

## EXPERIENCE AS STUDENTS WITH CIF!

As students of Social Work at the University of Applied Sciences Vienna (Fachhochschule Campus Wien) we had the chance to participate in one of the programs from CIF International this year. As we had the chance to organize some activities and appointments with the 5 participants who joined the CIF program this year in Vienna/Austria from 10<sup>th</sup> April till 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2015 we felt even more that we are part of it.

First we were informed of the schedule the participants will do in our city and we built little groups of 4 to 7 students to plan different activities that would let „our“ guests see more of the social work in Austria but also the historic parts of (social) Vienna and – nevertheless – inform them about our system of studying Social Work.



After some meetings for planning the activities in this little groups of students we decided that first there should be a little get together in our university on the first evening to get to know the participants of this year and let them have an idea of who we are and what we plan to do with them and also to show them around our university.

„This first evening was very nice and we felt a very nice atmosphere and it was not hard to get in contact with the participants as they seemed to be very curious about the program. I had a lot of good talks with all of them“, Tamara, one of our colleagues said at the end of the „Get Together Evening“. Also our guests enjoyed meeting us students in such a relaxed way.

For our University-course we also should choose one of the planned study visits CIF offered to the participants and participate to get a feeling of the program CIF Austria organizes. Most of the students took part in one or more excursions and meetings with CIF.



The next event planned from a group of students for our 5 guests was an alternative city tour.

A group of five students conducted an alternative sightseeing tour through the city. The aim of the activity was to show our visitors some highlights of the Social Work in Austria. The activity was held in the university campus, where students organized a tour under the slogan "Home and Homelessness in Austria". All visited places were directly associated to this slogan keeping always a Social Work framework in mind.



The meeting point was set at the entrance to the *Votiv Church*. There, participants had the chance to detail the neo-gothic architecture of the old building. Later on, right beside the church, surrounded by greenery of Sigmund-Freud-Park, the history and pastoral mission of the

church was narrated, especially the role played by the religionist community on the protection and support provided to foreigners, as well as their last act of solidarity with a group of refugees which have had a great impact in Vienna. In the benches, under the trees of the Sigmund-Freud-Park, enjoying a glass of sparkling wine, the student group responsible for the activity, narrated the causes, development and effects of the refugees' protest of 2012 named 'Protest Refugee Camp Vienna':

*With the aim of stopping the deportation of refugees, supported actively by students, NGOs and the Socialist Left Party (SLP), 63 activists camped illegally on the lawns of the Sigmund-Freud-Park before being forced out by the police. Then they managed to be sheltered by the Votiv Church, thus activist could carry on with the protest. Later on, the interventions and mediation by political and social leaders contributed to reach a partial solution: some of the refugees got the asylum. After this, "Protest Refugee Camp Vienna" was consolidated as an organization in defense of migrant rights in Vienna.*



Afterwards, we went to visit the University of Vienna. We first went to appreciate the structure of the University and then we presented a brief history of this important Austrian institution. Then, we took our visitors to the Audimax, one of the largest halls of the University of Vienna, which was occupied during the student protests in

2009. We told them that this protest, against restrictive policies on higher education, had a great shock to Austrian society since the country had to face strong criticism by the international press yielding into a broad discussion on education policy.



After walking a few blocks behind the church, we found the coffee-bar/restaurant 'VinziRast-CortiHaus'. This is an interesting place for us, we explained them.

*It turns out that this place belongs to the partnership 'Vinzenzgemeinschaft Saint Stephan', which also runs several shelters for homeless. The profits of the restaurant are invested in the organization and help to remunerate a few number of volunteers in the center. This association also develops an innovative social housing project where student volunteers live with homeless, thus, the latter have the chance of learning new skills that may be useful for work and coexistence.*

We thus concluded the tour with a dinner and a drink in the Coffee-bar 'VinziRast-CortiHaus'.

The alternative City-Tour was an amazing success as we heard only compliments about it from our guest: "It was really impressive to see all this places where such important things like that happened and it was a good mixture of information about the buildings and the things that happened here in the context of refugees and homeless people and student protests. It all fit together, very interesting" Shilpa, one of the CIF participants from India said when we talked to her on the last day of our program

during the last big activity we held together with our guests and many others in the big hall of our university. The third group of students organized a "World Café" Info-Evening.

The motto of the evening was „Change through Exchange - Broaden your horizon!“. Amongst the guest were participants from Spain, India, Greece and Kyrgyzstan as well as Ian D. Turnbull, MA (Hons) from Scotland and DSA Manuela Hausegger, MA from Vienna.

At the beginning we started off with a buffet where our guests could at first get into contact with each other and numerous conversations emerged with international flair. Everyone enjoyed the active exchange between our participants, the guest speakers and members of the Council of International Fellowship.

Afterwards, FH-Prof.in Dr.in Barbara Bittner (FH Campus Wien) and Judith Lamatsch (CIF Austria) welcomed everyone present. This was followed by an exciting and cheerful speech of Ian D. Turnbull about „Change through Exchange – Broaden your horizon!“. Also Manuela Hausegger enabled interesting insights into her master thesis. In this context, she talked about chances, motives and outcomes of the participation in international exchange programs for Austrian social work professionals. Later was time for questions and discussions which emerged during the speeches. After a short break we watched two video clips which introduced us to the organization CIF. It was very pleasant to see all the reaction of those who already participated in a CIF program.

This article was written by the students Mike, Johanna and Carolina.



The last item on the agenda was the World Cafe, where there was the possibility of interchanging amongst the participants. It was great to see with how much joy and commitment our guests talked about their work and experiences. Furthermore, it was exciting to get involved into discussion and see different views of the people.

After a conclusion and farewell, also this evening came to an end. This atmospheric event was a valuable experience which we will still remember for a long time.

