

GUEST EDITOR



Ercan Tural, completed the Bachelor of Social Sciences in the University of Tubingen- Germany in 1996.

An accomplished Executive Manager, with expertise in leading the social change to close the gap between where people with disabilities are and where they should have been. Proven ability to innovate social responsibility projects with local and multinational companies in Turkey. Solid experience in creating strategies and processes that enhance the integrity of socially disadvantage population into the community. Strong management and leadership skills, with ability to motivate volunteers and promote volunteerism and develop smart solutions on disability.

Excellent communicator, with emphasis on building strong relationships with local and multinational non-governmental organizations. Deep understanding of how to lead organizational changes.

He is an expert on accessibility solutions.

World ambassador of Design for All Foundation.

Founder of: AYDER–Alternative Life Association, Dreams Academy, Alternative Camp, Social Inclusion Band, Dreams Kitchen, D-Film, Best Buddies Turkey and SortyApp.

Among his social accomplishments include being Olympic Torch Bearer in 2004 Athens & 2012 London.

Throughout his career he has received various awards such as:

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Guest Editorial:

DREAMS HAVE NO BARRIER..!

This is the story of extraordinary people with “Dreams” who are seeking an “Alternative”. Their stories speak louder than numbers and repeated statistics. This is the story of the World’s Largest Minority, people with disabilities. It is an ongoing journey to break the walls , obstacles and societal barriers that perpetuate the “disability problem” in Turkey. It is also the story of one change maker, Ercan Tural who embarked on a personal quest to become the change he wished to see in the world. His alternative journey has become part of a series of innovative solutions to the “disability problem” in Turkey.

An Accessible Life Journey And Social Change Leadership Adventure.

Awareness;

The University years in Germany were the years when my awareness of the existence of the disabled in social life began and I turned into consciousness by observing, thinking about and making inferences about active forms of existence in all areas of life.

Individuals from different disability groups could be found in the pool, library, disco, bus, subway, workplace, sports fields and streets almost everywhere. They enjoyed all the constitutional, human and civil rights like other citizens fully and equally. And even dozens of social living spaces, which provided special solutions for different need groups, stood in front of me as models that opened their doors to everyone.

Fabrics, integrated workplaces, ateliers where are managed by PWD and/or they were 100% employed; "life houses" that take the burden of the severely disabled on the family and offer a guarantee of life, dozens of sports clubs affiliated to federations, holiday villages, hotels, dormitories and especially public transportation solutions..

Each one of them, as indispensables of modern and human life, formed the cornerstones of a brand new life goal in my soul and consciousness.

Flashback ;

Perhaps the most important turning point in the whole process of awareness and consciousness formation would be to remember the current situation in my country and then to personally research it. Were they able to actively participate in the education and employment processes? Were the legal practices adequate and, moreover, could existing laws be enforced?

I realized that there was almost no normal frame of life that I could clearly remember. From my childhood and early teenage years, there were blind street singers, beggars with canes and wheelchairs, mental hospitals, children in chains, disability reduced to the concepts of mocking, humiliation and swearing.

There was a "discrimination", "social exclusion" and "stigma" that started in concepts at the very first stage, and in almost all of our society, the concepts of disability were used as adjectives of contempt, ridicule and swearing.

Consciousness;

"Be the change you want to see in the world...(Gandhi)"

Yes, Gandhi said, "Whatever change, innovation and revolution you want, you have to be that first"; If so, I would start with myself. I tried to enrich my life sharing by deepening research, reading more, making detailed observations, and entering personal relationships. To make it happen, I had to be the one first. And in every step I took, in every new relationship I entered, I saw that only and only "human" was in front of me. And there were decent opportunities and solutions.

Each of them had different life stories

One that looks like ours, that might look like his...(e.t)

Genetic disorders that cause impairment and thus disability, traffic accidents, birth defects, malnutrition, wrong first aid, consanguineous marriages, bad habits... the list went on and on. Knowing all these, I had to determine the methods and methodology for my way to the goal. The general situation determination in the world already put a grave picture before us; 200 million of the 1,5 billion disabled people were in the ranking of this "great minority" just because of malnutrition. My face was red when I thought of the leftovers on our tables and our spoiled choice of food. These figures

were approximate for almost all countries.. While it was around 10 % in developed countries, this rate was approaching 15% in less developed, low income and backward countries.

