

GESI Newsletter

Global and European Studies Institute

03/2010 ~ An EMGS Special Edition Issue



EDITORIAL

This year's graduation ceremony held in Vienna University's luxurious Academic Festsaal offered not only the opportunity to meet with the 2008-10 cohort of the EMGS programme but was also combined with a large alumni conference.

After five years of the programme three classes have now successfully completed the Global Studies course by sharing a European perspective. This European perspective is nothing less than an exclusive European property which wonderfully benefits from an enriched community of students and scholars coming from all over the world concerned and motivated to look at the global issues at hand.

No wonder then that students especially emphasise this aspect of their studying experience as this programme stands alone with its institutionalised possibility to learn in such diverse classes with peers from India, Ghana, Chile or the Ukraine to name but a few. To date, the course has attracted students from 42 countries, and this pool of interest is increasing as the consortium, with its partners in, now, eleven countries on four continents, receive more and more applications annually. For the forthcoming academic year, for example, we must select just 75 students from more than the 1000 applications submitted. Not an easy task as I am sure you can appreciate, especially when hundreds are so well qualified.

At the other end of the process there is, of course, the ever-present question of how to enter the labour market and how

to find an appropriate job when your field of study is not as generally well known as the more traditional disciplines. However, concrete, tangible examples from those who have completed the EMGS course and have since moved on clams fears and assumptions; this is what we were pleased to receive from the alumni meeting which was more than encouraging.

As expected graduates of the programme make their way into the academic as well as in the business sectors, they receive offers from public services and further private initiatives to create their own business. For the first time in 2010 we had alumni who - after further qualification in their respective organisations - offered courses back to the programme. We hope to be able to benefit from more of this in the near future, since it further enforces the link between the programme and the practice of global activities. Moreover it encouragingly proves that those solidarities established in class during the time as Global Studies students are crucially valid and of the utmost importance as graduates take their first tentative steps and move into a new professional situation which often requires support.

It is a great pleasure to invite readers to have a look at a number of personal testimonies and experiences collected for this special issue of our newsletter. I would like to take the opportunity here to especially thank Ian Mills who has made it possible that the inspiration we all felt at the Vienna event has been translated into this special edition. We sincerely hope that by these means such inspiration will endeavour whilst not being locatio-

nal bound to Vienna but it will transcend around the world wherever the EMGS students, alumni and fellows are busy and find themselves.

With all my best wishes for the New Year from an exceptionally snowy Leipzig

CONGRATULATIONS

Our warmest congratulations are extended to all the graduates of the 2008-2010 cohort and especially to **Derek Elliot** for his thesis on: "*Politics Not Pirates: Contested Sovereignities of the Konkan Coast, c.1690-1756.*" to **Martijn Mos** for his thesis on: "*Conflicted Normative Power Europe: The European Union and Sexual Minority Rights*"

and to **Ekaterina Vladimirova** for his thesis on: "*Migration and institutional transformation in Russia in 1990s*"

Martijn Mos also won the prize for the best graduate 2010, completing his studies with an overall average grade of 1.0 - the highest possible grade to achieve!!!

Finally with are pleased to announce that **Dr. Victoria Reinhardt** recently gave birth to a healthy baby boy on 29th October 2010. We wish her, baby Alexander and the rest of the family a happy and enjoyable start to 2011.

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The EMGS Newsletter is always looking for reports and articles from across the EMGS consortium and around the world. If you would like to contribute to the next issue please send all pictures and articles to: emgs.alumni@uni-leipzig.de



Graduation Ceremony 2010 in Vienna © Univ. Wien/Foto Weiwurm

EMGS FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WROCLAW

Touching down in Poland in late September, I was a bit apprehensive about studying in Wrocław. The city, as I had heard, had a great reputation as a vibrant student town within a dynamic and fast-paced city. On the other hand, I had seen pictures of the city with its canals and the River Oder gently flowing through, and these romantic images filled me with a feeling of whimsy. Having been here for about seven weeks, I can say Wrocław has exceeded my expectations. In speaking with other students, this sentiment appears to be universal and we "EMGSers" in Wrocław regard the city with a sense of pride. I studied in Kraków back in 2008, but there was a completely different feel for that experience. Here in Wrocław there is a different vibe, which is a combination of being part of a great community and building unique life experiences. Already, a great relationship has formed between the first and second year students. We exchange various points of view, work together on projects, and more than occasionally a bottle of *Zubrówka*.

Wrocław, from a Polish and central European context, is quickly developing. Stepping outside the dormitory reveals this rather quickly; one can see offices for Google, McKinsey & Co., HP and other multinational firms which rank rather highly in terms of reputation and performance.

Another great aspect of studying in Wrocław is the fact that you're definitely not alone. Aside from having a large EMGS cohort, Wrocław is home to over 100,000 students, most of whom are eager to meet new, foreign faces and share tips on what's where, who's who, and how to do what.



