



EDUC
European Studies Summer School
University of Pécs, Hungary
9-22 July 2023

Report

Daniel Grosse

Our arrival to Pécs, Hungary, on 9 July coincided with the Pécs Light Festival – an annual event during which historic buildings throughout the city are illuminated with different colours, motifs, and animations. Although the two-week summer school officially began a day later, the event was a fantastic way to meet many of the other students – 50 in total from 17 different countries – as well as the student mentors from the University of Pécs, who were our committed guides and helpers during our stay in the city. Pécs has a history stretching back over 2,000 years – starting first as a Roman settlement within the province of Pannonia and then, after the arrival of the Hungarian tribes from the Ural Mountains in the 10th century, experiencing different ethnic and cultural shifts. Like a large portion of Hungary, the city was annexed by the Ottoman Empire and experienced 150 years of (Islamic) Ottoman rule, which is why many mosques (and a noticeable Turkish flair generally) are to be found and felt in the city. However, along with a large Croatian ethnic minority, Pécs also has a significant German ethnic and linguistic minority (of Swabian decent specifically), which explains why the city has remained an extremely international, open, and outward-looking place. This, together with its wine regions (something we were able to discover first-hand during a wine tasting evening on 19 July) as well as its Mediterranean climate, gives Pécs a definitive European character and feeling.

The programme of the summer school itself catered to a wide range of different students. Besides students of the humanities, there were also students from disciplines as diverse as law, architecture, data science and quantum physics. Our lectures and workshops covered topics including EU economics, politics, and history; European art history; migration and human rights; gender issues in Europe as well as Hungarian history, culture, and politics. These classes in particular enabled some interesting (and frank) discussions between the students and the lecturers regarding the current Hungarian government and its arguable “democratic backsliding” (here, pro-EU sentiments could be sensed on behalf of the students as well as the lecturers generally, although important critical points were also raised). Despite the fact that I have visited Hungary on numerous occasions over the last decade, I gained significantly more insight into the country and its culture than I was expecting before taking part in the summer school; The rich cultural and historical diversity of Pécs specifically, but also Hungary generally, is something I was not overtly aware of and something I was able to appreciate and sense “in real time” during our stay. Afternoon and evening cultural activities –

including city tours, visits to historical sites (such as the former mosque in the city's centre) as well as dinners with traditional Hungarian food – only enhanced this experience, and the highlight of the lectures and workshops themselves came on the final day of classes, when we were taught traditional Hungarian (as well as Croatian and Hungarian-German) dances.

One of the most valuable experiences of the summer school, however, was the cultural exchange with the other participating students. I was not aware that non-EDUC universities would be taking part, and I believe that this greatly enhanced the programme overall. Students from non-EU countries such as the UK, Russia, Turkey, Argentina, the US, and India ensured that there were genuinely diverse discussions and perspectives during the classes – and not just European-centric assessments or viewpoints on specific topics. More importantly still, genuine friendships were forged over the course of the two-week summer school which – as important as academic learning and exchange are – ensure that genuine notions of open-mindedness, respect, interest in other cultures, and good will are able to cement themselves in the mentalities and hearts of people.

Overall, I was extremely pleased with the summer school and would like to thank the University of Potsdam, the DAAD, EDUC, as well as the University of Pécs for giving me the opportunity to participate (as well as for covering the cost of the course). I felt that – like myself – all other students taking part were able to gain so much in so many ways in such a short amount of time. As my studies will be finishing over the next coming months, I am very glad I was able to take advantage of such a fantastic opportunity before my time at the University of Potsdam comes to an end. I would wholeheartedly recommend the programme to everyone and would encourage all the institutions involved to continue running it and supporting students in being able to participate.

Daniel Grosse

Potsdam, 25 July 2023