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Social Work -Virtual Campus

SOCIAL WORK-VIRTUAL CAMPUS (SW-VirCamp)

VirCamp
addresses international cooperation and international curriculum development in social work. The overall aim of VirCamp is that social work students will be more competent to meet the needs of a knowledge based, intercultural, socially cohesive European society, by means of an international bachelor in social work specialization realized via a Virtual Campus.

The specific objectives of VirCamp are:
• to realize a shared framework for the international bachelor specialization
• to develop a module on community work / community development
• to set up a pilot introduction of the new community work module in the Virtual Campus setting, with 55 students.
• to develop Virtual Campus learning materials

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Final Report   Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

This report aims to reach the educational sector and the field of Social Work, developers of e-learning courses and virtual campuses, as well as the evaluators of the project.

The main objective for the Social Work – Virtual Campus (SW-VirCamp) project was to develop a virtual campus for Social Work in Europe that would offer students an international specialisation in Social Work. An e-learning course in Community Work was to be developed, with virtual learning material. It was also an objective to increase the digital competence among students as well as academic staff. Furthermore e-teaching competence and knowledge of creating virtual learning material and a competence-based curriculum plan was to be developed. The project was to benefit higher educational institutions (the project partners) and their staff, students, future social workers and their clients. Through the dissemination that was planned as a part of the project, researchers and professionals outside the consortium were also going to benefit from it.

Twelve partners from nine European countries cooperated in the project. The teachers and researchers involved had diverse academic backgrounds, but were all connected to Social Work Education at their institutions. Media staff (with multimedia competence), management and administrative staff were also active in the project.

A democratic and transparent approach characterised the project. All decisions were made in meetings. Minutes, plans and reports were presented at the project website. Ideas for the virtual learning material were developed in workshops, and screen lectures and triggers were later produced by some of the partner institutions. Data to be used in the project was collected through surveys and interviews, and after being analysed, reported back to the respondents. Promotional material was distributed among the stakeholders and numerous presentations of the objectives and results were made in various meetings and at important conferences. Throughout the project there was a process of both internal and external evaluation.

The main result from the project is a sustainable virtual campus that offers in-depth international studies (in the application called international specialisation) to students. The virtual campus has been made sustainable through a consortium agreement that includes an administrative and financial model without external grants and support. To ensure both quality and sustainability, a comprehensive quality guide has been developed. An e-learning course in Community Work from an international perspective has been developed and a pilot course has been run. A Virtual Book with learning material for the course, including screen lectures, triggers and a virtual case, was produced for the course. A new web portal for the virtual campus has been developed and will be activated in the beginning of 2011.

After the project period the main focus will be on the running and further development of the new virtual campus. New courses will be developed and the consortium will continue to work for a better integration of the courses in the institutional bachelor programmes. It is an aim to increase the number of partners in the consortium and to increase the number of qualified e-teachers. In the future the virtual campus will not only offer e-learning courses, but also practice placements as well as campus courses in English to promote the international exchange of students. The research cooperation between partners will continue and will build on existing cooperation and develop new research projects.

The address to the project website and the coming web portal of the Social Work Virtual Campus is www.vircamp.net. At the website a promotional video of the virtual campus can be found.

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1.   Project Objectives

1.1 Background

Since 2004 most of the partners in the SW-VirCamp project have participated in a consortium called the Virtual Classroom for Social Work in Europe – VIRCLASS (www.virclass.net). This consortium has developed e-learning courses for bachelor students in Social Work. An overall objective of the SW-VirCamp project was to broaden the offer of e-learning courses and to achieve a better integration of these courses in the students' own curricula by offering an international specialisation at bachelor level.

Education for Europe – challenges that have to be met

Today labour mobility and immigration increase the cultural diversity within the European nations. It is important to create a European awareness among Social Work students as they will be working with citizens from different countries. Differences in approaches can increase the knowledge about how to solve social problems and about Social Work in different countries with different welfare systems. Online courses in an international virtual classroom as well as the provision of studying abroad promotes a pan-European perspective and an outside viewpoint on the students' own country and Social Work related issues. This enhances understanding of people from other countries and cultures who are in need of social service.

As a consequence of immigration, but also of changing family structures, an increasing part of the population in European countries lacks a social network. Social exclusion and ethnocentrism are challenges the EU has to deal with in realising its ambitions towards social inclusion. In addition, welfare systems in Europe are changing. These challenges affect the Social Work profession and as a result education preparing future social workers needs to change. Until recently this education was not engaged in developing a truly internationally oriented curriculum. The Social Work Virtual Campus project has addressed these needs by developing an international e-learning course in Community Work and core subjects in Social Work.

Community Work

Development of a course in Community Work was one of the objectives of the SW-VirCamp Project. Community Work is a planned process of assisting people to improve their own communities and undertake autonomous collective action. The traditional approaches in Social Work have been to meet the needs of individuals. When the welfare state and family networks can no longer take care of the individual, new approaches have to be developed and collective initiatives have to be taken based on people's needs. Community Work focuses on participation and fosters empowerment, emancipation and change through collective action. It is strongly allied to work for human rights.[1]

While Community Work was a more common approach during the seventies, it has virtually disappeared for many years and has not been prioritised in Social Work education in Europe. The planning of the e-learning course in Community Work was therefore an attempt to strengthen European Social Work education so that the needs described above could be met.

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[1] See curriculum plan for *Community Work in an International Perspective* (2010).

Main Objectives

The main objectives of the SW-VirCamp project were:

- to develop an international specialisation in Social Work
- to develop a sustainable virtual campus serving the specialisation
- to develop an e-learning module in Community Work with virtual learning material
- to ensure high quality of processes and outcomes for the project period and beyond
- to disseminate the project and its results for stakeholders.

1.2 International Specialisation in Social Work

One of the main objectives for the SW-VirCamp project was to develop an international specialisation for Social Work at Bachelor level, which would be an option for students to deepen their understanding of the international influence on Social Work through theory and practice, and through contact with students and teachers from other countries.

