

## **Burg Workshop 2016 report**

On the weekend of October 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 a group of 59 ERM students from the Bachelor and Master programme went on a workshop in the youth hostel of Burg in the Spreewald area. The workshop was organised by the seven members of ERM's Board of Students and a group of five dedicated students from Bachelor programme's third semester.

The main goals of the workshop were:

- Giving the new ERM students space and time to make new friends in an open atmosphere.
- Learning about cultural differences between students from different parts of the world and becoming sensitive for them.
- Developing ideas how to deal with this differences for everybody's benefit in academic and non-academic contexts.
- Spending a joyful and energized weekend together.

The special challenge for students of the ERM programme is the composition of the students' body. People from all over the world come to Cottbus to study ERM often by themselves. These students have different preconditions in terms of educational and cultural background. In Cottbus they have to study and work together in smaller and bigger groups. Besides the academic work, the socio-environment of ERM students is also dominated by intercultural contacts. The Burg workshop was designed to integrate the new students in the students' body and enable them to deal with the special challenge of its diversity.

The programme of the workshop started with an introduction of the moderators and the programme itself. Afterwards, the students were asked to form small groups and answer three simply questions about their spoken languages, feelings about their arrival in Cottbus and their origins. They groups presented their answers in short presentations. In a "ranking game" the students were asked to position themselves according to different statements of background and cultural self-images. Using this method first differences among themselves became observable for the students.

The programme of Saturday afternoon was organised by the guest lecturer Dr. Günther Rusch. He is an expert on the field of intercultural studies and has many years of experience. His seminar was divided in two parts: "Questions and identity" and "Environment and development". In the first part he focussed on the challenge of intercultural contact. In the second part he presented some coherences of environment and development in the global context and linked these to job perspectives of ERM students.

After dinner the method of "World Café" was applied. On different tables, students were asked to discuss about the following topics: Educational System, Men-women interaction, Religion/Culture/Worldview, Verbal and non-verbal communication, Homesickness and the seminar's content given by Dr. Rusch. In addition, one table was kept as open space for self-chosen topics. The discussions took place in a casual atmosphere and students participated actively. Results of the discussions were recorded on flipchart sheets.

On Sunday after breakfast, the results from the "World Café" were used as basis for the method "Think Tank". In this method, students were split again in small groups and were

asked to work on the different topics in a rotational system. Challenges arising from different backgrounds and preconditions were determined. In the next step ideas were developed how to deal with these challenges in a beneficial way, following the questions “What can I do?” and “What can others do?”. Finally, the results were presented in front of the whole group.

In the following the results of the methods “World Café” and “Think Tank” are summarised:

#### Educational System:

ERM students have different levels of education and experience of academic group work and giving presentations. Students have to consider this and to support each other. Teachers also have to take this into account when giving tasks and grading performances.

#### Men-women interaction:

Roles of women and men and gender equality are perceived differently depending on cultural backgrounds. Students have to be aware of different role models and stereotypes and broaden their mindsets towards different roles of women and men. Respecting each other, stating opinions honestly to others and respecting other opinions is the basis of a positive social coexistence.

#### Religion/Culture/Worldview:

Cultural differences exist on many levels like religion, sexuality and habits in general and can lead to misunderstandings. Often these differences are expressed in stereotypes. To overcome stereotypes and understand others' mindsets intercultural exchange is necessary. Therefore, students have to be tolerant, non-judgemental and respectful. Informing oneself and sharing knowledge about other cultures and learning from each other are important elements of intercultural learning. This process should be supported by the university by integrating intercultural learning in ERM's curriculum.

#### Verbal and non-verbal communication:

Among the students ways of verbal and non-verbal communication differ. Levels and accents of spoken English are spread widely. Different ways and levels of greeting each other, perceiving jokes, being straightforward and reliability may cause misunderstandings. Students should reflect about reasons in situations of difficult communication and be patient. By regular open minded exchange between students the levels of communication can match and misunderstandings be reduced. The space for regular exchange can be provided by the implementation of a regular World Café.

#### Homesickness:

Students that come from abroad often feel homesick. This homesickness can be triggered by many different things like smells, art, events, food, weather or just being far away from friends and family members. Meeting in groups of people of the same origin as well as being integrated in groups of other students are important to deal with homesickness. Therefore, students that are native in Germany or already feel integrated are responsible to include new students in group activities. Culture Nights are a good way to create a space of feeling home.

Open space:

Different perception of punctuality and food preferences in terms of eating meat, vegetarian or vegan dishes are realised among the students. Ways to deal with those differences are reflecting own and other attitudes as well as taking own space and giving space to others.

After lunch a puzzle hunt was played. Divided in small groups, the students did several team-building activities in a playful manner spread over the area of the youth hostel.

Before finishing the workshop, the students were offered to give feedback to the organisation team.

Summarising, it can be stated that the workshop created space for the new ERM students to open up themselves, to listen to others and having an exchange about their experiences and backgrounds on a deeper level as it would be possible in the lecture hall. Students used this space to think about themselves, their fellow students and about the special situation of living and studying together in Cottbus.

And not to forget, all had a great time of community spirit, joy and fun.

Big credits to all who made this workshop happen!

## Impressions



Figure 1 - Group presentation



Figure 2 – All participants





Figure 3 - Energizer: pillow race



Figure 4 - World Café