

EXCHANGE REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

For my exchange I wanted to push myself to try new things and gain experiences and take on challenges and opportunities that I would probably not be able to have again in life. I chose South Korea because I was always mesmerized by the culture, but it also always felt a bit too much out of reach. I wanted to experience the country by spending some time there. My expectations were to learn something new about the culture but mainly about the architecture and their approach to design and different problems. I felt that as one of the oldest civilizations in the world their view on things would exceed the one, we have in Europe, that the focus would be on more than just the practicality of things.

FIRST DAYS

People do not usually talk about what everything goes into the preparation for exchange. It is an amazing opportunity and experience but sometimes it can get really hard. Before I left, I sacrificed a lot of things in Denmark; I gave up my apartment, I sold all of the furniture that I had here, I quit my job and left all my friends, knowing I would have to start all over again once I come back. Nevertheless, I was head-over-heels excited to start a new journey in the far East.

I flew from Vienna directly to Seoul on 28th of August 2022 because I wanted to have some days before the school starts, to settle in. I arrived at the international airport Incheon and carried my bags to the city center. I booked a hotel in advance. As there were still Covid precautions in South Korea, I had to get tested in a certain period, as a governmental order. One of the hardest things in the beginning was the time difference and the jetlag I experienced. In the beginning the time difference was 7 hours, so when I woke up at seven in the morning, it was midnight back home. My family wished me good morning and went to sleep, and I felt like I was completely alone. It took some time to get adjusted and used to it.

Not a lot of people speak good English in Korea but almost everyone is trying to help and is extremely respectful. When you enter a store or meet someone, as a greeting, you bow to each other. It is considered extremely impolite to give or take something by one hand, especially cards. One should always use both hands and bow their head. It is a thing you learn overtime and consider very normal. When I came back to Europe, I bowed to a lady in McDonalds who gave me my order. I thought it disrespectful when she did not bow back.

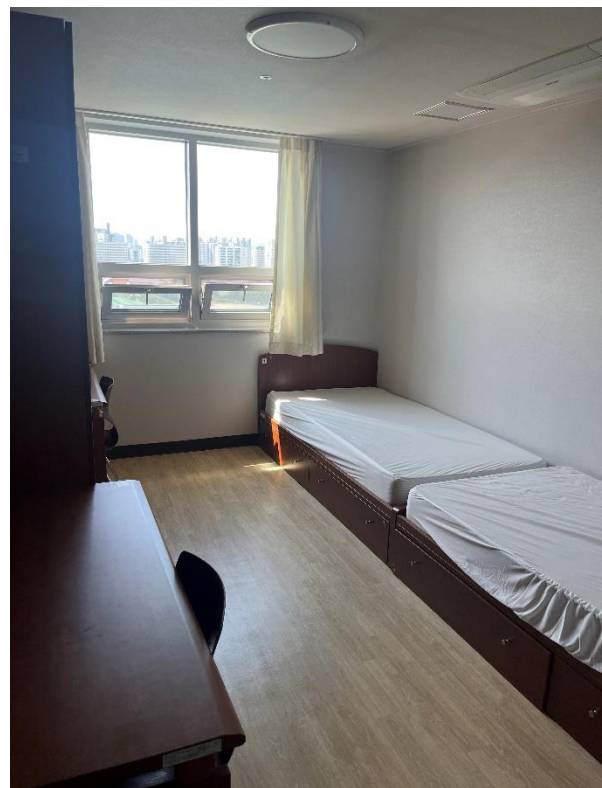
In the metro, buses, and trains you always keep quiet. You should not talk to your friends and if you do, be ready to receive some interesting looks. It was the first time for me that I experienced some kind of racism. Not in a bad way, but probably because they do not see a lot of European people around, they tend to stare to a point where it is very uncomfortable. Sometimes when I sat in a metro, the person next to me stood up and switched places or I experienced under nose whispers from people walking next to me.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING

We were told there was a problem with the housing situation, and we could not get the rooms we applied for. I applied for a double room, where there would be a shared kitchen and bathroom, but I would still have a private room with the bed and my things. I was transferred to a women's dormitory where there was no kitchen, only two beds stuck against each other. At first it was very hard for me because I am a person that needs at least some private space.

