

## CHRONICLE

**Report on the 5<sup>th</sup> EUGEO Congress***30 August – 2 September 2015, Budapest*

Since 2007 EUGEO, the Association of Geographical Societies in Europe, has been organising its congresses every second year at various locations. After Amsterdam (2007), Bratislava (2009), London (2011), and Rome (2013) in 2015 Budapest had the opportunity to organise the 5<sup>th</sup> EUGEO Congress. By now, this series has become the most important European geographical congress to promote exchange of knowledge, information and best practices among geographers in Europe and beyond.

The only major international geographical conference to be held in Hungary was the IGU regional conference in 1971. Since then the Iron Curtain was lifted, old boundaries were dismantled in Europe, and a new generation of geographers has grown up. Therefore, the organisation of a major geographical

event hosted by Hungary was more than timely. The importance of EUGEO congresses has grown since the first Amsterdam meeting, the number of participants and the diversity of sessions have also greatly increased, reflecting the growing demand of geographers for this Pan-European academic meeting. The initiative of EUGEO founding fathers to make the biennial congresses easily accessible for young geographers undoubtedly created good opportunities for early career researchers to introduce themselves and establish scientific contacts which are especially important for international collaboration, joint projects and publications.

Traditionally, EUGEO congresses also warmly welcome “non Europeans” and “non geographers” among the participants which makes this event more



Welcome speech of Zoltán Kovács at the opening ceremony of the Congress

open minded, inclusive and interdisciplinary. This was also the case in Budapest, where multidimensional sight showed up in different sessions and in different discussion. Where one of the most frequent debates concentrated on different environmental processes and their effects on the society, equality and fairness, sustainability and efficiency.

The programme of the Budapest Congress started on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August with registration and a cheerful Icebreaker Party. Next morning the opening ceremony took place in the spectacular setting of the Ceremonial Hall of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS). As first speaker Zoltán Kovács, Vice-President of the Hungarian Geographical Society and Chairman of the Organising Committee noted that the motto of the congress „Convergences and Divergences of Geography in Europe” reflects the way in which geography has developed in the recent past. The mushrooming of new research topics, the far-reaching specialisations and not least the strengthening cooperation between geographers and representatives of other disciplines all loosened up the traditional boundaries of geography. According to his expectation the congress would shed light on the question if divergence is pervasive within our discipline or it goes hand in hand with certain tendencies of convergence among various sub-disciplines, countries and schools.

As second speaker Henk OTTENS President of EUGEO welcomed the delegates. He emphasised that EUGEO 2015 takes place in a period of tension, uncertainty and warfare, both within and at the borders of Europe. Political Geography, in particular European geopolitics and financial geographies, rightly have been given a prominent place among the themes to be presented and discussed at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of EUGEO. Space-time dynamics are at the heart of geographical inquiry, and geographers should continue to give priority to closely monitor and interpret these dynamics. Many sessions were devoted also to this theme. Vulnerability of and hazards in the natural environment, often related to climate change and sustainability of resources were also among the main topics of the congress. Finally, Geoinformation Science, as he commented, continues to be a thriving interdisciplinary field and business opportunity that needs substantial geographic input and the new data and methods that are developed should be exploited in geographical research and applications. In this respect the Budapest Congress could also open up new perspectives. The first two welcome greetings were followed by a short performance of the string quintet of Concerto Budapest entitled ‘The Sounds of Hungary’.

In the second part of the opening ceremony Ádám Török, Secretary General of the Hungarian



Welcome speech of Ádám Török at the opening ceremony of the Congress

Academy of Sciences, András KISFALUDY, Vice-Rector of Eötvös Loránd University and Alexandra SZALAY-BOBROVNICZKY, Vice Mayor of Budapest warmly welcomed participants of the 5<sup>th</sup> EUGEO Congress from all over the world. After the welcome speeches the first two keynote lectures were delivered.

After the opening ceremony bus transfer was provided the delegates to the main congress venue, the Lágymányos Campus of Eötvös Loránd University where 520 papers were presented in 60 sessions in the next two and a half day. The Congress also gave opportunity to present posters at the poster session, where 31 posters were exhibited.

Every day two keynote lectures were followed by the curious participants. The first day Jean POESEN from Belgium questioned if we need more researches in soil erosion hazard and mitigation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The answer is undoubtedly in the affirmative, whilst soil protection should be more coordinated on integrational level within the EU, as one of the most important natural resource. Also on the first day Herman VAN DER WUSTEN from the Netherlands talked about 'Imagined communities and practiced geopolitics' which is getting more and more important in today's infocommunication-based world. In the evening a special lecture was given by Norbert CSIZMADIA from Pallas Athéné Geopolitical Foundation, Hungary – one of the biggest sponsors of

the Congress – shared ideas how vision and strategy evolve from a single idea, and how the 'new economy' will born via political and economic reforms. The first day of the Congress culminated in the social dinner where old friends could reunite again and new friendships could be established

On Tuesday after the parallel sessions Eleonore KOFMAN from the United Kingdom talked about 'Mobilities and Migrations in Europe: a problematic dichotomy' in her keynote lecture. This was followed by Michael A. FULLEN's presentation on 'Closed loop recycling and Physical Geography'. The afternoon sessions closed at 7 pm. It was also Tuesday afternoon when the EUGEO had its General Assembly. The General Assembly discussed among others new applications for membership in EUGEO, and future congresses and seminars. In the evening the Gala dinner of the Congress took place in the fascinating Gerbeaud House.

