

ERASMUS EXCHANGE REPORT

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I chose to go to Belgium because it is the heart of Europe and Brussels is the political capital of EU, so it is easier to make important contacts while studying. I chose Louvain School of Management (LSM) as my exchange destination, because it is the best management school in all of Belgium. It is situated in a small city nearby Brussels in Louvain-La-Neuve.

The Louvain School of Management combines the history and heritage of the Université catholique de Louvain, almost six-century-old and one of the oldest complete universities in Europe, with a progressive and dynamic approach to business education and research. It gives the opportunity to explore multidisciplinary perspectives, which are so important in the business world. LSM is a modern world-class school of management promoting intended learning outcomes, transferring cutting-edge knowledge from its centers of excellence and integrating the real life business practices.

Being close to Brussels, the capital of Europe, Louvain-la-Neuve is a unique pedestrian city that welcomes people from all over the world and provides an ideal environment for studying within a vibrant community and multiculturalism.

In Louvain-La-Neuve, everything is close by. The University is situated in the middle of the city, in another words, the whole city is one big university campus and everything needed is close by in 4 kilometer range. Students can walk all the way or rent a bike.

The Academic calendar; orientation period (and how it was arranged), starting date and ending date of the studies, exam dates.

The academic calendar starts in the end of January because in Belgium Christmas and the winter vacation lasts more than a month. The studies themselves start in mid-February, because there's a two week orientation time for all the exchange studies. In the orientation weeks international students can participate all the courses to see which ones are suitable for their studies. At the same time, local ESN (Erasmus Student Network) office welcomes you and shows you around the

campus area. They also have put together an activity calendar, so it would be interactive study period with a lot of events and trips to local areas and to other BENELUX countries and France.

Orientation period was a lot of fun, due to the events prepared by the ESN. We had a lot of parties, dinners, game nights, trips, etc, not only the orientation week but the whole semester. In the orientation week, we were introduced to the Belgian culture and how everything in the university works. It was about 2 weeks of activities and cultural events to meet other international students, not only from Erasmus region, but all over the world.

In the orientation week we had to put together a study plan and there were a lot of information missing by the lack of professionalism of the University Coordinator. During those weeks we found different courses which were not listed that we could take as our courses as well. I chose Procurement module and Supply Chain module.

After that, studies begin and as Belgian culture is similar to French culture, local students partied more than they studied and had a lot of events besides studying during the whole semester. Belgian students started to seriously study 5 weeks prior the exam session. They have this system, where all the independent- and group works in the courses should be done few weeks after the main study period is finished. It ends in the beginning of May. After that a 3-week study period starts where all the students study only for the exams. In June, all the exams take place. It is more like a high school system for Northern European students.

Apartment

Apartment prices started from 240 euros. The prices depended whether you want to stay in a special theme KOT, where you live with a lot of people in the same apartment, about 5-9 co-cotters, or you want more privacy. I were living in a KOT with 5 other students, 3 Belgians, 1 Spanish and 1 from South-Korea. We had a 2 story apartment. Compared to Finnish apartment providers, local institution charged extra for electricity, about 10-20 euros per 2 months. There were no saunas.

In Louvain-La-Neuve, most of the houses have been built in the 60-s and they have problems with ventilation systems. Due to the bad construction planning, lot of rooms have problems with humidity and there might be mold in the sealing and bathrooms. I had the same issue with my

room, where the mold had infested the sealing corner. You need to clean it with vinegar or just call the local apartment provider, which might take some time.

Another thing is when you register to the room and you need to make a list of problems in the room, usually the old comparable list says that everything is excellent, which is odd. Moreover, everything is written in French and local office people don't speak English very well. Sometimes they even get frustrated that you come to Belgium and you don't speak fluent French, at least it feels like that. So, to complete the list, find a French speaking friend.

