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## Geography in the Heart of Europe 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Czech Geographic Society and 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Slovak Geographical Society

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The joint 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Czech Geographic Society and the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Slovak Geographical Society entitled ‘Geography in the Heart of Europe’ took place in Prague on 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> August 2014. After more than twenty years, Czech and Slovak geographers thus had an opportunity to meet again at a summit held on the occasion of the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Czech Geographic Society (1894). The event took place under the auspices of the Rector of the Charles University in Prague, Professor Tomáš Zima, the Dean of the Faculty of Science of the Charles University in Prague, Professor Bohuslav Gaš, Vice-Dean of the hosting Geographical Institute of the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague, Assoc. Prof. Jakub Langhammer, and Capital City Mayor Dr. Tomáš Hudeček.

A total of 307 participants from Czechia and Slovakia, including several foreign guests, registered to the congress in order to devote four days to the discussion of individual issues of physical geography, human geography, cartography, and demography. The meeting was opened by the presidents of the two societies, Prof. Tadeusz Siwek (University of Ostrava, Faculty of Science), and Prof. René Matlovič (University of Presov in Presov, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences). Following the welcome by the Prague City Mayor and active CGS member Dr. Tomáš Hudeček, who appreciated the role of geographers in municipal development and emphasised their irreplaceable function, invited speakers representing the main directions of geographic research made their presentations during a plenary session. In his paper titled ‘*Physical Geography in Czechia and Europe*’, Prof. Bohumír Janský (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science) assessed the current research focus of physical geography at both domestic and European leading university departments. The paper ‘*Positivism, Post-positivism and What Next? Transcending the Quantitative-Qualitative Rift in Social Geography*’ presented by Assoc. Prof. Josef Novotný (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science) reflected upon the course of research approaches in social geography. Interdisciplinary cooperation of geographers, historians and cartographers was highly acknowledged by Prof. Eva Semotanová (Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v. v. i.) in her presentation titled ‘*Historical Geography – Tradition and Modernity*’. The paper of Assoc. Prof. Petr Kubíček (Masaryk University, Faculty of Science) entitled ‘*Cartographic Theory and Practice in Interdisciplinary Research*’ dealt with the modern concept of cartography and information technologies as one of the ways of contemporary exploration of spatial processes, drawing attention to the most recent trends in the use of (geo)information technologies in both research and application. In his paper ‘*Geographic Education:*

*Conceptions and Reality*', Dr. Miroslav Marada (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science) discussed the current situation of geographic and environmental education, pointing out the existing problems as well as the often insufficiently used opportunities for applying geography in educational practices in elementary and secondary schools.

During the next part of the conference, which was divided in ten blocks, each consisting of 7 or 8 parallel sessions, a total of 216 papers were presented. In addition to individual presentations, there was also a possibility of presenting comprehensive panels. This opportunity was used by a significant number of participants and so a total of 39 individual panels with 136 presentations were included in the scientific programme. Thus, papers making part of exhaustive thematic panels accounted for more than half of all papers presented at the conference. The focus of these panels shows to a significant extent the themes that enjoyed the greatest interest from the congress participants, or more precisely from the presenters. Among the most represented thematic scopes, to which a series of two or three panels were devoted, were environmental history, regional identities, historical geography including settlement and landscape transformation, transport geography, rural geography, geographic and environmental education, current issues in tourism, the study of migration and immigrant integration, development geography, urban geography and segregation problems. Physical geography was mainly represented by hydrology and hydrogeography, including a discussion of relevant research methods. Besides the afore-mentioned panels, the organisational board accepted 80 individual papers that were divided into several thematic scopes. Cartography thus proved to be significantly represented; altogether four sections dealt with various aspects of cartographic research, another two sections focused on old maps and the production of historical atlases. We should also mention several sections devoted to economic topics, especially to those concerning regional development. Political geography issues, with particular emphasis on current events in Eastern Europe, enjoyed relatively a lot of interest. Many papers had either a methodological or applicational orientation; the problems of public participation and engagement in planning processes and local/regional development occupied an important place. By contrast, demographical issues and a great deal of physical geographical disciplines were represented rather marginally.

