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A Wonderful Experience in Japan for the German Joint Delegations from Erfurt and North Rhine-Westphalia

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Abstract

In fall 2016, two German delegations from the University of Erfurt and the German United Nations Association from North Rhine Westphalia (DGVN NRW) participated at the NMUN in Kobe, representing Japan, China, Peru and Moldova. The groups prepared jointly, a Japan-specific event was staged at the UN-day in the German UN-city of Bonn. Together the two groups also organized a study-trip in Japan prior to the Conference, with various briefings in Tokyo. Building upon this experience they enjoyed the well-planned cultural visits of the NMUN Kobe. Everyone returned with wonderful experiences, newfound friends from all over the world and valuable lessons learned.

Key words: United Nations Association, University of Erfurt, Study Trip, UN-city Bonn, NMUN preparation

1. Introduction

The University of Erfurt has been involved with the National Model United Nations program since 2003 and has ever since sent delegations yearly to the world's largest conference *National Model United Nations New York City*. The number of participants in Erfurt has increased throughout the years; a development which led us to the decision to participate in the annual international conferences hosted by the *National Collegiate Conference Association* (NCCA). In addition to helping participants to 'understand the United Nations and contemporary international issues' more clearly, we fully acknowledge the personal growth that participants gain from attending any Model United Nations conference hosted by the NCCA.¹ In addition to the educational value that such simulations offer, our participants furthermore appreciate the opportunity to experience the international setting of these conferences. The prospect of attending a Model United Nations simulation in Japan was therefore particularly interesting. Having been a participant of the New York City conference for several years, we anticipated potentially different dynamics during formal and informal discussions as well as during negotiations at a conference held in Japan. We believed, however, that this would make the conference all the more realistic and likely more challenging for our participants.

The North Rhine-Westphalian Branch of the German United Nations Association (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für die Vereinten Nationen – DGVN NRW e.V.*) was established as a non-profit organization in Bonn in 2006, the federal UNA was founded in 1952 and had its main seat in Bonn until the capital was moved to Berlin. The purpose of the organization is to inform the German civil society:

...in an impartial and critical manner about the aims, institutions and activities of the United Nations. It intends to increase interest in and awareness of current events in foreign and development policy, cultural and world economic policy as well as international relations and developments in general. UNA-Germany wants to encourage debate on these topics while simultaneously engaging in critical discussion of German UN policy.²

The NRW-chapter in its bylaws stresses in particular the role of young people in this

¹ <http://www.nmun.org/ncca.html>

² <http://www.dgvn.de/homepage/>

and identifies them as key stakeholders. According to this mission-statement *DGVN NRW* has organized a number of seminars and other events for students of all ages and sent a delegation to the *NMUN* in New York for the first time in spring of 2015. Since then, groups from *UNA Germany NRW* have participated in the international *NMUNs* in Olomouc and Kobe and will go to Banff in the fall of 2017.

2. Co-Operation with Universities in Japan

Since 2003 students from North Rhine-Westphalia have had the chance to meet with students from Japan and participate at Model UNs. In the fall of 2003 a group of ten students from Bonn visited Kyoto, returning a visit from *Kyoto University of Foreign Studies (KUFS)* delegation who took part in the German Model UN in spring of that year. Further visits followed in 2005 and 2007 and the collaboration was expanded through Professors Donna Tatsuki, Lori Zenuk-Nishide and Craig Smith from *KUFS* and the *Kobe City University of Foreign Studies (KCFUS)*. Alongside reciprocal visits students from these two Japanese universities have participated at the *NMUN* in New York as part of a joint delegation with the University of Bonn. The University of Applied Sciences in Recklinghausen with Prof. Andreas Mücklich joined this informal and the *DGVN NRW* has also been an active member since 2010 and we were happy to extend the cooperation to the University of Erfurt. For all sides involved it has been a very rewarding experience with lots of learning opportunities for the participating students. Given the similarity of the Japanese and German History and involvement in the UN and on the international stage as a whole enables the groups to reflect on their own country's position while learning about different approaches. Communicating in a foreign language with peers from another continent while meeting on a third continent adds another valuable component, emphasizing the mixture of soft skills and emphatic learning that is strived for. Given this wonderful co-operation we were thrilled to learn that *KUFS* would host the *NMUN* in Kobe in 2016 and students would have another wonderful opportunity to participate at *NMUN*. Our joy was even greater when we found out that our wish to represent Japan amongst other countries was granted and we could visit Japan for the season of leaves turning, combining studies of the UN and Japan with great cultural visits in the *Kansai* region. As the delegations from Erfurt and *DGVN NRW* were the only ones from Germany it was clear we would prepare together and plans were drawn up for a joint study trip prior to the Conference.

