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# **“Deepening Spirituality as a source of Strength and Renewal”**

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**The LIEN Series on Professional Life and Societal Change  
European Regional Congress  
Pasman-Croatia, July 24-31, 2005**

*Report*

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With the courage to care, we contribute our insights and skills to processes of social transformation. In our work place, our families and communities, we cherish the capacity for positive, equitable relations, existing in harmony with the Earth and the Cosmos. Yet we sometimes struggle to find the balance amongst the different spheres and commitments of life. Making the time to reflect and learn, renewing our sense of meaning in life, is important for our well-being and effectiveness. By deepening spirituality, we can be stronger for the joys and challenges of our personal and professional lives.

**This Regional Congress aimed:**

- To create a space for deepening spiritual awareness
- To learn from each others' experiences and expertise
- To bring clarity to our present situations and futures
- To develop our capacities for action and leadership
- To enrich our sense of community and solidarity
- To explore areas for cooperation and support
- To discover more deeply the meaning of the Grail

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9:30-12:00		Women and Professional Life (Ine)	Hiking	Spiritual Diversity (Robin)	Women and Leadership (Ine & Liliane)	Women and Non-Violence (Andjelka)
17:00-18:30	Introduction	Labyrinth (Mia)	Caring for the Future (Paula)	Defining LIEN (Kerstin)	Sightseeing	Looking Ahead
19:00-20:00		Taize Songs	Garden of Life (Kerstin Annamaria)	Ritual (Anna-Maria)	Meditation with the Sea Organ	
22:00-23:00			Trance Dance			Farewell Party



### Community Norms

- Respect participating (or not)
- Time to be alone
- No superficiality
- Giving and receiving of oneself
- Direct and honest make clarifications
- Keeping on time
- Listening to who is speaking
- Common “living” space



*I am **Kerstin Jacobsson** from Sweden. I guess I am one of LIEN's grand ladies, in the sense that I have had the pleasure to participate in the network since the start in 1989. I live in Stockholm and work as a university lecturer and researcher of sociology. I enjoy nature and travelling, among other things. 38 years old (time flies...)*



*My name is **Carole**. I live in Brussels, Belgium and I am French. Like most women in their early thirties, I spend a great deal of my time trying to find a balance in my life. Hence my participation in this LIEN meeting...*

*Hello I am **Joy France**, a US Grail Member. I am currently the Co-Director of Grailville, a Grail Center in Loveland, Ohio. My life is filled with running our home, mothering our daughter, keeping up relationships with a large extended family, part-time work at Grailville, part-time work at Queen of Angels Montessori school teaching music to 6-9 year old children, and helping to develop the liturgical celebrations at Grailville. My goal in life is to join in the celebration of God's Creation in my home and in my work.*

*I am **Mia Spangenberg**, a Finnish-German-American and am glad to be part of the Grail, where I feel at home and can share my spirituality with other bright and caring women. I am working on getting my PhD in Scandinavian Studies, focusing on the crisis of masculinities in current day Finland. After that, I hope to move to Finland and pursue Grail work in the Nordic countries.*

***Andjelka Rudic** from Croatia, affiliated with LIEN since 1993, participated at several international meetings; linguist by education, feminist by conviction, trying to put together foreign languages, feminism, environmental issues and non-violence and to develop more skill for dealing with people.*

***Liliana Teixeira Lopes**, 29, aspiring to actively care for the future as a link in a dynamic worldwide network of human beings, A.K.A. growing tree with roots in Oporto and branches as far as they can come to reach. Arriving in Croatia seeking for the nurturing and challenging echoes of other trees in the forest. Seriously committed to bare fruits.*

People call me **Ginoca** since I was a child, but my name is **Inês Neto**. I come from Portugal, Lisbon and I live at the moment near the beach in Oeiras. In a few months I will move to a new apartment in Lisbon (Olivais). I'm 31 years old and work on a TV station (SIC), on a project with shopping centers. In my free time I like to play volleyball, work as a volunteer with children, go to the cinema, write stories for children and I like to read novels. I met Lien in 1996 and since then I attend to the meetings locally in Portugal and to international meetings as much as I can. This network is a very important part of my life where I grew a lot on the knowledge of myself and the others.

