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editorial

Dear Readers,

This issue of the Messenger is different. Thanks to a few students who have kindly agreed to share their ERASMUS experience with us, we have devoted the whole issue to (hopefully) everything that you might like to know about these study stays abroad. If you still feel that you need more information, or you are inspired by any of our articles or whatever else, please feel free to contact us at gabriela.oaklandova@gmail.com.

You might like to send us your comments or suggestions for articles, or, indeed, the articles themselves.

With thanks

*Your editor
Gabriela Oaklandová*

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interview

Interview with Zdeněk Janík
Gabriela Oaklandová

Gabriela Oaklandová has interviewed Zdeněk Janík, who (along with Pavla Buchtová) is in charge of ERASMUS in our department

Q: Zdeněk, what is ERASMUS and what is its point?

The Erasmus programme is, officially speaking, a European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. The goal of the programme is to support cooperation among universities and increase compatibility of university education qualifications in Europe.

As for students, this exchange programme gives them a great opportunity to spend between three and twelve months studying in another European country.

Now what we have today, however, is Erasmus+. The programme commenced this year with overall estimated funding of €14.7 billion and will end with the academic year 2020/21. The universities participating in Erasmus+ are the 28 EU member states, plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey. The European Commission intends to extend the participation to other non-European countries, hence 'Erasmus+' as Erasmus "plus something more", but that will take a while to realise.

What I'd like to emphasize here is that students' exchange study stays count towards their degree. That is their participation in the programme, including the courses they've taken abroad, will show in their diploma supplement, which is something that should improve their chances in the

labour market.

Also, Erasmus+ is not only about studying. It enables students to work abroad as well.

Q: So what do students have to take into consideration before applying?

First, applicants need to make sure they're eligible for the study stay. That is they must be enrolled in a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree programme at our English department. Further, the students on the bachelor's programme should be in the second year of their studies when they apply. Erasmus+ agreements are drawn up between our department and corresponding institutions at partner universities, with the primary focus on English Language Teaching and Education. That is the reason why only students from our department should apply. Some of our partners limit their offer to the bachelor's degree applicants, but in most cases students of any degree (i.e. including master's and doctorate), both full-time and part-time, can apply.

Next, applicants should study the list of our Partner Universities (available on the English Department website) and choose where and when (i.e. which semester) they intend to take part in an Erasmus study stay. All of the study stays but one are for one semester, i.e. approx. five months; the study stay at the University of Lisbon is for 10 months. Applicants should also check the list of courses offered by our partner universities (by clicking on the weblinks provided on the list of our Partners Universities on the English Department website). They need to make sure they'll be able to select courses that are compatible with their study programme at home (i.e. courses on English Language and Literature and, alternatively, Education or Teacher

Training) and that they can earn a minimum of 20 credits per semester. Ideally, they should be able to study abroad the courses they would otherwise be obliged to study at their home institution, although this happens only rarely. However, all of our students studying at Partner Universities have so far been able to study courses corresponding to their study programme at home and the credits they have earned there have counted towards their study degree. Also, students need to consider their English language proficiency. They should have achieved B1 level by the time they apply. Their study results will be taken into consideration as well.

Q: And what about our primary-education students or distance-learning students? Are there any restrictions there? They can apply as well.

Q: OK, great. And what is the interview like? What do you ask? Can students prepare for this interview somehow? Students are asked to prove they have very good study results. We assess that by checking their Transcript of Record.

Equally important is their motivation. Students are asked to write and submit a motivation letter in which they should give relevant and interesting insights about themselves and prove that they are the best and most highly motivated person to be chosen for participation in Erasmus+ mobility.

