

## GIVING PARTICIPATION A EUROPEAN DIMENSION



Following on from the Brussels 2009 assembly...

# Empowerment

Increase the involvement of companions in the life of the movement and Emmaus Europe's political stances

Our 4<sup>th</sup> regional assembly will be held in 2011, so it's time to start preparing your group for the event...

To all the European groups

The assembly will be held on 11-12 May 2011 in the 13<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris.

Let's all get involved!

And finally...

Empowerment is a long slow process that needs to be encouraged or it will not happen. At first it can be intimidating because it means handing over power and authority but once you begin to realise that nothing is going to go badly wrong, you will gain confidence in the concept.

**EMMAUS EUROPE**  
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## FOLLOWING ON FROM THE BRUSSELS



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A BIG THANK YOU TO SIMON GRAINGE AND WILLI DOES FOR  
PUTTING TOGETHER THIS DOCUMENT:

### Reflection and action

You aim to guide people forwards in search of truth through a shared process of reflection and action, so that they can discover the truth that they themselves can believe in and put into practice. If individuals have to express their views, they will look for reasons to support them and listen more carefully to the views of others. In this way, they reflect on their own views and may be ready to change them. People need opportunities to rethink their assumptions in action in order to change.



### Summarising

Who draws the discussion to a close at the end of a session? If you do it, it fulfils people’s common expectations that you will translate the group members’ words into acceptable, official language! Whenever possible, encourage group members themselves to summarise, to exercise their own critical thought. In the first few sessions together, you may need to offer summaries in order to show people how to do it. At the same time, you can reflect on the process and show that it can be done critically.

### Reflection - Action – Reflection

The discussion is summed up and the group decides on the action which is to follow. You are not talking for the sake of talking! Some action is important. When that action is taken it leads to a further stage of reflection. What happened? Why? Could we do this differently? In what way could we be more effective?

***This, of course, leads to further action and so the process goes on.....reflection.....action.....reflection.....action.....reflection.....***

## PUTTING THE PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE, CONTINUED...

**Putting the Principles into Practice** You are not just looking for subjects people need to know about. You are concerned with the way they feel.

What matters most is how much you understand about the people in the group, what they know, what they want, how they live, what kinds of critical thinking are operating. If you are to animate people, you need this sort of basic information. You start from where they are and not from where you are.

Then think about what role you want to take, animator, facilitator, enabler?



- An Animator is one who brings the group to life, who stimulates people to thought and action
- A Facilitator is one who makes it easy for the group to discuss and plan
- An Enabler is one who makes it possible to discuss and plan, who provides a process or structure so this can take place.

Whatever role you take, you should be in a democratic relationship, but you are different from and not equal to the people. You provide a purposeful structure and you help them in their thinking and

## PUTTING THE PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE



### LANGUAGE

Listen to people. What words do they use? Active listening and overhearing will often be more productive than asking direct questions. Their language will often be the key to your understanding of their interests and needs. Intellectuals tend to use concepts, while many others first describe situations in more concrete terms. They try to understand their experiences through stories, parables and metaphors, which keep them close to the concrete. You need to start from their concreteness, from their common sense, if you are to reach a true understanding of their situation.

Share in everyday conversation so that you learn about people's interests and needs through what they choose to tell you. At first, ask gentle questions which do not probe too hard. Broad general questions enable people to make their own choice about what to say. e.g. "How do you find life in the group?" If you ask narrow and specific questions

which restrict people to your chosen subjects you may never learn the issues which are important to the people.



Additional information about Emmaus Europe is available online:  
[WWW.EMMAUS-EUROPE.ORG](http://WWW.EMMAUS-EUROPE.ORG)

## THEORY. SOME PRINCIPLES



**Ideas and priorities should come from the people themselves and be issues of importance to them NOW**

You may think that you know what is best for members of a group, but their priorities may be quite different.

