

**FS REPORT****Name**

Ludvig Nordling

Year and term for exchange

VT24VT24

Country for the project

South Africa

Degree programme

Integrated Product Design – Innovation Management and Product Development

Field Study at a truck manufacturer in Durban, South Africa

Before departure

We were looking for an exciting master thesis, and this was the perfect opportunity! We found the opportunity when one of us reached out to an alumni who had previously conducted a field study in South Africa. The alumni told us to talk to a professor who was very engaged in KTH's collaboration with African universities. The professor was equally as excited as we were when we reached out and she told us that she had the perfect thesis for us. She and a couple of KTH researchers had just initiated a research project with a Swedish truck manufacturing company with a plant in Durban, South Africa. She suggested that we could be a part of the project's initial phase of "Case South Africa". We sent the project group a personal letter where we described why we wanted to be a part of the project and then we were onboard!

Preparations included the ordinary admin for a master thesis, but besides that we did vaccinations and tried to learn as much about the country as possible. No visa is needed for visits less than 90 days in South Africa.

Upon arrival

We got a lot of help prior to our arrival. We got tips on where to stay, what to do, transport, they tracked our flight etc. We really felt welcome.

We arrived on a Monday and were at the office Tuesday morning, so we started right away! We came prepared with a presentation but quickly realized that we had to get to know the place and the employees before starting our research which was good. The people at the factory welcomed us and showed us around. We went to restaurants, football games, bars. We had a great time! At the plant, one of the managers let us stay in his office, so we had a great experience sitting next to him every day.

Financials

South Africa is generally affordable if you compare it to Sweden. It does, however, depend on where you stay, what you eat, transport etc. If you want to, South Africa can be really cheap. We, however, had quite a comfortable everyday life. I would estimate that the meals we ate were half the price they would have been in Sweden.

Credit cards work great in South Africa, so no need to take out cash.

Accommodation

We stayed in an airbnb which was very convenient. There are hotels even though they are more expensive. What you should be mindful of is the area in which you stay as these can differ significantly.

Project

The project was a part of a larger research product called "Fair and Circular Innovation Ecosystems" which is an initiative by KTH, Volvo AB, Umeå Kommun and University of Cape Town - Graduate

School of Business. The aim of the larger project is to compare two innovation ecosystems around Volvo plants in two very different contexts: Umeå in Sweden and Durban in South Africa. Our project was part of Case South Africa and was conducted at the Volvo plant in Durban. The aim of our project was to design a potential innovation ecosystem to support the Volvo plant in Durban in a socially just transition to a circular economy. Our findings will also support the larger project in the initial face and hopefully we will continue to support the big project with our experiences.

During our field study we worked closely with Volvo for 6 weeks. Every weekday we took an Uber to the plant, since public transport is non-existent in Durban, and we sat in the office of the Quality & Environment Manager who was also involved in the larger project and basically became our contact person in Durban. Our formal contact person was a Swedish professor at the Graduate School of Business in Cape Town and he supported us a lot during our preparations before arriving in South Africa and also during our stay with practical questions. The last 2 weeks of the Field Study we stayed in Cape Town and started our analysis work of the data collected in Durban. We had a half time presentation of our work with representatives from Volvo in Durban and Sweden over Teams and we will have a final presentation of our findings for Volvo in June as well.



Country

We had done a lot of research before-hand in order to understand the context of South Africa. The history of the country, especially apartheid, still has a huge impact on the country which we believed was very important to be aware of. It is the most unequal country in the world with an extremely high unemployment rate and very high rates of crime. All of these things were important for us to understand in order to treat people with respect and also for our own safety. We also did research on the cultural differences between Swedes and South Africans, even though South Africa has a very large diversity of different cultures which cannot be generalised in the same way. One of the biggest cultural shocks we experienced was that South Africans are very relationship oriented on the contrary to Swedes, who are very task oriented when it comes to work. This meant that the first week at the Durban plant was about getting to know the people before we could start working on our thesis with interviews etc. However, the people we got to know at the plant were also very welcoming and took us with them even after working hours to show us the life in the townships in Durban. The townships are the suburbs where black people were forced to live during apartheid and being able to experience these areas with locals was an invaluable experience.



Leisure and social activities

We explored as much as we could! We did hiking in Drakensberg, safari in Imfolozi, 4x4 drive in Lesotho and much more. South Africa is a wonderful place with many things to see and do.

Local activities we did were rugby games, football games, restaurants, bars, DJ events and more. The people at the factory were very kind and took us to many of these things and showed us around. Many of the things we saw are not the regular tourist attractions which was really exciting.

Sustainability

As South Africa can be quite dangerous, we decided to commute to the factory by car. If there would have been a safe way of transport such as bus, train or likewise we would have done that instead.

Our research studied how to develop just and circular ecosystems in developing countries. By just, we mean that economic benefits and burdens of circular economy needs to be distributed equally. By circular economy, we mean re-using, recycling or repairing products. This mainly contributes to three of the UN's sustainability development goals, 8, 10 and 12. Decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities and responsible consumption and production.

Other recommendations and observations

Go to South Africa!!