Wrocław City Centre

The city itself represents a great history, one with a combination of German, Bohemian and Polish influences. After all, until 1945, Wrocław was known as Breslau. The German cultural heritage is vividly apparent and quite striking when viewing the myriad of gothic structures within the city. A stroll along the Cathedral Island will reveal this and make for some great photos to send back home.

It's very easy for any of the EMGSers here to say that we're pleased to be in Wrocław. We're glad to have had this opportunity to meet each other, but also a truly original city with a fresh vibe, cultured past, and alluring future.

By Matthew Przybylek

ROSKILDE

I stood in the middle of Copenhagen airport with my two impossibly heavy suitcases and two carry-ons in front of me, several possibilities for the right train platform which nevertheless meant nothing to me, multiple sweat drops running down my face, and not one person to help me through this. Despair would have surely overtaken me if I hadn't been so excited about entering a new life and its endless opportunities, having condensed my old American life (minus Hawaiian shirts) into luggage that although bulky, would fit inside a car trunk.

So into a trunk – a cab trunk – went my 60-kilo luggage, and out of my pocket came 600 Danish kroner, or about 80 euros. It was a small price to pay to avoid dislocating my shoulders and missing the sign-in period at Roskilde University, or RUC. There was no way I would've found the right train, anyway.

Once in the cab, I heard a familiar song on the radio and for a few seconds missed a friend from back home. But the sight of Trekroner Town took my mind off that: farm animals... fields stretching as far as the eye could see... cosmopolitan Copenhagen seeming oh so far away... apparently nothing to do except take long walks, soon in the freezing cold and snow... wait, is that a building?

No, it was several buildings... we had arrived at RUC. I had no idea where to go, but a Good (Danish) Samaritan named Mads, who would later become my Danish teacher, not only took me to where I was supposed to register but also helped me with my luggage. I'd gradually come to find out that Danes can be very helpful, warm, fun, and hilarious, although they're often perceived as too reserved except when they're drunk and decide to take off their shirts or dress up as moose and Christmas pixies.

I'd also gradually come to appreciate their system at RUC of favoring group projects and not monitoring our work, letting us do it in our own time as long as we make the one deadline, which is the opposite of what I've been used to. (The downside of such a laidback attitude at RUC is that sometimes it takes a while to get an administrator to take care of important matters for us, during the short opening hours. But like everything else in a new country, we have to learn to deal with it.)

Fortunately, I found a "family" at RUC to make such a big transition easier – fellow international students with whom I instantly connected and who would be a constant in my life over the next few months: David (a German enrolled in European Studies), registered at RUC at the same time I did, went with me to our dorm, Korallen, and somehow managed to carry my two impossibly heavy suitcases up the stairs to my room; Leonie and Ellie (another German and a Finn who, like me, are going for a Master's in Global Studies) smiled at me the next day at Orientation, I sat with them, and we have been inseparable ever since; and Amanda and Magdalena (an Aussie in Communications and an Austrian in Biology) joined our "family" soon after, making it complete with the different flavors of their personalities.

Together, we have decorated the kitchen at gray, overpriced, sometimes frustrating Korallen, and cooked surprisingly delicious meals with simple ingredients from the two supermarkets in sleepy Trekroner. We have explored and found little hangout spots in beautiful Roskilde and Copenhagen, which turn out to be not so far away from where we live and not necessarily always extremely expensive. We have danced all night at parties the French, Spanish, and Italian students throw at Korallen to make it feel more like we are in Ibiza than in the middle of farm fields. Come to think of it, the international students have made Trekroner somewhat cosmopolitan...

I will miss my "family" as I move in with a Danish acquaintance in Copenhagen next semester and most of them go back to their respective countries. But I am also looking forward to entering yet another new phase, when I will have been more integrated into Denmark and with its people (now that I have gotten closer to some of them), and will have more access to city life. Then next year it starts all over again when I move on to Wrocław, Poland, to the second year of my Erasmus Mundus Master's program. I can no longer complain, as I did in the US, that my life lacks change or adventures...

By Ana Ribiero

LEIPZIG

We are together...It was a Thursday evening, when we finished our movie night. We waited at the tram station in wild wind and snow. Out of nowhere, Daniela said: "what is the odds of one Spanish girl, one Chinese girl, one Romanian girl and one Greek girl meeting together and waiting for the tram in such a German city—Leipzig?" We looked at each other and laughed. We all said that Daniela was being sentimental, but in our minds we clearly all had had the same thought: how lucky are we? The odds must have been around zero, but our program seems to be a magic-maker. It changes the impossible into possible.

So, here we are. 31 people from 20 different countries with diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Like the words we have used in our facebook group: flavours from all over the world, but mostly spicy.

There is no word better than "adventure" to describe our life in Leipzig, but this "ad-



First Year Leipzig Students

venture" is mild, colourful, and the most importantly: we are always together.