Job opportunities for students with in-depth international studies can be in immigration services, prisons, hospitals, social services, labour offices, NGOs, local communities and other places where people from other cultures are in need of help from a social worker.

Students choosing the option of an international specialisation would be offered e-learning courses in an international virtual classroom, a period of study abroad and/or carrying out a placement abroad, and would write their final thesis focusing on a comparative international theme – preferably in English, or with an English summary (see figure 1).

SW-VIRCAMP INTERNATIONAL SPECIALIZATION	
Part 1 →	The first 1.5 years of study, (or 2.5 years if the BA is 4 year) students will study at their home university.
Part 2 →	After this, students who register for the IS participate in international e-learning courses (30 ECTS credits)
Part 3 →	Students who have started on the IS continue the next semester with study abroad/placement abroad at one of the partner institutions/countries (30 ECTS credits).
Part 4 →	Students return to their home university and participate in the national programme. They complete their education by writing their BA thesis (in English) on a comparative international theme in social work.

Figure 1: A model of SW-VirCamp International Specialisation

An international specialisation requires that the credits students gain from the e-learning courses is integrated into the bachelor programmes at their home universities. To secure a sustainable commitment to the arrangement and integration of the international study programme within the partner institutions' bachelor programmes in Social Work, there was a need for an administrative and financial model. It was therefore an aim for the project to reach a consensus among the partners about a consortium agreement for future cooperation.

1.3 A Virtual Campus

The European Commission defines "Virtual Campus" as:

> "Cooperation between higher education institutions in the field of e-learning, regarding: design of joint curricula development by several universities, including agreements for the evaluation, validation and recognition of acquired competences, subject to national procedures; large–scale experiments of virtual mobility in addition to physical mobility and development of innovative dual mode curricula, based on both traditional and online learning methods.
>
> This broad definition involves many issues from partnerships between traditional and/or distance universities and [higher education institutions] with a view to offering joint certifications (for undergraduate and/or postgraduate levels) and cooperation with learning support services. This might also include collaborative activities in strategic areas of education or research through cooperation involving researchers, academics, students, management, administrative and technical personnel. 'Virtual campuses' should not be confused with e-learning platforms".[2]

The definition above contains all the important elements that we wish to offer the users of the future Social Work Virtual Campus and want to include in our new web portal.

Surveys conducted among students at the beginning of the e-learning courses arranged by VIRCLASS and SW-VirCamp show that students' experiences with e-learning are limited, and international e-learning studies in Social Work is something our students are rarely, if ever, offered in their home curricula. It was therefore a long-term aim for the SW-VirCamp to increase the digital literacy among students in our partner institutions through the offering of e-learning courses. It was also an aim to increase the possibilities for internationalisation at home for students who cannot go abroad for different reasons, through virtual mobility.

A virtual campus needs qualified e-teachers. Another aim of the project was therefore to develop the e-teacher competences among the academic staff, including the ability to make a competence-based curriculum plan. Development of an e-learning module in *Community Work from an international perspective* of 15 ECTS credits was yet another important aim for the project. Through the work with this pilot course the academic staff was given necessary experience as e-teachers through the development of the course content and by running the actual course. The VIRCLASS Consortium had developed an e-pedagogy course for teachers in higher education and some of the teachers had previously followed this course.[3]

Development of high quality virtual learning material that would support the students' learning process in the Community Work course was also an important aim. The ambition of the project was to upgrade the knowledge and the competences of academic and technical/media staff at the partner institutions for development of virtual learning material for this and future courses.

1.4 Quality Assurance and Sustainability

It was an aim for the project to maintain a high level of quality and to secure sustainability for the future. It was therefore an objective to develop a quality guide that would give instructions and recommendations regarding the contents of the curriculum, technological tools and their application, and administrative and managerial aspects of the project. The document should

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[2] Source: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/guide/glossary_en.html (accessed 25.06.2010).
[3] See http://www.virclass.net/eped.

also establish a comprehensive set of quality indicators, both for the project, the pilot course and future courses.

An external evaluator was to follow the process of developing the pilot course in Community Work and the running of the course. The students were to play an important part in the evaluation process, as described in Section 2 of this report.

1.5 Exploitation and Dissemination

To ensure the impact and sustainability of the project it was important to make students, teachers and administrative staff at higher education institutions and professional social workers aware of the possibilities offered by the project. In order to gather important information for the development of the project and for promotional material and research, data was to be collected from the stakeholders about their knowledge and interests in e-learning courses and community work. This contact with the stakeholders at the same time had the purpose of spreading information about the project.

It was an aim to present the project and its results at the most important international conferences, both Social Work professional/educational and ICT conferences, during the project period.

There was a plan to carry out Participatory Action Research (PAR)/Participatory Action Learning (PAL) [4] from the very beginning of the planning process of the pilot till the end of the course. The results from this research was then planned to be presented in journals and at conferences even after the end of the project period.

Picture 1: Anne Karin Larsen (pictured above), Bergen University College and Andrés Arias Astray from University Complutense Madrid participating at the EDEN annual conference in Valencia, 2010, with a poster and a paper presentation.

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[4] The Action-research spiral: the *"spiral of self-reflective cycles of planning, acting and reflecting..., then planning... etc"* (Kemmis, S. and McTaggert, R. (2000: pp. 596-597). "Participatory Action Research", in: Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, London, New Dehli, Sage Publications.

2. Project Approach

It has been a strategy for the project to use a task-centred approach that stimulates learning by doing, reflection and evaluation, according to the PAR/PAL principles. All material relevant for the project has been made available at the website www.vircamp.net, which has made the project transparent for partners and stakeholder. These principles have also permeated the pedagogy of the Community Work course for students.