As for the motivation letter, students should not focus only on how they'd benefit personally from studying abroad (that is improving their English, broadening their horizons, learning about a new culture and methods of teaching, getting a different picture of an education system, trying new courses, working towards their future career, and so on); they should also

indicate how their stay could be beneficial for the receiving institution, in other words, what they can offer to the university they're applying to. Just stating that they intend to represent Masaryk University and the Czech Republic is not enough, as good representation is taken for granted. The question is whether they can share their learning experience with teachers and students abroad - for instance by giving a presentation on their country and an insight into the Czech education system and Czech culture to teachers and students at the host university. They might be in the process of writing their bachelor's or master's thesis and their topic might be interesting to teachers and students abroad. Or they are involved in a project or work for a voluntary organization in the Czech Republic and might consider sharing and exchanging experience in these fields as well. That's also why we are interested in knowing about applicants' extra curricular activities (such as work for a broader community).

Most applicants say they just want to improve their English. I understand that this motivates them highly, but shouldn't they improve their English primarily at our institution? Simply 'improving my English' does not guarantee a ticket to the desired destination. This is especially true of study stays for which there's great competition, such as Newman University College in Birmingham. Most applicants want to go to the U.K., but there're just two placements we can offer. So the students should prove that their English proficiency, study skills and other qualities qualify them for a study stay at Newman or elsewhere.

Q: Where do our students go most often? And what do the universities offer them? I mean, do they offer anything "extra"?

The universities definitely offer something more to our students than they can gain from an exchange programme. The added value is to become a member of the Erasmus community (Erasmus+ is already on FB) and an international students club run by volunteers at each of the universities.

As for where our students mostly like to go, the most popular destination is Newman University College in Birmingham. The variety of courses our students can study there ranges from English for Speakers of Other Languages to Industry and Invention in Birmingham. The Erasmus study programmes at other partner universities can be divided into those focusing on education and teacher training generally and those offering courses in English language, literature and history. Linköpings University in Sweden and University College Lillebaelt in Denmark give our students a great opportunity to broaden their horizons concerning what quality education is all about. Students visiting these popular destinations have vastly enriched their schooling and teaching experience. Teacher training can also be studied at Publica Universitat de Navarra in Pamplona, where at least a basic knowledge of Spanish is required. The Spanish are known for giving a very high priority to teaching practice. This is also true of Zaragoza University, but this university also welcomes students more interested in studying English linguistics and literature. Those who perhaps don't want to go so far and would like to study both teacher training and English language can apply to the University College of Teacher Education in Vienna.

Courses of English language, literature, history and culture are offered at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Chemnitz University of Technology in Germany, the University of Lisbon and

the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia in Bulgaria. By the way, the study stay in Lisbon lasts 10 months, so it is meant for the students who wish to spend two semesters abroad.

Q: Thank you. I suppose the only thing we don't know now is what the interview is like. What can students expect? And when do they get the results?

I think I've partly answered this question when talking about how students should prepare for the interview. At the interview, which takes about 10 minutes, students are asked about their choice of university, why they have made this choice, if they have had a look at the courses they can study at that university and how the courses comply with their study programme here at MU, their interests, and their future career. They should also show that they are motivated, that is they should demonstrate clearly how they will benefit from studying abroad and at least predict how the university may benefit from hosting them. We may also ask for details concerning their motivation letter, their involvement in extra-curricular activities, etc.

Today students apply for the Erasmus study programme through an on-line application. Prior to coming to the interview, they fill in relevant data (indicate their choice of university, enter personal data, and so on) and upload their motivation letter in the on-line application. The results of the interview are announced through the on-line application, mostly within a week of the date of the interview. If they are successful, they need to confirm their nomination, which is also done in the on-line application.

When you asked me about the students' eligibility to apply, I forgot to say that students can go on an Erasmus+

study programme more than once, which is different from the 'old' Erasmus, in which students could not participate repeatedly.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Just one more thing. Since we still have some vacancies for study stays at universities in Denmark, Budapest, Vienna and Bulgaria, it is very likely that a second round of Erasmus+ interviews will be held, particularly for the stays scheduled for spring semester 2015. The date of the interview is not yet known, as this is announced by the Rector's Office. But I suppose it will be some time in April. The announcement will be posted on the English Department website and students will receive more information by email. Also leaflets will be posted on noticeboards on the 3rd floor of Porici 9. I'd like to encourage our students to apply.

