

Bártová, Zuzana

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# *The Diamond Way in the Age of Globalization: A Study of Transnational Buddhist Community Formation*

ZUZANA BÁRTOVÁ

It is 11 p.m. Several thousand people are sitting relaxed on the floor of a big tent at 'the Europe Center' near Immenstadt and listening to Ole Nydahl. This Danish citizen (with his wife Hannah Nydahl) is the founder and the principal teacher of the Diamond Way, which could be considered<sup>1</sup> as a religious organization<sup>2</sup> of lay western<sup>3</sup> converts<sup>4</sup> whose teachings and practices are based on the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. It is present today over a large part of the world. I argue that its ambition is to be a transnational community. It has accelerated this tendency since the foundation of the Europe Center in Germany. In this article I take a close look precisely at this community and the role of the shared location materialized by the Europe Center. With respect to the transnational community making<sup>5</sup> of the Diamond Way, I associate, by means of a dynamic approach, the choice to adopt particular Buddhist teachings and values that

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- 1 The Diamond Way has been the subject of an extremely limited number of scholarly studies so far (see Burkhard Scherer, "Interpreting the Diamond Way: Contemporary Convert Buddhism in Transition", *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10, 2009, 17-48: 28).
  - 2 In accord with Lionel Obadia, we understand the Diamond Way as a particular organization whose founder is Ole Nydahl (and Hannah Nydahl), see Lionel Obadia, "Diamond Way Buddhism", in: J. Gordon Melton – Martin Baumann (eds.), *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopaedia of Beliefs and Practices*, Santa Barbara – Denver – Oxford: ABC-CLIO 2002, 398-399. The term 'Diamond Way' is an English translation of *vajrayāna*, one of expressions designing a tantric form of Buddhism (Paul Williams – Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, London – New York: Routledge 2000, 196).
  - 3 We use the term 'western' to speak about non-Asian converts for pragmatic reasons (cf. Martin Baumann – Charles S. Prebish, "Introduction", in: iid. [eds.], *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press 2002, 1-16: 5).
  - 4 The term is generally used for non-Asian Buddhists in opposition to the Buddhism of migrants. It stays pertinent although ambiguous (Paul David Numbrich, "Two Buddhisms Further Considered", in: David Keown [ed.], *Buddhist Studies from India to America: Essays in Honor of Charles Prebish*, London – New York: Routledge 2006, 182-204). We can also use the term 'followers' or 'practitioners'.
  - 5 I prefer to talk about a transnational community to underline the extent of its expansion and multiple sorts of connections inside the organization even if the Diamond Way itself uses the phrase 'international community' to describe its multinational character.



may mark the entrance to a religious community with the importance of a physical location and the possibilities of face to face encounters.

It is argued that the aim of the Diamond Way organization is not simply geographical growth but the creation of a particular kind of transnational community that cannot exist only on the basis of shared teachings, practices and teachers without direct social interactions on a transnational level. The aim is to show that the geographical aspect remains important for contemporary communities but cannot be seen as it used to be as a permanent place of living of all members of the community in question. It is rather a shared place of living during exceptional, emotionally charged occasions, symbolizing a common goal and helping to strengthen a common feeling of belonging. Nevertheless, I also point out several limits to the role of the Europe Center in the process of transnational community formation, mainly because of the primary importance of national and local communities as illustrated on the Czech Diamond Way.

The results presented in this article are drawn from Ph.D. research in progress about Buddhism in Europe. The project seeks to investigate several Buddhist organizations and their practitioners in France and the Czech Republic. In this article I do not attempt to present overall conclusions of this project. Instead I present a particular topic I find interesting. The research work took place between September 2010 and November 2013 and employed a combination of participative observations and qualitative interviews. The first method involved taking part in teachings, meditations, rituals, socialising, and work-related activities and notes were mostly taken afterwards. As for interviews, I conducted 70 semi-directive interviews with leaders and practitioners, most of them recorded on a voice recorder. The sampling procedure adopted consisted of judgement sampling.

In the case of the Czech Diamond Way,<sup>6</sup> overt participation took place in the Prague center during several stays over the research period. My presence was negotiated with the movement resulting in several minor restrictions such as limited access to organization meetings and small intensive practice weekends. In order to participate in the Summer Course in 2012, a simple form of Internet registration was necessary, even though I had informed Czech leaders and the organizational leader Caty Hartung beforehand about my presence. The interview with Caty Hartung took place in the Europe Center outside the Summer Course and enabled me to see the everyday life of residents and guests; the image was complemented by an interview with one Czech Europe Center resident. As for particular interviews with practitioners, most of them were carried out in Prague,

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6 The Diamond Way was not studied in France due to its really limited number of practitioners.



eighteen in total. In addition, a great number of informal discussions took place throughout the research.

Primarily, we should focus our attention on the expansion of Diamond Way ideas and practices worldwide as a result of the Nydahls' missionary activity and its organizational transnational management. This shared reality seems to be insufficient for the building of a transnational community of all followers, the reason for which the Diamond Way founded the Europe Center and launched the Summer Course. The practitioners from different parts of the world gather in one place during a massive gathering, multiplying occasions for encounters. However, personal contacts among different nationalities are not so numerous and remain rather ephemeral in comparison to the already existing personal interactions among practitioners from local centers. Therefore, I see that the Europe Center holds an ambivalent position for practitioners from Czech centers. These findings lead to the conclusion that the Europe Center is a place for strengthening the transnational community rather than creating it.

