

Ellie Lapp

Living in Dialogue

Today, Steinar (the director of the Nansen Center) came to visit us in Oslo to check in on our group. All of the Peace Scholars along with the students from the Balkans gathered together to share our reflections on Lillehammer and offer him feedback. Because it has been a couple of weeks since we were there, we all had a deeper understanding of how that experience has affected our time here in Oslo and our lives in general.

During these reflections, several themes emerged. Many of us felt that our worldviews had significantly changed during that short week. Now, when I read about ethnically and religiously framed conflicts, I think of my Balkan friends. When I hear updates on Ukraine, I think of the Ukrainian cohort that taught me so much about their country, but just as much about grassroots NGO's and physics competitions. I also have a better understanding of how growing up in the United States, specifically a small town in Montana, has shaped who I am today and how I think about the world. Another theme that almost all of us discussed was how close we became during that short time, and how much better our transition to the summer school has been with 30 built-in close friends.

In my reflection tonight, I thought specifically of the last day we were in Lillehammer when we each made promises to ourselves and to the group. We had just finished dialogue sessions where we split up into the three groups (from the US, the Balkans, and Ukraine) and spent an hour and a half thinking of meaningful questions to ask the other groups. We then spent several hours over the course of two days answering these questions openly and honestly, and intently listening to one another share perspectives. Again today, Steinar reminded us that the essence of dialogue is active listening and good questions. My promises were thus to continue with this spirit of dialogue by being a good listener and asking genuine questions, with the ultimate goal of intentionally creating meaningful relationships.

Since making that promise, I have become less afraid of living curiously— asking what I want to ask, and listening to the answers with an open mind. I am trying to share more about myself than I normally would, and am finding that others respond with equal vulnerability. In all, although this trip is an academic endeavor to learn about the methodology of peacebuilding, in creating these relationships I have begun to see what “living in dialogue” truly means and am incredibly thankful for our time in Lillehammer for challenging me to grow in this way.

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