

TransactionNumber: 386631



Call #: HV1 .C37

Location: Daley PER

Article Information

Journal Title: Case Conference

Volume: 13 Issue: 4

Month/Year: August 1966 Pages: 141-143

Article Author: David Drucker

Article Title: The 1965 Community Development Study Tour in Turkey

Loan Information

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The 1965 Community Development Study Tour In Turkey

DAVID DRUCKER

FOR 13 YEARS, Swansea University has provided courses for social welfare workers from overseas. Students are encouraged to consider social priorities in relation to the needs of their own countries, and to question certain Western concepts of society and social ills—a challenge which may be unwelcome to workers eager to leave behind the struggles of village life, poverty, dirt and unemployment, for the more sophisticated urban problems neatly packaged in courts, clinics and casework agencies. Such services can be observed during field work in Britain and students often aspire to recreate them at home, but we cannot in this country give them the opportunity of seeing theory applied in conditions similar to their own. We've had to look elsewhere. Groups of students have studied community development projects in Eire, Calabria, Greece and Turkey. It is the visit to Turkey last year which I want to describe.

We were a party of 14 (15 if one counts an eight-month-old baby), and the students came from Africa (Malawi, Zambia and Nigeria), Latin America (Colombia), the West Indies, and from the Philippines, Sarawak and Brunei in the Pacific. All were leaving Swansea after periods of one or two years and had had considerable experience in Social Welfare as field workers, administrators or in some cases as teachers in countries where this profession plays an important role in social development. Most were in their 30's and had families of their own. The writer was the sole member of staff to accompany the students though other members of staff had helped with introductions to the Province Governor, the State Planning Board and the Public Health Authorities. Personal discussion had taken place previously with the personnel of these organisations in planning a programme for us and this had been supplemented with a sometimes laboured but eventually forthcoming correspondence. Valuable assistance also came from ex-Swansea students now members of the staff of the Academy of Social Work in Ankara, and these old friends did great service in translating both language and the significance of what we observed. Financial arrangements were worked out by the students' governments mostly through the good offices of the British Council and the Ministry of Overseas Development, and the writer slowly found himself as travel agent, international financier, caterer, search party, ambassador and sanitary inspector, just

to name a few skills that the social work text books had not taught him. However, a lifetime of anecdote was lived from the relatively painless Channel crossing and the well-organised train from Ostend to the excruciatingly slow train from Salonika—16 miles an hour I calculated for 14 hours plus two hours late. At the Turkish border the train waits for reasons no doubt lost in antiquity for seven hours before proceeding. We were informed that our connecting train was 22 hours away. However, mysterious Morse tappings throughout the night reduced our waiting to nine hours before covering the final 20 miles to our destination, where somewhat fleabitten, tired and dirty but miraculously cheerful we descended to a civic reception which had been waiting some 10 or 11 hours.

We were based at Edirne, once the fourth largest city in Europe and capital of the Ottoman Empire. Since the seventeenth century it has been occupied by Russians, Greeks and Bulgars and lost much of the territory of which it was formerly the centre, so that now the city of a hundred mosques is merely a gateway for tourists. The bank deals in foreign exchange; the military patrol the border. We stayed in a school which had bare classrooms lined with beds, a little fountain in the courtyard and an enormous bust of Kemal Ataturk in the foyer. We were helped during our stay by provincial staff concerned with health, education and agriculture, and by members of the Ministry of Village Affairs and the State Planning Board, and every day we set out on our visits in jeeps which bore the insignia of UNESCO.

Edirne province includes 267 villages and has a population of 270,000, of whom 40,000 live in the town itself. The birthrate has been increasing by 2.3% per year, but people continue to move away to the towns, to Istanbul, and, in common with other countries through which we passed, to the booming industries of West Germany. This is the background to the choice of Edirne for the pilot scheme of the community development programme in Western Turkey.

In principle community development seeks to involve the public in self-help projects—a policy which recommends itself on both ideological and practical grounds, presenting democracy in action and utilising human labour in countries where other economic resources are scarce. The Turkish government has set up a Ministry of Village Affairs to co-ordinate the efforts of other ministries to improve agricultural, educational and health services (in the face of some opposition on the grounds that the creation of a new Ministry would complicate an already complicated structure). In their dealings with the councils of village elders, who are the traditional administrators of local affairs, community development workers have tried to represent the central government as a power for social and economic growth, rather than as an alien authority keeping law and order. They have also supported new kinds of leadership in the villages. There are no specially appointed officials at local level in the Ministry of Village Affairs and responsibility is assigned

to those who are prepared to undertake it. These are often teachers; in contrast to other countries, the religious leaders apparently take little active part in secular affairs.

