everything is according to the children's pace. They are challenged and they are smiling. They get a chance of winning and a chance to try again. They have an opportunity of getting praised. Rhythm is the most important quality of the schools.'





It is the character of the schools and it is like a good dance. A large part of the rhythm comes from the music – perhaps 30 per cent. However, the rhythm also comes from all the extra that is being done – when there are extra fruit, bananas or cakes. The rhythm occurs with all the little things settling.'

THE WEATHER

However, the schools also have enemies, who can destroy everything. A practical opponent can be the conditions at the field. No water or toilets or that the facilities are out of operations. However, the largest and most stubborn enemy is the weather. If it rains or if it is too hot. And it is particularly catastrophic if the tap does not work and the weather is 35° C. Sometimes, they need to get hoses or put up a toilet, Esko tells. And he knows what he is talking about. Because Esko is not only an expert based on his many years in the fields or because he was the one writing the monitor manual. Esko has been there. He has been organizing almost 300 schools and has probably seen about 100. No one can beat that in the OFFS-organization.

The interesting part is that even though he has seen so many schools, not two schools are the same. They each have their own expression and atmosphere. The little things always find their own place. And Esko makes it clear, so you have no doubt. He will never grow tired from watching the schools. Quite the contrary. When he gets to a field, the children and the footballs, it makes him want to be a coach again and join the games.

THE STORY FROM THE VICEFEUDAL MINISTER OF CULTURE AND SPORTS IN BOSNIA

MUSTAFA DEMIR

I was one of the few people who believed in the project and gave it my full support. However, I must also emphasize that not everyone liked it. They did not believe in it and back then a lot of projects were suspicious. I believed in it, because I believed in Anders and Esko and because I knew Esko as an honest and hardworking man.

I am convinced that the football schools are the best youth project in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The content of the schools is adjusted to the youth and break a pattern of sport being focused on competition. The football schools introduced the element of play with a large enrichment. More than 40,000 children have played; we have received quality equipment and thousands of coaches have been educated.

THE PROJECT NEEDS TO BE INSTITUTIONALISED

The reason for the success of the project is first and foremost the serious approach and the strong professional planning. They have been in contact with clubs all over the country and the fact that the schools have been spread throughout the country without any limitation is the biggest quality.

There is still a need for the schools. We can see that the civil society support the project today with funding and education, because they have realized that we need this initiative. However, we will not benefit from the project until it has been integrated into the communities, the clubs, and the youth organizations. We have the option of the football association taking over this role of coordination. This project has had major influence on the association bringing them together, because the country and all the participants realized that corporation was necessary – for the children’s sake.

The future also depends on the clubs acknowledging the program using it as point of departure for all their youth activities.

A LAST GREETING FROM THE HEART

Before we end the interview, look at the photographs and exchange stories about sports, results and other anecdotes, Mustafa solemnly asks me to include a greeting. Here it comes: ‘Thank you a lot for all of those who started the project. Thank you so much for the huge impact it has had on Bosnia-Herzegovina.’



THE PERSONAL STORY

OF THE CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

FINN BERGGREN

I joined the project in the most amazing and motivating way. It was back in 2002, when I had just joined Gerlev Sports Academy as principal. I was called and informed that this organization, the CCPA, needed to work with an organization that could vouch for their financial reports. The CCPA worked with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was very confused about what to do about a one-man-army like Anders. I like fun and different things, so Anders and the Chairman of the Board, Jens Christensen, met with me at the Sports Academy where we agreed to oversee administration. We hired a person at the school to oversee the finances and we agreed to help developing the schools.

COMMUNITY OF VALUES WITH GERLEV

In practice, it meant that the first three years' seminars were conducted here at Gerlev. I became emotionally involved by meeting the instructors and feel the excitement among the instructor crowd. I felt how they struggled to keep their national interests in check. There were horrible stories about some who had killed other people's families. However, in this place they kept it down. Our core values in this school are built on the game, the play, the dance and the immersion. It has been an incredibly positive situation to be able to pass on these values to the organization that had a huge need for support and that we have been proud to be a part of.

EVERYDAY SPARRING

The work of the board consists of 4-5 meetings annually, but I think about the CCPA every day and talk to Anders on the phone a lot. I have never felt the age difference between Anders and I. I have only felt a common bond created by the things we do and want.

During the time, when I did not have the managing responsibility, I thought a lot about the content and the pedagogical approach. I have been very much affected by the constant feeling of lifeblood of this project. I think I can say that, because I have experienced the lifeblood at seminars, when I have met people here and in the Balkans. And I see that they have not lost their lifeblood over a period of 10 years.

I think we have been lucky, because at the board level we have never discussed football systems or training philosophies. The center of attention has always been outside. Our discussions have often been about means and funding. We have never disagreed on the method. We have focused on the hot spots where we could make a difference. We have aimed at the points of intersections and we have constantly focused on the peace-making dialogue – we did not just want to establish schools.

A PROJECT WITH PRIDE

That is why I am so proud. As a person and a chairman, when you experience through conflicts and tension we can establish schools that inspire and develop school systems and football. We see that the schools develop society as a cornerstone focused on physical activity, health, well-being, and comfort.



**THE PERSONAL STORY OF
A BOSNIAN REFUGEE
WHO WAS HIRED AT THE OFFICE IN DENMARK**

GORAN FAZLINOXIC

I have met many people in my life for whom the football schools have had huge importance. However, there is no doubt that one fate and one person stands out. He is also the person I have become closest to and have spent most time with – my tour guide and interpreter, Goran. The man has been a part of the schools since the beginning and who has been a central co-player for the football schools in the Balkans ever since.

When Anders first introduced me to the task of writing this book, he was almost dancing around in excitement. He had struck it lucky. He was so enthusiastic: ‘I have hired Goran to travel with you and be your fixer. He is the right man for the job. When you travel with Goran everything will go well. He knows everything and everyone’.

I was very excited when I met ‘the miracle’ for the first time. He met me with open arms, a friendly smile and his characteristic Danish-Bosnian accent.

I was relieved and happy. We were going to spend many intense weeks traveling in Bosnia together, but it was going to be nice. It was. Giving in every sense of the word. Anders was right. A better or more appropriate man to travel with and gather the stories of the football school from did not exist. Goran had been there all the way, and he had the story and the culture with him.

Along the way, I got his knowledge about the history of the countries on the Balkans and the background of the conflicts in little, pedagogical bites – however, his own story has made the biggest impression.

Goran is Bosnian Muslim from Trebinje in South-eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina. He studied sports in Sarajevo, finished his military service and was back at the university when tensions in the country rose. He was recalled, but after four months he deserted. It was not his war. He was afraid to die. It sounded so simple, when he said it, but what a revolutionary decision it was!

In the same quiet way, it was very dramatic to hear about the flight to Denmark. At first, Goran went hiding and friends helped him escape Trebinje dressed in a uniform. He came by bus to FYR Macedonia with 56 other refugees heading for peaceful Scandinavia. The only thing they brought was a joint interim passport and it was a trip with many detours. The bus had to pass many of Europe's borders, bribing employees with cigarettes, Whisky and German D-Marks to reach Swinoujscie, the harbor port to Denmark.