My name is **Ine van Emmerik**, 47 years old and I live in the Netherlands. I am participating in Grail since 1999. I have first been at a LIEN-meeting in Portugal in 2001. What is important for me, is important in my work too: learning how to learn and develop your own talents. Extra talents, there are always more than you think. Many of them can be discovered and developed in interaction with others. I am looking forward to the Congress: meeting other woman, learning about their life and inspiration.

I'm **Robin Sclafani**, a grown woman and Grail child, participating in LIEN as a way to explore and encourage the intersection of spirituality, social transformation and personal/professional life development. We have a small group that meets locally in Brussels each month where we can be together and support the balance of these important dimensions in our lives. Coming to Croatia, I am concerned about the future of humanity, creating a healthy social space for individual and collective spiritual evolution, and nurturing new life in its most essential qualities.

Other participants:

**Marta Baric, Croatia**

**Patricia Camicao, Portugal, living in Brussels**

**Annamaria Ahlen, Sweden**

**Paula Borges, Portugal**

**Christine, Switzerland**

# ***PROFESSIONAL LIFE***

## **Main Outcomes**

The very definition of the LIEN network inspires the proposal to work around the terms *profession* and *professional life*. The extensive usage of these terms has led to a point in which the concepts involved are unclear: what do we mean by professional life? How do we live and fill up this concept? How do we as LIEN understand it?

A quick search in a dictionary may tell us that a *professional is someone trained in a profession and who exercises it as a specialist*. This implies social recognition – one is a professional as long as one develops a socially recognized activity, in an organized way that can be monitored by his peers. But where does this leave the professional profiles in the make? And even more importantly when it comes to women throughout the world, where does this leave the non-publicly recognized activities? Individuals that fall through the holes of such narrow definitions find themselves with the challenge to define their own ethics, codes and roles that support their action in this world, and that are consequently explicit in their speech and in their practice. But in fact this is a process that we all should undergo, and so we were asked to think on the meaning of our *professional life*, as well as to adopt a definition for it as a group.

Together we have come to the conclusion that the future employment of the term *profession* or *professional life* in the LIEN context must be as wide as to comprehend the diversity of approaches we found in this group: *service, mission, vocation, calling, social context of identity development*. This is not necessarily applicable to the term *job*, since not all people have an opportunity to be remunerated for the development of what they consider to be their service/mission/vocation/calling/social context of identity development. The need to earn money is a world wide and transversal pressure that makes many people devote most of their time to the exercise of activities that differ from their personal wishes and from the role they want to perform in the world.

The recognition of the profession by others is an important aspect of the definition of what is professional life. What is performed publicly and remunerated is immediately related to an individual as his/her profession, on the contrary what is developed either on the private sphere or as a volunteer is not socially recognized as profession. Here we should support and enhance the role that private recognition plays: if one defines this private and/or volunteer activities as his/her field of identity development, if an ethic code and a set of values is associated with these activities and deepened by the individual as a consequence of them, if that is also a defining part of your action and intervention in the world, it is to be considered professional life. We believe that this definition is the only one that can assure the

inclusiveness and embrace the diversity expressed by the women of the LIEN network.

Complementary to this reflection, and because most of the women in this group are employed and exercise their professions as a job, the term *employability* came to discussion. As important as the maintenance and definition of a personal profile according to what one defines as profession (and vice-versa), the contemporary society demands from the individuals the maintenance of a profile that assures him a place in the labour market. This is a great responsibility upon each of us, a transference of a great percentage of social risk to the individual sphere – the market defines the criteria for employability and we all have to comply with its norms and standards because precarity is continuously and growingly upon us. However, a thin balance is permanently demanded from individuals seeking authenticity and coherence: between values and the adaptation to the market's standards. In this equilibrium the development of off-job professions may be an important key to maintain and deepen practices that are consequent with identity choices.

