



European meeting in Verona

Share ideas and discuss

Emmaus Europe met in Verona and made its presence felt. Against the backdrop of a period of social and debt crisis, Emmaus Europe examined social issues in greater depth in order to gain a better understanding of the environment in which it works. For meeting participants, the objective was to discuss the topics that form the core of Emmaus Europe's work and are its very *raison d'être*.

26 & 27 April 2013. Verona. Italy.

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The Emmaus Europe Regional meeting took place on 26-7 April in Verona and brought together 220 participants from 110 Emmaus groups from 16 European countries. Representatives from Austria, Lithuania and Albania were also keen to take part in the event.

Representatives from Sweden, Portugal, Romania, UK, Ukraine, France, Germany, Italy, Finland, Spain, Belgium, Denmark, Poland, Netherlands and Switzerland were eager to interact with each other.

The aim of the event: share experiences and make progress on common policy areas!

Introduction by Julio de la Granja



Julio started by thanking the Italian national organisation, its president and the Italian Emmaus groups for their efficient help with preparations for the meeting.

The president thanked the Regional Executive of Emmaus Europe for the choices made and meeting content and for arranging the meeting. He also thanked the Regional Council of Emmaus Europe for supporting the programme.

Meet up

He informed the gathering that the meeting had 220 participants from the 16 European countries where Emmaus has a presence, plus representatives from Austria, Lithuania and Albania. In total, 110 European groups were represented at the meeting.

He highlighted the issues that we face and the practical solutions delivered by Emmaus. He also reminded participants about the aims of this discussion meeting.

The meeting aimed to be in sync with the desires of the member organisations.

The programme endeavours to **reflect the reality of a Europe Region whose members are keen to listen to each other** about practices, initiatives and views about the initiatives on the economic, political and social role of Emmaus Europe, and secondly, a sustainable lifestyle and degrowth for Emmaus Europe.

The age-old European continent has been left reeling by the economic, social and political crisis, which is also proving to be a crisis of civilisation. The crisis is particularly affecting the most deprived members of our society with policy throughout Europe increasingly widening the gulf between the 'haves' and 'have nots', between the north and south, between the majority and the minority.

Share ideas and discuss

Each and every organisation should be able to benefit from the experiences of others and conversely should be able to promote their own achievements.

At the same time, our irresponsible attitude when exploiting the earth's resources means that more and more people are speaking out in order to make us understand that if we continue heading in the same direction, we will be jeopardizing life and the very existence of future generations.

Act

Give ourselves the means to gain a better understanding of our immediate environment and therefore address the root causes of extreme poverty. Observe our own practices and ensure that the region flourishes based on participation.

The president Julio de la Granja announced the presence of professors Bruno Amoroso and Maurizio Pallante who would deliver keynote lectures on the two main topics.

Finally, he thanked the European member organisations for attending and wished everyone a sociable and productive meeting.

Welcome speech delivered by Renzo Fior, the President of Emmaus Italy

Renzo firstly welcomed all the participants and then presented the Italian Emmaus groups.

Emmaus Italy has 17 member groups, 14 communities and three committees of friends, which are solely managed by volunteers. This makes for a total of 185 companions, 41 paid staff and 380 volunteers. He stressed the fact that the Italian groups offer unconditional shelter and support. Their work revolves around collecting, recycling and reselling goods, furniture and clothing at affordable prices. Particular attention is paid to sustainable development. This means that several communities have solar panels, collect rainwater and have wood-fired heating.

At grassroots level, the Emmaus groups work on a daily basis to combat social exclusion, at the same time helping the most disadvantaged members of society to regain hope and dignity.

The economic, social and political role of Emmaus Europe

“Looking beyond austerity to a solidarity economy” - keynote speech delivered by Professor Bruno Amoroso, a former economics professor at the University of Roskilde in Denmark.

Having provided a recap of the history of economics, during which he focused on the limits of the expansion of wealth generating parallel conflicts, Professor Amoroso described Emmaus as being a new way of recreating family and solidarity concepts based on an ethos of sharing. He also reiterated that non-governmental organisations are duty bound to create an alternative lifestyle in order to counteract capitalism, a system in which the market holds sway!