### **Religion and community in the era of globalization**

As already stated, my main interest is centred on the transnational community building of the Diamond Way in the era of globalization. Globalization, as 'the growing multidirectional flows' of persons, ideas, objects etc.,<sup>7</sup> has resulted in the transformation of community, introducing especially its transnational expressions.<sup>8</sup> Religious communities are no exception, as indicated by Linda Woodhead's remarks about the importance of transnational religious communities.<sup>9</sup> However, Woodhead does not develop the question in more detail. How, therefore, should we understand this type of community?

The sociology of community bears the heritage of the first sociologists, mostly of Ferdinand Tönnies, famous for his classical distinction between community and society.<sup>10</sup> However, it should not be presented as a strict opposition between an authentic social form of community characterized by local closeness, intimacy and long-standing relationships – in short, common life – and society as a set of individuals connected only by the shared place where they live, because Tönnies' analysis of community

7 George Ritzer, *Globalization: A Basic Text*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2010, 2.

8 Gerard Delanty, *Community*, (Key Ideas), London – New York: Routledge 2010, 119.

9 Linda Woodhead, "Introduction", in: Linda Woodhead – Rebecca Catto (eds.), *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, London: Routledge 2012, 1-33: 26.

10 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001 (first ed. in German: 1887).

concerns pre-modern societies.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, his conceptual distinction and subsequent analysis seems not to be particularly useful in the discussion of today's communities. Another well-known analysis is presented by Max Weber. His ideas of a community depending on a subjective feeling of belonging, whose source lies in emotions and/or traditions, presupposes a common locality and social interactions.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to these classical authors, more and more researchers highlight the choice of community made by individuals.<sup>13</sup> Signe Howell, discussing adoptive parents in Norway, points out that members of a community subscribe to a shared view of reality and shared goals, but personal relationships do not disappear. They come into question once the common specialness of individuals has been instituted.<sup>14</sup> Sociologists thus confirm the prevalence of interaction for collective identity.<sup>15</sup> Thanks to personal contact, a feeling of belonging is possible because the abstract idea of community symbolizes concrete persons with whom experiences, activities and stories are shared. Personal contact is possible in a shared place which, therefore, keeps its importance also in the digital age.<sup>16</sup> A shared place does not constitute a basic feature of the community but is still important.<sup>17</sup> These analyses can also be applied to religious communities, influenced by modern transformations. It may be said that transnational religious communities in the globalization era do not have to share a common place permanently in order to exist; however, a common reality together with social interactions suppose the existence of a place to meet if such communities are to exist.

### **The spread of the Diamond Way and its institutionalisation**

Following the idea of a reality shared among individuals in a particular community, as underlined by Howell, we must consider the distinctive features of the Diamond Way. These are common teachings and practices

11 F. Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*..., 32-91.

12 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* I, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press 1978, 40-43.

13 Jan Váně, "Late Modernity and the Transformations of Ways of Life: Rethinking Community", in: Helena Kubátová (ed.), *Ways of Life in the Late Modernity*, Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc 2013, 55-82: 66.

14 Signe Howell, "Community beyond Place: Adoptive Families in Norway", in: Vered Amit (ed.), *Realizing Community: Concepts, Social Relationships and Sentiments*, London – New York: Routledge 2003, 84-104: 87-89.

15 See also Vered Amit, "Reconceptualizing Community", in: ead. (ed.), *Realizing Community: Concepts, Social Relationships and Sentiments*, London – New York: Routledge 2003, 1-20: 3.

16 *Ibid.*, 18.

17 Cf. S. Howell, "Community beyond Place...", 89.

spread transnationally in the Diamond Way since the 1970s, and the gradually constituted transnational organization.

The history of the Diamond Way can be traced to a wave of interest in Tibetan Buddhism among European youth in the 1960s, expressed also by travels to Tibet or neighbouring areas.<sup>18</sup> Two of these young seekers were Ole Nydahl (born 1941) and his wife Hannah Nydahl (1946-2007), who, in 1968, spent their honeymoon in Nepal, where they discovered Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>19</sup> During the next several years, the Danish couple travelled regularly to the Himalayan countries and on numerous occasions met the sixteenth Karmapa (1924-1981)<sup>20</sup> and other Tibetan teachers. Later, in the 1970s, they accompanied these teachers in their travels to the West and began their 'missionary activity'<sup>21</sup> in 1972 in the Karmapa's name. Since then, Ole Nydahl has been the main driving force of the expansion of the Diamond Way thanks to his travels and lectures. Up until her death, his wife devoted much of her time to translating texts from Tibetan language with Tibetan Buddhist teachers.

