

## **IUW-Report by Nico Striegel**

### **St. Pölten 2025 (March 31-April 4, 2025):**

*„Changing Social Work through Participation and Service User Involvement“*

*(Blended Intensive Program / SocNet98)*

*"Short-term mobility with a mandatory virtual component"*

The SocNet98 International University Week, with the theme "Changing Social Work through Participation and Service User Involvement," took place from March 31 to April 4, 2025. The program included a variety of activities, presentations, workshops, and excursions focused on strengthening service user participation and involvement in social work. Social work students and professors from the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria participated.

The week began on Monday with registration, followed by the opening and welcome address. An important part of the morning was the online streaming of all SocNet 98 IUWs 2025 in Porsgrunn, Nitra, and Bremen. Julien S. Bourrelle (known from "TED Talks") gave an online keynote speech on cultural differences in different countries regarding human interactions on-site. After a break, there were further keynote speeches by Andrea Pilgerstorfer (Prof. in St. Pölten) on "Changing Perspectives with SUI" and by Eduard Carrera-Fossas on community social work and collective participation in Olot, Spain. This was, in my opinion, a very interesting presentation on "community work" in a Spanish neighborhood. In the afternoon, there was a welcome event to get to know each other and form groups. In these groups, a social project focused on SUI was to be designed by the end of the week and presented at the end of the week. The day concluded with a welcome party after a presentation by the universities and student groups through specially created videos. On Tuesday, the morning began with parallel workshops addressing various topics, such as "Housing for All," "Work for All," "Science for All," "Living for All," and "Participation for All." These workshops were led by professors or students from the various participating countries. In the afternoon, a meal was served for all participants. Afterwards, Franz Haberl presented "Peers in Vienna Homeless Services Peer Café and Forum Obdach," a "model project" for effective SUI in homeless assistance in Vienna. It is an effective and, above all, perspective-providing project for clients. The term "expert of experience" particularly stuck in my mind. It highlights the clear resource of clients, building a bridge between social workers and clients. Peers are close to the homeless, as they can deeply understand their lives and can help ease the shame of homelessness. Their experience is also an important resource for supporting social workers! The day concluded with an excursion through the city.

Wednesday morning was dedicated to creatively strengthening the service user perspective through various activities such as radio work with Campus & City Radio, music, cultural animation, and creative writing and painting. In the early afternoon, the team from Peers4You, a student-led consulting project at St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences and Arts, presented their work. This was followed by a series of parallel workshops. Topics included "Building Peer Support Networks" (Lucerne

University of Applied Sciences and Arts), "Migration: How can people with a refugee background be better integrated?" (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts), "Involving service users in conversation" (UCL University College Odense), and "Recovery is up to you!" (College of Polytechnics Jihlava). The topic of parenting skills development for parents with cognitive difficulties was also addressed in a workshop (University of South-Eastern Norway Porsgrunn). After a break in the late afternoon, another series of parallel workshops took place. Topics included "The Voice of 'Service Users'" (University of Girona), "Learning about AI" (Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen), "Changing Social Work through Participation and Service User Involvement?" (University of Applied Sciences Jena), "Growing together: sharing experiences and strengthening social work skills" (University of South Bohemia), "Participatory Migration Counseling" (University of Applied Sciences Jena), and "Reflecting Diversity and Inequalities in Social Work" (University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten). In the evening, the ÖH Social Work hosted an event at the Bowling Center, which was well attended by many students.

On Thursday morning, parallel workshops were again scheduled. Topics again included "Learning about AI" (Hanze Hogeschool Groningen), "Family Group Conferencing" with Michael Delorette (FH St. Pölten), "Working with service users in Belgium" (UCLL Leuven), "The shadow of opportunities, if not equal" (PXL Hasselt), "Growing together" (University of South Bohemia), "Recovery is up to you!" (College of Polytechnics Jihlava), and "Changing Social Work through Participation and Service User Involvement?" (FH Jena). After a break, there was time to exchange student projects. After lunch, there was a video presentation on the topic of coercive contexts. Another time to exchange student projects followed. In the afternoon, after a break, various excursions or activities were available, including a guided city tour, the St. Pölten Museum, a trip to the Diversity Café, Emmaus Kalvarienberg, or the opportunity to explore St. Pölten independently. Another option was cooking: Austrian specialties such as apple strudel, potato cheese, and Liptauer were prepared in the "Kitchen Lab." The evening concluded with a science pub quiz, a tasting of homemade Austrian dishes, and a farewell party.

Friday, April 4, was the last day and began in the morning with project presentations in the auditorium. This was followed by the evaluation of the IUWs, which was streamed online with all other IUWs. After a break, the project presentations continued, and a winner was chosen. The certification and farewell ceremony took place in the early afternoon.

Overall, the week offered a packed program that provided diverse insights into the topics of participation and "service user involvement" in social work, with contributions from faculty and students from various European universities, but above all from clients of various SUI projects.

The IUW was a good opportunity for international exchange; the opportunity to exchange ideas with professors from other universities and countries was particularly interesting as a student. I also liked the common thread of the week, which became clear through the successful SUI project concepts at the end of the week, and the fact that every participant contributed something.