He made a comparison between big business and the Emmaus Movement using two key development model concepts:

Firstly, the population: people are not a priority for major companies who use and then reject them when they are no longer needed, whereas human relations between the people who make up Emmaus are at the very heart of the organisation's concerns.

Land: he drew the same conclusion as for the population. Big business uses the land and then abandons it once it has been exploited, whereas Emmaus takes care of its plots of land, which are regarded as being common property, and takes account of sustainability when growing crops.

Professor Amoroso therefore recommended living an alternative lifestyle, protecting our local environment as much as possible. The sustainability of society is at stake!

Workshop arrangements

On average, the 10 themed working groups each had some **40 participants**. Each participant could choose two working groups. Each group had a moderator, who was tasked with helping to generate concrete proposals, and a rapporteur.

The work of the member organisations was **contextualised** in order to introduce the workshops.

The participants then agreed on the following key points, which were presented in a plenary session.

Feedback from the working groups

Theme 1: The economic, political and social role of Emmaus Europe

Sub-theme 1.1: How can migrant and asylum seeker rights be increased?

The participants highlighted the vocabulary used to describe those living at Emmaus. *Dublinés* (referring to the Dublin Regulation), failed asylum seekers and foreign nationals are just some examples of a situation that differs from one group to the next.

The following proposals were made:

- Seek partnerships in order to apply a cross-cutting approach to everyday support for migrants and asylum seekers.
- Appoint a 'Europe' representative for European regulations.
- Make use of the Emmaus Europe website.
- Keep a close eye on the local impact of European regulations and base arguments on the contribution made by migrants locally: they cost society nothing and make a financial contribution.
- Focus work on the root causes of problems and work alongside Emmaus International to champion unconditional shelter and support and freedom of movement.
- Take advantage of the run-up to the 2014 European parliamentary elections to lobby candidates, placing the stress on the limitations of the economic model.



Sub-theme 1.2: Initiatives with the Roma community and lobbying

- Step up awareness raising work targeting the general public in order to counteract stereotypes and stigmatisation of the Roma population.
- Change their image: an initiative needs to be devised and rolled out in all the European groups in order to do just that. A proposal to organise a campaign day on 10 December (International Human Rights Day) was made.

Sub-theme 1.3: Human trafficking victim initiatives

- Promote the expertise of the groups that have been combating human trafficking for over a decade.
- Collect and further publicise information on the web.
- Change mentalities in order to counteract the problem.

Sub-theme 1.4: What should be Emmaus Europe's role in response to poverty and the financial crisis?

- Bring alive the Emmaus values.
- Highlight the fact that our values can be an alternative to the economic model.

Sub-theme 1.5: Looking beyond austerity to a solidarity economy

- Protect our member groups and place the stress on defending democracy.
- Arrange monthly meetings and discuss issues in order to achieve this.
- Devise a way of explaining economics in order to raise the awareness of the companions.
- It is our responsibility to raise the awareness of local communities.

- Get in touch with think tanks in order to lobby the European institutions.

Sub-theme 1.6: How to work with the public authorities?

Sharing experiences on different aspects and on ways of cooperating was brought to light. The following proposals were made:

- Petitions in themselves are unfortunately insufficient. We need to invite the public authorities and bring about meetings with them in order to become more influential: this enables us to demonstrate that deprived people can be worked with.
- Encourage the public authorities to turn to us, the 'worker ants' in this crisis situation.
- Convey the Movement's views in the media. Publicise our initiatives.

Sub-theme 1.7: Lobbying the public authorities

Discussions followed the following potential initiatives:

- Coordinate work at local, national and regional level.
- Raise the profile of work at local level.
- Limit the number of issues to be raised at regional level (draw on statistics).
- Organise media training.
- Appoint a communications contact person. This would give the secretariat contacts in order to communicate more effectively.
- We are stronger when we are united. This applies both within and outside the Movement.

Sub-theme 1.8: How can ethical finance be a part of our groups' lives?

The following ideas were selected for implementation in the groups:

- Be truly aware about our business activity.
- Bring alive ethical finance in our groups.
- Bank with an ethical bank.