The Tibetan missionary endeavour in the West was immediately followed by its institutionalization.<sup>22</sup> In the same vein, Ole Nydahl established the first Diamond Way center in Copenhagen in 1973. However, the traditional Tibetan institutional division between monks and laypeople was not respected in this case: in fact, only laypeople constitute the Diamond Way. After this institutional beginning, basic meditation on the sixteenth Karmapa,<sup>23</sup> translated into several European languages, was introduced in a growing number of Diamond Way centers, as well as preliminary practices, a highly demanding curriculum of meditation techniques.

In the years that followed, the development of the Diamond Way centers corresponded to the general expansion of Tibetan Buddhism in Europe from the mid-1970s to 1990<sup>24</sup> and to the accelerated circulation of people

18 Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*, Berkeley: Parallax Press 1994, 69.

19 Unless mentioned otherwise, the source of biographical information on Ole and Hannah Nydahl is the following: Ole Nydahl, *Riding the Tiger: The Risks and Joys of Bringing Tibetan Buddhism to the West*, Nevada City: Blue Dolphin Publishing 1992, Ole Nydahl, *Entering the Diamond Way: Tibetan Buddhism meets the West*, Nevada City: Blue Dolphin Publishing 1999.

20 The sixteenth Karmapa is the head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

21 Obadia has already pertinently pointed out the missionary character of expansion of Tibetan Buddhism (Lionel Obadia, *Bouddhisme et Occident: La diffusion du bouddhisme tibétain en France*, Paris: L'Harmattan 1999).

22 S. Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West...*, 111-116.

23 The meditation on a teacher is a form of meditation typical for Tantric Buddhism.

24 Martin Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects", in: Martin Baumann – Charles S. Prebish (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, Berkeley –

and ideas throughout the globe as one of the consequences of globalization.<sup>25</sup> Until the beginning of the 1990s, the growth of Diamond Way centers was slow but continuous.<sup>26</sup> An inner circle of the organization known as the TCHO (until Hannah Nydahl's death in 2007) was also established.<sup>27</sup> The acronym is comprised of the initials of the Nydahls, of Tomek Lehnert and of Caty Hartung.

It seems that the Diamond Way centers developed a particularly strong common identity after 1992, the year of the controversy surrounding a new Karmapa.<sup>28</sup> Ole Nydhal took the side of one of the candidates, Thaye Dorje,<sup>29</sup> who has, since then, been the spiritual head of all Diamond Way centers. The controversy also marked the growth of their independence from the Tibetan tradition and the organization became more professionalized, especially thanks to Caty Hartung. In addition, the movement unified its practices and teachings. International travelling teachers began to play a role. Appointed by Ole Nydahl, they guarantee the delivery of basic religious education in centers on a regular basis. A common style of meditation was adopted and translations of Tibetan texts were improved. As for teachings, transmitted via the traditional relationship between the teacher and his/her disciples, Buddhism in its Diamond Way version is "based on experience" and claimed to be "useful for daily life" in virtue of working on one's mind by means of the traditional meditation techniques of Karma Kagyu.<sup>30</sup> It represents the importance of experience and of the practical dimension of contemporary subjective religiosity.<sup>31</sup> Its goals are happiness and personal development while helping others.<sup>32</sup> The same teachings are

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Los Angeles – London: University of California Press 2002, 85-105: 92.

25 James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, 118.

26 There were five centers in four countries in 1975 and fifty six in seventeen countries in 1990 (the numbers given during the Summer Course in 2011).

27 Cf. B. Scherer, "Interpreting the Diamond Way...", 28.

28 The Summer Course in 2011 was dedicated to the history of the movement in the 1990s.

29 Tomek Lehnert, *Rogues in Robes: An Inside Chronicle of a Recent Chinese-Tibetan Intrigue in the Karma Kagyu Lineage of the Diamond Way Buddhism*, Nevada City: Blue Dolphin Publishing 1998.

30 Ole Nydahl, *The Way Things Are: A Living Approach to Buddhism for Today's World*, trans. Kenn Maly, Ropley: John Hunt 2008, 87-90.

31 Cf. Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: Romantic Themes and Consumptive Capitalism*, Malden – Oxford: Blackwell 2008, 17.

32 Ole Nydahl is a great critic of Islam with its purported 'hetero-machismo' opinions (Burkhard Scherer, "Macho Buddhism: Gender and Sexuality in the Diamond Way", *Religion and Gender* 1, 2011, 85-103: 89). According to Ole Nydahl, his "politically incorrect" ideas should be considered as personal, as he precises during his lectures. Nevertheless, since they are expressed openly during public Buddhist lectures, it is difficult to separate them from the teaching of the Diamond Way.



transmitted in all Diamond Way centers. They are not adapted to particular national contexts. Thus, the global teachings do not mix with local particularities and do not form what Roland Robertson would call a “glocalised” new religion, a mixture of the global and the local.<sup>33</sup>

In Eastern Europe, an even larger expansion of Tibetan Buddhism began after 1989<sup>34</sup> thanks to the changes in the political and social situation. This context along with post-controversy transformations permitted Ole Nydahl to extend his activity in this region, mainly in Poland, the Czech Republic and Russia. The Diamond Way started to globalize and gave birth to large-scale transnational expansion. As of 2014, there are 651 Diamond Way Buddhist centers<sup>35</sup> in fifty-four countries, assembling 15,000-70,000 students<sup>36</sup> under Ole Nydahl’s direction. The Diamond Way can be found in South America as well as in Russia and Israel. However, it should be noted that around a quarter of centers are in Germany and the rest mainly in eastern and south-eastern European countries. In a short period of time, Ole Nydahl succeeded in spreading his teachings on large scale.

