

Experience Report on My Semester Abroad at Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden

At the beginning of my master's degree in production and management with a specialization in Wood Technology, I decided to spend a semester abroad at the Swedish partner university Linnaeus University (LNU) in Växjö. During my stay, I took the course "Global Innovation – Transdisciplinary System Perspectives for Sustainable Change". The course started at the beginning of January and ended at the beginning of June. In total, I was able to earn 30 credits.

Preparation and Organization

For the preparation, it is important to plan enough time. Many steps depend on important documents that need to be filled out, signed and sent back. Sometimes, this requires patience. The International Office at TH-OWL, as well as Prof. Dipl.-Holzwirtin Frühwald, supported me a lot during the preparation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them very much. One important tip from my side is to not hesitate to ask questions. It is better to ask one time too many than one time too few. Especially in the beginning, everything can feel a bit confusing, but after some time, things become clearer.

It is also important to start looking for accommodation as early as possible. I started about three to four months before the beginning of my stay. I decided to rent a room through the housing company Vidingehem. Online, you can find helpful information about how the application system for accommodation works. It is important to register on the platform early. Usually, this is done through another website called "Mina Sidor". Later, this website is used to apply for apartments and to manage everything related to housing and parking.

After registering on "Mina Sidor", you collect points every day. These points are important when applying for accommodation. The more points you have, the higher your chances are of getting an apartment. That is why it is really worth registering as early as possible. Also, apartments become available at different times, so it is helpful to check the platform regularly. For my apartment, a parking space for my car and electricity, I paid around 500 euros per month in total. The apartment was unfurnished. Usually, you receive separate bills for the apartment and electricity.

Travelling to Sweden

I travelled to Sweden by car. I made this decision because Sweden is not very densely populated, and I wanted to explore as much of the landscape as possible during my stay. Looking back, having a car was a very good decision for me. My tip for everyone who also wants to travel by car is to take the ferry from Rostock to Sweden. It is a very relaxed option. I took the overnight ferry, which worked very well. You arrive in Sweden in the morning, and the journey feels much more comfortable and relaxed.

For everyone who wants to save some money, sleeping on the ferry can also be done in a simple way. Some travellers sleep on a sleeping mat in the restaurant area or on deck. Many truck drivers did the same. For me, this worked without any problems.

Meeting People and Free Time

To meet new people, I can highly recommend the activities offered by Culture Connection. They organize many different activities, so there is something for many different interests. Especially in the beginning, this is a great way to get in contact with other students. I also went climbing every week. The climbing gym was located a little outside the campus, but it was easy to reach by bus or by bike.

Nature and Trips

If you enjoy spending time outdoors, you will really like Sweden. The country has many nature reserves and beautiful hiking routes. For this, having a car is very helpful, because some places are difficult to reach by public transport. To get a good overview of hiking routes and outdoor activities in Sweden, I can recommend the app “Naturkartan”. There, you can find a lot of information about nature areas, hiking trails, shelters and activities.

For everyone who likes bouldering, the app “The Topo” is also very useful. It shows many bouldering areas, including some around Växjö. During my time in Sweden, many people became interested in this sport. In spring and early summer, we often went climbing outdoors together.



Figure 1: Climbing trip near Växjö

It is also good to know that winter in Sweden lasts much longer than in Germany. Because of this, you can experience both the Swedish winter and the beginning of summer. For me, this was a very nice experience.

Studying at LNU

I was very satisfied with studying at LNU. The course “Global Innovation” is mainly aimed at international students. Because of this, everyone was very open, friendly and interested in meeting new people. I especially liked the group work. Since students from different academic backgrounds

worked together, I was able to learn many new perspectives. You do not only learn the course content, but also how people from other disciplines think and work.

I also experienced the lecturers as very open and approachable. The atmosphere felt less hierarchical than what I sometimes know from Germany. This made it easier to ask questions and actively participate in class. I can really recommend the course "Global Innovation". Even though the first course of the Swedish Master's programme, "Local Innovation", may sound more interesting at first, I was very happy with the second course.

One advantage was that many of the students already knew each other. Because of this, the group work was often well organized, and everyone had a better idea of their own strengths. For us exchange students, this made it easier to become part of the group and contribute.

Studying at TH OWL at the Same Time

One point that should definitely be considered is the overlap with the winter semester at TH OWL. The winter semester there continues until mid-February, and exams can sometimes take place until April. So, if you still have courses or exams at TH OWL while studying abroad, you should plan this carefully in advance. In my case, the communication with the professors at TH OWL was very open and uncomplicated. In the end, everything worked out well.

Nevertheless, you should honestly ask yourself beforehand whether you want to take on this double workload. Looking back, I have to say that it took a lot of time and should not be underestimated. Personally, I was often busy studying until late in the evening because I had courses in Sweden and at TH OWL at the same time.

Conclusion

Overall, I was very positively surprised by my semester abroad in Växjö. I can recommend it to anyone who is interested in new experiences, different ways of thinking and an international environment. You do not only learn a lot academically, but you also grow personally. I especially enjoyed the exchange with people from different countries and academic backgrounds. This helped me improve my communication skills and gain new perspectives.

The nature in Sweden was also a big highlight for me. The many forests, lakes and outdoor opportunities made the stay very special. To sum up, a semester abroad at LNU in Växjö is an experience I would definitely do again.