

Experience report study abroad semester

How was it?

You may have heard this question more often now that you are at the end of your semester abroad. The International Center would also like to know how you evaluate your semester abroad and what you need to know. The experience reports will be published and serve to help orient others going abroad. The International Office would also like to use the contents for advertising purposes if necessary. We would therefore like you to keep this in mind when filling out the report.

1. General information

Please do not mention any personal information (name, e-mail address, etc.) in the experience report.

I agree to the publication of the report and the attached photos:

Yes No

Study program at EUF

B.A. European Cultures and Society

Subject combination (if BABW)

Klicken oder tippen Sie hier, um Text einzugeben.

Host country

Sweden

Host university

Linköping University (LiU)

Semester abroad (e.g. fall semester 2020/21)

Fall Semester 2021/2022

2. Your Experience Abroad

At this point you can share the experience you made abroad. Sometimes it is not so easy to report on such experiences in such a compressed way. We have therefore prepared some questions to help you do this. At the end of the questionnaire, you will also find a free field for you to fill in, in which you are welcome to enter aspects that are not covered by any of these questions.

How did you prepare for the semester abroad?

I took the Swedish language course A1 during the semester before my stay abroad. Besides the Erasmus+ formalities that needed to be done beforehand I did not prepare anything else.

How did you establish social networks in your host country? Do you have any tips on how this can be achieved?

Prior to my stay, there was an online welcome event, where I connected to many international students and we exchanged numbers and created a group chat. LiU has a very active Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and International Student Association (ISA) and both organized a ton of activities during the month of August and September. This made it very easy to connect to all other international students. When I arrived, there were already many students in Linköping and thanks to the telegram groups and Facebook/Instagram of ISA and ESN, I already felt connected to the other internationals before I even arrived. Many internationals then also took initiative and created groups for different hobbies/trips/etc. on their own and I joined many of them to get engaged. I would just advise to join the many social events that are being organized because they are lots of fun and a great way to connect to others. Furthermore, I lived in a corridor together with ~26 students of which many are Swedes. Doing 'fika' with them and cooking/hanging out with them was my strategy of getting in touch with Swedes, as otherwise most of my contacts were internationals and Swedish people can be very shy.

Did you learn the local language, respectively how important did you think it was for your stay?

I began to learn Swedish during the semester before my stay. I managed to pass the course but when I arrived I had to realize that my skills were not as great as I hoped. To cover my gaps I decided to repeat the A1 course, instead of continuing with A2. Overall, one can definitely manage to live in Linköping without knowing Swedish because everyone is very sufficient in English and people are usually always supportive and friendly if you need help. Since I lived together with many Swedish students, I think it is nice to have at least a basic understanding for the language, but it

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is not necessary to survive. Except the language course, all my classes were taught in English.

How was the study program at the partner university structured?

(e.g. premises, workload, language of instruction, examination forms, accessibility)

What intercultural encounters/competencies shaped your stay?

The semester is divided into different periods and courses are categorized by their study pace. For example, there are 100% pace courses and 25% pace courses.

100% equals to full-time study of 40 hours of study per week and the course is usually only a month or two long.

25% equals to about 10 hours of study per week and they are usually more stretched over the (whole) semester.

It can happen that several courses are given in parallel or they may be consecutive, depending on the faculty. This is important to know, as you want to avoid to have more than 100% study pace in total at the same time. Unfortunately, I somehow managed to have one month of overlapping courses with 175% workload total. That was not smart, as I could hardly manage to keep up with all my courses because it was simply too much workload at once.

Generally, the workload is split between work in class and individual study. For me, at first, it was a little challenge to have quiet a lot of free time and not so much time in class, as I had to learn that the focus is very much on self-study and it is up to me how much effort I put into my study.

The student-teacher relationship is quite informal and students are free to approach and question their teachers. It is customary that you address lecturers by their first name, which was definitely a different, but appreciated academic cultural experience for me.

Something that can be overwhelming are the many group works. For example, I took the InGenious course, where the whole course consisted of one big group work during the whole semester. This was a very nice experience, but it was also challenging to be so dependent on other people for the course. In two of my other courses I also noticed that there was quiet a lot of group works and many examinations were also done in groups (e.g. reports or presentations). Other than that, I had to hand in an essay, assignments, hold presentations/oral examinations or standard written examinations.

One nice thing about the Swedish university culture is the meal prep. It is common to bring your own food to uni and warm it up in one of the huge microwave rooms on campus instead of buying food there.

