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Introduction

Truth to be told I wasn't planning on going for exchange for a long time. The end of 2019 and 2020 were not easy. Some people had canceled their travel plans, including semester exchanges. For me it was different. Because of pandemic I lost my job, SU and was losing savings in no time. Living in Denmark/Copenhagen is many things but no cheap. I was worrying sick that I would have to either drop out or put my studies on hold.

I had been on an exchange before, so I was checking KEA's partner institutions from time to time. Firstly, because I was curious. Later to be able to continue my program. Especially that I was two semesters away from getting my PBA in Software Development at that point. You can easily imagine my surprise when I discovered that on the list, there is not only a university in Poland but also in my home city – Szczecin. West Pomeranian University of Technology came to my rescue.

With support and help from our KEA's mobile exchange coordinator, Anna Dibbern, everything was set and here I am now, writing my report. ☺



Corona-time in Szczecin

After reading introduction you might be wondering... how is that? Going on exchange to your own country? Not only that, to your own city? What kind of value can give such an experience? Well... I might not be new to the city or language but – I got to meet other foreign students and see for myself how is it to study in Poland. Naturally I became a buddy, translator and a guide the moment other students found out that I am a local.

It didn't bother me. I would say that it was quite the opposite. I could rediscover my city and it made me realize how much Szczecin has to offer.

The city is beautiful, it has a harbor, lots of nature around (lakes, rivers, forests, parks – you name it) and it takes around 2 hours to get to Berlin and even less to reach seaside. 😊

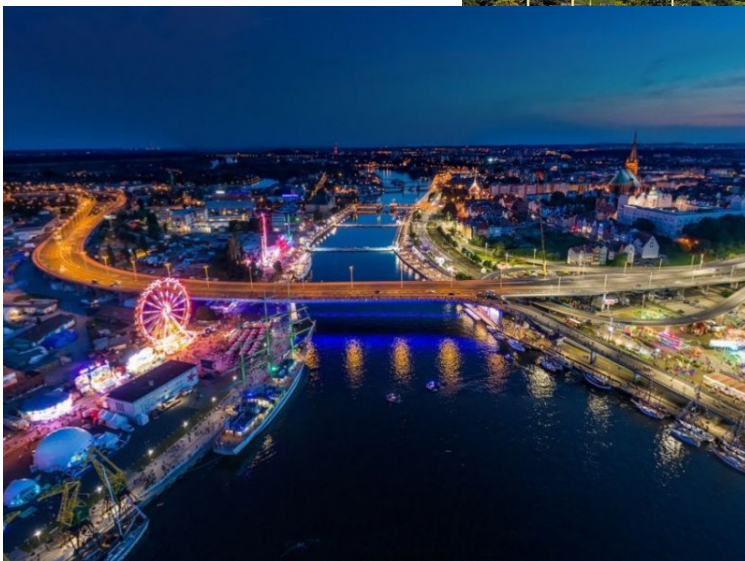
Sounds good? Great but there is more... Poland is so much cheaper than Denmark!

Everything cost less here and, on top of that – being a student grants many discounts.

Imagine that instead of paying between 3 500 - 5 500 DKK for a room in Copenhagen you get a room for half of that amount. Even less if you rent with a friend or decide to live in the dormitory while being on exchange.

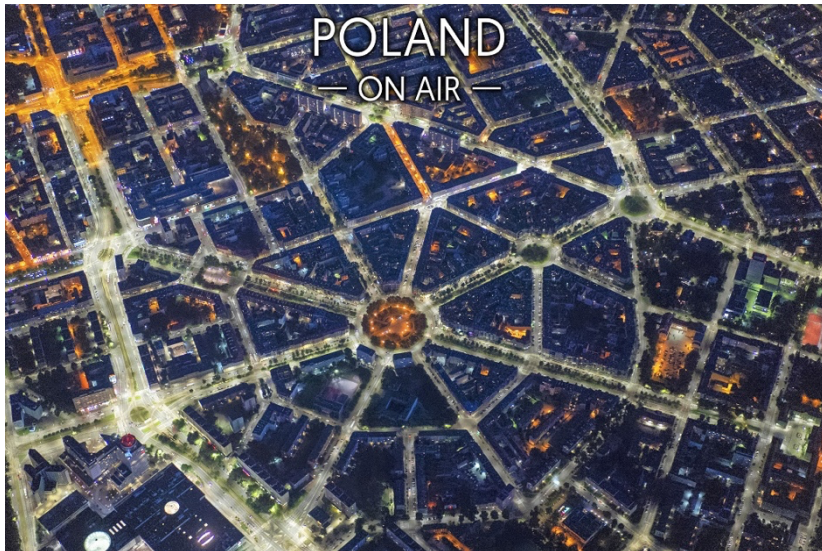
Other examples coming right up – freshly baked bread from a bakery – 5 PLN (up to 15 DKK). Coffee? Around 12 PLN (=25 DKK), monthly ticket for ALL public transportation, student price: 80 PLN (=180 DKK). Not convinced? Let's jump to what we can do in/near Szczecin 😊

