

The European Geography Ass

Exchanging Knowledge and Fostering Interests Students

In 1987 students from Warsaw, Barcelona, Vienna and Utrecht universities came together and started the idea of a European geography association for students and young geographers. Since then, 17 congresses have been held and EGEA has grown from the four participants (entities) to 80 entities in 33 different countries. It is estimated that EGEA has over 2,000 active members European wide.

By Gert Ruepert

sions for students from every geography specialisation. Each spring four regional congresses take place. Besides these five 'official' congresses, entities organise other events, like thematical seminars, national weekends, and expeditions.

Another way for EGEA members to meet are the student exchanges. Exchanges are organised quite often, in a cheap and simple way. Two entities visit each other, usually for one week, with a group of 10 to 20 persons. The host entity is responsible for the programme and accommodation. Exchanges have got a geographical programme but cultural exchange and socialising are just as important.

EGEA and GIS

Florian Fischer (27)

Working at Maximilians University Munich, board member of EGEA and organiser of the EGEA Annual Congress 2006

Fisher explains why EGEA wants to promote the use of GIS: "In recent years GIS found its way to everyday life mostly due to the constantly growing use of GIS in the Internet applications. Everybody can discover every place on earth while accessing huge archives of maps and geodata about the world. We are coming closer and closer to the vision of 'the digital earth'."

"For students in spatial science the use of GIS is quite common nowadays and it has already been popular for a long time. GIS helps students to understand the complexity of spatial phenomena. It helps to understand urban development processes, climate change, traffic jams and many more spatial phenomena. Furthermore GIS enables students to analyse these spatial processes and to manage them, like in risk management or land management."

"Unfortunately GIS skills are not evenly taught in all universities in Europe and that is why EGEA wants to support and strengthen the GIS skills of all EGEA members. During the EGEA congresses and seminars every year there are always some workshops using GIS to discover or analyse a special topic, mostly in a playful way. Experience shows that many people get interested in GIS after that and try to improve their skills. In future we want to extend the number of workshops that make use of GIS and maybe organise some kind of international summer school on GIS."

"As geographers we are very broadly educat-



At the top, excursion during the Alps Seminar 2005 in Austria.

Foster Interests

The European GEOgraphy Association (EGEA) is the European network for geography students and young geographers. It aims to exchange knowledge and information between geography students and to foster their interests. To achieve this EGEA organises congresses and exchanges and it has an extensive Internet forum. EGEA has a partnership with ESRI and is funded by the European Union. The European Office is hosted at the faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

In geography studies the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) is getting more and more important. EGEA acknowledges the importance of GIS. On EGEA congresses there

are always workshops where GIS are being used. This article gives an introduction to the work of EGEA and what four geography students from Koper, Athens, Barcelona and Prague will tell about the use of GIS in their studies.

Annual Congress 2006

The main event is the Annual Congress, where over 200 students meet for 5 or 6 days. Each year the Annual Congress is organised by another entity. The Annual Congress 2006 will be held from 10th till the 15th of September in Bad Aussee, (Salzkammergut, Austria), jointly organised by EGEA-Vienna and EGEA Munich. The theme of the congress is 'Europe, inside out' and it will contain workshops and excur-

ociation and GIS

ed. But the job market often asks for specialists. We as geographers know how to work with GIS and this is what can give us an advantage over students from other disciplines. Now GIS is used more and more, also in other studies, from sociology to archaeology to chemistry. If we want to keep our advantage we have to deepen our knowledge in GIS. EGEA wants to foster the interests of European geography students, and because we think that knowing how to work with GIS is in the interest of geography students, we are promoting the use of GIS at our geography departments.”

Petra Slavec (23)

Geography student, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia

“The faculty of Humanities is part of the recently established University of Primorska. The first generation of geography students entered their studies only five years ago and went through an educational programme based on interdisciplinary and electiveness, which allow students to choose subjects depending on their individual interests. As it is positioned in a specific intercultural space, the faculty above all offers direct insight into spatial, social and political processes of bordering

areas. The faculty encourages students towards research work, so significant importance is given to the methodology of geographical research. Unfortunately, for now only one subject for practicing GIS is available. The first final theses of the geography department however were based on GIS (cartography of sea flooding), which suggests that students are aware of the importance of GIS programmes and are willing to practise them individually.”