My roommate was a girl from Russia, and she studied Electrical Engineering. She was doing two schools at the same time and because she had so much on her shoulders, she hardly ever left the room. In the end we became very close, we helped each other in the hard times and could speak Russian to each other. I am quite happy with how it turned out, and because of her I also realized that the problems I have are almost nothing to the problems other people have.

I prepaid for breakfasts and dinners and the canteen. It was much cheaper than eating out every day or buying all your food (we also did not have a proper kitchen where we could cook). After a few times I stopped going to breakfast because we had the same thing every morning, which was a toast bread, with fried egg and cabbage. There was also an option of full meal like soup and rice with meat but that felt too heavy for me in the morning. The dinners were usually quite good, we were able to experience and taste all kinds of Korean food thanks to it. We always had some kind of soup, rice, and meat. There was no option of choosing vegetarian meals.



MAKING FRIENDS



Immediately on the first day I met a group of other international students that became my group of friends. We would organize trips and hikes together, explore the nightlife in Seoul and helped each other in everything and anything. I made a lot of new friends from all around the world. There were people from countries you would not usually meet in Europe, but also people close to home. I met people from Kazakhstan, Japan, China, Mongolia, Taiwan, Mexico but also people from Germany, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Poland and many more. It

was bit harder to make Korean friends, they seem a bit closed off and shy. They are very afraid to speak English but once they are comfortable, they are fun and easy going. There are some cultural differences. In Europe I am used to hugging my friends whenever saying hello or goodbye, but they do not do that in Korea. As long as they are not in a relationship with someone, they hardly ever touch each other and like to have their personal space uninterrupted.



My Korean classmates, and one of my friends mocking me for how tall I am compared to her.

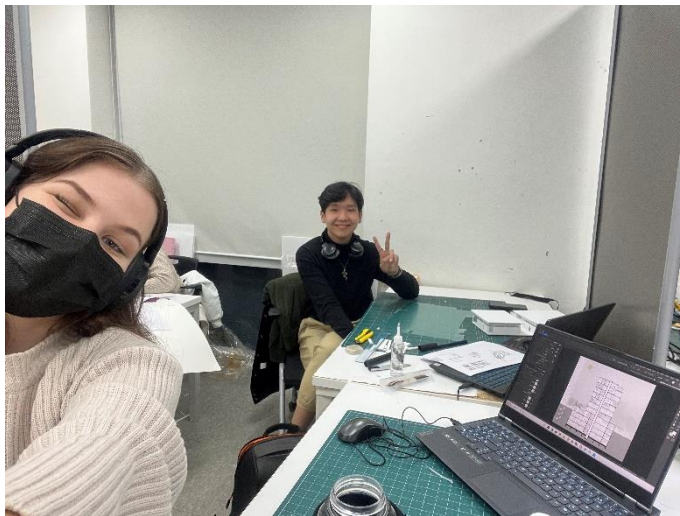


Korean man stopping us on the street and explaining to us that he was a referee in a very important football game against the Netherlands long time ago.

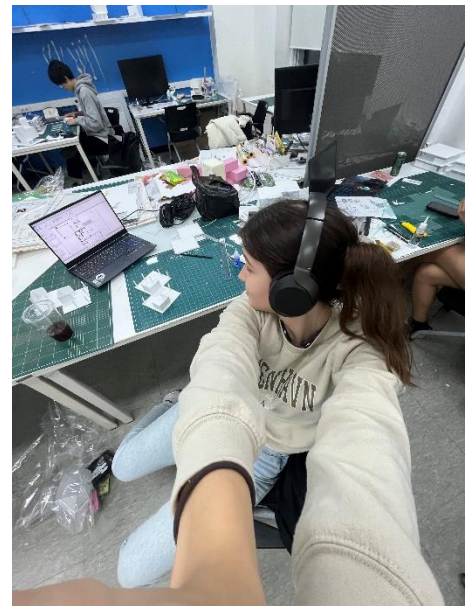
EDUCATION

I took 4 classes in total. There was a problem with one of them as on the list and in the school system it was stated as a English but when we came to class it was fully in Korean, and when we asked the teacher about it, she told us that in the previous semesters, Korean students had hard time understanding so she changed it to Korean and did not let the school know yet. As it was after the deadline for changing courses, we went to speak to the office of student affairs, they said that they were very sorry, that it is a mistake on their end but there is not much they can do. We had two options, stay in the Korean class or find a class, where the teacher would allow us in as the portal was already closed. There was no other architectural class for me to take, and in the end, I had to take Recognition to Korean History for Foreign Students.