The most popular projects have dealt with roads and water supplies. Throughout the area, villagers have housed engineers and offered their labour in clearing land and laying the foundations for link roads, digging new hygienic wells and establishing supply fountains at new points in the villages. These projects, important in themselves, are valued as exercises in strengthening the spirit of co-operation between villagers and outside organisations.

It is obvious even from a short acquaintance with the region that any improvement in the standard of living depends on agricultural progress. Demonstration farms and experimental stations have been instituted. Training camps teach the sons of farmers new methods and the use and maintenance of agricultural machinery, while the department of education has sponsored young farmers' clubs to provide both educational and recreational facilities. We saw newly constructed water holes which enable farmers to maintain larger herds of cattle than in the past, and projects for soil conservation and afforestation. The area is largely wheat-growing country, but the introduction of cash crops such as tobacco, sunflower and recently cotton has been successful. Attempts to establish co-operatives for production and marketing have been held back by political distrust, and the introduction of fertilisers has also encountered resistance. Farmers are reluctant to use animal manure, since dried cakes of dung are burned during the cold winters and other fuel is hard to find. Modern fertilisers are viewed with suspicion, partly because of the high initial cost—villagers accustomed to a subsistence style of living cannot readily accept the risk of investing heavily in future returns. Furthermore some farmers have used the new fertilisers somewhat indiscriminately, and, disappointed by the results, have dissuaded their neighbours from similar experiments. It has proved difficult to persuade farmers that a proper soil analysis must be made to ascertain which types and quantities of fertiliser are required.

Nevertheless some villages have prospered, as we were able to see for ourselves. Prosperity itself may bring problems of co-operation; in one village there were 19 tractors, all chronically under-used, as every farmer had been anxious to possess his own. Elsewhere we learned of a dispute as to whether labour and money should be expended on a new mosque or on machinery for the selection of seed. The older members of the community contended that a mosque was essential to the well-being of the village and a prerequisite of progress. The younger men, convinced presumably that God helps those who help themselves, claimed that improvement of their crops should have priority so that an even more splendid mosque might be built in the future with the proceeds. The discussion seems to have raged for a long time, but when

we arrived, we were shown with pride the building which was to house the new machinery.

Public health services have also benefited from the community development programme. The plan for a national health service in Turkey is phased over a period of 15 years and is destined not to reach Edirne until 1977. However, during the world-wide campaign against malaria, a team of workers served the villages of Edirne province. By 1961, new cases of malaria had been completely eliminated, but the proposal to disband the teams was opposed by their head, Dr. Kasancigil. He argued that their detailed knowledge of the villages equipped them to work as intermediaries between the Ministry of Health and the people, dealing with sanitation, infectious diseases, epidemiology, tuberculosis, and mother-and-child care. As a result, doctors were encouraged to visit the villages on a fortnightly basis, and the training of midwives began. Previously doctors had only been required to go to the villages for forensic purposes or during outbreaks of infectious disease. They were not familiar with the villagers, who, in their turn, had never had a regular doctor. During the early experimental period, the doctor usually held his surgery in the local tea-house, but gradually the villagers were convinced that the service would continue free of charge, and undertook to build houses for the clinics and for the midwives. These usually consisted of two rooms, one for examinations and the other for "lying in". Doctors now volunteered to help the public health service; in 1962, 195 working days were contributed; the first half of 1965 yielded 751 working days; and it is now possible for the service to make payments to doctors and their assistants.

Among the problems which arose was the discovery that only a quarter of the prescriptions issued by the doctors were ever used. Investigation showed that some villagers could not reach the town to obtain medicines, some could not afford them; some patients had perhaps attended the clinic from curiosity rather than genuine symptoms, others recovered spontaneously. It was felt in the public health department that the sale of drugs by doctors would undermine the principle of a free service, and pharmacists were recruited to call at the villages. Where long distances prevented this, pharmaceutical stocks were stored in the local centre and the midwife gave a monthly account to the pharmacist of the prescriptions that had been issued. Sometimes a member of the village undertook responsibility for the pharmacy, and occasionally villagers claimed the right to run their own pharmacy service in order to save the 20% margin reserved for the pharmacist—an impractical proposal since only properly trained pharmacists could be licensed. It became increasingly difficult for the supply of doctors to keep pace with demand from the villages.