2.1 International Specialisation in Social Work – Approach

To get the necessary background information to be able to reach the aim of an international specialisation, a survey was conducted among partner institutions. Information about the existing educational programmes, characteristics of the institutions, ICT and staff facilities, teacher competences, etc. was collected through the survey and through e-mail and phone interviews. An analysis report was made – *From VIRCLASS to Virtual Campus* – based on the results from the data collection. The report was distributed in draft to the partners and later updated based on the received feedback.

The report led to discussions within and among the partner institutions regarding the possibilities for the integration of an international specialisation in the bachelor programmes. Different times for holidays, the start and end of semesters, exam periods, etc. complicated the process towards a common agreement. Another problem was that several partners were not allowed or had difficulties with introducing a specialisation or optional courses in their curricula.

To investigate the interest for e-learning courses and an international Community Work course in the professional field of Social Work, a questionnaire and an interview guide was made for collecting data. The collection of data was carried out by six partners interviewing 52 social workers at 26 different working arenas. An added value from this survey was to make the project known in the field. The information collected was also used to develop information material directed at the professional field.

Nr.	Country	Number of field institutions	Respondents number
1.	Germany	8	8
2.	Belgium	4	4
3.	Portugal	4	4
4.	Latvia	4	5
5.	Norway	3	20
6.	Sweden	3	11

Table 1: Number of respondents per country and field institutions.

To develop an administrative and financial model for the sustainability of the future Virtual Campus, we searched for information about existing models connected to other projects, but without finding a model suitable for our purposes. However, there were lessons to be learned from the existing VIRCLASS consortium. A note was prepared where two different models were outlined: one similar to the VIRCLASS administrative model (a centralised model) and an alternative, decentralised, model. This note[5] was used as a starting point for discussions in the steering committee and at partner meetings.

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[5] See note.

To secure sustainability for the Virtual Campus after the project period has ended, a proposal for a consortium agreement was developed based on the two agreements already existing for the VIRCLASS and the SW-VirCamp consortia. A draft proposed agreement was distributed to the partners, subsequently discussed at the final partner meeting and adjusted to produce the administrative and financial model eventually agreed by the consortium.

2.2 A Virtual Campus – Approach

Pilot Course

An important approach to developing the international specialisation, and a central part of the project, was the running of a pilot course in the Spring semester of 2010. In preparation for the pilot course, a curriculum plan was developed. In the process of making the curriculum, all partners were involved in the discussions, which was important to ensure a feeling of obligation towards running the Community Work module in the future. The experience of following a competence-based curriculum plan was new to many institutions and students and this contributed to changing the way of teaching and learning among some of the teachers. The staff involved learned more about the curricula at their home universities, because they had to explain it to the other partners.

A subgroup of the partners developed the course content, the weekly programmes and the structure of the course in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). A reading list for the course was produced with input from the partners[6]. The pedagogy and the teachers' role in an e-learning course was discussed and agreed upon in teacher meetings. From the start of planning the curriculum plan Participatory Action Research (PAR)/Participatory Action Learning (PAL) was an important approach to developing the curriculum plan, the course content and the role of the teachers. Through group interviews with the teachers in the Community Work course, reflection notes and the teachers' blog, the participants' opinions and wishes were taken into account. The interviews were taped and the transcription given to the respondents for feedback and comments. The results will be published in journals and in a planned book ("Participation in Community Work – an International Perspective"), which will be part of the readings for the future Community Work courses.

To prepare the production of promotional material to recruit students for the pilot course, a survey was conducted among 225 students and alumni (now professionals) at the partner institutions. The purpose of the survey was to uncover information about the students' and professionals' experiences and aspirations regarding international study and work, e-learning, Community Work, etc. In addition to collecting this kind of information, conducting the survey contributed to making the project known among students and professionals.

Competence Development through Production of Learning Material

To raise the competence of the media, technical and teaching staff in advance of the pilot course, a training course about developing virtual learning material was held for these staff groups in Bergen in March 2009. At the course, the participants started producing audiovisual learning material that had the purpose of initiating discussions among students, like screen lectures and triggers. This inter-professional course improved the important understanding of communication between different professional "languages". Creating learning material has the added value of teaching the teacher to be more focused, clear and specific. It also creates ideas for changes in campus teaching.

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[6] Special input and ideas for readings came from partners that offered master programmes in Community Work, and from a research network in Community Work, the project's associated partners from South Africa.

After the workshop partners continued to develop the virtual learning material (e.g. triggers and screen lectures). Partners built on previous experiences from the VIRCLASS project in this process. When producing triggers and a video/blog case, free available online resources (Creative Commence) as pictures, videos and audio files available online, were used and producers were credited.

The development of the video/blog case started with a workshop in Patones near Madrid, where the ideas of the concept and the characters were developed. The text was later developed by staff at the Media Centre at Bergen University College and transformed into a blog genre. Some short video recordings were made for the case and included in the blog.

Picture 2: The first ideas for the Green Park Community started to develop at the workshop in Patones, Spain.

2.3 Quality Assurance – Approach

Quality has been ensured throughout the project period through careful planning. Detailed plans have been developed for all activities in the project, like a detailed time schedule for all tasks in the project, a budget plan and a plan for evaluation.

An important tool to ensure quality and sustainability in the future virtual campus is the Quality Guide. To develop this guide, the quality literature was thoroughly consulted. It soon became clear that this literature was complex, diverse and fragmented and that very little had been done to develop quality guides that could be used for this kind of project. Contact was made with other e-learning projects, like the Free Technology Academy, to collect information about their development of quality guides. Also the quality guides of partner institutions were explored. A lot of innovative work still had to be done to develop the draft Quality Guide. The draft guide was then distributed to all partners and discussed in a consortium meeting where it was revised and finalised.

A student survey was undertaken three times during the pilot course – at the beginning, middle and end. Teachers were also interviewed about their experiences of the pilot. These surveys and interviews focused on expectations, experiences from teaching and learning methods, the use of virtual learning material etc. Strategies were made as to how the students' and teachers' feedback was to be followed up. The results of the surveys were presented to the students and their suggestions for changes were followed up and some

changes made during the pilot course. In a final teacher meeting, the pilot course was adjusted based on the feedback and experiences gathered during the running of the course.