The last thing is the down-payment. It is 150 euros and you get it back during 6 months after you have left the school, so it's a long period. I have heard some stories that they purposely find excuses not to give you the money back. So, the best solution would be to say to them that for this down-payment you will pay for the last months half of the rent or electricity bills.

Costs

Living expenses are high, comparable to Finland but the quality of the living conditions are much lower. Transportation prices are cheaper than in Finland. Train tickets are really cheap. Food is the same price range, in some cases even cheaper. If you buy your groceries from Aldi or Delhaize you might get really good prices and they have private labels which are suitable for the students. Other expenses as sport center and other post-study events are comparable to Finland.

Other Erasmus students

In my exchange time, I met a lot of people all over the world and made a lot of friends with a different cultural background and hopefully with some of them I might do business together. During Erasmus, we had a lot of events together, starting with dinners and trips, finishing with mega parties in the "cycle" and pub rally events and grills near the lake. In my personal opinion, these were the best student parties I have ever attended before.

Trips

Local ESN unit gave us plenty of options to travel with them to different places in Belgium and visit nearby countries like France and Netherlands. Lot of these trips were pretty cheap compared to normal fares. As Brussels Airport is one of the main European airports, the prices to the Western

Europe and Southern Europe where quite cheap if using Ryanair or other cheap flight operators. As I understood, lot of professors made their schedule so that the Fridays were free, so that the exchange students would have time to travel for 3 days.

Courses

I chose LSM because of the courses they proposed for exchange students. There were lot of courses in marketing and European business. After arriving we found out that we can take really good courses in Procurement and Supply Chain Management. Procurement was led by the best Procurement professors in this area of expertise in Europe. Moreover, Procurement Module consisted of 3 courses and was sponsored by one of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies – GlaxoSmithKline. I took the whole Procurement module and I'm really satisfied with what I have learned. As a marketing student I now understand the other side of the business processes. As a sales and marketing person I have developed skills to understand what strategies and logics are used by the procurement function in the purchasing process.

Here is an overview of the Procurement courses I took in LSM and why.

Procurement professionals manage in most firms the biggest spend due to an increased outsourcing ratio and further reliance on suppliers for generating innovations. The job of procurement professionals is characterized by having high responsibility from the first day in the job on. Moreover, procurement professionals heavily interact with international suppliers, thus being affluent and interest in diverse cultures is an important asset.

The job market for procurement professionals in the world is very positive. Students educated in procurement are rare (e.g. UCL is the only university in Belgium offering courses in this specialization). In many other jobs like e.g. marketing you have to wait a long time until you have your own budgets you can work with, in procurement you will face responsibility from the first day on.

The module opens up careers in almost every industry in manufacturing as well as service industries. Even though the demand in manufacturing firms is historically higher, the demand of the insurance & banking sector as well as in consulting have increased tremendously in recent years.

To complement Procurement I took extra courses in Advanced Strategic Management to understand better global trends and strategic pillars of international business. Moreover, to understand better how Procurement is attached to the production processes, I took Supply Chain Planning course.

Tips and facts

- Nr 1 sports center in Belgium is located in Louvain-La-Neuve.
- Lot of officials didn't speak English at all, so it is necessary to find a translator if you don't speak French yourself.
- In Belgium you will find the best beers in the world and lot of exclusive beers from all over the world. (Check out the BeerBar)
- Try to attend every event scheduled by ESN and you will have an excellent exchange experience.
- Try to find a middle path between studying and having fun, because you might lose your concentration why are you there in the first place.
- As an exchange student, you need only 50% out of the whole course, no need to pass all the parts of the course, like in Finland. For example, if you have received more than 50% from the course, you might not need to take the exam, because in the long term your Erasmus grades are not transferred, only pass and fail is stated.

In conclusion, I'm really pleased with my choice even with the setbacks that occurred. I learned a lot about Belgian and other cultures, and made a lot of friends all over the world. Moreover, the quality of the studies were similar to Northern-Europe and took courses that are unavailable in Finland.