

Gernika Oct 2014: Young farmers meeting “Defending the commons”

Peter Volz, 30.10.2014

Arriving at the young farmers conference in Gernika in the Basque country made me feel I had arrived in a meeting in a squat house in Berlin where I used to hang out sometimes: progressive hair do's, pirate flags and punk t-shirts all over - truly a different experience from the young farmers I meet in Germany. The issues addressed however in the meeting are the same Europe-wide.



The organization of this meeting of farmers' trade union Ehne Bizkaia and the NGO Mugarik Gabe was excellent because they put together an interesting programme that was participatory, informative and innovative – including local farmers and representatives from Basque, Spanish and Latin American farmers organisations as well as researchactivists from Spain and Germany.

It started off by the fact that there was a graphic designer present who simultaneously to the presentations of the speakers was sketching the ideas on papers and putting it on a wall afterwards - a great way of summoning the thoughts.

The introduction was made by Angel Calle from the University of Cordoba who introduced the idea and theoretical concept of the commons, the implications it has for reorganizing our economy and the role of the young farmers. He laid the foundations for this event and although it was the theoretical start of the day he did it in a passionate and stimulating way.

After that a series of talks discussed the fundamental agricultural and societal issues of Water, Seeds, Land,

Knowledge and Social Care in a general way, the situation in the Basque country and in respect to the requirements of the young farmers. This was a quite impressive “tour de force” and everybody used the lunch break with local organic and vegetarian delights to digest the information. Only the Cuban representative of the animal production association ACPA was looking slightly disappointed because of the lack of meat at the buffet. The sketches of the designer helped in reflecting on the presentations and gave a great overview.





The day was followed by further elaborations and questions on the fundamentals of agriculture outlined above before the conference hall was then turned into a stage where 7 women, partly dressed as men, were performing a foro theatre play called "Donde no hay mata no hay patata". This was a remarkable experience from the first moment when we were asked to participate in several physical and sound warm-ups. The theatre play addressed the issues of access to markets for small ecological farmers and the alternative of CSA projects as well as farm debt and farm succession. At some point the play's dramatic end was re-played by volunteers from the audience providing positive alternatives to the story. This was the message everybody took home.

The next day began with input from the representative of farmers from Guatemala and from Cuba putting their experiences in their respective societal context.

The next part of the day was a series of small workshops on the experiences of a local land bank, the conflict resolution in civic agricultural and social movement initiatives, collective organization and the problems and solutions in Freiburg, Germany and Europe. The last was outlined by me as the representative for the organization Die Agronauten.

The experience in Gernika gave inspiration and knowledge. It is great to know that this experience is shared through a great video.