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Jo Toepfer: "The preparation is a key"

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During 3 days there was the unique training of Berlin Open Space cooperative (BOSCO) fellows (Jo Toepfer, Frederik Wortmann and Maja Bergfeld) for baltartekmen. Open Space is a meeting format which makes participants not to be spectators, but main actors. In the beginning, everyone has the possibility to post issues of concern (idea, questions, topics of discussion, projects, activities, etc.) and work on them in several breakout groups at the same time. These groups work self-organized – the participants decide about size, approach, length by themselves.

When participants decided upon follow up actions, made plans for future projects and cooperation, we talked to Jo Toepfer about Open Space Technology and the results of our session.

- Jo, tell me about you. Why did you star to make Open Space events?
- The story is quite simple. I worked in Russian Federation from 1991 to 1999. My profession is organization development consultant. While I was working

in Russia I discovered that the traditional approach of organization development is not fitting to the conditions. In traditional way of working you collect papers, do analysis, make an urgent plans and etc. This approach took us 15 months. When we arrived at the end of this process, we discovered that we were in completely different world. At that period of time everything changed so fast and it was a good experience for me. I understood that I should find another method to include as much human resources as possible. And it was Open Space Technology, because people can quickly self-organize to deal productively and constructively with complex issues in a very short time.

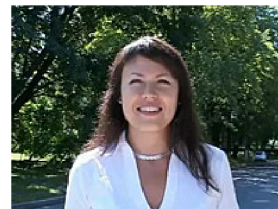
- Why classical ways of working are not effective anymore?
- I can't say that it's not effective. Sometimes traditional meetings are suitable in certain situations. However Open Space works best in quick condition, when all members should think about company's problems. For example, you bank collapsed and there is no answer what to do. In other words, Open Space Technology is the main working approach in the realm of transformation.

- What do you find difficult in "Baltic Artek"?
- Well, I think it was not difficult. Something was unusual. For instance, normally we work in the office with suits and ties. But the camp as a place of working is rather interesting too. It's a challenge to bring this type of work where people really want to change, to learn something new, to discuss and to solve problems. Of course, we need to adapt to these conditions. In any case it depends on people, not on a place or conditions.

- What kind of people have you seen here?
- I've seen lots of passionate people. They are young and they are full of ideas. It is great!

- Do you manage with your aim? Are you satisfied after three days of Open Space?
- My colleagues and I tried to create comfortable structure that allows people to self-organize and have good product of their activity. I saw participants' activity and I can say "yes, we cope with our purpose".

- What can you advise to baltartekmen? Any secret of success?
- The secret of success is to prepare yourself. I mean preparation is a key. There is no prefixed or externally set agenda. Nothing is planned in advance. But we should prepare ourselves to be surprised, to learn new information, to adapt to new conditions.

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