

International Exchange Week 2006 in Groningen

Sunday, 23th april 2006: 8.41 a.m., train-station Jena-West – with our package full of nice presents for our Dutch hosts, we started our 10-hours-trip throughout the wide landscapes of Germany to the land of tulips, called Holland. When we finally arrived in Groningen, our hosts were already waiting for us. After we got rid of our heavy rucksacks in their flats, we got to know each other better in the „De Drie Gezusters“, one of the largest pubs in Europe at all.



Monday: The official part of the International Exchange Week started at 9.30 a.m. at the Hanzehogeschool. After the nice presentations of the six participating universities from Holland, Belgium, Finland, Norway and Germany, we played a few games to introduce each other, including some „speed-dating“ with 70 people in about five minutes. After that we couldn't even remember our own names. Then we met in the workshop-groups to do some organisational stuff for the following days. After a free afternoon, we were invited to the Welcome-dinner in a nice Chinese restaurant called „Lee Garden“ where we got a great meal. Then there was the Welcome-party with a Carribean DJ and an international-students-party in the close-by pub.

Tuesday: Damn, we really had a bad hangover this morning – but there was no point to that as our workshops started now. We had to choose one of the following workshops: „Addiction“, „Experiential Learning“, „Judicial social work“, „Violence“, „Intercultural Communication“ und „Rehabilitation“. To get as much impressions as possible from Social Work in the Netherlands, the five of us decided to participate in four different workshops.

Intercultural Communication: At the workshop „Intercultural Communication“ we were introduced to different methods in intercultural communication and we also practiced these methods. We had role – plays with conversations between different cultures and what you can do false. We visited two organizations, which are related to this subject. Our first excursion was at the „Jasmijn“, an institution which organizes different activities for female immigrants. At the second excursion we attend „Humanitas“, an organization based on the help of volunteers, who coach and train immigrants to integrate in the Netherlands. As the participants of the workshop were from differnet countries as well, we also had much practical training in intercultural communication.

Rehabilitation: My workshop about Rehabilitation started on Tuesday morning with an introduction in the psychosocial rehabilitation by William de Jonge (teacher at the Hanzehogeschool Groningen). In the afternoon we made an excursion to GGZ (Mental Health) Groningen, department Cenzor of division psychosocial rehabilitation. We heard some information about the institution, the target group (people with psychiatric disabilities) and how the social workers work there. Our next lecture was on Thursday. Peter v/d Ende told us some more facts about the psychosocial rehabilitation and the principles of psychiatric rehabilitation. Later on this day we had an other excursion and went by bus to the Stichting Hospitium den Eikelaar in Leek. Young people, families and elderly people live there in different parts in the organisation and get support how they can handle their financial depts. All in all the workshop was very interesting and I'd like to say thank you to the coordination by Rianne.

Violence: This workshop was about how to deal with violence in different fields of social work and as a social worker at all. At first we visited an institution working with sexual-abused children and their families and were introduced to their very interesting way of dealing with those people. Afterwards we had an other excursion to a huge shelter for battered women in Groningen, where we learned a lot about violence in families and how to cope with that. The second part of the workshop consisted of some lessons about how to react on violence as a professional social worker when you are personally faced with it. This one included some theory about different forms of violence and some practice in a self-defense-workshop, where we learned how to react on physical violence. All in all, this was a great workshop, especially because of all the practical excursions and trainings.

Experiential Learning: The first day of the workshop started up with a few practical excersises, to introduce people to the topic „Drama as a learning medium in Social Work“. We recognized very fast that in the Netherlands drama is a very common method in Social Work. But we also recognized that it isn't in the rest of Europe, so we learned a lot of new stuff. In the afternoon we were given some lectures in „Stories and poem“. Writing stories and poems is a very good method to express your feelings and your problems, which you often can't do in any other way. It often helps you to get to know your own problems better and offers an opportunity to express yourself in an unusual way. The third part of the workshop was about music and its theoretical and practical meaning in Social Work. This lecture was given by a student from Amsterdam who works with mentally disordered children. She told us about her experiences with music in this field of Social Work. We also got some practice in playing music instruments by ourselves then. The final and most spectacular event of our workshop was an excursion to „Outdoor International“. We had opportunities to do abseiling from a 30m high building and played some other kooperative outdoor games as well. Some of us got to know their personal limitations and we all tried to overcome our inhibitions.

Tuesday's evening most of us relaxed with our hosts at home.

Wednesday: We finally had a good night's rest, as we had to start not that early at 11.30 a.m. for the interactive city-walk. We climbed the Martinitower, Groningens tallest building, but unfortunately couldn't have a nice view because of the fog around the town. In the afternoon we had some pots of „warme Chokolademelk“ and a shopping-tour which ended up with us eating „Pannenkoek“ on the famous „Pannenkoek“-ship. Afterwards we went straight to the pub again, where we played some very funny games with our Dutch friends, including „I've never ever...“. We got to bed very late that night.



Thursday: This day the second parts of the workshops took place. In the afternoon we had a short rest so we were fit again for the Farewell-party that took place in an Irish pub. There was lots of good foods from all the international participants of the exchange week and we did some karaoke. Afterwards we had another nightlife-sightseeing-tour through Groningen.



Friday: At 10 a.m. the presentation of the workshops started. The workshop „Intercultural Communication“ won the prize for the best one, as this was the main theme of the exchange-week at all. Then the official part of this year's exchange week ended and we had a big goodbye. At first we thought the Dutch people to build up the huge stages and make those big party all over Groningen just for our departure, but later on we recognized that it was Queens-Day, Hollands official celebrating-day that they did it for. That's why we stayed in Groningen for another night...

Saturday: ...and finally caught our train back home after two hours of sleep very early on Saturday morning. After another ten-hours-trip, we arrived back in Jena and went straight to our beds, because we were very very tired after this exhausting exchange week. It really was a great event.

„Groningen, ik vind je leuk“ – Groningen, I really like you.
And some special thanks to our hosts and the organisation-staff in Holland...

Eva, Margit, Micha, Steffi and Stephanie