

Report on the 32nd International Geographical Congress

Cologne, 26–30 August 2012

More than hundred years after the IGU's (International Geographical Union) 7th Congress held in Berlin in 1899, its quadrennial meeting took place again in Germany in August 2012. On that occasion geographers from all over the world gathered in Cologne, where science and research have been the organic part of the city since the foundation of the University of Cologne in 1388. The central building of the university offered an excellent venue for the congress. Under the motto "Down to Earth" wide ranges of topics and research results were presented demonstrating the versatile contribution of geography to many acute problems affecting our planet. The congress was on the one hand a platform where geographers could share their views, their research results and opinions, and on the other hand, it gave place to the traditional meetings of the IGC Commissions as well.

Scientifically, the five-day-long congress covered wide range of topics, which were grouped into four main themes, such as: *Global change and globalisation*, *Society and environment*, *Risks and conflicts*, and *Urbanisation and demographic change*. The congress attracted more than 2,400 participants from all over the world. The 400 sessions with great number of presentations and the 180 posters provided the opportunity to everybody to find new pieces of information about comprehensive topics of geography.

The orientation between the parallel sessions held in four neighbouring university buildings was easy due to the very well edited, nearly 300-page, programme book and due to the kind instructions of the organising staff. In addition, a flash-drive with the abstracts of all the papers provided facilitated the participants to make the right choice which sessions or lectures to visit.

For every day of the congress a keynote lecture was scheduled just before the lunch break. In these plenary sessions a prominent person (mostly politicians) and a geographer held presentations in one of the IGC's four key themes in the conference hall of the main building. As the capacity of the lecture room was limited, these presentations were both broadcasted online and projected in the neighbouring rooms of the conference venue.

The scope and depth of presentations varied greatly, as is the case in such large congresses. While in sessions, like the "Managing changes in cultural heritage cities in South-East Asia" one could meet rather specific examples from Myanmar, Indonesia and Burma, in the session of "Facets of Contested Geographies: negotiating *lieux de mémoire* in Transnational Context" more general and more theoretical presentations were given. In the session of "Demographic divide 3: Population decline in post-socialist city" nice examples illustrated the wide possibilities in using quantitative research methods (and the difficulties made by the lack of data in some countries). While lectures in the double session of "Multilocality: symbolic and material constructions of space in societies of mobile individuals" revealed how qualitative research methods can be used efficiently and creatively. In the morning session of "Tourism Sustainability with GIS and zoning systems" one could meet exemplary attempts of using GIS systems in exploring social phenomena of geography.

Geographers from Hungary represented themselves in great number at the congress. The researchers of four universities and of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences gave presentations in a wide spectrum of topics. Just to mention a couple of these presentations, Éva Kiss talked about the Hungarian industry and its crises, Mónika VÁRADI, Ágnes ERŐSS and Patrik TÁTRAI in cooperation with Doris WASTL-WALTER (University of Bern) provided some of the results of an international research project focusing on cross-border educational migration.



No less than 195 well-prepared volunteers (most of them students of geography) were giving information and helped at the registration



Looking around at one of the exhibition halls during the minutes of coffee-breaks



Loads of information about the reinvention of Bonn after the loss of capital function. A one-day tour with the leadership of Prof. Hans Dieter LAUX



The best view over the most debated building of Cologne, the large mosque Zentralmoschee. The first station of the fieldtrip "Cologne – a cultural meltingpot"

From the University of Szeged numerous colleagues gave presentations. Ilona BÁRÁNY-KEVEI, besides giving a short overview on "The significance of landscape ecological research in the 21st century", also chaired the session on "Human impacts and environmental changes in karst". The results of the research she carried out together with her colleagues on land cover patterns in Hungarian karst areas (with Eszter TANÁCS) and on freshwater tufa sites and karst springs (with Gabriella KOLTAI and Sándor KELE) were also presented. Gábor MEZŐSI and Péter CSORBA in cooperation with Burghard MEYER (University of Leipzig) introduced their results on "Climate change impact assessment in Hungarian landscapes". Zoltán KOVÁCS, Viktor PÁL and Péter BAJMÓCY presented papers on various social and economic geographical aspects of Hungary like the garry-mendering phenomenon of the new Hungarian electoral system, the spatial justice in the Hungarian healthcare policy and the recent urbanisation trends in Hungary, respectively. Researchers of the Institute of Geography, University of Pécs, Gábor PIRISI, Tamás NÉMETH, András TRÓCSÁNYI and Tímea VERCSE, presented their paper on the reactions of Hungarian small towns when facing shrinking-based challenges.

A lot of new information could be acquired also in the coffee breaks held between the sessions when participants were offered sandwiches, coffee and/or tea to regenerate. Both newly established and long-term professional relationships could be further strengthened not only during these short coffee breaks but also during the Congress Dinner and the Reception Party held in the town hall. The Young Researcher's Party was another forum where young geographers could meet each other and in some friendly conversations they could share their experiences, doubts and questions regarding their research topics.

The rich and concentrated scientific program of the congress could be diluted by the numerous one-day and half-day excursions provided by the organisers before, during and after the congress. In the framework of one-day trips participants could experience geography "live" by witnessing for example the waterfront revitalisation in Duisburg or the advantages and risks the national park "Eifel" has to face due to tourism flows. By participating in half-day trips one could get insight into the colourful issues strongly determining the life of Cologne: the changing face of its port, its car-production, the revitalisation of its building after World War II, its multicultural society and its most monumental building: the word-famous Cologne cathedral.

Those who did not enrol to any of the field trips also had the opportunity to take a short break in the city of Cologne and enjoy its fascinating cathedral, its riverfront little parks, the numerous restaurants and bars. These were all ideal places to have a rest for some time and let the new seeds of ideas and impressions gained during the inspiring discussions of the geographical congress become deeply rooted.

Until the next International Geographical Congress to be held in Beijing we have to wait four more years, but in the meantime the IGU will organise regional conferences in Kyoto (2013), Cracow (2014) and Moscow (2015). We sincerely hope that these forthcoming IGU conferences will be attended by an increasing number of Hungarian participants giving insights about the most important results of Hungarian geography.

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