Aim ;

Being aware of the reality lived in was raising awareness, and now it was necessary to go on a journey with a determined goal and to engage in an active participation process. Next was the responsibility of expressing, taking on tasks and developing solutions, imposed by the level of consciousness that became clear. And I was ready to take on this responsibility. With these first steps I took to solve the problem I described, my journey of a thousand miles had begun.

The name of the road; It was to produce solutions for the biggest minority who had congenital or after birth disabilities, diseases, physical-mental-hearing and visual differences and were deprived of their most basic right to life only because of these realities, and to be the active implementer of these propositions. Thus I had a strong purpose and put on the clothes of this new journey. It was necessary to return to the country and start working with this determination.

To face reality;

"Do the blind dream? Sure they do.. Those who lose their real dreams become blind.. It is not the blindness of the individual but the social blindness that we are afraid to name in this rapid flow.!(e.t)

Very different from the short-term comings and goings, I started to understand the real dimension of the current situation in Turkey, but

the day I returned for sure, I started to understand better. First, I tried to visit official institutions, associations, foundations, sports clubs and rehabilitation centers related to these issues and collect concrete information and data. I wanted to see the obstacles in its structure closely, and on the other hand, I wanted the steps I would take to be suitable for concrete situations.

Insensitivity and stigma were at the highest level in the society in general. There was almost no source on the subject of disability, and aside from the lack of literature, the terminology used was outdated. Regardless of the subject, the lack of standards was the most prominent issue. International standards were not even mentioned. and then it was disconnected from all social life processes. They did not exist, they were ignored and excluded.

There were no NGOs that put the disability phenomenon on the basis of the work program. The associations were playing "associationism" and operated almost with the logic of a coffee house. Being an NGO, creating a civil initiative awareness etc. was not even known.

As a volunteer, social entrepreneur or sensitive citizen who has already gone on a journey to define the problems and find solutions, the doors I knocked on -whatever we say- were always closed in my face. There was no information, data, source, representative authority and addressee in the official channels. Rehabilitation centers and academics did not have much patience for someone other than themselves to try to find a solution. I always had to come back through these doors. Many times..!

The strongest support has always come from my family and close friends. If you have a strong castle, you do not collapse...

First step;

"..we discovered the healing and liberating power of the ocean..(J.M.Cousteau)

I had no time to lose. Because it was very obvious that the environment was not ready for innovations in this area yet. Choosing the right fields and tools would speed me up. With the "sports for social change" approach, I could break the ice and awaken the sleeping giant through sports.

With "Diving is Freedom!" motto, I started free of charge scuba diving trainings for the disabled. I was also carrying out the training of trainers and assistants who could take an active role in these studies. I wanted to spread international standards on diving sports and show that anything can be done if desired.

Making the accommodation and activity areas suitable for wheelchair users, and the meeting of the first dive candidates with the magic of the underwater world, lit the first spark starting from our environment. These initiatives created awareness in the close social circle and especially in the media and became the main news in the national media many times. People, tradesmen and institutions started to open their doors and hearts.

The healing and liberating power of the underwater world has enabled not only the bodies and worlds of disabled divers, but also a sensitive social environment to look at the subject freely and without prejudice. Dozens of people from different (dis)ability groups participated in these activities. They received their certificates and became acquainted with the mystery of the world of the seas.

Yes, underwater world has no barriers... a world of no dependency on a person, a vehicle and an object.

A world of underwater where the wheelchairs, crutches and white canes you were destined for, lost their power... A world of freedom and equality..

The crippled-solid, dwarf-giant, black-white and sight-blind, who do not distinguish..it is entirely yours.

a world.. Free from obstacles, unlimited with fish, algae and corals..

You and Him

alone, a world for you with its healing and liberating power..

No high sidewalks, steep slopes and stairs, narrow doors, no elevators and no ramps. A world without the shame of "modern" life such as discrimination, ignoring and degrading. A world where you feel better, freer, more equal and more human. .. A world underwater that gives you back the life you thought that it has already gone away from your grasp...

