STUDY ABROAD

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Fanni Gerda Mazsar
Munich, Germany
Introduction

This is a brief reflection of my Erasmus semester spent in Munich Business School, Munich, Germany. I started my studies there on 4th of January right after my last exam at my home university. Firstly, I would like to briefly introduce the country Germany, the city Munich and the university Munich Business School and compare them to my home country Hungary, city Budapest and Corvinus University of Budapest. Secondly, talk about the educational system in Germany and how I experienced it as a foreigner, what were similar and different than at home. Moreover, the cultural differences I faced during this semester from the German people and the other Erasmus students. Last but not least, the experiences I had throughout the semester.

Germany is located in the centre of Europe with 9 neighbouring countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Luxemburg, Poland, Switzerland and the Netherlands. With 81 million inhabitants Germany is the most populous country in the European Union. The official language is German, which derives from the same Indo-European language family as English and many other European languages. Germany is a polycentric country with 4 cities above 1 million inhabitants. The biggest population lives in the capital city Berlin around 3.4 million, the second is Hamburg with 1.7 million, Munich with 1.4 million and Cologne with 1 million. The government type is federal parliamentary republic, which is a federal system with some of the responsibilities in the hands of the states like the education. There are 16 states, the biggest is Bavaria in the South and the most populous is North-Rhine Westphalia. This is where I will talk about Munich a little. Munich is the capital city of Bavaria with around 1.4 million people living there. It is an extremely traditional city with high importance for technology, innovation and tourism. Why Munich is a traditional city you may ask, well I have experienced that when there is a national holiday, like May Day which is on May 1 people wear their traditional clothes. Lederhosen for men, and Dirndl for women. As for innovation and technology Munich is home to several big companies including BMW and Siemens, which are leaders in these categories. Tourism is also a big relevance to the city; the main event of the year is obviously the Oktoberfest. This is a beer festival held annually since 1810, usually starts in the middle of September and lasts for 16-18 days. During these days visitors from all over the world come to Germany to enjoy drinking beer and listening to the traditional German folk music. Approximately 7 million litres of beer are consumed during the Oktoberfest where all 6 of the breweries from Munich are
represented. Including the oldest brewery in Munich Augustiner Bräu, founded in 1328.
Munich Business School, where I did my studies this semester was established in 1991 as a
private business school offering both undergraduate and graduate programs. If I am to contrast
Hungary and Germany I can say that Germany is a richer country both with democratic system
in Germany also with federal governments. Hungary is a centralized country with Budapest in
the middle with nearly 2 million people, while Germany is a decentralized country with several
cities above 1 million inhabitants.
Education

Before arriving to Munich, I had to select 30 ETCS worth subject which for me were: Communication Management, Business in Europe, German, Integrated Corporate Communication and Relationship Marketing, Innovation management, Luxury Marketing, and Project management. The timetable is the first thing which I discovered completely different from my home university. At home we have a timetable for the semester and that does not change, we have to same classes at the same time every week. In Munich Business School however the timetable is only relevant for one week. Every week there are different classes in different times. For me personally the timetable used at home is more suitable as I am a person who likes to know beforehand what to expect from the week ahead and that way I can arrange my things easier.

The grading system is also a huge difference between the two educational system. At home we get percentage points and grades based on that, while in Germany you get grades from 5 to 1 where 1 is the best, “sehr gut” and 5 is unacceptable. It was hard to get used to it.

Another aspect of the education is the buddy program, which means that a master’s student can earn social points by being a mentor to an Erasmus student for the semester. For us Erasmus students it is an important idea as they can help up with issues rising even before getting to Munich. One example of this would be the accommodation, which is extremely hard to find there. I was looking for a room for months without success, then I asked my buddy whether he has any idea where I could find one and that is how I got my apartment. Also, he introduced me to his friends there, who all helped me adapt to this new situation.
Cultural differences

When you arrive to Germany whether you go there by plane, car or train the first thing you notice is that their language is different. The German language is from the same language family as English, so they have some similarities, but completely different from Hungarian for example. Another noticeable part of culture is the food, which you realise that it is different, but without help you will be lost what to order at a restaurant for example. I tried to search online for special German food what you have to try if you are there, but my first attempt ended up as a complete failure as I the Bavarian German is different than normal German. This is where I realized I need help and asked my buddy what he recommends and with his help now I can say I tried 2/3 of the traditional Bavarian dishes.

Whenever I see someone familiar in my home country I greet them or ask them how they were. Well this is not acceptable in Germany. When you see someone and want to simply greet them and ask them how they were get prepared to spend 10 or so minutes with them as they will literally tell what happened with them recently. Luckily in the school where I was studying people got used to just say hello to each other and that is it. It is not a bad thing, but definitely needs time to get used to. At home if I want to know how someone is doing I would invite them for a coffee for example not talk about it in the streets.
Impacts on my views and me

At home I always thought that after I moved to Budapest from my home city I immediately became responsible for myself and I could live on my own without any help. After last semester when I was working next to university this feeling grew exponentially as I made some money which I could in theory use for whatever I wanted thus I felt I was independent from my parents. In reality it was not true at all and the Erasmus program was the one that opened my eyes to see the truth. For example, even when I was working that money went into my savings account and I only spent about 20% of it on myself. The rent and living expenses were still financed by my parents. Whenever I had problems I could just take the train or car and go home in a 30 minutes route and they helped me with everything. Well, this changed completely when I arrived in Munich. The money I had on my savings account from the last semester was the money I could spend on myself I had to manage on my own. If I had any problem I did not have my parents to run to, so I had to manage those as well. I would say I had to make huge efforts to achieve this semester the way I did. Every minute spent the way I spent them, every euro cent spent on things I did all came down to an excellent experience which I would do again anytime. It really is true that you have to step out of your comfort zone to achieve and experience the greatest things.

Conclusion

I can say this Erasmus experience came at the best possible moment. Changed everything from the first moment: culture, people, school everything and I extremely needed this. The people I got to know well in Munich are going to be close friends for a long time as we shared moments together which made a special bond between us. I really appreciate the opportunity from both the school and my parents that I could apply for this. I would do it again if I had the chance.