3. Preparation in Germany from April 2016 onwards³

In order to guarantee an adequate timeframe for preparation and training, we began our weekly seminar during the German summer term in 2016. The syllabus included traditional sessions on various topics such as rhetorical skills, negotiations, the United Nations system as well as the diverse documentation types of Model UN committees (Figure 1 & 2). Given the unique nature of the conference setting, namely its host country Japan, we further decided to include various lessons on Japanese culture, diplomacy, and negotiation techniques. In April, we began our regular training with numerous practice hours and exercises to improve and build up on our rhetorical skills and negotiation techniques. Although most participants are students of International Relations we emphasize the importance of a full understanding and solid knowledge on the United Nations system. This is stressed further by our weekend training session, which stretches over three days and allows the participants to fully engage in the vocabulary and skill set of a United Nations diplomat. More importantly it provides them with the chance to act as a delegate for the first time in a safe and well-known environment. Although many delegates are already confident public speakers when they begin our program, many still feel anxious when they attend their first larger conference. In order to curb this anxiety we allow them to try out various mechanisms and strategies in an open environment.



Figure 1. Students during their first training simulation in Erfurt

³ For a general overview of the purpose and benefits of Model UNs cf. Zenuk-Nishide (Ed.): “Experiential Learning through Model United Nations Simulations” – Project Phase 1 & 2, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, Kobe, Japan, 2009 & 2011 and Klein/Weiler (Hrsg.): “National Model United Nations – Eine Fallstudie zu Vorbereitung, Ablauf und Nutzen der akademischen Simulation”, Bonn: Bonndai, 2001.

Once the technical details of a Model United Nations conference are well understood, we draw attention to the assigned countries as well as the host country of the conference. Given that our team consisted of 18 students, we were assigned multiple countries: China, Peru, and in cooperation with the German United Nations Association North Rhine-Westphalia the countries Japan and Moldova. It is always an incredible honor to represent the host country itself at the Model UN conference, as it allows the group to gain a deeper understanding of the country, its traditions and history. In order to foster the awareness of and insight into the assigned country, we encourage participants to take a closer look at the country during news segments, in newspaper and magazine articles and by researching contemporary domestic and international interests of the country. Furthermore, we are convinced that one must develop a solid understanding of a country's history, its culture and traditions as all three strongly influence the country's political sphere.

Although, it is true that the participants have to do the majority of their preparation and research in their own time and at their personal speed, we support them by providing platforms to share the newly found facts and to debate these in various talk rounds. During several weekly sessions, we host so called roundtables during which all representatives of one country exchange their views and data on their individual assignments. This exercise does not only foster the group spirit but furthermore it



Figure 2. Opening ceremony of DomMUN in Erfurt, Germany

allows the group to arrive at common conclusions, to reach a thorough and extensive understanding, and a deep insight into the country's position on national, regional, and international stages. It is of utter importance that the representatives of a country portray and present its position in a unified and identical manner across the different committees during conferences. The shared research as well as the exchange of information allows the participants to become fully emerged in their assigned country.

Finally, the students prepared position papers for the *National Model United Nations* conference in Kobe, Japan. Due to the high interest in the project we typically allow about twenty students to participate in the class and take a majority of them to the final conference. This allows us to assign two students per country assignment to a certain committee. The students therefore do not only have the opportunity to discuss matters such as the country's position and policies with their assigned team partner but they are further given the chance to extend their personal skills. The students are paired by the lecturer of the seminar based in part on their performances during classes and prior conferences and additionally in regard to their personal strengths and weaknesses. We strongly believe that Model UN does not merely teach participants about the United Nations system but it moreover furthers the realization of their individual strong suits as well as their shortcomings. We value the opportunity to introduce participants to different character traits and appreciate the practical training they receive.

