



Kwan Um  
School of Zen Europe

# **Sangha Convention 2018**

## *Report*

*Listening to the Voices of the Sangha*

September 8, 2018. Warsaw Zen Center, Poland

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# Table of Contents

## Report Summary

Topic 1 - New forms of together action for community

Topic 2 - Zen practice for beginners

Topic 3 - More education

Topic 4 - Empowerment of students

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.2 Motivation & context

## 2. Survey design & methodology

2.1 Overview

2.2 Methodological shortcomings

2.2.1. Semantic issues

2.2.2. Audience

2.2.3 Biases

2.2.4. Correlations

2.3 Conclusion

## 3. Findings & recommendations

3.1 Overview

3.2 Recommendations

### **3.2.1. Topic 1 - New forms of together action for community**

A) Case Study

B) Recommendations

C) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw

D) Voices of the Online Sangha

E) Survey Quotes

### **3.2.2. Topic 2 - Zen practice for beginners**

A) Motivation & Objective

B) Survey highlights

C) Case Study

D) Recommendations

E) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw

F) Voices of the Online Sangha

G) Survey Quotes

### **3.2.3 Topic 3 - More education**

A) Motivation and objective

B) Survey highlights

C) Case Study

D) Recommendations

E) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw

F) Voices of the Online Sangha

G) Survey Quotes

**3.2.4. Topic 4 - Empowering students**

A) Motivation and objective:

B) Survey highlights

C) Case Study

D) Recommendations: Empowering students

E) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw

F) Voices of the Online Sangha

G) Survey Quotes

**4. Lessons learned**

4.1. Sangha Convention Survey

4.2 Sangha Convention

4.3 SC Online on FB

**5. Closing remarks**

There is time for being ahead,  
a time for being behind,

a time for being in motion,  
a time for being at rest,

a time for being vigorous,  
a time for being exhausted,

a time for being safe,  
a time for being in danger.

The Master sees things as they are,  
without trying to control them.

She lets them go their own way  
and resides in the center of the circle.

***Tao Te King***

# Report Summary

It is more than 40 years ago that Zen Master Seung Sahn (DSSN) came to the United States and shared with us his teaching. As a small school we are now struggling with new challenges including a new generation of students facing already different life demands in our fast changing world.

The [Millennial Dharma Report](#) which was published in 2016 gives us insight into some of these changes and the resulting wishes for change. The Millennial Report focused mostly on the US Sangha, so European Meeting of Members in 2017 formally decided that the European Sangha should have its own exercise to find answers to these challenges. This was done in the first Sangha Convention (SC) on September 18th at Wubongsa temple in Warsaw, Poland. According to European bylaws SC is a legal vehicle to “exchange **views regarding innovations or changes, or in respect to new inputs** or unresolved topics.”

This report summarizes the approach that was taken to prepare for the SC, including a description of the survey that was conducted, the survey design and survey methodology (**chapter 2**). It also includes the findings of the survey and recommendations drawn from survey by a group of volunteers and endorsed by the SC delegates (**chapter 3**).

Through open Sangha consultations four topics were identified and these became the basis for the survey, recommendations and discussions during the SC event and online in a dedicated Facebook (FB) group:

- ❑ Topic 1 - New forms of together action for community building
- ❑ Topic 2 - Zen practice for beginners
- ❑ Topic 3 - More education
- ❑ Topic 4 - Empowerment of students

## Topic 1 - New forms of together action for community

At the core of topic 1 is finding approaches to encourage new ways of together action within the local Sanghas. Through discussions in local work groups and thanks to creating a position of Community Director locally and centrally in the EO to coordinate these efforts we could build a stronger, more diverse and inclusive community.

## Topic 2 - Zen practice for beginners

The recommendations for topic 2 focus on finding ways to introduce beginners to our School and eliminate possible hurdles that prevent them from becoming regular practitioners by making the access to the core teaching too difficult, odd or not adequate to modern life. This includes a suggestion for a Beginner’s Program, setting up a system

for collecting membership data and reconsideration of some of the cultural and religious aspects of our practice forms.

### **Topic 3 - More education**

A growing need for knowledge in our current culture was identified and topic 3 addresses the needs for education within our Sangha. The recommendations involve cultivating an open attitude towards various kinds of education including a standardized certification program for DT training, new methods of explaining basic buddhist tenets other than standard Questions&Answers and the promotion of podcasts and webinars on buddhist subjects prepared by the European teachers and Kwan Um Zen Centers.

### **Topic 4 - Empowerment of students**

This topic looked into the hierarchical structure of the Sangha, professionalization of the Sangha administration and the decision making processes. The resulting recommendations suggest promoting the culture of acknowledging volunteers, for example by developing a credit/loyalty system, enabling employment within School structures and introducing a trusted person in ethics from among students. It also looked at formally promoting a Dharma Friend (mentorship) Program and considering a change in the Dharma Teacher title to one of the options suggested by SC.

These topics were discussed during the SC and in the online FB group. The voices of the Sangha are also summarized in this report together with case studies, which were to track the organic trends and changes that already happened in the contemporary Kwan Um Zen Centers and Groups (**chapter 3**). Further refinements and suggestions for the topics were provided by members, including objections towards the recommendations or the process in general. This was documented and a general evaluation of the process is also outlined in this report in order for the future organisers to learn from this first “pilot study” experience (**chapter 4**).

In summary, throughout the whole SC process, we heard clearly the voices of many of our members. Some open to change, others reluctant or perhaps resistant to change. But considering the contemporary challenges we are facing as a school and the emergence of a new generation of members in a modern consumer society, which also offers many ways for personal growth and dealing with suffering, we may want to address the issues and suggestions that have been brought forward.

We take refuge in the three Jewels, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. At the core of our School are the teachings of DSSN and a prospering Sangha which can reach people and embrace all beings is a safeguard for these teachings. The challenge will be finding a balance between accepting change, implementation of some or all of the recommendations while safeguarding DSSN’s teachings. This report and its recommendations are a start.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

According to our [bylaws](#) The Sangha Convention of the Kwan Um School of Zen / Europe is a **forum and a meeting of senior students and Sangha deputies who form the advisory board to the other bodies of the KUSZEU** and consists of all Senior Dharma Teachers of the KUSZEU, Sangha deputies of the KUSZEU and all Guiding Teachers.”

Our first SC took place on 8th of September 2018 in Wubongsa Temple in Warsaw, Poland. It was **preceded by a couple of months of discussions among members** of the School, who responded to our **open invitation to join** and volunteered to prepare the event and survey. One week before the meeting took place, a **closed group** for members only was established **on FB**, where members could contribute with their comments until two weeks after the Sangha gathering.

### Numbers:

- ❑ **~25 members** participated in preparing SC topics and case studies
- ❑ **103 members** responded to SC survey
- ❑ **~40 Senior Dharma Teachers** and Sangha delegates came to Warsaw
- ❑ **161 people joined** SC online:
  - ❑ **16 members** watching a real time streaming of discussions
  - ❑ **480 posts**, comments and reactions.

This report is **to summarize our findings and learn from this first “pilot study” experience** on how and on what scale we shall organize such an event next time and what the Sangha needs are in this area.

As our bylaws state Sangha Convention “discusses all matters which are important inside the Sangha and exchange their **views regarding innovations or changes, or in respect to new inputs** or unresolved topics”. According to the opening poem from Tao Te King, which was chosen as our guiding motive, we gathered to see the things as they are in our Sangha today and to discuss, whether it is time for any changes now. The poem also points to the SC values, which helped us to **establish an open, friendly and inclusive atmosphere**, going beyond seemingly opposite opinions regarding tradition and change and finding **how we can use everything that appears to help this world**.

