

THE SUNNY SIDE OF SOFIA – Celebrating variety: Making the most of your teaching context

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It has been quite some time since I attended BETA Bulgaria conference and every time I think about it my memories get sunnier and sunnier! I remember the conference all in bright colours and sunshine, which is a bit strange because I was welcomed by Sofia with showers of rain.

Our first day there saw us searching for the accommodation in the drizzle, as if we were playing the most wonderful game of treasure hunt. Our team was luckily and quite accidentally backed up by Vaselena, a wonderful Bulgarian student who wouldn't give up until we were safely handed over to the reception. The weather improved as soon as we were inside and from that moment my sunshine memories paint Sofia's beautiful sights outside, as well as the inside of one perfect venue for the conference 'The Institute for World Economy'.

I must say I have been wondering why there is so much sunshine in my memories and then my mind made a pattern for me: sunshine - light- enlightening. And that is the key - the Sofia conference was enlightening for me in many different ways. That is where all the sunshine comes from!



Opposite the conference venue: Einstein and some sunshine



Inside the conference venue:
with Virginia Evans



with Suzana Krivokapic and
Anna Parisi

First of all I must say I was really impressed by the whole event. It was flawlessly organized and all the members of the organizing committee did their best to make the conference a memorable one. For me they are the stars, so my big thanks to Zivka, Zarina, Silvia, Irina, Gergana, Albena (it appears in anti-alphabetical order :) ... The conference programme was carefully planned, many great speakers invited, and it was indeed my great pleasure to meet them and listen to their interesting presentation. Let me just mention Lilia Savova (Indiana University of Pennsylvania), Terry Lamb (University of Sheffield), Virginia Evans (Express Publishing), Paul Davies (Pilgrims), Desmond Thomas (University of Essex), Zarina Markova (South-West University, Bulgaria), Anna Parisi (SEETA President)...

Probably the biggest source of enlightenment for me was indeed the plenary given by Desmond, Zarina and Anna: 'Making the most of your teaching context: SEETA Research Project'. Frankly speaking, I always thought nobody was interested in classroom-based research done by teachers. I always thought teachers are too busy teaching. I always thought teachers should be given support to do research. And there and then, during this plenary, I realised there is a project organized for teachers interested in research. I realized the project is aimed at encouraging teachers to become active researchers. It was love at second sight! The second sight because when I first heard about the project, a couple of months before the conference, it appeared I was too late to join the first stage, which was launched in September 2014. Then and there in Sofia I was told they would repeat the first set of webinars and I realised I was not too late to join in! (For those like me, you can find further information and the

recordings of the webinars in the SEETA Research area at www.seeta.eu) Then and there in Sofia I realised 'THOSE WHO TEACH, CAN!!!'

I wouldn't like to finish this piece of writing without mentioning the social side of the conference. I still smile when I think about all the nice people I met, like my travel companion Suzana from Montenegro, Marta Bujakowska from IATEFL POLAND, Biljana from Ohrid from Macedonia and many more. I still smile when I think about the dinner for the official representatives at Bori Mechkata! What a great place and what fabulous atmosphere! I would definitely always recommend such a place for networking! And how not to mention the second night event, when I realized that Bulgarian teachers are excellent dancers, as well! I would also like to take this opportunity to praise Bulgarian publishers! Frankly speaking, I don't think I have ever seen more generous and more delicious donations (both in quality and quantity)!



At Bori Mechkata with Suzana and Gergana



The second night: Kolo

To conclude, the conference was rich in ideas and actions. The whole atmosphere was so relaxing and pleasant and yet thought-provoking. I had the feeling that was not my first time in Bulgaria, I felt like I was there to meet some old friends. That is exactly what I intend to do, attend the conference again and meet my old-new friends.

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*I certify that I have the right to publish these photos.