

Personal Experience Report

Finland,

Joensuu,

University of Eastern Finland – UEF,

Environmental Policy + Forestry Sciences

- Preparation Phase

The decision of choosing Finland as the country for my semester abroad was questioned by almost everyone whom I am close to. The doubts of the rightness of this decision were provoked by the constant arguments to me, such as that it's impossibly cold in Finland, there is no daylight and I would live in pitch-darkness for six months. However, none of these arguments led to the point, due to which I would change my decision. The strong desire to experience one of the best educational systems, as what Finland is considered to have, was incomparable to the fear of living in a harsh Finnish winter. So, nothing could change my mind regarding the choice of the country for my semester abroad. However, University of Eastern Finland has two campuses, one is located in the town of Joensuu and another one is in Kuopio. Depending on the faculty I wanted to study in, I chose the one that is situated in Joensuu. The Kuopio campus has also the faculty related to the environmental and natural sciences called Environmental Science, however, I personally didn't like the modules offered by this faculty. I was more interested in the ones offered by the faculty of Environmental Policy in Joensuu. Information regarding the courses could be found in the WebOodi portal. Thus, I prepared all necessary documents and applied to the faculty of Environmental Policy of the University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu. Application deadline was 30th of April and all the documents had to be submitted to the SoleMOVE portal. The university website contains all relevant information and everything is updated and clearly stated. After a while, I received the acceptance letter from the responsible coordinator of UEF. And in this letter, other important documents were attached, related to student accommodation, student union, sports services, and other important recommendations concerning the studying and living in Joensuu were included as well, what showed me a high level of organization in UEF.

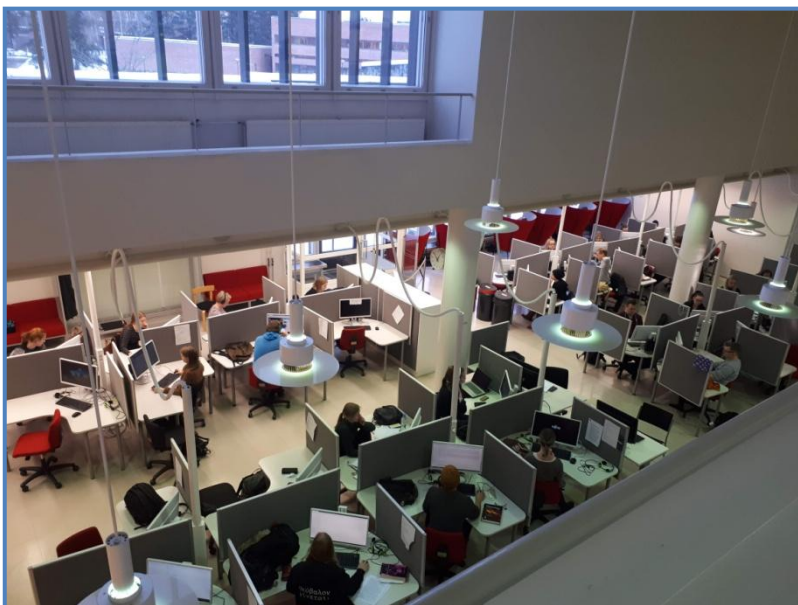
- Accommodation in the host country

The student housing was offered by the Joensuu Elli, which is regarded as an independent student housing company. There weren't any on-campus dormitories, so Joensuu Elli provided the places in the different parts of the town. Some of them were close to the campus, others were quite far away. The company offered shared flats, furnished and unfurnished ones, and single flats, to which you need to apply at least one year before. As soon as I received my confirmation letter of the acceptance from the UEF, I applied to a shared furnished flat. However, Joensuu Elli was not informing me whether they had any free places or not till the end of August, until I asked them to respond to me. So, as it turned out they indeed didn't have any flats to offer for September for the new incoming students. Two weeks remained until the beginning of the semester in order for me to find any place to live. So, I was naively depending on a place from Joensuu Elli company, but they didn't even deign to inform me earlier to search for other housing agencies, since they couldn't offer any. Thus, I had to look for the place to stay in a big panic in the different platforms. And thanks to the tutor to whom I was assigned in UEF, I was able to solve this acute issue. She explained to me that it is very common that Joensuu Elli didn't have the places and that they didn't let students know about this beforehand. So, she recommended one hostel to stay and to check one facebook page in which private estate agents publish their offers. On this page, I found that there are plenty of students in an urgent need for the place. Thus, shortly after, one company offered me a two-room apartment shared between the other four girls. The rent was two times higher than Joensuu

Elli's prices, however less than other offers and the hostels' ones. However, I accepted this offer only with the hope that Joensuu Elli would provide me its company's shared flat since I wouldn't be able to offer myself to live at such an enormous rent for the whole semester stay. And fortunately, I received the room in the shared flat from Joensuu Elli in October, but the room was unfurnished. The furniture was found on one facebook page, on which students and all other people living in Joensuu sell and buy different kinds of household items at a reduced price. Thus, finding accommodation in Joensuu is problematic, and it is the only aspect that left an unpleasant impression of my semester abroad.

- Study at the host university

The whole teaching and administrative processes were highly organized and performed very qualitatively and professionally. Most of the modules which I initially intended to take were based on the literature examination, which means that there is no teaching conducted, but rather a self-learning, and at the end of the semester, you write the exam according to what you read. I didn't like this approach of studying since I was more curious about experiencing the teaching process myself and how the academic learning environment has been established within the walls of the university. Thus, I changed some of the modules to the ones offered by the faculty of Forestry Sciences. And I really enjoyed them, especially the system of how the classes were organized. The first half of the modules start at the beginning of the semester, are held intensively, and finishes in the middle of the semester with the corresponding exam. The second half starts around the time you finish your first half of the modules and finishes at the end of the semester. So, by that system, I felt the workload was distributed evenly within the whole semester. All professors have a very proficient level of English language, not mentioning their competence in their professional field. Moreover, I was pleasantly surprised, that the professors and administrative staff were very keen to be helpful and useful. They were not only concerned about your progress in studies but also very concerned about your emotional health. Any student could have come to them with any question needed to be resolved. Thus, from my personal experience, I also consider that the academic learning environment and social environment in Finnish universities are indeed to be among the best in the world.



Picture 1: University Library



Picture 2: University Campus

- Everyday life and free time activities

The Student Union of the University of Eastern Finland organizes plenty of different events and activities, which would allow you to gain international experience, make friends and simply enjoy your time-being in Joensuu while studying. There are various clubs, such as Theater club, Music club, Board Gamers club, Debate Society, African Students Association, Japanese Culture club, and many others, which would fit at least one of your interest. And sports activities are very diverse, starting from yoga to skiing on the slopes of snowy Joensuu. I attended the Debate Club every Tuesday, yoga and ice skating classes, which kept me busy along with the studies and made my semester abroad more enjoyable. And the most fantastic lifetime experience that you might have while studying in Joensuu is traveling. The Student Union organizes amazing trips to Koli national park, visa-free cruise to St.Petersburg, to Baltic countries, to Northern Lapland and to the breathtaking Lofoten islands in Norway. And certainly you need to pay for each of the excursion. Besides, there is a public library very close to the university with many books, DVDs, CDs and newspapers of different languages. I took some books written by Finnish authors to get to know Finnish culture and literature a little bit better. And another leisure activity I was enjoying to do is walking in the forests and picking up the mushrooms and berries before the winter came.



Picture 3: Koli National Park