## **WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP**

### **Map of the Session**

1. **Leadership in our native language – immediate impressions**
2. **To explore in small groups:**
  - a) **Our position as a woman in today's world**  
How do you view your position on society today?
  - b) **Generations**  
What do we learn/earn/receive from our grandmothers and mothers?  
Appreciation of the inheritance (positive and negative aspects)
3. **To discuss in the large group:**
  - c) **Feminism today**  
Comment on a quote from an article regarding the 4<sup>th</sup> wave of feminism
  - d) **Leadership of women in the world of today – Caring?**  
Introduction of a text on leadership from Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo as a challenge (*New Energy needed: Women's Leadership*, Lezing gehouden op Vrijdag 7 November 1986 in de Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam, Bernardin ten Zeldam stichting, Amsterdam)  
What is leadership? What is your leadership? How do we develop leadership?
4. **Written personal reflection:**
  - what is leadership?
  - Word poem:  
**W**  
**O**  
**M**  
**A**  
**N**

### **Main Outcomes**

The starting point for this Focus Group was marked by the great diversity in the cultural and social approaches to leadership throughout the world. In the countries of origin of each of the LIEN women present we can find some significant differences:

**Ledarskap** – in **Sweden** the connotation of the word is not so positive. This society shares a political culture of consensus, of homogenous participation of its members, so it wouldn't be viewed as positive for someone to stick out as

a leader would. To be a leader, and to think or speak of oneself as a leader, is a provocative attitude. The leadership that exists arises from peer recognition and not from a formal position, so there is a notion of good democratic leadership although it is not immediately associated with the term. In Finland the situation is very similar, but somewhat more extreme – the concept is not used commonly and so there is no word for it. The closest word would be more in the line of *empowerment*, and the usage of the word in English is related to management hierarchical structures.

**Leiderschap** – the connotation of the word in **Holland** is neither positive nor negative in itself. This society has also established a traditional basis of decision through consensus, but presently its perspective of leadership is more open than the Swedish one.

**Vodstvo** – in **Croatia** the word exists only in the masculine form. It has a strong masculine and political connotation, and also reflects a concept of strength. There is another word that can be used, in both the feminine and the masculine form, but its meaning is slightly different: it's less connected to strength and implies leading groups or processes. The Croatian culture is not based on consensual decisions, we often hear people crying out for strong leaders and strong leaderships to guide the country, so leadership comes associated with power and its exercise through decision making.

**Leadership** – in the **North American** culture leadership is a highly valued feature, and can be seen in all levels of society. Individualism and initiative are encouraged and valued since kindergarten as a strategy to develop leadership abilities – programs are designed to produce good leaders. Because leadership is so encouraged, some conflicts arise in groups, but once the leader is established and has the capacity to gather consensus around him, these conflicts stop, and so this is the most valued type of leader. On the other hand, good followers are also highly valued. Leadership is nothing to be embarrassed about, in the U.S. it is easily accepted and dealt with, as long as the leader's characteristics are valued by a group of followers who acknowledge this leadership and are willing to work under it. A negative aspect of leadership would be its connotation as the central core of a military culture, which is highly valued in the U.S. and has so many negative consequences.

**No Equivalent French Word** – in **France** there is no equivalent word for leadership or for leader, but there is the usage of different verbs for the actions and tasks associated with the exercise of leadership. The French society is not based in a consensus culture, it's quite confrontational and conflict marked. There is no dialogue tradition – a leader or boss will give its orders and if you disagree you complain and a conflict will arise. The word *leader* has therefore been emptied of meaning, it's used to make jokes. In **Switzerland**, because of the country's heterogeneity, the tradition has been the imposed consensus by a collegial government. The concept of an

individual as a leader only exists in the private business world. In the **French Speaking Belgium** they also use the English term and there is some ambivalence towards the concept of leadership – it's not clear whether it is accepted and valued or if it's something uncomfortable. That's why new concepts like the "Jeune Leaders" (mediators that animate other young people and work towards changing relations between teachers and students) have to be de-constructed and explained prior to its implementation.

