

## *My exchange semester in Bodø*

In autumn 2015 I spent 4.5 months in Bodø, Norway. Bodø is a small city with about 50'000 inhabitants and is situated in the north of Norway. The first thing to say about Norway is that many people underestimate the size of the country, including myself. It takes for example more than 17 hours with the train from Oslo to Bodø, therefore most of the Norwegians use airplanes to travel within the country. Norway is quite expensive, similar to Switzerland, but with some exceptions like meat, alcohol and tobacco, which are extremely expensive due to the tax system.

When I arrived at the beginning of August I didn't really know what to expect. I knew that I would live in a student accommodation since the University of Nordland offers guaranteed housing for all the exchange students. At the airport the shuttle service of the university was picking me up and brought me to the student home. At first I was sceptical as my home was about 25-35 minutes away from the university, but right away I realized the advantages of this living situation. The pure Norwegian nature with many amazing places was really close to the house and the city centre was about 10 minutes' walk distance, which already says that the University is outside the city. My room was not too big and not too small, it was comfortable and every room included a toilet and a shower. The kitchens were shared with 3 other people, in my case two girls from Spain and one girl from Norway. This was the most wonderful part of the whole experience, as you get to know so many people from so many different countries and cultures. We had numerous international dinners, we went for hiking trips, fishing trips, boat trips or just to some parties with many Internationals and Norwegians. All in all the living situation was great and I was allowed to experience hundreds of things.

The first week was all about getting to know each other, the university, the city and the culture. The university offers a great program during this week with many events, at the end of this week I felt already a bit home paired with a huge excitement. In August and September it was surprisingly warm and as it was bright for almost 21 hours the opportunities to get to know the nature and other cities were countless. Moreover the university offered several trips for a much cheaper price than tourists would have to pay. Not only the international students made an effort to integrate everybody, also the locals invited me to quite a few events and before the lectures started I already knew half of the students in my classes.

I'm doing a master program in economics, consequently my lectures were mostly within the business school combined with politics. The way of teaching depends on the class and can differ a lot, f.e. the subject "Economics" was more or less a one way class, whereas "Ecological

Economics” was based on interaction and in “Norwegian Politics” the professor changed every two lectures. I also could learn Norwegian in a language class, as my mother tongue is German, written Norwegian is not too far away. The pronunciation and the understanding however is very difficult and different to the languages in central Europe, but then again the English level of 90% of the locals is impressive. The lectures were not extremely hard and not easy either. To professors expected us to read a lot and to think a lot, which I think can't be focused enough. The classes contain on average more ECTS as in Fribourg, but the effort to put in is higher as well, all in all the work-output ratio makes sense compared with Fribourg. The exams were different from what I experienced before. The duration was from 4 to 6 hours and the number of questions was low, which means that a topic development during the exam was asked to get a good grade. Also in most of the classes a midterm paper has to be written, this could take quite a lot of time, depending on the ambitions of course. I learned a lot of things during this semester, from economical models over to the political system of Norway to the importance of Ecological Economics and sustainability. I put a lot of effort in my studies, also because the topics interested me a lot.

I already mentioned the good weather and the brightness at the beginning, however this changed in the second half of the semester. There was more rain and the days got shorter and shorter. In December there was almost no daylight or direct sun but then another spectacle of nature could be admired, the Northern Lights, which was one of the most amazing thing I have ever seen. The darkness was not as bad as I expected, the activities shifted more inside, what was no problem with more than 100 people living in my accommodation. Also the intensity at the university got higher and higher, the darkness made it easier to study. The temperatures are no problem for Swiss people, due to the Gulf Stream it does not get too cold, even though Bodø lies north from the Polar Circle.

My semester in Bodø was an incredible experience and I can recommend it to everyone. The nature in Norway is breath taking and the people are warm and helpful, as soon as you get to know them. The international students make it possible to experience the whole world in a few months, students come from every part of the world to Bodø. The cohesion of the people is amazing and I guess much higher than in bigger cities and universities. Nevertheless the price level is high and some people might struggle with the darkness in November and December, even though Bodø is the city with the most light in the whole world. I want to thank everybody that made this adventure possible.

Sincerely, Sandro Brantschen