The simple transnational expansion of teachings and practices does not prove, in itself, the existence of a particular transnational community. There also exists, however, the transnational management of national Diamond Way groups without any transnational administrative Diamond Way structure. Power is centralized around Ole Nydahl, representing charismatic authority;<sup>37</sup> Caty Hartung, a figure of legal authority and a skilful manager;<sup>38</sup> and Caty Hartung’s husband, Gergely Porkoláb; together with a limited team of people.<sup>39</sup> They have significant influence in national communities but do not interfere in their everyday affairs. The role of transnational organization is partly fulfilled by the German Diamond Way

33 Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London: SAGE 1994, 173. We argue that it is not appropriate to think about Czech or German versions of Diamond Way teachings. Transformations *vis-à-vis* its Asian counterpart that led some scholars to notice national or western adaptations of Buddhism are not the object of study here (as an example of this approach, see Eva Brechtová, “Formování a proměny obrazů buddhismu ve Francii”, *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 12/2, 2004, 228-244).

34 M. Baumann, “Buddhism in Europe...”, 85.

35 “Diamond Way Buddhist Centers Worldwide: Locate a Buddhist Center” [online], <<http://www.diamondway-buddhism.org/diamondway-buddhist-centers>>, [22 November 2014].

36 B. Scherer, “Interpreting the Diamond Way..”, 25.

37 Cf. M. Weber, *Economy and Society... I...*, 241-245.

38 Cf. B. Scherer, “Interpreting the Diamond Way..”, 28.

39 Jakub Kadlec, president of the Czech Diamond Way organization, interview from 26 November 2011.



Buddhism Foundation *Buddhismus Stiftung Diamantweg*,<sup>40</sup> which owns or financially supports centers in different parts of the world. It has a crucial role especially in regions where a local organization is not yet well established. Moreover, the German centers' annual meeting is very important for all the Diamond Way centers and reflects the pivotal role of the German Diamond Way organization in the transnational structure.<sup>41</sup>

To understand the Diamond Way organization on a transnational level, it is necessary to realize that contemporary religious organizations tend to conform to managerial forms of leadership.<sup>42</sup> According to current theories of management of organizations, the establishment of organizational rules and the surveillance of every action is more and more seen as being out-of-date.<sup>43</sup> In the case of the Diamond Way, they were replaced by techniques of 'spiritual direction', 'advice', 'harmonizing', and 'sharing', and by a culture of 'friendship' and 'trust'. National representatives meet Ole Nydahl, Caty Hartung, and her husband at the International Center Meeting. They also participate in the German Centers' Meeting and see them on other different, more or less informal, occasions. In this way, they relay information about national communities and are kept informed about the transnational community and decisions concerning this community.<sup>44</sup> During these occasions different teams are supposed to cooperate and brainstorm together under the supervision of Ole Nydahl and of the core team in order to manage the complexity of 'work'. This approach is open to innovation, such as the use of new communication technologies. The movement actively uses streaming and different social media to proselytize outsiders, and to assist insiders in maintaining connections with teachings and with other followers by facilitating the compression of time and space.<sup>45</sup> These techniques are also effective marketing tools, as a common system of management also involves 'religious branding'.<sup>46</sup> The Diamond Way has indeed become a distinctive brand with its common personalities, symbols, slogans, propagation materials, meditation booklets, and books.

40 B. Scherer, "Interpreting the Diamond Way...", 41.

41 Cf. *ibid.*

42 François Gauthier – Tuomas Martikainen – Linda Woodhead, "Introduction: Consumerism as the Ethos of Consumer Society", in: François Gauthier – Tuomas Martikainen (eds.), *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*, Surrey – Burlington: Ashgate 2013, 1-24: 21-22.

43 Stewart Clegg – Martin Kornberger – Tyrone Pitsis, *Managing Organizations: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, Los Angeles – London – New Delhi: SAGE 2011, 31.

44 See for instance the report *Centres' Meeting in Braunschweig: Living in the Future*, 2007 (personal archive of the author).

45 For the idea of the compression of time and space, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Cambridge – Oxford – Carlton: Blackwell 1989.

46 Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*, London – New York: Routledge 2008.

Another important feature of transnational management is a common language necessary to facilitate the organizational management. English, the *lingua franca* of the contemporary world, is officially encouraged and promoted.

Still, from the individual point of view, common teachings, practices, and teachers are not necessarily the basis of a personal sense of belonging to a transnational community. For instance, not all Czechs interested in the Diamond Way appear to identify with this community. This leads us to think about other aspects essential to transnational belonging and community formation. One of these aspects may be a particular geographical location promoting direct social interactions on a transnational level.

