

A SERVAS multi-town meeting (Oostende, Belgium, June 3-5, 2022)

*Frits Stuurman, Utrecht
(stuurmanfrits@gmail.com)*

Some history

The first meeting in what was later mentioned as a “multi-town meeting” was in Strassburg in 1998. Margreet and I joined for the first time in the year 2000 in Frankfurt. In our opinion such a meeting was great, and that is why we have now met more than twenty times in one of our towns.

A long weekend of staying overnight with Servas hosts and ‘do touristic things’, pleasant evenings with lots of singing and meals together, enjoying each other’s dishes (with everyone’s local touch) that we had agreed to bring with us (we have learned to call that a “potluck”). All these things together made it a golden recipe.

And that is why we have done that the same way year after year in so many different towns. A visit to Utrecht was the next in 2001 and later Trier and Mainz. Leuven joined in, as well. Until the Corona pandemic spoiled our pleasure: no meeting was possible in 2020 and 2021.

We were all too happy to see it possible again this year. The Leuven team had the feeling that the Belgian coastal town of Oostende (Ostend) would be a suitable venue. And right they were. Ostend would inspire and offer many agreeable opportunities.

Dear reader, that was the background for the multi-town meetings. This year’s was the 22nd one, and to add a perspective for the future, the Servas friends from Utrecht will try and create the sequel for 2023.

Ostend, Pentecost weekend 3-5 June 2022

Friday

Delicious: we would begin with the potluck. In a comfortable and welcoming social centre, “De Klisse”, with sufficient cooking facilities in Ostend’s “Vredestraat” (Peace Street): could it be more suitable for a Servas meeting? Slowly the Servas guests drop in. All through conversations of ‘happy to see you again’. The dishes they brought along are displayed on tables. And other tables made ready to sit at.



At the table for the potluck

Dinner starts. Everyone fills their plate with small portions – there are so many delicious things to try. Michaël Goethals cordially bids us welcome and offers us a look into what has been prepared for us to enjoy together the coming days. In the meantime his wife Josee Heuts and the other members of the Leuven organisation team Gaya en Gustave are busy with what has to leave the kitchen. And they do have many assistants, of course, also for the washing up afterwards. “Gezelligheid kent geen tijd”. How can one say that in English or German or French? Quite late it gets when the decision comes to leave and find our lodgings. For us, from the Netherlands, that was to be the Youth Hostel, a fine place for the following three nights.



Opening of the multi-town meeting by Michaël Goethals

Saturday

The first morning we visit the Mu.ZEE, an appealing museum with literally for everyone his liking. I for instance was intrigued by the sculptural group of José Vermeersch: nine persons and five dogs. They stood in a row and looked like people of centuries ago. Or the painting by Athos Burez of September 2020, “The bathers of Ostend”, in which we see some bathers watching all kinds of other bathers.



The sculpture group of José Vermeersch in MU.ZEE



Sculpture Dancing Waves at the start of the town walk

In the afternoon we get a city walking tour. We have to meet at a sculpture called “Dancing Waves”. We stop at, among other places, a bust of Princess Grace of Monaco (Ostend has a city bond with Monaco). The walk ends at the railway station where we have a group picture taken.



Guided tour through Ostend, here around the bust of Grace of Monaco

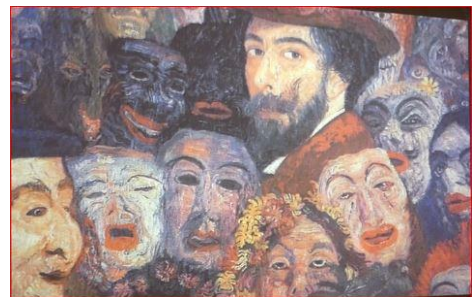


At the Ostend railway station after the town walk

For the evening we visit individual hosts that offer us a cosy dinner and where we can exchange lots of Servas experiences. Our hosts happened to live high up in a flat with a fabulous view from the roof terrace.

Sunday

The next day is Sunday, Pentecost, and we start in the James Ensor house. In the paintings of this famous Ostend artist masks play an important role. Very fascinating.



In the James Ensor house: Masks and Ensor's self-portrait



Warm lunch in the Koninginnehof in the Maria Hendrika Park

Then it is time for a warm lunch in the “Koninginnehof” (Queen’s Court), splendidly located in the Maria Hendrika Park.

In the afternoon we had a walk guided by Michael under the motto “cartoon figures, beach, dunes, art and views” in the nearby village of Middelkerke. A hefty and cheerfull tour, interrupted by a group picture in a frame.



The walkers in Middelkerke

An eventually we ended in De Klisse once again, for a farewell dinner the belgian way. What could that be? Belgian beers, cheeses and WAFFLES baked in situ, in which we could indulge for a long while, also thanks to the delicious strawberries and whipped cream. And then it is time for Frits to include in a word of thanks to the organisers a few funny anecdotes of the weekend. We all have enjoyed the programme and each other’s presence.



Around the delicatessen at the farewell dinner

Back home

That was the end of a pleasurable weekend. There is plenty of good reason to continue the newly flourishing tradition. Therefore, also enthusiasm from Utrecht. We don’t want to keep the participants stressed about next year. For the sixth time the Utrecht friends will explore the possibility of putting together an interesting programme. Hosts of Utrecht: we do hope that you all will take part again.

Illustrations and photographs (with photographer's name or his initials - FS = Frits Schuurman)

01 Servas Ostend.JPG - At the table for the potluck (FS)

02 Servas Ostend.JPG - Opening of the multi-town meeting by Michaël Goethals (FS)

03 Servas Ostend.JPG - The sculpture group of José Vermeersch in MU.ZEE (FS)

04 Servas Ostend.jpg - Sculpture *Dancing Waves* at the start of the town walk (Johanneke Pas)

05 Servas Ostend.JPG - Guided tour through Ostend, here around bust of Grace of Monaco (FS)

06 Servas Ostend.jpg - At the Ostend railway station after the town walk (Josee Heuts)

07 Servas Ostend.JPG - In the James Ensor house: Masks and Ensor's self portrait (FS)

08 Servas Ostend.JPG - Warm lunch in the Koninginnehof in the Maria Hendrika park. (FS)

09 Servas Ostend.jpg - Group photo of the walkers in Middelkerke (Josee Heuts)

10 Servas Ostend.JPG - Around the delicatessen at the farewell dinner (FS)