What intercultural encounters/competencies shaped your stay?

One aspect about the Swedish/Linköping student culture is the amazing social engagement by so many students and associations. Almost every week, there were events on campus: Parties, competitions to win something, 'queueing' for parties, breakfasts, game nights, free coffee/cinnamon buns... Queueing on campus for days and nights for a "Kravall" is very important if one wants to take part in Linköping's legendary student parties!

Another experience that I found very special is the overall tradition. When you start your studies/are an exchange student, you can get an overall in the colour of your faculty. This overall comes with many funny rules and traditions and on almost every party/social event you have to wear it and you can buy a patch to sew on your overall. At the end of your stay, this interesting piece of clothing will definitely make a very nice memory!

Besides my mostly Swedish corridor mates it was rather difficult to get in touch with Swedish people, so I guess one would have to make an extra effort to get in touch with Swedes outside of ones home by attending more activities that are hosted from Swedes instead of the international organizations.

Which perspectives on the host country/country of origin have changed and why?

Since I had learnt many things about the Swedish health care/welfare system, I had high expectations towards it of being one of the best in the world. As a non-Swedish person (with out a Swedish personal number) it however turned out to be very difficult to get into the system if help is needed. My expectations towards Sweden shattered a bit in this sense. One can only get the personal number if one stays in Sweden for at least a year. Unfortunately, a lot of things are connected to this number: Bank accounts (Swish), health care, etc. So I would advice to find Swedish friends to pay for you when only Swish, the digital payment, is accepted.

This also explains why I now think little of Germany's payment options. After half a year of only using cashless payments, my view has changed and I find it so much more useful. Cash is rarely accepted in Sweden.

This leads to the fact that you can hardly survive in Sweden without a mobile phone. This is often not a problem for people from my generation, but one has to admit that without a smartphone one is very much out of the game in Sweden.

The other thing which is the university culture. I noticed in Sweden that students are treated very equally from their

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teachers. There is a lot of self-responsibility expected from students, but communication, deadlines, feedbacks, etc. are working very well and much better and in a more respectful manner than in Germany. The focus of the studies is not so much on achievement and titles and more on personal development and it's up to oneself to make the most out of their studies with little comparison/competition between students, which I really appreciated.

What was your daily life like where you were? (e.g. living, shopping, leisure, inclusion)

During the beginning of my stay (August) I attended as many of the social events of ESN and ISA as I could. When the semester started, my days started to become more structured and although many of my classes were held online, I rode my bicycle to the Studenthuset (library) every day. This was a nice routine as I got to go outside, hang out or have fika (coffee and cinnamon bun break) with my friends and of course enjoy studying on the beautiful campus. On the weekends, there were always options to party and I also took many weekend trips to other cities. In the evenings I usually hung out with my friends or my corridor mates and cooked together with them. I also started to learn skating here and I went swimming from time to time. On Sundays, my corridor always did fika together in the evening.

What are the unique or special issues in the host country and what were the opportunities for engaging with these issues?

I would say that one issue in Sweden is definitely the money aspect: Everything is very expensive and this can be shocking in the beginning (especially alcohol). At some point, I guess it is only advisable to accept this and try to make the best of the situation in the way that it is possible and affordable for oneself. For example, I asked my visitors from Germany to bring me things from home. However, I also noticed that what you get for your money is usually always very good quality, therefore, everything "pays off". 😊 To go shopping I loved going to second hand stores because they are usually very nice and well-equipped for anything (also furniture, decoration, etc.).

Is there anything else you would like to share? (e.g. anecdotes, criticism, etc.)

If you can afford it and get the chances, go travel around! For example the lapland trip to the Kiruna and seeing the northern lights. Sweden is a beautiful country with stunning nature. I can recommend to just find geocaches and check out nice lakes or nature areas in the same time. Since there is really not a lot of bright hours in the winter time, I recommend to go outside whenever it is nice weather. During the six months, I have seen the most beautiful sunsets and

going on a frozen lake nearby (Roxen) a nice way to capture them.

3. Photos

Finally, you can upload photos here, which visualize/represent your stay abroad well. If necessary, add a description. The following questions can help you choose the appropriate photos:

- Does the photo possibly reinforce prejudices or stereotypes about the country?
- Do you have the consensual consent of the persons depicted in the photos?
- "A picture is worth a thousand words!" What does your picture say about the country and your semester abroad?



The northern lights - they were even visible in Linköping once, although this is suuuper rare!

The overall of a friend of mine.

Many thanks for your support!