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Over the Borders. Building and launching the Virtual Campus SW-VirCamp. An external evaluation report.

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Over the borders
– Building and launching the Virtual Campus –
SW-VirCamp

**An external evaluation report by
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Over the borders
- Building and launching the Virtual Campus: SW-VirCamp

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On request from Høgskolen i Bergen as the leading partner in the SW-VirCamp project (*)

HØGSKOLEN I BERGEN

Content

1.   Introduction

The Social Work Virtual Campus (Sw-VirCamp) is an Internet based international pedagogical pilot project. The project is aiming at three main goals: The first is developing a virtual campus for social work education, the second is developing a new e-learning module in Community Work and Community Development and the third is arranging a pilot course in the mentioned subjects. The Sw-VirCamp project started 2008-10-01 and ends after implementing the pilot course and after delivering a final report 2010-09-30.

The project is financed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency within the Lifelong learning ERASMUS program and under power delegated by the Commission of European Communities[1].

This report is an external evaluation of the project, as planned in the formal project application. The evaluation is primarily based on interviews with some of the participating partners (students and staff members) but is also intended to give the reader a view on the build up and process in the growing and - later on – implementing of the project. The report initially presents assignment and evaluation methods, in chapter 2 followed by a presentation of the VirCamp project, its structure and content. In chapter 3 and 4 the results from the interviews are presented and the report finishes off in chapter 5 with discussion and conclusions.

1.1   Assignment and method for the external evaluation

Firstly some words on evaluation in general and then – both in chapter 1.1 and 1.2 - the prerequisites for this specific external evaluation.

One important part of every project is to follow the process, take care of experiences and evaluate outcomes. An evaluation can have a range of focal points. One is to evaluate how the outcome of the project stands to the goals written in the project plan. This you could call a "summative" evaluation, as the evaluation often takes place after the project and summarizes the results and experiences in a final report. Another kind of evaluation is to focus the process while the process is proceeding, a "formative" evaluation. In the latter focus is to learn from experiences and activities during the process, using reflections and observations to influence and improve the project while it is running (Vedung 1998).

To achieve this both internal and external evaluations have been incorporated in the project plan for the Sw-VirCamp project. The internal evaluation performed by the initiators of the project has for example done iterative surveys to staff members linked to special occasions (like work shops and dialogue seminars) and later likewise surveys to students attending the pilot course in its different phases.

In addition to the internal evaluations an external evaluation - resulting in this report - has been executed. The main objective for the external evaluation has been to follow the development process "from the development of a new curriculum plan through arranging a

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[1] See further the Grant Agreement between the European Commission and Högskolen in Bergen, Norway, from November 2008 (Agreement n. 2008 - 3252 / 001 – 001. PROJECT NUMBER - 142767-LLP- 1-2008-1-NO-ERASMUS-EVC). www.VirCamp.net

pilot course" (cited from main application of the project). That is, in short, to follow the project through the birth, growth and implementation of the pilot e-learning course.

Being aware of that the 14 days calculated in the project plan for the external evaluation does not admit any profound examination of this complex project, there have been necessary limitations. In spite of this I have made the choice to talk to people involved in the project by carrying out interviews, fully aware that this is a time consuming way of collecting data. I have thus far extended the time share for the external evaluation, but claim that the carried out interviews have been essential in contributing different perspectives, experiences and viewpoints.

The evaluation follows and examines the development and working process that, in this case, has lead to an international e-learning curriculum and a practice mainly formed in web based course activity. This implies studying the developing and implementing of the e-learning module, studying e-learning material and activities on the course site and listening to reactions, reflections and conclusions among some different actors mainly in the end of the period. One objective with the external evaluation has been to identify hindrances and possibilities within the project to support a future development process.

My intentions here, considering the limits of my task and time, is not to highlight all details in this project that is complex and dense with information. Instead I will concentrate on especially interesting aspects and materials that give a certain profile to this specific course or campus.

The results of this evaluation are to be perceived as one of many contributions to further knowledge development. This being especially true in case the findings of the evaluation can be set in relation to existing research in regard to, for example, the area of education and e-learning, project development or other related areas.

1.2   Methods and basic data for the external evaluation

The evaluation framework as well as a more detailed description of the basic data for this report is presented in this chapter.

The conceptual base of the program, or the logical framework of the program, has functioned as a starting point of the evaluation. In a so called "program theory" method one of the evaluator's areas of interest is to decipher what program initiators had in mind and wanted to accomplish with the project. In other words – what are the implicit or explicit thoughts behind the project and in what ways have the initiators and course developers realized or implemented the project goals (Rogers et al 2000). One task is to identify the tangible features and settings of the project - or with the words of Rossi & Freeman; "the bare bones of the program" (Rossi & Freeman 1989). That includes describing for example structural and organizational arrangements and settings, program staff involved, resources used, identified target groups and so on, but also the range of activities that takes place in order to implement the goals. In other words: (how) does the program theory show in activities, actions and outcomes? Are there any obvious external factors that have evident effects on the outcome?

In this evaluation students and staff members are invited to contribute with knowledge, experiences, standpoints and reflections from their different perspectives as some of the vital

basic data for the evaluation, alongside with written documents and observations conducted on the net[2].

The basic data used in this evaluation is

1) Interviews. The main empirical material in this evaluation consists of *eight interviews*, whereof *three with students* and *five with members of the staff*. As the internal evaluations appear as surveys, the interviews can be seen as a complement from another perspective. The purpose of these interviews has been to offer an opportunity for participating students and staff members to express themselves and give voice to viewpoints and experiences in direct dialogue with me as an external evaluator.

Several contacts completed with an interview with the project leader have provided a valuable and useful source of information and views on the project, but this is not included in the interview presentations below.

- *The three students:* The project leader of VirCamp informed the students about the external evaluation, requesting them to contact me. This procedure was designed to spare the students as they already had been participating in a number of internal evaluations. Three students contacted me by mail and we made arrangements for the interviews. The students came from three different participating countries.

It is important to be aware of that this way of recruiting students to interview could affect the outcome of the answers in different ways. These students could be seen as especially engaged or interested, all sharing the will and determination to fulfil the course. There is a risk that the answers thereby mirror a more positive attitude towards the course, while students who might have more critical aspects to the course remain unheard as they chose not to be interviewed. But being aware that the interviewed are a minor part of the students participating in the course, these students could offer a lot of interesting information and a variety of experiences to share.

- *The five staff members* (teachers and/or partners) were all but one members of the steering group. Initially the ambition was to start interviewing partners represented in the steering group that were new or nearly new to cooperating with the partners. An invitation (and later a reminder) to be interviewed was thus sent by e-mail. As there was little response (one claimed problems with the English language, others did not respond at all) I went on contacting more partners in the group aiming at about 5 interviews considering the timetable. The final amount of interviews was 5, including one of the teachers that did not belong to the steering group. The interviewed persons also cover 5 of the 12 participating universities.

In this case there could be a similar discussion as with the students on who chose to accept to be interviewed, all being very engaged and interested in the project. But here the same goes for the interviewed staff members as for the students; they could offer a lot of interesting information and a variety of experiences to share[3].

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[2] Recommended readings on evaluation: Karlsson (1999), Vedung (1998), Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman (2004), Lindgren (2006), Sandberg & Faugert (2007) and SOU 2005:29 (Lahti Edmark et al).
[3] The interviews with students and staff members have in common that they each lasted 45-70 minutes and were done either by using Internet tool Skype or by telephone. The interviews have been covering thematic question areas. I thereby used a semi structured interview guide with "open" questions, meaning that the questions did not have fixed answers but rather was following the way of expression of the interviewed (Halvorsen 1992). The

2) Written documents: I have taken part of documents like applications, agreements[4] and minutes from consortium, staff and work group meetings from the development period (staff) and course period (staff and students).

More than 50 minutes are published on the site www.VirCamp.net . The considerable amount of written documents following the procedure and the development of the Virtual campus and the pilot course has mainly been used as a source for information and orientation.

3) Internet environment, sites and web tools: I have studied current Internet websites and tools used in the project; primarily at www.VirCamp.net, which is used for the build up period and for information, and *It's learning* which is the main e-learning management system (LMS) used in the pilot course. The project has also been using *Google docs* e.g. for creating shared documents, but this I just visited shortly.

Another Internet tool is *the online conference tool VITERO,* http://www.vitero.de/english, which has been a very useful tool for the staff, both during the course constructing period and during the pilot course. I have been participating as a guest on one occasion with the course constructors using VITERO. *Google blogger* has during the course period been used by the teachers for reflections and exchange of experiences. I have had no access to this blog.

The last tool to mention is *Skype*, allowing users to make free voice calls over the Internet. Skype can also be viewed by a web camera on the computers and is possible for conferences. Skype is used by staff members and students in different situations (e.g planning and role play playing). I have been using Skype conducting some of the interviews in the evaluation.

Thus having presented the framework and basic data for the evaluation, my intention here is to contribute with but one piece in a puzzle discussing the experiences from the Vircamp project. Numerous alternative possibilities to study this project are yet to be launched by other researchers.

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interviews have all been recorded, listened to, thematically summarized and anonymized. The student interviews have additionally been transcribed. Interviews carried out in Swedish and Norwegian have been translated to English by me.
[4] The Grant Agreement between the Commission and Högskolen in Bergen, Norway and The Consortium Agreement between the participating partners.

2. A dynamic and complex project

To be able to understand the Vircamp project or the processes connected to it, it is necessary to get a picture of the ideas, prerequisites and structure that constructs the project. In this chapter the initial initiatives and ideas – here formulated in the Grant Agreement – are presented, as well as the administrative structure supporting the development and implementation of the project. The pilot course curriculum plan is viewed, as well as the content and build up of the virtual e-learning environment.

2 .1   The program theory of the initiators and creators

The aims and objectives of the VirCamp project are described in numerous documents. The document cited in this chapter to present the project goals are mainly from the Grant Agreement with the Commission[5].

In the Grant Agreement the initiators argue that Europe, in the urge of being a competitive knowledge based community, faces challenges like social exclusion and ethnocentrism in a society featuring intercultural diversity and a growing global interdependency. These challenges also affect social work, especially seen in an international context, which emphasizes the need to prepare (future) social workers to deal with the situation both in their own countries and in cooperation with colleagues in other countries. The VirCamp project is aiming at being one possible alternative in an international context, especially as it can reach and attract students with estimated low physical international mobility.

By using an outspoken team approach the project focus not only on preparing the mentioned social work students, but also addresses social work teachers in higher education, as well as technical and media staff connected to e-learning, university net works and social work professionals. Team approach and cooperation are iterative conceptions used through the development process and also significant for the pedagogical approach of the project.

The concrete outcomes cited from the Grant Agreement summarizes as:
1. To develop a knowledge based international Bachelor specialization in Social Work, aligned with national and international (Bologna) requirements and quality standards. The specialization being initially focused on developing a module on community work and community development and implementing this in a pilot course (15 ECTS credits[6]) in a virtual setting addressing 55 students.
2. To develop a virtual campus as an international community firstly serving the pilot course. In this upgrade existing functional and technical systems and facilities based on VIRCLASS[7], upgrade the competencies of the technical and media staff involved and further develop e-learning materials (firstly for the pilot course).
3. To assure quality by producing a quality guide and carry out internal and external evaluations.

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[5] Grant Agreement between the European Commission and Högskolen in Bergen, Norway, from November 2008 (Agreement n. 2008 - 3252 / 001 – 001. PROJECT NUMBER - 142767-LLP- 1-2008-1-NO-ERASMUS-EVC). www.VirCamp.net

[6] European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool to measure the volume of learning based on the workload students need in order to achieve the expected outcomes of a learning process at a specific level. 60 ECTS corresponds to the workload of a full time year of studies. It is used by all EU countries. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf

[7] VIRCLASS (the Virtual Classroom for Social Work) will be described later in this report.

4. In a planned way attract attention to the project by presentations in conferences and publicizing written material (articles in journals, etc) in relevant magazines, networks and a variety of relevant professional sectors.

The VirCamp project thus is not only focusing the pilot course itself, but as much the surrounding activities like providing an environment for maintaining an ongoing process of further developing, creating and refining teaching material for e-learning courses in active and concrete cooperation over the (university- and country-)borders. The EUSW (The European Platform for Worldwide Social Work[8]) network is mentioned as one of the possible actors disseminating the concept of the VirCamp project to a range of social work faculties. Developing the specialization into an international bachelor of social work as well as implementing the concept to non-social work stakeholders is also on the future agenda.

Another emphasized and highlighted aspect, the dissemination of knowledge and experiences of the project, can be seen as closely connected to the prior VIRCLASS concept. The VIRCLASS (The Virtual Classroom for Social Work in Europe) was one of the spin off results from EUSW and collected nine European universities around the intention to create an international virtual classroom for social work. One of the results (though with no EU-funding) was VIRCLASS, the first course launched in 2005.

The experiences from VIRCLASS stimulated many of the partners to later become the core partners in the VirCamp consortium and project, thus benefiting from the achieved knowledge. Furthermore the dissemination of both concepts has shown in a variety of ways. Presentations has taken place at a number of conferences (e.g. in Dubrovnik, Bodö, Dortmund) and a number of articles, papers or chapters in international books have been published by partners in the project(s)[9].

Another way of dissemination is the creating of a pedagogical course in e-learning offered to teachers in higher education by Högskolen in Bergen (www.VIRCLASS.net/eped). The course is basically constructed and built on prior experiences and pedagogical research on e-learning. In this way the received knowledge and experiences is taken care of strengthening the options to interest and – with new teachers enrolled – further develop and refine the e-learning pedagogy and education materials.

