Erasmus Experience Report

I was immeasurably fortunate to be a participant of an Erasmus program in the receiving host University of Groningen, in the Netherlands. Besides priceless knowledge and life kicking experiences I had met numerous interesting individuals and learnt about Dutch culture from its very inside. My program was 1 year long - a double degree masters in international economics and business. It was also not a simple Erasmus, which is stereotypically perceived as lots of fun and parties only. In my case it was about attending complex courses, writing a master thesis with application of econometric models and methods (what was not taught in Corvinus - I had to learn it individually) as well as preparing myself for comprehensive examination and job haunt. Nevertheless, besides serious things I had time to have fun, too. I have joined a local Erasmus group, which have organized numerous activities, parties, excursions, etc for international students. In the university there was a wide range of other communities, such as: AISEC, Amnesty International, Energy Academy Europe Club (I was actively participating here as well), Economics and Business Faculty Club (EBF) and so on. Personally I can recommend each, as besides networking they also provide a possibility to participate in the interactive master classes, conferences and raising awareness lectures.

I have arrived on 26th of August and settled in the student house named Plutolaan or BNC, close to Zernike and 15 mins to the city centre. This student house is known for its citizens, as they are mainly PhDs and masters students, thus if you want to study - it's always silent, clean and peaceful there.

- Bicycle
As it is known, Dutch culture is famous for its bicycle culture, everyone is biking from small age of 3-4 years until 80+. That was one of the shocking things for me, in the transportation system, they have the priority almost always. Therefore we bought ( me and one of other Hungarian student , who got to be
my neighbor at the Plutolaan, thus we did a lot of things together) our bicycles at the bike sale next to the police station, which is held every 3 months and opens very early in the morning - approx. 5-6 AM. It is also possible to buy it in the shop, but there the price is too high. Sometimes on the street you may run into a homeless person who sells it for 10-15 EUR, I wouldn't suggest using that opportunity as on the one hand it's illegal and dangerous (if police catches you - you get fined and may get problems with authorities, minimal fine is around 200-1000 EUR).

- Erasmus Week & Introduction

Then my Erasmus week started (so to say an introduction week - cost of the ticket 35 EUR, which includes the price of the ESN card, numerous discounts to lots of places, Lebara phone card with an international package, etc) which was full of interesting and funny activities, among my favorites were clog painting and stroop-waffle (local "must try it" type of sweet) master class.

- Parties

Also we had several thematic parties - Dutch night (when everyone had to wear orange), jungle night (smth tropical) and national flag party (your native). We also had a dinner with ESN instructors - who cooked for us smth Dutch - sausages and smashed potatoes with lots of beers :). It was more like a team building activity, where we talked and got to know each other better, in order to keep up and hang out together later on. Throughout the whole year ESN held international dinners once in 2-3 weeks, where they were feathering teams of 5-6 ppl from one nationality eager to cook for 50 other ESN students, in order to introduce their most tasty delicatesses.

Usually the ESN organizes parties at "Drie Gezusters" (3 Sisters - central pub with averagely high prices) for international students, but during the year me and my friends had an opportunity to explore other places too, among which our favorites were: Het Feest, Shooters, 9 Circles and Kokomo Beach.

- University and Courses

From 6th of September classes started, and to tell the truth the first week was not only full of new and interesting information but also a bit shocking - we had to read a LOT, not just small articles of 10-20 pages for week as we were used to, but 300-500 pages per week from 3 subjects, it was a bit unusual in the beginning, but not impossible.
Teaching style is also different and the behavior of the students too. Tutors are demanding and always try to challenge you, so you think about your personal point of view backing it up with theory and research facts. I also liked that there was less power distance and more curiosity from students - there were not afraid to ask provocative questions, but on contrary eager to challenge the tutor with more detailed questions or to proclaim their argument if they had a different point of view. Courses were really intensive - held for 6 weeks and more hours per week with huge amount of material. We had numerous group projects and individual homework (more attention was paid to individual work) - we had to use applied econometrics and theoretical reasoning basing it upon recent research papers or statistical evidence.

- **Exams**

Exams are really different from those I was used to back in Hungary. 3 hours long without opportunity to have a break or to use a bathroom. The exam paper looked like a real horror - crazy amount of pages with different colors and several forms to fill out. Usually there were open essay questions which sometimes didn't have a right template answer, but it depended on how you can back it up with an argument - thus personal reasoning and usage of theory was highly valued.

- **Grading**

Grading system is also different, instead of 1-5 grades we had 1 to 10 system. In order to pass you had to reach at least 5.5 points (some subjects 6.5). It was almost impossible to get a 10 or 9, but 8 was considered as a great result and doable. The average grade is usually 7.

- **Master Thesis and Comprehensive Examination**

Writing a dissertation is originally not an easy task - as it has to be based upon your interest, applicable, something new and usage of gained knowledge. In a foreign country it is hard as you are away from your comfort zone, you are not that familiar with the supervisor’s style and interest area and it is not easy to estimate the strictness of the evaluation system of the university. I have researched the convergence of Dutch, German and Danish electricity prices over the last decade and possible economic effect the divergence had. I was lucky to be in Groningen (Energy Valley of Europe and other organizations which are focusing on sustainability are centered there as well as my supervisor was also highly interested in the given topic) - I was so to say in the right place at the right time.
After submitting the final version and closing up our exam sessions we had to pass the comprehensive examination. There in front of the board of examiners we had to cover questions based on the subjects and theories we have learnt the last 2 years.

- **Kings Day**
One of the most famous celebrations in Holland is Kings Day (April 29th). The whole country for 3-4 days dresses up in orange, goes on streets, has fun. It's like a 3 day long festival where everyone drinks beer, goes on streets and in this way expresses his/her love to the monarch. I loved this celebration a lot, great chance to explore etch culture and to have fun with friends.

- **Places to visit**
During the year I didn't have much free time to travel around as I was busy with my studies, nevertheless I went to Rotterdam (to visit a friend), Bremen (Christmas market with ESN), Brugge (with parents who visited me) and Amsterdam (to Keukenhoff tulip park). I mainly traveled by train. Common ticket is too expensive, thus I figured out there is a possibility to buy a group ticket (if 10 ppl max) for 6.40 EUR via Facebook group. In this was you get a day ticket for very cheap and you are not obliged to travel with the whole group, just to have a common destination and to use it after 9 AM. More information available at: [www.ns.nl](http://www.ns.nl).

- **Other**
Among other worthy "to know" is for example HEMA where you can have a breakfast for 1 EUR (2 breads with omelet, croissant, jam and coffee or tea) or a dinner for 2.5 EUR (some meat and side dish). Then there is Mamamini, where students bring their stuff and the shop sells it for really cheap prices - a cup for tea around 10 EUR Cents. One can join numerous Facebook groups for Buy/Sell deals in order to get the best offer.

- **Food**
I was usually buying food at Lidl or Aldi, they have the cheapest prices, approximately 10-20 cents cheaper than other chains. Local shopping chain is Albert Hein - there you can buy Dutch specialties or regular food for a bit more than in above mentioned supermarkets. According to my observations Spar is the most expensive place.
Also, if you have time and like fresh food you can go to the Vissmarkt, there is an open air market which works on Tuesdays, Thursdays and weekends. There you have a variety of farmers who are selling fresh greens, meat, cheese and etc. The "must try" here is herring (fish with onions) on hollandaise style.

All in all I was satisfied with my Erasmus experience, because I feel I have learnt a lot and became more responsible and organized.