

Friends visit Friends – Department of Social Work discovered by International Guests

Between the 19th and 23rd April 2010 the department of Social Work said „Welcome to the International University Week 2010“. The meeting is annually situated in a partner university of the Socrates University Network of Schools of Social Work in Europe. The aim is to advance the intercultural exchange about Social Work in several countries and not least to exchange about the similarities and disparities of the different study places. Out of eight different countries 46 guests arrived, for example from the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Austria and Denmark.

The eruption of the Icelandic volcano “Eyjafjallajökull” in those days did not just interact in the European flight schedule, the arrival of some participants was complicated, too. Therefore, the expected guests from Greece, Finland and Sweden were holding off. Nevertheless, the situation was handled flexible. Most of the participants arrived in Jena on Sunday night. Based on the motto “friends visit friends” everybody stayed with a student from the Department of Social Work and experienced the daily life of the students from Jena. Hence the exchange was not only about the current issues of Social Work, but also to deliver insight into the student culture in Jena, which was unconsciously given to the guests.

All arrived and local students and teacher were welcomed with a coffee and cake reception. This was prepared by a group of volunteer students who planned the accomplishment of the international meeting since October and they cared for smoothly flow of the meeting together with the international coordinator of the department of social work Prof. Dr. Trenczek.

After a short presentation of every university, an introduction program and some so called “icebreaker-games” for the first acquaintance, the agenda was followed by an alternative sightseeing rally to discover Jena. The first day finished with a welcome party in the youth club “meeting point” in Lobeda East. There the participants were welcomed again by a self-made dinner buffet. The evening was accompanied with music from the band “Lost Minds” from Jena.

The two following days were themed by the device of the international meeting: "Diversity and Methods in Social Work in a European Perspective". Within this topic there were twelve different workshops, in which the participants could inscribe themselves before. In small groups people worked on different contributions about themes like experienced based learning, rehabilitation and music, the arts and social work, social work and the transformation of the welfare state and many more. The separation of the participants featured a good working climate, let enough space for discussions and not least about Social Work is working in the "own home country" in reference to the topic. In some workshop there was the chance and possibility to try out oneself or gaining practical experiences, especially in experienced based learning activities or the visit of institutions of youth welfare or aid for drug users.

After the successful conclusion of the workshops, everybody was invited to the beach party on Wednesday night, originally planned at the "Beach 22/Strand 22" in the paradise park. According to the April-like weather and the heavy rain it was displaced to the "Meeting point". There, the social work students could enjoy the original thuringian sausages together with their guests and teachers. Additionally, home-made salads by the Jena students were provided. From 9 p.m. on the event was opened for all social work students and teachers from Jena to get to know the international guests. Despite of the cold, some of the visitors remained outside the youth club to sit around a campfire.

To familiarize the international guests with the German culture and history, an excursion to Weimar was planned on the day next to the last. After a walking trip to the "Ettersberg" the former concentration camp Buchenwald could be visited. An English-guided tour was arranged to give the guests an understanding of the sensitive part of the German history. Subsequently, the discovery of the former cultural capital was provided. In the evening the hosts already invited to the "Farewell party" again in the "Meeting point". The Jena band "Soulcreep" cared for the musical scale with melodic rock. Following DJ-music later on, everybody tried their "socialcompedance". Some of them danced until the morning light.

The completion event of the international meeting on Friday morning was prelude by the Jena student choir "Chorissimo". Afterwards, the participants presented their workshop results. At the end, everybody received a certificate and a little thank-you presents was given to the teachers and the 21 hard-working student helpers. With cordial embrace, the

promise to see each other again soon and sometimes even with a tear - everybody had to say good-bye until they will meet each other again at the next International University Week in Jena in 2013.

All in all, the International University Week 2010 has been a successful exchange on which the participant could learn from each other on a personal and professional level.

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