However, by destiny one night he and the group were finally on the ferry from Poland to Denmark without money, papers, or any belongings, it was October 7 1992. At midnight, a new Danish law became effective and Denmark was closed for Bosnian refugees.

The group was arrested and detained. A friendly Dane, however, gave Goran a dime for a telephone booth and Goran succeeded in reaching a journalist, who once lived in Serbia. The journalist helped blow up the case in Denmark, while Goran and the group were deported to Poland the next day. They stayed for a month, until their complaint was processed and they got permission to access Denmark.





Goran kept the group together, fought with the Russian mob, Romanian human traffickers, Polish bureaucracy, suicide attempts and to get money for the ferry ticket. Symbolically, he was the last man to jump on board, after he struggled to get the last ticket. The bow aileron was closing and his feet hit the water. But he got on although in a tight corner. After that, 18,000 refugees entered Denmark from Bosnia.

Goran lived in Denmark for three years on standby-paragraph 15. He stayed fit, learned the language, interpreted and educated other refugees and he worked as coach at the athletic club AK73. He also got a sweet Danish girlfriend and their son Theis was born.

Goran volunteered in the Danish Refugee Council and through this contact he got on the list of participants at an information meeting with a certain Anders Levinsen and his football school project.

This becomes one of the fate-experiences that means everything for Goran the next many years. First, he becomes a voluntary leader and he always travels with Ander getting involved in all events and line-ups. When the first office opens in Sarajevo, he takes time off his job as nursery assistant in Denmark, and when I meet him, he has been working for the football schools ever since.

However, now it is time to try something new. That makes our joint round trip particularly special. I am introduced to all the people, the stories, the events, and the significance. At the same time I say hello, Goran says goodbye. He finishes a life epoch. A life for and with the football schools is finished for now, and Goran has gotten another job in Copenhagen as a project worker.

Goran does not think he will ever come back to the Balkans for good. Perhaps when he retires. But today, he feels like a Dane. He is happy that he could build bridges between Denmark and the Balkans. That he has contributed by translating and communicating the Danish concept into something that has given children and adults in the Balkans so much.

When you spend time with this calm man with a like for ice cream and sweet thing, you have no doubts. The football schools are so much more than 'a project'.

THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES FROM

VOLUNTARY ASSISTENTS IN DENMARK

They do not stand out. They are all on the field, and they look like the rest. The same t-shirts and caps. However, there is something special about them. The Danish soldiers and their families exude an amazing energy and a high spirit. They cheer, laugh, play, and have fun and they are present with everything they have. You have no doubt if you enjoy the old and worn stadium in Pec in the Western Kosovo. Here are a group of Danes, who enjoy being part and get a great experience. You do not want to disturb them, but they agree to take a short recess from the stadium and go to the wrecked spectator seats to talk about their work here. Steen Sørensen and Finn Falck are both professional soldiers who have been stationed here in Kosovo with the UN and who are now here with their children and wives from Western Jutland. A cheerful crowd of six people, the children come sit with us to tell us about their experiences.

In Spring 2009, Finn and Steen read an article about the football schools, which included an offer for former soldiers in the Balkans, who could bring their families and come visit the schools. Finn first thought it would be a fun trip for him and his son. However, his wife and daughter wanted to join. They put up a notice at the barracks and more people joined.



COACH SEMINAR

The first part of their experience took place at a coach seminar in Struga. The Danes insisted on joining on equal terms at the seminar. It became a huge adventure for children and adults – especially to see the different population groups together without conflicts. The only things they noticed were a bit of skepticism towards the Serbs. When they were introduced, the applause was not as loud and the Albanians and the Serbs were not very happy initially about sitting at the same table. Two other things made a great impression: One of the leaders from Serbia had taken a detour to get to the seminar, because she was afraid to go through Kosovo. So, the tensions and insecurities were still a part of their lives. You could also see that many people collected some of the food in their napkins. They were clearly not used to have abundances or extra food.

THE FIRST SCHOOL

Seeing the first school with 200 kids playing was huge. The Danes were impressed how good they were at segregating the children into teams and have them work so well together quickly. There were a few conflicts, especially with the girls, who were not allowed to take turn but also between the different ethnical groups. There were, however, no trouble, the way you would have seen it at a Danish school with Danish children. On the other hand, it was fun to watch, as a Dane, how selfish the local kids were. They tackled each other to get the ball and they wanted to score the goals themselves. However, the coaches did a great job fighting it and making the children play together. They succeeded in changing it.

For 13-year-old Nikolaj, being a part of it was a really good experience. Even though he could not communicate with the rest of the children, he still got friends. They came to him, they played together, and walking around the town outside the school was cool as the other kids came to him to say hello. Danish children would never do that, but he clearly felt that it was huge for them.

17-year-old Camilla worked as an assistant. When she started, she had problems controlling the team. The children did not want to listen to her, because they did not respect her as a young girl. Then she got pissed and scolded them in Danish. They ended up understanding – even though they did not speak Danish – that they had to behave. She had arranged several water fights and there is no doubt she was having a party with both children and adults. She had no doubts either. This was a great way to be on holiday. Her explanation was logic – it is much better to be here on the field in the heat under primitive conditions instead of a regular vacation. When you go to the beach, you are not active. When you go to the beach in southern Europe, you only do it to please yourself. Here you bring happiness to others. You can see how happy they are.

Nikolaj also thought that when you go to other places in foreign countries, everything is neat. But here, you see Albanian, Serbian, and Croatian countries reduced to ruins, suddenly there is a cow on the road, he has seen children walking a cow and others getting water in a wheelbarrow. It is another way of living and that is exciting.

The families have gained more friends, who they visit and meet with and Camilla has kept in touch via Facebook with many of the coaches and coach assistants, where they struggle with their English. However, they have still kept in touch.



THE CHILDREN WANTED TO GO BACK

The fact that so many children played in slippers or barefoot made a huge impression on Camilla and Nikolaj. When they came back they initiated a boot fundraising. They wrote an article in the local paper and put an ad in the paper, which brought in lots of boots and shin pads. During the winter, a union donated funds, so they could buy 38 sets of playing clothes for the club.

Camilla and Nikolaj obviously wanted to go back and help distributing the equipment. Fortunately, they got help from the military sending the clothes to Bosnia and the Danish soldiers helped distributing the equipment. Even though the clothes and the boots are used, the locals were very happy.

VISIBLE PROGRESS

The Danes agree that they could see a huge development in the country in only one year. This year, not many have not had boots or play in dresses or worn out sandals. There are not so many poor people. The infrastructure has been rebuilt and the town life has become more active. It seems that there is more money in Kosovo and when the football schools make local companies sponsor and donate juice and bread rolls, you feel the support. They are ready to rebuild things.

All the Danes agree that this project is amazing. And spending your vacation this way if you want to help others is amazing too. At the same time, it is exciting as a family to see where your father and husband used to work and finally to be accepted in such a warm manner by the locals. When you feel how grateful and happy they are, it makes you proud as a Dane.

