

## **The Wilton Park experience. How was it for me?**

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Wilton Park? Never heard of it. Was this just another leadership programme on the burgeoning scene? I was wrong, it seems.

So, you may ask -how did the journey start? Over coffee, a good colleague of mine from Durham University suggested that I might be interested in attending the WP leadership programme. As he had participated himself and received the benefits from the networks that emerged, he felt that I too would gain tremendously from this week long dialogue with other individuals.

His suggestion was that as someone with lots to say, someone with a keen eye on political matters and a strong personality who would be keen on articulating my viewpoints I would fit right in. Wilton Park would give me a week to sit in the historical seat of dialogue and just let my thoughts flow. And that certainly did happen. We concentrated, debated, explored and rigourously challenged some assumptions on diverse topics dealing with the economy, State, the different health systems and international relations.

Isolated from any decent mobile connection and the outside world in the quintessentially historical town sometimes the search for answers just led to more questions and escalation of debates. Oh, how I loved it. And I couldn't begin to tell what my best moments were. Was it the discussion with German and British colleagues to discuss these topics, or probing the stellar cast of senior guests and establishment figures who were invited to introduce these themes, playing croquet by night with others or something else altogether?

In the end my lingering memory will be of the evening discussion I had with two German friends on the topics of our identities. There was me - Zubeda a British, Asian headscarf wearing Muslim working in local government; Kelvin, who was a German- American, black- Jewish diplomatic advisor and Stefan who was a German born, internationally educated, Swiss based ex-pro-tennis player. Much like the rigours of the WP programme, we talked, explored and challenged our own assumptions on our own differences and in the end we settled for the hand of friendship knowing that some answers cannot fit any one global environment.

This pretty much summed up the Wilton Park experience. That is, being open and reflective of our common humanity and where democracy remains at the heart of our answers on the journey ahead.