We study together. The schoolwork in Leipzig is stressful. Before I came here, it never occurred to me that these never-ending readings and essays could be something I could appreciate; that the library could be somewhere I could fall in love with. The night of an essay deadline; the weekend before a mid-term exam; the lunch-break between two seminars, we are all in library, our cosy, warm library with a soft sofa. We bump into each other even on the way to bathroom. We are there for each other and ready to send spiritual support by maybe only glance and smile.

We travel together. I always say that I feel like I am back in high school where everybody carried a backpack and travelled in the school bus. We were together

in Weimar, in Vienna, and will be together in Poland, in London or anywhere else in Europe.

We party together; we celebrate all the festivals together. We cooked turkey on Thanksgiving; we ate potato pancakes on Hanukkah; we made a deal: as long as we are together, we will celebrate all the holidays from all countries together. Thank you Jennifer for hosting every weekend and holiday parties and making all these plans possible.

We live close enough that it can even be called "together". People say, "Leipzig is small and boring". But they don't know how I appreciate the smallness of Leipzig. Because it is small, we can live on the same street and go to campus with the same tram; because it is small, we can walk home around 4am with all the laughter and jokes as never fading memories; because it is small, we never feel alone.

I once pictured my studies abroad before I came here. I was fully prepared for all the loneliness and hardships. What I didn't

prepare for was all the joys and surprises: I didn't expect that I would talk to a Bolivian girl at 2am about her romantic love story; I didn't expect that I would hear the words "no problem, what are friends for" from an American girl when I asked for a big favour; I didn't expect that an Azerbaijan boy would show up five minutes after I said "we need help"; I didn't expect that I can experience passion and power from all that "post-colonisation" or "deterritorialization" academic talk; I didn't expect that I would find tons of similarities everyday among us although we come from different nations.

I didn't expect that we would always be together.

By Qian Sun

ALUMNI MEETING VIENNA

EMGS Alumni Meeting – Vienna 2010

It was in glorious spring weather of 18°C and sunshine that over 100 Erasmus Mundus Global Studies students and Alumni met in Vienna between 11th and 14th November 2010 in order to celebrate the 2nd EMGS Alumni Meeting and the 4th Graduation Ceremony of the course.

The objective of the meeting was to

strengthen the communication links between current and previous students and to take advantage of achieving the critical mass of over 300 course Alumni into initiating and overarching, Alumni-led organisation. The founding premise of such an organisation, which will be developed in the coming weeks and months, is to better use the knowledge and skills of all students, past and present, of the five participating universities and share such expertise with each other.

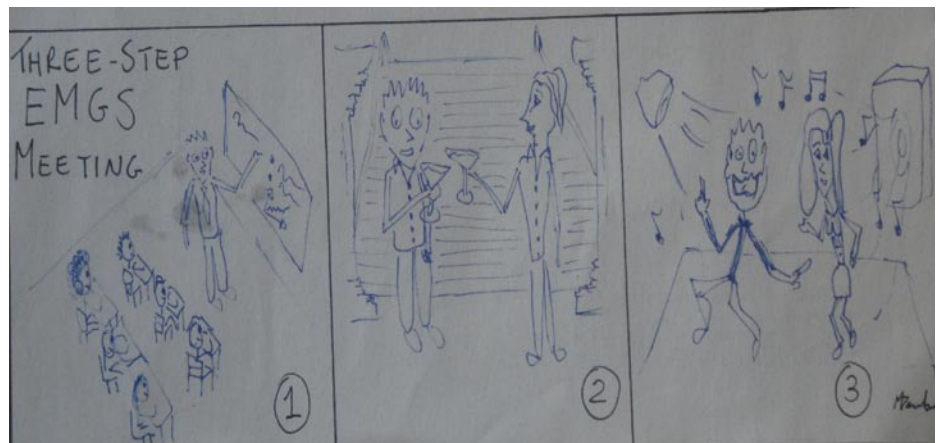
The meeting not only focused on the foundation of the Alumni Organisation, but also offered an insight into the perspectives and career paths of those that had successfully completed the two year course "Global Studies: A European Perspective" since 2007. The academic route was presented by former students **Ulrike Lorenz**, **Ashley Hurst** and **Forrest Kilimnik** who gave impressions of their PhD topics, recounted experiences and gave advice when following such a path. Furthermore an introduction to the new Centre of Area Studies based in Leipzig along with its operations and functions was given by **Forrest Kilimnik**. Some possible career path options were also given centre stage in presentations by Alumni about the International Press Institute (**Nayana Jayarajan**), the International Atomic Energy Agency (**Thayyb Sahini**), Capital Group (**Yiwen Li**), Youth Bank (**Johannes Raffel**) and GPR Dehler (**Justin Brown**). Furthermore, Alumni-led projects were also presented in an effort to raise awareness of the course and reinforce inter-cohort dialogue. Such projects included Globalistan (**Fahad Mustafa**), the EMA (**Deepti Kakkar**), the Global Studies Think Tank (**David Engelhardt**) the Alumni portal (**Ian Mills**). Moreover, many of the participants took part in a workshop session entitled "Proaction, Innovation and Cooperation in cultures of peace" led by **Jenny Lind Elmaco** und **Peter Frommelt**. During the various points of the itinerary of the meeting the participants also had the chance to discover the delights of Vienna as well as taking part in an excursion to an exhibition of "European Urban Spaces" at the Architekturzentrum. Such opportunities allowed the participants the possibility to discuss with each other about their experiences, home countries and impressions of the, now, five European and six non-European universities in the Consortium. The highpoint of the meeting took place in the prestigious Großer Festsaal of the University of Vienna in the form of the Graduation Ceremony for the 2008-2010 course. Thereafter the festivities were continued at the re-release party