A USEFUL PROJECT

After the Danes have participated in two schools, they have no doubts. The football schools are a great way to teach the children how to cooperate across ethnicity. They realize that it is possible and that they can cooperate.

The project may tie bonds when they realize that their opponent is all right and he has become a good friend. Even though many things cannot be changed here and now – it will probably take generations – there are many things you can use on both sides.

Last year, threats against Serbian villages in Serbia occurred. The support for them would be withdrawn if they participated. This year, the Serbian villages do not want to participate because they fear for their safety. However, it is a shame that they make up excuses because the children are paying for it. It is hard to believe that there would be problems, because 20 Serbian children came to play.

However, there is fertile soil for peace. The Danish families believe in that. Especially because of the development of the coaches, which they consider to be central. When they look at the coaches and their spirits, they indicate that the war and conflicts are forgotten. They are prepared for moving on. That is the way to stop a conflict no matter where the conflict came from or what it involved.



EXPERIENCING THE SCHOOL

'BY A LOCAL FOOTBALL SCHOOL FAMILY'

VISITING OGNJEN AFTER SCHOOL

We are invited to visit a 'typical football school family'. We can go back home with the instructor Luka and his son Ognjen (directly translated it means 'the flame'). It turns out that Luka is bringing home 7 children in his car and we follow them.

We drive from Srebrenica to the neighboring town Bratuvac and steadily move through the streets ending on a sheer gravel road. By the neighbor house, three ladies are taking care of the ornament for a wedding. The children quickly run home, but more hang out with us.

Ognjen go to his room and takes off his boots and t-shirt – he does it more than one time in honor of the photographer. His room is dark and only has one bed. However, his sister Tamara, who also participated at the school, has the nicest girl's room with idol posters, a TV, an old computer, and lots of dolls and toys. We are invited for coffee in the living room downstairs, while taking more pictures. There is a kitchen corner and a dining table squeezed in with lots of juice, a sponsor present from the schools.

The furniture is heavy and brown, there is a writing desk, chests of drawers and kitchen closets in a dark colour. There is a big freezer in the corner, a collection of plants, a TV, and a DVD player.

The mother is no sports woman, she says. However, everyone is friendly and hospitable and we talk for a while with the children watching. In the kitchen garden, outside, lots of beans, cabbage and tomatoes and three pigs are in a cage in the back. It seems nice and calm.

Ognjen goes to the back yard, juggling the ball. Tomorrow is another football school.







“THE GREATEST EXPERIENCES”

HEADMASTER

One of the most amazing experiences was when we established the first school and children from a village 16 kilometers away joined. The first day they came by bus. However, the next day the bus broke, so they walked instead.

All the way out and all the way back.

It is huge that the children love the school, their friends and playing so much.

OFFICE EMPLOYEE

I have helped pump up balls all night, I have spread butter on layers of sandwiches for children, and I have spent nights getting fields ready. I have been to the Champions League final and in Monaco for a prize giving. However, no matter if I am at a luxury hotel in Oslo or if I sleep on an airbed somewhere, the feeling is always great.

Working for a good cause is a gift. When you are passionate and cannot let go.

COACH

Yesterday, I had a great experience, when the girls gave me a hug after training and asked me: “Are we going to play tomorrow?” I love to be at the circle with the children shouting war cries after every exercise.

COACH

One of the girls on my girls' team was joining a football school. At first, she was very nervous, insecure and afraid that she was not good enough. It was such a moving experience when at day 2, she came running 100 meters towards me yelling: "I am having so much fun."

COACH

I had an incredible experience with a tough coach with a ponytail, who had a son who was going to play at the Red Star Cadet School. After working by the principles of the football schools for a day at the seminar, he got up in front of everyone, announcing that he had been working wrong for 12 years. He regretted and was going to change when he got back home. His most important goal so far had been to get results and win.

Now he was going home to play.

HEADMASTER

The best experience I have had was at a school in the neighboring village, when the headmaster suggested marching through the city on the last day. We walked from the field to the old part of town where we took a break eating ice cream. When we came with 200 children through the town, we got a lot of attention. The children were happy and having a good time and they were singing all the way through the town.

It was a great experience.



THE CORE AND THE CORNER STONES

From the beginning of the football schools, the primary goal was – reconciliation!

The purpose of the football schools was to help reunite the Balkans after the war. The OFFS were to become a miracle cure to defeat the mistrust, the fear, and the hatred between the ethnically torn local communities.

‘The most important aspect is for the children in this age group to get to know each other, coping with the negative inputs of history. It is about appreciating the human being, seeing the human being as the most important factor. We must invest in people through sports building a healthy society. We must start now giving the right values to the children – despite their ethnical background, culture, mind, and practice. Children’s sport is now attributed great value. We work with the child in the center and the children will work with good values. The children, who go through this project, become positive people, who can rebuild a future society, which is healthy and filled with joy’.

The quote was said by a former leader and coach, now employed in the department of sports in the community. ‘We build people’, another leader told me at some point. A very accurate way to describe the reconciliation process. The unique aspect of the football schools is that reconciliation starts at grassroots level. The process is simple, which makes it easy to join and be moved. It is more than remarkable that the football schools have managed to reconcile in a way that was not possible for the politicians and the established system. That is what you call a huge success. It makes you listen. What have the football schools done to succeed? How can we ‘lurk’ and learn?

“THE FOOTBALL SCHOOLS – IN THREE WORDS”

When I asked the coaches, the leaders, and the children to describe the schools in three words, the typical answer was as described in the following examples:

- Love – playing – friendships
 - Playing – learning
- Funny – exciting – impressive

It is a very difficult task to measure quality of life or the ‘value’ of inner experiences and feelings. However, the answers from the participants of the football schools clearly indicate what the schools can accomplish.

The answers circled almost only around the same words. The heart of the football schools.

The projects are capable of building friendships, fostering happiness, fun experiences – and turning everyday life into an incredible party.

‘May Everyday be like today...’,

those are the words in one of the newest songs of the schools. To create good experiences for the children that make them want to come back again and again.

That is the key behind the final success. If you can create lots of joy, you have a successful reconciliation project!

However, the big question that many want an answer to in life:
How do we create a lot of the happiness?!



THE RECIPE OF A FOOTBALL SCHOOL

TO LEAD THOSE WHO ARE NOT TO BE LED

The crucial piece of the puzzle is to understand the traditions surrounding the schools. The specific tone that all participants have found. The melody of the schools. Fundamentally, it is about finding a good way to handle difficult tasks – to run the ‘management of the volunteers’. It is an almost impossible and contradictory task. Volunteers are not to be led. They are to walk by themselves.

However, the solution on this dilemma is handled in a specific OFFS-way with a special approach, which can be called ‘managing through relations’. When new participants on a seminar or experienced coaches are to explain what working in the project is like, the same personal experience recurs.

To be part of the football schools is a relaxed and simple experience. It is about teamwork and dialogue. There is a noticeable absence of hierarchy and dictatorship. The participants like to be heard. With a surprised voice, they explain how there are no suits here and that the atmosphere consists of non-pretentious training suits.

