

Kraków. The Host City: Stories Episode 5: VIII World Congress of the Universal Esperanto Association 1912

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The impressive VIII World Congress of the Universal Esperanto Association, listed in ICCA's database, was held in Kraków on 11-18 August 1912 to mark the 25th anniversary of publishing the first Esperanto textbook, whose author as well as initiator of the Esperanto movement was the Polish ophthalmologist Ludwik Zamenhof. Let us recall that Esperanto is the most widespread international supporting language in the world, currently spoken by around 2 million people.

Around 1000 Esperanto speakers from Europe, Asia and America attended the congress, which was divided into 28 sections and plenary sessions. It was held in the hall of the Old Theatre, while the press office, the section meetings and the exhibition were located in the building of the Trading Academy on Kapucyńska Street. Its organisation was the responsibility of a committee headed by Odo Bujwid, the first Polish bacteriologist and pioneer of hygiene. Interestingly, preparations for this congress had already begun more than half a year earlier. The Kraków City Council allocated a subsidy of 3000 crowns for the organisation and allowed the hall of the Old Theatre to be used. An illustrated guide to Kraków in Esperanto was published for the conference. A fire brigade played the role of today's Service and Decoration Company and was responsible for decorating the city – flagpoles adorned with flags, inscriptions and green garlands were erected in front of the Trading Academy. The National Bank of the Kingdom of Galicia opened an exchange office on the ground floor especially for the congress, where delegates could exchange money. Same as today, as part of the conference package the participants of the event received publications and brochures – an illustrated congress book, an illustrated guide to Kraków and Zakopane, an album of views of Kraków and, on presentation of the congress card they were entitled to, among other things, free use of tram transport, entry to all Kraków museums, discounts on accompanying trips, and the opportunity to attend the ball free of charge. The ball became a traditional and distinctive feature of the event; it was opened, leading with a polonaise, by Odo Bujwid with Mrs Zamenhof, and the party lasted until morning. During the gala, congress guests specially wore national costumes that showed the culture of each nation that had come to the congress, and 90 people outside the congress could watch the ball from the gallery after buying special tickets. During the accompanying excursions, guests could visit places that are still attractive today – the Wieliczka Salt Mine (attended by 1200 event participants) and Zakopane (over 100 participants). Interestingly, three Esperantists travelled to Zakopane on foot (one of them even travelled this way to Kraków as far as from Paris – this is surely a hint for us, how we can reduce our carbon footprint). ☐☐

Subsequent editions of the congress took place in San Francisco, Prague, Vienna, Paris, Gdańsk (1927) and Warsaw (1937), and Esperantists returned to Kraków in 1931 to take part in the XXIII World Esperanto Congress.

It should also be mentioned that from a separated part of the Trading Academy, the later Cracow University of Economics was founded in 1925. In the next episode we will present you some interesting facts about dormitories, inns, and the Kraków Academy. You are cordially invited. ☐☐

Photo source: <http://bc.wbp.lublin.pl/dlibra/doccontent?id=24905>



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