

Latvia and Estonia Study Tour Reflections

Donna Grabowski, Teacher

Paldies and Aitäh are thank you in Latvian and Estonian, respectively. I am extremely thankful for the opportunity to have participated with GEEA on the Teacher Study Tour to Latvia and Estonia this past June 2019. This was my second study tour with GEEA, and each study tour is an amazing window to economic classes around the globe.

GEEA promotes Economic practices throughout the world. They provide an opportunity for teachers from the United States like myself to see, learn, interact with and bring back to our classrooms the deeper cooperation and sharing of ideas that is critical to student growth. Some people argue that globalization has increased competition in our country and between countries. While some aspects of this are true, it has also helped to bring forth a sense of yearning for more knowledge about the world outside of the United States, especially for our students. As educators, we are continuously working to enhance our students experience in the classroom. If our journeys can open up their worlds and showcase the value of international perspective, then the value of GEEA and other organizations like them are invaluable.

So the Latvia and Estonia journey began. We saw the flexibility and creativity of different school systems, we participated in teacher workshops, we shared in the country culture, we were welcomed for dinner at teachers' homes, we visited country landmarks and we became close as a group of Educators.

Donna Grabowski



Our first day in Latvia!

Junior Achievement Latvia is with
John Brock in Riga, Latvia.

Yesterday at 9:01 PM ·

Šajās dienās Junior Achievement Latvia uzņem
Global Economic Education Alliance ekonomikas
un uzņēmējdarbības pedagog... [Continue Reading](#)

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Patty Bellamy Bartram and 2 others



Our first day in Riga, we were welcomed by Jānis from Junior Achievement Latvia. We were a group of weary travelers from New Jersey (myself), Georgia, Colorado, Atlanta, Kentucky, and Florida. Some of us had flight delays and no luggage, however we were excited to start the study tour and we felt so welcomed by the wonderful people we had met thus far. Travelling always reminds me of the importance of patience and empathy. Getting stuck at an airport, or having lost luggage are some of the parts of navigating travel. Patience and understanding are also important characteristics of what it takes

to teach. So, as we master the art of study tour participation, we also become more prepared to deal with our students' needs.

The first day in Latvia I was struck by the IMPACT of the fact that this country of almost 2 million people (25% of NYC's population, which is my backyard) has survived two totalitarian regimes three separate times. The crimes committed by foreign powers against the peoples of Latvia were horrific. It was powerful to see and feel the history of those who perished, were persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, forcefully deported, or fled the occupation of the regime.



It is pictures like this stark KGB Prison cell that I will show students to bring the real world to my class. Sharing me and my experiences makes topics real and relevant. The pictures will relate the grim atrocities of a brutal KGB secret police against a total country population. However, I can explain that from all of this adversity, real people, people who we met and whose relatives even experienced these uncertain fates, have persevered and the country has moved on. Finally in 1991, Latvia has regained its

independence. We could feel the freedom and the country's Freedom Monument is an important testament to their Independence. For most American students in my class who only know freedom, independence and sovereignty, this monument will be an important symbol to explain in terms of Economics and the Features of Free Enterprise.



Another feature of our travel to the Baltic States was the experience of midsummer and the upcoming solstice that we would miss by a little more than a week. We learned that going to the countryside in celebration of the shortest night and longest day was as important as St. Patrick's Day in Ireland or Oktoberfest in Germany. While we missed the actual solstice, we wished each other celebratory exchanges via email and we did get to experience the long days of summer, as the days were light well into the time we would be ready for bed!



The picture above was almost 10:00pm in the evening! The students will be amazed at what so many hours of daylight means to an Economy!! Contrary to the wonders of daylight, what might darkness mean to an Economy during the winter months for a country like Latvia and Estonia?

We were so fortunate to have the daylight to bring us closer together as a group. Each day we became closer as friends and educators. We were committed to really learning about the culture of the countries, and we shared ideas about how we would incorporate the trip into our classrooms.