For variety's sake, the congress included six panel discussions, some of which complemented and developed the three thematic blocks mentioned above. Other three discussions dealt with diverse issues of geographical education (including cartographic production at school and benefits of the Geographical Olympiad); a panel discussion also concluded the programme on transport geography. The remaining panel discussions introduced brand new themes, such as applicationally focused strategic planning or copyright problems in geography. The discussion about what could be termed as marginal or alternative directions of research and their position within the Czech and Slovak human geography showed to be considerably innovative; embracing, for example, geography of religion, sexual minorities and the handicapped. All the realised discussions were highly thought-provoking, leaving panellists and all other participants enough leeway for expression.

The poster session, which included 23 posters, was very rich, too. Its broad thematic scope encompassed physical geography, landscape development, cartographic methods, migration issues, regional identity and heritage; political conflicts, geographical education and introduction of some leading geography departments. The poster session, whose official opening took place on Tuesday morning, remained accessible during the entire conference.

The very extensive programme made it possible for every participant of the congress to attend presentations from the field of his/her own interest as well as those from the neighbouring geographical disciplines. The wide offer of scientific programme of the conference was complemented with a selling exhibition (accessible during the whole congress) of the most recent publications by Czech and Slovak geographical workplaces, and with an exposition entitled '*The Albertov Geography*' elucidating both the history and the current focus of research at individual departments of the hosting Geographical Institute of the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague.

Activities related to the functioning of the Czech Geographic Society also constituted an inseparable part of the 23<sup>rd</sup> congress. All six sections of CGS were given the opportunity to hold their separate sessions, allowing their members to discuss current problems and plans for the future. A considerable part of the sections elected their new chairmen. On Tuesday late afternoon the section

meetings were followed by the traditional General Assembly of the Czech Geographic Society during which all participants could get acquainted with the entire range of CGS's activities, discuss common problems and approve the society's new Main Board. The General Assembly elected Prof. Bohumír Janský (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science), CGS's President for the 2014–2018 period. The former President, Prof. Tadeusz Siwek (University of Ostrava, Faculty of Science), was appointed the Vice-President. Like in the past elections, two student representatives were elected to the Main Board.

One of the points on the agenda of the General Assembly consisted in granting honourable CGS membership to Assoc. Prof. RNDr. Václav Toušek, CSc. (Palackého University in Olomouc), Prof. Dr. Peter Jordan, PhD. (Institute of Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna), Assoc. Prof. RNDr. Petr Šindler, CSc. (University of Ostrava), Prof. RNDr. Jozef Mládek, DrSc. (Komenský University in Bratislava) and one of the oldest CGS members, Vladislav Maceček, a renowned geography teacher from the Moravian-Silesian region holding a degree in education.

CGS's activities also included the organisation of the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the '*Student Scientific Work*' competition scheduled for the very first day of the congress, wherein 36 geography students from all domestic universities competed for the title '*The Best Student Thesis in Geography*' in two categories – Bachelor's theses and Master theses. The awards went to six students; the 1<sup>st</sup> prize in the Bachelor's thesis category was won by Lenka Havelková (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science) and Jan Šimbera (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science); the Master thesis category was won by Kateřina Šťovíčková (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science). All the competitors were rewarded with free access to all sections of the scientific programme and all events held during the conference.

The social part of the programme took place not only in the couloirs of the Faculty of Science of the Charles University in Prague, but also on the occasion of the common dinner on Tuesday and during an excursion tracing the circumstances of the 1918 declaration of the Czechoslovak Republic. The participants could thus visit well-known, less known and unknown recesses of Prague. The delegates were also invited to take part in a commented visit to the recently reconstructed Map Collection of the Geographical Institute of the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague, including its normally inaccessible parts. Another social event that ought to be mentioned is the meeting of the two main committees of the Czech Geographic Society and the Slovak Geographical Society at the representational premises of the Prague Mayor's residence. The Main Board thanked the former CGS President, Prof. Tadeusz Siwek, and all the departing members and welcomed the newly elected President, Prof. Bohumír Janský, and the new CGS Main Board members.

The programme of the joint conference summit of the Czech and Slovak geographers was evaluated very positively by both of the parties. The possibility of comparing different research approaches and focuses in both the Czech and Slovak geography proved to be highly rewarding, giving the meeting not only in the form of take-away impressions and thoughts, but also in the form of an electronic book containing abstracts of all oral presentations, posters and discussions.

Last but not least, we ought to point out the very friendly, even cordial, ambience and cooperativeness of all the participants which significantly contributed to the overall success of the conference. The successful course of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the Czech Geographic Society and the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Slovak Geographical Society was accentuated by excellent organisation ensured by the organisational team led by Dr. Vít Jančák (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science) and Dr. Zdeněk Kučera (Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science).