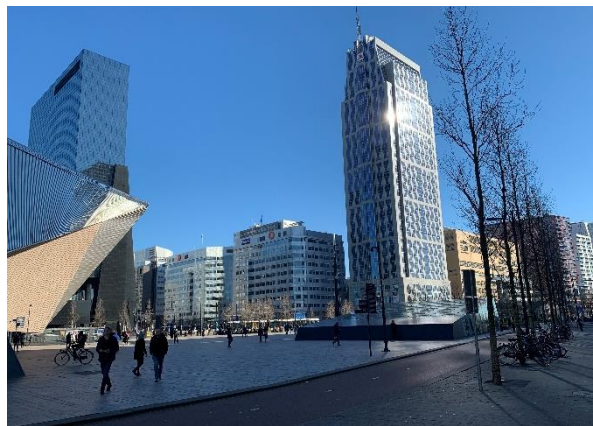


## EXPERIENCE REPORT SPRING SEMESTER 2019

(21<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY 2019 – 13<sup>TH</sup> OF JUNE 2019)



Michèle Leber

CEMS Master in International Management

Master in Accounting and Finance, University of St. Gallen

[michele.leber@bluewin.ch](mailto:michele.leber@bluewin.ch)

+41 79 333 47 87

## INTRODUCTION

---

In spring 2019, I got the chance to spend my CEMS exchange semester from January to June at well renowned Rotterdam School of Management (RSM). The program kicked off end of January with the three-days lasting skill seminar Responsible Global Leadership in Soest – a rather small village 80 kilometres from Rotterdam. During this seminar, we did not only learn about the importance of global responsibility, but also got to know our fellow CEMS students from all around the world. Our CEMS cohort counted 55 people from more than 20 countries and was therefore a rather big one. Hence, there was a broad offer of different social activities organized by the CEMS-Club Rotterdam during the whole semester. If you are looking for a challenging university at a high academic level paired with ambitious people who also know how to enjoy social life, a CEMS exchange semester at Rotterdam School of Management is the right choice.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the exchange semester in Rotterdam at Rotterdam School of Management. You can contact me via E-Mail ([michele.leber@bluewin.ch](mailto:michele.leber@bluewin.ch)) or via phone (+41 79 333 47 87).

## ROTTERDAM

---

Dutch cities are well-known for their charming historic city centres which are shaped by canals (the so-called “Grachten”) and the nice houses at these canals. As Rotterdam was bombed in 1940 during the World War II, the city lost most of its charming houses close to canals. Therefore, the city-centre is rather modern and better known for its big harbour (the biggest in Europe), the Erasmus Bridge, its skyscrapers and fancy (sometimes a bit crazy) architecture. Nevertheless, Rotterdam also offers places which still are charming. Some of my favourites places in the city are:

- Kralingse Plas – a parkside at the lake in Kralingen neighbourhood
- De Boeg – an amazing view of the Erasmus Bridge
- Witte de Withstraat – a street full of people enjoying social life
- Willhelminaplein and the area around Hotel New York – the city from the other side
- Fenix Food Factory – a place which tastes good
- Euromast – if the city gets too flat for your taste, take a ride 100 metres up to the sky

Rotterdam is a very good starting point to travel around The Netherlands. During my exchange semester, I travelled to the following places (starting point for time indication is Rotterdam main station):

- The Hague – the capital city and home of the Dutch royal family – 60 mins by metro
- Scheveningen – a beachside 15 mins from The Hague – 75 mins by metro and bus
- Amsterdam – very touristy but a must-see – 60 mins by train

- Utrecht – like Amsterdam, but smaller, good for shopping – 40 mins by train
- Leiden – very nice Grachten and very charming – 30 mins by train
- Keukenhof – the world-famous tulips garden – 2 hours by trains and bus
- Texel – a wonderful island surrounded by the northern sea – 3 hours by car and ferry
- Kinderdijk – UNESCO world-heritage wind mills park – 60 mins by bike

Although the semester was very demanding academic-wise (34.5 ECTS), I was able to also travel internationally two times without decreases in academic performance. Therefore, you will find time to travel around although you study at demanding RSM.