Our first trip to a school in Latvia was to the Riga State Gymnasium No. 3 School. We were welcomed by teachers who told us about their Economics Curriculum, had a student share her experiences with us, explained the concept of student companies to us and gave us a tour of the school. The school visits, whether in my first GEEA trip to Peru or this trip to the Baltics confirm what I have said in my first reflection paper. I believe it is very poignant and a point I stress when sharing my experiences with other teachers, our school board and students. No matter how rich, how poor, how different, across cultures, amongst countries, the qualities in students and the qualities in teachers generally tend to be the same. Students are happy and they are learning! Teachers are there because they want to teach students and because we care and have passion. It doesn't get better than that. We also shared about our curriculum. For as different as our countries are, it is amazing how similar we are in terms of the content that we teach. Again, another point to share with students in the US. The world truly is "flat," and we need to appreciate and understand the stories and lives of people not only in our country but other countries as well. As we become more Global, the economy and world in which the students of today

live is truly is changing. The teacher study tours help us show students an appreciation of other cultures, help us show our students anything is possible and we too become students again!





Economics and Commerce

Grade 10:

- Entrepreneurship
- Marketing
- Business English

⇒ 40 minutes per week whole year

SMC ⇒ whole school year

Company Research

Grade 11:

- Entrepreneurship
- Office Work
- Bookkeeping

+ Business English

SMC ⇒ 40 minutes per week / whole school year

Business Plan ⇒ whole school year

Grade 12:

- Business management
- Politics
- Law
- Etiquette

+ Business English

SMC ⇒ 40 minutes per week / 1/2 school year

Final Exams

Yes, the curriculum content was so similar! I couldn't wait to share what I was learning with my colleagues back home! Certainly, I did think a course in Etiquette would be a welcome to our course offerings!

We also had the opportunity to participate in teacher workshops. In Latvia. The workshop at the Microsoft sponsored building was filled with energetic and welcoming teachers who welcomed Dr. Brock and Dr. Harter as they taught lessons on Income Distribution and Barriers to Trade. We engaged as one group of teachers, not separated by borders or language, but collaborated as educators wanting to find ways to bring meaningful lessons to our students. So, as we traded beads and jumped over a yardstick to the limbo song, we all were thinking of ways to incorporate these activities into our classrooms to help our students, promoting active learning, creating teamwork, and getting our students thinking about the subject matter.





We ended our time in Latvia with a celebratory dinner. It was a culmination of our time with amazing new friends who welcomed us as educators. They had shared their schools with us, their students with us, their projects with us, their history and their economy. So as we enjoyed Maizes zupa, Latvian Bread Soup and toasted with Riga Black Balsam, we said good bye to our new friends.



It was 10:30 in the evening when we left the restaurant and it was still light outside!

The next morning, we left our hotel on a 4.5 hour bus ride to Tallinn, Estonia.

Most of the ride we saw the forests of Latvia. The tall treed areas claim more than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the country and we learned that Latvians forage for mushrooms in the forest. Latvians are bonkers about mushrooms. It is a natural obsession. Another point of interest to share with students. What are Americans bonkers about?

Also, when we crossed into Estonia, there was no stop at the border, no passport checks and no passport stamps. While our passports and ID's were all checked before we boarded the bus, the process was smooth and simple. So different than when we travel between countries. Another discussion for our class.

We made it to Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Tallinn's Old Town had a very medieval feel, with picturesque stone walls enclosing the town, with plenty of lookout points. We could instantly sense the

higher standard of living in Tallinn. There were more tourists from the many cruise ships that come to port, as well. Certainly, this drives the economy of Estonia and as we discuss the three questions every society must answer, What goods to produce, How to Produce them and For whom, it is discussions about other countries and our ability to travel that make these questions more relevant.



In Estonia, our liaison for the week was Elbe, who teaches Economics and also works with Junior Achievement Estonia. Just as in Latvia, in Estonia we were welcomed by their teachers and students. While the weather typically is in the mid 60's for June, Tallinn experienced a heat wave while we were there and temperatures reached the high 80's! That didn't stop us. Our days were once again filled with



learning. We were becoming even closer as a group and the bonds of friendship made our time together special. We laughed, we shared, and the study tour was becoming an amazing experience for us. We even found a little piece of home and took a picture with the American Flag.

The walking tour of Tallinn enabled us to take in the beautiful sights of the capital city and the central town square from viewpoints on high.