### **Crystallization of the Diamond Way transnational community around the Europe Center**

Tönnies and Weber based their conceptions of community largely on the idea of a shared locality, and Obadia notes that the diffusion of Buddhism in the West requires a material place;<sup>47</sup> it cannot be limited to the ideological dimension. While Obadia focuses mostly on the importance of local structures for local communities, the Diamond Way is materialized also on a higher level by creating a local center serving to a transnational community: the territorialization of the Diamond Way in different countries was followed by the foundation of the Europe Center. This shared but local center represents a common goal and enables multinational social interactions, one of the bases of the feeling of belonging to the transnational community. However, I will not only show that the geographical dimension does not, in itself, constitute a prerequisite for the existence of the community, but also that its sharing is not imagined to be permanent.

Because of the lay character of the Diamond Way and the predominance of European followers, a lay center was founded in Europe. Germany, where a quarter of all Diamond Way centers are situated, was specifically chosen to host it. In 2007, necessary steps were taken to purchase a building, a former 'model farm', near the small town of Immenstadt. The rural location is consistent with the kinds of localities generally preferred by western Buddhism.<sup>48</sup> It provides the movement with space and calm for its activities. The aesthetic dimension of a beautiful view is guaranteed by its

47 Lionel Obadia, "Transplantation religieuse et l'aménagement de l'espace: L'exemple du bouddhisme en Occident", in: Paul Servais – Roger Hogelstein (eds.), *Perception et organisation de l'espace urbain: Une confrontation Orient-Occident*, Louvain-La-Neuve: Bruylant 2001, 301-324: 306-308.

48 *Ibid.*, 313.



position on the top of a hill. Its material character is adjusted to the original dispositions of the place and to the character of the activities that take place there, rather than to the traditional disposition of a Tibetan monastery. Concerning this appearance, we can observe a specific re-appropriation of Tibetan Buddhist elements. This reflects the movement's ideology of keeping the 'essentials'.<sup>49</sup> Tibetan paintings and statues are omnipresent on the white walls and in the midst of Art deco furniture, while the exterior has preserved its original visual aspect from the time of construction in 1911.<sup>50</sup>

The Europe Center represents a shared goal. All Diamond Way centers were mobilized to raise funds for its purchase.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the German contribution was essential.<sup>52</sup> The same pattern is being repeated for the large construction project at the Europe Center launched in 2011 whose aim is to expand the center in order to be able to host more people. Money flows principally from Germany, but other countries also participate. For example, the second most active group are Czechs, who represent 13 % of the total number of donors.<sup>53</sup> Donations contribute to the strengthening of a common identity and create an attachment to the center, as attested by Ivan, a Czech two-year practitioner, who has not yet been to the Europe Center:

Interviewer: What does it mean for you to give money to the EC?

Ivan: It means taking part in the project. It wasn't a particularly big sum of money. But we participate together. I would like to go there to help. I feel a connection to the place, you are part of it, you have a relationship to it. It is important for our future.<sup>54</sup>

Money flow is thus one way to build a transnational community but it also supposes some prior group solidarity based on a collective identity. The quoted person has never visited the Europe Center; he does not support it because he likes the place or has any good memories of it. I argue that, at the time of the construction of the Europe Center and also today, practitioners already partake in some kind of collective identity that is strengthened rather than created by the existence of the Europe Center.

49 Caty Hartung, interview 20 September 2012.

50 We do not take into account the recent structures built since 2013 as a part of the large construction project called *More EC*.

51 Günter Mutenhammer, "Rozhovor o Evropském centru s Günterem Mutenhammerem", *Buddhismus dnes* 8/1, 2004, 56-57: 56.

52 Jan Matuška, "Letní kurz v Kasselu", *Buddhismus dnes* 8/1, 2004, 44-46: 46.

53 "Where Do We Stand Today?" [online], <<http://more.ec/donate/>>, [8 June 2014].

54 Ivan, interview 10 June 2012.

Moreover, the Europe Center is viewed as an unfinished, ongoing project, which brings the members' attention to the future and to group maintenance. This means that Michel Maffessoli's view of contemporary groups as neo-tribal, ephemeral and hedonistic phenomena<sup>55</sup> cannot be applied to the Diamond Way transnational community.

Once the estate for the construction of the center was bought in 2007, it became a place for Buddhist practice and social interaction for practitioners from different parts of the world. Visitors to the Europe Center website are greeted with the slogan 'Welcome home!'<sup>56</sup>, which univocally evokes the experience that awaits visitors: an experience of everyday life, of familiarity, of privacy with people one can trust. On the other hand, the Center is the symbol of the large-scale transnational community of the Diamond Way. There are a multitude of social forms in this geographic locality. From this point of view, locality does not precede a community feeling of belonging, manifested by common solidarity in the purchase of the Center, but creates a geographical setting for transnational social interactions. Accordingly, the Europe Center attracts two communities with different types of social interactions, but still based on a personal choice of participation.

In Weberian terminology, the Europe Center is a household, a community of common residence<sup>57</sup> for about fifteen residents, mostly from European countries, including the Czech Republic, as well as for about one hundred practitioners who live in the town and the surrounding area, principally German citizens. Contrary to the general pattern of center creation supposing the existence of a community of practitioners in a geographical area, the community was formed around the Center. As soon as the Center was purchased, practitioners from different parts of the world started to move inside<sup>58</sup> and outside its walls.<sup>59</sup> A household type of community transforms into a village because of the limited space in the Europe Center itself, but the Europe Center remains the central point of sociability.

