

My experience in Germany, focusing on my integration process, intercultural communication and teamwork.

My integration experience according to the culture shock model:

- My experience was different than the more common: "I go study abroad" since I went to an international university and during the first weeks, I was able to meet a lot of people who are also in this uni for their first time. Being in this context my cultural adjustment process got skewed and I think it went somehow like this:

- Honeymoon and adjustment: since when I arrived most people, I met are also freshies the adjustment process began right at the beginning of the Exchange. This process was also eased by the attitude of the university where basically every student is an international student and by the orientation activities organized by the peer mentors which provided many occasions to meet people and build a social circle, which can help a lot in the overall cultural adjustment process.

- Shared cultural shock and international environment: Also because of the international environment I think my cultural shock was reduced a lot since the culture shift was not from Italy to Germany but from Italy to "international university" with some Germany. Same as before the knowledge and tips given from older students and the "early made" international social circle helped a lot.

- Integration: for me the integration in this new environment was almost seamless. Again, this "faster integration" is also due to the easier to integrate into international environment and the partly separation to the proper German culture, which is also increased in my experience due to my short stay, compared to other students who plan to stay in Germany for multiple years.

Intercultural communication in my experience:

- Formal communication: In my experience, communicating with professors, instructors, staff members was fairly seamless. In my opinion the international environment, to which the professors are used to and the staff members are specifically trained for reduces the possible communication obstacles common between different cultures. I also noticed a friendly attitude from the professors and staff side and a fairly direct communication which is probably the best condition for this type of communication.

- Informal/ social communication: My communication style in an informal/ social context is fairly direct, I don't like to spend an excessive number of words, but I tend to be careful when talking about sensitive topics and I try to make myself sound as less "judgmental" as possible. In my social circle here in the university, I noticed that everyone tries to make themselves as clear as possible, to try to avoid misunderstandings, especially when talking about more delicate topics. I also noticed that we tend to take ourselves less seriously and take discussions with irony, in this way if there are misunderstandings or someone is a bit too much explicit, we can call it off fairly easy and don't take it personally. I found that this way of tackling our communication works fairly well and creates a way of "taking it easy" that prevents conflicts but still allows confrontation and allows a more serious way of communication if needed for important topics.

My teamwork experience:

During this semester I was able to experience some intercultural teamwork by doing a group project in the Human Computer Interaction course. I think that the time spent is not enough to make strong conclusions but from what I experienced, in my group we tried to listen to everyone's opinion during the meetings, be clear with the task and respect all deadlines, trust other members with their assigned tasks, and humbly listen to comments from other group members knowing they're not personal attacks but opportunities to improve the project. In my opinion the group project went fairly well and we were able to work together smoothly, focusing our attention on the work to do the best project possible.

Now I'd like to write about two things that I noticed "united" me and my friends even while being from completely different cultures (ex: Italian, Kazakh, Korean, Bolivian etc.): drinking and internet memes.

- Intercultural popularity of drinking: From my experience I was able to notice how the drinking culture is spread around the world and that, even with many cultural differences, drinking is a worldwide phenomenon (only exception may be Muslim countries). I had the occasion to have fun drinking with people from very different cultures like eastern Europeans, SE Asians, central Americans, Koreans... and it was very interesting to see different ways to approach drinking (ex. Korean drinking games) and the fact that is such a common experience.

- Internet memes and pop culture: In this exchange I was able to see how internet humour is really something intercultural, realizing that I was on the same vibe with people from cultures that I don't have anything to do with, just by saying some random internet memes. I think that this kind of "intercultural internet humour" is very similar to pop culture in its diffusion, but the main difference is that most of the material is made by common people and, with the high speed "viral diffusion" that the web has, it's spread all over the world.

In conclusion I think this exchange experience has been extremely enriching to me, made me in contact with very different cultures and taught me how to approach them and to not give anything by granted since everyone has a different story to tell.