

## Time to Think

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, APR 2 2014

There's something to be said for the benefits of academic traveling. Oh, sure, I could do without the hassles of connecting flights, airport security and Lufthansa pilots deciding to strike while I'm 2000km from home, but I'm willing to trade what are minor inconveniences for the benefits that come from getting out of the daily academic grind and turning my mind free.

I was in Thessaloniki, Greece, this week on the invitation of the Greek Association of Political and Economic Sciences Students (GRAPES) and the organizers of the IAPSS World Congress of Political Science. The Crisis Simulation that I had developed for my students at CEFAM was something I had discussed at a conference in Bucharest last year with some of the organizing team and, in Thessaloniki, I had a chance to deploy that simulation in an international setting.

If mounting the Crisis Simulation was the reason for the trip, though, it was not the only place where value was to be found. While in Greece I had the opportunity to speak with professors and staff at the University of Macedonia, with colleagues and researchers from across Europe, to connect with old and new friends, and to discuss a couple of collaborative publishing projects. Though only on the ground for less than 40 hours, I spent my time productively and even managed to fit in a little shopping time, too (my son is looking forward to the stuffed toy he has already christened 'Kevin' via Skype).

Yet the meetings I had and the connections I made and re-made are still only part of the reason that academic travel is beneficial. I think the most beneficial thing to emerge from my academic travel is the brief chance to escape the office and the classroom and just think. As much as I'd like to imagine it is possible to get out of the office at CEFAM and find time for thinking or as much as others may argue that I can do this on any regular weekend at home should I choose to, I know it is not the same thing. There is always an email that interrupts, a household task that needs doing, a boss who inevitably adds something else to my to-do list, a child who needs attention or any one of a million other distractions.

In Thessaloniki I was free to ignore the background noise and think. My inability to say anything other than 'hello', 'please' and 'thank you' in Greek meant I could withdraw a little bit more than normal into my thoughts, ignoring the snatches of other people's conversation that pull on your subconscious even if you are trying to concentrate. The world became background noise for a few hours and I sat, drank fairly reasonably priced coffee, looked out over the water and just...thought.

Understand that I am not saying that I had an incredible breakthrough or that these hours of thinking led to anything mind-blowingly great in terms of international relations theory. There might not be an article in what I was thinking about and what seemed so clear in a Thessaloniki Starbucks might end up having an obvious objection that an inquisitive student will spot immediately but that my enthusiasm blinded me to.

But whatever.

The chance to think, reflect, imagine and is a valuable one for any academic – hell, for any person – and even if I am flying back to a Thursday and Friday packed with 20 hours of teaching, meetings and administrative appointments

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the brief time spent out of CEFAM has been valuable, of that I am sure.

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### **About the author:**

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