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## GreatUniHack - impressions from hackathon

by Nikola Milošević - Tuesday, April 21, 2015

<https://inspiratron.org/blog/2015/04/21/greatunihack-hackathon-impressions/>

This weekend (17th-19th April 2015.) I was participating [GreatUniHack](#), so I would like to share here some impressions and experiences. GreatUniHack is a 36 hour hackathon organised by University of Manchester students and supported by [Major League Hacking](#) - an planetary organisation that supports hackathons around the World. It was held in Old Grenada Studios, the place where I was told Coronation street was filmed and some other popular BBC series.

It was supposed to start at 6PM on Friday 17th April. After a bit of struggling with meeting one of our team member, we managed to arrive at the place at 6:10. We found a table, took couple of photos. In my team was Michele, who is also a PhD student from my research group and two first year students - Veselin and Yazan. We had some ideas before, but we also left some space to be inspired during the event. Event was not starting, until 8PM, so we went around, talked with some sponsors. [Bloomberg](#) guys wanted to offer us job straight away (when they heard that we are doing PhD in Text Mining), but lets first finish studying.



Me with MLH trophy

Around 8PM dinner arrived and opening presentation started. First chunk of food was not perfect, but it improved next days. Coding started at around 9 or 9:30PM. We also could get some hardware provided by sponsors. There was a lot of things I heard about Oculus Rift, so I

took that piece. However, I had some problems with HDMI on my computer, so I could not make it work. Michele with some help managed to make it work, but we were not very impressed. It is quite hard to set up and we thought that image quality is quite low. Since we just wanted to try it, after about hour, we decided to return it, since there was some guys who wanted to do some development on it.



Oculus Rift on my computer

We were for some time brainstorming and came up with the idea about Android app. However, after realizing that my Android knowledge is rusted and noone else in the team ever touched Android development we gave up the idea. And start development of a portal where citizens can report various problems in their cities by uploading images and government can react and fix the problems. Users will either through image (Exif data), phone GPS or by manually entering provide a location of the problem and description. There is a view where people can see reported problems and a heat map of problems. Also there is a filter for different kinds of problems (broken road, broken signalling, garbage, etc.). One page shows most active users and one can donate some money to them. We used [Sendgrid](#) and [BrainTree](#) (PayPal) APIs for development.



My

eCitizen team

During the first night we have not slept almost at all. I slept about 1 hour near the morning. But probably noone exceeded more than 4. Development went quite heavy and I was doing quite a lot of RedBulls and other energetic drinks to keep me going. At about 9AM breakfast arrived - corns and croissants. After taking a break to eat something the coding continued. At about 3PM the major features were done. However, we continued doing some improvements and brainstorming about new ideas that could be added to the system. Most of them we managed to develop. There was a Pizza for the dinner. First they told us that there are 3 slices each, which was quite dissapointing, however, after everyone took their 3 slices, they announced that we can take as much pizza as we need. And there was plenty left.

Organisers asked me if I want to do the interview for Major League Hacking. As they said it will be streamed to the US, where they have some TV channel and then it will be posted on YouTube. I was a bit hesitating, but at the end I agreed. Here you can see the interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXUeL2-21aw>

At some point Macedonian guy I know from school found out two other ex-Yu guys, one Croat and one Slovenian. So I joined conversation as well, to fill up the missing Yugoslav link. It was fun talking and realizing after about 30 hours spent in same room, that we are talking the same language, while we didn't know it all the time.

After 30 hours of coding came time where noone knew anymore which language are they talking about. So couple of times it happened that Veselin (my team mate) started asking me something on Bulgarian and I responded in Serbian. Some times this worked, however, sometimes it did not. I realized that I can understand quite well Bulgarian, probably since I can understand Serbian, Slovak and Czech. The drawback is that Bulgarians were not able to understand so well my Serbian.

At about 10 in the Sunday morning the coding stopped. We had to submit projects to the [ChallengePost](http://challengepost.com/software/greatunihackproject) website. Here you can see our submission: <http://challengepost.com/software/greatunihackproject>. There was about one hour between the time when coding stopped and the time presentation started. Organisers at the beginning of the presentations thanked sponsors and then each team had 2 minutes to present their "hack". For us, I was showing the application, while Michele was talking. We finished a bit early, I guess because of stress, which we

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should not have, but it went ok. There was about 40 teams and total about 200 hackers participating on the hackathon. The judges selected 5 best teams who had another 3 minutes to present. We were not among them. The impression was that the projects that goes best on these kind of events are those looking cool (usually with some hardware like [Oculus Rift](#) which won the first prize or [Muse](#), or at least using 3D graphics). There is no empathy on usefulness or benefit it will create for the world, which was our application all about. It is good to know, so we can build something like that next time when we will be participating.



Team with sticker enriched laptops

Everything finished about 3PM. There was also some afterparty, with free drinks, but we were too tired to go there. We decided to go home and have a rest. It was quite interesting experience.

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