

Report from SICOGA 2018 in Seoul, Korea

SICOGA means „**Servas International Conference and General Assembly** and consists of the international conference as well as the members' assembly and takes place every 3 years. It is the international working meeting of Servas International in which every country has a vote, independent of its number of Servas members or overall population size. In this respect Servas works like the UN or the EU, one must try to gather support for one's projects – in a politically smart way.

This year Servas Korea received the **49 international delegates and 121 observers** in a youth guest house in Seoul. The event began with a fantastic welcoming ceremony. Having practiced this martial art myself, I was particularly impressed by the **Taekwondo** show. How fitting since it was developed in Korea in the past century! In addition, there were also outstanding **drummers**, dancers and a one-woman-theatre.

The next morning the conference was launched. The 49 voting delegates sat in a large U, behind them the observers. The conference programme went from 8:30 to 18:00 and was followed by working groups. Among the topics discussed were the future of Servas, ServasOnline, regional development, youth work and all motions that the countries had handed in during the spring. Some of these were controversially discussed, especially those regarding budget and financing. **Important motions concerned the further financing and development of ServasOnline and the new fee-model “Simplify Servas”.**

Later in the evening each country introduced itself, e.g. with short films, dance or singing performances. Especially the song **Gangnam-Style**, a Korean hit from 2012, carried the audience. The following morning from 6:00 there were offers of yoga courses or a bike trip to a nearby river, for those ready at daybreak.

My main task was **ServasOnline**. The entire past year, we, the international ServasOnline group, had collaborated and discussed using GoogleGroups and Sunday Skype sessions. In Seoul there were seven of us from four continents and six countries and we used every opportunity to continue our work on ServasOnline. Bernhard from France, who has been project manager of ServasOnline for six years, has resigned. His tasks have been divided into seven packages and must now be re-assigned. In addition, we briefed new members and noted suggestions for improvement.

In the remaining time, I tried to support Conni in the running the conference, e.g. by formulating arguments for our proposals, finding background material like attachments to motions, fixing the broken Wi-Fi or simply getting delegates a cup of tea, since she was unable to leave her post during the votes. It was essential for her and others to stay put for all sessions, listening to each question, explaining or defending one's own motions or trying to straighten out unclear statements.

Having been stuck indoors for three complete days without the light of day I was very happy about the day trip due north to the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). For Servas, tolerance is crucial and so we waited patiently for one and a half hours until all of us, alphabetically sorted by country names, sat in the correct busses and could be counted. Why the French wife of the French Servas chairman had to sit in the bus

with delegates from Sweden, Taiwan and the USA shall remain a secret of the Korean organisers. After a ride through beautiful landscapes, viewpoints overlooking North Korea, a hike in an infiltration tunnel and lunch in a village whose specialty are tasty soya bean dishes, we all returned safe and sound.

Last but not least a new board, the **Servas International Exco** or SI EXCO was elected. You may find more information on this on our [German](#) or [international](#) website.

The continuous programme, small to medium organisational mishaps, working groups, evening country presentations, controversial discussions, lack of sleep, meetings with people from so many countries – while A SICOGA is very interesting and engrossing, it is also very tiring! Working together closely to realise an international conference requires addressing some big cultural challenges as well. What a unique experience!

Dagmar