A blog for the course teachers was activated when the course started and was actively used for reflection on the teaching experiences during the course period.

The consortium signed a contract with an external evaluator at Lund University, Sweden. The evaluator followed the process from the development of the new curriculum plan through to the arranging of the pilot course. The evaluator was given access to all relevant information, including a guest account at the e-learning Community Work course. She interviewed students, teachers and partners in the project, participated at an online meeting about evaluation and consulted the documents available at the website (minutes etc.). The evaluation is presented in a report, Over the borders – Building and launching the Virtual Campus – SW-VirCamp (Edmark, 2010).

2.4 Exploitation and Dissemination – Approach

At the start of the project period it was the aim to give the project a kind of "corporate identity", i.e. to develop a common outlook by creating a SW-VirCamp logo and design.

The next step was to collect data from stakeholders (students, higher education institutions and social workers in the field), as discussed in section 2.1. This data was used for developing promotional material, like pamphlets, minifolders and posters. The intention was to create awareness of the value of an international virtual campus and the need for international collaboration and cultural understanding related to professional social work.

A plan for dissemination and exploitation was made early in the project period and was later revised as needed. In this overview, partners' plans for presentations of the project at various meetings and national and international conferences were presented. The plan also included the writing of papers for journals and a book. To simplify and standardise the task of dissemination, a PowerPoint design and three different PowerPoint presentations were made. These could be adjusted as needed and used for presentations of the project, the Community Work course and the principles of the pedagogy.
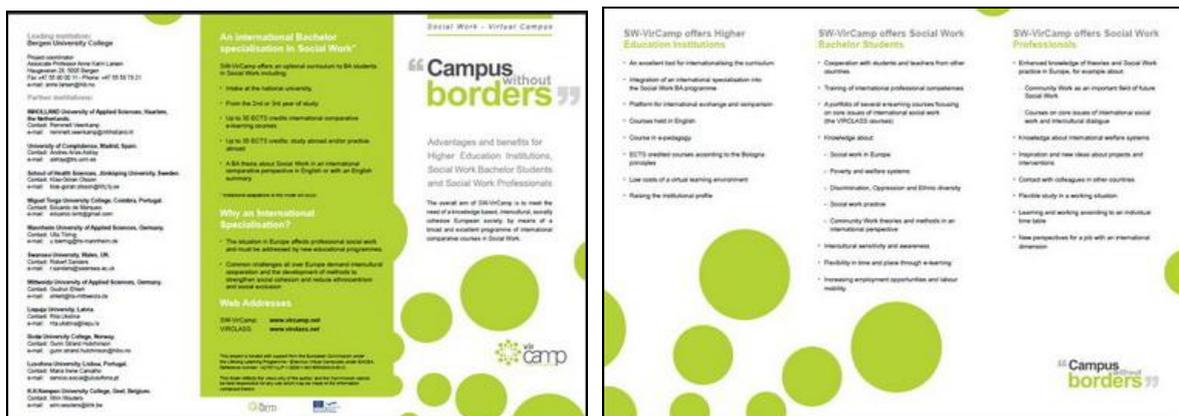
Picture 3: Pamphlet to stakeholders; professionals, students and Higher Education Institutions.

3.   Project Outcomes & Results

3.1 International Specialisation – Outcomes

The report *"From VIRCLASS to Virtual Campus"* reveals that there are commonalities and differences between the partners regarding: the duration of the bachelor programmes, the number of study hours per ECTS credit, the dates for starting and ending semesters and holidays, the number and length of semesters in a year, exam periods, the requirements for the minimum and maximum number of ECTS credits per study unit, and which decision-maker has the authority to make decisions about changes in the study programmes.

It is important for the institutions and a guarantee of the quality of the educational programmes to obtain accreditation of the study programmes. For some of the partners the inclusion of international e-learning courses in their study programmes has been valued positively by the accreditation authorities[7], whereas for others this has been an obstacle.

The concept International Specialisation as presented in this report (see section 1.2) turned out to be problematic for most of the partners, as they are not formally allowed to include a specialisation in their bachelor programmes. However, to offer students optional courses that can be combined with study abroad, practice abroad and a special international focus in their bachelor theses is a realistic possibility for most of the partners. What was originally called an *international specialisation* is now therefore referred to as *in-depth international studies*.

In spite of all the differences mentioned above, most of the partner institutions have been able to integrate the e-learning courses, or some of them, as optional courses in their regular bachelor programmes. This is the most important prerequisite to prevent students from dropping out of the courses.

The data presented in the report *"From VIRCLASS to Virtual Campus"* provided an important background for developing an administrative and financial model for future collaboration.

The SW-VirCamp consortium decided on a decentralised administrative and financial model. In this model the leadership will change between partners every third year. The leading institution will coordinate the activities in the consortium. A steering committee of five persons from different institutions will have responsibility for specific functions of the future Virtual Campus: education, research, development, the web portal, and coordination of the consortium. All partners will have a responsibility to deliver teachers and assessors for the courses and to present possibilities for practice placements and courses for incoming foreign students. Each partner institution will be responsible for the intake of their own students to the e-learning courses and to ensure that the necessary requirements for admission are met by each student. The partners also have the responsibility to ensure that the ECTS credits the students achieve at the e-learning courses are recognised and included in their final certificates. One institution will take the responsibility to give all students access to the Learning Management System (LMS) used for the e-learning courses.

