

Ukraine at BachoTeX 2019: Thoughts and impressions

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In May 2019, four students of Odessa I.I. Mechnikov National University and myself, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of mathematics, physics and information technology, attended BachoTeX, the 27th annual GUST conference of TeX users and friends.



Our team at BachoTeX. Photo by Harald Koenig

First, I would like to thank the TeX Users Group, GUST and all the people who made this trip possible. We are happy to be the first Ukrainian participants at BachoTeX and look forward to further cooperation. Now I want to look back and note some important points and impressions.

Education. I have been teaching L^ATeX courses to students since 2014. So, first of all, we considered this trip as a good opportunity to widen our knowledge about TeX, its history and ‘cutting edge’. The world is getting smaller now, and we have access to many teaching materials from the best universities and other institutions. However, despite the rapid development of online education, I think nothing can replace a real lecture and live communication. BachoTeX was a great place for communication because all lecturers were open-minded and friendly. So attending the talks brought us even more than we expected.

“This was the first time I attended the BachoTeX conference. I use TeX software for writing term papers and diplomas. At the conference, I learned that TeX’s capabilities are not limited by these actions. Presentations, magazines, typing musical notes, writing the code... For me, this conference was very informative,” said one of the students, Yuliia.

Popularization of TeX. In Ukraine, particularly at my alma mater, Odessa National University, we have a few TeX enthusiasts rather than an organized community. I am a big fan of TeX and try to popularize it among the students of our faculty. I use it for typesetting my books, lecture notes and other teaching materials, examination sheets and even posters, flyers and certificates. It’s nice to see that more and more students have recently started using L^ATeX to prepare bachelor, master or PhD thesis, draw pictures with TikZ and don’t fear using non-WYSIWYG systems anymore.

Events such as the BachoTeX conference clearly help the TeX community to grow and, on the other hand, also contribute to promoting TeX products among educators and students. We received



many printed materials (many thanks for that) and the latest version of TeX software on DVD, which I will be able to distribute at the faculty to popularize their use. Furthermore, we met with many users and professionals of ConTeXt — I think only a few people in Ukraine have heard about this software (I will try and tell my colleagues).

International experience. Three out of four of our participants were abroad for the first time of their life. And this is no wonder. Unfortunately, due to economic and social reasons, many young Ukrainians don’t have enough opportunities to visit other countries in Europe and in the world. That is why higher education institutions in Ukraine now are trying to make more international contacts to allow students to participate in exchange programs, scientific schools, workshops, etc., funded by foreign organizations. Many of today’s school graduates are searching for educational programs with more international opportunities. This is the reason why participation in BachoTeX can also make a positive impact at our faculty and university.



Time for a coffee break. Photo by Ye. Strakhov

Networking. The basic idea of any conference is communication, making new friends and meeting like-minded people in your area of interest. Again, BachoTeX can bring even more, because TeX users are not only mathematicians or computer scientists — they are very versatile and creative people (with a good sense of humor)! And — for me the most important — all of them love what they do. This makes the atmosphere warm and unforgettable.

Yuliia adds, “There were a lot of different people at the conference, so I thought it would be difficult for me to see eye to eye with everyone. They were of different ages and nationalities, they had different interests. But absolutely everyone was positive and was inspired by the conference. It was their openness and friendliness that allowed me immediately join the team.”

“We did not limit ourselves to discussing only TeX. There were many interesting contests and games, master classes, beer tasting. Enthralling tradition — Bonfire and spending the last night in house number 13.”



Workshop on logo design. Photo by Ye. Strakhov

People. I cannot forget the famous quote: “Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.” No matter who said that, there is a rationale to it. Education is not only about theoretical or practical knowledge, but also about design of thinking, emotions and impressions. It is not only about classroom activities, but also about informal events like those at BachoTeX. Education is for people and it is powered by people. And maybe the best feedback to you as an organizer and lecturer is when your students are happy.

Another member of our team, Inna, recently wrote (the following is my translation):

“To say that I am delighted with this country is not to say anything. Poland won me over with its architecture, style, cleanliness and comfort. Poles? These are people for the soul, people next to whom you just feel indescribable peace. BachoTeX? I am incredibly grateful to the people who motivated, sponsored and just participated in this event. I received a lot of positive and only positive emotions that are just unforgettable. #BachTeX-2020 #you.my.small.dream”



It motivates the most. We, all the Ukrainian guests, would like to express our deep gratitude for the organizers’ work. We highly appreciate your concern for us. Thanks to you, our stay at the conference was comfortable and we were happy. The high level of organization has greatly impressed us.

Other members seem to agree with me, “The information content of the conference and the cordial attitude of its participants left me with the most positive opinion.”

“I think that attending BachoTeX will be a good experience for students and they will definitely get a lot of impressions.”

Thanks for an opportunity to be a part of the worldwide TeX community. We hope to be here again next year.

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