

Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC), Barcelona, Spain:
MSc Hydroinformatics and Water Management (EuroAqua)

1) Preparation

Getting the spot to do an exchange semester in UPC Barcelona was not difficult since UPC is a partner of the EuroAqua program. After confirming that I have been accepted to UPC, the learning agreement was prepared. The final Before Mobility Learning Agreement took some time to be accomplished since there were some differences between UPC and BTU especially in the duration, start and end of semesters hence it would be wise to ensure that these details are confirmed with UPC or your receiving institution prior to getting signatures from the coordinators.

As a non-EU student, there are also extra steps necessary in order to be able to legally stay in Spain. Either the student obtains another student visa through the embassy or acquire a student permit upon arrival in Barcelona which can only be done if the German residency permit is valid throughout the duration of the exchange semester. I opted to get the student permit since this is more practical and easier for me and also since my German residency would still be valid throughout the semester in UPC. This permit is something that is not widely known but would actually make lives easier for students. For any queries regarding such matters, the student may refer to this page for international students of UPC: <https://www.upc.edu/sri/en/students/students-mobility-office/international-students> or contact Eulalia Miñarro for more specific concerns: email- maria.eulalia.minarro@upc.edu; tel.- +34 93 405 41 33. She is very helpful and nice. Upon arrival, you should also drop by their office to submit requirements for the student permit which they will process on your behalf.

2) Accommodation

Finding accommodation in Barcelona is tough! And most of my peers who do not know anyone especially also had difficulties. First, Barcelona attracts many students from all over the world and second, the language barrier can also be a hindrance for someone to choose you as a tenant. For me, I was only able to finalize my accommodation four days after I arrived and it was only by chance that I found the place through Spain's version of craigslist. However, the main website that should be looked into for accommodation in Barcelona is www.idealista.com. It is common for rooms to range between 300-400 euros/month. This also depends heavily of course on what type of room and apartment you want and also the neighborhood. My room was 350 euros/month and it was small and furnished, roughly 7 to 8 m² in an apartment shared with 3 other people with 2 bathrooms, 1 kitchen and living room and this apartment is in Eixample neighborhood, around 20-30 minutes by bus or train to UPC.

3) Studying at Host University

The medium of instruction for all the classes I took that was part of the program is English. The class size was generally small since the classes were mostly catered to EuroAqua students, only four of us during this particular semester. Only one class out of four was quite big at roughly seventy students. Since most classes were small, the lectures were catered to the group's pace which was good. The professors were also very good and approachable and we were able to have a good relationship with them since there were only four of us. The semester typically starts in September and ends in January.

Foreign language is not part of the curriculum in UPC and it is not for free unlike Cottbus. Since I wanted to learn basic Spanish, I registered for a Basic Spanish course and had to pay extra for it. I chose to do this module at Merit school since they have a branch in UPC and it was convenient. The basic course was good and interactive. The class size was around 10. The course is usually twice a week for around 10 weeks. For me, I typically spent free time with my friends/classmates after school or back home doing school work.

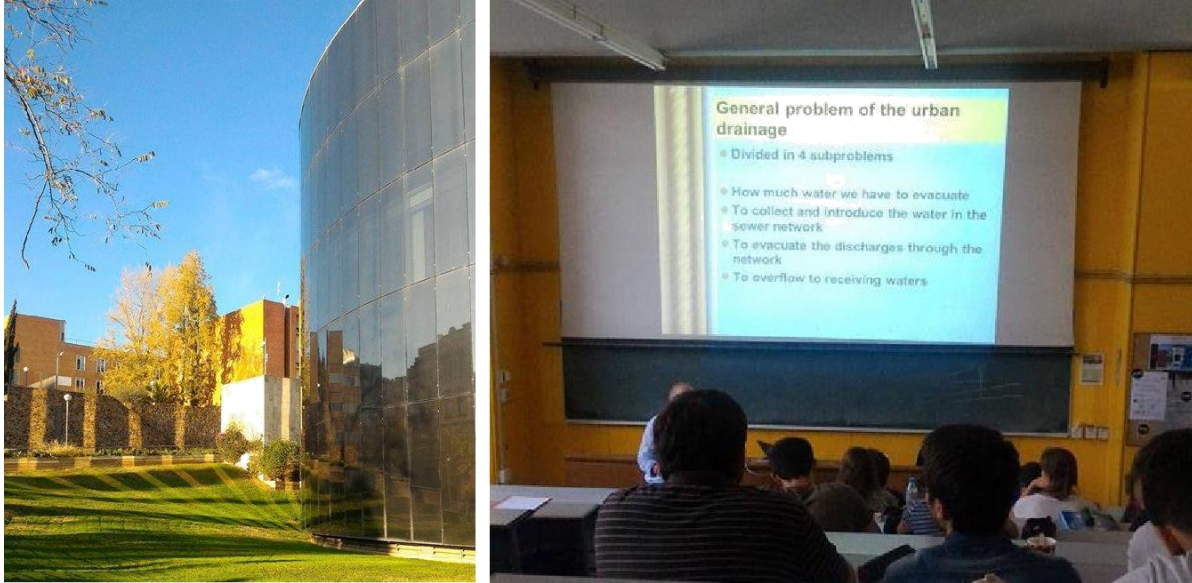


Figure 1. UPC Campus and Classroom

4) Daily Life

Daily life in space is generally quite relaxing as compared to Germany, possible because of the cultural differences. On top of that, we only had few classes and there were many holidays. Generally, people speak either Spanish or Catalan but most people understand English also which is advantageous for me since I am not fluent in either Spanish nor Catalan. The standard of living is not too high although higher than in Cottbus because of the difference in accommodation fees but groceries are roughly the same price. Main means of transportation are the metro, bus or tram. There is no semester pass included in the university registration unlike in BTU but there are different types of passes one can buy which is accepted in all three types of public transportation. Single fare is around 2 euros so it would be beneficial for you to get some type of multi-pass if you will be staying for a long time. There is T-10 which is 10 euros and allows you 10 trips. There is also the T-Mes which allows unlimited travel for 30 days at around 50 euros. There are other types of passes which you can check at ticket booths in metro stations.

The food here is wonderful! They have paella and tapas which are really good. There are also many drinks to choose from. Of course, the beers are incomparable to those in Germany but in Spain they also have sangria and cava which are really good.



Figure 2. Typical architecture and neighborhood in Barcelona

5) Free Time

For me, I typically spent free time with my friends/classmates after school or back home doing school work. There are many things happening in Barcelona so one will not run out of things to do. There are all the touristy sights such as Sagrada Familia, Casa Batllo and Park Guell. One can also explore nearby areas or other parts of Spain and this accessible by bus, train or plane. I for one went on a short trip to Zaragoza over the La Muerta Dia (Halloween) holiday. All the kids and even adults dress up in scary outfits mostly skeletons. During Christmas season, there are also several Christmas markets which sell traditional stuff.



Figure 3. Casa Batllo and Sagrada Familia