

SocNet98 - 20th Anniversary History and Reflections



SocNet 98-Anniversary – History and Reflections



- SocNet'98 was initiated by Menno van Veen (Groningen) und Thomas Trenczek (Jena) during an international week of both universities in June 1998 in Groningen.
- The inaugural meeting of the international coordinators invited has been conducted **November 4th - 6th, 1998** in Jena with participants of Groningen (Menno van Veen and Theo Koning), Jena (Thomas Trenczek), Newcastle (Henry Ross), Porsgrunn (Ketil Eide), Rovaniemi (Iiris Happo), Bremen (Lutz Walk) and Emden (Gertrud Cuers).
- The second coordinators conferences in Jan. 2001 in Porsgrunn (Norway) has been hosted by Veslemøy Wiese (Porsgrunn). In 2001, our partners in Odense (Nicolai Paulsen) und Hasselt (Ilse Vanderstukken) joined the network.
- In the following years St. Pölten (Peter Pantucek), Budeovice (Adéla Mojžíšová), Leuven (Maurits Wismans), Linz (Carolyn Mayr) and Malaga (María Luisa Gomez Jiménez) have become a member of the network.



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- Everything big starts small: Coordinators meeting in Porsgrunn (Menno van Veen, Veslemoy Wiese, Gertued Cuers, Jacqueliën Vis-Rothfusz, Henry Ross, TT)



Porsgrunn/Rauland 2001

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- We have been invited my Veslemoy Wiese to stay for a couple of days in her family's cabin in Rauland.



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Budeovice 2005

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Rovaniemi 2006

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Didde Auring: I remember the incident in Rovaniemi where we were told not to walk to the university if the temperature was under -25 degrees C. We all decided that the temperature was not that low and walked. Gertrud did not cover her ears with a cap as the rest of us did. Arriving at the university and the warm meeting room Gertrud's ears began to thaw. They became very red and very big! Gertrud said: Funny - I can't feel my ears.... She was lucky that they actually did not fall off or suffered damage 😊. My memories: Snow shoe excursion to a Sami village. A lot of fun and very interesting insight in Sami culture. One evening we were driving to a dinner meeting and when the temperature indicator of the car showed -40 C, the driver stopped the car and we danced on the street...(no photos, unfortunately; -)

Rovaniemi 2006

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- The idea and goal of the network was not only to intensify the bilateral exchange but to establish a broader network of European university schools of social work that **fosters exchange of students and lecturers** in particular.
- Since the beginning, the most important part of our network activities was
 - the organization of the **International University Week (IUW)** each year
 - in 2018 we were able to host the 20th IUW in Bournemouth, Bremen, Jena and Porsgrunn.
- **Main Activities:**
 - International University Week (IUW) hosted by 3-4 partners each summer semester.
 - Annual coordinators meeting hosted by one of the partners each year in winter semester
 - Individual teachers exchange/teaching activities under the Erasmus umbrella
- **Other projects:**
 - European Master (hosted by Hanzehogescholen Groningen)
 - SocNet-Internet presence: <http://www.socnet98.eu/>
 - (early version: <https://iuw.sw.eah-jena.de/socnet98-socrates-network-of-european-university-schools-of-social-work/>)

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- Beyond fostering students and teachers exchange and personal networking, within the first 10 years the SocNet98 meetings and discussions especially focussed on
 - Comparison of university life, curricula and establishing joint programs (e.g. European Master)
 - finding a **name** for our network:
 - Socrates Network of European University Schools of Social Work (SocNet98)**
(The abbreviation “Soc” stands for both Socrates as well as Social)
 - essential bylaws and expectations regarding new members
 - the question whether or not the network should stay rather small as a group of 7-8 partner universities or should we open up the network and grow.
- Since 1998, there have been more than 20 universities participation in the network.
- Some partners (Gabrovo, Lille, Malaga, Newcastle, Rovaniemi, Umea, Waterford) have left the network for different reasons.

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Currently SocNet98 has **14 partner universities in 10 European countries ...:**

- Austria: St. Pölten and Linz
- Belgium: PXL Limburg, Hasselt and UC Leuven-Limburg
- Czech Republic: Ceske Budejovice and Jihlava
- Denmark: Lillebaelt/Odense
- England: Bournemouth
- Finland: Humak Helsinki
- Germany: Bremen, Emden and Jena
- Netherlands: Groningen
- Norway: Porsgrunn

New aspirants/prospective partners:

- Slovakia: Nitra
- Scotland: Glasgow Caledonian University

... that fulfil all **SocNet98 criteria**, which are

- Bilateral Erasmus Agreements to all SocNet98 partner universities
- Exchanging students and lecturers/teachers (bilateral)
- Organizing an International University Week every 3rd or 4th year
- Sending students and lecturers/teachers to International University Weeks in other European countries

(see <http://www.socnet98.eu/>)

