

EU-Canada Student Mobility Program Personal Experience

By Michael Kume (SFU)

In the fall of 2009, I was given the opportunity to participate in the EU-Canada Academic Mobility Program as an exchange student from Simon Fraser University. My placement was in the Romanian city of Targu Mures where I spent most of my time working on the Mobile Robot Hockey System.

Targu Mures

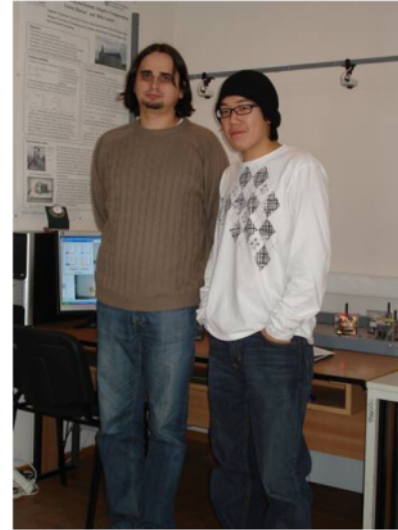
I remember when I first arrived in Targu Mures in early September, my first thought was “What have I gotten myself into?”. Everything was completely different when compared to Vancouver. Targu Mures is a much smaller city with a population of approximately 150,000 people. Thus unlike Vancouver and many of the major cities within Europe, there are only a small number of foreigners living in the city. And with little to no tourist attractions within Targu Mures, few people can speak English. I soon realized that the little Romanian that I had learned through the help of a friend at SFU was little help. And all the sudden, even the simplest tasks such as buying groceries or taking the bus to the university became a challenge. Not only was communication an issue, the fact that I was pretty much the only Oriental person in the entire city warranted constant stares from many people, every time I went outside. This was something that I could not get used to until the very end of my time in Targu Mures.



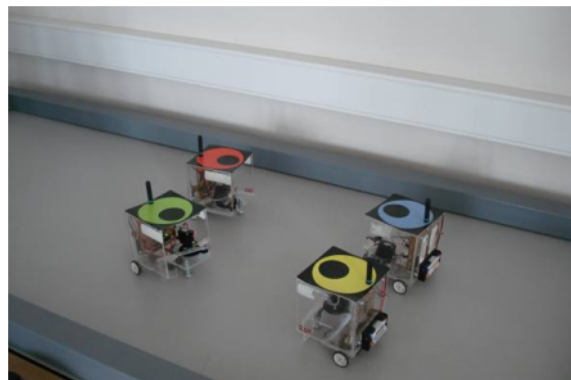
Historically, Targu Mures as well as the Transylvania region of Romania was once a part of the Hungarian Empire. After the military defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the First World War, territory formerly belonging to the Hungarian Empire was divided among surrounding countries. Part of Transylvania, south of the Mures River and east of the Somes River came under control of Romania. As a result, there is still a large Hungarian presence in Targu Mures, with the Hungarian community making up almost 50 percent of the population. And many of the people are fluent in both the Romanian and Hungarian languages. This made things more difficult for me because when a person talked to me, I had to figure out in what language they were speaking before I responded. Either way, I usually ended up apologizing that both my Hungarian and Romanian is very limited, and praying that the person could speak some English. Luckily, most people in general understood my situation and were kind enough to patiently wait for me to get my point across. And when everything failed, the global language of hand gestures came in.

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania

Sapientia University is where I spent the most time working on the Mobile Robot Hockey project under the supervision of Professor Lorinc Marton. As stated in the name, Sapientia University is a Hungarian University. Funded by the Hungarian government, Sapientia University was formed so that ethnically Hungarian people living in Romania can pursue a post secondary in their mother tongue.



By the time I began my co-op workterm at Sapientia University, most of the hardware for the Mobile Robot Hockey System had already been completed. Therefore, the tasks that were left for me were mostly software based. Initially, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to complete my assigned tasks because programming is one of my weakest fields and other than the introductory programming courses I have taken at SFU, I do not have any other programming experience. Fortunately, through Professor Marton's constant support, I was able to complete my assigned tasks. Seeing the mobile robots function properly after I integrated my newly written code into the existing program was probably the best feeling I've ever had while working with software.



