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Reflections on the Dianova conference in Madrid, 4-9 November

When Dianova celebrated its tenth anniversary by an international conference 4-9 November 2008 in Madrid we had the privilege to join the festivities. We were invited to the conference as outsider guests from the University of Lund and we were received in warm and hospitable way by the employees from the fourteen participating countries.

During the conference, we were taking part of the reflections about Dianovas history, its future objectives, but also reports on how Dianova member organizations work and develop in South & North America and in Europe. Not only did we get a good picture of what Dianova stands for and what distinguishes the different units but also plenty of time to get to know many of the 180 participants at well organized social occasions, enjoying the Spanish cuisine.

Dianova is an organization that is constantly adapting as society changes. Professional staff has been linked to the various treatment centres to better serve Dianova clients to process their experience and to rebuild their lives. However, during the conference days we spotted something that we would say is Dianovas social capital. It was the many employees who every day serve as role models and examples showing that one can leave a life of substance abuse. They show that the intrinsic resources that exist in each human being can be developed and used in the society in a very meaningful way. It was a warming experience for us "outsiders" to see old friends meet - so many memories and common struggle – which made the World Conference an important meeting.

Dianova is an unusual organization because of its international character, but also because of the way the different units manage to combine professional knowledge with experience-based knowledge of abuse and recovery. Often, social work is too influenced by traditions that are dominant in each country, which makes innovation and change hard to imply within national borders. The fact that Dianova is a cooperative organization that includes 14 countries, allows for the exchange of best practise, and is therefore a unique example of a modern organization that won't be constrained by national conformity. Dianova is also a pioneer in combining different types of knowledge - knowledge based on scientific studies and the valuable knowledge that comes from people with experiences of for example abuse, exclusion or deprivation. Our hope is that Dianova will continue to manage these unique features.

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