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Science

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[EU-CANADA EXPERIENCE -- ROMANIA]

In the January of 2009, I landed in the outskirts of Tirgu Mures and started my EU-Canada exchange experience. Little did I know that in the next four months, I will meet many hospitable Hungarians and have a rewarding and fun experience. As I exited the airport building with a mixed sense of uncertainty and curiosity, I was greeted warmly by my supervisor Dr. Lőrinc Marton, and was escorted to the housing he had arranged for me in Tirgu Mures.

Historical Background

Tirgu Mures (or **Marosvásárhely** in Hungarian) is a small town by the Mures River, in the province of Transylvania. “Tirgu” means market, and the town’s name simply means the market beside Mures River, as it was a market town in the medieval times. Looking into History, the Transylvania plane was part of Hungary until the end of WWI. Hence, there is still a large Hungarian population in Tirgu Mures. In fact, about 45% of the people in Tirgu Mures speak Hungarian.

Language

Because of the unique history of Transylvania, in Tirgu Mures, one can live normally if he/she speaks either Hungarian or Romanian. However, because Tirgu Mures is a small city and also not being a tourist attraction, few people can speak English. I was quite worried at the beginning as the little Romanian I had learned for preparation was definitely not enough to communicate with the locals.

However, my worries soon proved quite needless as all the shops are very much self-served. Even for those that were not, by simple hand gestures, I could get my meaning across to them. To my amazement, all the people that I attempted to communicate to were all extremely nice, always bearing a smile on their faces, and never became the least impatient when I couldn’t get my point across.

Perhaps it is for this reason that I did not feel a bit alienated during the time I stayed in Tirgu Mures. For the occasions where verbal communication is absolutely necessary, Dr. Marton was kind to help me out. As a result, the language barrier that is one of my biggest worries was resolved.

Academic Experience

The school for my exchange is the Sapientia Hungarian University of Technology (SHUT). As its name suggests, it is a university founded by a Hungarian foundation, which is very interesting. Since this is an exchange program, I am required to work in a project under the supervision of Dr. Marton during my stay. The project I worked on is a multi-agent robotic system that can play a game of hockey once completed. Working on this project has been a very rewarding experience. This hockey robot system is very complicated and all of the topics involved in this system are of utmost interest to researchers around the world. Due to its nature, all of the problems are new

and challenging to an undergraduate student like me, and are therefore very interesting to learn about.

In terms of experience, this project is most similar to ENSC 440, where students have to research ways to solve an engineering problem and apply their knowledge to solve that problem. However, the difference is that in this project, students have the guidance of the supervisors. There were numerous times where I encountered problems during the project, and I was quite stuck. Luckily, I was always able to discuss my problems with Dr. Marton, and through discussion we were able to solve the problems or find alternative approaches. Through these discussions, I learned new techniques of analyzing a problem which would greatly help me in my future academic career. This would not happen in ENSC 440, because the professor has to look over many groups of students, and is not always able to provide detailed feedback to students. Therefore, the experience I have gained in this project is rewarding (and more enjoyable than my ENSC 440 experience).

This exchange experience is rewarding in other ways as well. As a requirement, the exchange students must take cultural lessons as well. It is because of this requirement I was able to meet with my Hungarian Lesson instructor, who I befriended. During my Hungarian lesson, she was always supportive and kindly explains my questions about Hungary and Hungarian (as a language). Consequently, I felt encouraged to learn Hungarian and enjoyed the lessons.

Because half the people in Tirgu Mures are Hungarian, I was able to apply what I learned in real life. At the end of my stay, I was able to conduct simple conversations with Hungarians, and knew quite a bit about Hungarian history, which proved very useful for my travelling to Budapest.

Yet another rewarding aspect of this experience is making friends with fellow students at SHUT. As this hockey project is very complicated, it is attempted by a group of students. My group members are all very passionate about the project and friendly, and helped bring me up to the current status of project quickly. The group dynamic was quite good. In addition, they also showed me around the city and the lives of students in Tirgu Mures.

Because of all the hospitality these people have showed me, I had quite a pleasant experience in Tirgu Mures. Below are some pictures of my interesting academic experience.



Figure 1 Hockey Robot System



Figure 2 Hockey Robot



Figure 3 Robotics Lab



Figure 4 our Project Group



Figure 5 Second from Left, Dr. Lőrinc Marton

Living in Tirgu Mures

From my personal aspect, this exchange is a very entertaining and cultural experience. During my stay in Tirgu Mures, I was able to get in touch with Hungarian culture. I had seen 2 performances of Maros folk dance (a traditional Hungarian folk dance), gone to one concert, and seen one performance of drum music. Despite the fact I did not understand a word of the dialog before the dance performance, I deeply enjoyed the performance. Indeed, art is beyond borders and languages.



