



## ERASMUS-EXPERIENCE REPORT

**Name: Anonymous**

**Field of study: Landscape architecture and Landscape Planning**

**Host University: Boku**

**Year of study: 2022**

**Duration of stay: from 25.08.2022 to 28.01.2023**

### **Publication of the report**

I consent to the publication of this experience report including the above data (field of study, host university, year of study, duration of stay) on the website of BOKU-International Relations for the purpose of sharing information related to the study visit, so that future interested outgoings can inform themselves about your experience at the host institution.

**yes**  **no**

The consent is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time without giving reasons with immediate future effect. Any withdrawal can be declared at any time by e-mail to [erasmus@boku.ac.at](mailto:erasmus@boku.ac.at).

## **THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS WOULD BE INTERESTING FOR FUTURE OUTGOINGS:**

### **1. City, country and people + social integration**

I stayed in Gembloux in Belgium, which was also the city where my university was. The city is one hour by train from Brussels. It's quite small and everything is reachable by bike. I was looking forward to living in a small town, but I have to admit, the idea was more romantic in my head than it turned out to be in real life. Since it is so small I got to know the town and the university quite quickly, which was nice. On the other side, the people that I met, I got to know only through lucky coincidences. My closest friends in Gembloux were my two flatmates. One of them also studied with me and we initially met through the "integration weeks" from Erasmus which were super nice. This event was the start of my stay which was somehow also the best time of the whole semester. Everyday for 2 weeks we went to Namur, the next big city, and capital of the French-speaking part of Belgium. We were a huge group of all the Erasmus students of Namur and Gembloux together. It was nice to be with so many Erasmus people, because for us Erasmus students in Gembloux it was the only occasion to meet so many new people. In our small town we were only we were only 4 Erasmus students plus a group who were doing an international master (but who already knew each other and also had to study a lot during the semester). After these two integration weeks I saw the other Erasmus students only for the French classes which were also in Namur.

I was lucky enough to take master classes and to end up in a class of 12 students. This small number made everything very personal and they were all really nice and welcoming to me. We had some dinners or drinks out in Brussels as a class, which felt really nice. Other than that, the university offers some nice sports or culture groups to get into. There is one orientation day where all of these groups give you all the information you need, to register. This I can only recommend as well, since it helps you to get to know more sides of the university.

All in all, I was traveling a lot since I had classes in Gembloux, Namur and Brussels. It was nice for me because that way I got to know some different cities in Belgium.

### **2. Accommodation**

In the beginning, it was already very hard to find accommodation because most "kot"s (that is how they call their shared houses) were looking for people who stay for longer than one semester. One of my future flatmates texted me on facebook (which is the only place to find "kot"s) asking me if we wanted to look for a place to move in together, which was super nice for me since she already knew some people in the town. Finally, we ended up in a shared house with 8 students but the living culture was not at all as cozy and personal as I knew it from my shared flat in Vienna. I would have liked to organize some flat dinners or some other hang-outs, but most of my flatmates went home to their parents every weekend and were busy studying during the week. Sometimes I had the feeling that my flatmates did not want to or were not used to taking responsibility for our shared house since they were not at home so much. We Erasmus students who stayed every weekend, were sometimes left in a dirty house for the weekends since the cleaning person (who was included in the rent, which I also did not know at first) also did not come regularly.



Another thing that surprised me, was that most houses do not have a washing machine or a dish washer. In our flat with 8 students, this was sometimes a problem, especially during exam week when everybody did not want “to waste time” on cleaning dishes.

For washing our clothes we had to walk 20 minutes to the next public laundry (which costs 4€ for washing and 4€ for drying which we had to pay as well since there was no space in our house to hang up wet clothes).

### 3. Costs and expenses

Belgium is quite an expensive country and I spent more money than usual because I was on the move a lot. I wanted to travel during my Erasmus, so I spent more money than usual for food and transport.

The rent for my room was only 340€ which was super nice. Food was more expensive but there are quite a lot of students who go dumpster diving which saves a lot of costs again. Studying in Gembloux you spend a lot of money for transport, since there is not so much to do in the town itself and you will want (and also have) to move a lot.

### 4. Arrival and departure (mean of transport)

I arrived in Belgium in the middle of August already since the welcome weeks started then. I bought an interrail ticket for the way there and stopped in Germany to visit some friends. This was a really nice way to arrive at my Erasmus destination.

During my stay I never went back to my home country but traveled quite a lot (still using my interrail ticket). During holidays the Belgium transport organization offers nice tariffs for students to travel the country which I can highly recommend.

For my return in December I booked a solo return train ticket. The train ride from Gembloux to Vienna is about 12 hours though (including stop-overs and waits).

### 5. Other (visa, insurance, etc.)

I did not need a visa and I also did not take any extra insurance. I had a travel insurance from my credit card and told my Austrian health insurance that I was going on Erasmus. I went to the doctor twice in Brussels and they gave me a receipt to send to my health insurance.

### 6. Description of host university

The university building is very nice and old. It is located very central in Gembloux and also has the only park in the town around. Next to it, there are a few bars or places to get fries or other snacks.

From the train station to the main university building I had to walk 20 minutes, but then again, I did not have any classes there. For us landscape architecture students, classes were in all kinds of different places. Some classes were even further away, so I highly recommend renting a bike to get around in Gembloux (even if it is not that big, but it just really pays off!).

Other classes we had in Brussels so once a week we had to go there by train (1h).

Another day of the week I had my French class in Namur, which was also a 15min train ride.