“In the coming years a renovation of the geography programme is planned to improve the study. Experiences, suggestions and opinions of the first graduates and academic staff will be implemented in the future programme. As GIS are becoming the primary methodological tool for interpreting and presenting geographical features and processes, the improvement of GIS education on the geography department should be one of the highest priorities of the mentioned program renovation. As the Faculty of Humanities is moving to a new location in the next two years, also better facilities for GIS practising should be available.”

“Working on my final thesis now, I wish I had deeper insight in GIS during the study. Fortunately the professors are willing to help at all times. It is of great importance to be

competent with GIS, especially for those of us who are interested in research work. So losing sleep in front of the computer doing a thesis in cartography is in my opinion more than worthwhile.”

Vasileios Peppas (21)

Geography student, Department of Geography, Harokopio University of Athens, Greece

“GIS, Cadastral applications and Remote Sensing constitute one of the five main thematic units of the curriculum. Four core subjects cover the basic skills required from a geographer, whereas three elective courses offer advanced knowledge and a wider scope of applications. It is intrinsic in the Department’s philosophy that GIS should be taught as a tool, rather than as a subject per se. Therefore, applied knowledge is promoted against pure GIS studies, mostly applicable to IT professionals. Accordingly, the GIS thematic courses cover a conservative 10 per cent of the curriculum and contribute a likewise 10 per cent in earned credits towards a Geography degree. However, GIS as an academic tool has been incorporated in the syllabuses of all major advanced –mainly elective- courses, ranging from Spatial Planning and Natural



Excursion during the Tatra seminar 2006 organised by EGEA Krakow.

Disasters' Management to Remote Sensing and Applied Geomorphology.”

“The generic character of GIS studies in the Department qualifies young geographers with dexterity to adjust to market needs in an emerging sector in Greece. This is also evident in the high number of final year theses that encounters GIS problem-solving.”

“I do like GIS since they are practical in basic geographic research and timesaving. However, there are some drawbacks. For example, in Greece it is difficult to find digitised maps on request and sometimes you have to perform digitising yourself, which takes time and possibly costs money.”

Laura Roman (26)

Graduated Geography Student, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

“We study two courses of GIS: geoinformatics and a second one where we go more deeply into GIS. In the first course we use the ESRI software, but in the second course we use software developed by our university, called MiraMon, broadly used in Catalonia. On the non-GIS subjects where some spatial analysis is implied, the use of GIS, either MiraMon or the ESRI software, is also applied. There is also a third course in advanced GIS and

another one in remote sensing, for the education in GIS, but those are not compulsory.”

“Our faculty is equipped with a thousand PCs with the suitable software, but there is no room for only GIS computers. Personally I like GIS, but I have seen that especially human geographers don't really like dealing with it. I did part of my studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands where they have very good GIS education and GIS facilities. The knowledge I gained was very useful for obtaining my job. Currently I work at the GIS department in the cartographical institute of Catalonia. I am working with the computer on databases and GIS. I like it, but sometimes I miss the geography component a bit.”

Roman Matousek (22)

Geography and cartography student, Faculty of Science, Charles University Prague, Czech Republic

“The department of applied geoinformatics and cartography is mostly responsible for teaching GIS. Students of geography get in touch with GIS during their bachelor studies (BA). An introductory course of GIS takes place in the first year for 3 European Credit Transfer System points (ECTS; an academic year comprises 60 ECTS points). Students have to

prove some basic skills in ArcGIS, which is the most common software used at the university. In the second year an advanced course of GIS is obligatory for all geography students (for 4 ECTS). In the third year, a remote sensing course and using of PCI Geomatica is being taught (for 5 ECTS).”

“A few teachers in other subjects, such as physical and human geography, require the use of GIS in some assignments, which obliges students to use and improve their skills even if they do not want to specialize in GIS. During the master studies (MA), students can choose courses focused on using GIS in their specific field of interest, like physical or human geography. GIS courses are very popular among students, partly thanks to young and enthusiastic teachers. Some students feel that using other software besides ArcGIS would be useful. Students of non-geographical fields, such as biology, geology or environmental science, can choose GIS courses for their specific purposes.”

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