

## Internship at Audi Brussels 2021



Department: Analysezentrum/Pilothalle Brüssel (APH)

Subdepartment: Analyse Vorserie und Präventive Absicherung

It all started as a passion for engineering and cars. After finishing a bachelor's degree in Automotive design engineering in Mexico, I decided to go further and pursue a master's degree in Germany, the capital of the automotive industry in Europe. After one and a half year of a challenging, enriching, and wonderful experience in Germany as well as successfully accomplishment of all the classes in the MSc. Production Engineering and Management, I decided it was time to look for another challenge and experience abroad, which would lead me to Belgium.

On my last year of high school, I took French classes, but I always felt like the last one was a language I could feel good speaking and listening to, and because of my passion of classic literature, my goal was to one day read a full French novel in its original language. That was one of the reasons to look up for an internship where I could improve my French and practice it often. The second reason was to see how the work environment is in a different country. I am familiar of the engineer's way of thinking and working in Mexico. But what about Europe, in a country besides Germany?

Lastly and the main aspect that push me to look further was due to the 2020 contingency of COVID-19. The double master's degree I am pursuing is at the TH OWL in Germany and the University of Trieste in Italy. On the second semester starting in March 2020, I was ready and packed my things to go to Italy. Arriving on March 1<sup>st</sup> along my classmates and friends in Pordenone, the situation was not clear about the pandemics, and we were waiting for the semester to start. Little did we know that ten days later we will be packing our stuff in the middle of the night and catching the last fly to Germany before Italy closed its borders to the world. The situation was unknown, and we still had the hope to return maybe after a couple weeks, but as you know, that remained only in hopes. Our class was able to take the classes online by the Italian university while in lockdown and we were able to meet our Italian classmates via internet. However, something was missing, the real abroad experience was cancelled due to major cause forces, but my willing to discover, travel, meet new people, gather experiences abroad, was still in my system. And therefore, I refused to lose this experience since it might be the last one before I get my degree and stablish in a place and get a job. So, against the uncertainty we were living in, I decided to look up for opportunities, there was no harm on looking up on internet for any chances.

The first idea was France; nevertheless, my French was only proficient and not enough for an internship held full in this language. My previous experience in Audi Mexico, led me to look up for their companies around the world, landing in Audi Brussels, where I found many interesting open vacancies for an internship. This place counted with all the requirements I could ask for. The main advantage, was the offer of a vacancy in German and English with just French language as a plus, following the advantages, the offer was in a field that I like, my passion for cars can be fulfilled, I can keep learning and training my German in the daily basis and in a professional area, I can go to a different country and learn about their way of living, the way of thinking and acting, how society perceives itself and the rest of the world, and the most important, get my abroad experience.

There were only two main factors that were not the best. The first one as mentioned already, the pandemic situation, which was and remains unknown while I am writing this paper. And the second one, my aversion towards capital cities. Although I come from a big city with nearly 2 million inhabitants. Capital cities is something I try to avoid, mainly for factors like masses, traffic in excess, unsafety, contamination (visual, audible, environmental) and the general stress environment created by everyone in the city. But the advantages seemed to surpass these problems and I took the best decision. I signed my contract, and I was ready to go for an adventure.

Located in Brussels, the Belgian factory plays an important role in the Audi Group by being the first plant to produce the first fully electric vehicle from the brand, the Audi e-tron, CO2-neutral, since 2018. It was the first time I had the opportunity to work with this type of automotive technology since during my studies, electric cars were not as developed as the ones we know now.

I packed my things and travel in train to Brussels, while my main group of friends whom I met during my studies stayed together in the same city for their internship, I had to let them go and start a new group of friends all over again. It was already hard not seeing my family for year and a half and knowing that it would still take months until I could see them again due to the unpredictability of the pandemic. That was translated on letting go the small community I had. Everything I was already used to during my time away from home and where I found shelter during the hard lockdown times, I had to give it up to go to a place where nothing was sure, maybe I would have to go back, be again in lockdown, work only by home office. But I took the risk, and here is the story of where this decision took me.

