

Last Christmas I did not get my best present from Santa Claus, but from the EURO office. On 29th of December I received an email stating that I had been selected to represent EURO countries in Latin American Operations Research Summer School to be held in Uruguay in February 2004. To be honest, I had applied to the summer school purely due to my love of adventure. My prior knowledge about operations research in Latin America consisted of a hydro production planning paper, which used Brazilian hydro reservoirs as an example.

I knew already before the summer school that people in Latin America have very relaxed attitude towards life. It did not take me more than two emails from the conference organizers to learn that relaxed attitude does not mean badly organized. Actually, I might have learned that already after the first email, if I just had taken some more Spanish courses in high school. The first email was about two pages long and written in Spanish. When I replied and apologized that I do not understand Spanish it took less than ten minutes to get all the information in English. After the first contacts I got daily emails giving more information about the conference and Uruguay. Thus, when the date of departure finally came, I really felt that there is someone waiting me in Montevideo.

After about 24 hours and three flight changes, the Scandinavian winter had changed into sunshine. The summer school was organized in Hotel Ibis, where most of the participants also stayed. Officially the summer school started on Monday morning, but I met most of the participants and organizers already in the cocktail party on Sunday evening. Majority of the 80 participants were from Latin America. Thus, it is no wonder that I had to answer several times the question, why did you choose to participate in the X ELAVIO. The other fruitful topics for discussion were the similarities and dissimilarities between Finnish and local, weather, people, sports, politics, education ... You name it.

The program of the summer school consisted of 20 minute student presentations and 4-8 hour lecture series held by invited speakers. My favorite was Professor Gilbert Laporte from HEC Montréal. His compelling lectures on vehicle routing kept most of the students focused, even when he was introducing the, not so common problem in Latin America, snow removal problem. The organizers felt that as I have traveled the longest way to get to the summer school, I need 30 minutes for my presentation. I used the additional ten minutes to give an overview of the OR problems in the Scandinavian electricity markets. The last 20 minutes I used to present my own paper: "Flexibility and Technology Choice in Gas Fired Power Plant Investments".

In addition to the lectures we had a lot of social activities. Every evening we ate dinner together. On Wednesday afternoon we had a really nice and thorough tour around city of Montevideo. The most memorable moments I spent on Wednesday evening in a tango bar listening to Uruguayan Tango. In addition to the nice memories the X ELAVIO gave me a lot of new friends around the Latin America. I want wholeheartedly thank the organizers about their hospitality and EURO/IFORS about making the participation financially possible.

Erkka Näsäkkälä
Systems Analysis Laboratory
Helsinki University of Technology



Figure 1: A sunset in Montevideo