One important reason for choosing a decentralised administrative and financial model was that for many of the partners it was crucial to keep the administrative fee to the leading institution as low as possible. In the new model this has been solved by the sharing of workload as equally as possible between the partners over time. To make sure that the leading institution has adequate resources to coordinate the Virtual Campus, it is still necessary that all partners pay a minimum institutional fee to this institution. The calculation of this fee is based on the estimated number of working hours connected to the job as coordinator and other costs related to the administration of the consortium. An estimate has also been made of the hours for teaching and assessment related to the number of students

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[7] Two of the institutions in the consortium have had the SW-VirCamp study programme accredited by national accreditation authorities.

per teacher, as well as the number of hours related to coordination of the task groups and the steering committee job.

The new consortium agreement secures the legal regulations for the future cooperation and describes the obligations of the partners regarding the administration of the Virtual Campus, its courses and other activities. Together with the Quality Guide this agreement secures the sustainability of the SW-VirCamp.

3.2 Virtual Campus – Outcomes

Virtual Learning Material

A Virtual Book, *Community Work from an International Perspective*[8], has been made. This includes 9 screen lectures, 10 triggers and a community case. The screen lectures are lectures of 10-15 minutes duration recorded on video, presenting core theories and methods in Community Work. There are text files connected to each screen lecture. The triggers are short audio clips and video animations that stimulate discussion and reflection among the students. They are related to such concepts as empowerment, human rights, user participation, bottom-up perspectives, shrinking cities, etc. Short questions are presented related to each trigger.

The Community Case is a presentation of a virtual community, describing the lives of people living close to a fictional location, the Green Park. One of the inhabitants, Maja – a young girl, has started a blog for this area and has invited people living around the park to present different issues they are concerned about. The park is presented by the gardener in a short video and Maja introduces the blog in a short recording she has done with her mobile phone.
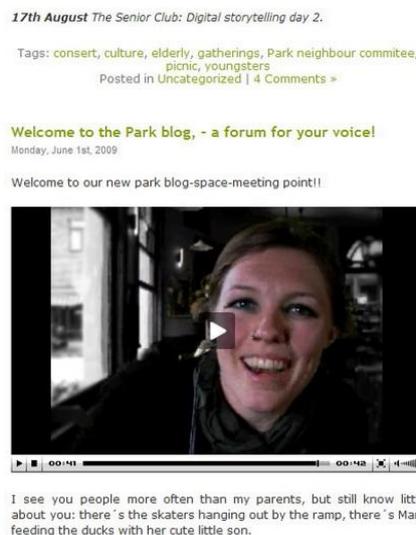
Picture 4: Maja's video introduction in the Green Park Community blog

Blog postings during half a year from different "inhabitants" in the Green Park Community, including short video clips collected from YouTube and pictures and feature articles from the City West Magazine, makes this learning material sufficiently sophisticated and complex to simulate a real community with all the different interests involved. One of the learning objectives for the Community Work course is that students make a project plan focusing on

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[8] The Virtual Book can be found on www.vircamp.net/cw, and is password protected. Since this is learning material for the students on the Community Work course, we want to ensure that the material is new to the students when they start the course.

some of the issues presented by the inhabitants of the Green Park. The students are also asked to make a role play involving the people of this virtual community.

Picture 5: The map view of the Green Park Community Blog.

Another blog, called *Europe Magazine*, has been developed to train the students to write in a public room and to present their jobs as community workers for people in the Green Park community.
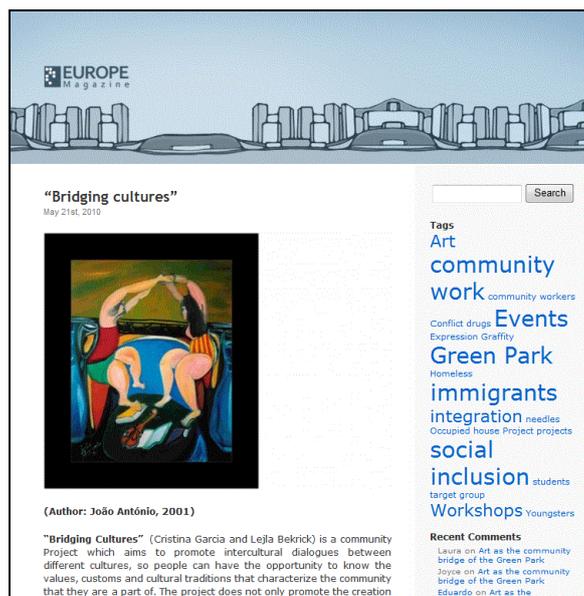
Picture 6: The Europe Magazine where students write in a public way about their projects.

The Pilot Course

The planned number of students for the pilot course in Community Work was 55. Promotional material was used by all partners when presenting the course for students. By the application deadline, 51 students had applied to participate in the course. Of these, 24 students continued until the end and 23 graduated from the course. The results of the students that finished the course were good. In the final survey 95 % of the students would recommend the course to other students[9]. The reasons for the rather large dropout were

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[9] More information about the results from the pilot course can be found in two other reports available at www.vircamp.net. See: Hole, Wouters, Olsson (2010) *Development of an E-learning Course in*

numerous. Some students started with unrealistic expectations of the course and insufficient information about the workload. Other students planned to take the course simultaneously to being on their practice placements on other continents, in other time zones. Some students had personal problems that caused too much stress during the course period. For most of these students the ECTS credits had not been effectively implemented in their bachelor programmes. Also lack of information to the students from some of the partner institutions about the study programme caused unreal expectations and students were not sufficiently prepared for the online comparative study.

All the learning material of the Virtual Book was used in the course. The students gave very positive feedback on the learning material. They reported that they liked the triggers, which stimulated their imagination and helped them to remember issues related to Community Work. They found most of the screen lectures interesting and helpful for their learning. The students reported that they found the case of the Green Park surprising and that this gave them an experience of reality that they had not expected to find in an e-learning course. In this way it helped them to relate theory to practice, which is important in a competence-based curriculum.

