My Comenius News
Third Edition

Slovakia Trip & The Topic of Minorities

My Visit to Slovakia
Mary-Anne Bolton
Assistant Head Teacher
Spring Common School

Looking back at my time at Spring Common School and supporting complex International Projects, I feel fortunate to build upon my experience as a Vice Principal in an inner city school in Toronto - one of the most multicultural cities in the world. The school I worked at has a very high ethnic student population and is still used as an inner city model school. Visitors from around the world came to see the resources and programmes in place that allow all of our students to work in harmony and receive such an enriching and positive learning experience.

Part of my role as the Vice Principal was to maintain our strong links and to build positive relationships with and beyond the local community while respecting everyone’s various ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs.

Comenius is all about collaboration, appreciation and respect with a clear goal – educating a new forward thinking generation.

My Comenius visit to Slovakia brought this all back to me. It was so rewarding to see all the different nationalities working together for the same outcome ~ A positive and meaningful education for all of our pupils while respecting, honoring and celebrating their various ethnicities.

“The theme minorities was very well chosen to come together, because this is a theme which transcends boarders and is a problem with has a similar cause in every community.” - Ellen Van Snick

“It was so rewarding to see all the different nationalities working together for the same outcome” - Mary-Anne

www.comenius-equalities.tk
Joris Heyrman

Did you ever feel homesick? Why?
This is a pretty good question, because when I was in elementary school and the first years of high school I always suffered from homesickness. I had one more exchange a couple of years ago and back then I still was a bit homesick, luckily for only one day... So I went to Slovakia with a bit of a mixed feeling because I wasn't sure if I would get homesick or not. At the end, I haven't been homesick for even a single minute in Slovakia! Maybe it was the good care of the family I was in? Or maybe homesickness has gone now? Or I just had fun? I don't know, but I'm happy that I don't have that stupid feeling anymore!

What is the biggest difference between Belgium and Slovakia?
I think it is the attitude towards other people. Slovakian citizens are way more bounteous than Belgian people (of course, this is just a stereotype for Belgium and Slovakia, but it was throughout the whole experience) and they care more about you than they care about themselves. Belgian people are more introverted and tend to only help people they know (again, my experience of course), so you could say this is a pretty positive difference in favour of Slovakia.

Do you want to go back there once? Why specifically?
I think so. The towns in Slovakia may be a little less pretty than those of Belgium (except Bratislava, really cool city), but the nature of Slovakia is beautiful! Originally we would visit some of the caves Slovakia had (told in Belgium) and I looked forward to that but we didn't do that. I also saw a video of a lake surrounded by mountains, which was frozen but you could step on it and see the bottom because the ice was so clear (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WBqX7MSqWw). Of course the Comenius project gave a first look on Slovakia, but that isn't the only reason why I would go back. I've never seen such nature as in the video in real life.

Pascal Heyrman

What was your best experience in Slovakia?
The best moment for me was the time I spent at the host "family" (only one woman and her son, whom we only saw a full two minutes). They were really friendly and open-hearted! We also skyped with her daughter who came to Belgium regarding the Comenius project but was in America right now. The room I stayed in was even better than mine at home with a TV and Playstation!
Is there something you want to remember for the rest of your life?

The city trip to Bratislava was really wonderful! It's actually a really modern city, unlike our hometown Hlohovec. I will also remember the Roma that walked past us at night with a knife in his hand, which we found really strange... It was the first time I caught a plane with friends rather than with family, which was a really nice experience! But the one thing that will haunt me for the rest of my life is losing against Mr De Geest when we were playing pool...

What was your best experience in Slovakia?

My best experience was definitely the trip to Bratislava. There was a nice balance between the guided tour, which taught us more about the history of the city, and free time to explore the city by ourselves (with the help of the Slovakian students, of course). By talking to them while walking through Bratislava, we learned a lot more about Slovakian habits and such. It was by far the most interesting day.

Overall do you think this exchange project has been a rewarding experience for you?

I do, we had an awesome time in Slovakia! We met some nice people back there and our group got to know each other a little bit better, too. My thoughts about the country really changed as well. Slovakia isn't a country I would visit with my family due to the stereotypes, so I am glad I chose this country!

If you know people who go to Slovakia this summer, which important pieces of advice would you give them?

They should definitely visit Bratislava. It is a beautiful city, it has a historical background, but also a big shopping centre. The spa town Piestany is also a nice place to visit, especially in September, when you could also visit the beer fest. Another amazing aspect about Slovakia is that the drinks and the food are ridiculously cheap in comparison to the prices here in Belgium. They shouldn't worry too much, it would be fun anyway.
A Brief Interview With Our Belgian Students who Visited Slovakia

Floren De Rop

Is there something you are going to remember for the rest your life?

Yes, I will absolutely remember my host, Dominik. He is one of the kindest person I have ever met in my life. Not that straightforward, especially because he was a complete stranger to me and I was to him. He was friendly all the time and the thing I will definitely remember is that he always translated everything he or someone else said in Slovak. He told me at the beginning of our trip that he would always do that because he didn’t want me to think that he was gossiping about me. I thought that that was very, very nice of him.

Ellen Van Snick

What is the biggest difference between Belgium and Slovakia?

In Belgium life is more expensive. Only 900km away, it’s a big contrast with our way of living in the North West of Europe. Facilities in schools, social media, public transport, food, culture,... Nevertheless, it was a very nice experience that should be shared between all European citizens.

Do you want to go back there once? Why specifically?

