

Visit Kolindros: The power of Greek hospitality!

On September 24th a Dutch delegation of 7 people left for Kolindros in Greece. The aim was to attend a symposium of the Charter of European Rural Communities with the theme “participating in local democracy” For that reason councillors were a part of each participating delegation. Besides our delegation from Esch (Haaren – the Netherlands), there were delegations from Naestved (Denmark), Bievre (Belgium), Lefkara (Cyprus), Ibanesti (Romania) and of course from the host: Kolindros (Greece).

After a long trip (with stops in Den Bosch, Amsterdam Zurich and Thessalonica) we at last reached Kolindros at 3.00 am in the morning. After a short night’s rest the program started at 9.00 am.

Amongst other things, there was planned a visit to the Prefect of Pieria. The prefecture is an administrative level which you could call a region. It is smaller than a Dutch province, but much bigger than a municipality. In this case the prefecture included 12 municipalities. Striking fact was that the Prefect regular had a meeting with all mayors to talk about the regional problems. Perhaps the deputies of our province “Brabant” in the Netherlands could also spread out such a structure to improve the connections between the province and the municipalities.

After the visit to the Prefect, a traditional pottery and an excavation with the remains of a former settlement were visited. The explanation of the Greek professor Kotsakis from the university of Thessalonica, was clear and made me also realise again that in this country there is a very important foundation for the western civilisation (both literally and figurative)

Besides politics and culture, the foreign delegations made an important contribution to a torch run, a well known Greek phenomenon which is mostly connected to the Olympic Games. In this case the purpose was to ask attention from the citizens to become a blood donor. Together with the children of Kolindros this torch run was held. And although it wasn’t a marathon we had to run, the local TV came and so publicity was generated. All Kolindros could see the foreign visitors. Moreover the contribution was recorded on CD so that home could also be witness of the run performance!

In the evening everyone joined the folk dancing. The market square was one big Greek dancing party and the Greeks quite appreciated the dance contribution of all members of the delegations.

On Saturday there was comprehensively spoken about the problems of local democracy in Europe. Before the meeting, all delegations had completed a list with questions about de way local democracy is organised in their own country. During the presentation of the answers it became clear that there are a lot of similarities but also a lot of differences. However, even though every country has its own political system and its own regulations, the problems of child day care, good primary schools, care and accommodation for elderly, depopulation of the country side etc are more or less the same everywhere. Just this finding connects the different delegations. Moreover the participants could learn from the different ways the problems are handled in the different countries. Those experiences are brought home and will probably be practised.

In the afternoon the ‘Athletic Centre’ on the edge of Kolindros was visited. Here you could see the effect of the Olympic Games 2004. Those games ensured that everywhere in the country the sport facilities were brought on a higher level. Besides a football field, a tennis

court, an athletic track and a sports hall, they also have a real Greek open air theatre, built along the lines of Antiquity, located at a beautiful top of a hill with a panoramic view. Not everything was completed, because of the economic problems.

In the evening there was again much to eat and to drink. A phenomenon that is characteristic for the Greek culture. Good food is very important and they enjoy very much all the good things the country produces. All members of the delegations were treated to a comprehensive package of products; of course the famous "Ouzo" was not forgotten. Moreover the party was enlivened by two "Dutch hooligans" who visited together with their host family a real Greek football game. Dressed in shirts of the local heroes, they danced till the boss of their host family send them home.....

Also the next day the host families showed their enormous hospitality. During the 4 days they have really done everything to make us feel good. Whether it had to do with good food, transport, cultural trips, picking us up at night or bringing us away, nothing was too much trouble. And you didn't have to try to buy them a drink. No, for those Greeks this was absolute impossible: the host pays and organises everything.

When we left Kolindros on Sunday at 01.00 am, everyone's suitcase was heavier then when we came. It was clear: the Greek host families left their marks en showed their power. Jammas!

Noël Suurmeijer
Councillor