

WELC(h)OME CAMP – confidence building project – introductory notes
(see below for a PDF file containing an introduction to the project)

At the end of January 2018, **Stella Brancato** (psychologist) and **Massimo Bonfatti** (Mondo in Cammino's President), flew to northern Caucasus to meet the three young men that will act as future tutors in the inter-ethnical and inter-religious camp to be held next August.

During their flight back, Massimo and Stella had the opportunity to review and discuss their time in Caucasus, and to reflect on the project. They became convinced that the original project's title should be changed in order to better reflect its intents and objectives. This conclusion came as a consequence of Massimo and Stella's discussions with the young men that will take part to it: in their common dialogue, they all realized that any word is irrevocably bound to its opposite, and that while many words share a single meaning, specific words stress specific (different) aspects of that meaning.

Why talk about peace when there's no (effective) war ongoing? Why talk about friendship, when there's no obligation to be friends? Why discuss an inter-ethnical and inter-religious project if (at least formally!) no one member of an ethnic/religious group has anything against the other ethnic groups and the other religions?

The more they discussed the issue, the more Stella and Massimo grew increasingly more convinced of the importance of the project's name and of how such name would eventually exert an influence on its outcome.

With this in mind, they decided to abandon the former name, "Peace Soars, in favour of a new name to be chosen, one having a higher unifying character and that wouldn't offend the consciences and sensitivities of those involved.

But the question was a difficult one: how to choose a name of such importance, so as not to trivialize the project? While the Caucasus mountains first, and Russia afterwards disappeared from under the windows our plane, Massimo and Stella started an excited brainstorming: ideas followed one another, with quick bursts of "this name could work!", and "No, this one for sure not...". The longer they discussed, the more an expression – "**reciprocal acquaintance**" – emerged as key to the entire project. Massimo and Stella kept reflecting on the importance, in our daily lives, of manifesting a reciprocal knowledge and acquaintance when people meet, and of doing so not merely when they meet the first time, but at each mutual encounter, and not simply between new acquaintances, but also between older acquaintances. Such a fundamental exchange of reciprocal acquaintance takes a very simple, and very friendly form: "**Welcome!**".

So, Massimo and Stella decided that, for the project, the "welcome" won't simply come directly from those young men involved as tutors: rather, it will take the form of the "inauguration" of the summer camp, it will have the shape of the common house in which they'll live together for 2 weeks while trying to deepen their mutual acquaintance, leveraging basic activities as conviviality and shared daily routines. **In this way, their living place during the camp won't be merely a "house" as a physical structure, but rather a "home" intended as a place where there's the feeling of family, and where they can grow to become a group.**

Then: **Welcome+home+the confidence arising from the construction of a reciprocal knowledge: WELC(h)OME CAMP – Confidence building project.** An english title to better represent the international character of the project but also to express, through simple words, its very deep meaning.

This is the sense of the in-progress experience that, for 3 consecutive summers starting August 2018, will bring together in a summer camp in Karachaev Cherkassia, Ossetian, Ingush and Chechen young men.



WELK(h)OME CAMP confidence building project

Mount Elbrus, the highest peak in Europe, is a majestic mountain with a significance transcending mere geography: its ancient name was *Strobilus*, the mountain to which Zeus chained Prometheus, while arabs called it *Gebel-as-Suni*, “the mountain of languages”, a name that aptly captures the bond linking the mountain to the incredibly rich panorama of Caucasian languages and populations (a Caucasian legend tells that, while He was distributing languages across the world, God stumbled over Caucasus, dropping there a lot more than planned; Plinius himself was confounded by the “over 300 languages” present there, while russian travellers used to describe Caucasus with this simple sentence “With the time needed to light a pipe one wonders through hundreds of different worlds”).

Mondo in Cammino ONLUS, an Italian Voluntary Association, began his activities in this rich land in 2005. Mondo in Cammino was first created by volunteers – many with knowledge of the russian language – willing to help “Chernobyl’s children” in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus; eventually, it increased the scope of its activities by focusing on areas in which projects similar to those carried out for Chernobyl could be implemented, and this led to North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnia. Later on, it focused on the youth, aiming at creating for them opportunities to meet and establish social and economical relations (through meetings, stages, cultural initiatives both in Italy and in Caucasus).

In 2014 a pilot project took place in Dombay (Karachaev Cherkassia), in the western part of Central Caucasus known as “Prielbruse”, where nine young men from the three aforementioned Republics spent 10 days living together to share a common experience; the result has been the creation of interpersonal relations that continued after the end of the project.

In 2017 Mondo in Cammino decided to run the project again, endowing it with an increased continuity. The project will be articulated over a three years’ project with the number of participants increasing year over year. To this end, three local tutors (one for each Republic) and one senior coordinating partner have been selected; they have been invited in July 2017 in Italy for a stage, and they have been involved – with the help of an italian psychologist – in a path of philosophical and organizational preparation in view of the first step of the project, the August 2018 camp to be held in an appropriate venue in the “Prielbruse” region.

This geographical choice is not casual: it stems both from the high symbolic value that the Elbrus mountain holds for the entire Caucasus, and in the wealth of regional languages, of which each participant is a representative.

The project is named “**Welc(h)ome camp – confidence building project**”: it is a camp in which everyone is **Welcome**, in which each one can feel at **(h)ome**, and in which mutual knowledge and trust are created.

In the first year 3 participants from each Republic will take part to the project; they will also take part to it for a second and third year as “senior members”, in the role of facilitators for newcomers. The participants will be joined by an italian psychologist and an interpreter (both members of Mondo in Cammino, to act as *connecting facilitators* due to their “extraterritoriality” and “neutrality”). Each camp will last 10-14 days. **Participants will have to abide by the instructions of the tutors, who work in strict synergy with Mondo in Cammino’s representatives; they will have to accept the program that will be presented to them before the camp, and will be required to sign a letter of intent. Their participation to the whole project will not be limited to the summer camp: they will also be required to partake in the various activities proposed by the tutors and that will take place between one summer camp and the next.**

Mondo in Cammino will be responsible for all the project’s costs, acting in cooperation with the Caucasian representatives (the tutors and the senior coordinator). Mondo in Cammino will be final arbiter in all matters of organization, management, methodology, project’s philosophy and eventual controversies.