Q: Oh, there is one more thing I meant to ask. Is there any age limit?

No age limit.

Q: Thanks, Zdeněk.

It was my pleasure.



Děkuji**Ywet Wai Aung**

People generally say “thanks” to express gratitude, acknowledgement or appreciation to others. Even though culture and language differ in the world, people have a similar practice of saying “thanks”. This is one of the lovely practices of human beings in communication. In my language, “Kye-Zuu-Tin-Par-Tae” means “thanks”. “Kye-Zuu” means “Benefit”. Whenever we get any benefit or advantage from someone or some people, we acknowledge him/her/them and say “Kye-Zuu-Tin-Par-Tae”. In the Czech language, děkuji is familiar to most foreign students as the word for “thanks”. Some of them can use it properly in communication with Czech people. If we can say the word “thanks” in the native language of a particular country, it is emotionally effective for native people.

First of all, I would like to say děkuji. Because the opportunity to study at Masaryk University, Czech Republic is a great honor for me. In the period of time that I have been studying at MU and staying in Brno, I have faced professional and social concerns. Professionally speaking, I am learning English and teaching methodology at the same time. I have faced a lot of challenges in the professional field because my education background and language level are different and low. To give an example, in exams the pass mark is 40 per cent in my country from primary to university level; the pass mark here is 65-70 per cent, depending on the course. Study and supplementary materials and learning methods are different from my country. Assessment methods (e.g. written and oral exams) are not familiar to me. Theoretical and practical aspects are trained at the same time. I have never before experienced so many courses

within one semester. Although I had a little experience from my part-time diploma studies on the ACU (Australian Catholic University) online program, the mechanisms are not similar. For example, in the online program we generally had to focus on only one course/subject for around 1 or 2 months, depending on the course. At my home university, I took 4 courses in one semester for Master’s Level. At MU, I had to take 12 courses in the first semester, 9 courses in the second semester and 8 courses in the third semester for compulsory courses, plus one selective from two departments. I tried really hard to pass the exams, to finish the assignments and to arrange the presentations in time. In addition, I had to go to schools for teaching practice. I have completed three semesters now. I have obtained wide knowledge as well as practical experience. I am aware that my professionalism has improved. Teaching practice was a wonderful experience as well as the most difficult part for me. It would not have been possible for me to face these challenges without the help of professors, lecturers, supervisors and my classmates in the departments. I would like to say děkuji.

As a foreigner, a long stay in a new place presented several difficulties for me. I have faced many social concerns, especially concerning the language barrier. Whenever I had a problem, I had to ask Czech friends. For example, I had to show my birth certificate at the immigration office in order to extend my visa. I did not bring it and I could not contact my parents in time. I had to explain this situation in Czech. One of my classmates helped by translating a letter to send to the office into Czech. When I had to send an official package to an embassy in my country, my Czech friend went to the post office with me and arranged for this. At the post office I

could not even say in Czech “regular or express mail”. I needed some services for phone and computer problems, occasional health problems, etc. In these serious cases, I asked my student tutor or classmates and other Czech friends for help. Among strangers I sometimes felt loneliness that might have been connected with homesickness or social differences; I sometimes wanted friendliness, warmth and kindness. A Czech friend invited me and some Asian friends to his home, Baclev. His family served us traditional food such as chicken with potatoes, dumplings, cabbage, cakes, different kinds of juices and homemade wines. The six of us stayed one night and we also had a barbecue party at his home. His parents were interested in our countries and cultures and asked many questions. My friend interpreted between his family and us. We were really happy and felt the warmth of family and community life. I would like to say děkuji to express my gratitude, because it would be impossible to face these social concerns if the native people did not help me and associate with me.

