

IAAS Germany Seminar Week 2016

A report by IAAS Austria member Ronja Landvogt



Dear reader,

from the 30th of April to the 7th of May 2016 a colleague and I took part in a Seminar Week organised by the local committee of IAAS Hohenheim in South-Western Germany. The subject of our week was:

An Agricultural Walk Along The Rhine River

I would like to give you an impression of what we did and how much we enjoyed this excursion.

After getting up at 4 o' clock on Saturday and a long journey to Stuttgart we got picked up by Julius, one of our very friendly hosts from **IAAS Hohenheim**. He was accompanied by Ursula and Irena from Slovenia as well as Asgeir from Norway.

On our drive to the **Hohenheim University** we already learned more about **sheep farming in Norway** than I could have imagined. We got to know the rest of the participants during a sunny and casual sit in on the grass in front of the students' home. Besides many participants from Hohenheim we had other guest from **Germany, Norway, Slovenia, Serbia, Ecuador, Austria, Switzerland, Indonesia, Italy and Croatia**.

Immediately we felt as if we knew each other before. This might be owed to our common fields of study, interesting talks and laughs about very different (agri)cultural aspects. During a **BBQ** in the evening we introduced ourselves and strolled around at the campus with a scavenger hunt around the Hohenheim palace.

Being to a foreign university is always very exciting in terms of comparing it to your own campus. Hohenheim has a **beautiful campus** with student homes surrounding the **botanical garden** and **palace** in the centre. Sports fields and idyllic landscapes are included in this really friendly and family like atmosphere.

After our visit to the **Stuttgarter Wasen** (similar to "Oktoberfest") we started our seminar the next morning with a walk up an old castle in a very typical German village. We took the first of many group photos, had lunch and continued to an **orchardist**.

This place was operated as a secondary occupation by a Swabian farmer. We had a lot of fun translating his words into English and stumbling across terms like "Schildlaus". We got to look at cherry trees, plums, black currant and strawberries. Of course the first question was whether we were allowed to taste the strawberries. He talked about several pests and illnesses, pruning methods concerning fruit cultivation as well as about economic and regional aspects of his farm. His friend showed us around on the **strawberry** cultivation site where they try to implement a more sufficient way of farming strawberries by lifting them on an elevated bench to improve economic efficiency. The financial part of labour costs and handling global market trends was always a topic.

After it started raining we drove along to our home in the mountains of the **Black Forest**. With great group dynamics and everyone taking care we soon felt at home and finished the night with regional drinks and talks about agriculture in the countries of all participants.

On Monday we visited the **Rauch** company in Sinsheim one of the leading companies for producing fertiliser spreaders worldwide. It was very interesting to see how organised the whole process of production was. We got a chance to walk along every step of production from the metal forming and welding to installing the electrics and hydraulics as well as powdering on the colour and seeing the finished machine in the storage. They were great hosts putting a lot of effort into explaining about the company, its current situation and future prospective. We were valued as the young generation of leaders in innovation and left the company with a great impression of agricultural machinery and the multitudinous technical know-how behind it.

The next stop was the **Landwirtschaftliches Technologiezentrum Augustenberg** where we were introduced to a governmental institute which works on the connection between scientific research and utilising this knowledge for the farmer to apply. The section we visited is working on **legumes** and their implementation to the common market. Currently we rely on soy beans making up the most of the European markets for legumes. However, there are several “undiscovered” crops which have an even better amino-acid composition and could be cultivated and used as feed as well. We were invited to taste Lupine Coffee and enjoyed the educational garden of different legumes.

Travelling back to the hostel we then went for a walk in the Black Forest and finished the day with a **Spätzle**-making session.

Tuesday started with an early breakfast and our travel to an **Asparagus breeding** site. We had a warm welcome and introduction on the market for Asparagus in Europe and a short overview about Asparagus breeding techniques. Then we got the chance to look at the registration process of the observed breeds, visited the seed production greenhouses and saw an asparagus peeling machine. Never having seen the root system of an asparagus before the breeder gave us some to study, take home and plant our own trials. Furthermore, we got a present of around 10 kilos of Asparagus to eat for dinner.

The next stop on our way was the **EU Parliament in Strasbourg** which is one of the three buildings the EU Parliament holds conferences in. After a security check we got a tour around the building, sat in the congress room and got an overview on the recent topics being discussed in the sessions.

Elsässer Flammkuchen, locally brewed beer and a walk through the small paths of Strasbourg in the sunset closed our exciting day.