of the Globalistan CD in the impressive Viennese Palmenhaus. Feedback from participants has been nothing but positive both during and following the event and is encouraging that the next Alumni Meeting and Graduation Ceremony will be just as successful and well attended.

By Ian Mills

The Global Parthenogenesisists: A Look at a Phenomenon Weekend

It is really difficult to be a participant of an elusively defined group, centered around a study with chimeric goals, and maintain some objectivity about our experiences. This was brought to mind as Sahini sat outside the orbit of the group at the co-operation workshop. Or when Peter, the welcome "outsider" who spoke to us at the same workshop about his perceptions of "you (us) guys". Is it really true that to the outside world "we" are so comprehensible yet we struggle to define ourselves. "I don't want to work for the Man". Perhaps, we are just going through a process of parthenogenesis, or self-birthing. The weekend was such a phenomenon that I wondered if a study could be made of it. I was headed to the center and capital of that virtual and moveable-placeless Globalistan. And believe me, it is supposed that citizenship of this non-state-state is extremely exclusive, it only consists of a rare breed. For me it all started in a bus from Leipzig. We left at 8:00, and by 9:00 there was already inter-cultural chaos. Wine passed around, massages, Spanish, German, Polish, Chinese, all billowed here and there, as the passengers de- and re-territorialized their seating arrangements. After a circuitous route over Munich, many stops, and thirteen hours of travel, we eventually arrived in Vienna, already a transformed group of people. New relationships developed, ideas were exchanged, trust was felt even emotions were expressed. In a sense the torturous bus ride was rewarding enough to expect nothing else. However, the weekend had a thousand beginnings, and created a thousand more beginnings or dreams of them. "I can give you a recommendation", "Perhaps I can help with an internship", "I will meet you in Singapore", "Yes, we should start a think-tank", "Let's finally start the French salon in Leipzig". Through some magical association, and assumed equal patronage, everyone wanted to be a resource for everyone else. But at what level? Do we have professional relationships, or are they hierarchical somehow; how? Or are they cultural, and can we, should we



The Three Step EMGS Meeting by **Matteo Dembech**

have personal relationships? Where are the social borders? Oh, it doesn't matter, you see, in Globalistan everyone is even interdisciplinary in that! What an amazing sui generis, group of people. My plans were in total disarray, I planned both too much and not at all. Visiting friends, moderating for people who didn't know my role (me included), sleeping twice in unplanned situations, cab drives with politically interested drivers from Iran. Or, life-sized ceramic giant squids in a puddle of water in a museum symbolizing the emergence from darkness and the mystery of the unknown. How could all these random and fascinating variables have been foreseen, or integrated from our collective experiences? Just more transcending, transforming, trans- everything perhaps. I suppose I should have merely planned on and expected a trans-, inter-, multi-, de-/re- everything kind of experience as all the others citizens seemed to have done. What have I learned from the Globalistanis? Well, I am uncertain as to whether I made gains in my learning or whether I have discovered a new and vast ignorance! Oh, "Sorry, I can only, speak three languages, read six, two of them being dead and useless, but can you explain to me why two Greek words are translated into four Latin ones?" "Oh, no, how embarrassing I have never visited your country, I foolishly visited some 20, 30, other ones." No matter how vast each citizens of Globalistan's knowledge, it was never enough. Is a conspiracy theory worth thinking about? Who knows who killed Kennedy, or if the Americans really went to the moon or not. Is globalization, Globalistan, glocal, lobal, ruurban, such a great big conspiracy?! I felt to play the part of Socrates (the ugly, shoeless fool part), as each of the others played their roles – some were actors, some were "elites", some were intellectuals, some "famous", other "influential",

some were rich other bitter Marxists,... These were the masks passed around at the parthenogenic phenomenon weekend between the citizens of Globalistan. And what did it matter which one we wore at any moment, everyone was all of these things. See, even our identities are trans, multi, inter, de-/re! And so many names, difficult ones, changed ones, alias', and nick-names. Erica and Shannon? Oh, those are not the real Chinese names. Perfectly normal... when I am in Africa I am called M'Bemba Bangora Toukaitou. And she is just using her German side of the family's name, but only here. It is the way it is for the Globalistanis to change their names in different places. And much more was shared.