Looking back the years with VIRCLASS in many ways can be seen as an important base of experience or even cradle for the further development of a virtual campus. Basic contacts were at hand, cooperation forms tried out, as was the development of a pedagogical philosophy, curriculum building and course structure. Last but not least an academic environment had been created; open for knowledge exchange and pedagogical experimenting, enrolling engaged and determined teachers and other staff members and an experienced project leader. The connection to the VIRCLASS concept can thus be considered of vital importance to the further development of the VirCamp concept.

The link between VIRCLASS and the VirCamp project is continuously strong. Earlier research approaches starting with focus on e-learning in VIRCLASS now intermesh and continues

[8] http://www.eusw.unipr.it/ The foundation of EUSW 2003 was facilitated by the EU.
[9] Examples: Anne Karin Larsen and Grete Oline Hole (2007) "The Role of the Virtual Classroom in Opening Up the European Curriculum" and Anne Karin Larsen, Robert Sanders, Andres Arias Astray and Grete Oline Hole (2008) "E-teacher Challenges and Competencies in International Comparative Social Work Courses". See a full list at http://www.VIRCLASS.net/index.php?action=static&id=6

focusing the VirCamp project. In both cases there is a vivid, open and intertwined relation between the researchers and the staff of the consortiums continuously supporting interest and dissemination.

2.2   Mapping the Administrative structure

This chapter concentrates on giving the reader a chance to grasp the administrative structure of the project, its meetings and working groups.

If the Grant of Agreement is a document stating the goals and economic framework for the VirCamp project, the Consortium Agreement dated January 2009[10] gives a picture of the administrative structure and organisational settings. The Consortium Agreement can be seen as a key document to understand definitions of concepts and acronyms used in the project, as well as to get information on the aims of the project, participating partners and their part in work groups, the participating partners´ responsibilities and obligations, the management and organisation of the project, etc.

To sort the information in a more visual way the organisation and its parties/partners can be mapped as follows:

Name	Participants	Content	Meetings
Project leader (PL)	Initiator from Högskolen in Bergen (HiB)[11]	Coordinates the project and the work package leaders. Acts as daily executive leader, represents the project, acts as contact person towards the Commission.	Active in meetings on all levels.
Project Administration Group (PAG)	Project leader (HiB), one representative from International Office (at HiB), one financial officer (HiB) and the head of the deparment (at HiB).	Responsible for contacting partners, initiating partner meetings, negotiations, reporting, accounting and project funding according to the Grant Agreement.	Face-to-face meetings during the project.
Partners	Participating partner institutions	12 European partner institutions[12]	
Partner/Consortium group	A group consisting of two representatives from each participating partner institution	The principal decision making body, the meetings being the general assembly of the project	Partner meetings (PM) or consortium meetings. 7 meeting minutes are found on the VirCamp.net (whereof 3 held in VITERO[13]).
Steering committee (SWSC=Social Work VirCamp Steering Committee)	The work package leaders including the project leader. One financial officer (from HiB) and one secretary (from HiB) attends the meetings but have no vote.	Management executive body	Meetings and online conferences (primarily using online tool VITERO). 18 meeting minutes are found on the VirCamp.net (whereof 13 held in VITERO).
Work package (WP)		The project is organised in 7 so called "work packages", each with a special profile and assignment	Work package meetings (WPM): 20 WP meeting minutes are found on the VirCamp.net (whereof 13 held in VITERO).
Work package leader (WPL)	A person from each partner chosen by the partner institution	Co-ordinates the work in a work package group (WP). Monitors and delivers according to project plan and budget. Responsible for contact with	

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[10] The Consortium Agreement SW-VirCamp, January 2009. www.VirCamp.net

[11] HiB is the official abbreviation for Högskolen in Bergen and will occasionally be used in this report.

[12] Attachment 1

[13] VITERO (Virtual team Room) is an online tool for virtual conferences. The tool has mainly been used for work meetings and seminars in the administration and staff groups. http://www.vitero.de/english

		and coordination of partners involved in the WP. Report progress to project leader, write report and iterative summarize the work. Represents the WP in the steering committee	
Associated partners	From South Africa (two) and Latin America	Creating screen lectures, developing (course) literature, etc.	Two face to face meetings, informal contacs.
Subcontractor	External evaluator	Conducting external evaluation	

Of a good 50 documented meetings until June 2010 (www.VirCamp.net), 29 have been held online using the conference tool VITERO (Virtual Team Room)[14]. Face to face meetings have been held in Bergen/Norway, Mannheim/Germany, Haarlem/The Netherlands and Madrid/Spain.

In addition further theme or program meetings have been launched. A Kick-off meeting was held in Bergen at the start of the project. Further a 4-day Media workshop with the Media Center (HiB) and the academic staff of the VirCamp course was held in Bergen. The Media Center, being a resource at Högskolen in Bergen, has thus been important providing knowledge and technical support when building e-learning material in cooperation with the project staff members.

Further on an International seminar was held in Bergen. Two teacher meetings - each lasting 2-3 days - were performed in Mannheim and in Jönköping.

In June 2010 a joint meeting was held in Lisboa/Portugal, combining 1) a steering committee meeting, 2) a VIRCLASS teacher meeting, 3) a joint seminar with VIRCLASS and VirCamp and 4) a joint consortium meeting with the VIRCLASS and the VirCamp consortium. The program for the meeting states that the occasion focused on how to take care of achieved knowledge and experiences from the VirCamp project and to discuss the possibilities to merge the two concepts of VIRCLASS and VirCamp[15].

An independent researcher, a part of the pedagogical research environment at Högskolen in Bergen, has been an important resource for informal support and research. The researcher have continuously been attending seminars and meetings as well as being a partner in writing articles on this and prior projects.

2.2.1 Work Packages

The work developing and implementing the Vircamp project have been organised in seven so called Work Packages (WP) or work groups. In this evaluation I will not specifically go deeper into the result or outcome of each WP, other than if it is mentioned in the interviews or in the educational material. The following overview is merely to give the reader a short orientation concerning the direction of work in the groups – and somewhat the expected outcomes of the groups.

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[14] http://www.vitero.de/english

[15] The information is collected and updated from web site www.VirCamp.net (June/July 2010).

Each Work Package group has had a specified task and specified deliveries to make. The coordinator of the group, the work package leader, is also a member of the steering committee/group.

Work Package 1 is responsible for the framework agreement between project partners based on reporting on and analyzing how to proceed with the international specialization in social work taking in account national and international agreements (like Bologna).

Work Package 2 is responsible for the pilot course, creating the curriculum plan and preparing the course in cooperation with and support from external experts (like the Media Center at Högskolen in Bergen). WP2 is also responsible for implementing the pilot course.

Work Package 3 is responsible for increasing the competences for technical/media staff and for producing learning material (like screen lectures, triggers etc). An important coordinating resource in this work is the Media Center at Högskolen in Bergen. But the development and production of learning material have also been carried through at other partner institutions.

Work Package 4 is responsible for the consortium contract regulating the partners work and use of products, to define and divide the concrete workload between the partners according to the project plan and to follow up the project budget. Furthermore the group is responsible for producing annual reports to EU and partners, to organize and execute meetings, seminars and conferences and for formulating a sustainable financial and administrative model.

Work Package 5 is responsible for producing and distributing promotion material for social work students and for raising awareness among e.g. professional social work organizations, indicating the benefits of the VirCamp concept. Plans for exploitation are made up in this WP.

Work Package 6 is responsible for producing a Quality guide to assure quality, to organize and report internal evaluations and to assess the pilot course.

Work Package 7 is responsible for developing a dissemination plan agreed between partners, to prepare and execute presentations on the current specialization and on the virtual campus, to participate in relevant network conferences and to produce and publish articles

Some of the WPs mentioned above are specifically aiming at information and recruitment considering potential students for the pilot course "Community work from an international perspective".

It is not easy – or it would rather be quite time consuming - for someone outside the project to summarize the actual work in the Work package groups. It seems though to be a relevant build up mirroring the project plans and fit to get a lot of work done and to distribute the workload. A lot of effort is invested not least on the technical side, including creating websites and building e-learning material. The descriptions of the WPs somewhat tend to focus on the forms and frames and tells little about the actual pedagogy and content of the pilot course. The impression is that if there is a solid form and framework, then the content can differ. To see distinguished borders between the WP groups (like WP 5 and 7) is sometimes a bit hard for an outsider. Maybe - as long as the work gets done – that might not be of great importance.

2.3   The curriculum plan for the pilot course

This chapter provides a short orientation on the pilot course of the VirCamp project: *Community Work from an international perspective*, 15 ECTS credits.

A curriculum plan presenting the content and pedagogical forms of the course can be found in attachment 2A and on www.vircamp.net. The introductory text in the curriculum plan presents Community Work as such as well as its ideological framework:

> Community work is a planned process to mobilise communities to use their own social structures and resources to address their own problems and achieve their own objectives. Community work focuses on participation and fosters empowerment, emancipation and change through collective action. Community work is closely related to work for human rights. The community work process is about people in communities creating opportunities for growth and change (from the VirCamp Curriculum plan for *Community Work from an international perspective*, 15 ECTS credits).

The curriculum plan outlines a competence based and solution oriented course in Community Work integrating knowledge, skills and attitudes in an international environment. The main aims for the students are to "develop a critical understanding of the wide range of theories and methods of community work" as well as concretely develop skills to "design a project plan of community work and show which steps and facilities are needed for realizing and managing processes and products". Concepts like grass-root level and bottom-up perspective are mentioned as basic pillars on which methods and theories are built, raising awareness of opportunities for participatory action on macro-, meso- and micro levels in communities.

Methods and theories, cooperation and professional development are in combination described as indicators for competence. The curriculum plan states the working together with students from different countries provides opportunities not only to cooperate around cases, but also to learn about and compare social work and community work between countries. This concrete training situation building professional networks is also described as a way to support a professional development within a challenging international framework.

In short; the students work individually and in groups in an e-learning environment using different web tools and ways of communication, working with assignments that gradually are presented throughout the course. Feedback is continuously given both by teachers and other students, and a successfully carried out course leads up to 15 ECTS credits.

In the project plan as well as in the curriculum plan there is an explicit description of the potential target groups, one being "social work students undertaking a bachelor's programs in their, second, third or fourth year" (quote curriculum plan, attach 2A). Students at postgraduate levels and professionals who are interested in getting an international perspective on community work issues and subjects are also welcome. The academic level of the programme is undergraduate and the credits are given in cooperation with Högskolen in Bergen and the partner/home institution of the student.

The amount of students estimated in project plan for the pilot course was 55 students. In the beginning of the course 51 students enrolled and of these 25 fulfilled the course (information from project leader July 2010).

This curriculum plan gives a framework of content for the pilot course when the e-learning environment – the virtual campus – is described in the following chapter.

2.4   Mapping the Virtual Campus

Creating an international virtual campus is the very core and heart of this project. My intentions in this chapter though is not to highlight all details in the multiple web tools used, but rather to give the reader a short orientation concerning the tools, the main structure and content of the virtual campus.

2.4.1 VirCamp.net, Google docs, Google blogger, Skype and VITERO

These are some of the virtual tools frequently used in the process of constructing VirCamp and running the pilot course:

VirCamp.net – a site for information: The frameworks and creation of the project VirCamp is documented on the website www.VirCamp.net . This site is dense with information and documents, e.g. describing the plans, forms and working processes creating and assessing the VirCamp project; promotional material, agendas and minutes from meetings, agreements, interesting links, and so on.

Google docs: The Google docs is used by students and teachers as a web tool where you - among other things - can work with and write in shared documents. I have not taken part of Google docs.

Google blogger: A blog tool that has been used by the teachers for reflections and exchange of experiences during the course period. I have had no access to this blog.

Skype: Skype is a software available for free video and voice calls (http://about.skype.com/). Skype has during the course been used for voice contacts with students and teachers, e.g. running role plays. When possible I have been using Skype in my interviews in addition to phone calls.

VITERO: VITERO is an online conference tool (http://www.vitero.de/english). This tool has not been used by the students, but rather for staff meeting and conferences both during the course constructing period and during the pilot course. I have attended one conference meeting on VITERO.

Having mentioned Vircamp.net, Google docs, Google blogger, Skype and Vitero, the main focus now turns to the most important Learning Management System (LMS) used for the pilot course: **It's learning**.

2.4.2 It's learning

The learning management system **It's learning** is chosen to be the main platform for the e-learning courses in VirCamp. Here you find the course site for the pilot course "Community work from an international perspective".

Logging in as a student with access to the course goes in steps. First step is logging on to the student VirCamp.net, second step is to adopt a user name for It's learning – being a part of the Högskolen in Bergen system - and third step to choose the course in question (Community work). When you are accepted to the password protected site you meet a main structure that for most Internet users would be quite easy to navigate in.

Picturing the design of the Community Work course site, I will briefly describe some of the more common parts of the site, and then focus on some quite specific features that profiles this course.

It's learning can be described as an inviting but quite conventional e-learning environment with at starting page for the Community work course presenting the curriculum plan of the course as well as a "Bulletin Board" for news, here often illustrated by colourful photos. The student has also a possibility to easily reach "New and edited elements" and – maybe most important – a navigation tree or menu in the very left column of the screen defining the content of the course information (and thereby the structure and content of the course) divided in headlines and folders.

All teachers and students in the course provide presentations of themselves, either by publishing a photo accompanied by an informative presentation text or by a short illustrated and often personal presentation video. On the home page you can also find a range of general information, instructions and tutorials, settings for personal ePortfolios for keeping the produced material, links to useful sites and a folder containing surveys conducted under the process of the course.

Other folders contain the time plans and schedules for the whole course, giving the student the opportunity to overview the content and assignments for the entire program.
Differing spaces for dialogue are offered: a café open for all for casual meetings, a forum for theme-discussions specifically focusing on course specific themes and finally blogs specifically for smaller student working groups.