The social interconnection of the Europe Center community is ensured by the sharing of the common space of the Center during the regular everyday program of common meditations, lectures and meetings. The Europe Center community also organizes events and shares unpaid work, thus giving its time and money to the center and creating the social connec-

55 Michel Maffessoli, *Le temps des tribus: Le déclin de l'individualisme dans les sociétés de masse*, Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck 1988, 22-35.

56 "Europe Center: The International Diamond Way Buddhist Project" [online], <<http://europe-center.org>>, [23 October 2013].

57 M. Weber, *Economy and Society... I...*, 356-360.

58 A Europe Center resident, interview 31 October 2011.

59 "Europe Center..."

tion.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, residents pay for accommodation and administer their personal finances on their own. It is a religious community of everyday social interaction in which close relations are formed thanks to the geographical proximity and shared Buddhist teachings and practices. It may diminish the strength of other social networks and lead, at least temporarily, to community life.

At the same time, the Europe Center can be a central place for all Diamond Way practitioners in the world. This second type of transnational community of practitioners in the Center is represented by temporary visitors. They form a close community on a small scale for the time of their visit, generally a weekend. They may come for different reasons. National representatives come to the Europe Center for different transnational organizational meetings. In this way, the Europe Center ensures spatio-temporal closeness and interpersonal relationships on the transnational level among different national leaders who may be joined by others with the same responsibilities via computer-mediated communication. The main content of the meetings is workshops of small teams focusing on particular topics such as travelling teachers, the media, the Summer Course, or the transnational community as a whole. The transnational diversity of these meetings is appreciated and accommodated.<sup>61</sup> It means that the movement put into practice managerial techniques that enable effective cooperation. Moreover, representatives are empowered by national communities and by the transnational core team made up of professionals in the field ensuring the necessary power and knowledge to affect decisions on the national level. Transnational coordination may also take the form of more individualized 'training', when long-term guests learn about the organization during their stay in the Europe Center and pass on this knowledge in their homeland.<sup>62</sup>

Ordinary practitioners visit the Center mainly on weekends. Special events might be organized involving common Buddhist practice and teachings. During my research, I repeatedly met people who had just come from the Europe Center or were going to spend the following weekend there.

Despite the current success of the Europe Center, the movement had to convince sceptics about the importance of the very existence of the Center,<sup>63</sup> and still needs to use marketing techniques to attract Diamond Way followers. Local centers adopt several strategies in order to bolster enthusiasm for the Europe Center. In the Czech Republic, posters are dis-

60 Cf. Alain Caillé, *Anthropologie du don: Le tiers paradigme*, (Sociologie économique), Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 2000, 124.

61 C. Hartung, interview 20 September 2012.

62 C. Hartung, interview 20 September 2012.

63 J. Matuška, "Letní kurz v Kassel...", 44-46.



played in the centers and stands are put up at large gatherings presenting the Center and its project *More EC*.

The Europe Center website emphasises the transnational audience and the family spirit of the gatherings it hosts, where social interactions with followers of different nationalities can take place easily thanks to common activities. This helps to establish a common sense of belonging to the transnational community. Staying together, even if for no more than a short period of time, enables participants to experience a situation in which they identify themselves with the social grouping of the place at which they live.

These more or less organised occasions attract Diamond Way practitioners to the Europe Center all year long, but the most important event held at the Europe Center, having a primary importance for transnational community formation, is the Summer Course.

### The Summer Course in the Europe Center

The Summer Course gives rise to all sorts of emotionally charged moments and different occasions encouraging a sense of belonging to the transnational community. It gathers a large proportion of all Diamond Way followers, who can share all the aforementioned aspects of the Center – the teachings, practices, goals, and locality – on a scale larger than a local one and become involved in face-to-face interactions at the transnational level, thereby making the abstract notion of transnational community more tangible.

Over six thousand people (with several hundred more online) from more than fifty countries took part in the two-week event in 2012.<sup>64</sup> The highest peak of attendance of around five thousand people occurred during the visit of the seventeenth Karmapa during the last weekend of the Course. The Summer Course has thus become a massive gathering confirming the trend in contemporary religious transformation: the importance of mass gatherings.<sup>65</sup>

First, however, how actually transnational is the meeting? The attendance reflects the structure of the movement with a prevalence of German-speaking, Eastern European, and Southern European practitioners, which means that the movement has re-territorialized the transnational structure of the Europe Center. The final numbers show that the Summer Course

64 According to the official statistics, 6370 people from 58 countries were checked in (Europe Center resident, personal communication, 7 June 2013).

65 François Gauthier, "Intimate Circles and Mass Meetings: The Social Forms of Event-Structured Religion in the Era of Globalised Markets and Hyper-Mediatiation", *Social Compass* 61/2, 2014, 261-271: 265.

remains a European event, with only minor exceptions.<sup>66</sup> More precisely, the second most represented nationality after the Germans were Czechs (over five hundred participants), representing a little less than 9 % of all participants, followed by Austrians and Poles.

