

I contacted a lecturer of mine Prof. Jan K. about master project opportunity on behavioural ecology. He put me in contact with PhD candidate Martje B. who is currently conducting her PhD project in collaboration with University of Chile. We had meetings together and I decided to join her team and do a project with her.

There were not much administration work to do. As a visiting student, I did not need to register at the University of Groningen. However, I do need an invitation letter from the university and the hosting professor. That is pretty much everything I get from the home and host university. In my opinion, the administration at the host institute is way better organised than LMU, in a sense that you do not need to sign too many complicated documents, and also all the documents I signed are by default in English, which saved me a lot of time.

As a Chinese citizen, I do need to apply for a visa. However, since I already have one residence permit in Germany, I can stay in the Netherlands for maximum 3 months which is enough for my internship period. The application process is very simple, with documents on accommodation, funding, etc and the visa is free. The host institute did not help me with this process but I managed it by myself easily.

Internship at host company

Language requirements and working language, procedure and contents / areas of responsibility, working hours, professional tips, changes in the Learning Agreement for Traineeships, recognition of achievements, supervision and support by receiving institution, geographical location

Since the project is mainly computer work and I did the project in an international team, the only language requirement is English. Everyone, from administration to students and professors speaks perfect English, which I find really helpful and belonged. My work is rather tedious because I need to filter and clean the data collected by different people during the field seasons of two years, so I spent a lot of time in front of a computer on the data analysis. The supervision I received from the supervisors and other students are not frequent but very useful, and I managed to finish all the work by the end of my internship. The geographical location of University of Groningen is not very center in the city of Groningen. However, because Groningen is a very small city, everywhere is bikeable. For me I bike for 20 mins everyday from my apartment to the institute.

Accommodation in the host country

Tips for finding accommodation (hostels / student residences / private residential market), help from receiving institution, costs

I lived in a wooden bungalow (field station) nearby one of our fieldwork sites. The housing is provided by my supervisor and I did not to worry about anything. The housing price is around 500 Euros for the 3 months that I stayed which is quite cheap in comparison to Groningen.

Finding an apartment/student residence in Groningen is extremely hard since the city is crammed with students and the housing is just not enough. I have heard urban stories how some students ended up sleeping in a camp for the first month they arrived. However, for me I was lucky because my staying period is very short. I am only staying for two months. So I digged into the private residential market and to see any kind of sublet from other students. However, I had to switch between two studios in the end because each one has a contract period of only 1 month. I paid 500 Euros per month, which is surprisingly around the same price as Munich. The receiving institute did not provide any help on searching for housing.

Everyday life and leisure

General leisure activities, sports, language courses, regional and cultural activities, information on public transport, quality of life

Daily work was very intensive in the two months of staying. I need to work from 9 – 5 every weekday. However, since Groningen is a well known student city, it is full of student activities such as seminars, parties, and concerts. I go out pretty often with my friends in the Netherlands in the evenings and during the weekend. The student sport center is not for exchange students, but I was brought there to play badminton with other local students. It is well constructed and student friendly. All in all, I think the quality of life in Groningen is comparable to Munich or even better because you can find people at the similar age quite easily and since it is a small city, it is easy to build your own social network. I really enjoyed the everyday life and leisure there. However, one thing that I really miss about Germany that Netherlands does not have is the nature. It is a very urbanised country and it is impossible to find a piece of woodland, let alone forest, in the city. The only place you can go is the city park which is not very big and always crowded. But in the winter time it is somewhat more ideal to stay at home or go to a bar with friends than be freezing out in the park.

Costs and financing of the stay abroad (voluntary)

Costs: e.g. the cost of living, additional expenses in comparison to Germany, tips (shopping, transportation, etc.)
Financing: sources of information, scholarships and application

Unfortunately, the Erasmus+ grant can barely cover my cost in Chile. I managed to survive with Erasmus+ fund and support from my family. Living cost is very expensive in the Netherlands. I spent around 400 Euros on food and other activities per month. However, I did not need to pay much on transportation since I bike to everywhere I want to go. However, if you want to travel in other cities in the Netherlands, you need to pay a lot on the train tickets. Luckily, sometimes you can find discount daily ticket which enables you to travel back and forth between two cities with less than 20 Euros within the same date.