A quite specific service offered to the students is that all course literature either can be found scanned in the Learning Material folder, or can be downloaded by presented link addresses. In this way all literature required for the course can be reached via the website.
One very specific and interesting part of the learning material is the Virtual Book, specifically created and designed to fit a virtual learning situation. The Virtual Book is further reviewed in the next chapter.

2.4.3 The Virtual Book

A very interesting part of the e-learning material is the Virtual Book. In this chapter the different parts in this book will shortly be presented.

The Virtual Book is a crucial part of the course material in the e-learning course, especially created and constructed to fit an e-learning environment. It is a part of the It's learning environment, yet can be reached independently from the course. The Virtual Book has taken quite some effort and demanded a lot of time to build, engaging most of the partners in the VirCamp project and in Media Center of Högskolen in Bergen. The result is interesting and challenging.

The Virtual Book (that requires a separate username/password) consists of three parts presented under separate headings: 1) Screen lectures, 2) Triggers and 3) The Community case (see attachment 2 for specific details).

The first part of the Virtual book is **the Screen Lectures**. Nine lectures appear on the site, all video filmed lectures featuring teachers from Norway, South Africa, Germany, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, all but one participating partners. The screen lectures are meant to be used as ordinary lectures, though virtual.

The screen lectures gives a wide range of perspectives on Community Work. The form is mixed, often a videotaped lecture in combination with illustrations (photos, music, power points, short videos). All lectures can also be collected as a text file, pictures inclusive.

The themes covered in the lectures are 1) Introduction, 2) Community, Self and Identity, 3) Community Work I, 4) Community Work II, 5) Appreciative Inquiry and Community Work, 6) Project Work, 7) How to compare theories, 8) Art as a tool for social change and 9) The use of PhotoVoice in Community Work. (Titles and contributors can be found in Attachment 3).

The second part presented in the Virtual book contains nine so called **Triggers**, consisting of scenarios, pictures and/or stories illustrating a current problem or dilemma to stimulate discussions and reflections. One example of a trigger is the "Top-down-TV", showing a range of photos/pictures from people in conventional governing bodies to general assemblies with people concerned in the community. Another example is "User participation", a scenario of an urban environment that slowly grows and changes by adding details in the picture accompanied by music. The students are challenged to discuss feelings and reactions that comes to their mind watching the scenes. (Titles and contributors to the Triggers can be found in Attachment 3).

The third and most composite part of the Virtual Book is the **Community case** or **the Green Park Community**. The Green Park is a virtual park, placed anywhere, described by a range of different actors viewing Green Park from different perspectives.

The Green Park has a modern layout. From one perspective it resembles a well designed illustrated websites and tools connecting to a large amount of links attracting a raising amount of people, like Facebook, Youtube and so on (the site actually includes cuts from Youtube and other sites illustrating a current question or target group). From another perspective the park could be compared to an online Internet game, as appearing in different scenarios and levels, offering various choices on continuing paths. The notion is that the park is created and built as a multilevel case with possibilities to find different perspectives from target groups (like immigrants, youngsters, elderly, homeless) or different subjects or activities (like women's rights, non-tolerance, gatherings, cultural obstacles), all linked to the park.

The Green Park though is somewhat hard to grasp – unless you have thoroughly time to study and/or profit from all parts of the construction. It is easy to get impressed by the ambitious effort – and it looks really good, but yet it is a bit hard to fully give an opinion on the very content, the selection and relevance of the material.

Shortly summarizing; the headline of this chapter - "A dynamic and complex project" – is referring to the picture of a complex project in constant motion creating a multilevel virtual

campus. Lots of skills, efforts and activities have been put down to create and execute this professional international virtual campus involving a range of engaged staff members and project partners. The complexity is challenging and tempting, but also - due to the big amount of components and information - in parts hard to grasp for someone with external perspective, not being fully familiar with the project but aiming at getting an overview.

3 Results: A staff perspective

In chapters 3 and 4 the empirical findings based on interviews with students and staff members are presented. The ambition with the interviews has been to give an opportunity for the interviewed students and staff members to express themselves and give voice to viewpoints and experiences on the VirCamp project in direct dialogue with me as an external evaluator.

Five staff members, teachers and/or partners from five different participating countries have been interviewed on the process and different aspects of building the virtual campus, developing a curriculum and arranging a pilot course in this project. Three students from different participating countries, all studying undergraduate bachelor Social Work at the time for the pilot course, have in the same way been interviewed. The focus in these interviews are similarly on the VirCamp project at large, but also specifically on the pilot course.

The selection of interviewed as well as the questions posed and analyzed have obvious influence on a possible result. This is true for all investigations and evaluations. The amount of interviewed is here limited by the time share for this evaluation. It is thereby worth noting that these interviews only picture the experiences and standpoints of these specific interviewed, not saying anything of the standpoints of other participants. It might also be the case that the persons accepting to be interviewed could be part of a "positive" selection - having a more positive attitude towards the course than others - while for example students who might have more critical views on the course remain unheard. This I have not studied.

Having said that the results are only picturing the voices of those been interviewed, I claim that the material still provides and offers a lot of interesting information and a variety of experiences, patterns and differences that could be taken in account in the future development of the project. This is a possibility to decipher some interesting patterns and differences, rather than claiming to give a general or overall picture of experiences. The results in this evaluation thus are to be seen as one of many contributions to a further knowledge development.

Main focus in interviewing students and staff has been to reflect on questions like the choice to join the pilot course and on how it turned out, that is: what is attractive with this e-learning experience. Other themes are experiences of the pedagogy and forms for working processes as well as viewpoints on the websites and tools and reflections on personal and professional learning outcomes. The staff members additionally have been asked to reflect on the creating process of the VirCamp project from different perspectives, but also organizational opportunities and challenges.

The results or findings are analyzed and sorted in themes, picturing experiences, standpoints, hindrances and possibilities that are expressed in the interviews. The interviewed staff members are given occasional numbers named R1-R5 (R=respondent). The students are named A, B and C.

In the following parts of chapter 3 the focus is on interviews with staff members, being teachers and/or partners in the project. One of the staff members starts off by shortly describing the project as follows in a "*one-sentence description*":

A European funded project to enable social workers throughout Europe to undertake an educational programme through e-learning to learn about social work practice throughout Europe. (R4)

3.1 Personal engagement an important driving force

The interviewed staff members were initially asked to capture or rather describe their personal driving forces and roles being part of the VirCamp project.

The interviewed are expressing a great amount of personal commitment and engagement in the VirCamp project, all with roots in and experiences from the prior VIRCLASS concept. The personal driving forces are expressed as an interest in international or cross-cultural social issues, a challenge to develop an international specialization, a curiosity and urge to learn from and exchange experiences with colleagues in other countries, or a will to be a part of developing e-learning pedagogy and education and creating an international virtual campus. One of the staff members clarifies: "*For sure there is a good stage for everyone* "(R4) and another claim: "*The personal driving power is important. This is not cooperation between institutions; it is cooperation between individuals/persons. But still – agreements are needed to get the prerequisites*" (R5).

The interviewed also describe a range of different roles, all explicitly multi-tasking: Being a developer (of ideas, curriculum, e-learning modules, Virtual Book, etc), teacher and/or head teacher (working in and/or responsible for a module), Work Package group member and/or leader, member of steering group and/or research group, proof reader, and so on.

All seem to be involved in a combination of different roles which turns out to be significant for participating in the project.

3.2 Organisational settings and attitudes

This chapter mainly mirrors the experience of the importance of a match between personal engagement and organisational settings and the process of recruiting students.

The personal interest or commitment obviously needs an evident support from the organization or institution to be sustainable. The interviewed emphasise the need to firmly establish the project in their home institution, making the institution adopt the project as an important part of the educational programme. Several of the interviewed are troubled by problems with institutions or organisations that on one hand shows interest in being part of the VirCamp project e.g. as a part of strengthening an international profile, but on the other hand abandons the engaged contact person when it comes to action.

A common experience is that the institutions or organisations say yes to the project, but give no or little support to the engaged contact person finding himself on his own: "*It is actually OUR project, not MY personal project*" (R3). One of the interviewed claims: "*I am much more alone than I thought from the beginning*", describing how planned potential cooperating colleagues suddenly disappeared to other assignments: "*There is a lot of verbal support concerning the importance of internationalisation, but when it comes down to getting people*

involved" (R4). This lack of cooperation and concrete support seems to be a somewhat unexpected hardship.

The discussion how to handle this situation differs. Some interviewed are self- critical, suspecting that they did not do enough to establish the project from the beginning: "*Perhaps we did not prepare the institutions enough…maybe we did not do a good job presenting the project to the institutions*" (R2). The interviewed claims that the current institutions or organisations have not fully grasped the importance of the project, but also that the time schedule might have been tight:

> *We said YES (to the project) because we wanted the Community Work course in the curricula. And here we had the chance. If we didn't do this now we would lose the opportunity. If we had said no, then we should have had to wait 5-6 years more. We wanted so much to be in the project.* (R2)

In this case it obviously was an offer or opportunity too good to resist. Others claim that they have been too optimistic, meaning that they might have neglected the importance not only to more thoroughly inform different key persons at the institutions or organisations, but also to guard that necessary formal frameworks and prerequisites are at hand: "*It is a political decision…You have to say NO if there are not the needed conditions. We have to be realistic*" (R2). "Realistic" in this case referring to having a reasonable working situation facilitated by support from the home organisation.

Another highlighted issue is the necessity to give the current e-learning course legitimacy. The way the institution handles scores or credits from the VirCamp course is considered giving essential signals to colleagues and students showing the status of the course. At some institutions or organisations the course thus has been administratively placed outside the program, the students not being able to use the credits as part of the program. This obviously causes trouble as is makes it harder to motivate students to attend the course.

This problem turned out to be a challenge even in the prior VIRCLASS concept: "*Not all partners were able to integrate the curricula in the program. Looking back, the way it was integrated in the curricula was not the strongest part of the project. It was a threat to the continuation*" (R1). Since then more institutions have accepted the current course as countable, but for those who still are negotiating the problem remains effecting the recruitment to the course: "*You can't ask the students for taking this course as some kind of a spare time activity alongside the ordinary courses*" (R3). It is considered as a basic prerequisite of crucial importance to be able to use the gained credits within the ordinary education program, to be able to attract students. "*To get full credits from the course is a basic thing. But a full legitimacy also includes that the course of course should be presented in the ordinary course catalogue*" (R3).

Thus recruiting students is considered being one of the crucial challenges launching a course. The methods of recruitment used in VirCamp is shortly formulated as "both written and oral", referring to online material, written pamphlets and information face-to-face. One of the interviewed stresses the importance of personal contacts, highlighting an occasion when visiting teachers from the partner institutions met students which created positive reactions: "*It makes a change when students meet teachers from different countries who inform…Maybe the best is a combination of meeting teachers from other institutions and getting a written material.*" (R5).

Some claim though that it is hard to get students interested, which is disappointing. One reason beside the above mentioned is the hardship to make time tables match between different education programmes in different countries.

At the same time the view on the target groups differs and worth discussing. One of the interviewed vividly presented what he considered being the four target groups:

The first group is students in different countries from the campuses. The interviewed describes that the course is often offered to the best students; not only the ones that speaks good English, but also who have good marks and are motivated. "*A bit elitist target group in our case*", the interviewed argue and continue: "*It is a selective process where we want to involve the best students*" (R2).

The second target group, the professionals, is described as problematic to involve. If they are not students at the home institution they have to pay. Besides there are only few places in VirCamp pilot course to distribute for the single institution, so the first group – the students – are prioritized.

The third target group is described as the teachers. It is necessary to interest and present the courses for the teachers; otherwise the continuation will not be sustainable. Yet a fourth target group is considered being the representatives of the institutions or organisations. The need to inform and further establish the concept is crucial.

Other interviewed settles with the first two groups, campus students and professionals, more closely following the curriculum.

Besides the importance of reasonable organisational settings and prerequisites for the teacher engagement in Vircamp and for recruiting students, all of the interviewed consider the exchange, following the networking in this and earlier project, have not only enriched themselves personally and professionally but also been a benefit to the home institutions or organisations in many ways.

3.3 The intertwined influence of VIRCLASS

The experiences from the prior e-learning concept VIRCLASS repeatedly shows to be of vital importance in a wide range of senses for the current VirCamp project. Many of the partners in VirCamp thus have a common history working together which has evolved as a solid base for cooperation. The VIRCLASS concept starting in 2004 did, according to the interviewed, showed to provide unique opportunities creating and developing a first pedagogical e-learning concept, starting to develop e-learning modules and materials and gaining initial routines, skills and knowledge as e-learning teachers.

Some of the teachers had prior experience from working with virtual learning environments from their home institutions, but then used course sites mostly as a tool for spreading information and material or for "blended learning"[16]. The interest and curiosity around e-learning was a driving force to join the VirCamp project, but the interviewed also describe how the use of the e-learning concept differed when being the only arena for communication:

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[16] Often based on on-campus learning in combination with using web tools.

"*This was quite another thing, a full size distance e-learning with another kind of pedagogy, another structure. It was comparative and the students had to cooperate. You even had to have activities in real time*" (R3).

One challenge also concerned being a part of a group of teachers not belonging to your home institution, with different backgrounds and experiences:

> *We discovered lots of differences between the schools and universities: different ways of looking at things, different perspectives and cultures, different practical prerequisites. But also how you judge and put credits, how you design courses and... Practical difficulties like different timetables for courses. We have had to compromise, but it never worked out that well in our own module system.* (R3)

In the prior VIRCLASS modules the knowledge and skills gradually grew: "*It was lots of work to develop VIRCLASS in the first place. But then we could use that. We got routines*" (R5). The experiences encouraged and stimulated to continue: "*It was quite successful, well prepared and good considering the level of e-learning. It was content orientated and motivating. I am proud of being a part of the VIRCLASS*" (R1).

