

## **International University Week (IUW) 2018 at the Ernst-Abbe University of Applied Sciences Jena**

Which standards do we want to maintain in European social work and what are current topics and challenges we are facing together? – These questions were discussed by the 112 participants of the International University Week 2018, which took place from 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> of April at the Ernst-Abbe University of applied sciences in Jena and had as its motto “Diversity, Innovation and Standards in European Social Work”. Among the participants were 87 students from 12 Universities in 10 different nations (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland, Switzerland and Germany). 11 international lecturers held workshops and 14 lecturers and partners from different fields of social work in Jena collaborated on a varied and interesting programme.

The IUW is a programme for international networking between European Universities and for the consolidation of intercultural competencies, which takes place annually at various locations across Europe. Participants are particularly members of the Socrates Network of European University Schools of Social Work (SocNet98), which was founded in 1998 by Prof. Dr. Thomas Trenczek (Ernst-Abbe University Jena) and Menno van Veen (Hanzehogeschool Groningen) during an event for international exchange in Groningen.

The programme started on Monday with a warmly welcome and some decent food in the “World Café” for which the students of the EAH had prepared tasty foods from all over the world. While eating and arriving, the foreign students and the students of the EAH could use the opportunity to become acquainted to each other, which was quite important since our students hosted the visitors during the week.

The formal programme began with opening speeches by Prof Dr Thomas Trenczek and the dean of the university, Prof Dr Andreas Lampert. Afterwards, the students and lecturers held presentations of the foreign universities: self-made posters, which represented their hometowns and universities were showed, there even was a self-made video and the highlight was a spontaneously and beautifully sung folk song by a student from Odense, Denmark. By the means of the presentations and an acquaintance game, the ice was broken, and the following city tour strengthened the community spirit and offered a lot of information about the history and the attractions of Jena. The first day ended with an amazing welcome-party at the youth club “Treffpunkt” in Jena Lobeda with a varied barbecue buffet for meat-lovers, vegetarians and vegans.

On Tuesday, the participants spent the day with diverse and interesting workshops and lectures on topics such as: “Social emotion in social Work”, “Promoting youth participation”, “Psychodrama on migration” and “Intercultural sensitivity”. Many different perspectives on the subjects resulted from the international setting, which also was a new experience for some of the lecturers. For the students, the development of diverse perspectives was a supportive experience for the creation of their professional identity.

In the evening, most of the participants spent their free time at the Paradiespark with barbecue, reflecting on the workshops and getting to know each other better.

The topics of the third day were of historical, cultural and professional nature. In the morning, we visited the memorial of the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar. The concentration camp, which was operated from 1937 – 1945 during the Nazi regime, now reminds of the terrible conditions, from which people of different nations were suffering as well as of the deceased, their relatives and the survivors of these gruesome times. From a professional point of view, we must ask ourselves, how survivors and bereaved as well as descendants of victims and perpetrators cope with this chapter of their lives or their family history and which consequences arise from that for individuals and our whole society; especially referring to international cooperation and the act of confidence-building between people of different nations. So, there was not only mourning in the

oppressive atmosphere of the memorial but also a vibrant discussion, not least of all about the current political situation in Europe, which strengthens populist movements in many countries.

In the afternoon, everyone could choose from different excursions in Weimar, such as a city tour including the introduction of the most important social institutions, a visitation of the “Kinderhaus” (children- and youth welfare work), the visit of an advice centre for refugees by the AWO or a guided tour through the national theatre of Weimar including the presentation of the field of work of theatre pedagogy. By this way, everyone could follow his or her interests and enjoy either a cultural programme or become immersed in a field of work of his or her choice. One could look behind the scenes (partly even literally!) of the diverse fields of social work in the cultural capital of Weimar. In the evening, there was the opportunity to reflect on the events of the day or to spend some free time on enjoying the diverse cultural attractions in Weimar.

On Thursday, the programme took place in Jena again. In the morning, there were some more workshops, for example on the following subjects: “Endangered diversities? Social work and group focused enmities”, “Violence prevention within social work” and “Children of parents with mental health problems”. In the Afternoon, there were offered some excursions as well, for example on street- and district-work in Jena, on social work with refugees in Jena, the visit of an advice centre for people with addiction related problems and even a sporty “Jugger”-workshop. Thanks to the numerous practice partners of the university, who took part in the IUW, the international participants could win an insight on practical social work in Jena as well.

On Thursday night, the big farewell party took place. It was an awesome evening with lots of music and dancing, talking and spontaneous discussions and not least of all a self-made buffet. The atmosphere showed that the group had grown together over the time, both on a personal and on a professional level.

On the last day of the IUW, all the participants met again at the EAH for a common breakfast and to reflect the impressions of the past days. There was a quantitative evaluation in the form of a detailed questionnaire as well as a qualitative evaluation with the possibility of giving a written feedback to the organizers of the event. Afterwards, the big farewell of our international guests took place, which was quite emotional, since a lot of friendships have been arising from the common experiences of the last week. Everybody seems to have learned a lot, since the international lecturers have been honoured for their lectures with great applause.

To summarize the impressions and experiences of these days, it can be said that the international university week at the EAH was an immense success for all. New perspectives have been created, both on a personal and a professional level and international relationships have been fostered. In my opinion, the IUW is a key factor for a successful international cooperation between the EAH and Universities of foreign nations as well as for communicating international competencies to students. Maybe some students from Jena were also stuck on by the international atmosphere and have become curious of a semester abroad in the context of the Erasmus-programme.

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