I have struggled with many professional and social challenges in the Czech Republic. I have been able to overcome these challenges through the help of people I have met. One or two pages is not enough to express all the gratitude I feel for them. I would like to say a hearty děkuji.

Thanks

Why Not You?

Lenka Himerova



Am yow alright babs and mates? Greetings from Birmingham. My name is Lenka Himerová and some of you might still remember me as your classmate or as a student. In September 2013 I left my home town Brno to live and study in the second largest city in the UK.

B'ham or Brum, as the locals call Birmingham, is a rather industrial city, which used to be a safe harbour for craftsmen, businessmen and other skilful individuals coming to the town to improve their lives. Birmingham may not be very popular among tourists nowadays, but if you look closer, there is a lot that the Second City might offer. Birmingham is said to have more canals than Venice. These played an important role in transport during the Industrial Revolution, which was powered by the development of a steam engine by James Watt, a Scottish inventor living in Birmingham. The metallic sound of the city also gave birth to iconic rock/metal bands, such as Duran Duran, Judas Priest and Black Sabbath. J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the fantasy novel *The Lord of The Rings*, spent a big part of his life in Birmingham; the industrial, smoky city inspired his vision of Mordor, the suffocating Land of Shadow. If you remember the Two Towers, also

synonymous with the title of the second book of *The Lord of The Rings*, they still stand not far away from the city centre. Nowadays, B'ham is undergoing a transformation from an industrial city to a more pleasant place to live. A very high percentage of its inhabitants are immigrants. There are large Indian, Pakistani, Irish, Vietnamese, Caribbean and Polish communities.



Newman University, where I study, is a rather small uni on the outskirts of the city. The academic atmosphere is very friendly, almost family-like. Students and teachers have a very close relationship here and the learning system differs from the Czech one a bit. First, there are hardly any compulsory lectures. Second, the number of people within a class is much smaller, usually only about 30 people or even fewer. Last but not least, the most important piece of work, the final assignment, is very often a written essay or an oral presentation. Progress on an essay is usually guided by a lecturer to make sure that all students are able to meet the set targets. Exams, tests or quizzes are rather rare.

Being given the opportunity to live and study in England is one of the best things that has ever happened to me. Living in a foreign country is never easy: one has to leave family, friends and loved ones behind, put up with different culture settings, master the local

language variety to some extent, meet complete strangers and make friends with them, and worst of all, always be self-reliant and support oneself, no matter what happens. On the other hand, the Erasmus programme is an amazing opportunity for personal development; it changes everybody and brings the best out of people. Moreover, one gets a broader view of or a completely different perspective on the foreign country, the country ones comes from and the whole world as well. Erasmus is not just a learning programme: it is also a community of people who come from different countries, share similar fears, face similar problems, tackle similar challenges and in the end have lots of fun together.

The overall Erasmus experience may vary from person to person. It is completely up to the individual how they spend their time abroad, what they do or what they make of their stay. We all learn differently, and we value different things differently, but everyone may choose to enjoy his/her stay, use their time abroad to learn as much as possible, meet wonderful people and grow as a person.

Have you been thinking about going to study abroad yourself? Take my advice, stop saying maybe and just go for it. People used to come to Birmingham to fulfil their destiny, to seize the opportunities that life offered, so why not you?

4 mistakes I wouldn't repeat if I had the chance to go on Erasmus again

Dagmar Wiesnerová

The aim of this article isn't to make you scared of Erasmus or to tell you that you shouldn't go. On the contrary! You definitely should if you get the chance. Erasmus is good for you! I'm sure you've heard about the benefits very many times. On the other hand, there are things you wish you had done differently or had known before you set off on the adventure. You want to get as much from it as you can. So what would I change about my Erasmus if I had the chance?