The challenge by leading volunteers is to include everyone – including their life blood. Volunteers look for a purpose – they need to feel that their effort is needed – and at the same time participating must be fun. Otherwise, you lose their commitment.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT

PUTTING THE CHILD IN THE CENTRE

The child in the center is the central point of the football schools. The task that sets the agenda. When the main task is to make children happy – to create positive feelings – the coach becomes the central person. The coach gives and takes, meets and controls, smiles and talks, shouts and applauds. Therefore, the way you work is central for the success of the football schools and the way you work – how the coach is led by the right fire.

'You are what you do' – is an important point in the way the football schools perform their pedagogical thinking. It is as simple as it sounds. The coaches must be able to use their head, their legs and their body. They must know what they are doing, how they are doing it and be able to show it. However, it is the way they children experience it that creates the feelings and the experiences at the end.

The respect of this sensitive interplay between child and coach is what makes the final agenda of how the football schools have chosen to organize.



TO FEEL IT ON YOUR OWN BODY
TO FIND THE FIRE WITHIN YOURSELF

When the football schools conduct the seminars with the workshop in and outside the field, the participants are the active ones. They help shape the goals and the means. The mission affects them, once the task is presented to them. You are to make sure that every little child here is happy. They must think about how to make children happy and they orchestrate the exercises themselves.

Lots of proposals of play and activities are built into the concept. However, the coaches and leaders are supposed to build the practice. During the seminars, they are given the opportunity to play and have a good time. It works. It makes managing volunteers without limitations and with the potential of setting free a lot of energy and drive.

CREATING THE MEETING

When you manage through relations, the crucial task for the organization behind it is to create opportunities for “meetings”. The challenge is to create a space where volunteers can exchange views, opinions, and play. The primary task of the leaders is to listen – not dictate how to do things. The art of being a leader is something as beautiful as being a mediator and facilitator. The leader sets the field, collects the good experiences and in the long run makes sure that they are used and implemented.

And now we have reached another key piece in explaining the success: The ability to listen and systematically collect the good experiences. The art of putting together an organization that can suck out everything that works by the grassroots. An organization that can feel the grass grow, that is close to the action and at the same time able to sort out what works and what does not – and quickly take in the good initiatives.



**TO LEARN
FROM EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE**

If you are to continue to grow and develop as an organization, you need take in all the nourishment and inspiration you can find. The football schools have had their eyes and ears open from the beginning. It is a crucial vitamin supplement – and an important ability – of the organization; the will and openness to learn from others. It has been a characteristic of the history of the football schools. Different experts and people have been recruited and people have listened.

The regional principle is built on the systematic confrontation of how different countries, regions, schools, leaders, and coaches work. You must listen to and learn from each other. Even if you feel that the internal competition about who is better has been healthy, the overall goal has been the most important.

Nobody hides his or her own tricks or methods. Everything that works has been put on the table. Everything that has been exciting has been pulled out and used. Nothing is hidden in the drawers in the transparent and honest way of working. It is contagious and helps create the good energy to develop and not stall.

USING THE SPORT AS A TOOL

Happy children are like the foam bubbling over the edge of the beer glass. Happy children make adults take the children and the project serious and happy children are the reason for gathering around a good and common cause. The specific task of the football schools in daily life is to be a super effective joy factory. The challenge is to create a lot of bubbling happiness with all the participants – every single day.

Using sport is clever – because it delivers. What makes sport so special is that sport, as well as art and music, is a common world language – and perhaps sport is the most obtainable meeting spot. Sport is innocent and you can use it across and despite different origin, background, ethnicity, language, and financial and social status. Sport strikes broadly, because it is built on the fundamental human drive – ‘the hidden wish to socialize’ – and our need to play and use our body. Sport has the capacity to put in motion social processes and through that the popular potential to change civil societies.

Because sport can erase dividing lines, enter communication, and create new communities. Sport can recreate structures, fill out empty spaces, and unite people who have been living in segregated societies.

Sport has a unique potential to eliminate insecurity, mistrust, and hatred. Through sport, you can approach normalization, fuel optimism, and find something to believe in. Sport is an unsystematic method to create informal networks. In short, sport builds bridges and bonds. And that is what successful reconciliation is built on.

Regarding reconciliation, what makes sport unique is the fact that it works from bottom-up and not top-down like other political initiatives. However, when that is said, you also need to include the fact that what determines if reconciliation works at the end, is for the initiatives not to stand alone. The established relations, the good and the positive experiences must be brought from sport and out in the local communities.

To create successful projects, you cannot just organize sport; you also need to include all the stake holders in the world outside the football field – the parents, the communities, the teachers, the local sponsors, the national and regional football associations, the local and national media, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, and other relevant people.

One final thing about this: Specifically, in its basic nature sport is unpredictable, varied, and not dangerous – and thus filled with lots of sources for positive surprises. It is the positive surprises that give you the wonderful inner positive reaction, which is so popular and desirable. HAPPINESS! The football schools are like a ‘joy factory’ that can stimulate the potential joy of sport. In all the different shapes the sport can deliver.



“THE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE YEARS”

HEADMASTER

The schools have changed a lot and today we play differently. In the beginning our motto was brotherhood and equality, and the Serbs, Muslims and Croats should mingle. That was difficult. When we started, the groups were very divided and we had to demand for them to mix. In the beginning, many came in their national football t-shirts. Now there is a different relationship between the children.

HEADMASTER

There was a time, when everything was torn apart and we could not communicate. It has become a lot easier. We had no trust in each other, and when you met it was under more demanding circumstances. In the beginning – the first and second year – gathering 30-50 children was difficult, because the parents were against it. They had big reservations about their children joining the Federation. However, today I can gather as many children as I want to. Today, you can talk about everything on the phone.

HEADMASTER

When we conducted the first school, the police were there. We do not need that anymore. The police can watch but it is not their job to keep order.

HEADMASTER

When we conducted the first training after the war, we only had three balls of which one was punctured.

However, during the years the football schools have done a lot for the old football school here. The equipment has been a huge help. After three years with the schools the club took in lots of children and conducted training according to the principles of the football schools. They started conducting training – also for the less talented children. They never turned down any children, because they had lots of equipment and the opportunity of collecting many children.

HEADMASTER

The development of the schools is like the birth and upbringing of a child. It is like a plan, where time passes, they grow and new things, tasks and demands occur. In the development of the project from baby to adult, we have reached the youth stage. However, we need to become adults and when you become a mature grown man or woman; you need to see progress and development with more schools, more children and more regions. It is like the tree that comes to fruition. It must spread. Once the tree reaches old age, the project should have spread to many other countries.

COUNTRY CORDINATOR

The first year I came to Croatia, I went from community to community to find people to help organize the schools. I travelled hundreds of miles and it was very exhausting. Today I do not need to travel. I can just send an email or make a call, I sent out our program, give them a time schedule and everything is going smoothly. We work with 20 schools together with 40 communities and we receive over 30 applications. It turns out that the project has been known, recognized, and accepted.

