

EUTOPIA CERTIFICATE PORTFOLIO ACTIVITIES

The international activities I participated in include ELASA meetings and hosting an exchange student at my university, who became one of my best friends. Firstly, I'll explain what ELASA is. ELASA stands for European Landscape Architecture Student Association and is a student organisation run by landscape architecture students from different European countries. It's a non-profit organisation whose purpose is to connect students from various backgrounds, where they can learn from one another, explore each other's cultures, projects, and meet new people.

There are always two organized meetings each year in two European countries. A mini meeting, which consists of 21 participants plus organisers and mentors, a big meeting, which consists of 42 participants plus organisers and mentors, and sometimes also something in between, for example, 35 participants, depending on the secured budget.

I participated in a mini ELASA meeting in April 2024 in Turkiye. Its theme was Landscape of memories. I didn't know what to expect from it, since Elasa wasn't well-known in Slovenia. At first, I was afraid to go, since I wasn't confident in my language skills and meeting new people. I also didn't know much about Turkiye except for its vastness and huge population. The main reason I attended the meeting was curiosity about the new culture and landscape.

I went there by plane from Vienna, and I was anxious about how to find local guides and others for the meeting. To my surprise, they were waiting for us at the airport, and some other participants were also on the same plane, so we travelled together from the airport to the meeting point by metro. At the meeting point, we had a nice welcoming party with cocktails and canapés, and we got to know each other.



The following day, we visited the Belgrade forest, which can be said to be the lungs of Istanbul. We met the local environmentalists, who explained to us about its origin and meaning to local wildlife, residents, and researchers around the world. When I look back at it, I have to admit that my view on nature expanded and became more profound. Even if the forest looks like a jungle and is uninhabitable for humans, it's still a habitat for other organisms, and we have to respect it like other

nationalities. In the evening, we had an international dinner on the boat, where each participant brought something from their home country to try, and we explored different cultures from Scandinavian, German, Slavic, and Muslim. I can confidently say that every country has a unique culture, and I got to experience it firsthand from locals, and my knowledge, opinion, and personal character grew a lot with it.



On the third day, we went around Istanbul and visited some projects, for example, the Rami library, which was a huge shock for me, since they said it's a small project worth 10 million euros, which is a big project in Slovenia. We ate



at some local restaurants that are only known to residents of Istanbul, and we loved experiencing them. As tourists, we would've never tried them, since we wouldn't have known about them, so I'm glad that I went to the meeting.



The next day was moving day, and we took a bus ride from Istanbul to Izmir. On the way, we stopped at a famous local restaurant, which made its own Ayran drink, and visited the ruins of an ancient Greek hospital. We also explored local culture via stalls that were selling sweets, handmade robes, and other clothes, and other souvenirs. It opened my eyes to new cultures and to never expect anything when travelling, since that way, you'll get the best and most unique experience.



The following day in Izmir was very entertaining. We went to a nursery, which was owned by a guy who looked like the Mafia. But he was very nice. He owns a nursery, vineyards, and has 243 employees, and over 20 km² of land. We had a tour of the nursery and vineyards, and later also a wine tasting at the URLA winery. After that, we went to another huge

landowner, who has made the best olive oil in the world for 5 years in a row already. He also owns an olive oil production museum, and he showed us how the olive oil competition is tested. It was a nice and unique experience.



On the sixth day, we went to the beach and the ruins of the Old Izmir square from Greek and Roman times. And in the evening, the organisers gave us a nice surprise in the form of the Izmir museum, which is a must-see if you ask me. It shows you the history of Izmir, the city of the goddess Artemis, and how it was

destroyed 3 times and flourished again after it was rebuilt. You can also see the remains of the famous library, colosseum, and some other interesting architecture.



On the last, seventh day, we visited the Bazaar in Izmir and a park, where we had lunch. After it, we had a workshop, which signified the end of the meeting, where we had to choose one of the visited sites and suggest improvements to it. We also had some other activities that increased our awareness of problems that arise with differences between cultures and landscapes.



The whole meeting consisted of learning about local projects, meeting new people from various countries, discussing the pros and cons of each project, and exchanging ideas, opinions, and proposing improvements and solutions.

The theme I'm mostly focusing on is interculturalism since it's the basis of ELASA. It's about exploring new cultures, meeting foreign students from the same program, and learning about their views on various subjects, sharing knowledge without restrictions, and so on. Besides getting to know new professionals in the field and gaining knowledge, I also improved my language skills and learned some new ones. I also improved my conversation and social skills, my view of the world, and my open-mindedness to other people.

Looking back at it, I realize that through this meeting, I changed my life's direction. Because of it, I started exploring new specialisation options for myself abroad instead of my home country, travelling and discovering new areas around the world, and meeting new people, no matter where they were coming from. It made me a more complex and developed person without prejudices.

From the first meeting, I decided to participate in next year's meetings as well and keep in touch with the new friends I made at it. Later, I visited them in their home countries and we tried to stay in touch and hopefully in the future, connect also on a professional level, starting a company or doing joint projects. For me, the biggest challenge I faced was organisation for participating since you have to reach the meeting point by yourself, and the language barrier, which seems to become smaller and smaller with each year, since all of us improve our English level. In the future, I would like to organise one of those meetings in Slovenia as well, so I guess that would be my chance to further enhance my skills, knowledge, and improve my portfolio.



LANDSCAPE MEMORIES

We curiously arrived in Istanbul,
the public transportation was very full,
we thought that we'd have presentations like in school,
but everything we did after landing was cool.

Everything we've seen was new.
The things we saw were quite a few.
The trip's tempo was quite fast,
so we sometimes lacked rest.

We started with a party in a council near the sea.
In the next stop, BELGRADE, you could find nearly every tree.
The Boat party at night was the cherry on top of the cake.
There was served Only the best that each country can make.

After that, we visited a lot of ruins and landscapes.
From busy streets and nurseries to fields of grapes.
We've also seen many city centers and squares,
where people sell clothes and other interesting wares.

We also saw locals' passion and their heritage.
We received their kindness and a very polite speech.
We ate kebab and drank black tea.
Also walked a lot and swam in the sea.

We had a certificate for all the local guides.
We mostly took the bus, but we also took some metro rides.
There are cats and dogs everywhere.
They are left in the locals' hands and their care.

We have taken a lot of group photos,
followed by the clapping and applause, and some inspiring Motos.
We loved basking in the sun,
and the whole trip was really fun.

And when the black night sets on the blue skies,
the organisers give you a nice surprise.
There are a lot of things we will all miss,
especially you guys and all the LANDSCAPE MEMORIES.

So we will definitely visit again,
and we will meet each other then.