1) I wouldn't have such high expectations

The less you expect the better your experience usually is. Don't expect to have the time of your life on an Erasmus stay. Of course you might and I really hope you do, but it's good to realize that our expectations could exceed reality. It's good to write your objectives and goals before you go but remember that sometimes the most important things you learn are not those you expect to learn. Truth to be told, Erasmus hasn't given me much from the academic point of view, but I have learned how to be more patient, tolerant, how to be a more valuable team member and what my role in a team is. And that's a lot.

2) I'd have learned more Spanish before I went

Although I knew some basic Spanish before I went to Spain and despite the fact that the local university assessed my Spanish to be at advanced B1 level, which should be enough for a basic conversation, I found it extremely hard to follow speech or to even understand what was going on or what I was supposed to do. At first I thought that it might actually motivate me to learn

more and faster (and it did in the end), but the inability to express my opinion was very frustrating, especially since I like talking. My lack of communication skills in Spanish and lack of communication skills in English also prevented me from taking part in several events.

3) I'd be prepared for some things to be very different

I am used to (and very fond of) the autonomy that I have as a learner and the fact that I am responsible for my own learning and results. In Spain, however, they had only one fixed date for an exam (plus one re-sit, also scheduled in advance), so I couldn't choose a date to suit me. Since all the courses I took weren't taught for the same year, this of course resulted in two exams overlapping. I talked to the teachers and we worked it out somehow, but I will forever value the freedom I have at MU.

4) I'd have paid more attention to the paperwork

Obtaining the right papers might be easier or harder than you expect, depending on the amount of scary stories you'll definitely hear from your friends. There's one rule though: don't underestimate it and read the Erasmus guide very carefully, especially the parts where it says what you should do! That's the only way of avoiding heart attacks and panicky e-mails to your coordinators or the Study Department. What surprised me the most was that at the Spanish university they don't close a subject for you when you pass an exam; all subjects for the whole university are closed on a certain date at the end of the semester. Therefore I left after passing all my courses and got the Transcript of Records a month later by mail, and since I had misread the guide, I thought I was supposed to wait there until I had it in

my hands. What I needed, though, was a confirmation of my period of study that the International Relations Office issued immediately, which resulted in a mild panic attack and a sleepless night.

I just hope I haven't discouraged you from going on an Erasmus stay. Go, have a safe trip, enjoy and make your own mistakes (and don't forget to tell other people about it so that they can avoid repeating them)!



Essay on MU

Nino Kukhaleishvili

Why did you choose the Czech Republic, Brno and Masaryk University? This was and still is the first question I get asked when I say that I am an Erasmus Mundus financed full-degree student from the Republic of Georgia. Frankly speaking, I was not planning to come. I simply filled in an application just to see whether I would be accepted or not. And so it happened and I made up my mind to come and try studying here.

Everything started in September, 2013, when I first came to Brno in order to study at Masaryk University. Not everything worked out well at the beginning. I felt frustrated quite a lot of the time as I didn't and still don't know the Czech language, but I couldn't have dealt with the confusion if it wasn't for my Coordinator at the Faculty of Education Ivana Hovořáková and some of my Czech friends, who always try their best to help me with any kind of problem I face concerning the faculty or subjects. Now I have been in Brno for seven months and I think I am having the experience of a lifetime. Gradually, day by day, I am getting used to the lifestyle, the university, and this city, so that my love for them is increasing and broadening.

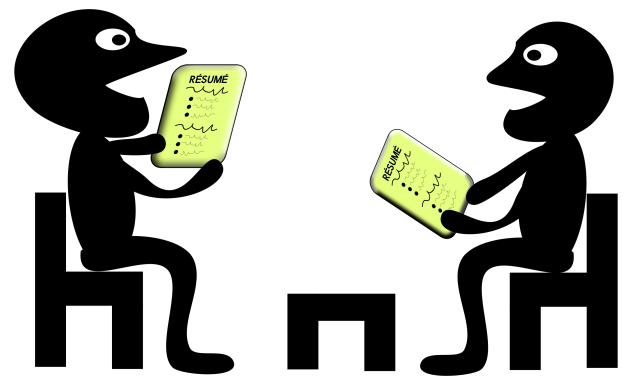
When I think about differences, not much comes to my mind. First of all, because both Georgia and the Czech Republic used to be parts of the Eastern Bloc. Having said that, people here don't seem to show their emotions so much as people in Georgia. Religion might be the biggest difference, as I have heard that about 90 per cent of people here are atheists, whereas in Georgia about 82% are orthodox Christians, but at the same time all religious holidays are celebrated with the same excitement here. Just recently I found out about the Easter