By **Ashe Outou**

Alumni meeting – a real global studies experience

The team that organised the Global Studies Alumni Meeting in Vienna must be proud of their work. It was a success. Not only due to the sharing of ideas which happened in the lectures at the University of Vienna, but also due to the great opportunity to meet new people and see old and good friends which has made part of our trajectory in our Global Studies experience.

Even with the possibility to be in contact with other colleagues from abroad offered in the summer and winter schools, this meeting was, crucially, different, and - if I can say - a more special experience. Rejoin all those who are successfully facing the "real" world in academia, in NGO's or in the private sector, add those who have just graduated, with the others which are - like me - in the middle of this way, next to the new ones was like journey through time. The different perspectives and experiences allied with the curiosity and fresh ideas resulted in a multi-cultural good fee-

ling shared by all the participants.

Every group, from every year in all universities has its own peculiarity and special feature. Even if we try to convince the other generations that "our" group was the best, it will be impossible to find a consensus. But, in this weekend, I realized that above all else, all global studies students have one thing in common, and I am not just talking about the party mood: they have thirst for life, for the new, for great and special moments. That is why I believe that being a part of this selected big group makes each of us special people, due to the things we experience and our sharing this with other special people means it will stay in our hearts and minds forever, no matter which path we take after that.

After the meeting, even after almost 10 hours in a cramped bus, I felt renewed within myself. Seeing that we are not alone in this global journey – at least for these two short years – made me even stronger and gave me energy to go deeper and deeper in this new, complex challenging, subjective, "everything and nothing" world that Global Studies can be. And I really hope that we will have more meetings like this one to remind us of how crucial and important this time of our lives was, is and always will be.

By Julia Dócolas

And finally, Deepti Kakkar's slideshow that accompanied the Globalistan/ Graduation Party is available at: <http://www.sendspace.com/file/jn170e>

ALUMNI REFLECTIONS

A Letter to the Students

Dear EMGS Students, I finished my studies of the Erasmus Mundus Programme in June 2008. In the meantime some things have happened (would be sad if not...). I went to Mozambique for an internship, working for an HIV/AIDS project in autumn 2008. This was an unbelievab-

le experience for myself and provided me with a good CV-input for the application for my current job.

I studied EMGS in Vienna and Sydney, and had lots of experiences like all of you might already have had. Especially the point of "meeting so many interesting people" has to be highlighted, as well as, and I really do mean it, almost all the courses I had the chance to take. I have been quite lucky, because while staying in Mozambique I found an advertisement for a position at the University of Vienna.

I am now working as University Assistant at the Department of Education in the field of international and intercultural comparative Special Needs Education. In May 2009 I attended a conference on Education in Addis Ababa/Ethiopia, which gave me a first insight into the field I am now working in.

I am currently in Addis Ababa, doing my field research here, and: I love it!! I started my first sentences in Amharic, and everybody is very impressed of my: "Hallo, how are you?" As for now however it doesn't allow for more "fluency".

I decided to write this short contribution to let you know about my life after studying. I meet lots of young people these days, who are thinking quite hard about their future. Some of them have to make tough decisions, and I think it is never easy to decide, which way to turn. My advice is to always say "yes" to the challenges that might come your way. In my opinion, this is the only way to make valuable experiences that will give you the knowledge-basis for further decisions.

Greetings from cold Addis (especially at night and in the morning... unbelievable...). We have already had to leave one school, where we were doing research at, because my Ethiopian assistant started to get really cold and got ill because of that.... But that's another story...

I wish you all the best, enjoy the studies!!

By Margarita Schiemer

A reflection on my time in EMGS

Upon graduating from my undergrad, it seemed as though the world was my oyster. The only problem was I don't eat shellfish. I had just completed 4 years of university schooling, only to find myself more lost than when I had started. I didn't know what I wanted to do or what I wanted to be, but I had enrolled into this Masters program in global studies, heading to Leipzig and then London. I decided upon this plan after studying abroad in Madrid my junior year and loving the experience of learning a new language, living a new culture, visiting new places and meeting new and interesting people. It had provoked my interest and enlightened my mind to the point where I simply had to have more.

Now, after graduating from the Masters program, I still don't know exactly what I want to do job-wise, but at least I know the general direction. I am reminded of a quote from a fantastic book, Ryszard Kapuscinski's *Travels with Herodotus*, that a good friend once recommended me:

"A journey, after all, neither begins in the instant we set out, nor ends when we have reached our doorstep once again. It starts much earlier and is really never over, because the film of memory continues running on inside of us long after we have come to a physical standstill. Indeed, there exists something like a contagion of travel, and the disease is essentially incurable."

To break out from one's comfort level and thrust oneself into a foreign world takes some serious cajones, but then again so does anything worth doing. That is why I loved this program so much: it gave me the opportunity not only to explore the world and see it through a different lens, but it also allowed me to discover new sides of myself. The differences in cultures brought by students served not to disjoint us, but rather to unify us in learning and understanding one another.