I learnt a lot about Korean culture and history and gained an understanding for it. I really enjoyed this class, but I was a bit sad and angry that there was no option for me, to find something in my own program. We learnt about the life on Korean peninsula from as early as the prehistoric era, through all the tribes and dynasties, the wars all the way to the Japanese occupation in the early 20th century. We took two written exams, wrote essays on different topics and movies. English level of this class was okay, the teacher prepared a script every class to present but sometimes it was hard to understand the accent. When you asked a question, you had to speak very slow because the teacher was not very good at improvising.



The only two international, exchange students in the architectural program.

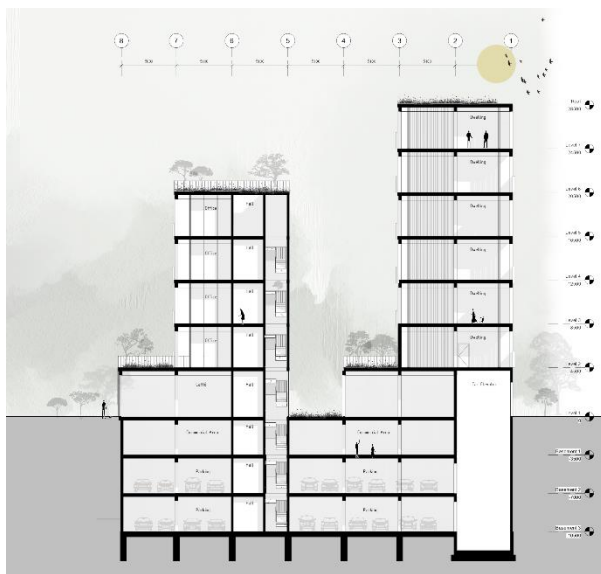


Spending long nights without sleep on our physical models

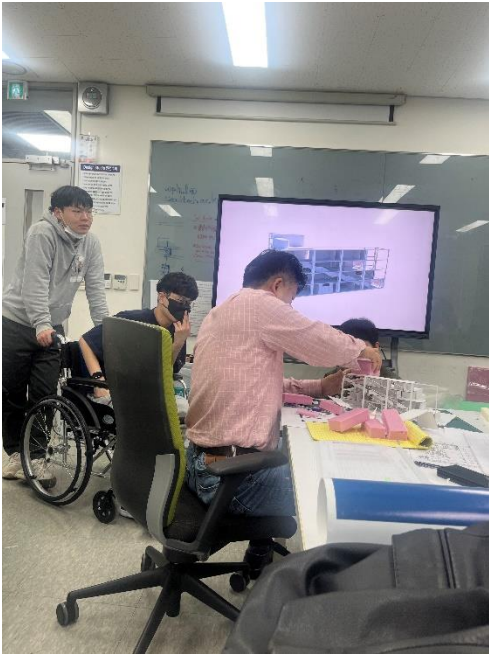
My most important class, that was for double credits was called the Architectural Design Studio II. with Professor Kim Wonpil. In the beginning of the semester did case studies on different topics like buildings in challenging natural environment, buildings focused on the cultural context and one teamwork case study on building similar to the one we were going to design later on in the semester. After that we move on to in depth site analysis, with focus on things like the infrastructure, sound, sun, orientation, views etc. We built a new physical model almost every week, and we had to buy all the materials ourselves. The demands were very high, and we did not sleep at least one night every week to finish our assignments. The final evaluation was judged based on a printed-out poster and the final physical model. We did not have any teaching about the software like Photoshop or Revit. The English level of this class was good, the teacher studied in Texas, and even though it was hard to understand his accent sometimes, you could get the main point most of the time. What I did not like, was that the teacher spoke Korean around 30% of the class because the level of English in the class was very low and some students did not understand English.



For my final presentation I was judged in English and in Korean as the architect (from Metropolitan Government), that our teacher invited, did not speak English.



My second architectural class was called Landscape and Design Architecture. I really enjoyed this class, we learnt about different problems in urban and landscape design and different solutions to how to make things work better. We focused on design for human scale and our teacher was especially fond of the Danish design, Danish urbanism, and Danish architects. We delivered two projects, one that was a group work and one individual one. They both focused on choosing a site, thorough site analysis and virtual implementation of suggested improvements. We also had one final written exam and an essay on a movie we had to watch. The English level of this class was okay, it was quite hard to understand the accent sometimes and the students did not really speak English/they did not want to, but you could always get at least the main points.