Even if the first years of VIRCLASS is described as fully oriented or focused on the pedagogy and the content - being social work and community work – it was not only the pedagogy or content that seems to have been of importance. The way or organizing and the organisational framework with administration and building of networks provided useful experiences and a solid base for further development. "*The most important was to organize and continue this type of learning. Even more important than the content of the module*" (R1). Starting as a EUSW-funded project, VIRCLASS continued as a joint project for participating institutions and organisations, the administration and project leader being situated and supported by Högskolen in Bergen: The project leader "*…developed a consortium of agencies with funding, also from her own school and the Norway Opening University*" (R4). To form a consortium turned out to be one of the strategies strengthening the construction ensuring a continuation. An application for EU funding concerning the growing concept VirCamp was a next step: "*So a lot of the structure was already in place through VIRCLASS*" (R4).

In VIRCLASS the module on Community Work soon emerged as a common interest of content after setting the pedagogical frame; "*We had as part of VIRCLASS developed a number of modules, like a module on social work practise, on poverty and welfare*" (R4). When the ideas of VirCamp developed the interviewed describe it as a "natural" upgrading or even a "wild" step further to an international virtual campus. The experience from VIRCLASS gave the courage and strength to continue: "*It made it all easier as we had been experiencing VIRCLASS*" (R5).

The VirCamp concept thus pedagogically being described as a "wild" and evolved upgrading vis-à-vis VIRCLASS, it is also stressed that it technically contains "*a much bigger amount of information…, triggers, active blogs, chats, Google doc with shared documents, assignments, and so on. Many technical things. It makes it complex both for teachers and students.*" (R5). VirCamp explicitly is described as being a more advanced design actually conceptualizing the vision of a full virtual campus far beyond - but also including - VIRCLASS. The pilot course is seen just as one of many courses in a coming extended virtual campus: "*The virtual campus is all about education and should contain more courses. More than we have. So as this module that was already on the agenda – this project was also a good opportunity to develop*

this module as well" (R1). The VirCamp concept is rather expressed as being a next step towards an international e-learning environment, one of the goals being to build a worldwide international Bachelor of Social Work. One challenge ahead is described as further developing an organisation, "*creating a kind of administrative module to manage such a cooperative activity when it is no longer a project*" (R3).

The circle seems to close. It is not only VIRCLASS that has enriched the VirCamp project; it is shown as much to be "*VirCamp enriching the continuation of VIRCLASS*" (R5).

3.4 A dynamic pre course working process and a distinct leadership

This chapter highlights the internal working climate, including the experiences of a supportive leadership and a troublesome time optimism.

The environment or atmosphere concerning the working and developing processes both in VIRCLASS and VirCamp is often lyrically described. The interviewed separately gives an illustration of a most creative and respectful experimental working environment, open to new ideas and explicitly based on the team and common team efforts.

> *The history of working together creating the material and curriculum has been very very good. People become more than colleagues, more of close friends. We have worked for a long time and we have met a lot of times. And we do also work online as well, chats, Skype-meetings and so on.* (R4)

The opportunity to work together and to get to know each other is cherished and a solid ground for creativity and mutual decisions. The process is described as characterized by "*…dialogue with consensus. It does not mean that everybody agrees. It means that with different opinions we agree on how we are going to go at it…We have actually always reached consensus on how we are going to do things*" (R4). One perspective is the respect, another one is openness to discussions:

> *It is a very respectful environment. And lots of discussions, sometimes very strong discussions, tough discussions. Even clashes of cultures. But it always is with respect. The team situation is a good one. Synergy between persons supports us to work in a constructive way. And there is always space to say what we think and to come back and talk things over. The situation is a good one.* (R1)

This also shows in situations of misunderstandings or disagreements. Again it is referred to the openness and respectful climate in the group. Disagreements, it is said, is handled in an open and satisfactory way and this supports the confidence to work openly: "*If there is a misunderstanding there is always an opportunity to talk about it in the open*"(R2). If there is not time enough to finish the discussion, the interviewed rely on the project leader to follow it up at next convenient occasion.

> *In the interchange of ideas there were of course disagreements during these days, it is normal… But the ideas also reverberated and got feedback from the others: 'What a good idea. How can we do that?' A very creative process… I have always been very engaged in the process, including in disagreements and they were handled in a satisfactory way. I don't stop myself from saying things.* (R4)

In this Högskolen in Bergen, being the institutional initiator to VIRCLASS and VirCamp, is held in very high esteem, being regarded as crucial in getting the project(s) running and developing in a creative way: "*Bergen is the power machine, the train of the project. It is at the present necessary*" (R2). The concept "Bergen" though is often referring specifically to the project leader herself, being seen as "*the prime mover, a powerful force moving things forward*"(R4). The descriptions are many and illustrative, the project leader being described as a hardworking, skilled and visionary person with power enough to drive a project forward, and sensitivity enough to respectfully support, engaged and involve partners and organisations.

"*In the early stages you could not see where it was going, but she kind of had a vision of how things would develop. And worked towards materializing – making a reality of that vision. She has done a very good job*". So the "*tough lady*"(R1) who has "*provided very strong effective and powerful leadership*"(R4) and is willing to do the work gets praised for her efforts:

> We would not have been were we are today without the tough lady who knows exactly what she wants. She is a very good communicator, good at convincing people, open to hear the others' options, able to search and find solutions, able to switch positions. In the lead, but open to other persons' perspectives. (R1)

At the same time it is emphasized that this is not a one person project, but rather a joint project: "*I don't have the idea that this is HER project, it is OUR project. But we need somebody that is in the lead*" (R1).

One of the credits given Bergen is referring to the ambition not to hold on to but to share the "ownership" and responsibility of the project with the partners, by building an organisation that is aimed at participation, cooperation and sustainability. "*But*", as one of the interviewed claims, "*as the universities of Europe are a split and complex world we would never had gained a cooperation without somebody taking the lead and main responsibility*" (R3). Obviously there is a need for a driving force, "*a power machine*", but at the same time the awareness of a potential risk: "*It is a balance. The balance between the need for somebody to take decisions centrally and the need to involve everybody in the decisions...I think it worked well*" (R4).

Another highlighted issue is the ambition to disseminate the project, by not only focusing on education and teaching, but also having the effort to turn the experiences into publications and put great emphasis on research.

One of the problems launched is a time optimism connected to the project showing as a mismatch. A common experience is that the planning has not been realistic referring to the amount of time needed. Interviewed find problems to combine the assessment of being part of the project (teaching, working and presenting results in Work Packages) and to handle a changing workload in the home organisation. Wanting to keep up the speed with the partners in the project in combination with worrying about not delivering material as planned even could affect the health:

> I have been working a lot of days more than we were planning. I have been working weekends and I have to stop working, to take care of myself. I am worrying a lot.

Sometimes I felt desperate because I don't have the time – it is like a jumping process. (R2)

Even if the latter quote is the most explicit, the same discussion repeats in all but one interviews, mentioning the good cooperation as a strong reason to stay: "*The group of teachers have been working very well together. It has been far too much work, but a lot of gain both personally and professionally. We became almost like a family*" (R5).

The amount of time invested in the VIRCLASS/VirCamp courses is by comparison to an "ordinary" course on campus described as unrealistic and a bit too "tied up". But it is mainly the time optimism that is stressed: "*We were optimistic concerning the work when we sent the application to the Commission. We promised to do this and this and this. That was not realistic*" (R2). A stimulating but heavy workload in combination with little support from the home organisation makes way for thoughts about what is reasonable in the long run, which causes concern and worries about future sustainability.

The working process in the VirCamp project seems to have been finding a creative, productive and at large a most appreciated form. An initiator balancing power and participation get a lot of credit. But at the same time there seems to be a certain mismatch between the amount of time planned and the time required to fulfil the stated ambitions. This is not least emphasized when circumstances beyond the project is at hand, for instance at the home institution. One challenge remaining is finding a time balance getting the project forward but not pushing the engaged over the edge.

3.5 Being an e-learning teacher

In this chapter the interviewed reflects on experiences from being an e-learning teacher in an international environment.

In the interviews there is partly a close connection between the reasons mentioned on why students are interested in the course and why the teachers want to be part of the concept. The challenges are expressed on many levels, focusing the awareness "*We have really a lot to learn from each other*"(R3), referring to inspiring meetings with colleagues from different countries and exciting exchange of knowledge, widening the views:

I have become more European. You take a lot of things for granted in your own country, now you have to think it over. I had to explain why. I learned a lot. You even learn a lot about your own country. That is really interesting and a big challenge for both me and the students. (R1)

The cooperation also gives specific gains focusing the theme of the pilot course, exploring community work in other countries. One aspect mentioned is the challenging connection with new literature and concepts:

You get in contact with literature that you otherwise wouldn't have. A quite new field of literature opens up, literature that was relatively unknown to me. Suddenly we have to create a common reading list in English. For instance I never used the concept anti-oppressive practice in my teaching before. How to handle a concept like that is challenging and demanding. It opens up for new perspectives. (R3)

One interviewed wants to go even further, seeing the possibility to ad and use even non-English material with contributions from all over the world: "*Like the people from South Africa can contribute, from America, Sweden, Norway...Open the search even to Latin America. Widen the view in the curricula*" (R2). A possible development is that the students could be active in contributing: "*Students can give input from different literature. So we can reach different parts of the world, like French students can get material from Morocco or other parts of Africa*" (R2).

The constructive effects of teacher exchange between countries are being exploited: "*We realized that there could also be a switch between teachers and that the teachers could be tutors for teachers from other countries*" (R1). Exciting, challenging and enriching both personally and professionally are concepts often mentioned.

But it is also emphasised that the hard work and many meetings before the start of the course have been essential for the development and cooperation. "*You have to have confidence in your colleague. The teachers have to work together. It is important that the teachers meet. It had not been possible if we had not met.*" (R5). The necessity to put things in writing is emphasised, different teachers from different countries not only being able to give the students the same information and answers but also make the content and message clearer to themselves.

Even the language turns out to be a challenge, not only for students but also for the participating partners. Being aware that in some countries the English could be harder to handle than in others:"*Some teachers even wanted to have an interpreter in the beginning, they were not used to speak English*"(R5), there also seems to have been a readiness and supportive acceptance to the occurring difficulties: "*In the beginning it was hard to understand and talk, but I felt confidence in them and they gave me the time to improve*" (R2).

Several interviews clearly regard the experience as being an enriching and important part of their teacher development: "*The group of teachers has been working very well together. It has been far too much work, but a lot of gain both personally and professionally*" (R5). Some even describe how this experience and cooperation fundamentally have influenced and in some cases even radically changed the teaching at the home institution:

> *By working with VirCamp we have been more organized, more strategic and have new ideas for research. Also in the ways of teaching; We now give more importance to the work of the students, give more input to the students' work. And participating – we give them voice. Then things have changed completely. It has changed the concrete behaviour in the classrooms. And the students give good feedback to us; they think that we work in a very good way.* (R2)

Another teacher gives an example referring to the open portfolio system that has emerged, starting in the prior VIRCLASS project: "*I am trying to implant the pedagogical thinking of the portfolio system in the program I am working at home. It is something that ties the courses together in the end of the program*" (R3).

Again the importance of the experience from VIRCLASS is emphasized: "*Teachers got trained in VIRCLASS which made it easier when they started to work in VirCamp. It is important to start THINKING around e-learning that it is only via Internet. That can be a bit*

tricky". As a lot of the curriculum was there from before it turned out much easier to start develop VirCamp: "*There were many experienced people*" (R5).

The experience of being a e-learning teacher in this international environment turns out to be very positive, although a lot of hard work are mentioned. Obviously the personal and professional gain is considered very valuable, worth the hard work.

3.6 The open feedback and open portfolios

One concept developed in and adopted from VIRCLASS is a so called "open" feedback to students presented on the net. In this chapter this open feedback will be in focus after a short introduction of different portfolios.

The students get a range of assignments to fulfil during the course. When working on e.g. producing a paper the student uses a personal Working portfolio closed to everyone but the student. When ready the student thereafter publishes the paper in an individual Assessment portfolio, in which all work produced during the course is collected (individual and group assignments). This is where everybody with access to the course can read all the papers or other work produced by the student and also the feedback from the teachers to the student, it is the open portfolio.

After getting feedback and comments in the open portfolio the student has the possibility to process and improve her/his work. Having fulfilled all the required assignments the student then can continue to the examination level also reflecting on learning process and outcomes before the teacher starts the final examination procedure.

The concept with an open feedback system is described as a transparent feedback to students. The view of the open concept varies among the interviewed, on a scale from very enthusiastic to a more neutral but positive standpoint. One interviewed describes the standpoint at the introduction of the concept being "*reluctant but willing to try*" (R4), also illustrating the controversy in connection to the suggestion and the thereby proceeding reflections:

> *It is not a traditional grip, we never told all students about a single students' work. It seemed to me like a violation of confidentiality. The idea that they were experimenting with was that everybody could learn from the feedback that other students got. There was a lot of controversy about it. I was reluctant, but agreed to try. I made sure that student A should know that the work is open to all the students and that the others can read the feedback.* (R4)

Another issue of hesitation concerned the way to formulate the feedback, could it be given the same ways as before? The finding was that:

> *You modify the feedback a little bit - but not that much. You still have to focus on the positive and the weaknesses and treat the student with dignity...You can't make the other students think that this student is really bad or anything like that. So you have to be mindful... a way to communicate to all the students. So in the end of the module I would say to the students: Make sure that you look at the feedback given to other students, because there are things in your work that I am not going to write about as I have already given a similar feedback to another student.* (R4)

Eventually this teacher became more positive, seeing also the open way as "a bit economic".