Our next morning began even earlier. Sleeping was really not an option in this week. We stated off to Switzerland visiting the **Urban Farmers** in Basel. Even though this location is currently reduced to a research place the people there were able to open our eyes to alternative food production with aquaponic systems on roof tops. An international team explained us about how the fish produce fertiliser for the plants and how the water then is recycled. We would have loved to stay longer to find out more about their business and the idea behind it.

With a tight schedule we continued our journey to **Syngenta Crop Protection** in Stein, Switzerland. After lunch we got an introduction about the company and its current economic and political situation. We were allowed to visit the labs and got a tour along the production of new pesticides. From applying chemicals to leaves, plants and insects to measuring growth factors and abiotic stress as well as seed treatment we covered the whole process. We were very stunned by the high technologies and restrictions with which Syngenta works.

After our travel back home we had the **Trade Fair** where every country presents national dishes and snacks for the others to try. We tasted various meat products, sweets, Indonesian noodles, Norwegian brown cheese, Slovenian wine and much more. The Eastern European countries fought

about which Rakija (spirit with a lot of alcohol) was the strongest and we fell into our beds with satisfied stomachs.

The rest of the week was not as packed as before and we had an easy morning with playing games outside and filling up our resources in the sun. **Baden-Baden**, Germany's well known Casino-town, was worth a visit. We were eating ice cream in the sun and enjoyed the tour guide's talk about millionaire density, roman baths and famous visitors.

We stopped by at a dairy farm on our way back and examined the **Lely milking robot**. Having a chance to see it in action was very interesting. Back home we finished off the day with a **bonfire** and torch walk to a lake in the forest. The next morning it was time to leave to Hohenheim again. We visited the botanical garden and **tropical greenhouses**. In there we got a feeling of what will wait for us in Indonesia during the World Congress in Summer 2016.

A journalist from the **magazine "Maschinenring"** came to interview one participant from each country and after a chill out we went to visit the **Schönbuch brewery** for a tour, beer tasting and dinner.

We finished our seminar with a breakfast and **feedback** session the next day, said goodbye and promised to welcome everyone again at our own seminar week next year.

During all our excursions the hosts were extremely friendly, wanting to share their knowledge and showing honest interest in us as students. We got free local food and were invited to have coffee and Brezeln all along the way.

I am honestly stunned with what engagement, patience and effort the team of IAAS Hohenheim organised the week. Everyone felt comfortable, we had a great catering and a cosy sleeping place. I have learned a tremendous amount of agricultural facts, was introduced to topics of agriculture I have not been aware of before, got an insight in the world of working and how science is applied in the economy. I tasted original food from various countries, raw asparagus, my first strawberries this summer, Elsässer Flammkuchen and many local beers.

We had lots of fun discovering clichés and also proving them wrong. Every time a strong man was needed or some Rakija had to be finished "the Serbians" were first to help. The people from Southern Germany enjoyed watching the others getting stuck in the Spätzle dough. Vania from Indonesia could not stop filming the huge fields of rapeseeds and would not believe that those are even just small sizes for Germany. Asgeir from Norway made us laugh so very often when he talked about his farm in the most northern and cold parts of Norway. I personally had fun talking with Judith about genetics for at least three hours and then applying my knowledge at the asparagus breeding site the next day. Oliver, being the caring IAAS-Daddy, even organised his mom to bring snacks to the Urban Farmers because we had to skip breakfast in the morning. The whole of IAAS Hohenheim did an amazing job being kind to everyone and enjoying their work for us as much as we did.

Getting to know many students from all over the world I am now excited to visit Vania in Indonesia during the World Congress this summer and invite back all our IAAS friends to join us on a Seminar Week in Austria.

The seminar was a great step in improving intercultural cooperation and settling IAAS Austria in the **worldwide IAAS community**. We got a feeling of how a Seminar Week is organised, what kind of expectations the participants have and how the team is managed. We know feel very motivated to improve our own IAAS activities at BOKU in Vienna to spread the international exchange of

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agricultural students. The week has shown us the importance of knowledge exchange and practical excursion to grasp the significance of our studies.

If you liked this report, are interested in participating at IAAS events or would just like to step by, please contact us via mail or facebook. We will invite you to our next meeting and are looking forward to seeing you there.

Best wishes to you all,

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The seminar group in the European Parliament in Strasbourg

International Association of Students in Agricultural and related Sciences



Aquaponic salad production at the Urban Farmers in Basel, Switzerland



Syngenta Crop Protection in Stein, Switzerland



IAAS Seminar participants in the tropical greenhouse in Hohenheim, Germany