**Liderança** – the **Portuguese** word for leadership tends to have a more negative than positive connotation due to the country's recent political history – the charismatic leadership of a right-wing dictator. However, the concept of democratic leadership, and the leadership qualities within this perspective, are growingly valued and viewed as positive.

Adding to this diversity, each of our own personal experiences shaped our conceptions of leadership and its exercise, and as a result the discussion was both rich and challenging.

With opinions ranging from the need for redefinition of an used, abused and emptied concept of leadership, based on a feminine approach with its qualitative marks of distinction from the traditionally masculine point of view, to the need for the adoption of a new word, freed from the weight of negatively charged conceptualizations that can exclude the feminine quality in social action from the leadership processes, this Focus Group struggled to find a common platform.

The time reserved to this session wasn't enough to explore all the points planned in advance, but we did manage to produce some key principles that establish a working base for a future operative definition of women's leadership in the LIEN network:

- the concept of leadership to promote should emerge from the basic principles of democracy, participation and valuing of all contributions;
- leadership should be perceived as one of the roles to perform in a cooperation process, connected to the group's own development dynamics, rather than as a hierarchical attribution;
- a leader emerges from a group as easily and spontaneously as she blends in again, for it is a consequence of an ability to read the context and read the group;
- leadership may be related to the power to decide, but the process of decision isn't necessarily linked with authority and individualism, the leadership style to value is based on reciprocity and mutualism;
- there is no leadership if there is no recognition of leadership by all the members of a group – they have to accept the leader's vision and proposals;

- being a leader doesn't mean concentrating tasks and responsibilities, it means acknowledging and developing the values and potentialities of a network;
- leadership and its exercise is not contrary to the promotion of an environment where all say what they believe in with assertiveness, a leader must balance the prosecution of a vision with the caring for the followers.

This, however, doesn't mean that a consensus was reached... the discussion is still opened, a satisfactory definition is yet to be found. The group didn't get to explore the specific contributions and characteristics of a leadership of women, the qualitative distinction between a feminine contribution on this matter and the traditional masculine marked approach. Some contributions were made regarding the dimension of caring as a central core of the exercise of leadership by a woman, and how that may be perverted by the fact that it is exercised in a context dominated by masculine representations of leadership, all agreeing with this point of view and with the need for women to feel the support of platforms such as LIEN to be able to develop a feminine style of leadership.



## ***SPIRITUALITY***

Spirituality was a very important theme throughout this Congress, as we were all needed time for reflection and renewal. The diversity of our spiritual beliefs and practices was a common thread throughout the week together, as we experienced each others' ways of practice – ranging from walking a labyrinth to trance dance, from breathing meditation to planting a garden of life.

A workshop on spiritual diversity provided an opportunity to discuss this diversity and to think about how we can manage the different needs, understandings and expressions within a shared commitment to valuing diversity.

The Map of the Session on Spiritual Diversity was based on an activity called "My History of Images of God" developed by Carolyn Gratton, Grail member in Canada, and now being used as part of a new training module on religious diversity being developed by Robin Sclafani in her work with the European Jewish Information Center (CEJI) in partnership with the International Grail.

### **My History of Images of God**

#### **Rationale:**

Each individual has a unique history of receiving messages and images about God and religion, contributing to the development of one's own religious or spiritual beliefs and personal identity. This activity brings to consciousness the messages we received about God throughout our lives, and gives participants an opportunity to share their own personal beliefs in relation to the society around them.

#### **Directions:**

1. Explain the rationale for the activity. Also, explain that you will be asking participants to reflect on a series of questions, and to write down some notes on their responses.
2. Distribute blank paper and ask participants to sit comfortably and calmly. They can respond to the questions either by writing or drawing, as they like.
3. Read off each of the questions, giving time in between each question for participants to respond privately.
  - What kinds of messages and/or images of God did you receive as a child?
  - As an adolescent?
  - As an adult?
  - When did you decide that God exists or does not exist?
  - Do you share the same religious values as your family? How or how not?
  - How is it to express your beliefs in the wider society where you live?