The "enthusiastic" interviewed do not at all mention any controversy around the issue, one of them on the contrary claiming that "*I don't recall there was any hesitation concerning this*" (R3). These interviewed find the open system very inspiring and a very good way of spreading knowledge – not only about content but also signalling that openness is a developing concept in itself. The idea is described as not judging or giving traditional credits on the papers, but rather regard theme as documents stimulating a development and learning process.

> *The open feedback is very positive. We worked it out in VIRCLASS and I am convinced that this is good. We know that the students read each others feedback. I can tell a student to read the reflections sent to another student and also to read what another student has written.* (R5)

Thus it is considered as a pedagogical grip giving signals on that it is important to inspire and learn from each other, focusing on the learning process of the student. This, the interviewed claim, has a direct connection to theories by Vygotsky, Ramsden and Schön supporting the idea of a portfolio system.

The open feedback, though an untraditional way of giving feedback obviously has been a rewarding experience for the interviewed. One aspect worth mentioning is that the portfolios, by my understanding, are open until the final examination. Still I find the concept quite complex, worthy of a more severe discussion.

3.7 Websites and e-learning material

In this chapter mainly views and experiences of e-learning material in the pilot course is presented.

Discussing the e-learning material appearing in the pilot course is discussing both form and content. The material was created in cooperation by teachers and partners in the project, some being more active than others but all invited in the process. Many parts were already in place already created in connection with VIRCLASS, but in VirCamp a new curriculum was worked out and the e-learning material further developed.

A crucial part of the further development influenced by the international situation included discussions on the current subject of the pilot course, Social work and Community work: "*The most of important in the curriculum plan is to decide what kind of Community Work we are talking about. In some countries -maybe outside Europe - the Community Work is done in the margin*"(R5).

In this the creating of new e-learning material became an essential and most concrete illustration visualizing how the discussions of content in combination with actually participating in the creation process of a community module could trigger the cooperation. There has been an open scene for trial and error. In this new competencies were explored:

We created and delivered the first module. We did the screen lectures on the module. (Name) has a strong rooted non-textual oriented social work education; working with audio images, movies, pictures, things like that. A very creative approach. (R4)

The combination of different competences appeared to be essential and fruitful. The cooperation with and the technical support from the Media centre in Bergen is described as a vital and influential example:

They helped us to create the screen lectures, the video introductions..... That might have raised the standard of the production of the material. What do social workers know about sound reproduction, sound images and so on? They are explaining to us how they are able to work within budget. (R4)[17]

It is stressed though that the Media centre did not have an input in the content, they have basically been concentrating on the technical parts. The content – the ideas, the cases, the stories – were created in shared responsibility by the participating partners and teachers; the "*social work educators of the group*":

*In the early stages of VIRCLASS (*name of partner and teacher*) was a prime mover of audio/voice showing by example were to go. So he would bring things from the Internet that would powerfully illustrate social issues/problems, showing methods of making things clearer. As a result of that in my module I created a virtual museum of racism and discrimination.* (R4)

The concept of VirCamp thus turned out to be using VIRCLASS as an important takeoff but developing its own much more complex construction. The development of different web tools and sites is mentioned as one of the characteristics of the virtual campus VirCamp. The interviewed point out that the VirCamp concept differs from the prior project in many ways:

In VirCamp it is a different concept with the Green Park community. There are also more tools for meeting and interactivity; role playing, Skype and things like that. That is a big difference. The VirCamp project is about trying to building a Internet based Bachelor, that is a difference. Then VIRCLASS becomes one part of VirCamp. (R3)

The interviews show an obvious curiosity and interest in the possibilities, some giving credit to the project for a gained openness to using new tools in teaching and education. Sharing experiences and findings with colleagues is seen as stimulating.

At the same time it is not always that easy to keep up the speed and adopt all the new equipment, either it is about content or websites or tools: "*The Park, it is lots of materials..... There is hardly time to look at all the things in the park. It would take many hours*" (R5). To get acquainted with and use new web tools is by some seen as a somewhat time consuming challenge, it takes time; "think it was a little bit too much technical in the beginning" (R5).

At the same time there are few complaints about technical problems, even if it for instance at the online conference tool Vitero not always work smoothly: "*There is always someone who does not get it to work. But after all – very little trouble. I like the VITERO-conferences, but it*

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[17] One result of this cooperation – starting already at the time for developing VIRCLASS – is that the project leader of VirCamp in cooperation with the Media Centre at Högskolen in Bergen, runs courses in e-pedagogy.

demands preparations" (R5). A little bit of technical problems is something you have to be prepared for. Instead the possibilities are pointed out, for instance using Skype: "*Skype is good when it is available. It is an important experience this time – to combine the written with the spoken. Not all students write as fast as they talk. Some get behind. Then Skype is a possibility*" (R5). Sometimes the wish to use Skype fails as not all students or teachers have Skype. The ones who have though find it very handy: "*For me who cannot call without going through the central telephone centre Skype is a good thing*"(R5).

Some of the interviewed though point out that it is a risk that the big amount of websites, tools and information causes confusion rather than clarification. It might be too much. A discussion would be desirable on the possibility to reduce the amount of Internet tools used. At the same time the amount assignments could be reflected on as well as need to be more clear and distinct concerning demands and expectations.

This being a pilot course with an experimental set up gives good opportunities for adjustments. At the same time it is claimed that only small differences are necessary in the pilot. New teachers joining the course must be given the opportunity to find their way of doing it. The interviewed, though very enthusiastic about the course, thus points out some concrete details or issues worth discussing and/or adjusting in future courses.

3.8 Learning outcomes for students; a teacher's view

In this chapter the interviewed on one hand reflect on views of learning outcomes for the students, on the other hand on why some students stay and why others drop out.

The interviewed state that students have expressed a personal and raising interest in exchanging experiences within an international setting, but also have found it fun and inspiring with many new perspectives. They have adopted and found the e-learning concept a good way of learning, opening possibilities to study even in situations when your personal life situation would make it impossible to go abroad. Their views have widened and they have got a lot of knowledge not only about comparing social problems, prerequisites and welfare models abroad, but also to a very big extent having learned a lot about their home countries. One way has been coping with new ways of working and new conceptions:"*They have learned to work with Community Work. Still I am impressed with the results. They have come up with project ideas and have been meeting anti-oppressive literature. It has been an aha-reaction*" (R5).

Another attractive part is considered being the attitudes and pedagogical ideas including participatory methods, adding not only new knowledge but also new ways of working: "*Community Work and bottom-up perspective have been new things for the students. They are used to get told that this is the way you should solve the problem, here instead you are asked 'What do you want to do with the park'*" (R5). The students have expressed that the course has widened their perception and added new perspectives.

Some students though have been frustrated when fellow students did not show up on the net, feeling at bit abandoned. One of the coming challenges thereby is to find more developed forms for getting acquainted and in close dialogue on the net. Students having good communication with other students tend to stay in the course, to support this contact emerging

is important. Finding forms for supporting creative and differing kinds of meetings between the students is crucial.

Another part of the learning that students, according to the interviewed, find very worthwhile and inspiring is the prior mentioned open feedback and open portfolio system.

A challenge in many e-learning courses is the drop out rate, the VirCamp pilot course turns out to be no exception. In the beginning of the pilot course 51 students applied and joined the course, whereof 25 of the students fulfilled. Asked to reflect on the reasons for students dropping out, the interviewed present mostly individual explanations – but also a couple of more technical ones.

Some students are regarded as time optimists, miscalculating the time demanded to follow the course but soon realizing that it did not work out. Others simply thought it was too much work. A few students is seen as having personal reasons for dropping out, family reasons, illness, etc. But the interviewed also figure that quite some students actually did not manage the English, they found it too hard. In addition some might have found that the pedagogical form was too tied up, unlike the free design at many universities. Being in the pilot requires activity on a regular basis, otherwise you tend to miss deadlines or to get behind, making it easy to give up and quit the course.

The interviewed describes as a risk being too eager to accept all students applying to the course – even if the prerequisite is not at hand.

More technical reasons mentioned are students not having the adequate technical equipment needed. It might be an Internet connection that is not fast enough; or maybe not having the Internet access at school that would be required.

The students remaining in the course are described as students with personal interest in getting experiences within an international setting. The idea is that these students also have found the e-learning concept interesting and fitting, some being experienced Internet users familiar with chats, forums and so on, others getting attracted by the challenges in this pedagogical form.

3.9 Main gain

> *We are small partners and not very famous, but my feeling is that we are constructing a space not only for academics but also for students and professionals in the future. I value that we had an idea in the beginning and it is coming true. I believe in this project.* (R2)

These lyrical words can summarize a pride that many of the interviewed express. There has been a lot of hard work - and a lot of gain. There has been a lot of worries – and laughter. And above all there has been a lot of exchange – on many levels. The impression of being part of something that makes a difference is outspoken: "*I feel I am involved in a project – a long time project. It is a project of a community of participants, of social workers – European, world wide*" (R2).

The big point emphasized is the international perspective, referring to that social work is at hand in all countries in the world. "*My views have changed; the view on social work, on our society and so on*" (R3). Other interviewed confirm the parallel processes that are at hand involving both students and staff members:

> *The most important thing is that the European students meet each other and find how different Europe is; to compare, to exchange experiences, to do a joint project in cooperation, to learn from each other. It is very enriching to be together across (borders) in Europe. And it is a parallel process with the teachers. I have learned a lot about welfare systems and other things.* (R5)

There is an obvious parallel process between students and teachers learning from each other. One of the learning outcomes from the work with VirCamp is that this is a possible way to make way for internationalisation – even in case you cannot go abroad due to factors like family reasons, handicap, economy, etc. "*It is a world that opens up for these students. It might even be a good way to prepare for future stays abroad – or reflecting on experiences afterwards*"(R3).

While some of the interviewed are a little bit leaned back, others lean forward, expressing ideas and dreams of even further future development:

> *My dream is to live the project and to see to that the project continues and stays alive. I want to continue to work in the project and involve more colleagues. Keep it alive, even make it better. In the beginning there was a world wide view. The idea was to have students from all over the world… The vision is to have a world wide VirCamp.* (R2)

Summarizing some of the prerequisites being highlighted to successfully run a project like VirCamp the support of the home university, institution or department is considered crucial. The interviewed find that without this support there are obvious difficulties to find sustainable forms for engagement. There is also a need to have skills and to be persistent concerning coping with a lot of bureaucracy – especially if it is an EU project.

The organizational skills include creating structures wherein people can operate and co operate the interviewed claim. It is important to go for quality in content and on organizational level. A good management is needed, the interviewed continue, although the management styles can differ. Crucial is to give people responsibilities and monitor them as well. But there is also a need for creating a team that cooperates, with confidence in the participating colleagues and good working procedures. Listening to the interviewed it is vital to see to that everybody is included – not excluded, but also that there is a reasonable level to fulfil the project, rather being realistic than taking on too much.

Finally the need for a vision is emphasized – having a real sense of details on how it is going to be like in the future. And on how to get things going forward in that direction.

Listening to the staff members many of these prerequisites have been at hand in VirCamp, although others are not satisfactory. The support from the participating partners offering reasonable working conditions for engaged staff members is necessary to secure further sustainable solutions.

4   A student perspective: The VirCamp course launched

In chapter 4 the interviewed students share their points of view.
Three students from different participating countries have been interviewed, all studying undergraduate bachelor Social Work at the time for the pilot course.

The focus in these interviews are both on the VirCamp project at large, but also specifically on the pilot course. Sometimes the answers thereby also come close to an "ordinary" course evaluation. In the same way as with the staff members in prior chapter, themes and opinions appearing in the student material are here thematized and gradually presented.

4.1 Making a choice

One of the first questions posed to the students concerned how they initially found or got in contact with the pilot course Community Work and what they found attractive enough to motivate applying for the course.

In spreading the word of the course, personal contacts obviously are important. Getting information and encouragement from engaged and interested staff at the own university has raised interest and motivation for the students leading to applying for the course. One of the students mentions that the initial curiosity grew after getting an e-mail in the student mailbox, checking out the website and further receiving a flyer with sufficient information. "*And I already wanted to do something in English... this was the first opportunity so I thought 'Yes, why not'*" (A).

The students were all studying social work at different undergraduate levels, either in the middle or in the end of the education programme. All students could include the 15 ECTS credits and replace ordinary scores. Answering the question if this fortunate fact has had an impact on choosing the VirCamp course, two differing views appeared: On one hand it is mentioned as an important reason to fulfil the course. "*We could choose it as an eligible course and count it as a regular course. That made it interesting*"(B). On the other it is considered of little concern, the students would have chosen the course in any case just out of interest. All students though appreciate explicitly to get the option to use it as a countable part of their education.

What especially caught the students´ attention was the opportunity to get in close contact with students and teachers from other countries and thereby getting the possibility to exchange experiences and learn about differing views and prerequisites concerning social work and social work studies. The curiosity and urge to learn more about social problems in other European countries and to compare and discover similarities and differences are especially challenged by the course being in English.

To get acquainted with Community work as such in the home country as well as in other countries is mentioned as very stimulating, especially when these international studies present the possibility to learn more about international matters even in case you do not have the opportunity or the urge to physically move or go abroad. The stimulating meetings with foreign students and professors from different countries being in the field of Social work are still at hand.

At the same time the students express that they were not really sure of the course layout or pedagogy. "*I didn't really have an idea on how it would work. I thought that we would mostly do work on our own*" (B). The expectation – or maybe rather fear - to be working alone without much interaction turned out to be the contrary; the interaction showed to be rich, varying and intense: "*There were lots of interaction and discussions and fighting and you fall out and get friends again and you disagree on things and another time you agree. Very lively discussions. It was something completely different from what I had expected*" (B). The latter told by a very satisfied course participant who claims that the contact with the teachers on the pilot quite unexpectedly turned out to be is even better than corresponding contacts at the home "live" campus.