THE SOUL OF THE SCHOOLS – THE OLD WIVES’ TALES

“THE STORY ABOUT THE FIRST MANUAL – BANANAS AND COFFEE”

TOLD BY GORAN FAZLINOXIC – EMPLOYED BY THE DANISH OFFICE

We were to write our own manual, but we could not just translate the Danish version. There were so many little things you did not consider, which was so different. For instance, in the Danish manual it said to call for help if a child was injured. However, that was not possible in Bosnia at that time. There were no phones – but chaos.

Not until Esko said the password – the coaches drink coffee and the children are eating bananas – that we got started. That sentence symbolized the coaches having a meeting discussing everything, while the children are taking a break and eating. Since that time, we found solutions and created a fine little manual.

“THE STORY ABOUT BEGGING IN DENMARK”

TOLD BY COUNTRY CORDINATOR VELIMIR SUBAN

We were divided into smaller groups, and I was with a young man from Bosnia, who was a good football player, a Danish girl, and a Danish tennis veteran. We were sent to the airport with collection boxes to collect for the project. My first reaction was embarrassment, because I did not want to beg. However, someone explained to me that this is the way to do it in Denmark. All we needed to do was take advantage of it. And it worked. We went to the personal restaurant at the airport during their break, and on the tables, were papers explaining the project, while we were to introduce ourselves and ask for a contribution to the project. The employees were very curious and they supported us, with a very small number not donating. It was exciting to count how much we collected.



“THE STORY ABOUT THE TIME WHEN WE WERE VERY POOR!”

TOLD BY MANAGING DIRECTOR ANDERS LEVINSEN

During the first years, we were very poor. I remember being in Sarajevo with the people from the Danish Embassy. They told me to sleep there, but even though I had no place to sleep and not a dime in my pocket, I thought it was too embarrassing as former UN manager not to have a place to sleep.

We had enjoyed a happy dinner. The others wanted to go party, but it was a problem for me to join, because I had no money to buy a round. Then we met an old acquaintance with a ponytail from the war, who ended up as the town's mafia boss, and when he recognized me, he bought a round for the whole company. Later that night, a guy from the embassy was dangling home, when he was arrested outside the bar, and he had no papers on him. They went and got me, and when I came out, the policeman recognized me and let the Danish guy from the embassy go. Afterwards, I think they thought I was one hell of a guy, but I had to go into town and find a bench to sleep.

The next day, I went to the refugee council and asked if they had a computer, I could borrow, because there was a couch in their office, where I could sleep.

“THE STORY ABOUT THE COACHES WHO WENT ASTRAY”

TOLD BY MANAGING DIRECTOR ANDERS LEVINSEN

While we were at the seminar in Pale, something special happened. There was a big guy there, who was quite violent, and everyone was afraid of him. He thought the schools should be on the Serbian sides in Sarajevo. We gave him an offer, he could not refuse. He could establish a school if he could guarantee that half of the coaches and children were Muslims. That was simply not possible at the time. However, he accepted and we thought: There goes a school down the drain.

However, he was given a bag with equipment, left and asked us when the rest of the equipment would arrive. After then there was silence. On the day of the school opening, we went to see it. When we arrived, 200 children were running around with four balls. There were no t-shirts or caps and we realized that the coaches were at the bar drinking schnapps, coffee and smoking cigarettes. Esko, who just had a hip surgery, threw his crutches through the air and smoke was coming out of my ears.

However, when I got to them, they told us to calm down. Only four years ago, the very same people here were shooting at each other. They recognized the voices of each other from the time they were shouting behind the front lines. So, they must start by drinking schnapps, so we sat down drinking with them. Esko took out the manual, drew and explained for about an hour. Then they went and lined up the field and the school had opened.

It was a unique school. Not the best – but an incredibly intense experience. At one point, the Muslim coaches were sitting by one of the side-lines breathing heavily. They were very tense and now they could breathe again. Now it was their place too. The last day they called and asked if they could do a school from 16-20 and play a veteran match. Those who had been shooting at each other were not fighting in the field. It became one big party, the children were cheering around the field, they cooked lamb and the coaches were singing and having a great time.



I slept at Esko's place and at 23 the phone rang. Angry parents were calling. Where were their children? We did not know, so we went there. They were partying. The coaches were very excited and singing. The children were playing like they did the same morning, playing hide and seek, and the bus driver had been partying too and was not able to drive. So, I ended up getting behind the wheel in a bus with 60 children driving them back home to their angry parents. The children calmed them down saying they had had a great time.

In many ways, it was a very land marking school, because this was where we practiced the 'twin city' concept for the first time. We started the schools according to the principle of same distribution between the ethnical groups.

However, that principle was making a division according to the dangerous nationalistic principles, which had resulted in who is who reference books about people's ethnicity before the war started. The school in Lukavac was a very important beginning of the 'twin city' concept turning the schools into a meeting spot for different areas and where the important thing was balance and that the schools were divided into the various geographical spots during the five days.



“THE STORY ABOUT WHY DRIVING MORE THAN ONE BUS IS A BAD IDEA”

TOLD BY COUNTRY CORDINATOR VELIMIR SUBAN

Many stories are tied to the first school. The children from Novo Travnik were to go to Vitez, but had to take a detour because going through Muslim territory was not safe. The Muslim children came from other areas and they also had to take a detour because it was not safe for them to go through the Croatian area. Going through the country back then was a great risk. We had to decide everything in advance.

It was a strange situation with two mayors in Vitez – one Muslim and one Croatian. The children were going to the same place, but the mayors were not happy about the children traveling together. So, each group got a bus. The first two days, both busses were driving, but then everyone realized it was not necessary. The Muslim bus picked up the Croatian children. There was no need for bus number two, so it was driving empty behind. At some point, only one of the mayors was in it.

“THE STORY ABOUT THE SREBRENICA-BRATUNAC SCHOOLS”

TOLD BY HEADMASTER LOGANIEG ZELJKO FROM BRATUNAC

I am Serbian and a refugee, and I was coach and head of the youth department, when I was invited for a meeting at the town hall about a project that no one knew anything about. When I came to the meeting, Djapic and Esko were there. They introduced the project with the multi-ethnic aspect and at that time there were no Muslims employed at the town hall and the politicians had no desire to change that. When Esko and Djapic left, the people at the town hall said that this was not going to happen.

However, Esko and Djapic told me that they were going to support me, if I were to enter the project, and they gave me two nights to think about it. I knew the target group I was going to work with and I knew who I was up against. I said yes and created a strategy of how to work against the radical ideas.

I found two people to join me. I convinced them to join the project by saying that the time for reconciliation will come to us, but we should work for it now rather than in 5, 6, or 10 years. To my surprise the town hall gave their permission, so I called Esko and Djapic giving them the great news.

The parents were concerned and even afraid. I had to conduct several parent meetings calming them and telling them that a serious organization was behind us and that the project was supported by the town hall. Finally, everyone supported it. Many times, the parents showed up with their children to look at everything.

Once they realized that there was nothing to fear, they were ok with it. The best cure was when the children enthusiastically came home telling them about their experiences. That was the biggest reason for them to come back.

In the beginning, I was very excited and had some internal battles. I wondered a lot, trying to keep a sense of perspective thinking about what could happen. I could not help being afraid of the unknown and that idiots would enter the field. However, because of how it went and the success we gained along the way, I have become free and relaxed and I have found myself.