Meeting people and making friends was probably my biggest concern during my time at the university. Sapientia University doesn't have a proper international student program. And there were no relevant courses offered in English during my time there so I couldn't take any courses. And the fact that my Hungarian was pretty much non-existent did not help either. However, after meeting students at the university, I found most people were friendly in general. And almost everyone could speak some English so communication wasn't a problem.

One of my biggest interests is soccer. So through Professor Marton's introduction, I was able to play soccer with a rec team consisting of students and professors from the university. As well as the people I met through soccer, I was also able to become friends with a few students who were executives for the university's student social club. In



addition to going out with them for drinks after class, I was also invited to a camping trip held by the club for first year students. For four days and three nights, I camped at a Romanian ski lodge, went on hiking trips, and even survived without clean water for the last half of the trip. I found that if you can drink beer and play soccer, you can make friends pretty easily.

Travels throughout Romania and Europe

The main reason why I applied for this program is because there are very few co-op positions available in the field of robotics, something that I have an interest in. But, another reason why applied is because of the opportunities to travel to places I have never been to before. On weekends, I traveled within the city (Targu Mures) and nearby places such as Sighisoara. In addition to the small trips within Romania, I took a couple of bigger trips with a friend on an exchange in Budapest, which allowed me to travel all over Northern and Western Europe. Pictures of the places I went to can be seen below.

Romania

In late September, I attended a symphony concert held by the Targu Mures Symphony Orchestra. The conductor of the symphony is actually Japanese, thus there was some Japanese influences in some of the songs that were performed.



Another place I went to is Sighi oara. Sighi oara is a popular tourist destination due to the town's prevalent medieval architecture, as well as the fact that it is the supposed birth place of Vlad the Impaler.



Sweden and Denmark

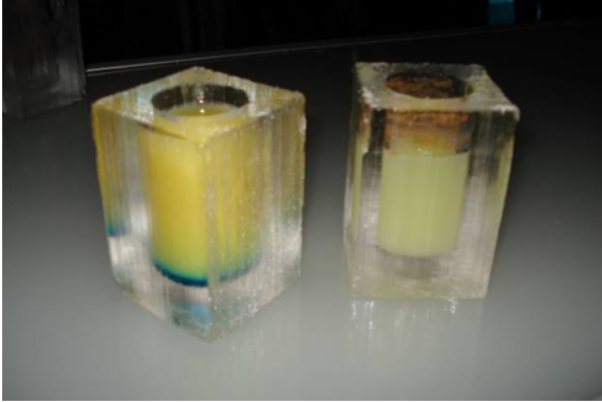
An interest that my friend in Budapest and I have in common is hockey. And because Sweden is considered to have one of the strongest hockey leagues in Europe, we decided to go to Stockholm to check out Swedish Elite League hockey. In addition to Stockholm, we also traveled by train to smaller cities such as Lund and Malmo, as well as Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark.



Swedish Elite League Hockey



Stockholm Open



Absolut Ice Bar in Stockholm, Sweden



Nobel Museum



Festival of Lights



Langholmen Hostel



Copenhagen, Denmark

Paris and Amsterdam

After school ended, I had some time before I went back to Vancouver. My flight was from London Heathrow so I decided to go to nearby Paris and Amsterdam.



Moulin Rouge



Fountain de Saint Michael



Louvre Pyramid



Eiffel Tower



Amsterdam, Holland

Conclusion

First of all, I'd like to thank the people that have continuously supported me during my four months exchange in Europe. Professor Shahram Payandeh for giving me the opportunity to participate in the program. Professor Marton for the continuous support he gave me during my time at Sapiientia University. My roommate Oscar who was always there to help me out, every time I had a problem. And last but not least, the friends that I made at Targu Mures. Thank you all and I hope that this isn't the last time I see you.

For those that are contemplating whether or not to participate in this program, I would fully recommend to everyone, especially for those that have never experienced living outside of Vancouver. It's not just an opportunity to further your engineering career. Participating in this program has allowed me to meet new people and learn about different cultures. Even though it was tough at certain times, it was a wonderful experience for me, one that I'll remember for the rest of my life.

Michael Kume