

16th Annual Congress in Baarlo/Utrecht, the Netherlands

EGEA... European Geography Association... On 9th of October, the day before my departure to the 16th Annual Congress, this abbreviation seemed to be a mystery for me. I didn't know much about this organization of young geographers, but I was full of impatience to find out what lies in its reality. In the evening I packed all the amenities I needed for the Congress – and among them – Russian flag, our national food and drinks, my knowledge, humor, communication skills and willingness to take part in all the activities at the Congress.

Our Moscow group consisted of four people – Igor, Maya, Misha and me. We were lucky because Igor had already participated in Congresses within EGEA and we had a perfect leader of the group, who knew everything and whom we could rely on in order not to be lost in unfamiliar country. Igor and Maya left two days before us, and we agreed to meet at the airport in Amsterdam in order to continue our trip together. And really we had to take a long distance trip almost through all the territory of the Netherlands from west to the east to reach Baarlo, the place where the Congress was held.

During our flight Misha and me were reading different materials and documents related to the topic of our workshops in the Congress, and it was a real pleasure to do that, because we felt involved in the Congress from the very beginning, even before we came to the Netherlands.

At the airport Igor and Maya told us about various places they had visited for these two days and about people they had met. We took the train from Hertogenbosch and then to Eindhoven.

In Hertogenbosch we were impressed by the atmosphere reigning there. I can say that it's a real traditional small European town, presented by narrow rows of small stone and wood houses painted in different colors, what makes you feel good and enjoy your life, smile to everyone you see, be friendly and realize that we live only once and that we should take everything good from our life and learn more from the people we communicate in order to transfer our knowledge, life experience and love to our planet and its nature. The streets of the town are paved with stone, you can see lots of people riding a bicycle, walking on foot or even riding a horse carriage. We visited St. Jacob's cathedral and decided that it was high time to have some food. We dropped in a typical Dutch snack-bar to try some national food. To our surprise (although as geographers, we know that Europe suffers from the population aging) the bar was full of retired people who had some beer, were laughing and discussing something in Dutch. There were no young people of our age at all. But despite of all this we had a good lunch and continued our trip.

Approaching to Eindhoven we were moving through its industrial outskirts presented by plants and factories of different enterprises, and mostly operating in the sphere of high-tech. When we went out from the railway station the first scenery we saw was a square full of bicycles – to my mind, there were more than three hundred of them. We decided to concentrate on the center of the city by the reason that we had lack of time before the our train's to Baarlo departure. It was Sunday and people in the city were having fun. Roaming around the streets, we turned out to be on one of them full of bars, restaurants, discos... I think people were very surprised seeing four

of us carrying our suitcases in such a late time and on Sunday. But it didn't bother them at all because they were busy with their beer and parties.

At last we came to Baarlo. It was already dark in the streets and we didn't have any opportunity to see what the town was like. Just imagine... A mini bus is moving along narrow streets of a provincial town, than it goes out of it – and then suddenly you appear in front of a castle... You go out of the car, take you luggage, strong wind is blowing, leaves are falling from the trees and whirl around you... It's cold and humid... You move to the entrance... It's quiet... And suddenly you meet a tall and strong guy wearing the T-shirt with the name of Russian football team – CSKA – in front of the castle! What a cultural shock it was! This guy turned out to be Alex from Berlin, and he is a real fan of Russian things – I was in the same workshop with him and saw different bags where it was written KGB, the USSR and so on. He is a real great person and very easy in communication. The room we lived in was very large and multinational: along with us there were Serbs, one Greek and one Swedish guy. There we even had the volleyball match with Serbs using macaroni as the ball and Serbian flag as a net.

All of us took part in different workshops: Maya was a member of workshop called “Europe and Migration”, Igor was an active geographer in “Youth and Europe” workshop, Misha took part in “Maritime Boundaries” workshop, and I was a part of “Nature Development and Room for the River” workshop. It was very useful for improvement of our language skills to be in different groups.

I liked the topic we discussed in our workshop for it dealt both with physic and economic geography problems at the same time. How to save the Netherlands from flooding? How to build dams and to leave nature untouched? How to boost the development of industry and agriculture and to keep it ongoing during nature disasters? We had a lot of discussions, role plays, an excursion to the Administration of Nature Resources of Limburg province, excursions to dams, to the local national park. At seminars we told about the nature catastrophes that our countries experience and the ways the authorities struggle with them. It was very interesting and thrilling because all the people were strongly involved in the discussions.

One day we had three common excursions for a choice for all the participants. Most part of our Moscow group went to the port of Antwerp. We saw lots of its terminals and visited the mouth of river Shield. That was a good practice for economic geographers.

In the evenings we communicated with people from different countries, danced, sang songs and tasted traditional national food and drinks. We also had lots of funny competitions.

The organizers of the Congress didn't forget about keeping us fit. Every day we had sport competition called “Olympic Games”. It was very good for our health.

Congress turned out to be very interesting and useful both from scientific (mostly!) and cultural sides. To my mind, it was perfectly organized and scheduled. Thanks to EGEE-Utrecht team for such unforgettable event and thanks to EGEE for its existence. Now I know what EGEE means for each geographer, who is involved in its activity... It means too much. Thanks to EGEE geographers, no matter from which country they are, no matter

which religion they follow, no matter what's their age – they stay together and share everything good they have in life, share their knowledge and promote development of geography as a science.

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