Once the students finish their preparation, they begin a thorough and detailed research on their assignment. We typically encourage them to firstly inform themselves about the general aspects of their country such as its history, culture and traditions. We firmly believe that political decisions are deeply intertwined with a country's identity and it is therefore of utmost importance to understand the cultural and historical background. In addition, we introduce them to the documentation system of the United Nations and encourage them to utilize various online databases as well as meeting records of the United Nations' councils. Given that we represented the People's Republic of China as well as the Republic of Peru and Republic of Moldova during the *NMUN* conference in Japan, we were given the chance to gain insight into highly diverse countries with heterogeneous political and cultural backgrounds.

However, besides preparing for the assigned countries and the committee work by practicing speeches, writing position papers and attending roundtables we stressed the

importance of being acquainted with Japanese culture as well. Due to the fact that we had never participated in a conference in Japan and furthermore the announcement that a majority of schools would be from Japan, China and other countries of this geographical area, we believed that a solid knowledge of Japanese and Asian culture was of utmost importance. Particularly given the different approaches to negotiations and discussions, we anticipated a new dynamic during the conference. As Germans, who tend to be rather direct communicators, we feared that our traditional negotiation style could be seen as uncooperative. Therefore, we emphasized the importance of firstly accepting and secondly understanding different negotiations and speaking techniques. Our delegates were encouraged to watch multiple videos of Japanese diplomats and to deeply engage with alternative measures of diplomacy. We are convinced that through this added cultural dimension to our preparation we allowed participants to appreciate the differences instead of regarding them as frustrating obstacles.

4. Celebrating UN-day in Bonn

With the capital being moved to Berlin, Bonn became a new hub for international co-operation and international organizations and companies, like the headquarters of logistics giant *DHL* as well as *Deutsche Telekom*, over 150 NGOs, but also the German broadcasters *Deutsche Welle* and *phoenix* and offices of all federal ministries.⁴ Most importantly, Bonn is a UN-city with 20 secretariats and organizations and over 1,000 employees⁵ The focus of activities is on sustainable development, Bonn e.g. hosts the UN Volunteers Programme, a part of the UN University and the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 2017 meeting on Climate Change (COP 23) will be held in Bonn (Figure 3).



Figure 3. statement by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC; picture available at newsroom. unfccc.int

⁴ <http://www.bonn-international.org/>

⁵ <http://www.bonn-international.org/city-of-bonn/un-in-bonn.html>

Celebrations to commemorate 20 years of UN in Bonn took place in 2016 and *DGVN NRW* is cooperating with the German UN-city of Bonn closely since the chapter was set up more than a decade ago (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Logo of 20 years UN-city Bonn, copyright UN-city of Bonn

We continuously stage seminars and talks with and at the old city hall and an annual highlight is the celebration of UN-day at the old market square. Bonn is the only UN-city to celebrate the “birthday” of the United Nations each year on a Saturday in October. On the evening before, *DGVN*, the City of Bonn and the UN in Bonn organize a UN-talk with high-ranking speakers.⁶ At the festivities tens of thousands of visitors have the chance to interact with the UN-agencies in Bonn, inform themselves about the various activities of clubs and NGOs and have a good time. Given our visit of Japan *DGVN NRW* was glad to have a Japanese Tea Ceremony by the Antique Institute in our tent during this event, drawing a lot of attention and enthused visitors to our exhibition (Figure 5).⁷



Figure 5. Two members of the Antique Institute with Thomas Weiler and moderator at the stage on UN-day in Bonn October 2016, photo by Antique Institute

⁶ http://www.bonn.de/wirtschaft_wissenschaft_internationales/uno-stadt/un_veranstaltungen/14955/index.html?lang=de

⁷ *DGVN NRW* thanks the Antique Institute for their help, more info on them and photos can be found at <http://antique-institute.com/index.php/activity/19-un-20th-anniversary-tea-ceremony>

5. Experiential Study Trip in Tokyo prior to the Conference

In addition to the academic experience that the participation in a *National Model United Nations* conference provides for its attendees, we strive for an all-encompassing experience, which allows students to not only apply their theoretical knowledge but to further their understanding of the vast possibilities that the political sphere offers. Each year we therefore organize study trips in Berlin, Germany and finally in Washington D.C. when attending *NMUN New York City*.