Professor cutting into one of the student's models in class.



My classmate presenting her model in class.



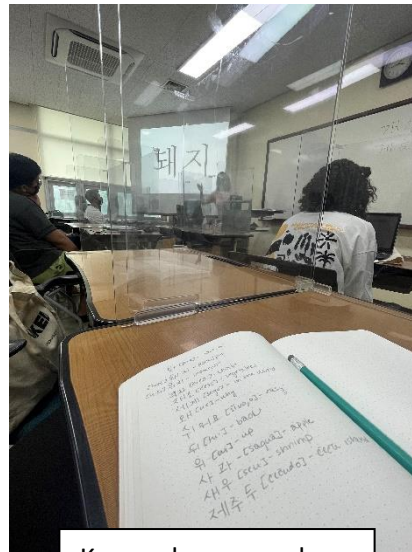
My classmates posing with their models.



My last class was Basic Korean for International Students. We were able to learn the Korean writing pretty fast. The teacher made a really good job of teaching us the most important basics in a relatively short period of time. We were able to introduce ourselves, order at a restaurant or hold a very basic conversation. On top of that she was one of the sweetest people I have ever met, she always tried to help and motivate us. We played a lot of interactive games in the class and for grades we wrote two big written exams and submitted a video of us speaking in Korean.



One of the classrooms.



Korean language class.

CAMPUS

SeoulTech campus is located in Nowon-gu, which is the northern most neighborhood in Seoul. As the city is so huge, it was very time-consuming to travel around the city and it took around 1.5-2 hours to get to the city center from the campus. It is an American style, closed off campus with around 30 buildings, with different purposes. There is three different dormitories, three restaurants, three cafeterias, two libraries, around four convenience stores, gymnasium, private gyms, sports field and many more. There is also different clubs and extra-curricular activities that you can join, I decided to join the Taekwondo club. We had trainings three times a week.



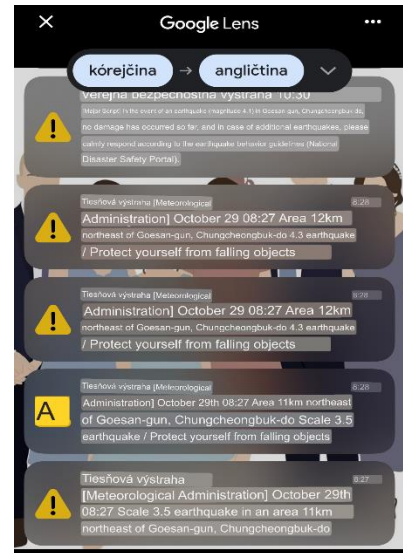
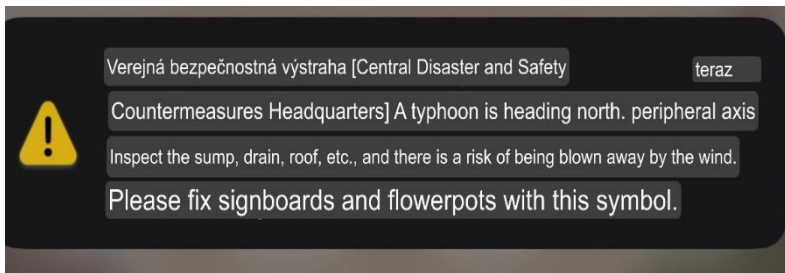
Wearing a taekwondo uniform.



Wearing SeoulTech varsity jacket on campus.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

There was a lot of things that happened outside of school when I was in Seoul. We used to get Public Danger notifications on our phones every day. Usually, it was a covid summary for the past day, but sometimes it was about something else. Right the first month when I arrived there was a typhoon coming from the sea, and we would get notifications warning us not to go outside because we could get blown away by the wind. It was raining nonstop for two weeks but I when I compared it to Denmark, I think people would still bike through that weather here 😊.



