

Report on the International University Week (IUW) Odense 2024: Digitalization in Social work with vulnerable citizens

1. Introduction

The IUW in Odense 2024 took place within the framework of the Socrates Network of European University Schools of Social Work, offering students of Social Work the opportunity to exchange ideas internationally and collaborate on current issues. Under the theme "Digitalization with vulnerable citizens" IUW 2024 at UCL allowed us to explore diverse challenges and opportunities of digitalization in the social sector.

Odense, Denmark's third-largest city, provided an inspiring backdrop for the IUW with its charming half-timbered houses, a very cute old town, and numerous sights. The city, renowned as the birthplace of the famous fairy tale writer Hans Christian Andersen, offered a unique blend of culture, history, and modernity despite the windy and cold weather.



UCL Campus



Odense city centre



2. Course of the IUW

The program of IUW Odense 2024 was characterized by a successful blend of theoretical and practical elements. In addition to engaging keynote speeches on current topics in Social Work within the context of digitalization, the participating universities presented themselves in introductory sessions. A diverse range of workshops, which participants could select based on their own interests, offered opportunities to become familiar with new technologies and applications related to various aspects of digitalization. This allowed participants to gain practical experience.

Time (CET)	Location	Activity
09.00-10.00	AU.103	Welcome to UCL - University College Denmark <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jens Mejer, Rector at UCL• Birgit Mortensen, Leader of the social work program in Vejle• The IUW2024 coordinator group• Students from UCL
10.15-11.00	AU.103	Keynote Digitalization as relations: A case study of frontline work with citizens in digitally vulnerable positions by Marianne Staal Stougaard & Anne Marie Dahler
11.15-12.00	AU.103	Students presentations Part 1 - Get to know each other
12.00-12.45	Canteen	Lunch break <i>Included: 1 sandwich and 1 reusable water bottle</i>
12.45-14.45	AU.103	Students presentations Part 2 - Get to know each other <i>Included: The famous Danish 'brunsviger' cake</i>
15.00-15.30	Transportation	Transport to Odense city centre <i>Transport costs are at your own expense</i>
16.00-18.00	Odense city	Guided tours with 'Gadens stemmer/Voices of the Street' UCL students distribute and guide students and coordinators to the meeting point
18.00-		Opportunity for dining and socializing with UCL students <i>Costs are at your own expense</i>

the program of Monday

Excursions to social work fields (so called "Fieldvisits") in Denmark, such as the organization "Headspace" – a support center for young people in need of assistance and someone to talk to, mainly operated by volunteers – illustrated the practical implementation of digital measures and provided insights into Danish social policy. A particularly interesting experience was the city tour of Odense with (former) homeless and drug-addicted People, who made it possible for us to discover the city from a new perspective.



Guided tour through the city

The week ended with a farewell party, which was rounded off with feedback sessions involving all participants. This offered an excellent opportunity for informal exchange and reflection on the gained insights. Additionally, every day we were treated with various classic Danish delicacies, which enriched the experience culinarily.



Smørrebrød



Buffet at the farewell party

3. Experiences During the Workshop Participation

The IUW workshops were organized by the participants themselves, mostly by professors or doctoral students from the universities. Each day, participants could sign up for the workshops of their choice for the following day. The variety of offerings was extensive, but due to limited time, it was only possible to attend a total of four out of the approximately 20 workshops offered. Therefore, the choice had to be well-considered.

A personal highlight for me was a workshop on Thursday where we played some kind of escape game in groups. This interactive and entertaining experience made the workshop very exciting and educational.



Escape-Game Workshop

4. Personal Development

Participating in the IUW Odense 2024 was a valuable experience for my professional and personal development. The exchange with students and faculty from various countries opened up new perspectives on the challenges of social work in the digital age. The diverse workshops also provided an opportunity to learn a lot about Denmark and its political system.

I was particularly impressed by how much Germany still needs to catch up in terms of digitalization. The week in Odense also allowed me to improve my English skills, make new friendships, and gather unforgettable experiences.

5. Critical Reflection and Suggestions for Improvement

In addition to the positive experiences, I would like to highlight some aspects for improvement for the IUW. The workshops were predominantly theoretical and only offered little room for sharing personal experiences and discussing controversial topics. A more critical reflection, especially when considering social policy issues in Denmark, would have been desirable. Additionally, it would have been helpful to know in advance that bus and train tickets could only be purchased with a credit card and via an app. This was problematic for some participants who did not have a credit card.

6. Conclusion

Participating in the IUW Odense 2024 was a highly enriching experience that promoted both my professional knowledge and personal development. Through the intensive exchange with international students and faculty from Norway, Finland, Denmark, Czech Republic, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Austria, and Spain, I gained valuable insights and new perspectives on the challenges of social work in the digital age. Despite some organizational challenges, I was able to gather a wealth of valuable experiences. The new impulses and ideas I gained for my future work in the field of social work were particularly impressive. The opportunity to improve my English skills, make new friendships, and gather unforgettable experiences made this week in Odense a unique opportunity. I highly recommend participating in the IUW to everyone and would gladly participate again. It is a must-have experience. 😊