

Report of ERASMUS exchange study

Home University: Brandenburg Technical University of Cottbus

Bachelor of Environmental and Resource Management, WS 2012/2013

Host University: Kuopio, Finland, University of Eastern Finland Kuopio Campus

Preparation: planning, organization and application to the Gasthochschule

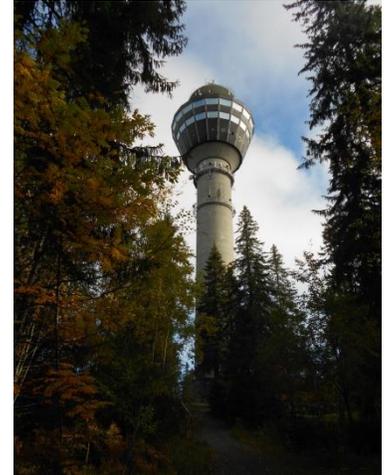
The information session for the semester abroad at BTU Cottbus was held twice, once for German students and other time for international students. The list of available universities and courses were available in earlier stage and therefore I could take enough time to determine which country I am interested and what I would like to study in semester abroad. In the beginning I was going to apply to one University in Spain, but later I noticed that the course I was interested in was not offered that semester. My second choice was Finland, the country which I have been and I liked, and the course I could take sounded very interesting and advanced. At the same time I was attracted by some courses offered at Lund University in Sweden. In the end I set University of Eastern Finland as my first choice, which had only one available place, and Lund and Halmstadt University in Sweden as second and third choice. Application was much of paper works and it was very time consuming firstly because we were confused about to whom we should ask for the signature, and secondly all the responsible persons were not always available. To search courses available in coming semester and estimate the possibly obtainable credits was also not as simple as expected. After the application period there was an information session for international students, but unfortunately some very important information was not emphasized enough. It is understandable that each student has to be responsible for their own ERASMUS study, but it would have been helpful if the University had warned more about the Visa to the non-European international students who may require another kind of Visa in host country differently from German students. Despite some difficulties I luckily received the notification of nomination to the University of Eastern Finland, and thus I can say all in all my application process was not very troublesome. Before leaving I also searched about Kuopio, weather in Finland and how cold it could be. My huge suitcase was full of winter clothes and I was very happy about it when I felt already pretty cold there in September.

Arrival and Accommodation:

The communication with the host University was very smooth. I received the information package from my host University not too late and all the necessary information was found in that envelop. Personal tutor from the host University contacted me and we decided the meeting date. She was very kind and answered my general questions too. On the day of arrival she introduced some important facilities in the city and helped me move in to the apartment. As I have listed the things I had to do as soon as I arrive in Kuopio, I could finish almost everything on the list the day I arrived in Kuopio. To open the bank account my tutor helped me very much in communication, because not many staff understood English. Otherwise most of the Finnish people understand and speak very good English so that I did not

need to hesitate to communicate with them at all. I have reserved a room in an apartment for three persons via Kuopas, the association which offers different types of accommodation to students and other people, and apart from the fact that I had to pay the full rent for August in which I was in Kuopio only for 3 days I did not face any problem while moving in. The room was simple but large. Entrance hall, Kitchen and bathroom were all very nice, but there was literary nothing in the apartment and therefore my roommates and I had to start from covering huge windows with curtains since our flat was on the ground floor which was visible from outside. The all doors were auto lock and we were warned not to leave our key never inside when going out. If you are locked out you have to pay so much for just 5 seconds of door opening with master key.

The orientation week was organized for first 3 days of the semester where most of the information session as well as get to know each other events were held. It was not easy to find a student who is also studying Environmental biology, but the orientation week was very useful in terms of getting familiar with education system/style of Finland and ensure about Visa and insurance etc.



Study at the Gasthochschule:

Once orientation week was over I went to the faculty coordinator who was responsible for all the available courses that semester. She offered me a list and general explanation of what I can learn in each course. She also helped me reach the credit points I was aiming by searching for some courses which I might be able to take. Unfortunately due to the trouble regarding the language course I could not reach the credit points I wanted to gain. Nevertheless I could choose what I really wanted to study. From my first wishing list of courses my final Learning Agreement looked very different. However, actual courses which were offered in that semester were more attractive to me and thus I was very



satisfied when I finally fixed my semester schedule. In a word, the study at University of eastern Finland was very practical and often very specialized. This is one point which I found very different from studying at BTU Cottbus. This is possible because the course I joined was Master degree course which is open for limited number of students. Every course had not more than 20 students and this made the class very individual and practical. One very

impressive course called “Ecological Stress Physiology of Plants” offered me practical and precise skills to deal with influence of air pollution on plants and the great writing guide for scientific articles. Teachers and professors were very kind and skilful and so fast in response!! They were always ready to help students and I can always expect to receive a reply to mails within a day. Another point which is

very different from what I know from BTU Cottbus was that in Finland passing the final written exam is not everything, but you have to manage several tasks in order to complete the course. For instance, the course called “Basics of Geographical Information System” required one short essay in the beginning of the semester, project and presentation in the middle of the semester, and then final report with length of 10 to 15 pages in the end. Each of them had deadline during the semester and thus students have to work on something all the time which I liked very much.

Every day and free time:

When I arrived in Kuopio in the end of August, the weather was sunny and beautiful and it lasted until the end of September. However, it was already chilly so I had to wear warm clothes and a scarf. From the apartment to the University I walked everyday for around 20 minutes unless it was too dark or slippery outside. The apartment was located on the top of the hill so walking to the University and back home was a good exercise. In October and November the daylight hours got shorter and shorter and accordingly the temperature decreased. It snowed very much once in the end of October. Though the snow melted shortly afterwards and therefore November was very dark without snow, cold and thus very difficult. At that time sharing the time with roommates supported me staying fine despite the dense darkness which I have never experienced before. I shudder at the thought of living alone in that darkness. You really need to have someone who can share the thoughts when you are not used to that kind of natural environment. In this sense I was very lucky to have found such nice roommates who I lived together for 4 months.



Sharing an apartment with three persons was first time for me, but it worked very well and we were all happy to live together. Most of my free time was spent to stay with my friends and roommates, and very often inside of the house. There were many parties organized by Student Union and there were many chances to get to know new people all the time. There was no way that we did not go out on the sunny day so we walked through the forest and went up to the tower near the apartment to enjoy the view. If you are fed up with the nature you can also go to the city, but it was an amazing experience to stay in the forest for long time where you can find some forest animals. On Tuesday the sauna is open for students for free which was one of the best thing I enjoyed a lot. Sauna was a good place to exchange information and chat with other students and of course to get warm in harsh winter.

All in all my stay in Kuopio for 4 months was totally comfortable and relaxing, exciting and very productive. One may take a little longer time to adapt to the environment, and only 6 hours daylight in winter is indeed very difficult. However, as long as you have someone to share the same thing and environment it is not impossible to enjoy the stay in Kuopio fully!!