## 1.2 Motivation & context

During the Meeting of Members 2017, the European Sangha was presented with the results of the [Millennial Dharma Report](#) - based on Global Sangha survey 2016 and interviews among the youngest generation of Kwan Um practitioners in America. In order to start a discussion about the challenges of the younger generation within the Dharma regarding - as the Millennial Report puts it - “**diversity, education, religion, values, health, environmentalism, social justice, and technology**” as well as other important topics raised by Sangha members, Meeting of Members decided to call the first European SC. One of its objectives was to check, **whether Millennial Report findings are also valid within Europe**. The European Teachers Group confirmed the decision to include this in the Sangha Convention.

Under the motto of “Listening to the voices of the Sangha” stressing the bottom-up approach of the SC the **invitation was sent calling all members to participate in submitting topics to discuss and to join preparatory discussions** on these topics.

Four areas emerged from the emails that were received by European Office, in which all topics mentioned could find an appropriate place:

- ❑ Topic 1 - New forms of together action for community building (7 responses)
- ❑ Topic 2 - Zen practice for beginners (4 responses)
- ❑ Topic 3 - More education (4 responses)
- ❑ Topic 4 - Empowerment of students (3 responses)

At the same time **a group of volunteers started to form**, consisting of members willing to work on these topics. Over 25 members engaged to various extent in these preliminary discussions and each topic team also included one of the three Council members.

They were asked to discuss issues raised by the Sangha **in reference to previous surveys**, findings and research in order to **recreate a preexisting landscape surrounding these issues**. Questions repeated within international Sangha, unresolved disagreements and solutions suggested over the course of couple of previous years regarding community building, education and Sangha organisation were reexamined again using documents below:

- ❑ [Millennial Report questions](#)
- ❑ [Millennial Report results](#)



- ❑ [KUSZ Global Dharma Teacher Training Survey 2017 questions](#)
- ❑ [Global Dharma Teacher Training Survey 2017 results](#)
- ❑ [KUSZSurveyResultsRegions2016 survey results - with current data on Europe](#)
- ❑ [Report for KUSZ \*\*Global\*\* Sangha Survey results](#)
- ❑ [Global Sangha Survey Comments](#)
- ❑ European Dharma Teacher Training committee recommendations

Based on the topic teams discussions, we found and posed many interesting questions, which were able to help us measure the moods within the European Sangha and see, **which solutions seem attractive and useful for most members**. Topic teams were also asked to:

- ❑ answer how does their topic expresses the needs, **organic trends and changes, which already happened in the contemporary Kwan Um Sangha**
- ❑ how can these trends and current flow be measured through survey to see, **where we are naturally heading**
- ❑ analyze the survey results
- ❑ gather case studies from the Sangha regarding their topics
- ❑ prepare preliminary recommendations for the broader Sangha to discuss during the actual gathering
- ❑ create PowerPoint presentations

The main theme seemed to be how Zen Master Seung Sahn's precious teaching can remain accessible and helpful in our contemporary culture, a culture which has changed significantly over the last 40 years, since our founder came to the West - without losing our core tradition and its intrinsic essence.

Throughout discussions the format of SC was decided upon. **Sanga Convention's 3 hour length was a compromise** between voices concerned that the debate will be too long (or even completely unnecessary) and voices willing to spend time to analyze things in detail. Responding to the need for **concrete and actionable recommendations**, SC team decided also to establish a result-oriented focus. After analyzing the survey and based on its findings, preliminary recommendations with possible solutions were prepared. They served as a basis for more focused discussions, which took place in a larger group in Warsaw and within the SC Online Facebook group.

## **2. Survey design & methodology**

### **2.1 Overview**

In this section we will describe the methodological approach undertaken in this research and discuss some of its drawbacks and challenges.

Having in mind the objective limitations with regard to available time and resources (lack of scientific tools, experienced researchers and therefore scientific accuracy), delivering an online survey as an instrument of research was a result of a conscious deliberation. Four teams of volunteers assembled around the four topics that have earlier been identified as most relevant. These teams worked together over many hours of online collaboration to generate a survey which was delivered online to all the Sangha (members, abbots, group leaders, etc) via Mailchimp campaigns.

The survey lasted for 2 weeks and more than 100 Sangha members, group leaders and abbots/abbesses completed it. Once the survey officially ended, the 4 teams got together to analyze the results which were then shaped into a series of recommendations that were presented at the SC.

As briefly mentioned above, it's been recognized from the very beginning of the survey construction process (and also asserted by the Sangha itself during the Convention) that this research is not without methodological flaws, and that these shortcomings may cast a shadow of doubt on the some of the ensuing results and interpretations.

### **2.2 Methodological shortcomings**

#### ***2.2.1. Semantic issues***

The way questions were formulated allowed for many different interpretations due to the arbitrary selection of words and concepts which may have been understood differently by different respondents.

Also, the survey was carried out in English which for most respondents (but also for the creators of the survey) is not their native language and therefore may have affected the way some of the questions were understood.

Many survey questions offered answers whose wording may have been overly vague or imprecise, and so selecting that answer did not necessarily result in more information.

#### ***2.2.2. Audience***

The survey contained questions that inquired about 3rd party subjects (i.e. newcomers) but mediated through the opinion of the survey respondents (members, abbots, group leaders) virtually rendering this survey as something measuring opinions on opinions.

### **2.2.3 Biases**

Searching for “survey methodological issues” on Google Scholar (a specialized scientific search engine) results in more than 2 million publications discussing the shortcomings of surveys as research methods.

One of such shortcomings is the well known confirmation bias which is basically a tendency to project existing preconceptions in the way questions are asked or answered, and to interpret ambiguous evidence as being in favor of already preconceived positions.

### **2.2.4. Correlations**

Another methodological issue is that of correlating two variables by establishing a causal link between them, or in simpler terms, by assuming that one thing causes the other just because they occurred at the same time (for example one might be tempted to attribute a surge/drop in the number of practitioners to some co-incidental event such as let’s say a temple renovation or something similar).

## **2.3 Conclusion**

While the aforementioned lack of scientific rigor was not only apparent but also unavoidable, the resulting outcomes are certainly not completely empty of substance and do deserve to be acknowledged (if not as evidence then hopefully as cues and indications). We do believe, in the end, that **these results provide a helpful intuition into the majority of the recommendations** that were presented.

Having said that, we hope that this process of trying to capture and express the perceptions of the Sangha marks a foundational stone for our future work in the context of the SC and is regarded as a valuable exercise that has helped us to, through the quality of our beginner mind, clearly perceive our mistakes and learn from them for the benefit of all beings.

# 3. Findings & recommendations

## 3.1 Overview

In this section we will provide an overview of the 4 topics that were discussed during the SC. We will provide a summary of the topics, the relevant survey results and the recommendations that resulted from the topic discussions. We will also include comments received during the SC and from our SC Online FB Group.

The full survey results, anonymized survey comments, and the transcript of the SC Online FB Group can be found here.

