

Aniko Kovcesi

Internship Impressions at Cultural Survival

The notion of internship or volunteering is not very popular in Eastern Europe, except a few international NGOs as Amnesty International or Greenpeace. Thus, I was really happy to be able to learn about this way of learning and gaining experience in a particular field. I have chosen Cultural Survival (Cambridge, MA) before I came to Bard College. My internship was a little bit of a dream come true. Thank you for that.

About Cultural Survival (www.cs.org)

CS represents the rights and voices of indigenous peoples around the world. Their main focus is the fair and accurate media representation of indigenous peoples. They have direct sources in many of the indigenous communities in the world, and report any major event in the world affecting indigenous peoples from their perspective. CS also has a great staff of really dedicated people, and of course Pia and David Maybury-Lewis, co-founders of the organization.

The Internship

I was working at publications covering Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. My work was mainly research about the indigenous peoples in these regions. It was interesting to find out for example that Europe does have indigenous peoples, the Saami up in Northern Europe. I also did a lot of research about Gypsies, who, though not really indigenous, are culturally oppressed people who need support. In June, Hungarian Livia Jaroka was elected as the first and only gypsy member in the European Parliament. I have made an interview with her about her election and its effects on Gypsies around Europe. I also transcribed interviews made by CS at the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues (interviews with indigenous women).

We had intern lunches every Wednesday, a time when all the interns and staff gathered for a meal and a guest speaker. We heard from: legal anthropologist Lars Waldorf give on Rwanda, a Native American (Alogonquin) from Canada who spoke about contemporary Indian problems in Canada, and a visual anthropologist who showed films he made among Huarani Indians in Ecuador, among others. I was asked to speak too, so I gave a brief introduction to Hungarians in Transylvania, and Gypsies in the region. I was very happy to see that there are people who are curious enough to go beyond Dracula myth and find out more about Transylvania. I

also screened Gadjó Dilo (Crazy Stranger by Tony Gatlif), a film about Gypsies in Romania.

Altogether, I had a marvelous time, met great people, and gained insight into the mechanics of an NGO. The most amazing thing about CS and the people there is their optimism considering their mission of preserving culture in a world of really aggressive global assimilation tendencies. CS makes a difference with little money and a lot of dedication – and above all, they care.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity and means to do this internship.

Sincerely,
Aniko Kovecsi (Transylvania, Romania)