I’d like to go back just to see my host family again. They were very sweet and I am very thankful for their hospitality. But I admit, Belgium is a more comfortable and luxurious country to live in.

Overall, do you think this exchange project has been a rewarding experience for you?

This project was an opportunity for me to explore new cultures, a new country I was not familiar with. I’ve learnt a lot about the culture. The theme minorities was very well chosen to come together, because this is a theme which transcends boarders and is a problem with has a similar cause in every community.
A Splendid Experience in Slovakia

Anastasia Lacovou

My name is Anastasia and I am 16 years old and I am from Cyprus. In my free time I like listening to music, playing with my siblings and spending time with my friends. I remember when I first learned that I would take part in the Comenius project I was very excited and happy, because I thought it would be a great experience for me. Finally after six months of preparations we were ready to go to Slovakia.

Before we went there, we stayed for two nights in Vienna because we thought it would be a good idea to visit the City and to do some shopping. After those two days we went to Slovakia. We first went to our partner Slovakian school where the girls who were hosting us were waiting for us and showed us around their school. It was a big school with a lot of classrooms. In the afternoon we met students from the other partner countries and we talked about ourselves and our countries. Each country had its traditional food on a separate table and we went round tasting each other’s food. At night we went to our host homes where we met the parents.

The following day, the Equalities Conference took place. A number of students from each country made a presentation on: “Minorities in Mass Media”. My friends and I were anxious because we were the first group to do the presentation of our project entitled “Minority groups living in Cyprus and the way they are presented in mass media”. After the presentations we went to the school and had lunch. Then we were divided into small groups and went on a tour around Hlohovec to answer the quiz which had been given to us. In the afternoon we ate pizza at school and were informed of the results of the quiz. At seven o clock we went kart racing which most of us liked.

“It was a great experience and if I have the chance I will gladly do it again”

Anastasia Lacovou
A Splendid Experience in Slovakia

The third day was my favorite one because we had the “business street” which was a fantastic experience!! On that day our group had the opportunity to show some of our traditional drinks and sweets which most people liked. The drink which was mostly appreciated was the Cypriot Commantaria, a well-known wine in Cyprus, which is only for adults because it contains alcohol. We also had the chance to meet some students there and made new friends. My friends and I had the chance to wear our traditional costumes. In the afternoon we had the sports day and all the students participated. After that, we had an evening walk in a famous spa town called Piestany. At night we went to our host families, we had dinner and went to bed.

On Friday we went on a tour in the capital city of Slovakia, Bratislava. After that, we had some time to go shopping at one of the malls. Then we went to our host families for dinner and at night we went back to school to have the farewell party where we had a lot of fun. On that night we learnt that our country won the prize for the business street. We were thrilled!! We also danced and sang along to the songs we heard. Some of the groups returned to their country, after saying goodbye to us. We were sad because our wonderful visit came to an end. However, we had lovely memories to cherish from all of us being together and having fun.

The next day was our last day in Slovakia. When it was time to leave I said goodbye to the family who hosted me and thanked them for their hospitality. Then it was time for us to leave so we hugged the girls we were staying with and thanked them as well. We went to the airport and our trip back home began!!

IT WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE AND IF I HAVE THE CHANCE I WILL GLADLY DO IT AGAIN!!
Our Stay In Slovakia
Michalina Komorowska

Definitely our stay in Slovakia will remain in our memories for a long time. We had the opportunity to learn the culture and traditions of this country.

“I wish we could meet again”
Michalina Komorowska

We discovered the taste of real Slovak dishes such as fried cheese – everyone should try or noodles with bacon and cream, and of course the best chocolate – “Studeneka”. We were definitely in the culinary paradise.

The attraction was a trip to the Spa Town - Piestany - a picturesque town which is famous for its large number of spas.

The real highlight was a trip to the capital of Slovakia, which is Bratislava. We spent the whole day enjoying the beauty of this city. We went to the biggest shopping mall, where we could buy lots of souvenirs.

The last item on the agenda was a farewell party. There were loads of great music, joy and tears. During that short time we have made many friends. We liked Slovakia so much that we did not want to go home. The next day at 5 am we left Hlohovec, taking the weight of memories and positive energy of Slovaks. I promised myself that I will come back there again!

Those are my memories of our stay in Slovakia – I wish we could meet again.
Cypriot Adventure
Patrycja Babicz

During my stay in Cyprus I visited many interesting places and I saw a lot of monuments.

Along with the other participants I got to know most of their history, not only during the trip with the whole Comenius group but also in a smaller group together with my host family.

In Kakopetia, one of the nicest villages we visited an interesting building which is called Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis. I will remember the church of Ayios Nikolaos tis Stegis which is situated in a central area of the Troodos mountain range, in the upper Solea valley.

On the second day of our stay we visited Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. We visited many museums, for example: Folk Art Museum or Ledra Museum Observatory. Thanks to this we learned a lot of about Cyprus itself.

On the third day we visited Paphos. According to Greek mythology, it was a place where the goddess of love - Aphrodite was born from the sea foam. Later, we could see Limassol Marina, where we had some free time for independent sightseeing. Those two places I liked the most.

But not only places will remain in my memory. Another very important thing was: tradition... Traditional food like halloumi, pita, timpana, traditional dances like zeibekiko, and the music that accompanied us during the trips together with the cultural evening.

I have also learned a few words in Greek, which I used when I tried to say good morning and goodbye.

I promise myself, I will be there again in the future.