In the course evaluation one of the students said in relation to the case:

> *"A virtual world with problems like Needle Hill, different opinions and attitudes between the different groups of immigrants and the local people, the young and the elderly can be found in every society. And there are events, concerts, even newspaper articles just like in real life."*[10]

Seven teachers were involved in the course, the main teacher and six teachers working in pairs, supervising three groups of students. Teachers that had little or no experience with e-teaching cooperated with a more experienced e-teacher. As a result staff members at partner institutions developed skills in e-teaching. This way of working, along with a teachers' reflection blog and online teacher meetings resulted in an experience of being part of an international teacher group that increased knowledge about e-learning and facilitated improvements to the course content and tasks.

The student-centred approach in the course led to the creation of tasks for students that would help them in their understanding and competence building. During the course students were to develop a project based on their mapping of the Green Park Community. Through tasks like this students were inspired not only to read and write theoretical papers, but also to use their knowledge in practice.

The teachers tried to act in a way similar to a community worker to stimulate the students' work, without giving them too much structure or too many instructions, but rather through examples giving them ideas about how to approach or to stimulate their own ideas.

3.3 Quality Assurance – Outcomes

As described above, an important element of the project was the development of a comprehensive Quality Guide. The guide has two aims: the first is to be a practical guide for e-learning studies and the second is to help us evaluate the SW-VirCamp project. The Quality Guide contains a set of quality principles and quality standards, with quantitative and qualitative indicators to fulfil the standards. In addition to this there are proposed methods and tools to measure the indicators. Finally, routine guidelines for specific processes are described. All of this will be of great importance to secure the high quality of the future Virtual Campus with a decentralised administrative model, where the leading institution will change

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Community Work from an International Perspective, and Edmark (2010) *Over the Borders – Building and launching the Virtual Campus – SW-VirCamp.*
[10] Permission for citations is given by students.

every three years. The Quality Guide that has been developed for this project may be of help to other projects that need to develop similar guides for e-learning courses.

A central element in the quality assurance of the Community Work course was the student evaluations. Most of the active students participated in these evaluations, which gave us a lot of interesting data to use in the further development of the course. Three surveys were conducted during the course; one within the first three weeks, one in the middle of the course and one at the end. After the first survey the results were reported to the students and the evaluators expressed how important it was to have the students' opinion and feedback. Some adjustments were made based on the students' responses. Students' experiences were taken seriously and this probably resulted in very full responses from students in the later surveys as well. In the report from Hole, Wouters, Olsson (2010) recommendations for improvements based both on the students' and the teachers' feedback have been summarised.

The external evaluator followed the project closely and found that it was dense with information. The resulting report, *Over the borders – Building and launching the Virtual Campus – SW-VirCamp* (Edmark, 2010), was based on a) interviews with five staff members and three students, b) written documents available in the project (of which there were many) and c) internet environment, sites and web tools. The interviewed staff members expressed a great amount of personal commitment and engagement in the project and they considered that it had both enriched themselves personally and professionally and had been of benefit to the home institutions in many ways. But they also pointed out some problem areas: the workload for the staff involved had been very high – in some cases too high; and some staff members experienced a lack of support and interest from their home institutions, which was very problematic. The interviewed students all felt they had learnt a lot from the course in Community Work and one of the most positive aspects of the course was the close interaction with the other students and the teachers. They also experienced the case as very interesting and stimulating for their integration of theory into practice and they learned a lot from doing the project plan. Some felt that it was complicated to navigate between all the different websites involved in the project and that they had to keep track of several different usernames and passwords.

3.4 Exploitation and Dissemination – Outcomes

Exploitation

Contact with the practical field was made through the interviews with social workers employed in different institutions and working arenas. A summary of the interviews has been produced. The interviews showed that social work professionals are interested in e-learning in social work education. But all the respondents admitted that they thought that lack of face-to-face meetings is a disadvantage for e-learning and for Social Work education. On the other hand, e-learning for most of them is a very good alternative for further education because of the flexibility in time and place.

About half of respondents were connected with, or directly involved in, Community Work. But some professionals said that they feel that there is lack of knowledge in this field and that it will be a very important field in the near future.

Almost all respondents claimed that in their everyday work they do not need an international specialisation. At the same time, some of the respondents answered that they would benefit from such a specialisation, especially those who work with immigrants and people with different cultural backgrounds and those who are participating in international projects.

Information about the project and the pilot course was presented at the website and through pamphlets and posters that were sent to all partner institutions and distributed in the classes.

From the first student survey we know that the main source of information about the course was the teachers, and after that various promotional material, the website and other students. Towards the end of the project period a promotional video for the virtual campus was made.

Dissemination

Different partners have participated at various conferences, like the international Social Work Conferences NASSW in Bodø, Norway, ENSACT in Dubrovnik, Croatia, and IASSW, ICSW and IFSW in Hong Kong and the international ICT conferences EDEN in Valencia, Spain and ALT-C in Manchester, UK. The project and results have also been presented at various national meetings and conferences with professional bodies and academics.

In the beginning of the project period, presentations at conferences and meetings focused on the project ideas and aims. In the latter part of the period, focus has been on the project outcomes and products. As a general rule, people attending these presentations have been very positive about the project. They have been impressed by the fact that virtual learning material has been developed in a way that actually triggers a sense of practice by the use of cases in a virtual classroom. People have also expressed the view that an international specialisation is innovative and interesting. After some of the presentations other universities have contacted the presenters to learn more about the project and some have asked about the possibilities for their own students to participate in the e-learning courses. The presentations can be found at the SW-VirCamp website.

The project has also produced several papers for publication in journals. To date two of these has been accepted (to Seminar.net - in English – and *Fontene* – in Norwegian[11]). Another paper (in English) has been sent for review. We have also accepted an invitation to write a paper for the Norway Opening Universities about sustainability and quality assurance in e-learning courses.