And eyes that can't see, bodies that can't walk become fish, algae and sea in this world...

They call out to those who think they see them, screaming from underwater;

"Diving is Freedom!...(e.t)"

And diving was truly freedom..!

Second step ;

The Red Sea Documentary and J.M.Cousteau..Two important keywords of my journey to a barrier free life. The level of diving activities

initiated with disabled people in Turkey and the level reached had to be shared with the international public as one of the best examples for the country. Actually, we mostly knew Father Cousteau from his documentaries about the world of the seas, not J.M.Cousteau. It was our dreams to take part in those documentaries and dive into the magical blue world from Cousteau's boat. It was written that he was shooting a diving documentary. He made an underwater film by making a diving trip with 6 disabled people from different parts of the world. As a summary of this work, J.Michel said, "We discovered the healing and liberating power of the ocean...".

I searched for sponsors for a year and finally a pharmaceutical company sponsored our diving trip and documentary filming in the Red Sea.

Changing, healing and liberating lives were actually both the subject and the award of the documentary we shot.

"A cloud above the sea / yellow fish in a silver ship on his face / a blue moss at the bottom / a naked man on the shore / standing and thinking Whether I am a cloud / a ship or a fish / algae or what it is, neither it, nor it / it must be the sea, my son With its cloud, its ship / its fish, its seaweed."

Mutlu..Ersoy..Gülçin...Berna...Ayhan...Safinaz...They were now the sea..!

The documentary "Diving is Freedom" was broadcast in the main news on TV for days, was screened in the documentary generation, received awards in international competitions, its photographs were exhibited many times, it was the subject of congresses in seminars, it traveled around the country in special screenings of documentary film

festivals. and even the world diving community has seen what disabled people can do and should be able to do when given the opportunity.

Third Step ;

Yes, diving, taking advantage of the buoyancy of water, no gravity and its dynamic and meditative power, and leaving the white canes, wheelchairs, crutches, fears and anxieties on the shore and becoming free had become livable. Hundreds of disabled young people met the beauties of a world they had not even dreamed of anymore, reinforced their self-confidence and became active members of social life.

But I shouldn't have stopped here, I had to open new doors and produce new models for social transformation. The idea of Alternative Camp was born from these needs. I visited almost all the disabled sports federations in Europe and tried to find out which sports branches they practice and by what methods. I tried to obtain new information from researches, private conversations and resources. There were very rich applications and dozens of different sports branches. While disabled sports were stuck between 3-4 branches in our country, more than 50 different sports events were held at Olympic standards in almost all European countries.

It was necessary to bring together disabled and disadvantaged youth in our country with all these activities. This could be done in such a way that sports, education, integration and vacation could be experienced together. The name of this definition was Alternative Camp.

Alternative Camp was opened in Bodrum in 2002 with the support of a few responsible businessman, despite all the resistances, oppositions and economic impossibilities.

The concept of the camp was entirely based on volunteering. Even from the farthest corners of the world, young people interested in the subject came to our camp to do long-term volunteering, do internships, improve their credit scores and take important steps in their career journey. Disabled people who go on vacation for the first time in their lives, see the pool and sea for the first time, have the opportunity to meet a foreign person for the first time, dive and ride a horse for the first time, use a canoe, wall-climbing, receive first aid training and even dance for the first time. .here is the pinnacle of integration..!Spanish volunteer playing dominoes with the visually impaired young people from Samsun with great pleasure..Japanese volunteer danced with a young man from Mardin in a wheelchair who had never seen or danced in a discotheque in his life..that was the integration.!

In the whole concept, almost everyone, volunteers and disabled participants were experiencing everything for the FIRST TIME. This is where the Alternative Camp project was most successful and its power to be innovative, entrepreneurial and alternative.

