

Report on the 3rd Romanian-Bulgarian-Hungarian-Serbian conference

Srebrno jezero (Veliko Gradište), Serbia, 18–21 September, 2014

The roots of the conference go back to the year 2010, when the first regional conference on the “Geographical environment and cross-border cooperation within the Danube lower basin”, was organized by the University of Craiova (Romania) gathering geographers and other researchers from European countries who shared their experiences, knowledge and research results about all aspects of geography. The first conference took place in Craiova and it was organized by the Geography Departments of the University of Craiova and the University of Timisoara. The second conference was held in Eger, and it was organised by the Department of Economic and Social Geography of the University of Szeged in 2012. The third conference was initiated by the Faculty of Geography (University of Belgrade) and Faculty of Sciences, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management (University of Novi Sad).

The conference theme was ‘Geographical Research and Cross-Border Cooperation in the Lower Basin of the Danube’. One of the main goals of the conference was to bring geographers and institutions together from the countries lying at the lower basin of the Danube and establish a working group to promote sustainable measures for the sake of cross-border cooperations. As participants, we can confirm the importance of personal meetings in the building of real and operating cross-border networks or communities of researchers.



Location of the conference – Hotel Danubia Park in Srebrno jezero (Veliko Gradište, Serbia)
(Photo: ERNŐ MOLNÁR)

The venue of the conference was in the Eastern Serbian Srebrno jezero (part of Veliko Gradište) near the Danube and close to the Iron Gates. This developing recreation zone is located next to a spectacular artificial bay of the river. The presentations took place in the Hotel Danubia Park.

On the first day the programme of the conference was opened by the representatives of the universities and national bodies (e.g. head of the office responsible for EU integration affairs) that was followed by plenary presentations. Seven sessions with approximately 100 presentations and more than 40 posters were planned (however considerable part of the previously registered participants did not show up). Apart from this fact a broad range of topics covered almost every field of geography and earth sciences.

Evidently, presentations relating to the European Union's Danube Strategy had high relevance among the topics presented. Considerable part of the presentations was in connection with hydrology e.g. from the aspects of floods or sedimentology. Research topics of weather and climate change were also represented through the results on urban heat islands, local climate zones, extreme weather events or evidences and forecasts of climate change. Topics of geomorphology and landscape ecology were primarily analysed by GIS methods which reflected the differences between countries in their approaches, in their most relevant issues and in their research methods.

Demographic issues represented important part of the presentations, mainly in the context of migration. Some debates were generated about the one way migration from Central and Eastern Europe towards the West European countries and about its effect on



The audience of the plenary session (Photo by the organizers)



Participants of the conference and field trip above the Danube and the Iron Gates at Kapetan Misin Breg (Photo by the organizers)

local demographic, social and economic situation. Ethnic issues were subordinated and focused primarily on international tourism. In the light of the presentations, tourism seemed to be one of the key elements in the building of cross-border cooperation.

The programme of the conference was supplemented by presentations about the situation and possible development of geography teaching (e.g. through out-of classroom lessons) in different countries.

Floods, water pollution, monitoring systems and tourism developments might provide possibility for countries to cooperate. Besides of these, some common socio-economic processes – e.g. international migration, transforming post-socialist spatial structure or tourism development – also give the chance to find ground to think together.

After the sessions a boat trip was organized on the Danube with guiding on board, concluding remarks of the sessions and a specific presentation about GIS techniques and devices.

A one-day bus trip was organized on Saturday (20 September) that contained several stops with geographic and historic relevance. Our first destination was the monumental Golubac Fortress that was under revitalization at the time of the conference (funded by the European Union). The location of the fortress provides a strategic position that was demonstrated by the Roman stronghold as historic background of the current structures. Lepenski Vir (next stop of the trip) is a Mesolithic archaeological site that was excavated during the creation of the Iron Gate gorges. The museum provides the possibility to study the transition from the Mesolithic to the New Stone Age.

The visit at Boljetin was a spectacular programme because flash floods caused massive damages there only few days before the conference. Participants could see the cleaning and reconstruction works nearby the fascinating geologic formations. Traditional local lunch

was served at Kapetan Misin Breg with beautiful scenery. The next stop was at Lajko's cave which is one of the most spectacular caves especially after torrential rains where quite humid conditions were waiting for the visitors. Majdanpek town was the last stop in the programme which is an important copper mining and metallurgy area in Serbia (Hungarian participants associated to Salgótarján seeing Majdanpek).

The organizers summarized some potential fields of international cooperation:

- Intensification of collaboration between the participating institutions (with signing a cooperation agreement);

- Intensification of the exchange of teachers and students among our institutions (e.g. in the form of summer schools and camps, what was organized by colleagues from Romania last summer)

- Preparation of scientific projects between geographical institutions from the region (establishment of a commission with 2 members from each country)

Some project ideas were also proposed:

- Vulnerability map of Natural Hazards for this region (Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria);

- Soil erosion map with assessment of changes in the intensity of soil erosion caused by demographic changes and changes in land use (in the given region);

- Assessment of soil loss caused by bank erosion in the southern part of the Pannonian basin;

- Preparation of a Global Change atlas.

A declared objective was to follow the traditions by the continuing the organization of similar conferences in the near future, next time in Bulgaria.

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