When we were welcomed to schools in Estonia, it is here that we really felt the sense of what student



companies mean in the Baltic States. We saw creations by students that were amazing, ranging from handbags made from leather to baked goods to tutoring services. Schools have very demanding and diverse curricula, however across the board, a sense of Entrepreneurship is fostered. Students participate in the Student Company model from an early age and they participate in student company competitions at the school level and the country level and across countries. The Borto Backpack as seen on the pictured model has its own Facebook marketing page and the product is selling for \$125 Euro. I cannot wait to share the innovative ideas of these students with my own. Clearly it sends the message that NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE.

The Student Company Model helps build skills such as creative thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and time management, Students told us they learned to be flexible. The architecture of all the schools we visited in Tallinn was a window to the past with a gateway to the present and future for all their students.



We also experienced the impact of the Soviet Occupation in Estonia. Like Latvia it was a regime of terror with mass arrests, executions and mass deportations to remote areas of the Soviet Union. Some people we met remember what it was like to live in a fully controlled, brutal and censored society. There was a communist unification of peoples social and cultural life, there was a destruction of everything that reminded them of their Estonia Country and people were forced to speak Russian. Today in Estonia, many people still speak Russian. It is taught in schools, as is English. These stories are palpable. When we visited the memorial to Estonia's victims of Communism we were reminded of this grim time not too long ago in history.



The long walled pathway was referred to as the walkway to Siberia. Most deportees were women and children.

We learned some interesting facts about Estonia on a walking tour of Old Town. When I meet my students in September, I'll ask them if there was an elixir that could cure all ills, how much would they be willing to give up for it? It's the premise of Opportunity Costs and the cornerstone of Economics. People make choices. Estonia has an elixir that many tourists purchase. Raeapteek is believed to be the oldest still active pharmacy in Europe. It is housed in its original building dating back to 1422 on the



Town Square in Tallinn. Its remedy wine called Klaret is made using a secret medieval recipe with different spices and it contains 14% alcohol. We purchased it on the study tour and cheered to having all our illnesses BE GONE. Another panacea we bought into was the purchase of marzipan. The medieval prescription for these candies comprise over 72% almonds and are believed to cure Broken Hearts. I brought back bags of marzipan candies to heal the broken hearts of any of my students who may need some relationship intervention during the school year.



The most impactful aspects of being a teacher participant on Study Group Tours is the opportunity to become immersed in local culture. So different than being a tourist, our time in the study group affords us opportunities to interact with the people who live and work and teach the same subject we do. We were welcomed into their homes for dinner, as well.

I was invited to Riin Saar's home. She is a Math teacher and a Scheduler at Tallinna ReaalKool in Tallinn. Her Mom, Ene Saar, is Director of the school and a teacher of Economics. In a beautiful suburb of Tallinn, together with their family, they welcomed us with down to earth traditional cuisine, refreshing summer wine and wonderful conversation. For dessert, Ene baked us a traditional Rhubarb Cake. Rhubarb is very popular in Estonia.

We definitely saw that all digital roads lead to Estonia. We saw first-hand the Innovation City of Tallinn and their commitment to digital transformation. Estonia is the first nation to declare Internet Access a Basic Human Right. They accept digital signature for most all transactions, and they have instituted complete online voting. We learned besides Marriage and Divorce, you can do almost anything online in Estonia! Their schools support the mission of becoming a Global leader in Digital Innovation, as well. Every Estonian has a Digital ID card and it is believed the technology saves Estonia 2% of GDP per year in Government Overhead Costs. There is a CNBC video titled "How a Tiny Country bordering Russia became one of the most tech savvy societies in the world." This video perfectly depicts what we saw and learned on the study tour and will be great to share with my students. Our visit to the Estonia Entrepreneurship

University of Applied Sciences also showed how Estonia promotes itself as an Information Society. Below is our study group and the University employees who welcomed us.



As our time was coming to a close in Estonia, we had one last time together with our new friends. At a special dinner, we shared some gifts we brought from home, we shared some gifts that will become prized memories and we gave thanks for the Study Tour Opportunity.



We Hugged. Offered Terviseks to each other and knew we made new friends from not only the United States, but the Baltics, as well. Yes, how Blessed we were.



Calvin K Kazanjian, the founder and president of Peter Paul Inc., makers of mounds and almond joy candy bars believes that if more people understood basic economics the world would be a better place in which to live. Certainly, the way to happiness and greater prosperity for all he notes lies in a mutual understanding of Economics.

Our Global Education Trip is a mechanism towards Economic Education. I am looking forward to sharing this experience in my classroom and beyond.