

# INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY WEEK 2022 IN HASSELT/ BELGIUM

From April 25th - 29th 2022 we, that is Carla, Marina, Rahel, Wiebke and Ziba (all studying social work in the 4th semester) participated in the International University Week (IUW) 2022 at the PXL Hogeschool in Hasselt, Belgium. Every year, the organisation SocNet98 offers students from all over Europe the opportunity to spend a week together, to learn and grow together, to make contacts and to exchange views on the different perspectives and achievements of social work in their home countries.

The IUW is always offered at four different locations at the same time (which change every year): This year it was in St. Pölten in Austria, Girona in Catalonia (Spain), Porsgrunn in Norway and Hasselt in Belgium. Hasselt, the city we visited, is a small town in Limburg, located in the north-east of Belgium. Hasselt has about 80,000 inhabitants. Our host university, the PXL, has more than 9,000 students on several campuses with a total of nine departments. Together with about 50 European students we got the opportunity to spend a week at the PXL, learning about the topic „International solidarity“!

In order to get familiar with the topic, all participating students already met online twice during the week before the start of the IUW. In the first meeting, we first exchanged ideas in small groups about the understanding of social work in our country and then clarified any open questions. At the second meeting, we listened to a lecture by the head of a social organisation that focuses on international solidarity. The lecture was not only very interesting, but also prepared us well for the topic and our week in Belgium.

In order to start the presence part of the IUW relaxed on Monday, we already travelled to Hasselt on Sunday. While Carla had previously visited her sister in Aachen and travelled alone, Ziba and Rahel met in the morning at the train station in Emden and then later Marina and Wiebke hopped on the same train in Leer. Together we first drove to Münster, from there we went on to Cologne and then in a crowded train to Liège. There we almost missed our connecting train, because it was not clear, at which section of the platform the train departs and of course we were at the other end of the platform when the train entered. After a short sprint, we made it into the train. After a ride in a surprisingly unmodern regional train, we were only a bus ride away from Hasselt. The only problem: There was no bus with the same number as on our tickets. After we asked some locals, we finally got on the right bus and arrived safely in Hasselt. Two Belgian students picked us up from the bus station and brought us to the hotel. There we met Carla and let the evening end nicely and relaxed in a restaurant.

## **Monday**

On Monday, we were able to meet the other participants of the IUW for the first time. Full of anticipation, we walked to the "PXL Hoogeschool" after breakfast. It was not easy to find the building because the university has many different buildings. We were welcomed by the students from Belgium. Everyone received a water bottle and a bag. We were also able to sign up for a list and choose the workshops and excursions on Wednesday. As we were there very early, we were lucky and there were still many places available.

After an official welcome, we could eat something in the canteen. We were all excited because the food was fantastic and there was a huge choice. During the meal, we also came into contact with the other students for the first time. In the evening, each country presented itself and its university in a presentation. Mrs. Sandersfeld also came and joined us. There was a lot of laughter, and everyone enjoyed the presentations. Afterwards, we tasted the food and drinks we had brought with us from the different countries. This was a special experience and gave the day a nice ending. When we arrived at the hotel, we fell into bed tired after an exhausting day.

## **Tuesday**

On Tuesday our day started at 8 o'clock. We gathered and we were welcomed. There was also an introduction into the day. At 8:30 am our first workshop started. Together with Ziba, Carla and Wiebke I attended the workshop entitled "solidarity, political bonding and allyship" presented by Antje Krüger from Bremen. At 10 a.m. we had a half-hour break. Then we continued with the second workshop. The title of this workshop was "diversity and inclusion; an international perspective". All 5 of us attended this workshop, which was conducted by Sjors Bottema from Denmark. At 12 o'clock pm we all took a lunch break. We ate in the canteen and the food tasted really delicious. Since we had a two-hour break, we learned some card games from Catalonia from the participants from Spain and we also showed games that we knew from Germany. We spent the rest of the break outside in front of the canteen because the sun was shining and the weather was very nice. We talked to the participants and we got to know each other better. The last workshop for this day started at 2 pm. Ziba, Wiebke and I attended the workshop "voluntary social work - a paradox?" presented by Tina Bernstrom Pedersen from Denmark. All workshops were interesting, designed differently, but at the end we were a bit exhausted from the whole day. From 3:30 p.m. we all had free time. We went into town, strolled through it, looked at the surroundings and went shopping. We also tried the Belgian waffle which tasted very very delicious. After we had dinner, the five of us went to a pub that offered discount on beer for students. Later the girls from Scotland came there too and we all sat down

together. We laughed together and even celebrated the birthday of a participant from Scotland. We all walked back to the hotel together and went to bed.