- ❑ [SC18 - Survey results](#)
- ❑ [SC18 - Survey comments](#) (anonymous)
- ❑ [SC18 - Transcript SC Online Facebook Group](#)

## 3.2 Recommendations

### 3.2.1. Topic 1 - New forms of together action for community

The propositions behind this topic are the following:

	<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Evidence from the Survey</b>
1	New activities will stimulate interest in our Sanghas and draw new people close enough to look at the Dharma as they work with us.	<i>Attracting new members remains difficult</i> - Over the past 12 months for most Sanghas (54%) few new students attend practice (less than 5) or even visit the Sangha (less than 20)
2	New activities should connect with the realities that people face to draw them into our Sanghas	<i>New members feel the practice does not really connect with their lives and contemporary reality.</i> - Reasons include: Doesn't help them (16.8%), Feels like a cult (22.1%), Too alien and ethnic (Korean), 21%

3	There is broad support in KUSZ Europe to try new activities to attract new members	<i>5 times as many respondents in the survey agree (55%) rather than disagree (10%) with this proposition.</i>
4	Open communications and transparency will encourage more together action.	<i>a strong majority (80.9%) agree with this proposition and a majority (61.9%) see this as a tool to build understanding.</i>
5	New innovative forms of together action are already being tried in many Sanghas.	<i>a majority (50.5%) agree with this proposition as shown in 4 sections of responses to Question 15: Dharma of Education, Dharma of Compassion, Green Dharma and Health Dharma</i>

## A) Case Study

### 1. Permaculture in Brussels:

- Increased meetings with neighbors and passers-by, grew with Facebook-inspired visits of curious first-timers.
- A way for Sangha members to work together, get to know each other better, bring people closer together, connect with people's lives in a meaningful way

### 2. London Diversity and Multi-faith Organization:

- Increased contact not only to Buddhists but also LGBTQ and other religious or governmental organizations.
- Sharing different experiences and perspectives, increasing creativity and sensitivity to art, increasing meaningful contacts with outside people & groups.

### 3. European KUSZ By-Laws: resulting in applying new discussion technique (fish bowl discussion).

### 4. Prajna Ship Game: Playfully learning about our increasingly uncertain world.

## ***B) Recommendations***

**1. Within each individual Sangha:** Establish a group discussion for everyone to work together to:

- a) find out what kind of new activity would be a good first experiment,
- b) learn as a group from the results, and
- c) to propose how to modify or abandon and try new experiments.
- *A discussion can support the Sangha in learning who is active, what skills they offer, what they are inspired to try, and how to work together in testing and improving new activities.*

**2. For the European KUSZ Sangha:** Establish a new position, Community Director (CD), in the European Office and with a possible equivalent at the local Sangha level. The CD will help all Sanghas understand what is possible in terms of discussing, testing and funding new activities. The CD will be responsible to monitor and collect information about:

- a) all the ongoing experiments in new activities in KUSZ Europe as well as,
- b) possibilities that have not been yet tried in our Sangha but show promise elsewhere, and
- c) possibilities to get support in the forms of information (how to) and in terms of funding.

## ***C) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw***

### **[COMMENT 1]**

Interreligious styles: we don't have interaction with other zen/buddhist/religious groups and may want to do so.

**[REPLY 1]**

Our practice can be applied to other religions. In 1974 Zen Master Seung Sahn invited all different groups.

**[REPLY 2]**

This may be different in the different countries in Europe. Some religions in some countries may not accept Zen (for example catholic church in Slovakia)

**[COMMENT 2]**

We need to be open to diversity, although this may be different by location.

**[COMMENT 3]**

Other forms of together action are already done, but we should focus on encouraging new forms of together action.

**[COMMENT 4]**

Why do we want to do this? To attract more people? How can we communicate with people that are different, for example people who don't believe in global warming? Maybe there is a way we can work with other religious, not to convert them, but to work together.

**[COMMENT 6]**

It is not about conversion to Buddhism but teaching the practice. Doors open naturally by not focusing on conversion, but what do we do naturally that we can give to others without giving the labels. For example talk about mindfulness in the workplace.

**[COMMENT 6]**

Respond to a need.

**[COMMENT 7]**

Don't necessarily look for new forms of together action but perhaps new places for together action, such as a meditation group in the city center instead of at the zen temple.

## ***D) Voices of the Online Sangha***

The online Sangha members had several additional suggestions of together action such as charity work, street retreats and mantra cleaning nature, which involves people who collectively collect garbage to clean nature. It was noted that together action should be well organised and that two approaches are possible. The first approach involves charity work where the charity is treated as a goal in itself for example helping poor and homeless people, but there is virtually no formal practice there and they don't sit in meditation. The second approach would be a vehicle to spread the dharma, : e.g. you give food for free but also provide you with some teachings. How to do charity is not really a question one should ask, because there are tons of examples around, the more difficult part is how to combine it with spreading dharma.

→ Read full transcript of SC Online Discussions [here](#).

## ***E) Survey Quotes***

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*“Spend time with people! We need to go out with them, were they are, mix with them, listen to them deeply. We need buddy energy, special friends, buddhist friends, who are cool and don’t just live in the KUSZ Sangha bubble. We need to reach out, in normal close, go to schools, companies, etc. Just being with people. Mix with other spiritual groups too! We need a big wide Sangha instead of a elite circle of old retreat buddies. That’s wonderful but not enough to help this world right now.”*

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### ***Presentation slides***

→ [Topic 1 - SC18 Powerpoint presentation](#)



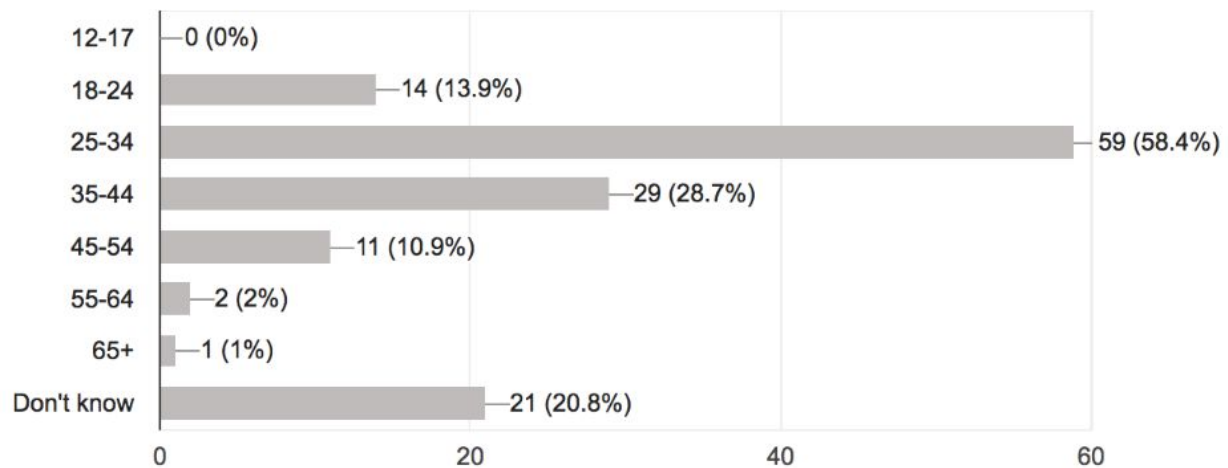
### 3.2.2. TOPIC 2 - Zen practice for beginners

#### A) Motivation & Objective

- ❑ What do we know about newcomers with regard to their demographics, learning style, motivation for practice, needs, etc?
- ❑ What are the barriers that newcomers experience on their journey with Zen and KUSZ so that we can come up with possible solutions to remove or at least lower them?
- ❑ Can and should we do anything to attract/motivate people to join/get involved?