## **ARRIVAL**

---

When you plan to travel to Rotterdam by plane, I recommend you to book your flight to Amsterdam Schiphol. From Amsterdam Schiphol you can take the train directly to Rotterdam, which lasts approximately 30 mins and only costs around € 13. After your arrival at the Schiphol airport, I recommend you to directly buy an OV Chipkaart (costs € 7.50, not refundable). The OV Chipkaart is a prepaid system – so you can top it up with money at any train station you want (minimum amount needed to enter the train station is around € 20). Please be aware: between Amsterdam Schiphol and Rotterdam main station runs the so-called Intercity Direct train. This train is a fast-paced train which demands a so-called “Zueslag” (€ 1.40) which you have to pay if you commute with this train. Do not forget to pay this “Zueslag” when you take the Intercity Direct to avoid an additional fee of € 10 when caught.

## **HOST UNIVERSITY**

---

Rotterdam School of Management is part of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, which is well-known for its academic research and studies. The Erasmus University with its almost 30'000 students is located in Rotterdam's district Kralingen, which is one of my favourite neighbourhoods in the city. In contrast to the rather industrial and sterile Rotterdam, the Kralingen neighbourhood offers charming places like Kralingse Plas (a lake where you can swim, sail, picknick in the park or just have a sundowner at one of the restaurants at the lakeside) or streets with restaurants and cafés. The campus itself offers various facilities such as a food-court, a library, a gym, a theatre pavilion, a SPAR grocery store, a bike store, a hairdresser and several cafés. Although some campus buildings are newly built, most of them are rather old. I must admit; some of the rooms we had classes in did not have windows – which was not very comfortable when having an eight hours course in this room. The university can be reached well by bike (approximately 5 kilometres from Rotterdam main station which is around a 20 mins bike ride). Like University of St. Gallen, RSM is a demanding university which will keep you busy during the whole semester. When choosing your courses, I would recommend you to not choose more than 3 other courses besides the CEMS International Business Project (IBP). I achieved 34.5 ECTS including the

IBP and felt that this was an appropriate amount of work but a bit more intensive than at University of St. Gallen as the performance record was more fragmented. The Dutch grading system ranges from 1 to 10, however it is very unlikely to get a grade over 9 since there is no social curve. Fortunately, the translation to the grades of University of St. Gallen is generous: With a 7.5 (achievable) you get a 5.5 at University of St. Gallen.

RSM	ECTS Grade	HSG	HSG-description
8.5 - 10.0	A	6	excellent
7.5 - 8.4	B	5.5	very good
7.0 - 7.4	C	5	good
6.5 - 6.9	D	4.5	satisfactory
6.0 - 6.4	E	4	marginal
< 6.0	F	< 4	fail

## ACADEMICS

---

RSM divides its academic year in five blocks. One block lasts approximately six weeks and ends with an exam period of one to two weeks. While the autumn semester only has two blocks, the spring semester obtains three blocks in total. It is highly recommended by RSM, to not take more than two courses in one block during the spring semester as the IBP also needs to be done during the spring semester. Therefore, I decided to take every block one course besides the IBP and the skill seminars. The following gives you an overview about the courses I chose:

### Management Challenges in International Organisations - mandatory

Global Management Practice

Dr. M. Shemla

7.5 ECTS (CEMS)

English

Participation, final exam, team project, individual cultural immersion

- This course was very work intensive as it required not only a lot of presence in class and a demanding team project, but also high individual effort out of the classroom. The course focused on the question how to manage people and teams in global contexts. The objective of the course included making the us (students) aware of our own culture and how our culture influences the way we see the world in order to gain greater intercultural sensitivity and empathy. Therefore, we must work in highly diverse teams for a team project during the whole block. Besides, we were assigned individually to face a personal weakness in a specific situation out of our comfort-zone (individual cultural immersion). After facing this situation, we must

write an individual report about our experience, our reactions, our behaviour and our learnings regarding this situation. At the end, we had to write a final written exam about all topics discussed in the classroom. As this course is a mandatory one in spring semester, you cannot choose whether to take it or not. But if you are open for self-reflection and interested in intercultural behaviour, it offers you a great platform to discuss about interesting topics. The most practical course I took at RSM – even though it required a lot of personal effort.

