

Impressions from EuroTeX 2006

■ GÁBOR BELLA

Arrival

Having been responsible for programming the conference website and followed email discussions on organisational matters, I arrived at the conference with the knowledge that only around 30 people were registered, a fact that worried me slightly. It had also appeared that a single person bore the brunt of the organisational work. However, what cheered me up was that this person was none other than Gyöngyi, the leading lady of the Hungarian TeX community whose wonderful personality we all know. And indeed, as it turned out on arrival, everything was impeccably organised and, despite the small number of people present, the overall ambience was very positive, light, and relaxed. The conference was held on one of the campuses of the Debrecen University. Hotel rooms were also provided on campus, just 50 metres from the conference hall. I, for one, was perfectly satisfied with the facilities and living conditions.

Debrecen is one of the most important cities of Hungary, both in terms of history and present influence. It is situated some 250 km to the east of Budapest. Those who traveled to Debrecen by train had no big problems during their trip. However, attendees taking the Budapest-Debrecen flight had the unique experience of landing *twice*. The Debrecen airport is new (it opened only two months before the conference) and apparently the logistics arrangements are not yet perfect: the flight controllers simply forgot to give landing clearance to the aeroplane, forcing it to head upwards again, do a circle and proceed to land a second time.

The first afternoon's tutorial sessions were followed by a dinner and a collective watching of the Germany vs. Italy semi-final. The author has to doff his hat to all the German supporters at EuroTeX who soberly accepted (despite the quantity of cheap Hungarian beer consumed) the unfavourable results of the game without the least inclination towards football hooliganism.

Registration

The registration procedure of TeX conferences is always a little bit like Christmas: this is the time when participants get to see and collect the usual T-shirts, mugs, pens, and other lion-related memorabilia. This year, these items all had a genuine Hungarian touch to them: instead of usual conference handbags, people were given haversacks. T-shirts were not bearing a traditional Duane Bibby illustration; rather, the conference logo was a simple design referring to the lions of the Chain Bridge, the symbols of Budapest and of Hungary (this is also proof of the strong TeX community that has existed here since the end of the 19th century). Conference mugs were handcrafted locally. Even the proceedings volume will perhaps become a collectible item, not only because of the simple but elegant design (adapted also for this proceedings) but also because it opens with a mystery: if this was really the 16th EuroTeX conference, why was a number *XVII* printed on the title page? Does EuroTeX feel too young and thus cheat to appear older? (The person who finds the most satisfying answer to this puzzle will win an extra set of conference items.)

Talks

Usually, talks at TeX conferences are mostly technical but sometimes also have a lighter side. In Debrecen, we had our share of both serious and fun talks. It also seemed that participants in general shared a genuinely positive and optimistic view about the present and future of TeX-related software development. As you will see from the following articles, we heard several announcements and saw demos of very exciting new advances. Fonts and font-related development were perhaps the most popular subject, addressed by seven speakers. Other hot topics were better extensibility of TeX-related systems and improved hyphenation algorithms, showing the need to address current weak points of TeX-based systems. Quite a few of the talks dealt not with the development of TeX itself but with using it for a variety of practical purposes. Read and enjoy.

Nightly sessions

When there was no football game to watch in the evening, we headed out from the campus into the Debrecen nightlife. The session chair for these nightly events was Gyöngyi, who led us around the city and took us to various pubs and bars. Not everyone, however, was equally motivated to stay up late, and only the most adventurous got to taste *Unicum*, a strong Hungarian herbal spirit whose medicinal powers were perhaps less immediate than its side effects. Congratulations to Arthur, the most fearless drinker of the group!

Trip

An entire day was devoted to exploring the city of Debrecen and its surroundings. First we had a look at the university's impressive central building. Having its roots in the historic *Reformist College* founded almost 500 years ago, the University of Debrecen is one of the biggest in Hungary, with more than twenty-five thousand students. Its enormous library (the second largest in the country) with its rich catalogue of ancient and rare books, including a large collection of prints from various European and Hungarian masters of typography, was a special treat for us.

In the afternoon we headed out to a National Park that embraces the westernmost remnant of the Eurasian *steppe* (*puszta*). One of the park's main goals is to preserve the special cattle breeds that do not exist

elsewhere. (Cows were another recurrent theme at the conference; see both Taco's talk and László Németh's presentation featuring an *ice cream cow* that we now all know how to hyphenate in Swedish.) The park also gives insights into how herdsmen and locals lived there centuries ago. And, *of course*, we all had *gulyás* for lunch!

Banquet dinner and conference ending

The banquet dinner provided, in the author's opinion, a real high point to the conference: the very nice dinner (especially the wild boar chops) was crowned by a real surprise when, with a glass of red wine in hand, we headed to a nearby hall to attend an exclusive live concert by a renowned local Dixieland band. It was a treat to listen to such professional musicians; those who did not come to the meeting missed a unique experience.

The next day, though full of interesting talks, was the day of departure. Despite the small number of attendees, I believe it was a very successful conference. I left with very good impressions and I believe all of us felt the same. *Thank you, Gyöngyi, for all your hard work, and see you all next time!*

(A sampling of conference photos are below, courtesy of Hartmut Henkel, Volker Schaa, Martin Schröder, and Ulrik Vieth. Many more are at <http://www.matexhu.org/eurotex2006/pictures>. Ed.)



Julika, Zsuzsa and Beáta at the registration desk



Staszek Wawrykiewicz



At work or watching football?



Martin Schröder and Hartmut Henkel



A technical problem needs the experts: Tamás Mihálydeák, Jerzy Ludwichowski, Hans Hagen, Yannis Haralambous



Tales from the history of typography: András Virágvyölygi



Thierry showed us the perspectives: Jean-Michel Hufflen, Thierry Bouche, Ferenc Wettl, Hossam Fahmy, Staszek Wawrykiewicz, Gábor Bella



Dag Langmyhr, Bogusław Jackowski, Jerzy Ludwichowski



The four champions at cracking the whip:
Jerzy Ludwichowski, Arthur Reutenauer, Hossam Fahmy,
Ferenc Wettl



Dixieland in Debrecen



Arthur Reutenauer, Ulrik Vieth, Taco Hoekwater,
Staszek Wawrykiewicz, Volker Schaa, Gyöngyi Bujdosó,
Gábor Bella



Gyöngyi Bujdosó



At the center, before departure: Hartmut Henkel,
Arthur Reutenauer, Siep Kroonenberg, Hans Hagen,
Taco Hoekwater, Hossam Fahmy