#### B) Survey highlights

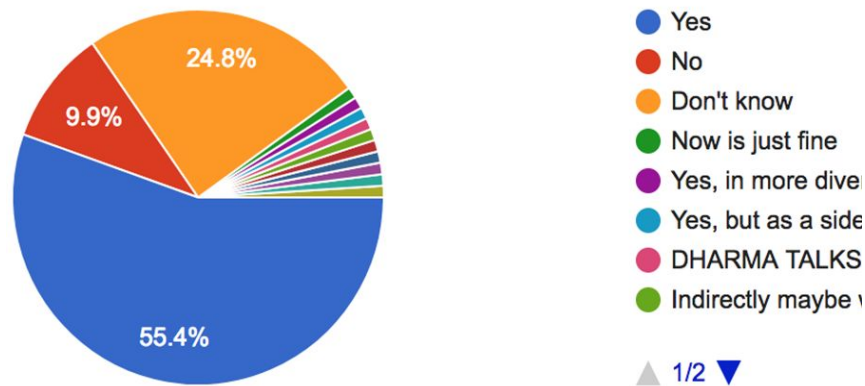
*The age distribution of newcomers*



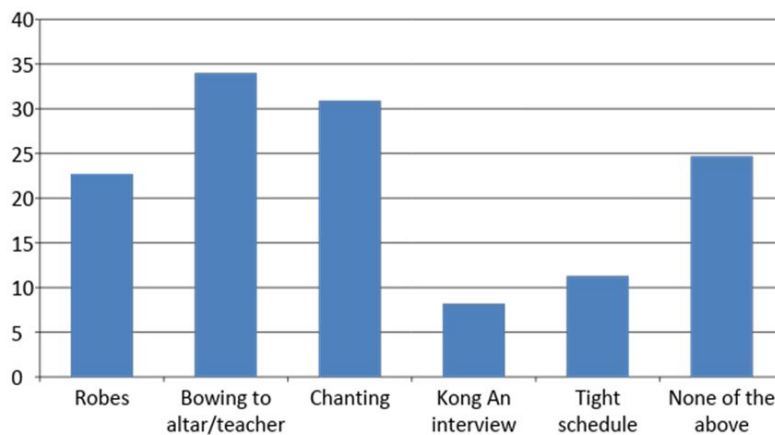
*Q: How do newcomers learn about the school?*

<b>Social media</b>	<b>34.7 %</b>
<b>Personal referral</b>	<b>23.5 %</b>
<b>Website</b>	<b>23.5 %</b>
<i>Doesn't know</i>	18.3 %

Q: Should we be attracting more members?



Q: Which formal aspects present a hindrance to newcomers?



The following case studies were presented:

### C) Case Study

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#### Zen Days for Beginners in Warsaw Zen Center

- one day long event with long intro to meditation by SSN with Q&A, without robes, silence, bowing, formal meal - only 20 minutes chanting and 2h sitting
  - compared to other activities (daily practice, short intro, 3h workshops, city sitting group, Dharma Talks, YMJJs, KC) largest number of new members
  - good, not hierarchical atmosphere and financially successful
  - booklet "First steps on the path of zen" made by student and containing student's testimonials
-

## *D) Recommendations*

### **1. Establish a standardized beginner's program/curriculum as a guideline for Sanghas to follow.**

*So that we can:*

- Provide an environment where newcomers can **ease into** the practice
- Provide an opportunity for newcomers to **ask questions** and **clear out doubts** about any potentially problematic issue (i.e. Precepts, Forms, Chanting etc.)
- Explain that practice is **not a substitute for psychotherapy** and inform the students about the psychological benefits but also the potential challenges of practice (especially during longer retreats)

*Potential solutions:*

- an **introduction program** taking place at the center over **several sessions**
- an optional version of the program online which can be watched and participated at home
- the assignment of an **Dharma friend** (DT or other experienced student) to **help and guide new members** and be available for them to contact

### **2. For all Sanghas or centrally in the KUSZE: Improve or establish a system to collect membership data of their members in order to:**

- ❑ give students a safe and encouraging way to give feedback (positive but especially negative)
- ❑ follow up on inactive members and provide information and resources
- ❑ get reliable membership data

*So that we can:*

- Understand which needs are being met and which are not
- Understand the common challenges and issues that newcomers face
- Provide a safe and encouraging way to give feedback (positive but especially negative with the options of doing it anonymously of course)
- follow up on inactive members and provide information and resources

*Potential solutions:*

- a) Registration forms connected to a database / cloud (Google Drive) / Mailchimp
- b) Evaluation sheets for feedback after events

### **3. Reconsider formal aspects of our practice that are not culturally relevant in the West.**

*So that we can:*

- Reduce barriers to practice for newcomers
- Mitigate/Reduce negative associations regarding the School, tradition and the teachings
- Enable newcomers to ease into the forms by choosing their own pace

*Potential solutions*

- a) offer evenings with less chanting and no robes
- b) look into bowing to the altar and teacher

### ***E) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw***

#### **[COMMENT 1]**

In regards to prostrations, it is the way how you present this technique. For example, it is simplified "salutation to the sun", helps you to focus on what you do next, it helps you to clear your mind before you practice. Many people like the technique when it is presented well and what this technique can give you.

**[COMMENT 2]**

A member is expressing an opinion about the cultural obstacles to practice. For example in Poland, where the majority is Catholic, people might feel uncomfortable with certain aspects of the practice (and even be afraid that the School is trying to sell them "stories & legends") and that we should make sure to explain more about what Zen is and how it fits in the context of other religions and the notion of God.

**[COMMENT 3]**

Very impressed with the strategy and use of online platforms as advertisement. Suggest that the School hires someone who can create a strategy and how to use the online platform, state of the art, to benefit the School.

**[COMMENT 4]**

Collection of the data was suspicious, because we didn't get the data of the people who stopped coming. But ok to start with our ideas. It will be difficult to change what we are, it is something that inspired us and it may attract different people than the people that are attracted so far. But like the idea of relaxed forms in a beginners program. We can perhaps find a framework that is less religious.

**[COMMENT 5]**

Impressed by seeing the beginner's program. A lot of teachers are trained in mindfulness, we may be missing out on opportunities to use this with beginners and companies. The mindfulness teachers lack the experience teachers in our school have.

**[COMMENT 6]**

Different approach don't focus on the beginners, but focus on ourselves. What we do, why we do it and how we do it? We should be able to explain this to others It is not important what we do, what we wear, but why. Dharma teachers should be able to explain this to others. There is talk about changing things, but we should talk between ourselves and explain it again to ourselves first and what these forms mean. Then when people come and don't like it, it is not that important.

## ***F) Voices of the Online Sangha***

The Online Sangha members also indicated that some of the formal aspects of our practice may create hurdles for beginners and they confirmed that they experienced this as well. It was expressed that it is important that when a newcomer arrives he or she needs someone that approaches them with kindness, welcoming attitude, patience and support. It was suggested that each Zen Center or Group has a senior student (with good social skills and who likes to do so) to be responsible to welcome newcomers, to introduce them to other members of the Sangha, to take care of them during their process of learning the forms and solving basic questions.

An example that was mentioned was the system in Hong Kong where, before the beginners join regular practice with senior students, they have their own space and schedule for practice that goes on for a month before they join regular practice.

Another suggestion that was made is to include the traditional scheme of "five gates" (that is meditation on: breath, impurities, so called loving-kindness, dependent origination, Buddha) or other similar scheme which are based on the view that people

differ on the level of their attachments or afflictions, therefore they need different kinds of practice. Another member did agree with studying carefully new approaches but never losing our own core styles of teaching and that Zen Master Seung Sahn never made any practice better than the other. A more in-depth discussion on Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching practice followed between several online members. For the full discussion please see the transcript.