When the school was opening in 2002, both mayors came and it was the first time they met each other. The communication between people in Srebrenica and Bratunac had been non-existent from the beginning. The football schools were the first project to open multi-ethnic corporation. Not many Muslims were still here, but they were living in the villages and had returned. Conditions now and then are 100 % different. Today, there are 20 Muslim children in his private club and the children now watch the games of the club and cheer for the Serbian club.

Even when we opened the second school in 2003, the barriers had been overcome, and politicians came and said hello to the children, while many new parents joined on day 2.

“THE STORY ABOUT THE STOLEN BUS”

TOLD BY VEDHAD IDRISIMOVIC, INSTRUCTOR FROM BOSNIA

In 2000, we were going to establish a school in Lukavac for five days. The headmaster Simo from Petrovo brought all his children in a bus that turned out to belong to a transport company in our community before the war – but had been stolen by the enemy. After the war, it had been left back. On the way to Lukavac the police, who asked those from Petrovo to drive the children to the football field and then take the bus for a technical inspection, stopped the bus. Here they learned that the bus belonged to a Lukavac transport company. That bus is not going back, they said. Simo came to me and told me that they had taken the bus. Simo was to arrange for a new bus to take the children back. They did not want to do that. Then, they wanted to walk home. Back then you could not do anything without going through all instances – the police, the peacekeeping forces needed to sign and approve because our project was a high-risk event.

When I heard about the bus, I tried calling the mayor and the police commissioner, but everyone was traveling, and their substitutes could not do anything. I had an intense conversation with the vice police commissioner and told him that the police had confiscated the bus. Finally, the police commissioner threatened me. If I kept pushing the issue, he was going to arrest me. And it was our bus from our company. I could not convince him over the phone, so I had to go to him waiting an hour in the hall. However, no agreements had been entered when I finally left the office, so when the school ended at 14, there was no bus. The bus driver had left too. He was so afraid that he had walked all the way home, scaring all the children’s parents.

Finally, the bus came with a new driver, and when it arrived at Petrovo there was almost a state of emergency. All the parents were out in the street. I called Simo at night and asked if they came the next day. “No”, he said. The parents did not want to send the children. We talked for a long time about the busses. We realized that there were plenty of busses divided between the two areas and Petrovo got to keep theirs. We solved the problems, and at the rest of the school the children came back and forth fine.



When the parents heard what was at the other side of the boarder, they came with us the next couple of children and they brought cheese and groceries to sell on the market. So, trading emerged along with the school. Before that, even visiting had been unimaginable.

The last day at the school we had a party and cooked two lambs, and there was an amazing friendship after that. Since that school, there has been contact between the children and the coaches. The politicians started collaborating through the football school and if there had been no school, there would not have been any bonding.

“THE STORY ABOUT THE ANGRY FATHER”

TOLD BY VELIMIR SUBAN

I had an acquaintance, whose friend had a son, who participated at the school. His friend also had a younger son, who was not at the school. The father came to me and asked: “Is my son going to play with the children of the dirty Muslims?” I knew the father a little and knew that he was tough and could be a source of trouble.

I told him: “Try looking at all the children out in the field. Can you tell me who is who? They are all the same and they all have white t-shirts on.”

He answered: “That is not what I asked. I asked if my son is going to play with the dirty Muslims?”

“I do not know which children you are talking about. I just know that all the children here are playing together,” I answered him.

“Do not raise my child”, he said and forbad his son to join the school. The boy cried and the little brother also started crying.

However, the father was tough, took the t-shirt off his son and returned it. The boy squeezed it and I told him that he could take the t-shirt home with him. I could feel that it was not wise of me to say anything. However, when the father once again told me that they were going home and that it was not my place to raise this child, I could not help but say that it was sad that he was raising the children.

On the third day of the school, we played the Bon Bon Cup and I saw the father at the stand. On the Muslim side of the stand. He watched the school for two hours and his youngest son was with him. The coaches saw it too and they told me that there could be troubles ahead. The police were there as well, but I told them to ignore it and keep working.

During the big break, the father came over and asked if we could talk. I am always up for a good conversation – especially, if something good comes out of it. However, I had no choice even though I did not want to talk to him or be in his company.

“What do you want?” I asked. He said that he was wrong and when he looked at the school and how we worked, he realized that it was good and asked if we would take back his son.

I had witnessed an amazing transformation and the influence the project had on him. I was so happy and it was one of the biggest victories in my life. I told him that his son could come back on one condition. He initially opposed to me making demands. But my only demand was that the younger brother could play too. Both boys came and joined on Thursday and Friday.

I think I acted wisely and with patience. However, the episode also showed the quality and value of the project.

“THE STORY ABOUT THE FIRST TRIP TO A MUSLIM TOWN”

TOLD BY HEADMASTER IUKOVIC VESHA-CICA FROM SAMAC, BOSNIA

We were to establish a school in a Muslim town, and the bus was loaded with refugee children, who had never been in a Muslim town before. The children were very young, but the parents had given their approval. When the children entered the field, I realized that it was located next to a new mosque. I asked the local coach if there were prayers in the mosque, which there was. I wanted to prevent something stupid from happening, when the children heard the calling for prayers.

So, I gathered all the children, who had never heard it before and made sure that we were playing, when they called for prayers, so they did not notice and bad situations would occur. You can easily tread on somebody's toes if you do not know how to behave. Fortunately, it went smoothly.

When we were returning, the police wanted to escort us out of the town. We did not want that. I knew the town from previously and I wanted to show the children the old town. So, we made a tour instead, sat in the park eating ice cream and talking, and the children relaxed. I had a cup of coffee and back home in the bus the children were happy and singing.

After we left the town, I told the children about it, and they were calm, because they had seen that it was not dangerous.





“THE STORY ABOUT A MOVIE PREMIERE WITH ROYAL VISITORS”

TOLD BY GORAN FAZLINOXIC – EMPLOYEE AT THE DANISH OFFICE

A Danish movie about the football schools in Bosnia was premiering. Gunvor Bjerre had written the manuscript and Lars Gudmund Hansen was instructor. Fundraising, casting, shootings, and editing had taken two years. There were 100 seats at the Danish National Museum, but we had a hard time filling out the seats, so we asked all our families and friends to come. At the same time, royal visitors from Norway were in Denmark around Norway's National Day on May 17. Suddenly, we heard that the Danish Crown Prince Frederik, his younger brother Prince Joachim and the Norwegian King Haakon were coming and bringing visitors from the Norwegian Football Association.

Anders was to cut down his speech from 12 to 4 minutes, so he was busy practicing. He did not have a tie, so the dress code was shorts and t-shirts. Suddenly, public servants, ambassadors, and other visitors rolled in and the police dogs arrived.

It was a huge moment for me. I had been there all the way and when the premiere began I was sitting on the first row with my young son and his mother. King Haakon from Norway and Crown Prince Frederik were at the front row with Anders and the film crew.

The producer introduced everyone and I was named last. I could hear that he told Frederik that I had been a part of it as interpreter. Outside of protocol Frederik got up, shook my hand and says: “It is nice to meet you.” “You too,” I said.

