

Autumn Travelling Fellowship

The Netherlands
4 – 10 October 2015

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Submitted to: EFORT, Nina Nürnberger

Reported by: Anna Konstantopoulou (Greece)

Introduction:

Writing this report a few weeks after the EFORT autumn travelling fellowship 2015 is a great opportunity for me to recall all the interesting details, images and feelings of my trip and turn my memories unfading through time. Hopefully, some of my colleagues will read it, realise the positive impact of this experience and be motivated to participate in a future event.

Detailed description of the fellowship:

Having been chosen from the Greek national society made me feel honoured and excited at the same time. I really did not know what to expect from the upcoming fellowship. To be honest, I had in my mind a vague picture of international congresses and courses, things that fitted previous experiences. That impression was swept out the moment I first met the group at the Café Boudewijn in Rotterdam, where I realised that this event was not just lectures or teaching of techniques, but also a matter of culture, conversation and genuine interest about exchanging opinions.

Before starting my description, I have to pinpoint that the schedule of the fellowship was provided before even applying for it. A final program was sent to all successful applicants highlighting some travelling details, making it so easy to get to Emma hotel in Rotterdam. All contact details were provided beforehand, which proved to be very handy as most of the flights to Amsterdam on October the 4th were delayed due to heavy fog!

So here I am, after a 12-hour trip in total, having a welcome drink with the fellows and our hosts! Olav van der Jagt fought a battle to get us all together and Duncan Meuffels helped us get over the first awkward moments! And we tried for the first time authentic Dutch "bitterballs". Later at the Eurostat during a dinner with a great view of Rotterdam, we had the chance to meet the president of the Dutch Orthopaedic Society dr Henk Koot, whose lovely welcome gifts are now in my living room, and of course Prof. Jan Verhaar who organised this



Rotterdam, view of the Erasmus Medical Centre from the Eurostat, picture by Jaan Laos

on behalf of the national society and was our "godfather" throughout the fellowship. I was impressed by the fact that Duncan had practically memorised each fellow's curriculum vitae; Rotterdam hosts had invested time and effort in our visit. I felt honoured and very welcome.

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Clogs, a welcome gift.
Picture by Olav van der Jagt

Every morning in Rotterdam, Olav was making the arrangements, walked us to the meeting places, escorted the group and actively participated to discussions; he was one of the fellows indeed!

As far as it concerns the lectures I will not get into much detail; there is a separate questionnaire about that. I will just highlight the fact that every lecture was accurately presented and highly interactive. In the afternoon sessions in Rotterdam (on Monday the 5th and Wednesday the 7th), instead of lectures the schedule included fellow presentations, where we spoke about our countries, our national societies and ourselves. That has been a brilliant way to get the participants introduced to each other and to our hosts. By the end of day one, I knew almost everybody's first name and country of origin.

Another brilliant idea had been the architecture tour of Rotterdam by bike, our activity on Monday evening. Cycling is an important part of Dutch everyday life and a beautiful way to get around in the city. Despite the fact that getting used to my bicycle gave me some trouble (and consequently slowed down Olav from the rest of the group) I found great interest in the city's remarkable architecture and history. (I had no idea that some bikes brake-backpedal instead of just backpedal).



Architecture tour of Rotterdam by bike, pictures by Jaan Laos and Olav van der Jagt

I have to admit that I especially enjoyed all evening activities planned by our hosts. On Tuesday we were in Leiden. After the lectures session we had a guided walk in the town where our host Prof. Rob Nelissen was kind enough to start a conversation with each and every one of the fellows. Endless discussions kept on and on in dinnertime everyday. I recall a very interesting conversation on Wednesday evening throughout dinner with Prof. Jan Verhaar about family life, hobbies and politics! Professors in the Netherlands are kind, smiling, openhearted people that treated us with respect and hospitality.

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Thursday the 8th and Friday the 9th. On our arrival to Amsterdam, everyone was sorry to let Olav go. However, the group was functioning as a team by that time. The colleagues we met at VUMC and AMC were also welcoming and friendly, unfortunately there was not that much time left to spend with them. Lectures and discussion, especially on Friday, were very interesting and we visited some of the AMC wards with Dr Peter Struijs. Thursday afternoon boat trip to Amsterdam was spectacular! Another unique way to meet a unique city; and of course Amsterdam's kind host Prof. Barend van Royen highlighted interesting details and had a drink with us while floating. On the last evening, after being guided through the "red light district" our team spent some time unhosted, altogether as friends that we were by then, hoping to meet again some day in the future...



Amsterdam boat trip, picture by Andrian Gheiti

Conclusion:

I have to admit that the multinational spirit of the Netherlands deeply affected our group, bridged our differences and helped us have a fruitful interaction. As far as the fellows are concerned, I have never encountered such an open-minded team; if that's the future, I'm proud to be a part of it!

What have I taken home with me? Apart from the joy of the journey, my personal motivation for knowledge and research was reinforced; I got more familiar with the EFORT mentality and appreciated the fact that young orthopaedic surgeons are offered numerous opportunities for knowledge and improvement.

Last but not least, I am looking forward to welcoming a travelling fellowship to Greece and being an active host, despite the fact that it will be an extremely hard job; you've already set very high standards! Well done!

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Let me share some more pictures...



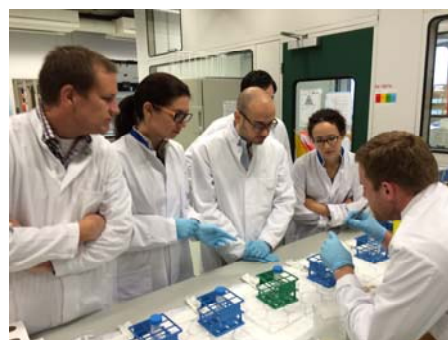
Rotterdam view and EMC's spectacular library



Leiden, beautiful student dorms and walk around the old town. Group picture by Jaan Laos



Our "godfather" Prof. Jan Verhaar, by Jaan Laos



"On action" by Olav van der Jagt

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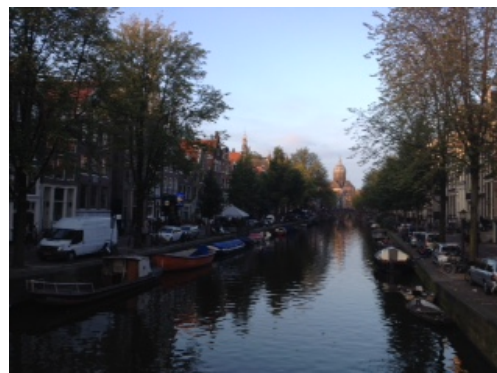
From left to right: The girls of the group and a Croatian gentleman, by Christian Pfeiffer.
I am taking a picture of Andrian taking a picture inside a water taxi in Rotterdam.



Amsterdam boathouses by Christian Pfeiffer



Some of my friends, by Jaan Laos



Amsterdam view



My wooden clogs, safe back home two days after my arrival, sent with my lost-but-found luggage...