I arrived on a Sunday in Brussels, it is important to make an emphasis on the specific way of the week because on that day, is not like the other regular days in Brussels. I remember taking a cab and be so proud of understanding the signs and the basic French as well as make myself understandable for other people. While leaving the train station, the neighborhoods started to change, from a flashy capital city to a neighborhood only 15 minutes away from the luxurious city center. My first feeling it was feeling the insecurity of the place, graffiti everywhere, all the trash outside without a system, the traffic, the atmosphere felt so heavy. But as I entered my new house, I felt good by meeting my new flat mates who were also moving in the same day to the place. We got along right away, some of them I will always be grateful to know, and I will try my best to keep the friendship with. I have to admit I felt sad on the first day, places outside were all closed due to lockdown, no places to meet people, to spend time, only the essentials, meaning making friends harder as well as enjoying an experience abroad such as traveling.

It took some weeks for me to adapt to the city. Regarding my internship, it all went well, I was able to understand all the tasks I was given and so far, I feel that I performed a good job, but I also know now how I could have improved it. A fun fact for me, but not so pleasant when it happened, it was getting used to all the languages in the exact same place. I am not a linguist, most of my time during work my mind is focused in the abstract, mathematics, physics, and logical thinking, so I was never familiar with a situation that involved more than 2 languages at the same time. But here I had to get used to 5! My mother tongue is Spanish, which makes it the language I am mostly using for my thoughts as well as to speak with my family and friends in Mexico, at work I have to use German for almost all purposes, although the majority of colleagues in my office where every day speaking in Dutch and although I don't speak it, I had to hear it every day. During lunch time and in the production lines, French was needed, also to live outside the factory, going to the supermarket and daily basis activities. When arriving home and since I lived with flat mates from five different countries, English was the established language to communicate. The first challenge was not to get distracted or get headaches by listening to everyone in the office swapping languages from one moment to another and all speaking different languages at the same time. Then, I should be able to try my best to make my brain fit for this on and off linguistic changes. As a cheery of the top and after a month there, I had to learn programming, which meant another language, maybe not a spoken one, but still complex and challenging.

The beginning is always hard but adding a pandemic to it in a country where you don't know no one and without knowing if by any reason I would have to stay longer or leave earlier, made it way harder. I was able to bring the best of the situation by getting to know my flat mates and Reyhaan, the intern who was in the same department as me. We would gather to play board games, cook together or trying to discover as much as possible the city within the restrictions. But it was until the re-opening of restaurants and normal activities when I could finally enjoy my experience abroad. Now I can say that even the joy of entering a restaurant to have a lemonade is so recomforting, and that is something I thought we would always have and there was no reason not to have it. The pandemics showed us a lot and personally, the lack of daily things like that are something that now I enjoy the most.

With this re-opening, the decreasing of cases, the increasing of vaccinated people led me to nice experiences. It is interesting to see the contrasts of the city's architecture, passing from a regular normal street to a luxurious ancient royal one and then moving forward to the most recent buildings representing the capital of Europe. What it amazed me is the multiculturalism from this place, although capital cities are well known for this aspect, here they level up. Not only is possible to find a big or small community of a country that many people might not be able to locate in a map, but it is also viable to find stores or places for almost each community. Mention a country and it is really possible that you can find a restaurant of their typical food. With this advantage you don't learn only about the Belgian traditions, you learn about the whole people living here. My favorite place to see every day in different lights, in different weather conditions is the Grand Place. The architecture of this place is outstanding. Each building with different architectural styles highlights the sight. The Atomium is also incredible, bigger than I thought and located in a nice part of Brussels, really quiet and with a park where is good for sports and meeting with friends.



Many times, I wondered if I made the right call by doing an Erasmus instead of staying in Germany in a better paid internship, near of my friends and where I knew how things where and were I felt safe. Now I realized how much I still needed to learn and to grow up. Experience new things but with new eyes since this is the third time that I study (or in this case work) abroad. I can tell for a fact that my time in Brussels that I appreciate and value friendship more. I have always been good at observing and listening carefully to people, which made me gain many good friendships, but I was bad at opening, at talking instead of listening. I thought I was empathic, and I was, but now my empathy towards others has growth even more.

At the end of this experience, I was able to give an answer and fulfill all my goals I had since the beginning. I could read a full French novel in its original language, although my French is not perfect yet, it improved a lot, in a way that I could reached this goal. I also learned how is working in a different country besides Mexico and Germany, as a sum up, I could say the Belgian engineers and the work environment are kind, hardworkers and not so stressed out. It was overall a one in a lifetime experience.