4.2 The first meeting with the course

The descriptions of the first meeting with the course differ widely and show three scenarios. One of the students wondered "what on earth" – being frustrated and confused the first weeks on the course. "*All time was spent on finding your way on different sites, log in here and log in there, look for the people in your group, look up your assigned teachers and so on. It felt corny*" (B). But gradually the student found that the exercises had filled their purpose. After the first weeks a good base was created, the structure of the course easier to comprehend and the exercises showed to be a big help in the continuation of the course.

The second scenario was presented by an experienced e-learning student, eager and able to quite fast explore the structure of the presented sites and tools. The first discussion online with a fellow student is what comes in mind thinking of the first meeting with the course.

> *We were talking about our own community. And it was interesting to see that we had some … the same things like integrations problems, housing problems and so on. It was quite amazing. We live in different countries and we have the same problems!* (A)

It turns out that this communication was due to one of the first assignments on the course. The student especially appreciated that it was not only in writing, but rather "*some interaction in live chats. We could ask questions, and also explain some more things*" (A). This really boosted the interest.

The third picture is of a quite different kind. Confusion and frustration are the main feelings described by a student that missed the introduction due to exams at the own university. The experience of getting no help, interest or answers from the professor at the own university (though being engaged in the pilot course) confirmed the feeling of being set aside and being confused using "*all these platforms*". "*I found it very confusing. I didn't know where I could find my tasks, I didn't know anything*" (C). Being a late starter there was a lot of work to catch up, and many of the fellow students from the same university and in the same situation decided to leave the pilot course. The student describes how their decision to drop out was partly due to the feeling of being pushed:

> *They really asked us almost every day: 'Are you still in the course' and so on. We were really put under pressure. And this - I think – is one of the reasons why a lot of students at my university stopped and told them 'No we are not'. It was a bit too much pressure sometimes.* (C)

The student claims to fully understand the need for the course staff to know if the student is still on the course. "*But they could have maybe waited a bit more*" (C).

4.3 Websites and learning material

The students being interviewed have at the time for the interview experienced the full pilot course. Thus, being asked to give a guided tour through websites and learning materials of the course, the complexity of the sites and materials shows.

Some of the first comments concern the amount of websites and tools; they are too many the students claim. And – which is considered more problematic - at any of these sites news could appear.

> *We used the Google group, we used the platform that we had at the Högskolen in Bergen and of course our e-mail addresses. We always had to look at all the sites if there is something new, a new task or…. I already have three e-mail addresses so this is my forth. I would appreciate one platform like It's learning. That would have been enough.* (C)

Consequently a suggestion raised is to consider gathering the course tools and skip some. What to skip though is not clearly expressed.

One more technical or structural hardship or rather cause of irritation is that you have to have a number of different usernames and passwords on the different sites. This also being the case even **within** the site It's learning - when you want to open the learning material Virtual Book. An explicit wish is to have but one username and one password to handle.

Another technical comment concerns the mobility within the websites: If you want to go back to a previous page on the site then you have to start from the very beginning. "*You have to go the whole way back, back to choosing Community course (*on the Högskolen in Bergen main It´s learning website, my comment*). Backing between pages is not possible which makes it tricky*" (B).

A far more positive and overall standpoint is that *It´s learning* is an inviting and comprehensive course site, "*It has a nice introduction when you open the course*" (A). Even for a beginner in e-learning the site works out well, at least after an initial time of training: "*I like that these files are like computer files... The design was similar to an ordinary computer program, so you know how to do it. And that was quite easy in the end for me.*" (C). Still another appreciated part of the set-up is the photos and presentations, both picturing professors and students. "*When you are looking for someone you find a picture and a short explanation. That is very positive*" (B).

On the other hand some confusion remains. The students state that the names of the files sometimes cheat the logical mind, mixing things up. This being true especially concerning the folders named **Weekly program** and **Tasks and assignments**.

> *In the Weekly program you found the tasks that you were doing this week. But not in the folder called Tasks... I would have preferred to have things under their right name. If*

the folder had been called "General information about tasks and assignments" then it would have been clear. This was the most confusion of the folders. (C)

Not only the assignments are presented and appear in the Weekly program but also links to the literature used - something that is found confusing in the beginning. The students express that they would prefer more clear and comprehensive principles for the files. The problem though is worse in the beginning, you gradually get used to the present order as the semester passes by.

The students also comment the literature itself. The one book applying for best book in the course is with no doubt the Australian book "Community development. Community-based alternatives in an age of globalisation" by Ife & Tesoriero (2006). The overall comment is that the mixture of literature is well composed, containing relevant literature showing to be useful and applicable not only to this course but also to regular courses at the home university and in practical professional contexts. "T*he literature has been different from what I am used to and that has been really good, because I have seen other things, been looking for other paths and opened up a little bit more*" (B).

Although the students express satisfaction with the literature, they also find the amount of literature/pages and reading required quite overwhelming, suggesting cutting down the amount of pages in a future course. The comments on the amount of pages give a hint that far from all is being used.

> *I noticed that some students could not read all the pages too… Because it is a lot. And you know that for all of us English is our second language - it is difficult to read. With so many pages. And also the subject... You have to read multiple times the same things.* (A)

It is worth noting that the literature is available on the It´s learning course site, either in full text, links or scanned material. None of the students highlighted this though. In my opinion the reading list could preferably be a part of the curriculum plan, giving interested (potential) students a chance to view the profile of the literature. Today you find the reading list on the course site when already being accepted to the course. And even then a majority of the titles in the reading list lacks information on number of pages, which makes it hard to get an overview on what amount of reading is required. A integrated reading list also could clarify what is requested on the course, something that is explicitly asked for both by staff members and students in the interviews.

4.3.1 The Virtual Book

The Virtual Book – being one of the most essential e-learning materials produced on the course - is a much appreciated learning material. Its different parts – **the Screen lectures, the Triggers** and **the Community case the Green Park** - are regarded as very professional.

The Screen lectures are described very positively, the effort and time producing these lectures quite obviously being appreciated. The students thus found it inspiring to see the teachers in action - while explaining and sometimes even interacting around the theories, "*so that you also get a virtual image of the theory*" (A). Not only being required to read but also to watch these media products online is seen as very motivating; "*The other things were only things*

you could read, but here you could watch and you could see the teachers and how they interact with each other" one student claims (A).

One aspect especially mentioned is the effort to meet the needs of students with different kinds of learning profiles. "*Some – like me – learn more when they have someone who tells them. And for me that is better than to read something. And for others it is better to read something than to listen to someone. It is really good*" (C). The participating lecturers also get high credits on their contributions, being described as doing a real good job and being "really professional". Even the language is commented: "*When it comes to the professor at my university – he is not very good in English. But in this presentation he really did a good job*" (C).

One of the commented lectures is focusing on creating a project plan. This turned out to be directly useful in working with one of the assignments. "*Sometimes I went back to check: What did they say now? It has really been useful.*" (B) The possibility to get the lecture in a text file as well even further opens up to reach students with different learning profiles.

The Triggers are another part of the Virtual Book getting high scores, even if not as high as the screen lectures. The Triggers turns out to stimulate the reflections on presented subjects, being a good base for discussions and exchange of thoughts.

> *I have used the Triggers a lot. Every time you view them you see something new, and when we have discussed what we have seen we have never seen the same thing. Instead you see things from your own point of view - but if you change perspective you see other things.* (B)

One of the students is questioning one or two of the triggers, seeing them not as relevant as the others, though adding "*but on the whole they are good*".

The Green Park – or the Community case – are also much appreciated, described as being a nice, exciting, complex, challenging and – above all – a "close to realistic" place. "It felt pretty realistic. It was like we were doing something in a real park. We could imagine how it was to practice Community Work in a real situation" (A). Another student though is rather confused: "*All this information. And you never really knew - is this true? Or is it just an imagination that there is a green park…*" (C)

Nevertheless – the park is also described as somewhat overwhelming coming to the huge amount of information, quite confusing. Some students claim that it was not that easy to find out what was in the park - especially in the first meetings with the park. In this the student working groups came to rescue, supporting each other to find the ways and the information they needed:

> *I know that I found information about the Green Park that others didn't…Maybe it was a bit too complex. But it was also good because in the chat room at the It's learning platform we could exchange our experiences about the Green Park and we exchanged the information that we had. So it wasn't that bad that it was complex…* (C)

The students mention the role play connected to the Green Park as being challenging and rewarding. Sometimes the technical conditions influenced the forms for playing: "*Normally we would have had to do it via Skype. But my group couldn't do that because my university*

offered only one Skype room, and this was occupied by the other girl that was participating…." (C).

One of the students presents a vivid description on one of the assignments in the Green Park - creating a project:

> *We worked out a proposal focusing immigrants and presented it to the teacher who responded ´If this is the most important to you – then go for it´… So we did. Our idea was to include them in a Community or in a project. In our case the immigrants were living in the park. So we could use the park to do things together. We had a theatre where we could be writing together, we had some groups cooking food from different countries offering the taste of food from different countries. To see, listen and to taste you know. That was our idea.* (B)

Afterwards the student group highlighted that even if the project in itself was interesting, the response from the teacher rather focused on and made them aware of the working process and the cooperation during the project.

> *Of course it is about the project and that is obliged to be interesting. But the notion is that it is as much about learning to cooperate, attracting attention to each other and so on...The project plan is interesting, but really it is a side issue if you compare to what you learn about listening and understanding and viewing things from different perspectives. It felt like that in fact that was really the goal.* (B)

Thus the Green park module came close to the real visualising Community Work, "*it is a nice practice based project*" (A). One of the students claim even to be ready to work with Community work after this course, being aware of its vital importance for the society but also feeling confident about the way of planning, organising and working, communicating with the people making it a mutual concern. Theories, practice and participation thus turns out to have been well connected

4.4 Working process

Much of the working process on the course is to be seen in the interaction patterns on the different websites and tools. The following pictures the process and rooms for communications in the words of the students, here focusing chat rooms, group work and feed back.

There are three kinds of rooms for communication or chats that are repeatedly mentioned in the interviews with the students: **the café, the theme discussion** and **the group chat** – all found at the It's learning site for the community course. The chat rooms are designed for different purposes and are meant for communication both on full class level and on group level.

The students have all spent quite little time at **the café**. The café is described as an open place for anyone in the course to attend. And it somewhat resembles an ordinary physical café, in the sense that you can meet anyone, any subject can be in focus and you can freely choose your level of activity. "*The café was just like a café. Relaxed and talking about anything you like*" (A). It is considered as a possibility to use the café if you have a question to pose to the

other participants of the course. Then you can put the question in the café and the others might respond "*this is how we did it*"(B).

The students claim that they have not been very active in the café, following comment being characteristic: "*I looked at it now and then but I never wrote comments... I think if you really have TIME then it is a really nice thing to have a café*" (C). Spending time on cafés is obviously considered as time consuming online in a virtual surrounding as offline.

The **theme discussion** is described as a quite useful space if you want to discuss theories and literature. One of the students points out that it is easier to make a contribution as this site is not in real time, you can do it anytime. The subjects on this site are – in comparison to the café - directly connected to the course projects, "*the theme discussion was more about themes and screen lectures and book we read*" (A). Thereby these two rooms for communication can be looked upon as fulfilling different purposes complementing each other, used and useful in different ways.

The students iteratively highlight the **group chat room** as being one of the most important tools on the site. This space is where many group discussions occur, as well as exchange of information and experiences. Maybe most important – this is a space for cooperation, often used together with Google docs (for creating shared documents) or Skype (for meetings in real time).

> *We have used the group chat room for current discussions... The room has been very good as we could say 'Meet me in the chat room at that and that time'. It could be something I am wondering about, or if I missed something or got behind or if there is something I don't understand. Then we meet to discuss just like in real reality. It has been very good.* (B)

This student also mentions linking to the Google documents, being able for many to write in the same shared document. Writing in a joint document on Google doc and using the group chat room is considered a fruitful combination as it supports cooperation: "*I could write 'Now I have done this part, could you please check and comment'. You were working together but still individually in a way*" (B).

The tasks of the course are both of individual and group character. The group work is in the interviews mentioned as one of the core action in the course, where the most exciting and challenging meetings and development happened, in support by the teachers and the learning material.

Thus the set-up of the course stimulated to cooperation and interaction. One of the students' reports:

> *We got divided into groups working together. One of the tasks was to make a project plan... firstly in a bigger group then in a smaller which made it easier. Then you know that it is these 5-6 people that you have to relate to. And we had a common goal – and that probably made the difference. You just had to cooperate towards the goal; otherwise you would not make it with the course.* (B)

One supportive factor mentioned is the Weekly program, giving the possibility for the students to plan their studies and work with assignments.

You have to have more self discipline studying on distance. ...And it has been good with all the group work. Everybody in the group knows what amount of time is available (for a task), which means that the task is not that much overdue. You have the structure to follow. (B)

One thing that is emphasized deriving from the course is skills on interacting with people. One of the students describes a positive astonishment being able to have surprisingly open, honest, fruitful and challenging exchange with people never seen - "just" meeting on the net. . The spin-off effect opened up for intense online communication and network building both nationally and across the boarders. The student claims to have gained a radically more positive understanding viewpoint considering the possibilities getting to know other people on the net building relations.

A certain disappointment is expressed on that too many fellow students dropped out, feeling that parts of the prerequisites for a even wider exchange vanished.

4.5 Feedback, demands and quality

The students give all the teachers very good credits concerning the ways to give feedback (except for one teacher who did not respond). One thing mentioned is that the teachers delivered clearly stated rules and instructions to follow, like "*if you deliver your tasks on time you will get feedback*" (B). Some students attract attention to the readiness they experience on behalf of the teachers promptly giving feedback even on blogs and other sites. "*We have even had better contact than I have with my teachers at (my home) campus*" (B). This has created a feeling that the teachers are very present: "*When I had a question about how to do this and that sometimes I had the feeling that they were just waiting for a question from a student to answer. So I really had answers within five minutes.*"(C).