It is incredible to think back on when I remember the first year and how I did not think we would succeed. In time, I have often thought: Nothing more can happen now. We received lots of awards, from the Peace Award to the “Beyond Sports Award”, UEFA's Gold Award, and our movie won several awards as well.

THE SECRET BEHIND THE SPECIAL VIRUS

CHASING THE SPECIAL OFFS-VIRUS

Another hot summer day in the Balkans. The children are at the field. We are a small Danish delegation at the sideline. Our children are playing and some of us are taking pictures, others are chatting, and I end up at the middle of the field between three stations with Stina, who usually works with economy and administration at the office in Denmark.

I take a break between interviews and video recordings and just take in the atmosphere next to Stina. Then Stina start talking about the “magic elements” without me even asking. However, once she is finished, I get my note pad and try to catch the essence of Stina’s simple but very fundamentally philosophic question. What is happening with these football schools?

STINA FROM THE OFFICE

ASKS THE GOOD QUESTION

Stina experienced it as a warm-hearted thing. Something that she could not put into words. However, the atmosphere reminds her somewhat of the spirit at the refugee center for the Danish Red Cross where she used to work. Perhaps it is because there is a mission and a goal and you feel like you make a difference that this special atmosphere emerges.



Perhaps good people attract good people. Stina thinks out loud. Or perhaps Anders has created it and passes it one from his own fireball? She shakes her head. She does not know. However, she describes the strong virus in a very accurate way. It is like an atmosphere all over – like you are a family. Even the former hard-core communists in the Caucasus are struck by it. Like a rolling avalanche. You are met by it and take it to heart – and if you do not get it, you cannot be part of the program. She has seen that too.

On the rest of my trip on the Balkans, I think about Stina's observations and questions. How can something so strong, beautiful, and unique emerge like it was ordered and almost without exception on every school? Imagine if anyone had the recipe for such a good source of infection. It would be the best revolution in the world to start such a positive feeling tsunami.

GORAN, WHO HAS BEEN THERE FROM THE BEGINNING

FELT IT FROM DAY 1

I look back on my notes and the papers and I stumble across the comments from my first interview – on a spring day with Goran in Denmark, long before I visited the schools and knew what he was talking about. However, Goran had told me about the first seminar that took place in the spot where Anders had been kept prisoner during the war. Goran emphasized that amazing atmosphere. People acted like one big happy family, no matter where they came from and even though most had very different motives for being there. Some wanted to help the community or the club, others came to develop professionally or to rebuild a network.

Goran came back as a refugee and had a strong need to teach people in Bosnia some of the things he had learned in Denmark. That there was new and different ways of doing things. The goal of the seminar had been to bring people together but people were contaminated by the concept of 'friendship – football – playing'. There were participants at the seminar, who went on with the project, spread the project and the virus like rings in the water – as Goran accurately describes it. Strong bonds were tied between participants at the seminars and the participants accurately became family and the work with the project turned into something much more than work. It became a lifestyle building on very close and dear feelings between family members.

DJAPIC THE INSTRUCTOR

HAD SEEN THE PROVE

On my trip around the Balkans, I have had the honor of meeting many of the 'culture carriers', which Goran mentions and who were part of the project from the beginning. They are still part of it and living proof of how strong and long-lasting the virus is. I ask them if they can explain the big and strong movement they are a part of, which goes to the soul.

I meet Djapic the first time in Moldova, the second time at a seminar in Jahorina, and the third time at his home field – while a school is being conducted at the field in Pale. Ironically, I seem to have caught the virus myself, because when I see Djapic walking along the side-lines in his nice dress – after a meeting at his work place – I feel like meeting a good old friend. I feel like giving him a huge bear hug, but I am not sure that would be appropriate. I give him a nice hug, and we sit on the bench in the shadow of the club house and I get to ask him basic questions about his story and how he can explain the omnipresent virus...

It is all in the concept, he explains. It occurs, when you invite people for a leader- and coach seminar. You must be blind not to see it. The very small drop-out rate is a proof of how strong it is. Djapic points to the field and the busy stations with children and coaches in action in the heat. All the coaches like these work hard under difficult circumstances, but when the school is finished they feel accomplished. They know that they have done something for the youth. They have helped promoting sports, a healthy lifestyle, friendships, and unity. They help others looking more tolerant at life and people around them.

I ask if he can explain in details what happens to the coaches and leaders, and Djapic thinks for a while, before he answers. – Every change for every person is very subjective and personal. It is difficult to see people changing their behavior. However, it means a lot that you are working for a good cause. While working with the football schools, you have an opportunity of making someone happy and satisfied and it brings something extra when you work with children. As coaches and leaders, you do everything to include all the children – also the ones who are late. We experience a great deal of happiness when the children meet us and shout: “Hello coach – when school again?”, Djapic explains with a contagious enthusiasm that leaves no doubt that the joy of the children is a strong source of keeping the virus alive.





THE VETERAN VELIMIR HAS CAUGHT THE VIRUS

CLOSE TO HIS HEART

One of the last days in the Balkans I meet Velimir who is one of the first 'disciples', who has been part of the project since the first trip to Denmark in 1998. He is a big, happy, lively, scarred, and forthcoming man, and he reflects nicely when I ask him about the virus.

- Anders had a great idea and together with us, we delivered the 'baby', who was born in 1998, is 13 years today and just finished secondary school. The people who were there from the beginning and the people who work with so much energy have been contaminated with the virus from the child. Those who enter the project stay because they like it. Those who left did not feel it.

Velimir makes some heavy facial expressions, when he talks about this 'positive virus'. It is a busy virus. It is a virus not artificially created by pharmacists. It is born from the heart. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers, children and parents have all been contaminated and you cannot fight it or find a cure. This virus must be nurtured.

When I ask how to recognize it, Velimir gives a good example. – We were conducting a seminar in Moldova for all our instructors in Croatia. Anders wanted to give the project the cost-cutting axe and he thought we should go by bus. I was not very keen on the idea. It was crazy and only something Anders would come up with. It would take us 50 hours by bus to get to Moldova. We agreed to ask people how many would go by bus. Everyone accepted except for me. That is the virus. We want to go and see our friends. We want to help involve others and explain to them the principles, so that they can carry out the project. We all want new countries to join. You can see at the persons struck by the virus that they never ask what is in it for them. People work to help others.

THE INITIATOR ANDERS LEVINSEN

ABOUT THE FATE OF MEETING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The summer has ended and I am sitting in Anders' living room above the office with a view over the sea through the big window in Anders' penthouse flat. I have not found a final answer of how to make this spirit contaminate and spread in such a beautiful and concentrated manner. However, when I look at Anders, who tells and explains with his arms, legs, eyes, and soul, I have no doubt that in addition to the good mission of the project and working with children, it is determining who gives birth to the idea and how the idea is shipped, with a good sense of personal spirit and energy. Anders has his own elaborating input to understanding the sweet virus.