tradition, and that is something that surprised me a lot. I might say it is really different from how we celebrate it in my country. I am happy I will be experiencing it and visiting my Czech friend's family for Easter. I love the student life here simply because the ISC club does an amazing job with activities during the whole week. There is a variety of things you can participate in every single day.

I find Masaryk University fascinating. I am particularly fond of the IS system, which really does help students. As well as that, as I am a student of the Faculty of Education and a future English teacher, I find it very useful that I get teaching practice like the rest of the students studying here. Even though it has turned out to be the biggest challenge for me, teaching in a public school where some students don't even understand me has added a lot to my teaching experience. It doesn't happen every day that we are given the chance to teach in a foreign country. I find the teacher-training system very useful, practical and pragmatic as it provides me with a good quality of experience. It is especially relevant for novice teachers as they are given the opportunity to teach and observe teachers. We have the same programme at my home university, but I don't think they get as many hours of teaching as we do and are required to complete. I don't find it difficult to study here and I like how the system is arranged so as to fit the needs of people who go to work. That's really something.

What do I think of it all? I still have time and I am eager to enjoy the rest of my stay here and learn as well as discover more things about the university and the city, but I have enjoyed it so much here that I have already started to recommend Masaryk University to my friends in the Republic of Georgia. It is a new experience, a different culture,

different people, and a different approach to studies, entertainment and lifestyle. Besides, Masaryk University offers a variety of subjects taught in English and that's the first reason why I encourage my friends to apply. On top of this, the ISC club is simply incredible, with its ideas and tutors who are always there for you voluntarily. In Brno if you are with the ISC, you never get bored. Here I have come to realize that even though we are from different countries, we have a lot in common; after all, we are all students.



There's no bad weather, just bad clothing

Tereza Smutná

Last year I and my son Kryštof (4) spent six months at a farm kindergarten in Norway. I worked there as an English-speaking assistant and my son joined one of the groups.

The Hestehoven kindergarten is special in many ways. Not only do they have their own farm animals like horses, hens and rabbits, they also have a very special approach towards very young learners. The kindergarten doesn't feel like an institution but like one big family

...

Children and the environment

Love is the key word, and everything else comes with this keyword. Norwegian children are very confident and in most cases they try to solve their quarrels themselves. They are communicative as well; they soon started to understand me speaking English and the older children started to speak English as well.

The outdoor environment plays an important role in problem-solving. Children are allowed to climb trees, play with sticks, run ahead on walks and not only that, they are encouraged to do it. (In the picture you can see the 'Climbing Challenge', which strongly supported teamwork among the kids). It is freedom within rules. The rules are called 'unwritten rules' among the teachers. The rules are passed orally from older children and teachers to the newcomers, and it works perfectly.

Free play

Free play and the welfare of the children play the most important role in the kindergarten. Free play is an essential skill that cannot be taught. It is learned and practised by children in play. Free play is encouraged as much as possible. An example of free play at

Hestehoven is a project without toys. The children used old paper boxes, mud and natural materials to play and create their own toys. The project was full of imagination and creativity.

Program in Hestehoven

Forest Program:

Every week the two older groups of children set out on a longer walk in the morning, cook lunch on an open fire and come back in the afternoon.

Riding (farm program):

The kindergarten has 2 ponies. As soon as the children are able to sit, they start to ride too. The children learn to use their natural balance. The children not only ride, they also take care of all the farm animals. They clean the stables, feed them and collect eggs . . .