Sub-theme 1.9: What should be Emmaus Europe's role in response to poverty and the financial crisis?

Several practical solutions were put forward for both the issues that were highlighted: mental health and human trafficking:

- Apply innovative practical measures in order to address isolation and the lack of hope so as to take worthwhile action.
- Endeavour to give a positive slant to life, make citizenship meaningful by raising the awareness of young people who are excluded from the education system.
- Promote access to food and at the same time produce our own food. Take action on food waste.
- Educate people about saving energy.
- Help those who have no access to healthcare in the EU.

Sub-theme 1.10: Understanding the financial crisis or adapting to a world undergoing radical transformation

The following recommendations were made:

- Create a café area to foster socialising.
- Maintain solidarity and mutual support.
- Sideline our relationship with money.
- Create an alternative currency in the Emmaus stores.
- Collect food for a food bank.
- Promote short circuits.



Professor Amoroso's observations on the work of the themed groups and presentation of his proposals

Professor Amoroso highlighted several points from the working group discussions:

Emmaus has a strong local commitment. Emmaus is an association that displays a great understanding of what is going on around it. Professor Amoroso then focused on a diagram that explained the difference between *mondialisation*, universalisation and globalization, summarized as follows:

The following concepts refer to prominent dynamics from each phase.

Mondialisation: This French term is synonymous with inter-influence and refers to countries seeking to organise a new model that is presented as the only alternative.

Globalisation: Another world is possible, alternatives must be found. The current dynamic is seeking to subsume the other models.

Universalisation: This phase is all about openness that enables ideas to be shared and people to open up to others. Alternatives must be found because another sort of world does exist. NGOs are reacting to the current phenomenon. Emmaus is an organisation that seeks to resist and wipe out inequality in the face of this situation.

However, the limitations of the Emmaus groups were flagged up at this point.

- Working to help the neediest members of society, when this in fact should be the State's role.
- Emmaus cannot just serve others.

In response to this review, the issue of how Emmaus should act was raised: how can we help people and meet their needs? Professor Amoroso put forward the following recommendations:

- Organise ourselves in order to protect them.
- Be aware of interculturality (understanding cultural differences and enabling people to understand them), as this will reduce tension caused by misunderstandings.
- Strengthen immune systems, particularly of the weakest members of society.

From these observations, it ensued that:

Fair trade is a key concept, while food self-sufficiency is not. We need to be able to resolve our problems by joining forces with others.

We need to remain alert about movements that establish codes of governance in all areas. These cause states to implode.

Everything that we need depends upon the financial markets.



A sustainable lifestyle and degrowth for Emmaus Europe

“The limitations of development” - keynote lecture delivered by Maurizio Pallente, a former literature teacher and currently an energy and environmental technologies consultant and member of the Happy Degrowth movement.

Maurizio Pallante presented his ideas about the end of an era. He talked about the unsustainability of economic growth. One of the causes is the depletion of renewable resources, which exceeds the earth's capacity to regenerate them, and the generation of waste that exceeds the planet's annual capacity to metabolise it.

In growth-based economies, an excess offering is endemic and stems from the fact that manufacturing companies systematically have to invest in technological innovation to increase productivity in order to maintain competition. Imbalances still exist and are accentuated by the increase in productivity.

As a consequence of these combined effects, the standard economic policy measures aiming to stimulate demand by cutting tax and increasing already in deficit public spending (facilities for the building industry, major public works, subsidies, tax reductions) not only do not have the expected knock-on effect but have worsened public debt in all the industrialised countries to the brink of bankruptcy. If the cause of the economic crisis is intrinsically connected to the end of manufacturing activities linked to the growth of industry, it is difficult to grasp why people thought that this problem could be overcome by attempting to relaunch growth by expanding demand that is stimulated by debt. It should be clear to see that we cannot solve a problem by accentuating its causes. Maybe people are refusing to acknowledge that this is a sign that we have come to the end of an era, or that the conceptual instruments of political economics do not enable us to understand it.