### **Wednesday**

Wednesday was scheduled for the excursions. There were four different tours to choose from. We students from Emden University of Applied Sciences chose a visit to the Japanese Garden. There was also an Art Tour, a Hello Hasselt Tour and a Historical City Walk. We were lucky to have very good weather, as all the activities took place outside. In the afternoon, a boat tour was planned which unfortunately could not take place due to organisational problems. Instead, we all went to the park together. The students from Belgium bought beer and snacks so that we could spend a nice afternoon together. In the evening, Ziba Marina Wiebke and I (Carla) went out for dinner and drinks with the students from Girona. We talked about social work and about typical things in Germany and Catalonia.

### **Thursday**

On Thursday we met at the PXL faculty for social work at 9 am after having an amazing breakfast at the holiday inn express hotel. Mrs. Leten, departmental coordinator internalisation of PXL-Social-Work, greeted us all and welcomed us to our last official day. After clearing up some organisational matters, such as talking about today's schedule and handing out our vouchers for lunch we went to our last workshop of the week.

All of us attended the workshop „Scotland's Place in the World `Global Justice Now´ A manifesto for global solidarity“, presented by the Scottish students themselves. The master students talked about how Scotland's social structure impacts their citizens and compared the different cities which were represented in the International University Week. To include the attending students, the presentators used the medium mentimeter and asked us questions and collected some keywords for the topic global justice. By including the listeners and comparing our countries with each other, the students managed to keep us all focused. Not simply was it interesting for us because of the little questions on the board and the countries represented, but it felt easier to listen to students than to actual teachers. After their presentation, a woman called Jana Kralova spoke briefly about her work and her insights into social work. Not only her speech itself and her way of depicting the topic of social death but the intensity the topic has, had us all invested. We as students talked about it and shared our feelings towards her presentation and we all agreed that it was the most powerful and intense presentation we heard about social work and even now back in Germany we talk about it, which shows that the international program itself had an impact on us, also the workshops did in fact animated us to think about controversial topics. After the last workshop of the week, we had some time for us and prepared ourselves for the students' dinner which was located in the cafeteria of the PXL

University. The dinner was a typical Belgium speciality, Belgium fries with sausages and many different sauces. They also had vegan alternatives to include everyone, which was very thoughtful. During the dinner we had time to chat with the other attendings and got to play cards. After the students' dinner the majority of us went to the planed farewell party at one of the biggest nightclubs in Belgium, the Versuz. On our way to the Versuz we had a lot of fun just talking to each other and playing little party games and typical educational games. After the one hour walk to the club and a bit of waiting time in front of the Versuz, we finally went inside of the huge building and got to have an amazing ending.

## **Friday**

Friday, the 29.04.2022, was our last day with the other students and our departure day. We were tired from the evening before and the resulting two hours of sleep and also a bit sad that this week is already over. We left our packed suitcases at the hotel which we could pick up when we would go home.

On the agenda for Friday was an evaluation with all participants of the International University Week from all four countries and the farewell. From 9:00 A.M. to 9:30 A.M., everyone gathered on campus. Then the evaluation started. With the help of an online meeting portal, all four universities and thus all participants of the International University Week 2022 could participate.

Each country shared a short resume of their week and some showed farewell videos or photos. Some students summarized their week. Then the evaluation about "Mentimeter" started. Anyone could participate in the evaluation online using their mobile phone. At about 11.00 A.M. the "closing session" followed. There were little snacks and drinks and you could talk to the other students one last time.

The farewell was not easy for most, but the more you look forward to seeing them again. After the short get-together and after saying goodbye to everyone and giving a lot of hugs, we went back to the city center. We bought a few souvenirs and of course a last Belgian Waffle could not be missing.

After we were done with souvenir shopping, we walked to the hotel to get our suitcases. Then we made our way to the train station. After waiting a little bit, we got on the train and drove off. From Hasselt we went to Liège-Guillemins. There we had about an hour waiting time until we went on to Cologne. Our train had a delay, so we did not arrive in Cologne on time and did not get our connecting train.

That meant waiting another hour for the next train. During the train ride we didn't do much. Most of the time we slept. We arrived in Münster around 8.00 pm and arrived in Emden about two hours later. Exhausted and tired, we all arrived home around 10.30 pm.

We can all agree that it was a wonderful week. We learned many new things, especially got to know new cultures, made a lot of friends and all had a lot of fun. The five of us also got to know each other better. It was an unforgettable time, but at the same time stressful. We got little sleep, but we all experienced beautiful moments together and with the other students and hopefully made some lifelong friendships.