The thing that surprised and also shocked me the most out of my whole Erasmus experience, was the student culture in Belgium. I had never really heard of it before, but was exposed to their traditions a lot during my stay. During the first month of university,



students who are new to the university can voluntarily (although it is quite frowned upon if you do not participate) take part in the so-called “baptism”. Basically, once a week students have to go through different tasks to prove that they are ready for university. This is quite an old tradition (in my view also a very old-fashioned and therefore really not fitting nowadays) done by students for students only. It is all very exclusive and strict so students who do not take part are not at all allowed to know what they are doing. This created a weird atmosphere for me, especially because I really did not at all feel at ease with these customs and therefore did not take part. Other students often asked me why I did not take part and wanted to encourage me to do it, to feel more included. For me, this culture made me feel the so-called “culture-shock” stronger than ever, before. I had a really hard time understanding and accepting this tradition and the values which came with it. At times I felt like I was the only one not fitting, not understanding their customs and I even caught myself questioning myself and wanting to fit in. Then again, I just could not at all accept the values (like peer pressure, exclusiveness, sexism, etc.) that came with this “baptism”. I experienced first hand only how others were affected by this, and it was enough for me. Two of my flatmates were being baptized during the time of my stay, and a third one stopped after a while because it got too much for her. I still feel really weird reflecting and writing about this but I want to be really honest because it influenced my Erasmus experience a lot. Looking back, it was also an important change of view for me because I really had to idea that these student cultures exist and I really felt totally “out of my bubble/comfort zone”. It was interesting for me to go through this process of questioning another culture, feeling as an outsider and questioning my own values and traditions. It was also the part from my stay from which I learned the most I guess.

#### 7. Application and enrollment formalities and orientation phase

The application and enrollment process was not very hard or complicated.

The first two weeks were the “integration weeks” which were the best weeks of my whole stay. They offered a great program, including language classes, excursions, beer tastings, etc. It was great to get to know all the Erasmus students from Namur and also to get around the country a bit. It was all paid and organized by the university which was also great.

#### 8. Course offer and attended courses (short description and possibly grading)

I took 4 classes, which were all very practical, which I really enjoyed: « Atelier Projet Q7 – Paysager », « Cours de francais pour étudiants en mobilité IN », « Paysage et biodiversité : applications », « Philosophie de la nature et du paysage ».

The project was held in Brussels and was probably my favourite class. I loved spending the day in Brussels and the class also gave me a whole new perspective on working in my field of studies. I enjoyed working together with other students, who all brought new perspectives as well. It was also the hardest class and the workload was definitely the most exhausting. But in the end I was super proud to have achieved this project. We were working in an area of Brussels and had to design a little project of our own, in the end. I was a little scared to have to work all on my own, but the teachers were super helpful and since our class only consisted of 12 students, it was very personal.

I also really enjoyed my philosophy class, which was a 3 hour long lecture, once a week. We also had a one day excursion to another city, Liège, to talk about different landscapes and what shapes them. For this course, the “exam” was to write an essay about one of



the main topics we talked about in the course (the main theme was “walking through the landscape”).

The biodiversity class was also very interesting. I liked, that we had a lot of excursion where we went to see different parks and looked at what they offered on a biodiversity level. Only the organization of this class was not very well done and the communication with the teacher was sometimes hard. In the end, the workload was quite high as well, we had to write a summary of every excursion, had to write a long report on one park which we had to visit individually and had to do an oral exam in the end.

The French class I can highly recommend: it was a lot of fun and the teacher was great. In the beginning, we had to take a short test for the teachers to put us into different classes depending on our level of French. I was not happy with my first teacher and even then it was no problem at all for me to change the class. My second teacher was super nice and helpful and adapted great to the level of each one of us. She made the classes real fun and creative.

#### 9. “Study workload” (ECTS) per semester + grading

I am very happy that almost all of my classes in Gembloux count for my classes here in Vienna. I did only 18 ECTS in total which was a nice workload for an Erasmus stay, allowing me to travel a bit next to studying. I have to mention that I only did classes from the Master in Gembloux, which was both nice and exhausting. All of the classes were in French, so I strongly recommend a good level of French.

Over all, I really enjoyed the classes of the University, and I felt that it gave me new points of view in my field of study. On the other side, I felt that it was definitely more workload than I was used to, from Boku (but then again, everything was in French – so that might also be a reason!).

The grading was better than I expected but I also had a lot of time to write my essays and I did not have any written exams, so no real time pressure and I used almost the whole month of January to write the reports.

#### 10. Academic counseling/support

The Erasmus team at the university in Gembloux was very welcoming and very helpful. They gave us a tour around the university and were always there for us, physically or via email.

#### 11. Tips and summary

I can recommend Gembloux for anyone who wants to get out of their comfort zone. I think it might be nicer to stay here for longer to adapt to the surroundings. Also, in summer it might be nicer. I enjoyed some nice student parties, which would probably also be nicer in summer since a lot of the student houses have super nice gardens. If you stay longer, you might also get a chance to get into one of the super beautiful houses with a garden, chicken and vegetable beds.

I also recommend taking part in one of the many groups like the cinema club, the theatre group or one of the sports classes. This is a really nice way to meet some new people and to meet people who have the same interests as you.

Overall, landscape architecture students were one of the most welcoming and warm-hearted people I met. They have some activities and groups of their own, which was also very nice.



I also really needed to get out of the small town from time to time, so I traveled the country and went to Brussels a lot.