Yes, I learned numerous aspects of globalization, global history, economic development and more, but perhaps the greatest knowledge I attained came from the numerous discussions with other EMGS-ers over countless cups of coffee, BBQ's in the park and frosty pilsners. The cross-cultural platform of this program has expanded my vision of the world and has acted as a mirror in which I can better understand myself. I remember one of the first nights in London after moving in with **Ian Tay** and **Cristina DeGiovanni**, hearing them talking in the kitchen about Kuala Lumpur. I came from the



Field Research in Addis Ababa

other room and asked whom this Kuala Lumpur guy was and was answered with uncontrolled laughter. They explained that it was the capital of Malaysia, exposing my ignorance, for which I am so glad. I was embarrassed to say the least and it inspired me to continue learning more about parts of the world for which I know little. I have heard that ignorance is bliss, but in reality it is just stupid. As soon as we give up on learning new peoples, places and cultures we have given up on life and our hearts are extinguished. The EMGS experience was tumultuous at times, but it has taught me to *Carpe Diem* each and every *Diem*. Fellow students became fast friends who inspired me, reinvigorated my sense of vitality, restored my motivation to discover, to learn, to experience anew and above all to aid others. No place was lonelier than the LSE library on a Friday night when I was working on my dissertation. But, when the best of friends were on either side of me, there was no other place I'd rather have been. Solidarity is perhaps a person's greatest discovery: when we all lean on each other, we all remain standing. I will always remember the good times we shared: barbecuing in Clara Zetkin park, picnics in Finsbury Park, dancing until sunrise, hiking in the mountains of *Sächsische Schweiz*, drinking *gluhwein* before class...and then after as well, traveling to friends' hometowns and seeing their lives' histories, eating Turkish food every week, having a Mexican feast for Easter, rooting for the countries we lived in during the world cup...the list goes on.

Graduation in Vienna was but another addition to the cascade of amazing memories that flow through my mind constantly. A culmination of the past two years, it was as though no time at all had passed since the last time I saw good friends. We reminisced, partied heartily, and enjoyed one another's company to a point of quintessential bliss. It was literally the best weekend of all time, to be relived in memories and pictures often. As I gathered my things to head to the airport on Sunday evening, I didn't want to say goodbye, so I said 'see you later' instead. My eyes watered as I hugged people not knowing when I would see them next. But then I thought: don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened. And so I did.

By Ian Ryan

My life since completing the programme

When I went back to Vienna for the recent graduation, several people com-

mented that they couldn't quite picture Tehran in their heads and that they were curious to hear what an average day was like for me. It reminded me of speaking to a good friend a couple of weeks earlier, who had said something along the lines of 'Even though I know that it's incorrect, I just can't help picturing a whole lot of camels.'

I arrived in Tehran on October 1st, to begin working for an Iranian NGO active in the field of Drug Demand Reduction. I live a few minutes' walk from Vanak Square, which is in the north of the city and quite a central location. The north of Tehran is much wealthier than the south and you can really notice the difference – as you drive north along Valiasr Ave (the main street here, which runs all the way from the south right up to the foothills of the Alborz Mountains), the streets become less chaotic, the apartments newer and nicer and the air a bit fresher. Valiasr Ave is quite beautiful; tree-lined with many shops, cafes and restaurants, although apparently it was far nicer before the revolution when there was far less traffic (at this time it was called Pahlavi Street). The Alborz Mountains form a very striking presence and if you can see the mountains then you can tell which way is north. To get to work I take a public taxi from Vanak Square to Sadeghie Square (south-west of Vanak). The taxi drivers have started to recognise me and as I approach I sometimes hear one of them call out 'Australian girl' to the others. So if I ever forgot that I was a foreigner I wouldn't forget for very long. Even though the drive only takes about 15 minutes in the morning it has on occasion taken up to two hours in the afternoon to get home because of traffic. There is currently a kind of hazy air to the city, because it is so polluted at the moment. There was a holiday last week which I spent with a friend from work and her family in Abbasabad, a very pretty city in the north of Iran, on the Caspian Sea. The holiday was aimed at reducing the pollution by reducing the traffic, but it doesn't seem to have made much of a difference.

I am working for an Iranian NGO that works in the field drug treatment, prevention and care. The organisation has numerous drop-in-centres and rehabilitation camps throughout Iran – I have visited a few just outside of Tehran. The drop-in-centres are for homeless men who can go there for a shower, a meal and to get clean needle and syringes as well as condoms. Iran is surprisingly liberal when it comes to the issue of harm reduction – it is one of the few countries in the world to have

needle and exchange programmes within the prison system (although currently only in a small number of the prisons). I visited one of the DICs, it surprised me that I was allowed into a place only for men. This city is full of surprises and contradictions.

