



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Study programme WUR	Health & Society
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	28-08-2023 until 22-12-2023
Exchange destination: University	University of Helsinki
Faculty	Social sciences
Country	Finland
City	Helsinki

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I have always wanted to live abroad for a while and was looking for new experiences, a different environment, and a fresh perspective on life.

What is the reason you chose for this country/university?

I had never been to Nordic countries before. The nature and cold seemed beautiful and the prospect of living in a winter landscape appealed to me. Besides that, I relied heavily on my intuition and feelings when making the decision.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination?

Helsinki is easily accessible by plane.

4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	Critical perspectives on diversity and power relations	5	Reflecting on sense of self and position in relation to systems of oppression. Exploration of experiences that reflect inequalities in society and how they may impact social work interventions.	4	To pass the course, you are required to create a learning portfolio. The classes were highly interactive, involving a lot of discussions and verbal engagement. Interactive learning materials, such as listening to podcasts or watching videos, were integral components of the course
2	Theme III: Persons and Social Relations	5	Anthropological approach to persons and personhood. Discussion of various theories and viewpoints through reading ethnographic materials.	3	We didn't receive explicit explanations or lectures; instead, we had to read a section before each class and essentially shape the lesson ourselves. The format involved engaging in discussions about the text and generating questions. I found this challenging at the beginning, but towards the end, I came to appreciate it, as anthropological questions often lack a straightforward answer. It was a master's level course, and you could pass it by writing a 4000-word essay.
3	Sociological Imagination	5	Each lecture covered a different renowned sociologist and their theories, sparking discussions on whether these ideas remain relevant in contemporary society.	5	The teacher had a captivating way of presenting, and clearly outlined his expectations of students. To pass the course, you had to write an essay, choosing from the sociologists discussed in class and the associated central question with that person from the lecture discussions.
4	Political Opinion	5	Exploring the importance of moral and values for political reasoning, identifying	2	I found the course to be a bit disappointing. To pass, you had to write 2 essays, give a presentation, and also write a learning diary. To be

			explanations for political behaviour, assessing different impacts on voting behaviour.		honest, I felt a lack of neutrality in the course; you could sense that the instructors were quite politically biased.
5	Digital Media and Society	5	Special characteristics of digital media, research concepts related to it, development trends in digital production and use and their impact on social and cultural practices.	4	The teacher could present information in an engaging manner. The content wasn't necessarily very new to me, and the lectures were lengthy (2.5 hours). To pass the course, you had to write an essay.
6	Gender, Politics and Media	5	Key moments of feminist politics, core concepts of feminist theories around gender, politics and media.	2	I didn't find the content of the lectures very interesting. To pass the course, you had to write an essay and give a presentation as part of a group.

What is it like to study there?

E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material.

The teaching format differs from Wageningen. In Wageningen, you receive information in a lecture and process it in the exam. In Helsinki, you don't necessarily get explanations; it's more about extensive talking and discussing topics. I didn't take exams here, only wrote essays. I would say that the workload is lower than in Wageningen. I usually had 3 days where I had to be on campus, and around 10 contact hours per week.

What is the culture of the university?

E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with the WUR?

The atmosphere between teachers and students is informal. During lectures, there is plenty of engagement with local students as well as international students.

What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

On campus there are lunch spots that provide a buffet for only €2.85, and there is gym with multiple locations and group classes. The introduction week is very well organized and they help you with some documents and signing up for courses during that week.

5.Housing-travelling-living

What are the possibilities for housing?

E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?

When applying to the university you could choose between Unihome and HOAS, and you communicate your preferences there. They then make you a one-time offer. If you don't accept it, you have to find something else yourself. I went through Unihome because I wanted a studio, and I was very satisfied with this. I also spoke to people who had declined the offer, and they were able to find something (with a bit more effort).

What is the culture of the country like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

Finnish people polite yet somewhat introverted, so spontaneous conversations are not likely to happen quickly, and in public transport, no one will sit next to you. There are some local dishes, but I did not like them that much, and what struck with me is that there are buffets everywhere during lunch.

Helsinki felt very safe, and there are low crime rates. Even at night, I felt safe waling on the streets as a women. In the gym and at some other places you have to take of your shoes and leave them at the entrance.

And then of course there is the sauna culture. Many apartment complexes (including my student residence) have a communal sauna.

Helsinki felt very relaxed to me; everyone is themselves, life is less hurried than in the Netherlands. Nature is important, and there is greenery and parks everywhere.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)

I found the public transportation very efficient and convenient. From my accommodation, a bus came every 7 minutes. There are buses, trains, metros, and trams. Everything ran very punctually. For students, the cost for unlimited travel in two zones is around 40 euros per month. Taxis are expensive, but you can also use Uber and Bolt.

6. Expenses

Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

E.g. you can also indicate price differences (higher/lower/equal) in comparison to the Netherlands.

Ticket there: around 180-200 including suitcases, but I postponed booking so you can probably get it cheaper.

Visa if applicable: -

Vaccinations if applicable: -

Insurances (extra, if applicable): -

Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation: I paid 615 a month for a studio of 23m²

Groceries: I'd say the same as in the Netherlands, but healthy products are cheaper than unhealthy products. Alcohol is expensive though.

Public transport: 40 euro per month

Restaurant/going out for dinner: regular restaurants are the same price for food as in the Netherlands, however, be prepared to pay at least 10 euros for a glass of wine.
Daytrips/sight-seeing: 1,5hour bus trip to nearby town: 16 euros, Ferry to Tallin: 25 euros, sleeping cabin in train to Lapland: 150euro per person.

Additional remarks regarding expenses?

At ESN parties there are sometimes student prices, but drinking when going out is expensive. (7-10 euros for a beer)

7. Free time

What are must-sees in the area?

E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?

Nature; Nuuksio national park (outside Helsinki but reachable with public transport), Lammassaari Nature Boardwalk (within Helsinki)

Saunas: definitely Sompasauna (free, community held), Allas sea pool, Löyly

Citytrips: day trip to Tallinn, cruise to Stockholm, trip to Lapland

In the city: café regatta, suomenlinna fortress

What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth a visit?

I believe that, besides tourist attractions, it's more about lifestyle in Helsinki. So definitely go to the sauna and try ice swimming.

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time?

E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?

Try to go out as much as you can during the daytime to avoid seasonal depression.

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

At the end of the exchange, I did struggle with the early darkness, so I would advise you to take vitamin D supplements and stay active, as well as make plans to meet people. That way, it's definitely manageable. I also only got to know the nicest people halfway through, so start making friends early because time really flies.

What is your best memory of your time abroad?

I personally could truly appreciate the city, the buildings and nature, and just being in a different environment and finding everything beautiful is already a good memory in itself. Additionally, I did do so much and saw a lot, and met many wonderful people.

9. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
Name/e-mail	Puck.rutten@wur.nl	