Cooking:

On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday the kids from one of the groups cook or prepare lunch for themselves and for the other 2 groups. The director of the kindergarten explains that they try to achieve a healthy eating program with warm dishes for lunch at least three times a week. It is natural for the kids to help and they enjoy it and appreciate the chance to do something important.

Gathering: Every Friday morning the whole kindergarten gathers in one house and the kids sing to a guitar or read fairy tales.

Swimming: The two older groups of children visit a swimming pool every week.

Climbing or Free day: Once a week the kids can have a free day, without activities. Those who want can do climbing with one of the teachers. They have their own climbing wall.

The kindergarten and the teaching approach have influenced me a lot and I'm happy I got the chance to learn how to run a kindergarten in a rather different way.

My Erasmus stay in Germany

Monika Panáčková

Everything started in February last year. I don't remember the exact day, but I do remember that moment when my friend Šárka and I were walking along the corridor and suddenly we noticed on the board the offers for Erasmus exchanges. The Department of German Language and Literature gave us this opportunity to spend four months at another university, either in Austria or in Germany. Finally, we chose to go to Germany, specifically to a smaller city called Magdeburg (it has only 230,000 citizens), home of Otto von Guericke University. We were really excited and didn't know what to do first. We found a lot of information on the internet and we used websites such as www.czs.muni.cz and the website of the university in Germany. At the Office for International Studies in Brno, our coordinators told us about a lot of things we needed to do, but we had still a plenty of time. The most important thing was not to forget some of the deadlines. We had to fill in an online application form by June and then during the holiday some documents which are still available on the Office for International Studies website (Learning Agreement, Financial Agreement, Statutory Declaration and Request for Confession of Scholarship). We had to get all the necessary signatures and the Learning Agreement had to be sent to the university abroad. The next thing to do was to apply for accommodation. The manager of the Accommodation Office wrote an email telling Šárka and me that he had a room for us. Although the rent was really high (251 Euro per month), we didn't have a better option. And we also thought that there was no other way for Erasmus students to find accommodation.

After we had submitted all the documents, we could pack our luggage. The start of the semester in Magdeburg was later than at our Faculty of Education: the semester began there on 14th October 2013. Before the start of the semester there was an orientation week, which in fact lasted two weeks. After our arrival Šárka and I were given a small apartment in a dormitory, which we shared. This apartment included a room for each of us, a bathroom and a kitchen. Other people lived in the second dormitory on their own (one room and a bathroom) and they shared the kitchen with everyone on the corridor. We really liked our apartment, but if we had known how cheap it was to stay with other students in a private flat, we would definitely have chosen that kind of living. It was much cheaper and, moreover, these people were mostly native speakers so we could have significantly improved our speaking skills. Unfortunately, my speaking skills aren't much better now, probably because of living with Šárka, who I spoke to in Czech. The people from the university prepared a lot of activities: a tour through the town, get-together parties, and also an intensive German course which we attended. We decided which level of German we had and according to this decision we were separated into groups (language levels A1-C1). During these two weeks we met a lot of people from all over the world, but almost all these people lived in the other dormitory. Our dormitory was quite quiet, with no parties, and we appreciated that we could sleep through the night. Then it was our first week at university and we attended the lessons entered in our Learning Agreement. In our plan there were about 6 seminars each week, for which attendance was compulsory. The first lessons were mostly informative and the professors spoke

about the final examinations and the requirements for passing the semester. In each subject there was only a final exam, no continuous assessment. At first these seminars made me feel quite confused. We didn't understand properly what the professors were speaking about, the curriculum was quite demanding and our classmates were native speakers, so they were much better than we. We had to try very hard to be as good as they were or at least not the worst in the whole group. But finally, after studying hard, we passed all the exams.