4. Once everyone has completed the reflection, divide participants into small groups of three or four people to discuss their responses. Upon returning to the large group, ask the following questions:
- What were the commonalities in the experiences of participants in the small groups?
  - The differences?

#### Commonalities

Different phases of search  
Questioning  
Importance of Grail influence  
Importance of group experience with free space for expression  
Spirituality expressed through actions  
Influence of family and/or culture in development  
Importance of symbols  
Exposure to Christian images

#### Differences

Belief in God  
Belief as private or public  
Age of decision of beliefs  
Responses to exposure to Christianity  
Perception of relationship between science and religion  
Places of workshop  
Sources of discovery  
Rituals of practice



#### How we can be together in LIEN with our diversity

Celebrating commonalities  
Respecting differences  
Enriching ourselves through mirroring differences  
Authenticity  
Willingness

*STILL POINT IMAGES*



## ***Non-violent communication***

This exercise is used many times in the context of women and non-violence. Taking an active role in resistance, taking responsibility is something that especially needs to be reflected upon by women. It is about linking personal identities in social structures.

### **Map of the session**

1. Making one drawing by a group of four participants. Each person has her own coloured pencil. Drawing is done in silence.

2. Individual evaluation.

Everyone writes her answers to the evaluation questions:

*How do I feel at the end of the exercise?*

*What needs are in the background of my feelings?*

*What did I think of during the exercise?*

*Looking at the final picture:*

*To what extent is my colour present in it? What is its relation to other colours?*

*How does my drawing differ from the drawing by the other group members?*

*How did I feel during the process of drawing? What was my role in it?*

*What were my own inner reactions that I noticed during the process?:*

*What made me happy, angry, what did I miss, wish for? What did I feel?*

*Is my behaviour typical for me? Do I recognise myself like that in other situations?*

Is there anything that I would like to clarify with someone from the group?

3. Reporting in small groups.

Each member of the group presents her personal reflections. While one is reporting, the others are only listening. When she finishes, other members can give their comments (one round), which the reporter listens to without commenting on them.

4. Reflection with the whole group, looking at all the drawings that were made.



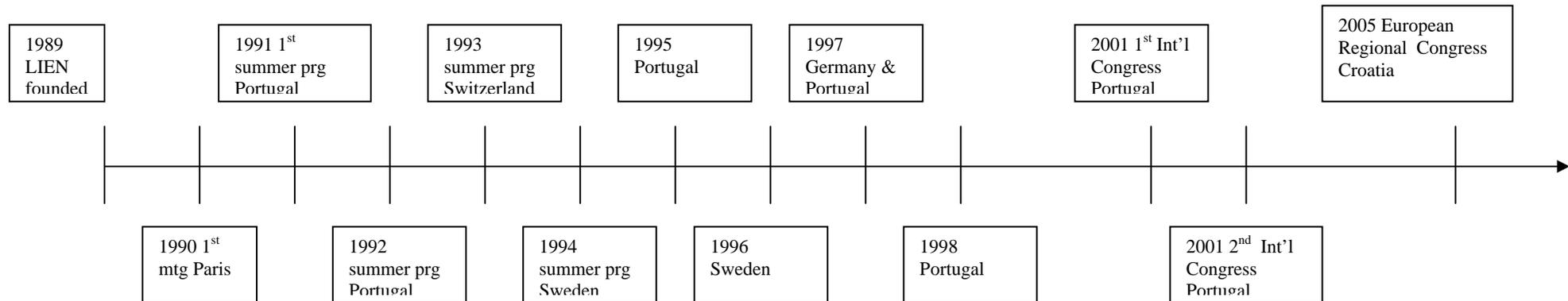
Looking at the three drawings, the observation was made that they seemed to address three large topics: family, nature and the metaphysical space.

One of the participants suggested that this method would be very much suitable working with traumatised children.

## ***NETWORK DEVELOPMENT: WHO ARE WE AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?***

### **LIEN History**

Begun with the falling of the Berlin Wall to open up a dialogue amongst young women from East and West Europe, LIEN has evolved much over the years its participants have grown from young students to mature professional women.