Figure 6. Participants at the United Nations University Japan

Given the internationality of Tokyo and the abundance of international institutions as well as United Nations organizations, we were committed to organizing diverse meetings in order to allow participants to experience the practical value of their attained knowledge through their university classes as well as our Model UN preparation.

We consider ourselves extremely lucky that we have had the chance to visit the United Nations University in Tokyo and to engage in various meetings with UN professionals (Figure 6). We were given the chance to speak with the Director of the UN University - Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), Mr. Sebastian von Einsiedel about contemporary issues concerning the United Nations and about the potentially requested calls for a reform of the Security Council. Participating students welcomed the opportunity to have their questions answered by a representative of the United Nations. Additionally, we spoke to Mr. Dirk Hebecker, Representative of the UNHCR Japan about current affairs of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees within and outside of Japan. Especially in regard to the simulation of the UNHCR at the National Model United Nations conference in Kobe, Japan we welcomed this opportunity and representatives of this council managed to get a better insight into the work of the committee as well as current cases it is dealing with.



Figure 7. Participants at the German Embassy in Tokyo Japan

Finally, we had the honor to meet with Mr. Tetsuo Kondo, who is the acting Director of the United Nations Development Programme Representation Office in Japan. Mr. Kondo took the time to emphasize the importance of the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals as well as the fieldwork he has conducted for UNDP in his early career days. Our students were particularly impressed by the wide-ranging work the UNDP conducts and valued the chance to inquire further details about the setting and diverse field of action of the UNDP. In addition, we were allowed to visit the United Nations University library at the end of our visit. It was incredibly humbling to examine the numerous resolutions listed and organized at the library and allowed the students to transfer their attained Model UN knowledge to the real United Nations organizations.

On our second day, we were honored to attend a meeting with Ambassador Yasushi Akashi, one of the greatest diplomats in Japan and a true trailblazer of Japanese foreign policy. Students did not only have the unique opportunity to ask valuable questions about Japanese foreign policy, a particular treat for those who represented Japan at the NMUN conference, but furthermore were given a magnificent example of true diplomacy. During the discussion with Ambassador Yasushi Akashi students learned the importance of ‘reading between the lines’ and how to ameliorate their own diplomatic skills. A second meeting brought us to the German Embassy in Tokyo during which we engaged in a conversation with the head of the cultural department (Figure 7). Participants were especially interested in the relations between the two countries as well as Germany’s interests in Japan.

The study trip in Tokyo provided the students with the opportunity to get a better insight into Japan’s foreign policy and the German-Japanese relations as well as the various United Nations organizations working in Japan. In addition to being a magnificent complement to the university studies conducted by the students, it was an incredible preparation for the National Model United Nations conference in Kobe, Japan.

6. Cultural Tours and Site Visits in Japan

On November 20, 2016, we finally arrived in Kobe and were excited to attend the wonderfully planned study trip organized by the *Kobe City University of Foreign Studies*. We were particularly interested in the cultural and historical insight into Japan that we would gain during those three days. It was remarkably impressive that the

organization committee recruited several hundred volunteers, who accompanied the participants of the study trip.

On the first day went on a guide tour of Kobe, having a chance to relive the devastation of the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 at the Earthquake Memorial Museum. Furthermore, we were able to sample some local Sake during a brewery tour and get a wonderful view of the city reborn from Mount Rokko.



Figure 8. Participants with the wonderful students of Kobe City University of Foreign Studies

The next trips took us to fabulous sights in the surrounding area: We visited numerous spectacular shrines and temples such as the *Kinkaku-ji*, a Buddhist temple in Kyoto. The students of the hosting university split us up in smaller group to allow better discussions on the various historical and architectural facts about the individual sights (Figure 8). We were especially impressed by the profound and well-researched knowledge that the students shared with us during those trips. In Kyoto, we also had lunch at a famous restaurant serving only tofu dishes.