An online member also mentioned that there is a great section on orientation for beginners in the Dharma mirror. Also there is a great detailed Dharma talk by Dae Kwang Sunim on how to handle programmes for beginners. These are great sources of ongoing reference.

It was also mentioned that we need to keep in mind that we need to comply with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### **G) Survey Quotes**

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*“If by more active we refer to a School that is receptive to the needs of its members then yes. The School should do everything possible to strengthen itself (financially and otherwise) so that it can do more for the benefit of all beings.”*

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*“Yes, but not at any price. Zen will always be for minorities and can not compromise their identity.”*

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*“More warmth and welcoming, and less Korean culture - everywhere where buddhism went, it assimilated with local culture. We need US buddhism, European buddhism, Israeli buddhism.”*

### **Presentation slides**

→ [Topic 2 - SC18 Powerpoint presentation](#)

### 3.2.3 TOPIC 3 - More education

#### A) Motivation and objective

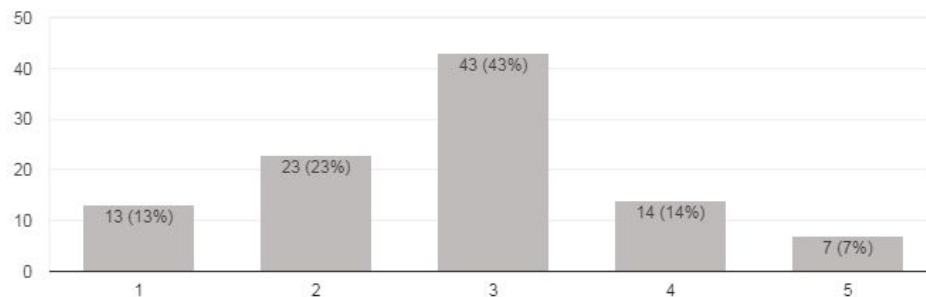
One of the significant changes in our culture since DSSN arrived in the West, is that our tendency towards education has grown stronger. The Millennial Report concluded that millennials are the best-educated generation in history and that younger generations are more oriented towards conceptual thinking. In the same way, the European Sangha clearly expressed, through the SC Survey and from the SC itself, the need to be more knowledgeable - not for the sake of achieving enlightenment, but as a tool that will address the growing need for knowledge in our current culture.

#### B) Survey highlights

- *36% pointed out that our school orientation towards reading/studying is more discouraging than encouraging (only 21%).*

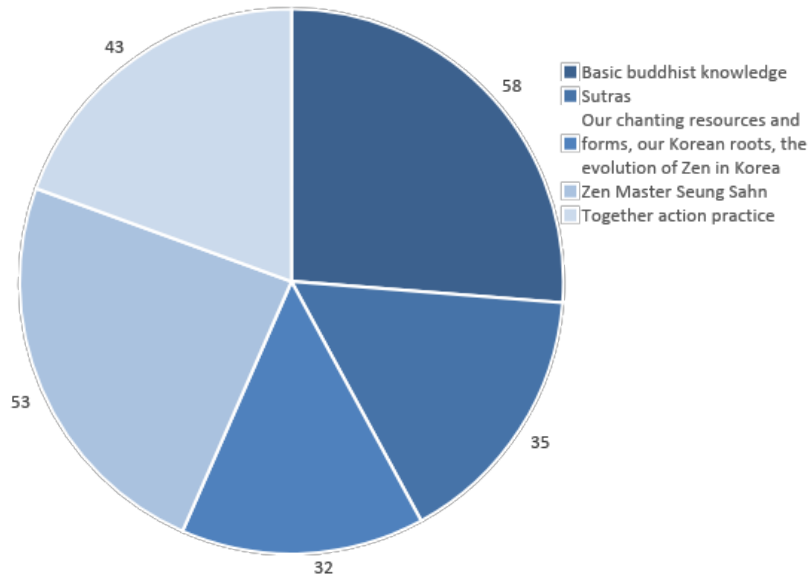
16. Do you find our school's attitude towards reading/studying encouraging or discouraging? (1-discouraging, 5-encouraging)

100 responses



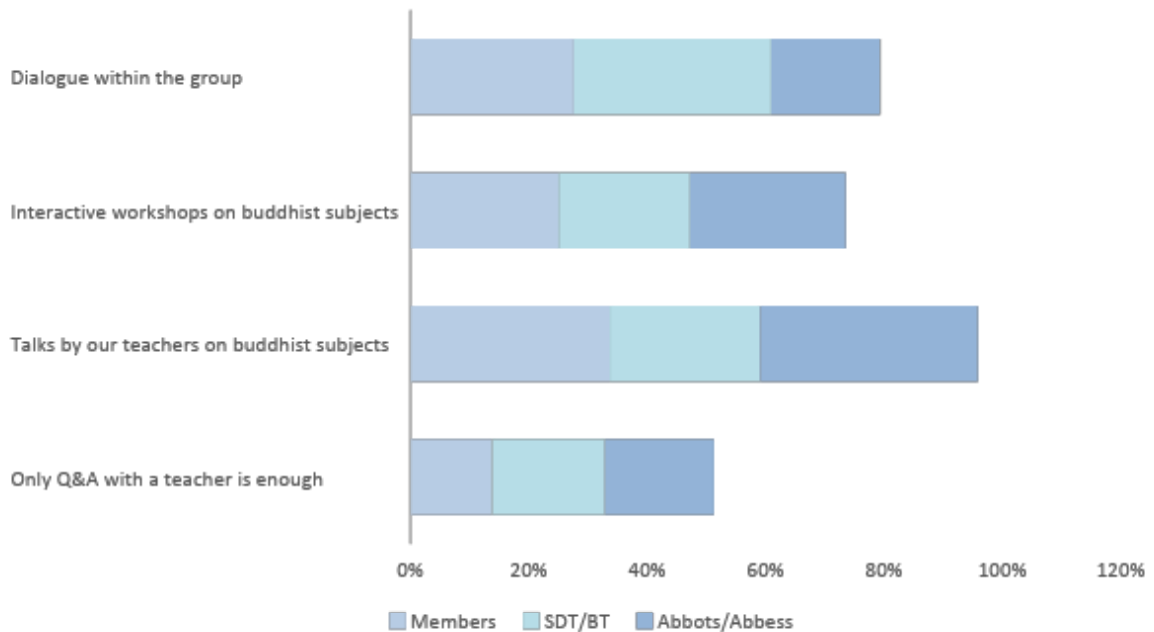
- There is clearly a broad interest in more education among the survey participants.