It is also claimed that the very best feedback sometimes has been from teachers from other universities, to whom there was no earlier connection or relation to. One of the students explicitly favour this feedback from somebody not being dependant on: "*You learn the most from a teacher you don't know...That is the best thing I think ... I can feel there was a PURE feedback on my work*" (A).

One special feature during the pilot course is the so called **open feedback***,* giving personal feedback by publishing it on the site for everybody to take part of. On asking the students to share their viewpoints on this, the response is utterly positive. "*I didn't find it as being an interruption of my privacy. Because people can learn from my mistakes and I can learn from others' mistakes* "(C).

One point is that it is good for the motivation: "*If you know that the others can see what you have published and have the possibility to view the response – then you think twice before sending the draft. You often discuss the draft with other students before you send it in*" (B). It is also seen as a positive thing that in this open structure all the students can read the feedback and also implant it in their own plan. The teachers on the other hand have the possibility of referring to other student's papers or to a fitting feedback already delivered to somebody else. It becomes interactive. The teachers can ask: "*Is this what you mean, or is there something I did not understand*" (B).

In some assignments we have worked in the group. And then the teacher has given the feedback to one of the group members – and need not write it out four times. We are able to get and read the feedback because it is considering the same joint project. (B)

Questions posed on what would happen if a) there would be negative feedback to deliver or b) a student would be shown "surfing" on behalf of the others, did not at all change the viewpoint of the students.

On a) the comment is that the feedback delivered is formulated in a positive and very constructive way – even in case of being critical. The feeling of and message in the feedback is understood as to be supportive, developing something that could be even better: "*It was things we could understand and it was written in a nice manner. It did not feel like they were shooting our work... If you get it in a good way then you are more motivated to continue*" (A). Another student claims that it is not very smart to deliver poorly written tasks.

If you deliver a bad assignment then you know what feedback you are going to get. Then you have to stand that all the others can see it. It is the same way when you are out working. People see what you are doing and you get feedback on what you are doing. So it is nothing strange if you compare. It is not a closed world. (B)

On b) the answer is that it definitely is possible to openly discuss such a case, but it is a hypothetical question as it is hard to imagine the situation to arise. "*Because you have to write many things in you own words and what you have learned about it. I don't think you can just surf with it. You have to invest a lot of time and you have to know what you are talking about*" (A).

It is obvious that the students are quite content with the feedback they get, even sharing the positive experience of the open feedback with the interviewed staff members.

The students also have a high esteem of the demands and quality of the course, not least showing in the required efforts from the students. One of the students pronounces this explicitly, comparing with the demands at the home university:

It is really high quality that you have to do. In my university ...if you do SOMETHING than you can be almost sure that you get a "1". But in this course it was different. It is a higher standard... You have to work really hard. And if you don't have really much time to do it - then you cannot just let it be. Or if you are satisfied with a "3" then it is ok. (C)

A thing that the students find annoying though is what is described as vague and unclear conceptions on what is required or expected to get the different scores. Not quite knowing what the expectations are causes uncertainty. Another aspect is the feeling that different teachers handle the commenting differently, some being more supportive than others. "*I know from another professor that he went through all the assignment papers from his...group before the final score... It was a bit unfair that some commented everything once more and others didn't*"(C).

The scoring system is commented as necessarily being a compromise due to the different systems in the different countries, although it in some parts creates problems translating the credits to the own system. There is though an understanding of the problem to find a better system.

4.6 Staying – or dropping out

The interviewed students belong to the group of 25 who decided to stay and fulfil the course. On the question why they stayed, they all separately claimed that they are persons who like to fulfil things they have decided on. "*I am persistent! If I chose to make something then I do it*" (C). But it is not only about determination; it is also about self-confidence, "*I know I can make it - so I do it*" (C). Some find the challenges of the course thrilling and, especially in a rear-view mirror, being a part of a personal development.

Some reasons mentioned are though of a more practical kind. Having the possibility to exchange this course with one of the regular minors with the same amount of ECTS credits is a good motivator. A problem in one case though was that half of the semester was overlapping the next minor due to the full semester time period of the pilot. The subject of the skipped minor was also already known to the student, which simplified the decision to stay in the pilot though the workload was considered quite overwhelming. It rather became a matter of calculating with time: "*I had to invest more time than I expected to. But I calculated it well*" (A).

It is clear though that one of the main conditions considering fulfilling the course is to have a genuine interest in the subject and the pedagogical outfit, reinforced by the opportunity to transform and use the new knowledge and skills outside the course. The students argue that they cannot only use the knowledge and experiences in other courses and in jobs, but also find that they bring along the way of thinking in alternative perspectives, being attentive to that the course have broadened their minds. In addition the English language skills have developed quite a lot. By practising all the time the communication gradually have gotten easier. Getting acquainted with special concepts and words in English concerning social research and welfare issues also build a bridge to a wider understanding.

Commenting on the fellow students dropping out from the course, the students claim that they find nothing strange or spectacular with the reasons to drop out; it is "*just the way it usually is*". A number of explanations are posed. Several of the drop outs had for instance, according to the interviewed students, miscalculated the amount of time required for the course. Many thus tried to take the course parallel to the regular courses but did not manage.

> *We talked about it on campus. It was too much. They had thought it would not be so hard, thinking it is only half time studies. Some thought it would be simple, something even that you can fix in a coffee break. But that is not how it is. It has been a lot to write and a lot to reflect on. And it has lasted the whole semester although it is only half time studies.* (B)

For some there has also been a mismatch between the time and demands of regular courses and the period of the pilot. Examinations (finals) occurred for some students at the same time as the pilot started. They dropped out "*because the course started when we had our exams.*

We were really busy with our exams and did not have any time to do the tasks. And then when we finally HAD time to do the tasks we had to catch up 4-5 tasks...at the same time" (C).

Another aspect mentioned is that the English language required in the course was unexpectedly demanding. It is said that it is certainly true that staff from Bergen gave information on the level of language skills required, "*but no one else. Not from my university*" (C). It is emphasized that English is a second language to most of the students, which should be taken into consideration.

The students though present some concrete suggestions on possibilities how to face some of these problems in an effort to counter some of the drop outs. One suggestion is creating a small dictionary for the course to support students who are interested but who initially have a hard time with the language. For students to whom the subject is perfectly new or unknown a motivator could be to offer short introductions in the different native languages to kick start them into the subject – as a contrast to what one student metaphorically claimed as "*we were thrown into cold water*" (C). Apparently though this particular student learned to swim, later expressing"*I learned a lot. My expectations really came true in the end. I would do the course again*"(C).

4.7 Looking back – what did you learn?

Shortly summarizing this final question was posed as an offer, many of the answers already being given under previous headings. Still there is reason to emphasize the joint experience of a range of learning outcomes, some concerning knowledge and skills useful in an immediate working situation.

> If you join or create a project the knowledge is there. You know how to do it – you know what a project is, how to write a project plan and you know what is needed. You know about the contacts needed in the community. You have practiced - you did not just read it just only from a book – you have practiced it. (A)

But the learning outcomes described is not only about social work and community work as such, but also about the social learning being offered in this e-learning environment. The communication and cooperation with the other students in blogs, chats and group assignments is even regarded as one of the main gains widening the views and opened up for new knowledge, perspectives and understanding. "*I see things much differently. You get a more open view*" (B). This is considered being a good base for networks and further co operations, but also as a gain in common social work.

> *When working as a social worker you meet people from other countries. When meeting the clients you listen to their views, try to understand their perspective. So I have learned a lot that is useful both in school and in the profession. It makes a big difference and it is rewarding.* (B)

Interacting with different kinds of people in the course has turned out to be not only a mutual learning between students from different countries but also between students and teachers. It is described as a living dialogue, not a one way learning. "*The visions of the teachers and the visions of the students – they don't have to match. We can learn from each other*"(A).

The students would gladly recommend the course to other students, finding it a really good alternative if you want to go join courses not being able to attend them on campus, even at advanced levels. "*I would say that it is a really hard course because you have to do a task every week... But I would also say that it is a lot of fun and in the end these tasks you have to do are not bad. They are not that hard to do*."(C)

The students all express an urge to learn more and do not hesitate to join more e-learning courses in the future. One suggestion is to create a "B-course" or a follow up course offering a possibility to continue to the next level.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter you initially find a short introduction to the Vircamp project. Then results of this external evaluation are summarized and discussed.

The Social Work Virtual Campus (Sw-VirCamp) is an Internet based international pedagogical pilot project aiming at three main goals: developing a virtual campus for social work education, developing a new e-learning module in Community Work and Community Development and arranging a pilot course in the mentioned subjects. The VirCamp project thus is not only focusing the pilot course itself, but as much the surrounding activities like providing an environment for maintaining an ongoing process of further developing, creating and refining teaching material for e-learning courses in active and concrete cooperation over the (university- and country-)borders. One of the interviewed summarizes the project in following sentence:

> *A European funded project to enable social workers throughout Europe to undertake an educational programme through e-learning to learn about social work practice throughout Europe.* (R4)

The Sw-VirCamp project started 2008-10-01 and ends after implementing the pilot course and after delivering a final report 2010-09-30. The project is financed by the EU within the Lifelong learning ERASMUS program.

The main objective for this report, being an external evaluation of the project, has been to follow the development process through the birth and growth of the project to the very implementation of the pilot e-learning course. The report is primarily based on eight interviews with students and staff members intending to give the reader a view on the build up and process in the growing and implementing of the project. It is important to be aware that the interviewed are a minor part of the students and staff members participating in the course, being a risk that the answers thereby mirror the viewpoints of the especially engaged or interested. This being said the interviewed could offer a lot of interesting information and a variety of experiences to share.

The VirCamp project is aiming at being one possible alternative in an international context, addressing not only social work students but also social work teachers in higher education, as well as technical and media staff connected to e-learning, university net works and social work professionals. An outspoken team approach aimed at cooperation is used throughout the development process and is also significant for the pedagogical approach of the project. Another aim is the exploitation of the experiences and results of the project, resulting in an ongoing dissemination of the experiences through articles, seminars and conferences.

A challenging experimental environment - with roots

Meeting VirCamp as an external evaluator has been facing a challenge to understand a dynamic complex multilevel project in constant development and dense with information. It has been – in a very limited period of time - trying to get an overview of a huge amount of written working material in progress, being invited to attend meetings and seminars and orientating in a vivid and evolving virtual learning environment. It is of course impossible to do this project justice. Instead my intentions have been giving voice to some of the

participating students and staff members, this report thus being one of many contributions to further knowledge development.

Talking to the interviewed have been an inspiring experience, soon revealing that this project is not to be seen as some isolated phenomena to the staff members, rather as being part of an fruitful and ongoing development process rooted in prior experiences. The influence of the prior VIRCLASS concept is considered being of vital importance, not least as providing an academic environment open for contact building, knowledge exchange and pedagogical experimenting on e-learning. On this fundament new ideas and inspiring development discussions on building a virtual campus nourished, refining skills and knowledge on processing a new concept, the Vircamp project.

These early experiences stimulated to become partners in the VirCamp project, thus taking care of and benefiting from the achieved knowledge. Earlier research approaches starting with focus on e-learning in VIRCLASS now intermesh and continues focusing the VirCamp project. There is a vivid and intertwined relation between the researchers and the staff of the consortiums continuously supporting interest and dissemination, which is mentioned as of crucial importance. The Vircamp project is not "only" implementing a project, it is also a part of exploiting the results for further development and knowledge building on e-learning and Community Work.

In my opinion this seems to be somewhat of a dream scenario; a new concept not having to start from scratch but rather benefiting from engagement and basic contacts being at hand, an organizational idea of structure partly tried out, cooperation forms being there to develop, ongoing discussions refining a pedagogical philosophy and experiences of curriculum building and course structure. The interviewed – whether having been part of this earlier project or not – explicitly cherish this useful source of knowledge and competence. The descriptions of the working process in VirCamp tells about a creative and respectful experimental working environment, open to new ideas and explicitly based on the team and common team efforts.

It is not easy – or it would rather be quite time consuming - for someone outside the project to summarize the actual work in the so called Work Package groups where the development and construction work is taking place. It seems though to be a relevant build up mirroring the project plans and fit to get a lot of work done and to distribute the workload. A lot of effort is invested not least on the technical side, including creating websites and building e-learning material. The descriptions of the WPs somewhat tend to focus on the forms and frames and tells little about the actual pedagogy and content of the pilot course. The impression is that if there is a solid form and framework, then the content can differ. To see distinguished borders between the WP groups is sometimes a bit hard for an outsider. Maybe - as long as the work gets done – that might not be of great importance.

The working process in the VirCamp project thus seems to have been finding a productive and at large a most appreciated form. An initiator balancing power and participation get a lot of credit. But at the same time there seems to be a certain mismatch between the amount of time planned and the time required to fulfil the stated ambitions. This is not least emphasized when circumstances beyond the project is at hand, for instance at the home institution. One challenge remaining is finding a time balance getting the project forward but not pushing the engaged over the edge.

The prerequisites forming a new virtual campus might partly be the knowledge and the personal engagement of individuals finding the task stimulating, but this solely is not sustainable without the explicit support of the participating institutions or organisations. Even if one of the present institutions or organisations in this project - as initiator and main contact with the EU - has been taking an essential part of the responsibility, it is outspoken that the partners are to democratically share the responsibility and workload. The participating partner representatives in the project have undoubtedly been deeply personally engaged taken on a big workload, sometimes almost to the extent of burn out. But many of the institutions or organisations – having accepted being a partner in Vircamp – has in reality been shirking support to their representatives, not attracting attention to or taking in account the commission in the virtual project while planning or distributing the work at the home institution. Many of the interviewed thereby find their working situation untenable in the long run, in urgent need of having the support from the management at home as well as getting approval on including more colleagues in the project.