harbor





Park Kasprowicza

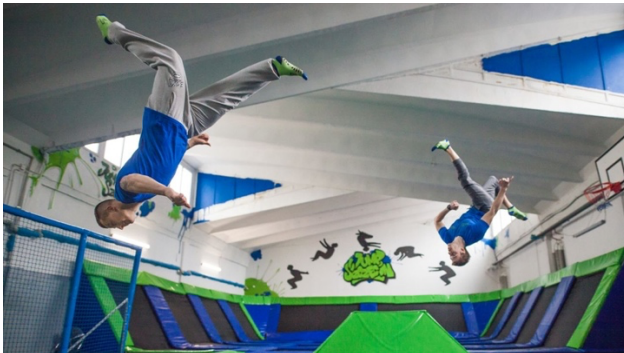


What to do (some attractions were open/closed on and off during pandemic due to restrictions):

- Walking around the city (=sightseeing) and green areas



- Bowling alley, trampoline park, swimming pools, go-carts, gun(=shooting) range



- Visiting parrot house ☺ (or as it is in Polish – “papugarnia”)



- Skiing and ice skating (open through most of the pandemic!)



- Trying out Polish/Szczecin best foods (and not only, list of favorites below)





..ps. to find out more about **pączki** you may google 'FAT THURSDAY' ☺

Studying at WPU

When thinking of going on semester exchange, beside checking up the location, prices, food and flights what is worth spending some time on is investigating what courses are offered at preferred university in a given semester. To be honest, I was a bit surprised when looking through the WPU's list for the first time. It contained over 50 courses... but after reading about them I realized that not all of them are actually taught during the time of my exchange. My advice – make sure that subjects that you are the most interested in are going to be available for certain period of time. Other than that, unfortunately keep in mind that opening a course depends on number of students interested in taking it... so you might be forced to adjust a bit on arrival. Don't worry though, within first two weeks it is completely fine to switch courses if you realized that you made a mistake. 😊

As for courses that I have taken at West Pomeranian University of Technology – to fit the program of my studies back at KEA (for me it was second semester of a Top Up degree in Software Development) I searched for similar ones to match the curriculum. After consultations with representatives from both schools I ended up taking few subjects in Polish and some in English. Also, courses at WPU are focused on certain topics so that they are “worth” less ECTS points which results in students pursuing more courses than in Denmark.

What I had on my list:

- Python programming language,
- Database systems,
- Software Engineering,
- Embedded systems programming [PL],
- Software manufacturing [PL],
- C# programming language,
- Graphical User Interface in .NET,
- Java EE/NET component programming [PL].

I liked Python, Embedded systems programming and Software manufacturing. As for embedded systems – students were given a lot of space when it comes to what they would like to do for the project. I used Arduino uno to build simple RFID system 😊 Python was taught by very friendly, involved and considerate teacher who listened to our suggestions and was preparing interesting exercises, adequate to our group skill level. I would highly recommend this course to anyone.

The other course that I mentioned – software manufacturing – it might not have been the easiest and sometimes not the most engaging, but I learned a lot. The only problem is... this was one of my Polish subjects and I am not sure if it does have an English version available for Erasmus students.

Beside the courses that I liked there are some that I didn't enjoy, and I would advise to think twice before choosing them. Here: C#, GUI and DB systems. The first one is a nice one but unfortunately lectures didn't match laboratories that well and truth to be told, teacher as nice as he is – would need to work on his English level because sometimes it was challenging to get a hand of what he was saying. GUI... maybe that was my high expectations because I

was counting on getting better at front-end related tasks – hence the name I was hoping that this course will be helpful. Unfortunately, we have been following tutorials available online so attending classes felt like complete waste of time.

Last but not least Database systems would be a very informative course but personally I was “repeating” that course because most of topics were realized earlier at KEA.

What is worth to mention is that because of pandemic most of the semester was done remotely as of the governmental restrictions had been introduced.

Conclusions

Closing up my report, I think Poland and Szczecin in particular is a nice place to choose for a semester exchange. Board range of courses offered within Erasmus program should accommodate any student 😊

International office is organizing meetings for all the incoming students, helping them to connect. There is option to get a buddy if someone is afraid of loneliness or just would love to have somebody to show her/him the city. I didn't apply for a buddy but became “unofficial buddy” to other Computer Science students, so I experienced that from a bit different perspective. Still, I think this is a very nice initiative.

WPU's staff is always trying to help, no matter if it is an international office member, coordinator or librarian.

Other possible way of gaining friends (even in the corona-time) were Tandem Meetings that gather foreigners and let them practice speaking in different languages.

It is a great way not to feel alone as they are still meeting up – just online... until everything gets back to so missed normal.

I am glad that I decided to spend those few months in Szczecin, have no regrets and I would recommend it to other students.

PS. Both Tandem meetings and Erasmus student groups (in Szczecin) can be found on Facebook so if you are interested you can join earlier!