21. Which of the following topics interest you most?



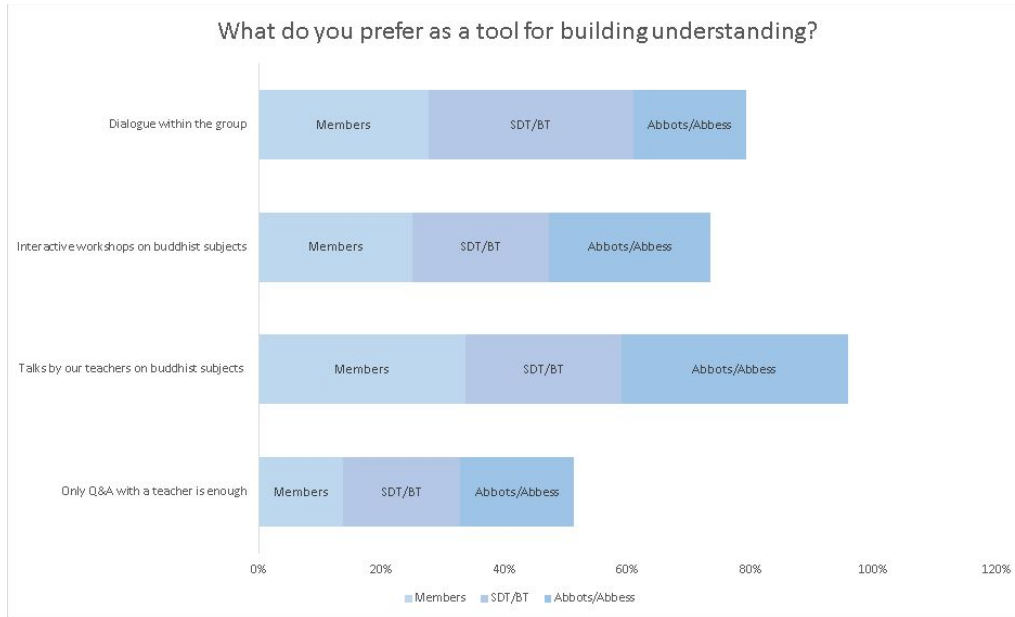
- Participants voted for allowing more methods, other than Q&A, of passing through the Dharma.

18. Preferred tool for building understanding?

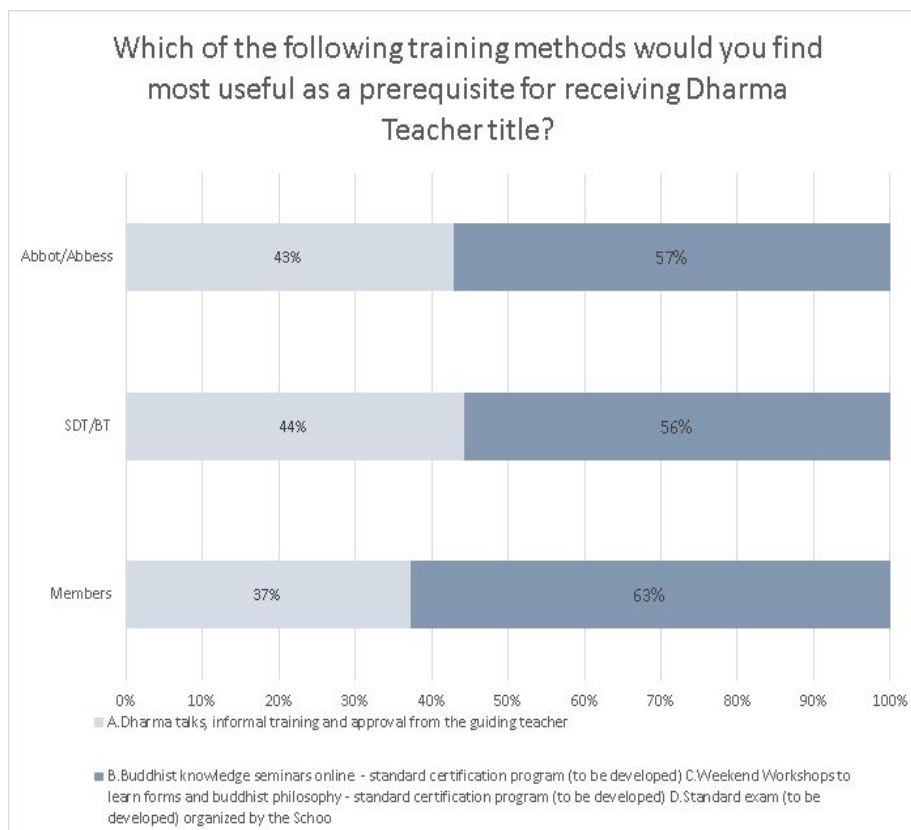


- Members are more in favor of facilitating time for education in the Dharma room. Group Leaders tend to see it as something that should be done individually.





- The majority is pushing forward for a change in the prerequisites that lead to receiving the DT title.



## *C) Case Study*

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### **Sutra studies in Toruń Zen Group**

- The idea is to work with a short Buddhist text through a talk and discussions.
  - It was always a success, more people attend those classes than regular practice.
  - It allows more connection to other Buddhist Sanghas
  - It “activated” not only new members but also many old members who got somehow bored with the practice and got interested again.
- 

## *D) Recommendations*

### **1. We recommend actively cultivating an open attitude towards offering various kinds of education for Sangha members.**

The data collected indicates the feeling within the Sangha of a closed attitude towards learning and towards education. We recognize a clear interest in learning. Opening our hearts and minds to education will lead to finding ways to gain and retain membership in our centers and will benefit our community.

#### *Potential solution:*

- Standardize certification program for DT training that will qualify DTs, among other things, to give short talks about Buddhist tenets through either eLearning platform or through workshops.
- Create a recommended reading list and keep it up to date
- Try to involve monks to transmit their experience from Kangwon
- Occasionally involve teachers from other traditions to give lectures about topics in which they are experts.

## **2. We should work on a new form of explaining basic Buddhist tenets in a more structured form.**

The general idea seems to be that the students should be able to express themselves more freely as opposed to listening only.

*Potential solution:*

- Survey results show that students think that we should use other tools than Q&A Dharma talk.
- Discussion
- Open Dharma circle
- Talking with teachers (meaning: more frequent contact with guiding teacher and other teachers)

## **3. We need to handle podcasts and webinars of a variety of Buddhist subjects by the European teachers.**

Our Zen Centers could use them in the Dharma rooms and spread the teachings amongst many centers.

### *E) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw*

#### **[COMMENT 1]**

There is a global group that is working on a structure of formal (DT) training but it is still in the beginning and haven't been announced yet. We are trying to take our time to process it, meeting for 2 hours every other week. On the online side, Jason JDPSN, is working on a platform that will allow talks about Sutras, and different kind of teachings. It's a work in progress.

#### **[COMMENT 2]**

It just occurred to me that one of the faces of Buddhism is the transmission from teacher to student, and here we are talking of some kind of a structured authentication and although I think it has a place, but still I think (we shouldn't forget that) the most important thing is the interaction between teacher and a student. When I went through my DTiT I didn't feel I have any training nor any personal connection with a teacher, so maybe this should be developed a bit more. There is a guiding teacher

in the Zen center and I think that the interaction between a teacher to a student should be the main training method and not only during retreats and kong-an interviews, so a more personal communication can lead to an institutional certification.

**[COMMENT 3]**

Younger generation is very interested in gathering knowledge and I hope it will be something that happens while sitting in front of a teacher so it will be done in the right way. .

## ***F) Voices of the Online Sangha***

The online Sangha members shared their experiences with education through other lineages and their offers.

One member was suggesting to combine education with examples from the students life through discussions in small groups.

Another participant was suggesting to use the platform that the International Initiative of our school has established to create online courses of our teachers. He was also recommending two books on the classical teachings of the Buddha.

Another suggestion was to systemize a regular classes and to relate the participation in those classes with, for example, retreats participation in order for education to be something more inherent in our School's teaching.

→ Read full transcript of SC Online Discussions [here](#).