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St. Pölten 2008

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Bremen 2009

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Hasselt 2012

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St. Pölten 2015

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Groningen 2017

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- Most SocNet98 partners over the years have had several coordinators:
 - Bremen: Lutz Walk, Christian Spatscheck
 - Bournemouth: Jill Davey
 - Budejovice: Adéla Mojžíšová, Jitka Dvoráková, David Urban; Lenka Motlová
 - Emden: Gertrud Cuers, Astrid Hübner
 - Groningen: Menno van Veen, Theo Koning, Jacquélien Vis-Rothfus, Bert Gijsbers, Jelco Caro
 - Hasselt: Ilse Vanderstukken, Johan de Ville, Ivette Leten
 - Helsinki: Sari Hoyla
 - Jena: Thomas Trenczek
 - Leuven: Maurits Wysmans, Raf Sondervorst, Bram Roosens
 - Linz: Carolyn Mayr, Iwona Wasilewska, Charlotte Sweet
 - Odense: Nicolai Paulsen, Didde Auring, Birte Hansen, Annie Klint
 - Porsgrunn: Ketil Eide, Verslmoy Wiese, Rolf Heimdal, Nils-Petter Karlsson, Anne Thrønsen
 - St. Pölten: Peter Pantucek, Andrea Janovsky, Barbara Zehetmayer, Christine Haselbacher, Andrea Pilgerstorfer
- Sadly, some of our friends have passed away: Gertrud Cuers and Bert Gijsbers
- New generations:
 - SocNet98 has led to two binational marriages/families at least (what I know;-)
 - Jelco Caro has joined the network earlier as a student, and today he represents Hanzehogeschool Groningen as a faculty coordinator.

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20th anniversary - Reflections of “old friends” of the first and second generation*:

Menno van Veen (Groningen): From the start my aim was not just establishing international exchange in itself, not just because there was money available, not just because it feels like a good idea. The main goal was – for me – creating chances for students and for teachers to discover that their own ideas, their way of looking at social work, differ from people in other countries. That much beliefs and ways of working are a product of their own history and culture. Literally crossing borders, thinking out of the box, experience other cultural perspectives. Working within the frame of our network was not only just working per se, it also was about meeting people and develop warm and friendly relations. Over the years I made some good acquaintances and even friends. Besides the work we had time to have a good meal, to socialize and even to party now and then. Thinking back at these activities puts a smile on my face

Didde Auring (Odense): I recall the agendas as being heavily loaded. It seems to me that you often volunteered to be chairman at the meetings - maybe to make sure that we had time enough to discuss all the items of the agenda. And you doing a great, constructive, but sometimes thankless job!

All in all I remember the Network Meetings as industrious, constructive, bubbling and only once in a while boring! We had a good balance between working hours and time to socialize. We got to know each other well in the group and it was sad when people stopped for whatever reason.

*The university coordinators of the first and second generation of SocNet98 have been contacted by Email and/or phone to contribute photos and a note of memory/retrospection as well.

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20th anniversary - Reflections of “old friends” of the first and second generation*:

Iiris Happo (Rovaniemi): I had a great pleasure to be part of SocNet98 almost ten years. Before my first meeting, I did not know, what to expect. I thought that it would be normal international cooperation between universities, but it was something beyond that. Indeed, we did cooperate a lot. We had International University Weeks every year and we helped our students to find exchange places etc. But it wasn't cooperation between our universities, it was cooperation between friends. ... For me, it was also a possibility to develop professionally. I learned a lot about social work. In addition, I had a chance to get to know educational systems in different countries and visit places and homes all over Europa. It was educational but above all it was memorable, valuable experiences.

Ilse Vanderstukken (Hasselt): I really appreciate the initiatives of all colleagues, over these 20 years. Menno van Veen and Thomas Trenzcek planted a tree, like all the trees in his beautiful garden, and after 20 years his tree still has beautiful flowers. A handshake and a smile to the colleagues of the network taking care for it during the whole period, just like Thomas. It was a pleasure to take part of this network, to love it, to spread it, and to know that our universities need strong social workers, well prepared, ready to mediate, to support, to help, to manage, to empower European social work!!!

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Maurits Wysmans (Leuven): Within the broad network of Socnet 98, I have the best memories in meeting colleagues from different universities with different opinions with different angles ... but always trying to develop similar concepts and IUW's to work on new opinions, new angles to stimulate a higher level in expertise. For this reason, I look back with several thoughts and feelings but all of them united in one great respect, admiration and gratitude. Those IUW's and coordinator-meetings belong to the best days in my professional life

Peter Pantucek (St. Pölten): For us as a small academy (not yet an university at these days) SocNet has been a very welcome chance to establish a multilateral European Network. We have been very warmly welcomed by Thomas and the other network partners. Our focus became more and more international. SocNet has laid a solid ground for the growth of modules with an international perspective at our university and increased the benefits for students and lecturers. Thanks to you and your partners, SocNet was a brilliant idea with long-term effect.

Jelco Caro, former student and current Erasmus coordinator (Groningen):

Both as a student as well as a lecturer I have reaped the many fruits SocNet has to offer. Even though back in 1999, when I went on my first international SocNet week I was hardly aware of the network itself, I already enjoyed the exchange with students from other countries. In Jena I stayed at a student's place and later that year I hosted this same student, Jan Janovic was his name, at my place. Now that I'm Erasmus coordinator and therefore active as representative on behalf of Hanze University Groningen, I still enjoy the many discussions, the sharing of experiences from different contexts and the development inspired students go through once they enter the world of SocNet!

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Final remarks:

- During the last 20 years I have met a lot of dear colleagues, we established professional coordination and friendship. Being the one who has been part of the network from the very beginning I can proudly conclude: Our network is based not only on the Erasmus program, the bi- and multilateral agreements and a functioning working structure – our annual international university weeks in spring as well as coordinators meeting each autumn - but most important SocNet98 relies on reliable personal contacts of the university coordinators. To establish a network like ours you need common interests, reliability and persistence. Beyond that, we share(d) the same idea and an international-European mindset. It is this mindset, attitude and commitment of us, the SocNet98 coordinators that keeps the network alive and prospering. It was good meeting you and staying in touch all over the years....
- 20 successful years of cooperation. Thanks to all of you and your predecessors. Thank you for fostering the idea and practice of an international university network and a peaceful Europe!
- **Long live SocNet98!**