The question is how to understand the described situation. Is it a matter of lacking interest from the institutions or organisations or lack of information? Have the institutions or organisations been taking the chance to say yes to an offer they could not resist without taking in account that it adds to the workload? Have the institution – or the engaged individual – been unrealistic in estimating the time required? Or is this an initiative driven by personal engagement of enthusiasts not being fully established by the management or adopted as an important part of the educational programme? Does the current e-learning course have appropriate legitimacy – or is it marginalized?

No matter how; if the institution or agency still wants to maintain the partnership in the project it is of crucial importance to support and offer a reasonable working setup and create realistic goals for the engagement. A stimulating but heavy workload in combination with little support from the home organisation makes way for thoughts about what is reasonable in the long run, which causes concern and worries about future sustainability. In other case there is an obvious risk for burn outs among the enthusiasts.

The pilot

The curriculum plan for the pilot course in Community work states that methods and theories, cooperation and professional development are in combination indicators for competence. It also states that working together with students from different countries provides opportunities not only to cooperate around cases, but also to learn about and compare social work and community work between countries. This concrete training situation building professional networks is also described as a way to support a professional development within a challenging international framework.

It is interesting to note that not only the students find that the goals in the curriculum plan at large are met, but also that the teachers in a parallel process have found that their competence have risen, the co operation over borders have opened up for new knowledge and alternative literature on social dilemmas and prerequisites thus contributing to a larger awareness of social work in an international perspective. Stimulating meetings – though only virtual on behalf of the students - working with foreign students and professors from different countries being in the field of Social work seems to be a cherished and rewarding concept benefiting both students and staff.

The mutual learning outcomes are, as shown, not only about social work and community work as such, but also to a large extent about the social communication and social learning being offered in this e-learning environment. The communication and cooperation with the other students in blogs, chats and group assignments is even regarded as one of the main gains widening the views opening up for new knowledge, perspectives and understanding, but also being useful when building networks or in social work in general.

Stepping into the virtual environment of the pilot course turns out to be an adventure as such to an external observer. The first impression is the ambitiously built virtual campus dense with information and varied in design. The "costume" though sometimes seems to be measured to meet a large amount of students, a campus rather aiming at a full program education than a single course. Is it too big or am I just puzzled? Both students and staff comments on the somewhat sprawling build up suggesting gathering information, remaking folders, discussing clarifying assignments, considering reducing the amount of web tools and so on. Some of the interviewed point out that it is a risk that the big amount of websites, tools and information on the net causes confusion rather than clarification. This might even be due to that too few students stay long enough to experience the virtues of the course. The ones who do stay though obviously get more than they expected.

This being a pilot course with an experimental set up gives good opportunities for adjustments. At the same time the interviewed claim that only minor changes are necessary in the pilot, giving new teachers joining the next course the opportunity to add their ideas. One discussion worth taking though seems to be the level of ambition, for instance concerning instant feedback, having in mind the possibility to raise the amount of students at least to the planned level in the pilot (being a full campus probably far above that level). Not forgetting the mentioned workload of the teachers, it is urgent to discuss sustainable solutions even reconsidering for instance the amount of or design of assignments or – what one of the interviewed called – the tied up schedule for a whole semester.

Lots of skills, efforts and activities have been put down to create and execute this professional international virtual campus involving a range of engaged staff members and project partners with a variety of competences. The complexity is challenging and tempting, but also - due to the big amount of components and information - in parts hard to grasp for someone with external perspective, not being fully familiar with the project but aiming at getting an overview.

This said I am convinced that this virtual campus has a great potential to continue to grow and develop, without losing an interesting focus. The potential is there to build a bigger campus, and the VirCamp project seems in large to have a build up that fulfils its purpose. Yet there is some uncertainty concerning the build up being dependent on a number of partner institutions or organisations. Serious and engaged institutions or organisations could offer stability, a vital research environment and crucial support (as being the case e.g. in contact with researcher and Media Centre in Bergen). But if the involved institutions or organisations fail to seriously put an effort supporting the engaged teachers, suddenly the situation can change and the teacher gets an unrealistic workload at the home institution independent of the virtual course. One way of avoiding this somewhat shaky situation could of course be creating a quite independent campus with a separate budget. On the other hand this - being a huge challenge - does not seem realistic at this stage, or maybe not even interesting.

The building of Vircamp has as shown occupied many people for many hours. The build up is impressive, the e-learning material as well – not least the Virtual Book. Thinking of the pilot – would it be possible to give a corresponding course without the present resources? Probably. But without the resources and competences in VirCamp and the support available from institutions or organisations it would probably be impossible to match this course.

Would this course be possible to offer to maybe 200-300 students? Possibly. But then again with essentially much lower ambitions, the risk overwhelming not being capable of keeping the quality required unless the number of teachers thoroughly increased and the ambitions lowered. Designing this pilot course for 55 students have provided the opportunity to put efforts in and experimenting, having a close contact with the students testing the quality and standards of the course.

The overall impression is that the pedagogical design developed in the project would be well fit to suite courses even with other content than Community work. The focus in the project being as much creating e-learning material and refining e-learning pedagogy opens up for other subjects and themes. The concept of teachers meeting in seminars working together creating the material have offered rich possibilities not only to form the pedagogy but also to discuss and develop the content of the course. Still I realize that I in this evaluation rather have been posing questions on pedagogical forms and learning outcomes than concentrating on the very cont Community Work. I could for instance have asked if the course focusing community work is innovative or if it mainly resembles earlier courses. I could also have studied if the very concept Community Work has been discussed in a new way? Or if the teachers of the course settle by defining and studying the excluded, not including studying the "other" side of the coin; the included? These types of questions of content or target groups I have not posed this time.

Finally; it has been a very stimulating and engaging challenge getting acquainted with this multiple and interesting project and the people concerned, even knowing from the start that it would be impossible to do this project justice in a short evaluation.

After all I hereby add but one piece to the knowledge puzzle.

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Attachment 1
(source: www.vircamp.net)

Partners in the Vircamp project

1. Högskolen i Bergen, Bergen, Norway
2. Hogeschool INHOLLAND, Haarlem, The Netherlands
3. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Escuela Universitaria de Trabajo Social, Madrid, Spain
4. Hälsohögskolan, Jönköpings universitet, Jönköping, Sweden
5. Instituto Superior Miguel Torga, Coimbra, Portugal
6. Hochschule Mannheim, Fakultät fur Sozialwesen, Mannheim, Germany
7. Swansey University, Swansey, Wales, UK
8. Hochschule Mittweida, Mittweida, Germany
9. Liepajas Universitate, Liepajas, Latvia
10. Högskolen i Bodö, Bodö, Norway
11. Universidad Lusofona de Humanidades e Technologias, Lisboa, Potugal
12. Katholieke Hogeschool Kempen, Geel, Belgium

CURRICULUM PLAN

COMMUNITY WORK FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, 15 ECTS CREDITS

Introduction

Community work is a planned process to mobilise communities to use their own social structures and resources to address their own problems and achieve their own objectives. Community work focuses on participation and fosters empowerment, emancipation and change through collective action. Community work is closely related to work for human rights. The community work process is about people in communities creating opportunities for growth and change.

'Community' can be understood in different ways, as geographical areas, interest groups, organisations or institutions. Community work rests on a basic democratic ideal, anti-oppressive practice, equality and solidarity with the affected individuals. It aims to generate and communicate new insights with a view to effecting change.
As community work is an ideological, theoretical and practical approach to social life and the risk of social exclusion, it is ideologically sustained by a basic trust in people's ability to improve their life chances. Society is the outcome of collective action and is perpetuated and/or changed by action.

Content and objectives

This course will focus on different theories, methods and approaches in community work from an international perspective. The course consists of several parts. One part focuses on theories and methods, another part consist of a case-study related to a video/virtual case. Students will make a project plan related to the case, by collaborating and comparing different approaches.

The students will learn about community work and its historic background and come to understand the risk of manipulation when community work is not worked out from a grass-root level. Students will also learn about the advantages and power in approaches carried out from a bottom-up perspective.

One of the main aims of the course is that students develop a critical understanding of the wide range of theories and methods of community work, develop the ability to recognize these in current projects and are able to design a project plan of community work, and show which steps and facilities are needed for realizing and managing processes and products.

Expected learning outcomes

This course is competence based. That is an integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which means that a student not only requires knowledge, but knows how to use it and what kind of attitude is needed in a specific situation.

The competences are:

- Methods and Theories in Community **Work**
This means the student is able to understand and demonstrate how to use theories and methods related to practical community work
- Cooperation
This means the student is able to cooperate in changing interdisciplinary national and international networks to achieve expected learning outcomes.
- Professional Development
This means the student is able to manage, justify and control his/her own educational development.

The expected learning outcomes are:

- The student is able to collect and analyze relevant information about communities and is able to report the findings.

- The student is able to see opportunities on macro-, meso- and micro- levels in communities and is able to create a plan for a community work project.

- The student is able to reflect on the understanding of a specific situation and is able to justify the chosen methods for community work.

- The student is able to reflect on his/her own continuing professional development.

Competence indicators:

Methods and Theories in Community Work
The student is able to describe, analyze, demonstrate how to use, and compare community work theories and methods.

-The student is able to make a project plan, including aims, participants, approaches, cost, and evaluation.

Cooperation
- The students will be able to work together with students and teachers from other countries in the virtual campus and take an active part in developing and evaluating the learning program.

- The students will be able to give and share information about their own community
 and compare commonalities and differences with those of others.

- The student will be able to demonstrate how to create a professional network to work collaboratively in community work.

Professional development

- The student is able to reflect on her or his personal and professional development
  from the start of the course and formulate personal strengths and learning objectives for community work.

  -The student will be able to critically reflect on the relevance of community work in society.

Study Methods

Throughout the study program students will work with a solution oriented focus, and by solving tasks they will reflect on situations concerning community work from a social work perspective and compare with the situation in other countries. Students will work both individually and in groups.

The course will start with an introduction to the e-learning platform, class and the virtual classroom to acquaint students with the international group of students and teachers with whom they will be working. Every second or third week students will receive new learning material and new tasks to work on both individually and in the group. The tasks given will be related to the objectives of the course. Students who deliver their tasks on time during the program will receive a response and guidance from the teacher. Participating as a student requires students to provide feedback to each other, both in terms of their own individual perspective and how issues might be seen from their country's perspective. Students who join the course have to enter the classroom at least once a week. Compulsory online conferences among students and teachers will be arranged during the study period.

All elements in the course will be organized and administrated through a common virtual learning management system.

Internet Access

The students will need consistent access to the Internet to participate in this course. The speed of the Internet connection will influence the student's access to the study material. Some of the course material is produced as media files and broadband is recommended. If connecting to the Internet through a dial-up connection, the download rate for accessing documents and media files will be significantly slower than with a broadband connection.

Assessment

The assessment in this course will be by submission of a portfolio. This means that the course will be task centred and as part of the learning process students will receive feedback on their tasks during the course. As a result, students will have an opportunity to improve their initial presentations.

All tasks must be completed before the final assessment. Completed tasks will be assembled into a portfolio and a number of these tasks will be required for the presentation portfolio. The maximum number of words in the presentation portfolio is 8000, plus a further 1000 words for reflection on the learning experience.

Information about which tasks student will be required to deliver for the final assessment/presentation portfolio will be given to students approximately three weeks before the final assessment is due. The final marks will be given from A-F (where F means not approved).

Target group

The target group for the programme is social work students undertaking a bachelor's programs in their, second, third or fourth year. The programme is open to students at postgraduate levels and professionals who are interested in getting an international perspective on community work issues and subjects. The academic level of the programme is undergraduate.

Credits and Certificate

The course leads to 15 ECTS credits. Bergen University College together with the student's university issue a certificate with credits to students.

Starts/ends

The course will run for the first time from 25 January 2010 and ends 7 June 2010

Readings

A reading list will be made available when the course starts.

 Reading List

Reading List Community Work from an International Perspective

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Attachment 3

Virtual Book

Contributors

This Virtual Book is a co-production among partners in the SW-VirCamp project.

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Attachment 4

STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The students in this report claim that they should clearly recommend the Community course in VirCamp to other students. Here is a summary of some pieces of advice to a potential student.

Advice to a potential student

- Go for it! It is a nice practice based project, it comes close to the real.
- Explore the information on the site.
- Be prepared, it is a heavy workload, you have to give it time.
- Practice your English! It is important, the English level is very high. "If you don't practice English it would be difficult to start the course" (A).
- You have to be familiar with the way of thinking. It is not recommended to take the course for somebody not working with social work or studying social work. Some kind of "pre knowledge" is necessary to be able to cope. This is especially true concerning the way of thinking. You need to be able to recognize that two persons can have different views that they don't agree on - and that is alright.
- Learn to relax and do not overdue things. It is easy to work too much and finally block out the creativity.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

The interviewed staff members were asked to give some advice if somebody would like to start a project similar to VirCamp.

Advice to a potential project creator (individual or a group)

- You need to have the support of you agency – very important.
- You need to have the ability to cope with a lot of bureaucracy. The EU bureaucracy is terrible.
- You need a vision – a real sense of details on how it is going to be like in the future. And on how to get things going forward in that direction.
- You need to have organizational skills: delegation, creating structures wherein people can operate.
- You need to create good management, although the management styles can differ. But you also need a team that cooperates.
- You have to find a reasonable level to fulfil the project, rather being realistic than taking on too much.
- You need to have confidence in the participating colleagues. Create a good working procedure.
- You need to get yourself a good focus. Go for quality on content and organizational level. See to that everybody is included – not excluded. Give people responsibilities and monitor them as well. Become a team.