



EXCHANGE REPORT

Name

Przemysław Jan Godlewski

Year and term for exchange

2021, autumn semester

Exchange university

ETH Zurich

Degree programme

Master in Architecture

ETH – Zurich, architecture

Before departure

I wanted to apply for the exchange semester since I strongly believe that it would have allowed me to develop new skills and acquire new academic and cultural insights in the field of my profession as an architect. I was hesitating between few universities, but my final choice was set on ETH Zurich due to its good reputation in the field and also because of the Switzerland as a country where I can practise my language skills.

Upon arrival

I arrived in Zurich two weeks before the semester start because of the intensive German course provided by the university. If someone wants to develop their skills in this language it is a perfect option since the classes last 5 hours a day and are focused mostly on speaking which allows one to pick up basics quickly. It is also great opportunity to get 2 credits and meet a lot of different international students from different fields. What is more coming to Zurich earlier than planned semester is also recommended since the city itself is beautiful during that time.

Financials

Zurich is an pretty expensive to live. It is definitely the most expensive city in Switzerland and one of the most expensive in Europe. As an exchange student I was granted a SEMP scholarship, which in total was 1900 CHF. As a foreign student in Sweden, I am not entitled to CSN, so living and traveling in Switzerland was quite difficult, but definitely possible with combination with private savings. Total expensed including accommodation, food, materials for university and traveling came to approximately 1500 CHF per month. The price is mostly dictated by the accommodation one is living in. For mine I was paying 545CHF per month. I also ate the lunch at the university's mensa, where the meals costed around 7 CHF, which for the Swiss prices is a bargain. Another cost that can be quite easily stressed is public transport. One must be prepared to spend 85CHF on it per month. What is more I would strongly recommended getting a Halb-tax, which is a half faire card, which allows to buy train tickets for half of its normal price. Halb-tax costed 180CHF for a year, but it paid off very soon in my case.

Additional costs at the Architecture faculty that one have to be aware of are costs for so called seminar-week. You choose one of the seminars in the beginning of the semester which is paid additionally, due to the fact it usually includes field trips. Prices for seminar week varies between 100CHF up to 2000CHF. For mine seminar week, where I got to learn how to work with glass, I paid 500CHF.

Accommodation

I got my accommodation granted from the university, so I did not have to think about it too much. The whole procedure was very easy and managed through one online form. The only thing to be aware of are deadlines for applications. My accommodation was simply a dorm for exchange students from both

ETH and UZH. As mentioned before, I paid 545CHF monthly, which is definitely very cheap for Zurich.

I was living in a room and shared both kitchen and bathrooms. Since there was only one kitchen and 160 housemates, the problem of cleaning became quite annoying in the very beginning. Even though there was a cleaning staff, common areas were not possible to be kept clean.

Even though there were some drawbacks, the biggest advantage is that one is allowed to meet a lot of different people with different cultural and educational backgrounds, which is extremely enriching.

University and studies

ETH is located in two main campuses – Centrum and Honggerbegr. School of architecture is placed in HIL building at Honggerberg. Both of the campuses are connected with free shuttle service. Some of architectural studios are also located in a bit separated building – ONA at Oerlikon. My studio was one of them so ONA became my main place of work in the end. Since I was staying at the Altsetten districts, my travel time to the university took approximately 15 min to Honggerberg and 30 min to ONA, which worked perfectly fine.

University provides its students with additional facilities. ASVZ is a sports organisation that is in charge of sports infrastructure. Students of ETH have an opportunity to use gym and other sports facilities without any additional costs.

Courses

To fulfil my study programme I had to take 30 credits, which is quite a lot as for ETH. ETH suggests taking 20-26 credits per semester. Design studios as a course of main occupation awards 14 credits. Most of the seminars and lectures are either for 2 or 1 credit, which while added up make a whole week of full-time classes. I personally believe that a good opportunity to learn something new and be granted 2 credits is an intensive German course before the start of the semester. Not only is it great from a didactic perspective, but also allows to take less courses during the semester. What is more one can meet a lot of students from different backgrounds before the start of the semester. Another great chance to get credits is so-called Ringvortagung – a set of lectures with professors of ETH. Lectures are not only very interesting, but also there is no examination after the semester, which gives additional 2 credits extra.

- Studio : Architectural Design V-IX: Informal Learning Spaces (M. Kaijima / F. Persyn)

Studio work concentrated on improvement of learning environment of ETH facilities. Interesting because of working in scale 1:1 and all the workshops that it involved.

- Seminarwoche Herbstsemester 2021

Absolutely amazing. I participated in glassblowing workshops for a week. We worked with glass as a material learning its characteristics.

- Ringvortagung Entwurf und Architektur: Architektur von...

Interesting set of lectures with professors from ETH. This semester's main theme is "failure". Teachers cover this uncomfortable topic based on examples from their own practices giving the students the knowledge of learning through failure.

- Serendipity: Sourced Waters

My favourite course this semester. We worked with analogue middle-format cameras and sound recorder in sources of potable water close to Zurich. The result was creation of soundscape combined with developed picture.

- History of Art and Architecture: Exhibiting Architecture

Seminar combining set of lectures with a proposal for an architectural exhibition. During lectures we had a chance to talk to both curators and artists understanding their position in the process of exhibition making. Personally I believe that this seminar involved too much work as for 2 credits.

- Integrierte Disziplin HS21 im Bereich Landschaft und Urbane Studien (LUS)

Course integrated with the studio work. I had to take it due to the specificity of my design studio.

- History and Theory in Architecture IX (Ursprung)

Easy to follow set of lectures. This year topics of lectures were based on the theme of crisis.

- Basic German 2-5; A1-A2: Intensive Course

Intensive course before the start of the semester. I would strongly recommend taking it.

- German 5; A2-B1: Einstieg ins Niveau B1

German course during the semester as a continuation of an intensive course.

City and country

I truly enjoyed the city. I think Zurich has several different faces. It is economically based city, though with many post-industrial places. Because of pandemic and workload at the university my traveling was rather limited to local hikes and very few trips. I can absolutely say that Swiss nature is amazing and worth exploring. The country itself is very diverse. German, French and Italia cultures are visible not only in language but also in behaviours of people.

Leisure and social activities

Zurich as a city facilitate all cultural and social activities. It is worth to be there a bit earlier to enjoy the summer and swimming in river Limmat. What is more Switzerland is a paradise for hikers. There are plenty of easily accessible hiking trails. As I mentioned before the University provide students with access to free gym, which is a nice addition.

What is more while coming to Switzerland one should try out skiing. All the skiing facilities are pretty expensive, but their quality is beyond expectations. Slopes are prepared beautify and there are not so many people skiing. If you have your own skiing equipment I would highly recommend taking it with you, rental is usually very expensive (70CHF per day).

Sustainability

You can travel to Zurich using several connections to get to Switzerland. I was traveling to Zurich from Poland and unfortunately train connections involved 5 or 6 changes on the way. In the end I took a bus, which not only was a sustainable alternative to plane, but in the end the cheapest option possible.

Public transport in Zurich is also well developed. And since the city itself is not very big one can get wherever they want without bigger problems. What is more there is a network of city, electrical bikes, which works perfectly and is one of the most efficient way of commuting.

Other recommendations and observations

I would recommend using all free time in-between studies to enjoy the city and the country. In the end meeting a lot of people from different backgrounds is the best thing that you will take back after your exchange.