

WASLI Newsletter 2008 - 07



WASLI is committed to the development of the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide

- WASLI in Sweden
- Sign Language Interpreting in Albania



WASLI in Sweden

Area: 449,964 sq km
Population: 9,045,389
Capital: Stockholm
Language: Swedish, small Sami- and Finnish speaking communities
Currency: Swedish krona (SEK)
GDP: \$37,500 per capita

(Source: CIA World Factbook

www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sw.html)

The WASLI Secretary made a visit to the beautiful port city of Uddevalla in Sweden to attend the Conference of Swedish Public Service sign language interpreters 12 – 13 June 2008.

The WASLI presentation was one of a number of workshop/presentations that delegates could attend. The presentation started with a focus on what Sweden has given to the world of cinema, sport, industry amongst many other things. Then the focus shifted to the work Sweden has done for Deaf communities around the world. Then the presentation looked at the work of the Swedish Sign Language Interpreter Association leading to a discussion on what it is that Sweden can do for the international sign language interpreting community.



(Above: The WASLI Secretary giving a presentation about WASLI)

Elisabeth Tomar and Camilla Eurenus were perfect hostesses and helped in producing WASLI information packs for delegates. A copy of the WASLI 2007 Conference Proceedings was presented to the President of the Conference and a few people became WASLI members. It was also an important opportunity to network and to meet the President of the Swedish Association of Sign Language Interpreters Anders Dahlin as well as some Swedish colleagues who have been working in the field for many years.



(Above: WASLI Secretary Zane Hema and STTF President Anders Dahlin)

I understand that in 2009 the Swedish Association of Sign Language Interpreters will be 40 years old.

(Report by Zane Hema, WASLI Secretary)

ALBANIA



Area: 28,748 km²
Population: 3,145,000
Capital: Tirana
Language: Albanian, Dialects Gaeg in the North and Tosk in the South
Currency: Lek (US\$1=109 Lek)
GDP: USD \$4,700
(Source: Reader's Digest World Atlas (2005))

My name is Nikoleta Spahi, I am the first sign language interpreter in Albania and have been the only employed interpreter for the past 6 years. Since 2002 I have been employed as a part-time in-house interpreter for the Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD). My second part-time employment is a teacher at the Albania Deaf Institute in Tirana. In 2000 I graduated from the University of Korca Fan.S.Noli as a preliminary schoolteacher and since then have been working as a teacher for the Deaf. This is currently the only education institution for Deaf children in Albania and its policies follow an oralist approach.

ANAD is a fairly young organisation and was formed in 1993, after the fall of communism, and in 1996 it became a member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). It was not until 2000 when a cooperative agreement between the Finish Association for the Deaf (FAD) and ANAD was founded that ANAD became an active organization (Hoyer, 2007). Since then, the support and funding fed from Finland has enabled ANAD to initiate various projects ranging from sign language research through to advocacy work, all directly improving the lives of deaf people in Albania.

For further information see <http://www.fidida.fi/kuvagalleria/albania>

There are currently five members of staff employed at ANAD Eduard Alas, Manager; Albana Dimraj/Izeti, Advocacy Research Officer; Florjan Rojba, Assistant Sign Language Researcher & Advocacy Officer; Valmira Avdullai Assistant project officer, Nikoleta Spahi, Part-time in-house interpreter and coordinator of Interpreter Training Project.

The interpreting situation here in Albania is very different to many other countries and has only begun to change through the campaign work from ANAD, support from FAD, funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Finland, and supervision from the Kosovo Association for the Deaf (KAD) interpreter trainer Selman Hoti. Through ANAD outreach work it has not been able to successfully find Deaf or hearing native bilinguals who can function in this role, this is because of the oppression Albanian Sign Language (AlbSL) has faced historically (through communism and oral education policies) and the negative attitudes attached to Deafness within the wider community (see Hoyer, 2007). As a result, unlike the situation in many other countries, there are no native Deaf signers, nor CODAs, who form the core heart of the Deaf community. The majority of deaf leaders are from hearing families and are late learners of the language. The demographics of people who do sign language interpreting work here in Albania are mostly female, 17 – 35 years old, Muslim, from hearing families (some with Deaf siblings), and are passionate about the language and signing abilities varies within the students.