Figure 6 Maros Folk Dance



Figure 7 concert in Tirgu Mures

Travel

One of the best perks about this exchange must be the chance to see Europe. During my 2 weeks of travel time, I have also traveled to several places. During my travel, I also met different travellers from around the world and made many friends. Below are some beautiful pictures of Europe.

Brasov

Brasov is one of the top tourist spot as the famous Bran Castle (Dracula castle) is only 30 km away. There are also one castle and one ruins of peasant fortress equally beautiful in the vicinity. Brasov is also one of the top ski resorts in Romania.



Figure 8 Brasov town square



Figure 9 Brasov Town square



Figure 10 ruins of peasant fortress



Figure 11 Bran Castle

Budapest

One of the most beautiful cities in Eastern Europe, Budapest is named “Paris of Eastern Europe”. Separated by the beautiful Danube River, Buda has the majestic royal palace on Castle hill, whereas Pest has the famous Szekrény Fűrdo (thermal bath).

Because I learned about Hungarian history, I was able relate the buildings to the historical figures and appreciate the history behind them, which makes my visit all the more meaningful. The following are some photos of “the Paris of Eastern Europe.”



Figure 12 Royal Palace on Castle Hill

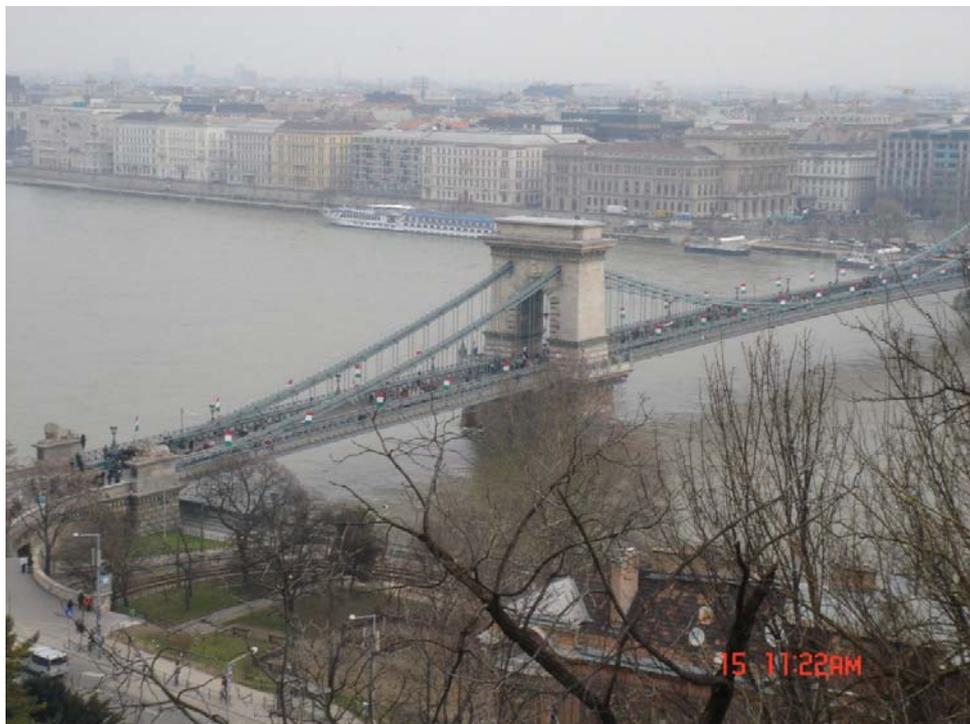


Figure 13 Szechrény Chain Bridge



Figure 14 Royal Palace at night



Figure 15 Parliament Building at night

Visegrad

Visegrad, Hungary was once home to their most beloved king, King Matyas, and has now the ruins of the 15th century citadel.



Figure 16 Ruins of King Matyas' Royal Palace



Figure 17 Ruins of 15th century citadel

Vienna

The capital of Austria is one city with a long history with music, and many world famous composers have had their pieces performed here. For this reason, the concert hall is one place that must be visited in Vienna.



Figure 18 Vienna Concert Hall

Aside from music, the city itself is filled with little parks and flowers, so one may have a feeling of walking in a garden when walking on the streets of Vienna.



Figure 19 park in front of city hall



Figure 20 Overlooking at City Hall

There are also some interesting architectures in Vienna, fully illustrating how fun the people can be here. One such example is the house built on one of the wings of the parliament building of Austria illustrated in Figure 21.



Figure 21 A house on one wing of parliament building

Other interesting buildings in Vienna are thanks to the artist turned architect--Friedensreich Hundertwasser. The buildings that he redesigned are now a main tourist attraction in Vienna.



Figure 22 "The Village"

The biggest building in Vienna is the St. Stephan's church, which has been continuously under maintenance since 15th century. Its size is so massive that even at the furthest corners of the square, I could not get a complete picture.