Competence and learning success

Increase in technical, social, linguistic, intercultural competence, etc., expected added value for academic and professional careers

I definitely have improved a lot in statistical analysis during my staying in Groningen. Since the project that I am working on is a very intensive data science one, I had to learn a lot of technical methods, from basic R coding to advanced tidyverse data wrangling, from simple linear model, to complicated generalised linear mixed models. I built up these skills mainly from self-learning, I read and search for tutorials online, but also received some guidance from the post doc researchers in the institute.

I also have made progress in social skills. Dutch researchers are well-known for being down to earth and friendly to the underlings. I had a very friendly relationship with my supervisors, we not only talk about science, but also our lives. We talk about what is going on in academia and how can we improve it, my career goal, my science interests, science and politics, stress and anxiety that I faced during my study period. All of these communications made me to know the researchers that I am working with a lively human, instead of just a paper machine. And I think it really made me realise that scientific communication should not only be critical,

but also thoughtful and personal, as we are all humans. I definitely find it helpful ever since I came back to Germany.

In the sense of linguistic skills, I improved a lot in my competence of programming language R, but also my English communication skills. Since I need to have regular communications with other researchers in the same institute, I learned a lot from them how to articulate your questions and answers in a easy-to-understand way. Meanwhile, I needed to finish a scientific report by the end of my internship, I read a lot of current literatures and it improved my written English skills as well.

As for intercultural competence, I am more comfortable to talk with people with different cultural background because I worked in an international team consists of people from Netherlands, Germany, Iran, China, France, Italy and More. The trick I learn is respect and find common interests. And be open-minded and direct when you are with other people.

Intercultural experiences

Assumptions that have been proven to be false or true; similarities/differences between the culture of your host country and your own; situations that have been perceived as difficult

I had the assumptions that Dutch people are very direct, which happen to be true. They will tell you when they disagree or agree. I find it very efficient and I start to apply this communication style myself. However, I do feel it is easier to build friendship with international people than with the local people, like everywhere else. Since we all come from a foreign country so that we do not so much attachment to the country, it is easier for us to get to know each other. There is barely any similarities between the culture of Netherlands and China, but it is not surprising since we share few roots in our culture.

As for situations that have been perceived as difficult, I find myself living in a bubble of academia and not so engaged in other social activities, or what is happening in the world. Since Groningen is not a very international city, you can barely find discussion or activities on global issues, but I could be wrong since I only stayed there for two months. But that is what I find missing in comparison to what I experienced in Munich before.

Intercultural seminar at the LMU before your mobility

Did you take part in an intercultural seminar before your stay? If so, was it helpful? To what extent did it help you abroad? What other support would you like from the LMU in this area? Can you recommend the seminar to other students?

Unfortunately I did not participate in the intercultural seminar in LMU so I cannot make judgment on it.

European integration

Give us examples of situations during your stay in which you became aware of the impact of the European Union on the daily lives of its citizens. Do you feel more like an EU citizen after your traineeship than before and why? During your internship, were you able to determine how the EU affects certain fields of work (e.g. through EU funding, EU projects, EU directives, etc.)?

As for daily life, I

I am international student, I don't have an EU citizenship, so I cannot say that I feel more like an EU citizen after my traineeship than before. But what I can say is that I did enjoy a lot of the benefits as an EU citizen. I can travel freely between the two EU countries, getting supported by the EU for my exchange. All these reasons made me want to stay in Europe after the completion of my study.

Because I am doing a scientific internship with the receiving institute, I will elaborate on what I am aware of the impact of European Union on science in both the German and Dutch institutes.



First of all, no border collaboration. The collaboration between scientific institutes is so tight that you can barely find any difference between the international (within-EU) collaboration and national collaboration. I can tell this from knowing how many projects in the research institute is a EU project.

Second, funding. A large proportion of scientific funding in the receiving institute is from the EU. Normally, these projects are long-term and broad-scope projects that aim at solving fundamental scientific questions in the field. Without the support of EU, I expect these kind of big projects will be less organised and more fragmented.

Other tips and suggestions

e.g. what should you take with you from Germany; what should you have known before your stay
What should you take from Germany, your Passport and a good mood. The Dutch are very chill in a lot of ways in comparison to the Germans.

Conclusion and critical reflection

The best experience I have is to learn to be direct in a social occasion. This is very typical in the Dutch society and it is very efficient especially in academia. The worst experience, unfortunately, was receiving racist insult from a local at the beginning of the pandemic. However, this happens in almost all the countries and it does not mean that most of the Dutch are racist. Another worst thing about Groningen in comparison to Munich is that the winter is very dark and depressing, so if you are a very social person, you might want to be more engaged

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