All the teachers were really nice and kind to us. If you decide to study at Otto von Guericke Magdeburg, I definitely recommend that you attend seminars with Mrs. Janakiev, Mrs. Haasse and Mrs. Pollmann. These lessons were interesting and useful, and thanks to these ladies I finally grasped the biggest problems of German grammar.

The weather and sport:

I was there in the autumn semester, which means from October to January. The weather wasn't bad, but it wasn't good either. I don't remember ever wearing a T-shirt, and in the winter there was no snow. I believe that the summer activities are great in Magdeburg. You can go inline-skating because there is a long track along the river, and the majority of people cycle there even in winter, so probably in summer the number of cyclists is higher still. Not many people travel by car because it is quicker to use a bicycle. In winter there weren't many opportunities for spending free time outside, so we had to make compromises. Although we had to study and prepare for our seminars a lot, we visited some nice pubs, where all the people were friendly. We went swimming

in a nice pool, where the water was perfect and we had a really good time. A group of people there also organised a lot of trips to the capital city, Dresden, Leipzig and lots of other places.

If I were you, I would definitely try to get on an Erasmus programme because it is well worth experiencing it.



My Erasmus Experience

Romana Hoferková

Spring semester 2013 - Spain, Pamplona

“Just do it!”

I've always enjoyed traveling and discovering new places. But it's different if you go to some place just for a few days or weeks and if you stay there for half or a whole year. A longer stay enables you to get to know the culture of a certain place and the mentality of people who live there. This is something very important and you can actually experience that deeper knowledge of a particular country when you stay and study there.

I went as an Erasmus student to Spain and stayed there half a year. It was a time full of new experiences. I had a unique opportunity to study in a different multicultural academic environment in which I got to know so many nice and kind people from different countries. What I appreciated even more were the friendships which I made with local people. And to be honest it wasn't easy at all. It is said that Spanish people are very open and friendly but that's not true for people who live in the northern part of Spain, particularly in Navarra, where I was. I usually had to take the first step by starting to talk to my classmates, who were all local Spanish students in most of my classes. I was the only Erasmus student there, which was quite hard at the beginning, I felt like a stranger and actually I was a stranger. But once I overcame that tough beginning I started to have a really nice time with my classmates. We worked on various projects, exchanged and shared our ideas and laughed together. And eventually I really felt like part of the class and that I

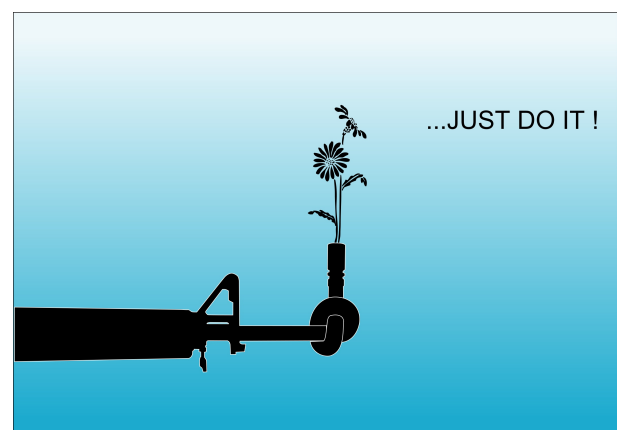
somehow belonged there. In my opinion this is a welcome feeling, especially if you are far from home, far from the place and people you know well.

So when “the ice was broken“ I realised that my classmates were quite curious about me and that they even kind of admired me because, in their eyes, I was someone who was brave enough to leave her comfort zone by deciding to go somewhere she didn't know. Moreover, I realised that I was supporting by my own example others who were considering the option of going abroad, and that's a great feeling.

When you go on an Erasmus stay you are sure to have a lot of fun, but you should also be ready for more difficult times, which in the end make you stronger and teach you a lot about yourself.

I would always say to anybody who might be thinking about Erasmus: “Just do it!”

It's definitely an experience worth having, and you might not get another chance like it later in your life.



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