The cornerstone of the values system on which social cohesion is based in growth societies is money. If the end goal of economic and productive activities is to increase the production of goods, the goods that are produced *need* to be bought and people *need* to satisfy their needs by buying goods. Those with more money can buy large quantities and can purchase the most expensive items and can quickly replace them with other more recent goods than those that they bought recently. The more people buy, the more the economy grows. All the values have gradually been subordinated to the accumulation of money, in particular spirituality, creativity, solidarity and affection.

Feedback from the working groups

Theme 2: A sustainable lifestyle and degrowth for Emmaus Europe

Sub-theme 2.1: Water – humankind’s shared property: how to save and protect water

- Recognise water as being common property. Address the cultural issues that this raises. There is a need for awareness raising.
- Tackle the problem on a day-to-day basis (town, community).
- Join networks with collective organisations and then at national (political) and international level.
- 2014 will be dedicated to collecting signatures in Europe for the European Citizens’ Initiative on *Water for All*. The issue was raised of means of mobilising / raising awareness and practical initiatives.
- Arrange public meetings and educate children.
- Save water as much as possible (e.g. ration tap water).

Sub-theme 2.2: Farming practices and how to achieve food self-sufficiency

- Protect your local area.
- The ISF (International Solidarity Forum) in Northern Bosnia has good practice in this area: the group grows vegetables and has a dairy and bakery. Contribution to the region’s economic and social development.
- The ISF is on the frontier between self-consumption and growing produce for sale. Aim of trying to sell to the local community in order to increase production.
- Fertilising land using earthworms is an option.

Sub-theme 2.3: Pleasant low-energy housing

- A significant number of experiences to be shared. Several communities have done building work (e.g. Emmaus Pamplona).
- Houses made from pallets, straw houses and dry toilets.
- Place the emphasis on small steps: “Better to do something small than nothing at all”.
- Raise awareness

- Consume responsibly. Give the companions responsibility. Arrange for an expert to visit the group in order to explain the concepts.
- Work in networks with specialised organisations.
- Gather together existing examples.

Sub-theme 2.4: What energies do we choose for our needs?

- Solar panels, geothermal power, insulation.
- Plan to recover gas from a waste reception centre.
- Get people to take responsibility for their energy use, work in networks with specialists.

Sub-theme 2-5: How to implement degrowth in practice

- Join with others.
The following issues were prioritized:
- Change GDP indicators in order to bring about change in society.
- Important for our words and actions to be coherent.
- Sustainable development or life enhancing development?
- Importance of raising awareness about the Emmaus products’ lifecycle.
- Carbon footprint at the heart of Emmaus’ choices.
- Importance of the difference between reuse and recycling.
- Importance of the social networks.

Sub-theme 2.6: How to assess our group’s carbon footprint

- What about a definition?
- Raise the issue of climatic justice.

High impact initiatives:

- Eat less meat.
- Fit solar panels.
- Raise awareness

Feasible initiatives:

- Buy locally.
- Buy second-hand.
- Reuse products that cannot be sold.

Sub-theme 2.7: Creativity: making musical instruments

- Raise awareness about waste.



Sub-theme 2.8: Different and frugal ways of consuming

- Exchange, save, make people responsible, rethink our consumption habits, recycle, eat less meat, and raise children's awareness.

- “The richest person is not the one who has the most, but the one rids him or herself of the most material possessions”, Gandhi.

Sub-theme 2.9: What energies do we choose for our needs?

- The complex issue of the pros and cons of each form of energy was raised.
- Issue of identifying the criteria for choosing. Is it a real choice?
- Consuming less or producing your own energy. Joining together to purchase energy.

Sub-theme 2.10: How to implement degrowth in practice

- Negative connotation of the term. A fair and trustworthy society is a better definition.
- Seek other ways of living.

Discussion with Maurizio Pallante on the work in themed groups and his proposals discussed in the plenary session, with the conclusion being:

Replacing GDP with another concept and finding other indicators is a complex issue. A study was commissioned by President Sarkozy and mentioned adding new indicators in order to also measure quality. Degrowth should focus on human beings. Not everything can be measured in terms of money. An improvement in living conditions does not bring about an increase in GDP.

Developing the importance of human relations will help to reduce our carbon footprint.