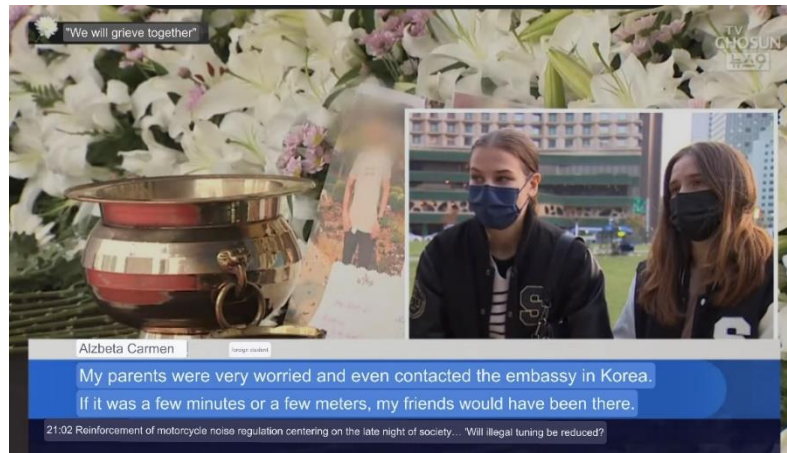
Another notification was about an earthquake that happened in the central Korea, and the officials were expecting it to move up north the metropolitan area of Seoul. But luckily nothing happened.

Anything hardly ever gets stolen in Seoul, I was one of the very unlucky ones and one day, my wallet got stolen. I had everything inside, and that would be my tip, everyone says it and it's true; do not have everything in one place, always have at least one card somewhere outside of your wallet. There is a police-run website in Korea, where people upload pictures of things that they found and I kept searching on there but nothing came up. I went to the police station to file a report. After three weeks they called me from a police station from the opposite side of the city that someone brought my wallet there. Luckily all of the cards and IDs were still there but no money. They took even 7 DKK.



My trip to the police station 😊

But one occasion hit all of the students in Korea very deep. It was the event that took place in Itaewon, Seoul on Halloween 2022. 156 students and young people died in a stampede while celebrating. We went there the night before but when we saw how many people there are we felt very unsafe and I decided not go there the next day. Some of my friends went, but luckily, they all returned home safe. As I was sleeping when it happened, my parents could not reach me for 4 hours and just kept getting terrible news from the TV. They panicked and even called the embassy. The atmosphere after it happened was just so heavy all around Seoul. We went to pay our respects to one of the altars, for all the lost souls.



TIPS

Seoul is a huge city. It is very important to always have a way to know how to get around the city. I would recommend getting an eSIM card with data right away on the airport. As not a lot of people speak English, you must have the translator always on hand, and you will need Korean phone number for different things as well. Google maps do not work very well in Korea and I would recommend using Naver map or Kakao map instead. KakaoTalk app is used for everything in Korea. It is a social media, but you can also do shopping (if you have Korean card), use it as a bank, call a taxi (for taxis the app is called KakaoT, usually foreigners will not be able to stop a taxi on the street, if they see an international, they will just drive by. This way you can order it from your phone). For using the public transport, you can buy Tmoney card in any convenience store (CU, 7-eleven, G25...), you can put money on there and check in – check out in metro and buses. You can also use this card for buying things if you have money on there. Cards like Visa and Mastercard usually work everywhere but sometimes it happens that they do not work so it is always good to have at least some cash on you. It is important to remember that the metro stops working before midnight and only starts working around 5-6 in the morning.

WHAT TO SEE

There is a lot of things to see in Seoul. The culture is very rich and there are palaces, monuments, historical buildings on every corner. You can rent a traditional costume called Hanbok and that way, you do not have to pay an entrance fee to the palaces. I would recommend walking around different neighborhoods like Myeongdong, Insadong, Gangnam, Itaewon, Hongdae... as every single one of them is special and has different vibe.

There is also a lot of things outside of Seoul. I took a trip to Tokyo, Japan and to another city in Korea called Busan. I know a lot of people travelled to Jeju Island to see natural wonders of Korea. There is so many great things to see and experience.

Also, when talking about food. Amongst the things I tried, there is live octopus, larvae, fried chicken stomachs... Explore what you can 😊





CONCLUSION

I am very happy, thankful, and grateful that I got this opportunity to study so far away. I grew as a person and even though it was very hard from time to time I would not change anything. I saw and experienced so many things and met a lot of people I would not have the ability to meet here. I grew as a person, learnt basics of a new language, studied different approaches to things, got humbled a lot of times. It is something I will keep in my heart forever.