## ***G) Survey Quotes***

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*“Most important to me: we are a Zen School. Sutra knowledge should be basic and ONLY be done to nourish our practice not to get buddhist knowledge. So when we start to teach Sutras and written knowledge, we must keep it down to earth, light and practical.”*

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*“We don't learn much and do it individually can be confusing.”*

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*“I find the above resources important and interrelated and all of them should be part of our training, but maybe some subjects should be part of our training at different moments.”*

**Presentation slides** → [Topic 3 - SC18 Powerpoint presentation](#)

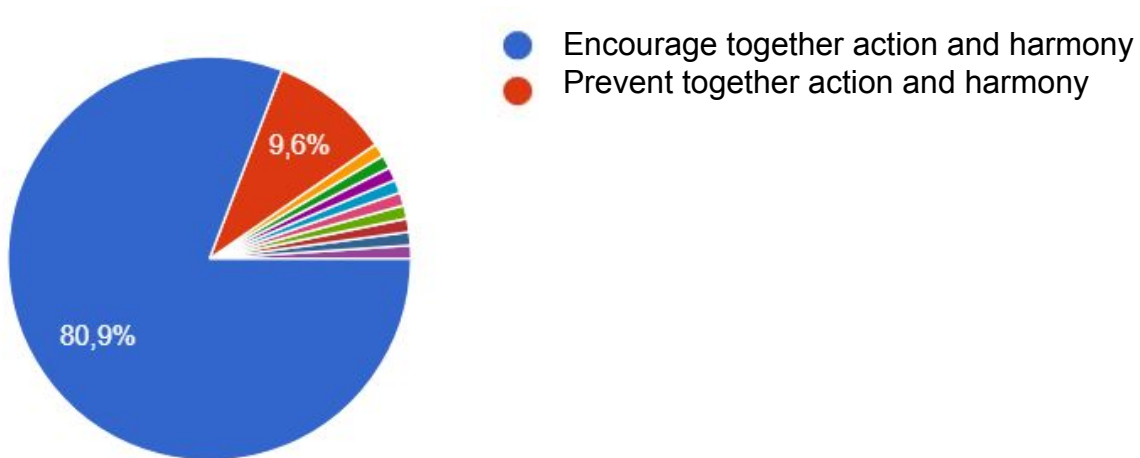
### 3.2.4. TOPIC 4 - Empowering students

#### A) Motivation and objective:

- ❑ Although Global Sangha Survey shows that 54% of European respondents would describe our School as encouraging, 25% would describe it as hierarchical. In order to make these numbers more valid, we can examine if needed encouragement is about titles or rather about responsibilities delegated according to skills and experience.
- ❑ Should we professionalize Sangha's operations and open our structures for influence of social sciences, civil society standards and contemporary solutions which have already been tested in organisations world-wide?
- ❑ Should decision making outside of teaching be shared by all Sangha members, both teachers and students based on skills, practice and work experience or academic education in related fields?

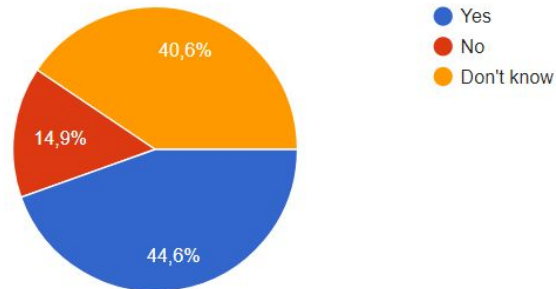
#### B) Survey highlights

13. Do you think that more open communication and discussions, transparency & accountability will:



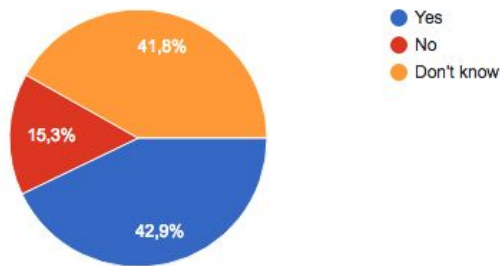
### 14. Should KUSZ separate teaching from school's administration?

101 odpowiedzi



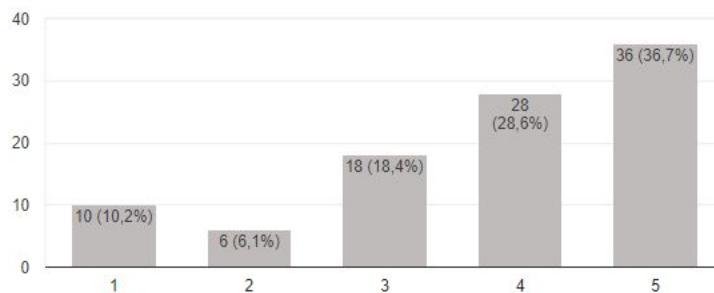
### 23. Would you find it helpful if the contact person for ethical misconduct was a trusted person involved neither in administration nor teaching within the Sangha to ensure neutrality?

98 reacties



### 25. How useful would it be to have a Dharma Teacher designated as one's Dharma Friend within a mentorship program for beginners?

98 odpowiedzi



## C) Case Study

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- KUSZ Germany - administration and teaching spheres are divided with one teacher as a middle-person and note that teachers can overwrite administrative / student staff decisions.
  - European Office - Currently EO has 7 student members and Council 4 teachers, and they meet monthly. The members of the European Council are composed of 4 teachers. Financial director for the E. KUSZ is a student now.
  - Dharma Friend Program:
    - ◆ Extra voluntary option in Precepts Ceremony 2016: 50% 5 precepts, 25% 10 precepts candidates chose their mentors, in Summer 2017 - 50%, Winter 2017 - 25%, 2018 - 75% chose mentors
    - ◆ Ask a Dharma Friend website in Poland:  
[www.zen.pl/zapytaj-przyjaciela-w-dharmie/](http://www.zen.pl/zapytaj-przyjaciela-w-dharmie/)
- 

## D) Recommendations: Empowering students

### 1. a) FOR KUSZE: Cooperation, professionalisation and leadership outside teaching and retreats:

#### *Potential solutions:*

- Promote a culture of acknowledging volunteers. Develop a credit/loyalty system of rewarding them with “karma points”, exchangeable for retreats.
- KUSZE association needs a part-time employee, who would be expected to be accountable and available for work. Ask European Finance Director to review if we can hire a regular employee in the future.

#### **Evidence:**

- Paid administrative positions In KUSZ worldwide: staff of large Zen Centers (Musangsa, Wubongsa, Providence, Cambridge), International Initiative secretary, EO accountant and Head Teacher of European School.
- Paid employees can broaden the scope of activity of the organisation and they make more profit than generate costs with their salary.

- It's a way for Bodhisattva Teachers and other students to engage full-time in their Dharmic vocation, which in many cases is not dependent on inka.

### **1. b) Consider opening the Council work to include student representative. Change the bylaws accordingly.**

#### **Evidence:**

- 80,9% respondents think that more transparency and communication will encourage together action and harmony in the Sangha. ~45% respondents feel teaching and administration should be separated. Only ~15% is against it.
- Student representative would guarantee the flow of information (+&- feedback) to and from Council and offer additional bottom-up perspective on issues.

### **1. c) Consider to assign a neutral person (neither involved in teaching or administration) as a first or alternative contact person when raising an ethical complaint.**

#### **Evidence:**

- 42,9% students consider this to be a good idea, whereas only 15,3 % oppose it.
- Current Ethics Policy directs ethical complaints to GT. For example: Bylaws state that it's GT who appoints the abbot, which generates risk that mutual respect of the two can become a bias and prevent providing help.

### **2. Formally promote Dharma Friend Program (peer mentoring)**

#### *Potential solution:*

- Engage in promoting Dharma Friend Program as we promote taking positions of Abbot, HDT, Housemaster and alike.
- Include guidelines and responsibilities for DF in Dharma Mirror.
- Engage Guiding Teachers, Abbots and HDTs in suggesting DFs for new members at the moment member application is filed.
- Make finding DF formal part of DTiT training.