On Wednesday after the morning sessions the first keynote speech was delivered by Peter MEUSBURGER who talked about the importance of scientific setting, knowledge environments in the recent scientific life. Professor MEUSBURGER became Honorary Member of the Hungarian Geographical Society in 2010, and this year he received the Lóczy Lajos Plaque, for his outstanding activity in establishing and maintaining close relationships between Hungarian and German



In the first plenary session Herman VAN DER WUSTEN delivering his keynote lecture





In the second plenary session Eleonore KOFMAN delivering her keynote lecture



The General Assembly of EUGEO discussing future joint activities

geography. The ceremony of the award took place after his keynote lecture.

Judit TIMÁR as the last keynote speaker focused on the 'Convergences and divergences of geographies from an East-Central European perspective' which gave and gives perfect theoretical frame for the whole Congress. TIMÁR highlighted the fact that from a post-socialist, East Central European point of view general geographic processes, described, defined, conceptualised in the "west" have different meaning. Wednesday afternoon the closing ceremony took place in the plenary room from 5 pm. First, Zoltán Kovács summarised the first main results of the Congress, then the plans of the next EUGEO congress were introduced by Christian VANDERMOTTEN. Finally, Henk OTTENS expressed his warm thanks to the local organisers for the great event.

In the following paragraphs I try to refer to some sessions where the post-socialist context came into discussion. New and traditional approaches made the session of electoral geography diverse. A question emerged if traditional social patterns or newly occurring global trends are influencing voting behaviour through different scales more. But not only the aspects of drivers were discussed, but also perspectives of space. It was questioned if place, position and border have the same role in political geography researches in East Central Europe and Western Europe. The session also disputed how power restructures the

above mentioned features. One of the most important conclusions of the slots of these sessions is the recognition of the emergence of radical movements and parties in Europe in the last decade.

Several informal meetings took place during the Congress to dispute recent processes and to strengthen international cooperation in research. Hungarian researchers engaged in economic geography started an initiative to establish a subcommittee to foster researches on recent economic processes and support the institutionalisation of economic geography in Hungary.

A critical geographical initiative took place in Gólya, the cult meeting point for critical thinkers and activists in recent years. The Critical Urban Research and Action group was founded in Valtice, Czech Republic and aims to connect European researchers dealing with post-socialist urban transformation, policy-making, involvement from perspective of post-colonialism, poststructuralism and political economy. The group also aims to find out how researchers can theorise the city in a changing political and power structure. Linking to the critical aspects several sessions and slots referred to conceptualising new and old urban spaces. The question arose many times who has right to the city, who is controlling urban growth, public spaces, residential areas. The sessions on power, resistance, occupation discussed recent debates on use, transformation and modification of space.



Peter MEUSBURGER receives the Lóczy Lajos Plaque





The main Congress Venue, in the Lágymányos Campus of Eötvös Loránd University



Cheerful delegates, geographers, friends



Henk OTTENS, President of EUGEO summarises his experiences at the closing ceremony

Sessions dealt with topics which for the first time seemed to work with traditional geographical perspective. Later it turned out that even the most traditional papers had some new innovation. The case of urban spatial processes highlighting migration, segregation, gentrification and suburbanisation. Presenters and discussants pointed out that the mentioned processes should be analysed on different scales, in which local and micro-scale effects should be emphasised. Ethnic and minority groups, such as deprived communities were named as the main stakeholders of the disadvantages of newly evolved urban processes. Many sessions also discussed recent migration trends in Europe, the possible scenarios and real or imagined outcomes, especially in the East Central European region.

Papers on life quality introduced recent trends and approaches how the so-called traditional statistical accounting changes to more qualitative aspects. The starting point was a complex point of view where environment, not only the built but the natural as well, is taken into account. There are problematic and hardly defensible indices used in the last decades to find out nature's impact on individuals and social groups. Several papers applied GIS techniques to map spatial inequalities in connection with health, well being and quality of life. As a conclusion it can be summarised that we are only at the beginning of establishing a valid, working and universal index for life quality, there is much more to be done, and researchers are just slowly approximating.

During the three days of the congress field trips were also provided by the local organisers. These city tours were very popular among the delegates as they could visit different parts of Budapest. Three different perspectives of Budapest were offered: a traditional touristic sight-seeing, a waterfront development and industrial transformation-theme, and one with different aspects of urban regeneration processes.

As a conclusion, after the initial phase EUGEO congresses the 5<sup>th</sup> Budapest Congress became more international and attractive than the organisers and the participants originally expected. Outdoor programmes gave good opportunity to discover Budapest and its surroundings and to know each other better, strengthening the connections among geographers which hopefully will lead to further cooperations. The wide-range of geographical and interdisciplinary topics gave the opportunity the delegates to get a little insight how recent geographical researches seek to answer challenges caused by environmental, social and economic changes. The next EUGEO Congress will take place in Brussels the capital of Belgium in 2017. We sincerely hope that many of those who attended the successful EUGEO 2015 congress will also join the next one.

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