

Praktikumsbericht

Auslandspraktikum

Angaben zur Person und zum Praktikum der/des Studierenden

Studienfach: Epidemiology

Bachelor/Master/Staatsexamen: Master

Praktikumszeitraum: 01/10/2025 - 16/01/2026

Praktikumsort: Amsterdam, Netherlands

Praktikumsinstitution: De Regenboog Groep

1 Planning and Preparation

At the end of my first mandatory internship, I became increasingly interested in gaining practical social experience rather than purely academic experience through a second internship. While my first internship mainly focused on academic research, I hoped that the second one would allow me to better understand how social and public health issues are addressed in practice.

Based on my academic interest in substance use and harm reduction policies, which also constituted the research topic of my first internship, I started searching online for non-academic NGOs or international organizations working in this field. During this process, I came across Correlation - European Harm Reduction Network (C-EHRN), an organization based in Amsterdam, Netherlands. I contacted the internship coordinator via email, briefly introducing my academic background and motivation and asking whether internship positions were available. After receiving a positive response, an interview was arranged. Following an online interview, both sides were satisfied, and I decided to start my internship at Correlation.

Before travelling to Amsterdam, I did not arrange accommodation in advance. This decision was mainly influenced by various practical concerns and my fear of housing scams. After arriving in Amsterdam, I first stayed in two different hostels for slightly over one week. During this time, I actively contacted landlords on the housing platform Kamernet, which does not charge agency fees. Many listings were already taken. Fortunately, before my hostel stay ended, I received two housing offers: one room for approximately €1200 per month (all inclusive) located in the southern part of Amsterdam, about 20–30 minutes by metro from the city centre, and another room for €775 per month (all inclusive) located outside Amsterdam,

approximately 1 hour 10–20 minutes away from the city centre by bus and metro. Considering my limited budget and the fact that my internship allowed extensive remote work, I chose the second option and moved in shortly after the on-site phase of my internship began.

Regarding the languages, as English was fully sufficient for communication in the workplace, I did not attend any additional language course.

2 Internship Process and Tasks

My internship position was Research & Advocacy Intern, with a workload of approximately 30 hours per week. My main tasks included:

- Supporting the creation of a dashboard to visualize data from an ongoing monitoring survey on hepatitis C care for people who use drugs and harm reduction programs
- supporting the design of graphics and maps for report writing for a report on new drug trends in Europe
- developing R manuals for future colleagues
- participating in team meetings and discussions with internal and external collaborators

Most of my work was conducted remotely. On days working from home, I usually started working after waking up, sometimes around 10:00 or even later. After completing assigned tasks, I reported my progress to my supervisor or colleagues via written communication. Based on their feedback, new tasks were assigned or revisions were requested. On days with regular meetings or office-based collaboration, I travelled to the office in Amsterdam. I usually left home between 9:00 and 10:00, arrived around 10:30–11:30, and worked on site until approximately 16:30–18:30.

Working in the office significantly improved communication efficiency and offered more opportunities for informal conversations and professional networking. The internship offered flexible working hours (30h/w), meaning that the specific time and location of work were generally not fixed. Occasionally, I worked in the evenings or on weekends. This was not required but aligned better with my personal working rhythm or compensated for days when I was unavailable.

Overall, the workload was moderate and well balanced. It allowed me to manage my university coursework alongside the internship without excessive pressure. My supervisor

regularly discussed my workload with me and adjusted it based on my feedback, showing strong understanding in cases of unexpected interruptions such as illness or personal matters.

3 Social Contacts

Due to my rather reserved personality and the absence of an established local social network, my social interactions during the internship were primarily centred around the workplace. Within this context, I was able to integrate well into the team and maintained consistently positive and professional relationships with my supervisor and colleagues.

Communication within the team was generally smooth and supportive. Although there was a minor misunderstanding with one colleague at an early stage of the internship, this issue was promptly addressed with the support of my supervisor, leading to improved mutual understanding.

Over time, I developed a friendly and respectful working relationship with my supervisor and two colleagues who regularly worked in the office. During the Christmas period, I prepared small gifts for them. In return, after returning from a holiday in Egypt, my supervisor brought souvenirs for each team member. These interactions contributed to a warm, supportive, and relaxed working atmosphere.

4 Daily Life and Leisure

My daily life outside work was strongly influenced by my place of residence. As I lived in a typical suburban town mainly consisting of residential areas, commercial and leisure facilities were relatively far away. On most weekdays, I only visited nearby supermarkets to buy groceries for the next few days and then cooked at home. If no shopping was necessary, I usually stayed in my room to enjoy my leisure time.

