

Unity in Diversity A Summer Course in Slovakia

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The universities of the third age of Bratislava, Wroclav and Groningen are members of the European Federation of Older Students (EFOS) and work closely together in the European Project EFOS Enlargement and Co-operation (EFOSEC). One of the activities of this project was a summer course in Slovakia. Older students got the opportunity to learn from each other and get acquainted with cultural themes of the host country.

This summer course was held by invitation of the University of the Third Age of the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia (*Univerzita tretieho veku, UTV*) in Modra-Harmonia from July 1 to 7 2007.



Four senior students from Groningen signed up for this course and left with great anticipations. They were met at the airport of Bratislava and brought to the study-centre of the Comenius university in Modra-Harmonia, ca. 30 km north of Bratislava.

The UTV director Dr. Nadia Hrapkova had prepared a very varied programme with among other things lectures about the Slovakian language, culture and history.

Lectures accompanied by physical exercises for older people were very appropriate. So the older

students (mostly ladies) from Poland, Austria, Germany, The Netherlands and Slovakia went swimming and walking and had a go at yoga- and aquarobic-exercises.

The excursions gave an extra dimension to the summer course. In Modra the Ludovit Stur museum was visited. The famous poet and linguist Ludovit Stur stood at the basis of the official standard Slovak language in 1848. In literature the Slovak language was already used by Anton Bernolac in the 18th century. Stur was also a national hero in the revolutionary year of 1848, when the Slovaks tried an unsuccessful uprising against the Hungarians, who controlled Slovakia in the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. From 1867 onwards Hungarian was proclaimed the only official language for the whole country.

The Slovaks are proud of their very good wines (and their beer), consequently a wine-tasting was conducted. We found out that the regional wines are of an excellent quality. Unfortunately no wine could be bought in the cellar.

A visit to the gallery of J. Bismayer was really exciting. His permanent exposition is set up in the renovated fortress tower in Modra. His figurative ceramics with their typical forms and decorations are of great artistic value and world-famous. The technics of this art can in Modra be followed back to the 17th century.

During a previous visit to the ceramics factory in Modra, the visitors were initiated in the secrets of hand-painted Majolica ceramics. The shop there had a good day.



The participants also visited the observatory, where the telescope is primarily used to monitor the solar system.

A senior student from Bratislava accompanied the group to the castle of Cerveny Kamen. It had been owned by the Fuggers for a long time and is famous for its huge medieval grain storage cellars, the biggest in Europe. The furniture in the rooms were admired very much.



Interesting lectures were:

- Persons with great influence for Slovakia, e.g. Bernolac en Stur by Mgr. Katarina Grünwald
- World Heritage Sites of Unesco in Slovakia by Dr. Silvia Dillnbergerova
- Bread-traditions in Slovakia by Dr. Silvia Dillnbergerova
- The importance of active physical exercise for seniors by doc. Simonek
- Health resorts in Slovakia by Dr. Marlen Jankovchova
- Yoga als prevention and therapy for different ailments by Dr. Juraj Gajdos

And then there were lovely evenings with all participants singing songs from their home-countries, especially the Polish and Slovak members gave a fine performance. The barbeque and the Slovak wine provided an extra input. What the students from The Netherlands tried to sing, let's not mention it. The vice-president of EFOS, Peter Hug, presented Dr. Hrapkova some gifts from the university of Groningen, and the translators Katarina, Marlen en Margiet got Dutch sweet cookies. Apparently Slovaks are as fond of sweets as the Dutch are.

A guided tour through Bratislava and a visit of the ruins of the Slavic castle in Devin tightened the bond between the Polish and Dutch participants as well as with the Slovak organizers and translators, the others had left earlier. The hot weather made climbing up the castle tiresome, but the breathtaking view of the Danube compensated for the effort. After that Silvia Dillnbergerova offered refreshments in her beautiful house at the foot of the castle.

The Dutch took special notice of the great amount of European flags in Bratislava. Obviously membership of the EU is held in high esteem.

The farewell was warm and cordial. All expressed their wish to see each other again on a similar course in Poland. EFOS Vice-president Peter Hug is to take this wish to the next EFOS meeting.

Conclusion is that content and form of this European project have considerably contributed to feelings of unity and solidarity.



Note: Peter en Sigrid Hug made a photo reportage, see www.efos-europa.eu/efosec-e