### Examples of Themes of the Meetings

- Cultural Exchanges (Portugal, Switzerland)
- Youth in Europe Today (Sweden 1994)
- Getting to know the Grail (Sweden 1996)
- Grail women preparing the future (Germany 1997)
- Professional life and societal change (Portugal 2001)



## ***LOOKING AHEAD: REFLECTION TO ACTION***

### Definition

As a group, we agreed that LIEN:

1. is still devoted to the four following topics which are in no hierarchical order or with any priority:

- spirituality
- women's development
- societal change
- international exchange

2. should not exclude anyone by age, but that LIEN encourages the participation of younger people and those with a youthful spirit.

3. is an open network of the Grail open to Grail and non-Grail members.

### Personal and Network Actions

We also broke up into small groups according to the presence of LIEN members in regions of Europe (the Nordic countries, Belgium and the Netherlands, Portugal, Croatia and Switzerland) and were asked to think about the following questions:

- 1) What have we learned from our week together?
- 2) What are we called to do, both personally and as a network?

### Network level

1) Portugal has taken on the task of updating LIEN members and contacts by the end of September 2005.

2) Belgium has offered to make a proposal on the organisation of the coordinating body by the end of December 2005.

3) We should discuss a date for the next meeting, perhaps 2 years from now in the summer. It was suggested that we should decide on a date by January 2006. We also discussed whether LIEN meetings should be regional and international and decided that regional meetings are preferable for the time being, with the participation of some people from other regions, because of the cost of travel and the desire to develop LIEN networks in the regions of Africa and the Americas.

4) It was also suggested that we could hold meetings in between regional congress meetings on specific themes, for example on feminism next summer in Croatia. Andjelka, Mia and Kerstin will discuss the feasibility of such a program.

5) As a network, we should explore our mutual resources and contacts and benefit from the richness of experience and diversity we already have in our network and use these resources and contacts to outreach to more younger women. Robin has for example received a grant to focus on religious diversity, and there may be opportunities for LIEN members to get involved as trainers or participants.

6) Those who are Grail members would also like to deepen the connection to other European Grail networks.

All of these points reflect the desire to reach out to old and new potential LIEN contacts in a timely and organized manner in order to create a sense of community across a larger geographic area.

#### Personal level

The learning process during our week together brought up the following key points, stressing the value of sharing on a deep level:

- trusting the process
- allowing for love
- affirming each person's current professional path
- discovering one's own priorities
- learning to better accept differences

Participants also expressed the desire to spend more time on the topics of religious diversity in social change and the literacy of women's leadership. Over-commitment also came up as a theme. These topics could be organized as future workshops.

Members also want to find the space and time to for rituals and symbolic expression in our lives at home.

## ***CLOSING REFLECTIONS***

As a first immediate conclusion: any attempt to leave you now with a fair and clear picture of how this Meeting will resonate in me is destined to fail. And this means that the LIEN Meeting in Croatia met my expectations of opening a specific window of reflection on the issues it was set to approach – the way it was structured predictably wouldn't allow us the time to extract the final statements/definitions/proposals we'd like to, but it's my belief that a group of such richness and diversity of in-depth perspectives could never limit its aspirations to the narrow purpose of defining borders and membership profiles. Struggling beyond that, we ended up seeding our minds with mutual experiences and thoughts, sketching how we can continue to build LIEN in the path of social transformation and caring for the future.

So we didn't arrive to an end, we arrived to a starting point...I regret we never got to pin down some very concrete strategies for operatively activating some connections this Meeting allowed to foresee, but I suppose and trust it is also a part of the challenge Croatia poses us.

Can we do this reflection again in 6 months? I can't close, I'm in opening mode! I'm sure by then we'll have a lot of new and interesting things to add and redesign, and that is in itself one of the perks of the rare privilege to have shared these living days with these LIEN women.

**We are going.  
Heaven knows where we are going,  
But we know within.  
We will get there.  
Heaven knows how we will get there.  
But we know we will.**

