

Final report

Internship abroad

Personal data and general information on the internship

Subject of studies: Neuroscience

Bachelor/Master/State exam: Master

Time of internship: 10/03/2025 – 09/07/2025

Place of internship: Leuven, Belgium

Internship institution: KU Leuven

My Personal Experience as an Erasmus Intern in the City of Leuven

I am just a graduate of the master's program in Neurosciences at LMU-GSN. It is true that some of us, when stepping out of our country and becoming internationals, the journey does not end in one country. And that's definitely me.

Becoming an international student, by moving from my country to Germany was the first step. After meeting amazing and open-minded people there, I decided to experience more. More cultures, new people, new food, etc. Thanks to Erasmus program, I had the opportunity to do so, and did so. Honestly, very highly recommendable.

Having as a compass the field I wanted to do my internship, and thus deep research in, and based on the quality of education that universities give, I decided to come to Belgium, and more specifically, at the KU Leuven.

As I had previously done a short project here, the application process went very fast.. also because the responsible people of Erasmus Office at LMU were super helpful. When it comes to accommodation, I had already my room, but just to give some brief information, the situation here (Leuven) is very similar to Munich, when it comes to prices. However, an important difference is that, because it considered a "student city" there are many dorms (public & private), so to make sure that almost all students have a room to stay.

Moving on to the internship, after completing a short project of 2 months here, I decided with my supervisor to stay and do my master's thesis here. And the journey began... Very interesting journey, very challenging, full of knowledge, emotions, smiles, and few times of devastation and tears.

All started by me wanting to change a bit the field where I was focusing on, and go into Education and Kids Psychology. My supervisor accepted it, even though my knowledge on this field was very very limited (challenging for both myself and her).. so very glad about it. Anyways, we started by finding a research question and building up a project with my PhD-supervisor. Long story short, I ended up having a completely different project from him. The amazing part: independence, lots of challenges, stepping out of my comfort zone to ask questions, call schools for participation (international ones – I was the first one in their lab who did so), figuring out things myself, because my supervisors are not specialized on my topic, gaining so much knowledge etc etc. The challenging part: not having help always when needed, quite stressful and overwhelming sometimes.

But you know what.. was worth it sooo much. The experiences I've gained and the growth I was challenged to achieve through this journey are invaluable. I am very glad for this amazing and challenging at the same time experience. I am glad that especially the professor believed in me and my capabilities, even though my knowledge on this field was very limited. Not only did she believe in me, but during difficult and very challenging times, when I was doubting myself and progress, she was there to push, to encourage and give me strength.

My opinion, guys, find people who believe in you, empower you, yes, but at the same time challenge you, push you to the core.. because this is where the growth happens, this is where the people next to you see the potential that we ourselves sometimes do not see. We just need to trust them, push ourselves, ask for help, admit that we feel overwhelmed, get a bit of support and keep pushing. It is just amazing for me, how much someone can grow and flourish as human, when they are willing to be challenged, push hard and be surrounded by people who believe in them and support them. Just amazing!

During my dissertation, I was working full time. Created a project, conducted schools, collected data, analyzed and got my results. My supervisor, provided me an office, where I was with 5 more friendly colleagues.

Now, I think enough with the academic part. When it comes to social life here in Leuven, it's very nice. However, that depends on the personality as well as the people ones can meet. Belgian people are a bit closed, but not all of them. Some of them are very international and willing to include new people in their group.

As said before, Leuven is a student city and thus very international. People here speak mostly Dutch, some of them French and almost all of them English. They understand when somebody does not

... speak Dutch within seconds—I really don't know how they do this. They are very willing to help new coming people find their way through in the city. Most people use their bikes to commute, as the city is small— from the one side to the other is approximately 20 minutes by bike. They also have bicycle lines and it is very safe. Interestingly enough, they are thinking of making the city “Bike Only” city, which I personally believe that it really makes sense. Okay, maybe winter will be a bit cold.. but well.. it's okay I guess.

Regarding activities, Leuven is very rich on that. First of all, as a student you can buy a 30 euros sports card, and you have accessibility to most sports facilities. They have dance groups, martial arts, football and many other sports. At the same times, there is a lot of nature, forests, gardens, and people really enjoy hanging out at these places and chill with beers. Something that impressed me is that especially during summer (April and till September) they organize free trainings (calisthenics, parkour, yoga etc.) for which the city pays the coaches.. and the quality is as high as if we would pay. It is very impressive that they have taken this initiative.

Additionally, Brussels is very close by, just 20 minutes by train. Therefore, if somebody wants to do an activity there, it's very easy to get there. I think there is train almost every 10 minutes from Leuven to Brussels.

One disadvantage that I would like you to pay attention to is the cost of living. I think is not the different from Munich, when it comes to rent, supermarket etc. However, when it comes to commuting, busses and trains are way more expensive. Unfortunately they don't have something similar with the Deutschland ticket, and the prices are quite high. During the weekends the price is half for round trip, but still expensive compare to Deutschland ticket. As far as I know, people who live in Leuven but work for companies in Brussels have free commuting, so that can be an option 😊.

When it comes to myself and my hobbies, since I came here, I immediately started dance classes (bachata). For latin dancers, Leuven provides mostly salsa, bachata and kizomba. The level is okay to good, but the people within the communities are very friendly and usually organize carpooling to Brussels or other cities where parties are happening and the level is higher. That was also my experience. The moment I stepped in a party in Leuven and started socializing, people immediately included me in their group. That happened not only to me, but to many people who come to dance and socialize. So, on that regard, people are very friendly, international, and willing to include in their community many people, as long as the behavior is appropriate.

That is not only in the dance community, but I also encountered it to a bit lesser extend but still is there, when I started the calisthenics workouts. Coaches are very willing to help, explain exercises in

depth and guide you properly even if you ask them extra questions, like I did. For example, “What Can I do to strengthen my core?” etc. People who are there doing the workout with you, some are willing to challenge you, other to help you do the exercise, other to correct you. The support there is also very impressive. And most of the times, these things will lead to “Ohh let’s go out after the workout” or “Do you wanna join us for an extra work out this Saturday” etc. . So, if you like these activities and you like socializing, be open to try new things and new activities, be open to talk to people, make fun and enjoy the activities. Leuven offer a lot of them.

To sum up, my personal experience here in Leuven couldn’t be better. I had a beautiful experience with my supervisors. I learnt a lot, I grew a lot, I even challenged them a lot. And believe me, it’s so nice to here from your supervisors “I learnt so much from you!”. The fact that I show how is to handle my own project, yet by having the support I needed taught me a lot. Moreover, what to say about the social life here. I simply loved it, I connected with people. I created amazing friendships, deep and meaningful ones. Finally, citizens are friendly, old people are smiling at you, the city is very safe, a bit further from the center is very calm and silent, in case you like silence like me. It is very clean and the nature is as fantastic as in Munich (not as much though, to be fair). All in all, I am very glad I had the opportunity to experience all these things.

In my opinion, when you feel is the right thing to try another country, to go a bit out of the comfort zone, do it. It worths it more than you can imagine. Even the difficulties, we all have. Just don’t be afraid to ask for help. I asked for a lot of helped. Didn’t get it always, but still got it when I mostly needed it. If you want to explore more and learn more about people and countries, open up. Many doors are going to open, and even though sometimes will be overwhelming (that’s life some times) the overall experience, knowledge, people you meet is going to pay off, more that you ever imagined.