- First and foremost, I have been lucky to find the good people from the beginning. I ask if it is only luck, and Anders elaborates. – People have been incredibly good. This year, I have seen about 20 schools, and we work in areas where people have been shooting at each other, and in areas, where management can be incredibly problematic. In 2010, we have been working with 6,000 volunteers and I have not had a chance to recruit one of them.

However, everyone in the project is so nice and wonderful. No matter where in the world I go. I just believe that this project is 'fueled' with good energy. It must come from inside. No one can have any objection to playing with children, you surrender yourself to the children and the children are in the center. The adults relax and just want to have a great time with the children. Instinctively, it calls for the good in people. It has nothing to do with me. I have not been there. It is so interesting to see how it happens.

When do you see people shouting at the children? It does not happen. I do not understand it. In many of the areas so much evil has happened, but they are so nice to the children. In Denmark, we are used to working from an approach of children having fun, but in many other countries, such as Ukraine, they believe that a good coach wins the games and makes results. Once we start playing, they are affected and start thinking differently. We want what is best for the children. If you ask about their feelings, it becomes a question of what you want for your child. They all give the same answer that I, as a father, want for my child. We want our children to be happy and well-functioning. It is great if they become good. However, there is so much more to it, Anders ends.

THE AUTHOR LISE

SITTING BACK WITH THE QUESTION ABOUT

Yes, there is so much more to it. No doubt about that. However, I am now sitting at my desk and I cannot get any more help. I cannot get any better explanations. I must finish the book and I would love to get an explanation of how and why the magic and the good spirit follows the Open Fun Football Schools.



The smartest thing I can think of is that the project is so pure and good in its soul and purpose that it turns on the best in people. The schools are only for good – nothing else. The project does not aim at power, prestige, or results. The schools are for the good cause here and now. The children are going to play and everything you need to do and built, you do together.

The project is well organized and not an inch of practice or politics gets in the way. It holds on to the simple things and the purpose. People who exude all the best carry it out. They do that quickly, because the thing about joy is that it is contagious.

When people are struck by happiness, it brings out the best in us. If the feeling of joy is dominating, we know from a scientific perspective that it makes us open up and makes the creative and creating resources thrive. When happiness is not present, we are on the guard and limit ourselves. However, joy is in every way nice to us. The positive virus is contagious and the smile dances on.

Not to be overly nostalgic, bleeding heart romantic, or to idealize the project, when my search for an explanation of this lovely OFFS-virus ends with this beautiful conclusion.

No, that is just the way it is. Rosy. The football schools you have established in the Balkans are a unique party package of positive feelings in all sizes and colors. Nothing black, grey, or ugly. It is gold, visions and happiness. A project that gives you faith in everything that is good. Is there nothing better than to feel the fever?

THE END RESULT

WHEN EVERYTHING IS SETTLED

‘We have done a lot. Many people have been pushed forward from dead spots. We have supported and helped regular public schools and educational systems, because we educate people and have disseminated the coach education. We have contributed a lot to the expansion of girls’ football and we have opened people’s eyes, showing them the way and told them – organize, find your way, you have a lot to offer the rest. You need to be willing to accept from others. ‘The others’ are not enemies! The wealth and great goods make us better human beings. We must be happy that we are part of this chain.

The country coordinator and veteran Velimir, who has been part of the project from the beginning, accurately sums up many of the prizes, the football schools have given the Balkans.

Let us hold on to the first thing, Velimir mentions. Everything the project has done for those people, who have been involved. Velimir calls it ‘moving people from dead spots’ and refers to the many leaders and coaches who got involved in the project and found or re-established lots of friendships and life quality. Experiences, feelings, and optimism were bubbling and for many people it was needed.

After traveling, talking, watching, and getting inspired, this giant personal significance the project has had for so many people appears the strongest.

All these good and strong feelings that go on and have the potential of creating reconciliation and other societal rewards, but in the moment, just feel so strong, because it has moved so many things for so many people.

That is the greatest brand. To sit in front of people with sparkling and wet eyes, who tell us what a reconciliation project started far away in Scandinavia by a crazy Dane has meant for them and many other people in a part of the world, where people and local communities had been torn apart.



“THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS”

(WHEN THE PEOPLE BEING ASKED OFTEN LAUGH AND SHAKE THEIR HEADS AFTER LONG MOMENTS OF THINKING)

HEADMASTER

The most difficult thing about creating a good school is to get the funding. Going from door to door is so tough. But I will never give up – for the children’s sake!

INSTRUCTOR

The most difficult for us is to establish a good organization and choose the best and the right people. People, who love to work with children and people, who can put themselves in the children’s place and not work for personal gains. When people start working, they need to know that there are no material gains – happiness and joy is the profit.

COACH

The most difficult is that it requires a great deal of technical preparation. You need to make sure that everything is settled to make it work optimally. It requires time and money and you need to engage a lot of people. It takes resources to find so many people. Previously, it was not difficult to find the fireballs, but it has become more difficult, because people need to make money.

HEADMASTER

The most difficult thing is the fact that we only have a limited number of t-shirts, caps and armbands, so often I cannot give to all the children.

COACH

The most difficult thing is when there is a conflict between two small kids and I must try and fix it. It is also hard to handle, if you see one of the groups not doing so well and get a bad feeling of failure.

HEADMASTER

The most difficult thing is the first day at the school, when you must unite three towns.

COACH

The most difficult thing is the weather. Apart from that, nothing is difficult.

COACH

It is not difficult. I just try to be nice and kind and not act as a policeman.

CHILD

The most difficult thing is when the coaches give us permission to decide for ourselves and we start arguing and everything falls apart. Sometimes we agree and then it is fun.

CHILD

The most difficult thing is to turn a hula hoop.

ONE LAST THANK YOU

It has been a very inspiring and privileged experience to be a part of this and I sincerely hope that I succeeded in communicating some of the magic of the virus; you have spread in the fields of the Balkans.

The project is spreading all over the world – to some of the many hot spots which will unfortunately always be here – and which will request concepts like this one. No one knows where it ends. However, the project has the potential of going far in every way – inside and outside.

Is that it then? Is this the whole story about the football schools in the Balkans? Are there no negative stories? Is everything so rosy?

No, that is not credible.

It happened many times along the way that the disappointment in the engagement or the organization appeared. It was frustrating if the coaches were no talented or if their energy had burned out and they were hanging out far from the field.

Especially, when you saw the frustrated or disappointed children. That was unbearable. The children were not supposed to wait or go home early...the more schools we visited, the more we became passionate that this should be done the right way. Even though there is no 'right' way – you can clearly feel if it is working or not.

However, I can be honest. Not many experiences are negative.

In my notes, I have one quote with a negative message. – A first time participant at a coach seminar, who thought many of the other participants were lazy and thought about fun and games instead of being present at the field... that was it.

How wonderful to end on a note like this.



FINAL WORDS
A WONDERFUL FINISH

The last impression is good and clear. Without a hitch or doubt in the soul.

What a great concept.

Great schools for the children.

Such wonderful people and such hospitality.

And most of all. Such wonderful children.

Familiar, open, relaxed, harmonious, and beautiful. They wave to you happily.

I still see them in the bus that drove by.

Congratulations! The building blocks for the future of the Balkans are into play.