In 2003-2005 ANAD began implementing the "Albanian Sign language Project" which led to the publication of our first AlbSL dictionary (in print, DVD and VSH format). This was led by Florjan Rojba our Assistant Sign language researcher. During this time I was fortunate to be receiving interpreting and sign language support/training from Karin Hoyer, a sign language linguist and employee of FAD, and other international advisors who participated in FAD projects (Liza Clews, Pam Spicer, Sheena Walters, Susan Emerson). This was the first type of interpreter training I received during my first three years working as an in-house interpreter at ANAD. This training gave me the opportunity to receive direct feedback on my work and, through the sign language research project, to learn more about AlbSL.

In 2007, after ANAD had completed its first outreach phase and its search for hearing people with signing skills, FAD and the MFA agreed to fund Albania's first sign language interpreter training programme (ITP). I was appointed the coordinator for this two year project and I also provided some training on local interpreting issues with the volunteers who interpret for ANAD. The training programme consists of 10-12 modules per year, each module is taught over one weekend. There are fifteen people receiving this training, and all come from hearing families (some have Deaf siblings). This meant that the people who were doing interpreting-like work for their family members, and visitors to ANAD, could begin to receive proper training to reflect on how they are practicing. This training programme is run by ANAD and supported by two international advisors. Selman Hoti provides the majority of training for the interpreting modules while Karin Hoyer provides training on the linguistic modules.

We have completed our first year of this training programme and the interpreting situation has changed a lot. The students have been able to develop their signing skills through the tuition provided by Eduard Ajas and Florian Rojba and given the opportunity to refine their interpreting skills through the voluntary work given to ANAD. At this half way stage we are in talks of trying to develop an Albanian Sign Language Interpreters Association to support ANAD with many of its campaign messages.



I am also pleased to write about the recent development of Albania's first two deaf interpreters. In January 2008 ANAD implemented a TV News training and development program run by Robert Skinner (British Sign Language interpreter). The aim was for deaf people to appear in-vision translating a live fifteen-minute news broadcast on the government funded station TVSH. Following this six week training and development programme Albania has now six working interpreters, five are regularly employed by the public television broadcaster TVSH (2 are Deaf), and myself at ANAD. This has been one of the big successes of this project, an increase in employed interpreters. I would also like to add that this is the first time AlbSL has been regularly shown on National television. Thousands of deaf people now have the opportunity to watch the News in their preferred language. The two Deaf interpreters work mainly in-vision and are supported by the hearing interpreters. Since the hearing interpreters are still developing their sign language skills much of their work takes place behind the camera and focuses on assisting the Deaf in-vision signer to develop and prepare an AlbSL translation from Albanian scripts.

So as you can imagine starting to work as Albania's first and only employed sign language interpreter has not been an easy task. Much of my training has been on the job and regrettably I have had to learn and develop my skills in this way. I have not always had a co-worker to discuss interpreting strategies, matters, practices, or share experiences for my skills to grow. There has been a second interpreter, Rovena Rojba, who is the only other person to have received regular work as a sign language interpreter in the past. Rovena has been employed by ANAD on an ad-hoc basis and for short term projects. In 2005 we were able to work closely together in translating all of the signed sentences in the AlbSL dictionary in to written Albanian. Although it has been difficult being the only employed interpreter I could not have progressed without the patience shown to me from the Deaf staff at ANAD and for the support and training given to me from the various international visitors to this country.

During these 6 years that I have worked in ANAD I haven't had possibilities to create any network with interpreter associations around the world and much of my work has focused on building the infrastructure here in Albania. I am now in a position where I would really like to create this international network because it is the only way we can develop as a team to the next level. I would now like to begin drawing in experiences from other countries and seeing how we can build on this information to improve standards within Albania.

If you would like to contact me, offer your support, or ask more questions then you can contact me at: nikoleta_itp@yahoo.com



(Report by Nikoleta Spahi, Sign Language Interpreter in Albania)

IMPORTANT

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