### **A Managerial Perspective on Mergers & Acquisitions – not recommended**

Elective

Prof. Dr. T. Reus

6 ECTS (CEMS)

English

Participation, team project, five individual assignments

- My personal interest in Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A's) let me choose this course as an elective CEMS course. This was a great experience as I could get in touch within this elective course with non-CEMS students at RSM, too. Unfortunately, this course was the most academic course I have ever been participating. Although this topic is a very practical one and many M&A cases from daily business life exist, the teacher held a rather sterile course about it. Moreover, the professor himself was never participating in an M&A deal personally. Hence, I felt disappointed and could not really "believe" in the professor's sayings about the topic and his opinion – although he is a renowned researcher at RSM about M&A.

### **Corporate Venturing – not recommended**

Exclusive

Prof. Dr. V. van de Vrande

7.5 ECTS (CEMS)

English

Participation, five individual assignments, group report, group presentation

- Unfortunately, this course was a very academic one, too – evidenced by the amount of academic papers we must read for every course day (minimum five research papers, each 20 to 25 pages). Moreover, every course day we must take a small test based on the papers read. As this fact is already a bit childish in my opinion, the level of difficulty of these test-questions was not fair, too. Positive were the five guest speakers who were invited at different course days. This made the topic a bit more practical.

## LIVING IN ROTTERDAM

---

### Weather

To be honest; you should not expect nice weather in Rotterdam. Most of the time it either is windy, rainy, cold or all together. When I arrived in January, it also snowed for several days. Therefore, bring some weatherproof clothes with you – also for biking if you plan to.

### Public Transportation / Biking (“Fietsen”)

The offer of public transportation in Rotterdam is broad and reliable. Nevertheless, as Rotterdam is flat and everything close by, I would recommend to either buy a second-hand bike or to rent a bike at Swapfiets (<https://swapfiets.nl/en/>). Do not forget to bring a waterproof backpack to store your laptop and books when you want to bike to university. Besides, I recommend you to buy an OV Chipkaart (<https://www.ov-chipkaart.nl/home.htm>) as soon as you arrive at the airport. Uber is also available in Rotterdam.

### Apartments

The housing market in Rotterdam is very competitive. Therefore, I would start searching for an accommodation early enough. Personally, I lived in a furnished studio, offered by Housing Anywhere, close to the main station in the city-centre of Rotterdam. Although the distance to the university is around 5 kilometres, I really enjoyed living in the city-centre. Several options for finding your accommodation exist:

- Shared apartments (see Facebook groups; RSM Exchange Students, Housing Rotterdam RSM)
- Student housing (on campus, high-priced, not in the city-centre, home students preferred)
- Rotterdam2Stay (fully furnished studios available, highly competitive, high-priced)
- Housing Anywhere (fully furnished studios available, highly competitive, high-priced)
- The Students Hotel (close to university and city-centre, additional facilities, high-priced)

### Money

I was surprised, that most of the stores in the city-centre and at university did not accept VISA or Mastercard (not even the big grocery stores like Albert Heijn or Aldi). Therefore, you have the option to either open a Dutch bank account or pay cash.

## **PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS – WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT MISS OUT**

---

### **Culture:**

- Market Hall Rotterdam
- Architecture around Market Hall
- Kinderdijk Wind Mills, UNESCO world-heritage
- The Hague Royal Palace
- Grachten of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Leiden
- Beachside at Scheveningen
- Keukenhof – Tulips Garden
- Harbour of Rotterdam
- Northern Sea at Texel Island

### **Cafés:**

- Jordy's Bakery Kralingen (brunch)
- Coffeelicious
- Lilith (Pancakes)
- Baker & Moore
- NOC NOC
- Mart Café
- Urban Bakery

### **Restaurants:**

- Restaurant De Tuin
- BOMM
- Dudok
- CEO Baas
- Fenix Food Factory
- Holy Smoke