

## **Experience report about studying abroad – Helsinki**

Chemistry, 1st mastersemester

### *Why did I choose Helsinki?*

I planned to study one semester abroad since the beginning of my study. I already looked for a possibility for the 5<sup>th</sup> semester, but due to the fact that the study plan for the bachelor program at German universities is very strict, it is hard or almost impossible to find a university which offers the desired modules. This is the easiest in the first master semester. Of course I wanted to use the ERASMUS program which restricts the possible exchange cities to the partner universities. The language of study should have been English which offers three universities in Great Britain and the universities in Istanbul and in Helsinki. After checking internet rankings and trying to find experience reports, I decided to go to Helsinki because it seemed not just to be a good university, but also with a lot of opportunities for trips and nice landscapes nearby and I also had a positive impression of the Scandinavian lifestyle and education system.

### *My way there and first impressions*

I went to Helsinki by car together with the second student of our university to be able to bring more stuff and additionally to visit Copenhagen and Stockholm. It was the by far more expensive way, but both cities were really worth a visit, especially in August when the weather is fine. Furthermore the trip by ferry from Stockholm to Helsinki along the uncountable islands between the capital of Sweden and the open sea was a real highlight. The exchange was well organized, there were no problems with the nice (but expensive) room and I got all needed information at a “Welcome Fair” in the beginning or from a tutor of the university. In this tutor group I already got to know all other chemistry exchange students which made it easy to get in contact with people from all over the world. This is what I miss the most; the close contact with people of different cultures even if it was just to play cards in the evening or to cook together. I learned about the cultural habits of different nations, their special food or general way to live and that this can be different than our understanding for what is a matter of course.



### *Life at university*

The structure of the semester in Finland is different. The semester is divided into two terms with changing modules. This means that I had to write the first exams already after six weeks. Combined with also existing intermediate exams or additional tasks of writing reports etc., you are occupied during the whole semester and you don't have the chance to decide whether to learn continuously or have really tough weeks before the exam period in the end like it is possible in Germany. On the other side you don't have to write all exams almost at the same time in the end and for this reason I think I finally prefer this way. Another difference is the style of exams. I am used to get strict questions with a strict answer. In Finland I often had to write an essay about a specific field of an area. I first struggled with this kind of testing knowledge and complained that it is not clear what you have to write and the professor may expect something which you know, but didn't mention, because you didn't think about it at that time. But to be honest, the German way makes it possible to just learn answers by heart and to get the full amount of points by just writing it down, even if you haven't understood it. I therefore think the Finnish way with the need of knowing the context may be better.

The facilities of the university were quite good. I was able to print for free, the rooms and lecture halls were clean and every campus had an own unisport center where you can do sport activities when being a member. I just have to claim that the food in the cafeteria could have been better and more diversified, but its price was really good, especially for Finland where the price for foods is remarkably higher. The offer of modules was good enough and with

about only 15-25 members in each module it was a more private atmosphere than in Germany. I was also able to do a practical course, but had to skip a few lectures for it. In the end I completed the same amount of lectures and practicals which I would have done in Germany. But I already finished my last exam on the 17<sup>th</sup> December, because the semester already started on the 1<sup>st</sup> September. My first impression was that the learning rate may be faster in Germany but finally I am not sure. I think the difference is not big.

With the aspect that I also learned a lot of things which don't deal with unilife like other cultures, to live in another country, to discover national parks, Lapland, Tallinn, Stockholm and Copenhagen and mainly had to speak English, I am able to say I benefited from this exchange semester. Furthermore I am happy with the decision to go to Finland, because the organization, atmosphere and the possibilities were just great. Who can claim to have seen northern lights on top of a frozen lake northern of the polar circle?