Alternative Camp had established a sustainable, new and unconventional system that made the project permanent with the philosophy of "not buying the service, but producing it". It had sponsors from dozens of responsible private sector representatives, companies and individuals. The studies were made news on TV and in newspapers. It took part in seminars, congresses and university presentations. It received many national and international awards. It became the world champion in "Social Responsibility" in the World Young Entrepreneurship Competition. He received the "Good Example

Award for Youth” by UNDP. And it (Alternative Camp) became the subject of a series of awards and accreditations.

We also continued the work of spreading the wind, which started in Bodrum in the Aegean Sea, to all regions of the country, and we made short and long-term regional camps in Van-Sinop-Artvin-Fatsa-Antalya-Kaş-Fethiye and-İzmir at different times.

Since the beginning, thousands of PWD and socially disadvantaged youngsters attended our camp, free of charge. It was an important turning point in their career journeys for almost 2000 volunteers.

As a result, what remained from the camps were the changed life goals, the self-confidence gained, new breakthroughs that turned into productivity, the bodies that got rid of inertia and even healed, and the souls that were liberated.

Alternative Camp continues its journey, knowing that it is on the right track in its goal of permanent social transformation as a pioneering model and dynamic application of barrier-free social life.

Social Change Leadership as an NGO;

As the Alternative Camp project ceased to be a project and assumed a corporate identity, the need for a legal identity arose. Actually, studies could have continued within one of the existing institutions in order not to contribute to the inflation of associations, foundations etc. AYDER (Alternative Life Association) was born out of this stalemate and imperative need. As an association that develops and implements alternative, innovative and sustainable projects in all areas of social life in accordance with international vision and standards for all disability groups, other groups and individuals

experiencing social disadvantages..A civil society initiative based on voluntary participation...a pioneering visionary model.

Being the first to sign the UN "Global Compact Principles " and taking an active role in international organizations such as Caravan2000, ENAT (European Network of Accessible Tourism), HSA (Handicapped Scuba Association); Turkey has become an important model in the world and Europe showcase with the projects it has implemented and the values it has produced.

Diving is Freedom,(1997-2008)

Red Sea Documentary (2001)

Alternative Camps, (2002-2008)

Accessible Tourism for All (TURSAB),(2006-2010)

Reha Istanbul (RehaCare/Düsseldorf)(2004-2008)

Accessible Istanbul Travel Guide (2006-2010)

Barrier-Free Design (room of interior architects)(2006)

Dreams Academy (UNDP- Vodafone)(2008-2018-...)

Life Plus (UNDP-CocaCola)(2006-2007-2008)

Olivium Climbing Wall(2006-2008)

The Truth of Dream (2008)

Correct Approach to Disability Issue Training Program (2008)

Social Inclusion Band (2009-)

Dreams Company (2009-.....)

AYDER, which has signed a series of projects such as, without deviating from its main goal of social change; It continues its journey to change the standards in the country in favor of the disabled, to permanently solve the bleeding problems, to create a general

awareness and consciousness in the society, and to create a disabled majority that actively and fully participates in all areas of life.

Dozens of moments when this difficult and long journey from Diving is Freedom to Alternative Camp and from Alternative Life Association to Dreams Academy was crowned, verified and rewarded were the most meaningful and important moments of my life as a social entrepreneur.

Carrying the Olympic Torch 2 times was an honor in itself. Being selected as a social entrepreneur by ASHOKA, receiving awards in international institution and private sector project competitions such as the World Bank, Eurowards, Coca-Cola, Vodafone, etc., receiving special certificates of appreciation from the Presidency and Prime Ministry, receiving the "Good Example for Youth" award from UNDP, from professional chambers, Receiving awards, certificates and honorary certificates from local representatives, media and dozens of different institutions became the most beautiful pages of my social responsibility and social entrepreneurship story that I have continued for a quarter of a century, starting from the first step I took.

Last word;

According to official statistics, one out of every 7 people in our country is disabled.. In our family, relatives, neighbors, school or colleagues.. in short, there is still a bleeding wound anywhere in our life squares.. They say that "*a fire burns where it falls..!*"

Intelligent consciousness and individuals do not wait to be burned. But they do not turn their back on the fire outside either.. They create solutions and implement them..

They go out into the street and clean in front of thier doors...

And even in front of other doors as much as they can..!!

ERCAN TUTAL