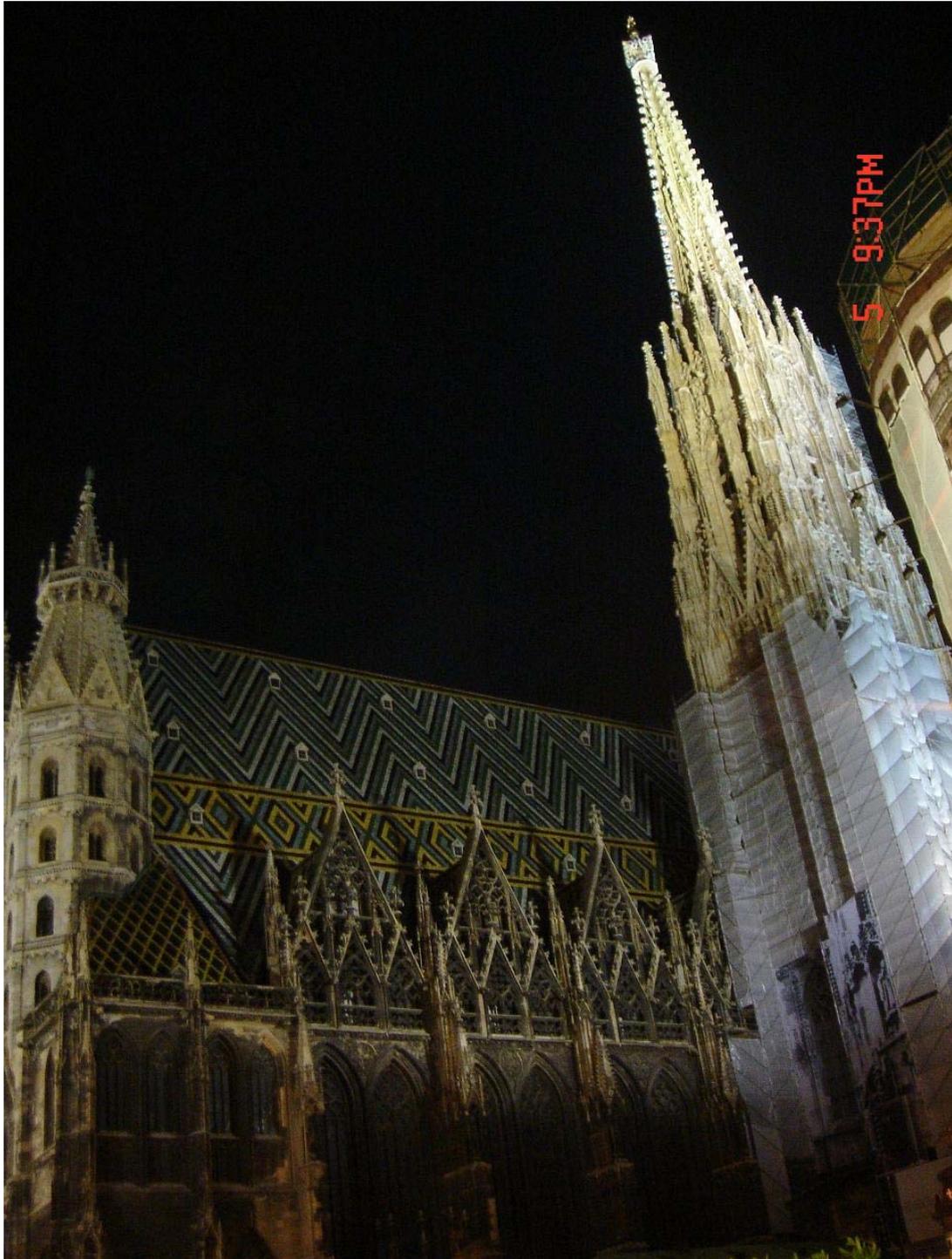


Figure 23 St. Stephan's Church Night

To put things into perspective, another picture can be used to demonstrate the size of the church.



Figure 24 Schönbrunn Palace & St. Stephan's Church

Even from the hills of the Schönbrunn palace garden, which is ten kilometres away, the St. Stephan's Church still stands out from the rest.



Figure 25 Schönbrunn Palace Garden

Prague

Another major attraction in Eastern Europe is Prague, the capital of Czech Republic. Unlike Vienna, Prague's beauty is based on its architectural beauty. Even more so than the buildings in other parts of Europe, buildings in Prague are crafted to the smallest details.



Figure 26 Prague Powder Gate



Figure 27 Charles Bridge



Figure 28 Tyn Church from old town square



Figure 29 Prague Royal Palace



Figure 30 Prague Dancing House



Figure 31 Prague streets along river banks

Conclusion

During this four month of EU-Canada exchange, I have met many hospitable people in Tirgu Mures and improved my problem solving skills through the hockey robot project. More importantly, I have made friends with many fellow engineers and widened the range of my networking. During my stay in Romania and travelling, I have met different people from around the globe. Not only did this experience allowed me to travel around Europe and experience the European culture, but it also broadened my perspective of the world. To conclude, my experience with the EU-Canada exchange is very rewarding and fun.