On the second day, we had the great honor to visit the city of Hiroshima including the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. On the train ride in the world-famous *Shinkansen* to

Hiroshima we were taught how to make *Origami* paper cranes by using the traditional origami techniques and the special meaning those paper cranes hold to the Japanese Nation (Figure 9). A second meeting allowed us to listen to a survivor of the 1945 tragedy of Hiroshima at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. It was an incredibly humbling moment and strengthened our desire to use diplomacy and negotiation during the upcoming Model UN conference and beyond. In addition, we were stunned by the beauty of the Miyajima “floating gate” at *Itsukushima-jinja*, with “attacks” by the deer on our samples of local cuisine adding some comic relief.



Figure 9. Students experience the Origami tradition

7. National Model United Nations Conference in Kobe, Japan

Finally, on Wednesday November 23, 2016 the long awaited *National Model United Nations* conference was declared open by the honorable Secretary General Sachiho Tani. Opening and first sessions took place at the serene *KCUFS*-campus outside of the city, the Conference then moved to the Portopia hotel in the Kobe harbor area. Transport was provided for and organization was perfect.

Our students had become an even more diverse group with three delegates from West Virginia joining us. Together, they participated in all four simulated committees namely the General Assembly (GA), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Office

of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Security Council (SC).⁸ Due to the many students who wanted to participate in this conference we were assigned several country assignments: Japan, China, Peru and Moldova.



Figure 10. Participants preparing their first speech

For the next four days, delegates discussed, negotiated, gave speeches and finally voted upon their draft resolutions (Figures 10 & 11). The diverse background of the conference attendees did not only add to the realistic approach to such meetings but it furthermore allowed our participants to utilize the obtained skills. We were particularly proud to have familiarized ourselves with Japanese culture and varying negotiation styles as fellow delegates used various different techniques. Our participants were able to confidently state their country's position across all committees and managed to work well with their fellow delegates.

On Saturday morning, the committees moved into voting procedure and passed several of their draft resolutions. The delegates in ECOSOC even had the chance to vote at the City Hall with city councilors and high-school students from all city districts in attendance. All delegates were proud of the work they had accomplished and embraced their fellow delegates.

⁸ Topics and further info can be found at: http://www.nmun.org/nmun_japan16.html

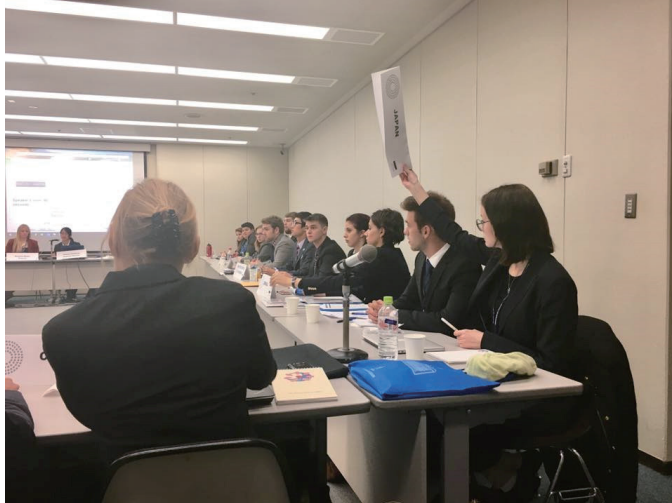


Figure 11. A delegate raises a placard to be added to the speakers' list

The closing ceremony was yet another high light of the conference and included a traditional Japanese dance performance. Our combined efforts were awarded with an Honorable Mention Awards at the conference and two Outstanding Position Paper Awards.

8. Looking Ahead

The participation at NMUN Kobe only strengthened our resolve to continue the project and our co-operation. In fall of 2017, we will travel to Canada to take part at the NMUN in Banff National Park, where *DGVN NRW* and the University of Erfurt will again team up, including one student from West Virginia. For 2018, we have NMUN New York again in our sights. In addition, several simulations in Germany are planned as well. For these Model UN simulations, we are considering to take part as joint delegations and hope to be able to continue visits to Japan.

In conclusion, we can only express our deepest gratitude to the entire *National Model United Nations Japan* team, especially all representatives and volunteers of the *Kobe City University of Foreign Studies*. Our attendance at the *NMUN Japan* conference allowed us to broaden our horizons, to deepen our understanding of the United Nations system and to engage with an incredibly diverse group of delegates and staff members.

Arigatou gozaimasu
ありがとうございます