In the process of transnational community formation, the movement has introduced strategies that aim to create an international consciousness. Participants are regularly kept informed about the multi-national character of the audience. The project-presentation evening allows them to discover the diversity of the Diamond Way global village. They are also encouraged to share common goals by participating in previously mentioned projects or in the project of the expansion of the Europe Center. Thus disconnected horizons are again united.

Transnational community is then experienced through various activities that take place according to the program arranged by the organization.<sup>67</sup> Even if individual adaptations are possible, most of the activities happen in a specified time and in a large group.

These activities are collective lectures, rituals and parties. As François Gauthier points out,<sup>68</sup> ‘effervescent gathering’ can provide a validation of beliefs and practices. Accordingly, the mass lectures about the Buddhist lineage of the Karma Kagyu confirm common beliefs and enhance a common sense of belonging to the same Buddhist tradition. The mass meditation sessions as well as mass initiations – rituals of empowerment – validate common Buddhist practice. A dinner party is organized where, in a festive atmosphere, participants are united with their teachers in order to enjoy a meal together. Closeness is accentuated by an official discourse about a ‘family evening’ with some three thousand people. Other more spontaneous parties take place every evening after the official program. Besides their function of validation, these activities are moments for collective emotions that are generated not so much by bodily co-presence as by shared goals, teachings and practices.<sup>69</sup> As a result, the social cohesion and solidarity of the transnational community is reinforced.

More ordinary activities such as eating meals and working are also significant. Everyday meals are without particular emotional content but are

66 Non-Europeans do not exceed 4 % of all participants.

67 Practitioners gather in big tents built for the occasion on the premises of the Europe Center.

68 François Gauthier, “Religion in Contemporary Consumer Societies: In Search of a Global Comprehensive Analytic” [online], *Journal du MAUSS*, <<http://www.journal-dumauss.net/?Religion-in-Contemporary-Consumer>>, 1 September 2009 [14 November 2014].

69 Cf. Christian Von Scheve, “Collective Emotions in Rituals: Elicitation, Transmission, and a ‘Matthew-effect’”, in: Axel Michaels – Christoph Wulf (eds.), *Emotions in Ritual and Performances*, New Delhi: Routledge 2012, 55-77.





no less important. Their main purpose is as much social bonding as nourishment. And thanks to work, i.e. the granting of time and energy to the whole participating community, social connection is made too. In fact, the course is organized on a voluntary basis, including such activities as cooking, cleaning, and logistics. Moreover, organizers succeed in this mobilization, because a large portion of the participants take part in working activities, demonstrating thereby a shared feeling of solidarity. Czechs also help, and some are members of the team of organizers, even having leading positions or prestigious jobs such as that of cooks preparing food for the teachers. Communal work implies inevitable direct social interaction between different nationalities. These activities are occasions for situational interactions, be they ephemeral, participating thus in the feeling of belonging. Practitioners from different countries become known persons with whom the experience was shared and can consequently represent more tangibly the abstract idea of a transnational community.

However, the process of transnational community formation has its weak point. The Summer Course socialisation activities strengthen first and foremost small-scale communities from local centers and other types of close relationships whose existence precedes the course, and only secondly the transnational community. The situation can be described as if 'intimate circles'<sup>70</sup> were kept together in the midst of a mass gathering. For instance, Czech practitioners from Prague can be found conversing informally with each other during a party attended by several hundred Diamond Way practitioners. Thus, these intimate circles often stay together, not engaging in anything more than small-talk conversations with strangers during socializing activities.

Nationally diverse practitioners are gathered at the Europe Center during the Summer Course. They demonstrate the diversity and unity of the Diamond Way through numerous activities. However, social interactions tend to take place in intimate circles and other previously formed close relationships. A closer examination of the local experience of the transnational community and the Europe Center will further illustrate this point.

### **Czech experience of the transnational community and the Europe Center**

In this part, I will discuss in more detail the position of the transnational community and the Europe Center in the Czech Diamond Way. Several examples featuring Czech followers have been used as illustra-

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70 See F. Gauthier, "Intimate Circles and Mass Meetings...", 4.





tions throughout the article, but now my intention is to present a more complex image of the situation.

The Europe Center is visible in local centers by publicity and particular activities such as fund-raising promotions of the *More EC* project, the plan to construct a larger Europe Center. However, in competition with local projects, Europe Center publicity could be sidelined and Czechs may prefer to financially support local centers. Still, such absence of donations does not mean the absence of any relationship to the Europe Center and consequently to the Diamond Way's transnational community.

At the same time, several Czechs participate in Diamond Way international organizational meetings held at the Europe Center. In general, these people are already active in, or at least regular visitors to, local centers. A handful of Czechs have been residents, long-term guests, guests at the Europe Center, or inhabitants of Immenstadt. Furthermore, hundreds of them go there regularly to attend the Summer Course.

However, there are those who do not go there, preferring the Czech annual summer course, if participating in big gatherings at all. The Czech Summer Course is a highly 'national affair' with participation oscillating between one thousand and two thousand people. Thus, the numbers confirm that more Czechs attend the Czech Summer Course (around 1000-2000) than the Summer Course at the Europe Center (around 500).