Meanwhile midwives were being trained. UNICEF has supplied transport and medicine chests, and it is hoped that the spread of this service will reduce the high infant mortality rate, deaths from diarrhoea in summer and from pneumonia in winter. Improve-

ments in sanitation, domestic hygiene, diet and child care may all be stimulated by the midwife. The training programme has involved not only girl students but also the traditional midwives, with their superstitions and semi-witchcraft, who have been provided with sterile materials in the hope that their practices will at least be rendered harmless until trained personnel can be sent in sufficient numbers and made acceptable to the village women. We were interested to find that, contrary to the usual premise of community development, it was considered undesirable to train local girls to work in their own villages. The villagers seemed to have little faith in young girls whom they had known all their lives, and who were themselves unmarried and therefore, by definition, uninitiated in the secrets of womanhood and birth. The medical officer had gone to great lengths to post midwives at some distance from their homes. He maintained that the people were ready for change—the more dramatic the better—and, though at first they were puzzled by the arrival of a young woman without mother or brothers to protect her, they respected her and soon began to offer protection of their own. We visited several medical centres and certainly the self-assured young nurses in their immaculate white uniforms looked a different species of woman from the black-robed figures peeping from their houses. One girl, we learned, had in seven months delivered 44 babies quite alone, out of a total of 53 babies born. In another area which had been slow to accept innovation, the nurse had attended 16 deliveries in two months from a total of 60, and this was considered no mean achievement. The medical centres were beautifully built with clean straw-coloured floors and walls hung with reproductions by Renoir and Murillo of romanticised children, elegant photographs from the "Family of Man" exhibition, and the bonny Anglo-Saxon cherubs of commercial advertising—in marked contrast to the strange-robed passive women feeding their babies with a vigorous jiggling movement as they waited to see the doctor.

At present women play a very subordinate role in the community development programmes, preoccupied as they are with the care of large families. To rear five or six children is commonplace and many more fail to survive. No doubt in time methods of family planning will be propagated, since the government has recently passed a Bill to legalise contraception, in the belief that, while abortion is a sin, the Islamic creed does not forbid birth control. The midwife's efforts to raise the standards of child care are supplemented by demonstrations by home economists. The diet of the average family consists of rice or flour soup, cheese, water melon and raki. Meat is eaten only once a fortnight, and though there are eggs and poultry, we were told wryly that in the past, chicken was a meal reserved for government officials. Children are breast-

fed for a long time, especially the boys, who are said to be privileged and may not be weaned until their third year. It is noteworthy that the schools built by the community development councils enrol four times as many boys as girls. This suggests that the female potential of the community may long remain untapped and that the dichotomy will persist between the strange young modern midwives and the uneducated women of the village.

This danger of the gulf between "us" and "them" was brought home to us by an American acquaintance who was introducing a new contingent of Peace Corps volunteers to Turkey. Some were teachers; others would be engaged in community development in remote villages. We were touched by their youthful enthusiasm; they were learning Turkish rapidly; but we couldn't help wondering how they would fare with so little experience in a culture so different from their own. Turkish informants told us that the great weakness of the Peace Corps was the lack of specialist supervision of the volunteers, who were not officially attached to the Ministry of Village Affairs or the Academy of Social Work, and whose formal links with other workers in the field consisted chiefly of government permission to go ahead.

We shall remember our journeys over rough-hewn roads in Edirne province, where our jeeps left great tails of dust obliterating the landscape; the thatched houses of mudbrick with great straw-plaited out-houses and small gardens bounded by twigs; the well at the centre of the villages with a few trees for shade and a tea-house. We were there at harvest time; corn stood bulging on the cob and sunflowers on the roadside gaped brilliantly in great masses above the ripe melons on the ground. Immense battlements of wheat surrounded the threshing floor where strong white oxen hypnotically circled, dragging a flint-studded sledge on which two or three women were seated, in pantaloons and sometimes veils, as the grain was separated from the chaff.

Whenever we stopped in a village, the men soon congregated to talk to us—children too, barefoot, ear-ringed and colourfully trousered. The women were lured from hiding in their courtyards by the sight of our eight-month-old. We asked on one occasion whether we weren't hindering the development programme by distracting so many men from their work, and were told good-naturedly that this was the way with people who came to help—they usually impeded the villagers' efforts to help themselves. The loss of time for them was pleasantly spent for us; in future it may even be seen to have been justified when students are able to apply what they have learned from this experience in community development projects throughout the world.