



Interface Nord-Sud et forum d'échanges sur les questions de société et d'auto-développement

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Report on an internship in the Fondation's office by Maria Schwertl (intern at the office between 26.10.10 and 5.1.2011)

Due to research on transnational and migrationally initiated „development projects“, I got in contact with New Generation in September of 2009. With the research being part of a PhD thesis, I wanted to follow the topic more deeply and thoroughly: this is why I decided to work not only on and with New Generation but also its partner in Cameroon, Fondation Kana – and luckily enough both partners agreed on that.

Before heading to Cameroon I tried to get informed on history, politics, country and people by reading books. Although I succeeded thus to get along with information and situation on site more quickly, you cannot grasp a country in books. Because life is too complex for this. An advice I can pass on to future interns is therefore: read less travel guides, inform yourselves about the political system, and history of Cameroon, learn French (if you are not fluent so far) and ask the Fondation or New Generation questions!

I was welcomed in Cameroon with arms wide open and anticipation: William Fedjo, coordinator and Steffi, who had started her internship at the Fondation two month before my arrival, picked me up at the airport and helped me through the organisational necessities of my first day: got me a mobile phone number, internet, registration at the police station and to the bank to get cash. What fascinated me the most during my first days in Yaounde: the red soil; earth rodes with holes; taxis passing through them, which you never use alone, as the taximen pick up up to five people – also you, for which you do not have to tell them the street you are heading for, but a locally known point in town which is close there, for example „Pharmacie Saint Bernadette“ and the area „Cradat“. If the taxi, i.e. the passengers being seated in it, is going your direction, the taximen will use the horn and you get in. Taxis are the most important and only means of transportation besides motorcycles, which you can use for shorter distances or those farer from city center. But transport is important in a city of chaotic traffic and flat houses covering huge areas.

... to continue: I was and am fascinated by booths and hawkers (you can shop everything from them. From sneakers to Kleenex).

Still (at a time, where I have been here for more than a month) I am deeply in love with Cameroonian food. It offers porridge-like stuff as well as dumpling-like stuff made of different ingredients and being accompanied by spicy sauces with meat. Breakfast consists of baguette and spread.

By the way I am living with Steffi, the other intern. We live on the first floor of a house, of which the ground floor is inhabited by a family of eight (parents, four children and two grown-up nieces).

The apartment is situated quietly and has a fabulous view over the redish-greenish hills of Yaoundé. We repeatedly have said, coming back home here after a day full of work is a real recreation. Besides its great living with a family, who can explain and show us, how they prepare

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food, do their laundry and manage their daily life, who visit the market with us from time to time and integrate us into their life repeatedly, e.g. when mom or dad pick us up with their car. For people worrying: nothing much happened to us - only a few things have been stolen from us. Family and members of the Fondation are taking care of one really well and besides one is scarcely on one's own. While this brings closeness and security along, it also puts borders to one's actions naturally - but the insights you get via friends and family make up for this deeply. Who has thought so far however, things were moving more slowly in Cameroon is to be told, we are working much here. The Fondation and all our acquaintances in Yaoundé are. If you have a job at least, since unemployment is high – also among graduates. Not few get involved in a social organisation while searching for a job. A good thing for social organisations and institutions, as there is much to be done for them: the basic structure of social security system and public institutions are scarcely there or non-existent.

Still there is kind of a system consisting of citizens' activeness and many private networks and organisations (for example tontines). Working here you can contribute to this activeness and give the Fondation new input, acknowledgement and spin. In the words of one of Fondation's

members: „Since you [Steffi and me] have arrived, we are all more motivated“. Which meant – as he explained later on – getting aware of external interest and support sets free new energies.

This is why my work here consists on the one hand of observation, questioning and discussion to learn something about this system-from-below on the other hand, we work on how to portrait the Fondation and make it interesting for partners and supporters. Furthermore we discuss which partners could be of interest etc. One of the most important points working here: be interested in all of the connections within and through the Fondation and try to learn something about it.

But I do not do plans, acquisition and discussion here only, I also work on the website, participate in meetings and accompany the three members doing the „soleil a l'école“-courses to the schools. This is how I not only can get glimpses of „organizational work“, but also of teaching and cooperating with ministries and international players in Cameroon.

In the evenings and at the weekend Steffi and me are often invited by William and other Fondation members to festivities or get-togethers (tontine-meetings, snack-bars or marriages).

This is why – during an internship – you not only get to know the Fondation but also daily life in Yaoundé/Cameroon. Fondation often feels more like friendship, and working with friends can set you free. In order to give a clearer idea, I have drafted the schedule of a normal day:

7:00	getting up, having breakfast
8:00	leaving the house with Papa, who has to go the same direction
8:00 till 10:00	Translating or working on files/or: doing interviews for the PhD
10:00 till 12:00	Working with William on plans, procedures and discussing with him and Papa Etienne
12:00 till 16:00	accompany a teacher to ‚soleil a l'école‘: this means am going one hour by taxi to the school, participate at up to three lessons (if there are three in a row, as on fridays at the moment), takes one hour to go back to the office (on the way I am sometimes grabbing a snack)
16:00 till 17:00	Working on files, translations, website
17:00 till 19:30	Meeting of Fondation's members: exchange news and discuss basic

questions

19:45 meeting Papa at a point close to the office and returning home with him

20:30 till 21:30 dinner + break

21:30ff. chatting; reading documents you were confronted with during the day;
watching videos; doing research on the Internet; preparing stuff for the
PhD-research

24:00 going to bed

... Saturdays or Sundays we are mostly doing shopping on the market, cleaning the flat, doing our laundry by hand (which can take a couple of hours) and cooking