The rehab camps are based around a 12-step, faith based approach and are completely free of medication (although there are other facilities people can visit if they want to access to methadone). In my first week here I met some girls in one of the camps who were in their first week of rehabilitation. I can't quite imagine the sort of pain they must have been in, especially with no medication. They had a stereo blaring and most were sort of dancing out the pain I guess, while a few lay curled up on mattresses. All the staff at the DICs and rehab camps are former drug users, as are some of the people in the office where I work. Every now and then someone brings around cake or sweets to celebrate his anniversary of being off drugs (and I say 'his' because so far no women in the office have done so...I am not sure if this is because the stigma of drug use is higher for women, or whether my time at the organisation hasn't coincided with one of their anniversaries or if none of the women at the head office are former drug users).

Even though I am so used to wearing a headscarf, it is the first thing that I take off when I get home after work, and then I really feel like myself again. The evenings in Tehran are lovely - there is something so special about the city. The air is a bit crisper, the city is lit up with some really beautiful (or kitsch, depending on your view) lights and there seems to be a more relaxed vibe to the place, although I could be imagining this. Shops and cafes are open very late, which I love. Not just for the convenience of but for the lively feeling that goes along with it. Like any city, Tehran is made special by the people I have met here – a close friend at work who has sort of adopted me into her family and a group of friends outside of work who are so warm and welcoming and include me in everything that they do.

By Julia Kensy

ALUMNI IN FOCUS

*After having successfully completed her EMGS course in 2009 after studying in both Vienna and Leipzig, **Sahiba Minhas** shares her experiences working for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Laos.*

Sabaidee* Laos – Experiences from the Other side

"The development sector is the biggest lie of the 21st century" - a welcome remark I received from a colleague when barely into the first week of my internship at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vientiane, Laos. Sitting across from me in the meeting room, we were brainstorming project activities for an alternative development project for post-opium producing communities in the Northern province of Houaphan in Laos. After much protesting and arguing with him about how "every little effort counts" and about "making a difference", he retorted, "I'll tell you one thing, work in this sector for 2 years and then we'll talk". Such was my 'introduction to the development world. For a young, enthusiastic, recent graduate of the Global Studies (GS) program these words saw the bubble of a marvelous, sparkly world of International Organizations burst.



First impressions of Lao

The call for the internship at UNODC, Laos welcomed a warm spring morning of Delhi in late March 2010. I was to leave within weeks to a land I knew little about. A flurry of excitement overtook me. All it took was a quick over-read of website articles and I found myself on a plane that took me to a city called Vientiane. The capital of Laos, sitting snug on the Mekong river, was to be my home for the next six months. I was so eager to leave, to embark upon a new journey, so much that I had forgotten to think about where it would take me and to what new experiences.

Staring at the boarding card "flight to Vientiane", it read; Vientiane, (pronounced "vieng-chan") strange name I thought. Slowly the crowds started to pull in. Lao people around me, speaking in a different tongue. Strangers all around me,

* Lao Greeting

Others refers to 'the far east', 'the communist' and the 'least developed'

and I felt at home. A smile tugged the corners of my lips. A Caucasian looking man sat beside me. Further down the row, next to him sat a young beautiful woman. She mentioned that she was an international consultant with World Health Organization and had lived there for almost 2 years. He started to speak with her about the city, places to go, things to do, how it felt and about dengue...before I knew it, I was listening into their conversation. I realized that I should have done the same, I should have tried to imagine it, I should have read more about the everyday of city life in Laos...and suddenly finding myself at a loss, I started to panic. Completely unprepared for the place where this flight would drop me off in the next one hour, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. A confidence took its charge, the kind that had been lingering somewhere within me. I was reminded of the days spent in Europe with my GS friends. It was at this moment when I told myself, I am a global studies student, capable of going anywhere in this world and being able to apply myself in the field of international development and relations. This is what we have been preparing for and it is what I took with me (among many other things) when I said goodbye to my last academic year at Leipzig. With this thought I braced myself and boarded the flight.

I felt fortunate that the country representative, for the most part, understood what Global studies meant, and understood my 'transnational' interests. My very first assignment was to deal with a drug situation analysis of the Mekong sub-region (includes China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos), linking trafficking routes and transnational organized crime across borders, that determined Laos as one of the major transit countries in the region. This analysis later paved the way for confidential drugs and crime situation briefs to donor countries and government line ministries. Later I was to join the communications officer in developing web stories and preparing informational advocacy materials for various high level meetings and conferences. The highlight of my engagement with UNODC came when I was to visit the project sites for post-opium producing communities. I visited two main Northern provinces of Phongsaly and Oudomxai, where I had the chance to interact with ethnic minority groups and witness alternative livelihood generation and other development related activities.