**Solutions to problems within a group should be found through sharing and dialogue, not by offering your solutions**

You may want to transfer to others your ideas, convictions and values, but, as far as possible, you need to offer these when requested - when people recognise their need and are ready for them. Even then, a conversational style discussion is often more effective than a speech or lecture.

**The development of a group should not be about offering all the answers but be problem-posing in order to promote creativity and a search for people's 'own' solutions**

You cannot help other people with their problems by offering your solutions. Their critical thinking will follow your problem-posing

**People's growth and development is an awakening, on-going process**

None of us can claim that we have reached our full potential; we all need to come to believe in ourselves. That can often be the start of a life long process of growth.

People themselves bring about transformation

They know their situation and have the experience, wisdom and ability to work things out. They will act on the issues they feel strongly about and can take responsibility for their own renewal and change. You must have faith in them and share something of their interests and feelings. You will need to work with people and not for them.

## INTRODUCTION

In theory, Emmaus is all about the empowerment of individuals who have not had the opportunity to express themselves or who have felt marginalised by mainstream society. But that does not mean that we can take it for granted that we do actually empower people. For example, when the question is asked "What do you do to empower people in your groups?" people find the question difficult to answer. This is probably because we are all so absorbed by what we do that we do not actively think about ways in which people can be empowered. This shows that even though Emmaus is an empowering model, it does not mean that we can sit back and neglect what is arguably the most important aspect of Emmaus. Whatever we are doing in Emmaus, wherever we are doing it and whoever with, empowerment will only take place if those who hold the power actively facilitate the process.

→ Emmaus does enable people the opportunity to express themselves at national and regional assemblies but is this real empowerment?

→ More importantly, do we really empower people within our own groups?

## OBJECTIVE

### WHY HAVE A GUIDE?

This short guide is not designed to provide all the answers; there is a huge amount of theory and examples from around the world on the Internet. This is only a starting point to get people thinking, **empowerment is not something you 'add' to what you do every day, it is a way of thinking that needs to be incorporated in everything you do.**

## What do we mean by 'empowerment'?

It is vital in the first instance to gain an overview of the concept of empowerment:

- Empowerment is an English word.
- The concept is linked to the idea that those with little or no influence, such as the socially excluded, are able to develop informed opinions, take initiatives, make independent choices and influence change. This also means that those who have an active influence change their attitudes, the rules and the way in which decisions are taken while involving the excluded.
- This concept is taken to different levels in our European groups via training, dialogue and action.

### Individual empowerment

- We give the people who live in our groups the means to rebuild themselves through work and by helping them to help those who suffer most. Rebuilding their lives involves becoming aware of their capacity to take their own decisions and therefore to take part in decision-making in the group and in society as a whole. The success achieved in the various projects in which the person is involved helps to reinforce the individual.
- This involves both relationships with others and taking on responsibility and each individual's capacity, affinities, commitment and respect for people's dignity. Empowerment models differ depending on how these various concepts are interlinked.
- Empowerment should be a collective experience. The aim is to enable individuals to realise that they are credible so that they can get back on their feet, be themselves and regain their dignity



### Collective empowerment

- An organisation could be empowered by becoming more independent in the way it obtains funds to cover its costs, for example. If the organisation becomes self-sufficient, instead of passively relying on public funds and donations, it has greater control of its destiny and strengthens its social environment.
- An association, and particularly our movement, could also become empowered by encouraging the active participation of companions and volunteers in the various local, national, European and international gatherings.

### THEMES

What do people feel strongly about? What are they worried about?...angry about?...hopeful about?...fearful about? Are they worried first about their own lives? Are they anxious about the future of the group? Are they angry about ineffective leadership?

The subjects which are really important to them will usually generate enough energy to help them break through apathy and stimulate initiatives. If you start with subjects/themes which people feel strongly about they are usually prepared to do something about it. If you start from a theme or a need which people are experiencing deeply they will see its relevance and commit themselves.