**Evidence:**

~65% survey respondents would find this program helpful and inspiring.

**3. Consider changing the Dharma Teacher title to one of the options suggested by SC.****Disclaimer:**

Validity of this recommendation has to be reevaluated. Please note that the below provided evidence is insufficient to make the validity claim.

**Evidence:**

- 43% survey respondents find the title (or function?) useful, whereas 21% find it not useful. To 35% it has a neutral value.
- 34 out of 103 people suggested various titles instead of “Dharma Teacher”. 15 respondents came out independently with same new name “senior student”.
- There was a vote for a different title during SC: Senior (Dharma) Student - 15, Meditation (or Dharma) Instructor - 6, Dharma Friend - 3.

***E) Voices of the Sangha in Warsaw***

- If there is an ethical problem, the first step is to try to deal with this person, not the abbot. The guiding teacher is the second one, if you trust him. Ethics policy need thorough training!
- It is correct that the abbot is not mentioned in the ethical policy but that doesn't make the proposition of trusted person in ethics wrong.
- Many people don't understand various positions in the Sangha structures and where can they address their case. Before suggesting new positions, we should become more professional in education on existing ones - HDT, HM etc.
- The name “karma/dharma points” is not a good name.
- Most important way to empower the student is through deepening one's practice.

***F) Voices of the Online Sangha*****Regarding Karma points (points exchangeable for i.e retreats):**

- **In favour** - it's to promote engagement, points could be received not only for work, but also for events (retreats etc.) and could be shared with friends to stress danaparamita aspect, it could be tested in one Sangha, similar solutions are

implemented in universities (example from Spain: it took 3 years to design an objective and confidential tools)

- **Against** - judging effort is not easy (how to discriminate between different personal/family situations), can backfire with competition and change of dana direction (calculating mind), usually merit for dana appears by itself, costs of volunteers are high (training them, breaking tools, injuries).
- **Alternatives** - more Haeng Won-like programs (practice at the temple in exchange for work), where Sangha calculates “value” of certain work in advance, promising i.e discounts for retreats and calls in an open ad for skilled volunteers

### **Regarding changing Dharma Teacher title:**

- **In favour** - Dharma Teacher/hoshi in soto zen title is very rare, online members concluded they like Dharma Mentor name
- **Against** - there was an erroneous survey data interpretation (adding neutral and negative attitudes towards the name, when in fact positive attitudes are stronger than negative), so this recommendation has no support in survey results; in Spain people know that teacher is not a master
- **Alternatives** - it wasn't clear for survey respondents if the question means changing the title or raising requirements of the training and the latter is a good idea, training should be based not only on commitment but also on skills, we should teach DTs forms and texts, but also social skills/people skills.

Online Sangha also shared that students in Council could bring new light to many matters to help teachers and that in every secular organisation trusted person in ethics is working from outside the hierarchy.

→ Read full transcript here [SC Online Transcript](#).

### **G) Survey Quotes**

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*“I believe that teachers should oversee the administrative matters of our School, but they should be able to dedicate most part of their efforts (90 percent of it) to deepen their practice and to the teaching.”*

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*“Decision making should be done according to local Sangha’s needs.”*

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*“The community should be as democratic as possible.”*

**Presentation slides** → [Topic 4 - SC18 Powerpoint presentation](#)

## 4. Lessons learned

### 4.1. Sangha Convention Survey

- **Scientific process:** If the survey is going to be a recurring measuring tool (in spite of its limitations), more time will need to be spent on developing a survey strategy, designing the survey, the survey questions and review of these questions using members with professional data collection skills and background in social sciences.
- **Timing:** It may be helpful to allow for more time for submitting the survey by the respondents.
- **Language barrier:** We may want to translate questions into two or more languages to cover a greater pool of members.
- **Audience:** In the survey, questions should be divided by survey group (member, Dharma Teacher, abbot) to avoid results being skewed towards a ‘don’t know’ or ‘guess’ answer by respondents who are not knowledgeable about a subject. For example in the current survey (new) members were asked about the number of newcomers.

### 4.2 Sangha Convention

#### General

- **Exit survey:** Have an exit survey at the end of the convention so we can gather feedback about what was good and bad and how we can improve next time. This also to avoid anecdotal feedback from members who are extremely positive or negative.
- **Duration:** Although we received some signals that SC might have been too long (or even completely unnecessary), overwhelming majority of comments indicated that it was too short (“why not 2 days?”) and left not enough time for in-person discussion. This means we need to either make the convention longer, reduce the number of discussion topics or find a different method of discussion.
- **Recommendations:** A new, team-oriented (instead of result-oriented) solution has to be found so the SC remains able to formulate concrete and actionable recommendations during the event instead of during preparatory phase. This will mean taking into account the factors of having so many various voices present and limited time, which can result in long discussion but no conclusions. One idea from participants would be to focus on case studies to extract what has already been tested as functional and effective. Working groups could gather around case study presenters, who would share what was tested in their Sanghas.

This would make SC less academic and the recommendations less abstract and more practical.

- **Family and work:** For Sangha members with families or work obligations we may want to look for ways to be more inclusive. Perhaps when we start preparing SC next time, we can send out an initial inquiry to members if any member would like to attend with their family and plan accordingly.
- **Evaluation sheets:** In the future, to quantify the results in a less general way than it was done (asking for voting against recommendations only), the final phase of voting could employ **evaluation sheets** with all recommendations printed. Each recommendation could have a scale like:

*How useful/helpful/important would it be in your view for the European Teachers Group to discuss this recommendation: (3) (2) (1) (0). 'Please elaborate'*

This can be then collected in addition to any verbal comments made during the convention. It would also provide more detailed info on members' attitudes towards each recommendation.

### 4.3 SC Online on FB

- **Advance notice:** Some members expressed their discomfort regarding the late notice, which happened as a result of lack of experience and lack of time as new challenges appeared in the course of preparations. Our intention was to gain more space for discussion and to include members with work, family and other obligations, who could join us only online. We will need to provide earlier notice next time.
- **Platform and privacy:** Another shortcoming that was highlighted by members is the insufficient attempt to secure a safe (verified members only) and consensual (no direct request if people's voices and image can be broadcasted) space for participants. Some delegates in Warsaw shared that they weren't comfortable not knowing, who is watching the stream. We will have to evaluate various platform options as an alternative to FB, also because not all members may have had access to FB.

## 5. Closing remarks

This was the first time that the Sangha Convention of the KUSZEU took place. The recommendations will be now sent to the appropriate bodies of the KUSZEU, to be considered in their decisions. We are very grateful to the members of our Sangha for being a part of the Convention: Those who came to the event, those who worked on complex topics, those who took part in the face to face or online discussions and you who just read this 37 pages Sangha Convention report.

This Convention is not only an important part of the KUSZEU bylaws. It's a chance for all of us to listen and look freshly without judgment – together as Sangha. Side by side – not divided into concepts and ideas – as human beings.

Council of KUSZEU

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*Bogumiła Malinowska JDPSN*

*Arne Schaefer JDPSN*

*Koen Vermeulen JDPSN*

*Knud Rosenmayr JDPSN*

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### **Note**

If you are a Kwan Um School of Zen member, teacher or complete beginner and you have any further comments, which you would like to share about Sangha Convention - the idea, the content or the process - know that **we will keep waiting to listen to your voice** any time at [comms@kwanumeurope.org](mailto:comms@kwanumeurope.org).

→ [European Office](#)