As a result of cooperation with the associated partners from South Africa, we discovered the need for the development of a textbook on Community Work with a focus on international issues and methods. The product of this cooperation is a proposal for a book, *Participation in Community Work. International Perspectives*, which has been sent to a publisher. Chapters in this book will be written by partners in the project as well as internationally renowned authors on Community Work.
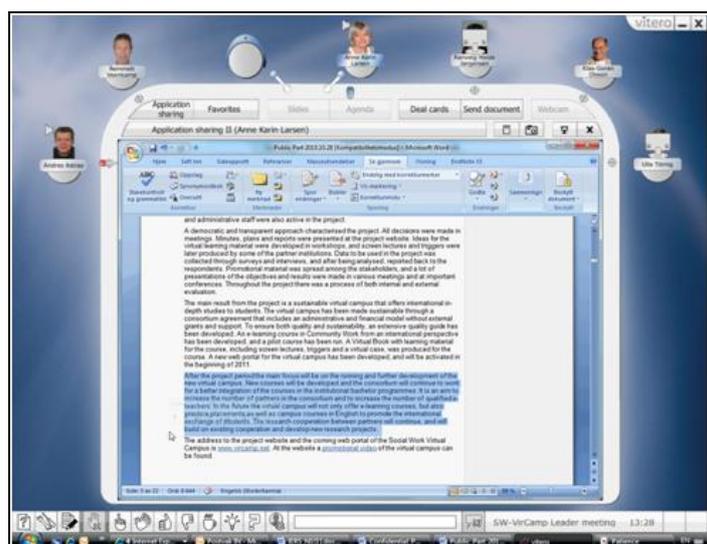
Picture 7: An online Steering Committee meeting in VITERO.

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[11] Paper in Seminar.net will be published in November 2010, Fontene during spring 2011

4. Partnerships

High commitment from the partners involved in the project has made it possible to reach the aims of the project and even to do more than was originally planned. Without this dedication the hard work required to fulfil all the objectives and the deliverables would not have   been possible. This is also what makes the Virtual Campus sustainable and able to continue the running of the education programme by a consortium of institutions of higher education.

In the SW-VirCamp project, 12 partner institutions from 9 European countries have co-operated. People working with the project have developed cultural competence through collaborating and visiting each other's countries and institutions and a high quality professional network among teachers has been developed.

The partners in the project are from different parts of Europe (south, centre, east and north). It has become clear that when students from different countries address similar problems in Social Work within different contexts, they learn a lot from discussing commonalities and differences with a task-solving approach. Knowledge, language skills and their European perspective on Social Work increase.

Staff involved in the project tends to feel more European as a consequence of working closely with European colleagues. In this manner, a European staff for a virtual campus has been established.

The project aimed to develop an international specialisation for students largely based on e-learning. It is interesting to note that through communication through e-mails, blogs, and an electronic conference room (VITERO) the participants have been able to plan, discuss and prepare courses and learning material together as they would with colleagues in their own countries. However, we have seen that it is also necessary to arrange some "physical" meetings. Online meetings are useful for updating the status and planning the next steps in the project, but for developing ideas, new concepts or policy "physical" meetings are necessary as these stimulate dialogue in a different way.

It has turned out to be very important that many of the partners knew each other beforehand and had already cooperated for a long time. This made the work much easier than it would otherwise have been.

The associated partners in South Africa have been involved in the project through preparation of the book referred to above. One of them has delivered a screen lecture for the Virtual Book.

Not all of the 12 partners in the project will participate in the future Virtual Campus. We have seen that for some of the partners ongoing internal institutional processes, like adaptation to the Bologna principles and changes of curricula, have demanded a lot of time and resources during the project period. The project in itself has also demanded a lot from the partners and because of these parallel processes it has been difficult to achieve the necessary consent for the steps needed to implement the in-depth international studies in the curricula of the partner institutions. Two of the partners have not been able to sign the new consortium agreement for future cooperation and have as a temporary arrangement signed a letter of intent to continue to cooperate and deliver a certain number of working hours for the next year related to the online courses. In this way we hope to keep them as partners in the consortium in the future.

The project has been run with a traditional project administration. There has been focus on making processes as transparent as possible through meetings, communication and by presenting all relevant information on the project website.

5. Plans for the Future

After the end of the project period, the consortium continues with 7 partners and 2 associated European partners. As a basis for sustainable cooperation a consortium agreement has been developed and signed. The agreement outlines the legal regulations for future cooperation, such as partners' responsibilities, an administrative and financial model, copyrights and intellectual property rights, extension of the network and duration of the agreement.

A new administrative and financial model has been agreed upon and is defined in the new Consortium Agreement and its appendices. A decentralised leadership based on work-share among the partners, as well as sharing the administrative costs and an agreement of hours of teaching and assessment offered by the different partners, is going to make the Virtual Campus sustainable after the project period.

The future Social Work Virtual Campus will include the already existing e-learning courses in VIRCLASS and SW-VirCamp. The courses will be offered through the newly developed Social Work Virtual Campus web portal[12], which will, when it is fully updated, include an *e-course centre* with virtual learning material, a library and access to the virtual learning environment, a *student administration centre* which will include electronic English language tests and intake information, an *international centre* with an overview of opportunities for practice placements and courses in English at the partner institutions, a *research and development centre* with an overview of existing and planned research on ICT and Social Work, and a *multimedia centre* with chatrooms, tutorials for the use of various free software and promotional videos.

An updated course programme for the next study year has been made, with the dates for the beginning and the end of the specific e-courses. An overview of teachers and assessors for the courses has also been made.

Research and publications based on the results and data from the project will continue as mentioned above.

To strengthen the sustainability of the virtual campus it is necessary that the consortium in the future adapts the international study programme to the institutional bachelor programmes, for instance by offering one course more than once a year and developing new courses.

A future aim for the consortium is to increase the number of academic staff at the partner institutions with e-teaching competences. The already developed e-pedagogy course for teachers in higher education will be one of the tools to achieve this.