When not in office, days in Vientiane were



Luang Temple in Vientiane

pretty much like the days spent in Leipzig outside class. House parties and social activities continue to galore. In desperate attempts to not find myself imprisoned to boredom, I saw my social life busier than what it has ever been. Vientiane is so international in its own little way that you would even find salsa lessons, baguettes everywhere (thanks to the French) and Moroccan food (provided you order a day earlier)! Given the large expat community here, I found myself speaking more German than I did when back in Germany. The large international community here feels like a re-enactment of the GS days. Interestingly I realized that this is where I feel at home the most. Having discussed the idea of 'home' with some other GS students, I believe our sense of 'homeness' or belonging-ness comes from the very 'un-belonging' nature of our lives and our work. We are the new breed of what the development sector calls international consultants.

My experience in Laos did not end with the end of the internship. In the beginning of September, the Indian President decided to make a state visit and I found myself in the flurry of preparations. I was one of the local hires. As a liaison officer, my job was to coordinate 19 Lao officers and to provide logistical support. For the most part the 70 something Indian delegation was surprised to find a girl of Indian origins, volunteering in Laos. "Whats here to do?" they would ask, "young kids these days have such ambitions, in our times we could only think of engineering or becoming doctors" remarked a diplomat. I would smile to myself and patiently explain what global studies was all about, impressed they would pat my back and wish me luck.



some 300 kms away, but takes a twelve hour bus ride to travel, such are the hilly terrains in this country. It is beautiful and majestic. What warms my heart the most is to be able to witness vibrant sunsets by the Mekong, little colorful birds, butterflies, geckos and poisonous spiders and frogs; a telling example of nature in the tropics thriving in

Field Trip visit

the city. As for the people, Lao people and their communal way of life taught me how to drink Beer Lao (something that Germany struggled with). They are friendly and very hospitable. Often accused of being too laid back, the falangs in the country were quick to change the name of the Lao PDR (People's Democratic Republic) to Lao PDR (Please-Don't-Rush).

Such have been my experiences here, and behind all of it, a gentle reminder of the foundations laid during the GS days. I approached the country as a clean slate, arriving with a thirst to learn and grow. A year after GS, I find myself that a part of my GS life has stayed on with me. Time and again I am reminded of the freshness of global studies. Having interacted with development professionals with more than 15 years of experience, some hopeful enthusiasts, often seeking new approaches to their work, respond well to it, while others are critical and see it as "the biggest lie of the 21st century". It has been very interesting to find myself in this prism of varied opinions and perceptions. It all depends now on how I (and hopefully my colleagues from EMGS) decide to carve and color our own picture of what this world means to us and how we position ourselves as a global/international citizens.

Laos has been a learning experience, intense and invigorating in its everyday realities. As for Vientiane, my first description of it to my family and friends back home was that 'it's a city in a village'. There are no clear signage, no proper street addresses (yes we still live in the age of PO Boxes), I live in a village called Sailom, and as a 'fa-lang' (read foreigner) we have to be registered with at the village chief's office. It all sounds very provincial but this is the biggest and the most commercial city in Laos. And just hours away lies a UNESCO's world heritage city of Luang Prabang which is just

in Wrocław (Poland) at the beginning of November. Initiators and organizers were **Justin Brown** (Academic & Research Coordinator at GPR Dehler and the founder of Research Nexus) and **Ashley Hurst** (PhD candidate at the University of Vienna) who want to set-up an ongoing cooperation with the University of Wrocław and other universities. Lucky participants, on the other hand, were students of 1st and 2nd Master and Global Studies in International Relations, and I was one of them.

For those three days, the faculty of Social Sciences became our home as there was no time to waste. Discussions based on the articles by inter alia **Michael Doyle**, **Elliott Jaques** and **Michael Mann** have broadened our knowledge and, for many of us, developed a new point of view for such a key aspect of today's world which is the power.

Moreover, everyone had to prepare a short presentation in an attempt to answer the question of how understanding imperial power structures in history would help us analyze the contemporary era and predict the future. On the first day, we asked ourselves a question if there was a danger that all the presentations would be the same, as it turned out however, in such a diverse group that was simply impossible. We had a great opportunity to work with students from all over the world who shared their experiences from their countries of origin. This always brings another dimension to a discussion as we can compare the different ways of seeing things. Nevertheless, we also realized how similar is the story of many countries and how modern empires are based on the same rules.

After a productive day there came the time for open-minded/out of record discussions in more student-friendly environment. A pub called Grawitacja was the place where our workshop came to an end, although we did not say 'good bye'. We said 'see you soon!', hopefully in Wrocław – The meeting place.

The workshop in numbers: 3 days, two great leaders, hundreds of questions, even more answers, 7 articles, 12 hours spent in class, for many – one sleepless night, 24 presentations, a new experience and fair amount of knowledge, 4 large pizzas, a couple of beers, and many pleasant memories.

By **Justin Brown & Ewa Cichocka**

ALUMNI WORK

Fertile ground of science

When knowledge and common interests meet up on a scientific ground with hard work as well as great amount of constructive fun it has to be a good workshop. This was the case of the "*Empires, Finance and Great Leaders in History*" seminar held

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