

Report on studies abroad in Budapest with support by ERASMUS+, summer semester 2023

I spend my summer semester 2023 abroad at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design in Budapest as part of ERASMUS+. The stay began on February 9th, 2023 and ended on May 26th, 2023.

Before the mobility

The application process at my home university of the University of the Arts Bremen began in January 2022. The decision to stay in Budapest had several reasons: I always enjoy living in a big city for an extended period of time. Only after a longer stay I begin to feel that I can really get to know a place and its culture. This was probably the most important reason why I decided to spend a semester abroad. Another criterion was the ability to finance the study. Since life is known to be more affordable in Eastern Europe, Hungary was on my shortlist. My first choice was Vienna and my second choice was Budapest. Since I considered Vienna to be a very desirable foreign destination, I wanted to make a second choice with a higher chance. Also because towards the end of my master's degree it was my last chance to stay abroad and I expected the demand for a semester abroad to be somewhat increased given the post-Corona situation.

When I started thinking about and applying for a stay abroad in autumn 2022, an actual application with a portfolio of my artistic work, my CV and a letter of motivation for the university abroad was to the following summer semester. Since Hungary is part of the EU, there was nothing really difficult on the administrative side that I needed to handle. However, I made the mistake to wait for my application request to be accepted before I applied for BAföG abroad. The office you need to work with does not depend on your place of residence, but depends on the country you plan to visit. While my domestic BAföG in Bremen always was processed very quickly and usually without any major complications, it took two months during my stay abroad before I received government support.

Fortunately, my landlords abroad were an older couple and friends of relatives of friends, to whom I simply communicated this issue and who also gave me a very warm welcome in Budapest. I also had this option in mind when making my choice and what generally probably tends to become one of the most difficult things – finding an apartment or a room abroad – was one of the easiest and most pleasant things for me. Not only was my apartment abroad (which was also very spacious, equipped with everything including an old elevator to the fourth floor – although the stairs are also very pleasant in Budapest architecture – and even had a small balcony) comparative affordable at 300 euros a month. The apartment also had an excellent location in the former Jewish quarter of Pest, but not the very touristy part of town. And this is also where I made my first acquaintances. This is of course more of an exception than usual and I regret that I cannot provide any further information on this for future students going to Budapest. I booked my trip there by train about two months in advance, as well as my return later, and was therefore funded with a further 50 euros through the ERASMUS+ Green Travel program.

Accommodation and local transport

Based on previous experience reports, I had already taken care of an international student ID card in advance and the first thing I did on the spot was buy a semester ticket. This was comparatively affordable at the equivalent of around 30 euros, valid from February to June and necessary because it took me around 50 minutes to travel by public transport to the somewhat remote

university location. In addition, it was still very cool in February for a summer semester, although the weather quickly got warmer as Hungary is geographically roughly at the same level as northern Italy.

The currency HUF (Hungarian Forint) also created some confusing situations at the beginning. I didn't set up an account abroad for my stay, but instead used my credit card to withdraw forints from the OPT ATMs - they had the best exchange rate and they at least asked if you agreed with this – or paid with a credit card. However, my bank charged me for the latter due to a rule change during my stay. Until then, I could use both card and cash. But overall, the living expense were not really more affordable than in Germany. The ERASMUS+ funding and money I had borrowed at the beginning of my stay kept me afloat until my BAföG abroad was approved. A student job would not have been an option for me due to language barriers. I also didn't know of any other students who had started a job without speaking the language.

Studies

After an initial information event for ERASMUS+ students, there was a one-week break to save heating costs. During this time, I strolled around the city and the surrounding area a lot and explored Budapest's art and cultural landscape. Since I preferred to study in English, the choice was limited to English-language courses and I chose Ceramics Art and Design. In general, however, the language presented a greater hurdle than expected. While it was more common in the older Hungarian society to learn German due to Hungary's political and geographical location, only a part of the younger generation learns to express themselves well in the English language. There was a contact person with good English skills at both the MOME International Office and my department. The University also assigned me a student to accompany during my stay. But for technical reasons we never managed to connect.

However, the English of the workshop managers in my department and the others was rather inadequate. Therefore, for me it was a lot of learning by observation. It was hard to catch important information on the courses and the materials we were working with and I therefore had to be enterprising and do my own research. The teaching was far more traditional than what I know from Bremen, where the university sees itself as a place where a broad spectrum of artistic and pedagogical approaches, embedded in current scientific discourses, come together.

The library was very useful for me as I could print using a prepaid card advertised on site. My aim was to really work in a focussed fashion and to further my education in the ceramic craft. I also succeeded in this. As a student form abroad I also was able to introduce and implement projects of my own design. A trip to the international ceramics studio Kecskemét, about an hour away from Budapest, towards the end of my stay was a nice end to this learning phase. In addition to certain semester groups, ERASMUS+ students were also allowed to participate and we worked in an old Japanese firing technique: Raku. In addition to studying ceramics, I took a very demanding but informative course on contemporary art theory.

Conclusion

This report is my last task of this foreign experience. With a certain waiting time involved, all the necessary documents have now been and will be forwarded. In general, I am very happy that opportunities like this exist. However, with regard to the political situation in Hungary in particular, I found this stay controversial. The stories about anti-queer political actions, actions

against the government and a general exhausting in society – which was noticeable even for me – leave a rather critical aftertaste.

“Budapest is like a sinking ship, with the rails still painted.” was the comment of a Hungarian fellow student that describes this feeling of controversy well and which stuck in my head. As much as I adore the architectural aesthetics and impressively diverse landscape of this city, I can't help but remember the magnificently rebuilt and maintained national buildings that shine a little too much for me personally.

Nevertheless, I am very grateful for the further education these experiences provided and for the local acquaintances. It's good for me and my profession to have once again chosen this destination for work in ceramics. The stay inspires, motivates and confirms my choice of further ceramic education. After my return to Germany, I continued the work I had started in Hungary and was able to sell some of my ceramic objects at the University Days of the University of the Arts Bremen. I assume that I will go on to undertake many more endeavours in my profession. But my stay abroad in Budapest certainly have contributed to my growing excitement about this work.