During the last partner meeting in Liepaja a workshop was arranged and by using the method of Appreciative Inquiry partners identified the key success factors and presented their dreams and concrete ambitions for the future. A slogan for the future was presented: *Social Work – Virtual Campus opening windows to the world*.

It is important that the established Virtual Campus creates specific aims for development and keeps up the high ambitions, as well as the energy and enthusiasm that have driven this project forward. In the transition period from the previous to a new organisation platform there is a need to stabilise and make sure that the grounds upon which we build our future ambitions are sustainable and a need to start to develop a concrete plan for further development.

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[12] The new web portal is under construction, and the temporary web address is www.vircamp.net/new. Once the new portal is active, the address will be www.vircamp.net.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The SW-VirCamp project has contributed to the reaching of several of the goals in both the Bologna and Lisbon processes.

6.1 Internationalisation

The project has, through the pilot course, contributed to the virtual mobility of students and thus to internationalisation at home. The close co-operation between 12 institutions has also contributed to the mobility of staff. In addition, the activities of the project have made the staff involved more familiar with the educational systems and contents in other countries. This has influenced their home institutions in a manner which has increased the internationalisation at home even for those students who did not directly participate in the pilot, through the increased focus on international studies.

The project has also facilitated the future physical mobility of students, as this will be part of the planned in-depth international studies. In line with the Bologna process, ECTS credits and marks from A to F have been used. At all the institutions that will continue in the partnership the students that take the e-learning courses will have their credits accepted at their home institutions. This will facilitate future mobility between the institutions. Also mapping of courses in English at the partner institutions and of possibilities for practical placements abroad has started and this too is expected to contribute to increased mobility of students.

6.2 Employability

Another aim of the Bologna process, and also of the Europe 2020 strategy, is increased employability, and the project has contributed to this aim in several ways. A competence-based curriculum has been developed and the course in Community Work stresses the use of student active learning methods, both of which should make students better prepared for their professional lives. Furthermore, the course enhances their co-operation skills as they collaborate closely with students in other countries. The course also improves the students' language skills and their digital literacy, and these are important qualifications for job applicants today. The international dimensions of the course – not least the fact that the students obtain thorough knowledge of Social Work in other countries – enhance their employability both in their own countries and abroad.

6.3 The Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning

The fact that the course in Community Work is internet-based and a virtual campus has been created, contributes to the Bologna aims of equality of opportunities and lifelong learning, especially in terms of access to higher education and international experiences. Many students cannot easily go abroad to study because of for instance family obligations. The virtual campus creates a highly flexible study situation that enables students to study even from their own homes. This also makes it easier to study while holding a job and we have already seen this, as professional social workers participated at the pilot course together with the Bachelor students. The professional social workers also found the course content highly relevant for their work.

The digital literacy achieved following the course also enhances the students' opportunity for lifelong learning, as they feel more competent to join other internet-based courses. The

students' evaluation of the courses indicates that they are inspired to continue with other e-learning courses.

The content of the e-courses offered by SW-VirCamp focuses on core issues in Social Work, highly relevant for promoting social inclusion and combating ethnocentrism. Principles of anti-oppressive practice, a bottom-up approach to Social Work and methods for how to meet the challenges of poverty in society are important in all the courses.

6.4 Increased Quality, Attractiveness and Competitiveness

The aim of the Lisbon process is to make the EU the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, based on sustainable education and social cohesion. Many of the points above contribute to this aim. In addition, the collaboration among European institutions contributes to increasing the quality of our education systems and as such to making them better prepared to compete in a global educative and labour market. The new educational programme that has been created in the project also contributes to social cohesion in society in general, as it aims to meet problems at a European level

6.5 European Values and Knowledge

The SW-VirCamp project promotes participatory, democratic and transparent learning perspectives, reflected both in content and processes at all levels of the project. This is in line with the values of active European citizenship. In addition, the project has increased the knowledge about Europe among the participants.
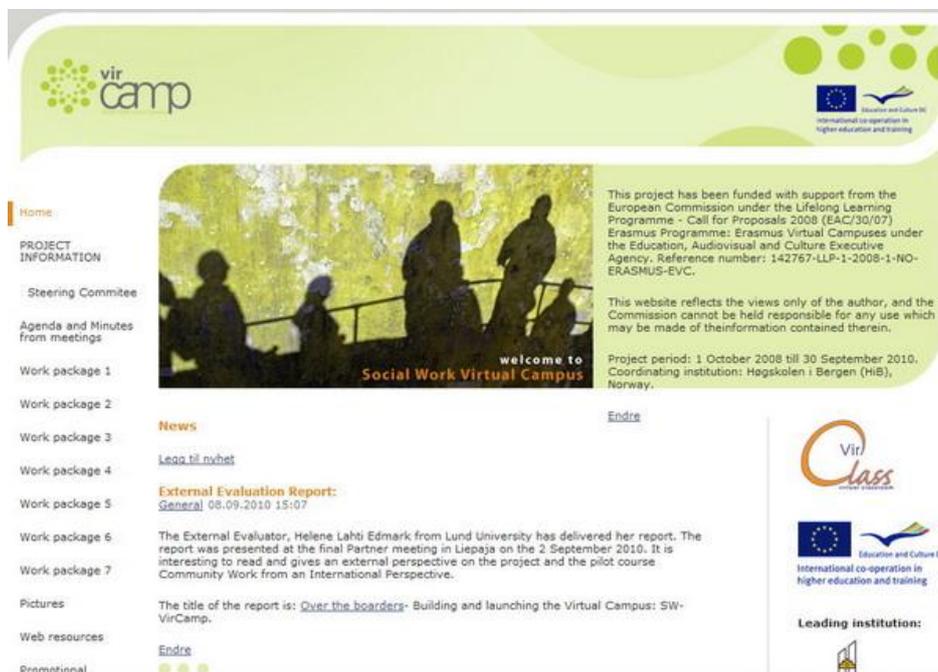
Picture 8: The SW-VirCamp web page www.vircamp.net