On weekends, I sometimes travelled to larger nearby towns for shopping or spent long periods in cafés. I also occasionally explored nearby cities such as Leiden, Haarlem, and The Hague to experience local culture and everyday life. During the Christmas period, I visited Amsterdam city centre and took part in a night canal cruise and attended the annual Amsterdam Light Festival, which was a particularly memorable cultural experience.

5 Costs and Financing

The cost of living in the Netherlands is generally high, particularly regarding housing, transportation, and daily necessities. In Amsterdam, finding accommodation for less than €800 per month is almost unrealistic. Unlike Germany, the Netherlands does not offer a nationwide public transport ticket comparable to the Deutschlandticket. Public transportation is operated by multiple companies, even within Amsterdam alone, which makes purchasing monthly tickets more complicated. However, if one does not need to optimize the choice of monthly passes and simply uses contactless check-in and check-out for each journey, the overall public transportation experience is still quite convenient and reliable.

Comprehensive monthly tickets are usually expensive and often do not include intercity trains. In my case, due to the long distance between my accommodation and the city centre, my monthly public transport ticket cost €176.50. Given that I commuted to the office fewer than 8 times per month, with a daily round-trip cost of approximately €16, this ticket was not cost-effective, and I therefore only purchased it for one month.

Daily necessities were generally about 10–20% more expensive than in Germany. For saving money, Lidl is a good option. Albert Heijn, comparable to Rewe in Germany, is slightly more expensive, but its membership card can offer significant discounts on selected items. You can also notice the price difference in everyday consumption outside supermarkets. For example, a cup of cappuccino in a café is typically €1.00-1.50 more expensive than in comparable cafés in Germany.

Regarding financing, the hosting organization provided a monthly internship allowance as well as a transportation subsidy. In addition, financial support through the Erasmus+ programme helped me a lot. Taken together, these sources of funding were sufficient to cover my monthly living expenses in the Netherlands, despite the generally high cost of living.

6 Internship and Academic Studies

Before the internship, my expectations were twofold. First, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how harm reduction programmes are implemented from a non-academic, grassroots perspective. Second, I expected to further develop my quantitative data analysis skills.

After completing the internship, I found that my first expectation was well fulfilled. Through close involvement in monitoring projects and daily work at the organization, I was able to

observe how harm reduction initiatives operate in practice and how they address the needs of marginalized populations at the community level.

However, my second expectation was not fully met. The organization mainly relies on qualitative research methods, such as focal interviews, and therefore the availability of quantitative data was limited. As a result, I had fewer opportunities to conduct in-depth quantitative analyses than initially anticipated.

Nevertheless, the internship exceeded my expectations in other important ways. I significantly improved my ability to create diverse data visualizations using R and various online tools, and I also gained my first experience with qualitative analysis methods. Overall, despite the partial mismatch between my initial expectations and actual tasks, I am highly satisfied with the learning outcomes of the internship.

7 Conclusion

Overall, my expectations for the internship were largely fulfilled. The most valuable aspects were the opportunity to study drug-related issues from a non-academic and grassroots perspective, the flexible working arrangements, and the supportive and respectful working environment.

The main challenge during the internship was the long commuting distance from my accommodation to the office, which occasionally made on-site work tiring. However, I believe this is a common issue for many people who live outside Amsterdam but work in the city.

One of the most inspiring experiences during my internship took place in the office where I worked, which was located above a drug consumption room and a community kitchen serving people who use drugs and other marginalized groups. The atmosphere there was unexpectedly warm and welcoming. Social workers and clients interacted with ease, and moments of laughter were common when someone shared a lighthearted joke. Those receiving support were polite, cheerful, and generous, often more so than many people I encountered in everyday life. The environment felt less like a place of assistance and more like a gathering of friends and family.

What affected me most was a moment at the clothing donation corner, when a volunteer showed me a video of his nine-year-old grandson playing the guitar. With bandages still

visible on his arm from an injection, he smiled with such pride that, for a brief moment, the social stigma commonly attached to people who use drugs seemed to disappear.

This experience profoundly shaped my understanding of what policy truly represents. It made me realize that policy discussions too often focus solely on indicators of efficiency or cost-effectiveness, while overlooking the fact that behind every figure stands a human being with inherent dignity. Effective policy should not only be evaluated by economic outcomes, but also by the extent to which it respects and protects human dignity. When individuals are reduced to statistics or economic units, policy fails in its fundamental moral purpose.

I would strongly recommend Correlation to future interns who are interested in harm reduction, social justice, and community-based research, and who wish to understand social problems beyond purely academic or analytical frameworks. Students primarily seeking intensive quantitative analysis training should, however, carefully consider whether the organization aligns with their expectations.