Beginners and practitioners with less significant community affiliation would rather go to the Czech Summer Course and spend the rest of their holidays otherwise – like Jitka, aged twenty-three, whom I met during the Czech Summer Course. She had been interested in Diamond Way Buddhism for a year or so and participated in massive Diamond Way Buddhist lectures, but had not engaged in any of the activities at its centers:<sup>71</sup>

Interviewer: And are you going to a foreign course?

Jitka: For the moment, no. I will start to meditate first and we shall see. They are so friendly, they told me, with twinkling eyes, to go with them to the Europe Center ... I prefer to spend my holiday in a different way.

Some other practitioners who meditate, work and socialize at a local center with like-minded people are, however, more inclined to spend their free time at the Europe Center.

It may be argued that visitors to the Europe Center Summer Course have become integrated with the Diamond Way ethos of travelling, but these are mainly practitioners with strong local community affiliation. The

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71 Jitka, interview 11 June 2012.



shared sense of belonging is not so much a question of the intensity and regularity of the practice of the Diamond Way, even if these factors may play a certain role, but rather of community integration and the pressure that emanates from it. Practitioners socialized in a local center talk about the Diamond Way with the awareness of belonging to a transnational community. The particular position of the Europe Center in this sentiment results from the prioritization of the Europe Center over other foreign Diamond Way centers and the shared opinion generated by Ole Nydahl's discourse about the primary importance of the Europe Center among Diamond Way centers.

Transnational community identification, however, is not limited to these people. Practitioners who do not engage in local center activities can also have the sense of belonging to the transnational community without participation in the common goal of edifying the Europe Center and sharing its locality during visits. For example, Petra, aged twenty-six and a five-year Diamond Way practitioner, had never been to the Europe Center, but had participated in several Czech courses and one held in Poland. Commenting on her travels to Nepal, she reports not to have seen any images of 'our' Karmapa.<sup>72</sup> This example suggests a feeling of belonging to the transnational community and its tradition ('our' Karmapa) but without passing necessarily through the Europe Center.

The sense of belonging to the transnational community of the Diamond Way may exist without the Europe Center, but a concrete geographical location for courses which associate like-minded people remains important for strengthening already existing community feeling. Face to face interactions taking place locally on a frequent basis lead subsequently to the shared sense of transnational belonging expressed by visits to the Europe Center and/or the making of financial donations to support it.

## **Conclusion**

The dynamic of community-making is complex, especially if the community is a transnational one. The Diamond Way shows an interesting example of how to handle diversity and create unity.

The Diamond Way has expanded to different parts of the world. The most important agent of this expansion has been Ole Nydahl and a small team of co-workers. Their missionary activity has led to the foundation of more than six hundred centers that share teachings and practices thanks to a high level of sophistication with respect to transnational management. The transnational community of the Diamond Way is a community of

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<sup>72</sup> Petra, informal discussion, 27 December 2010.



choice that can exist without the permanent geographical togetherness of all its members; however, this does not mean that a shared place is not important as a part of shared reality. It enables the followers of the Diamond Way to subscribe to a shared goal and to engage in social interactions at a multi-national level. These are the *raison d'être* of the Europe Center, where a small transnational community lives more or less permanently (in the Center itself and in its surroundings) and where other groups of visitors go for shorter periods of time, especially for the Summer Course. The transnational Diamond Way community is socially connected in one concrete geographical spot and thus social awareness of the community's scale is reinforced. The teachings and practices, communal work, and projects, all experienced collectively at the Europe Center, are efficient means of transnational community formation. Furthermore, direct social interactions among participants of different nationalities seem to be the most important part of this process. Still, the sense of belonging to local communities does not disappear; on the contrary, it is strengthened alongside the reinforcement of the transnational community. The importance of local communities is also confirmed by the Czech example. In the case of Diamond Way practitioners already well socialized in local centers, the Europe Center as a shared locality only reinforces the sense of belonging to the transnational community.



## SUMMARY

**The Diamond Way in the Age of Globalization: A Study of Transnational Buddhist Community Formation**

The author presents a study of the process of community-building in the era of globalization based on the example of the Buddhist Diamond Way. This organization has spread over the world over a period of some forty years, maintaining its unity by means of common teachings and practices and centralized transnational management. In order to reinforce relations among national communities, the movement founded the Europe Center, an international center which has become the major meeting place for its followers. By attracting attention to a common goal and by bringing followers together in one geographical location, the movement makes its transnational management more efficient and helps to strengthen its transnational community. The main strategy in this process is the organization of the Summer Course, which is a massive gathering of followers from different parts of the world. Multiple activities strengthen existing relationships as well as the transnational community as a whole. However, local communities remain important for the participants' feeling of belonging, as can be shown in the case of Czech Diamond Way followers.

**Keywords:** Western Buddhism; Diamond Way; religious community; transnational community; globalization.

Doctoral School of Theology  
and Religious Studies  
University of Strasbourg  
Palais universitaire  
9 place de l'Université  
67084 Strasbourg  
France

ZUZANA BÁRTOVÁ  
bartovaz1@gmail.com