We are at the end of an era that started at the end of the Industrial Revolution 150 years ago. This system is collapsing today. We need to free ourselves from our dependency on oil and go even further as transport is not the only area concerned. Water sources are now polluted. The issue of food distribution and seasonal production is also important.

Maurizio Pallante finally highlighted the distinction between quantity and quality. The idea is to have few products to consume in order to have less of an environmental impact. This would reduce waste. It also means that we would use less of the planet's resources.

We must try to take a new path and reflect upon the path we need to take in order to change consumption system and distribute wealth. Maurizio Pallante recommends:

1. Developing cutting-edge technology, designed to increase the effectiveness of raw materials and energy, to recover materials from used goods in order to reduce the inherent entropy of human activities and obtain everything that enables us to live while consuming as little as possible.
2. Change our lifestyles, reclaiming the concept of frugality and reducing our dependency on the market through the development of self-production and exchanges based on donations and reciprocity.

3. Make politics a meaningful activity once again, an activity that seeks to achieve the common good, to value common property, rediscover a system of values in which productive activities endeavour to improve the life of humankind and human beings are not used to create growth and produce goods.

Each country's opinion of the meeting

The national delegates offered their view of the meeting

- **Germany:** The event comes in response to a desire to meet up. Companions are well integrated, which is also a positive point: also invite companions to attend! A good mix of motivated individuals and experts.
- **Bosnia:** There were some wonderful human encounters. Society forgets the importance of human beings; we need to show the whole of humankind that Emmaus exists. The trend is to move towards a wider Movement on the topics in question.
- **Italy:** "Together we can do many things".
- **Finland:** A good family spirit. We have common objectives and values. The workshops were very interesting. The issues of gender and trafficking were raised. We need more creativity, to reforge the link with the Movement's Universal Manifesto and history.
- **France:** Both the keynote lectures and the workshops were very interesting. The chances to interact and exchange experiences were also highly positive. Thanks to the organisers and the Italian groups.
- **Portugal:** A warm welcome. It was a case of understanding the issues in order to be able to act differently. Boost the solidarity economy. Poverty is the inability to do things with what we have and not the inability to buy.
- **Netherlands:** The experts were a real source of inspiration and we learned a lot in the workshops. The importance of discussion and the sharing of everyday stories were inspiring.
- **Romania:** Extraordinary achievement by Emmaus Europe. A family spirit.
- **UK:** An impressive meeting due to the fact that we can make things happen. It was great to share ideas and we learned things at the meeting.
- **Sweden:** Too many men on the podium! Everyone should be integrated and express themselves.
- **Switzerland:** Reminder about the life and times of Abbé Pierre.
- **Ukraine:** Interesting, motivational and enriching encounter. Emmaus good practice was presented and should now be shared.



Conclusions by the President Julio de la Granja

Review of the meeting Following these discussion days, the participants expressed their **desire to continue moving forward with Emmaus Europe with the aim of *sharing, enhancing and publicising the work of the member organisations.***

The member organisations therefore wish to:

With regard to the economic, political and social role of Emmaus Europe

- Continue the work on the right of asylum at EU level and on migration in a more general sense.
- Lobby the May 2014 European Parliament elections candidates about the Emmaus values.
- Work internally and externally on the issue of the Roma community and specifically to combat their exclusion and stigmatisation. Also work in a general sense to combat the exclusion of minority groups (right to healthcare, work and education). As such, it was suggested that the Emmaus groups should establish a themed day on 10 December, as this would coincide with International Human Rights Day.
- Continue working on human trafficking and preventing it, especially in the field of education, help and support for victims.
- Work to get the public authorities to support the social and solidarity economy.
- Work in a network on different topics.
- Work on ethical finance.

Regarding a sustainable lifestyle and degrowth for Emmaus Europe

- Support the European 2014 Water Initiative with a launch day in the European groups in order to collect one million signatures in at least seven EU countries.
- Foster exchanges between the groups on farming techniques.

All of these ideas open the way for initiatives in the future. The meeting reflects the bottomless pool of future initiatives developed by the European groups who wish to help each other out.

