

Erasmus Exchange Program Report

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Degree: 2nd Year Master's in Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Sending Institution: Politechnika Lubelska (Lublin University of Technology), Poland

Receiving Institution: Université de Namur, Belgium

Period of Mobility: 29/08/2023 – 30/06/2024

Introduction

As part of my Erasmus exchange program, I had the incredible opportunity to spend my second year of the Master's in Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Université de Namur in Belgium. This report highlights my academic, cultural, and personal experiences during the mobility period. My goal was to deepen my knowledge in innovation management and entrepreneurship, while also growing as a person through exposure to a different culture and educational system.

Academic Experience

My exchange at Université de Namur provided a fresh perspective on innovation and entrepreneurship, complementing the strong foundation I had built at Politechnika Lubelska. The courses I attended were both challenging and enriching, helping me gain practical skills and knowledge.

Key Courses:

During my time at Namur, the following courses stood out and played a key role in shaping my understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship:

- **Innovation Management:** This course explored how companies can create an environment that fosters continuous innovation. I learned about tools and techniques used to stimulate creativity, as well as strategies for managing innovation in both startups and established firms.
- **Technology and Sustainability:** This subject was particularly fascinating, as it dealt with the role of emerging technologies in driving sustainable development. We examined how businesses can use technological advancements to develop eco-friendly solutions and sustainable business practices.
- **New Product Development and Launch:** In this course, we focused on the entire process of creating, testing, and launching new products. From brainstorming product ideas to market analysis and finally, the execution of a successful product launch, I gained practical skills that are crucial for any entrepreneur.

The interactive nature of these courses, combined with the diverse international student body, allowed me to engage in meaningful discussions and learn from a variety of perspectives. I especially appreciated the opportunity to work on real-world case studies and group projects, which brought theoretical knowledge to life.

Cultural and Social Integration

The cultural aspect of my Erasmus experience was just as impactful as the academic one. Namur, situated in the French-speaking region of Wallonia, is a charming city with a rich history and a welcoming atmosphere. Although French is the dominant language, English was widely used in academic settings, making it easier to navigate the university environment. However, living in Namur gave me a fantastic opportunity to improve my French, especially in day-to-day interactions with locals.

The **Erasmus Student Network (ESN)** at Université de Namur played a vital role in helping international students settle in. They organized various events, from city tours to international dinners, which made it easier to meet fellow Erasmus students and local students alike. These activities helped me create a strong network of friends from all over the world, while also learning more about Belgian culture.

In addition to social activities, I also took the time to explore Namur's rich cultural heritage. I visited the iconic **Citadel of Namur**, attended local festivals, and enjoyed Belgian cuisine—especially the famous waffles, chocolate, and fries! Belgium's central location also made it easy to travel; I took trips to Brussels, Bruges, and even ventured into neighboring countries like France and the Netherlands.

Personal and Professional Development

My Erasmus experience at Université de Namur was not only an academic journey but also an important phase of personal growth. Living abroad for nearly 10 months required me to adapt to new challenges, including managing my own accommodation, navigating a foreign language, and becoming more independent. These experiences helped me build resilience, problem-solving skills, and confidence in my ability to handle new situations.

On the professional side, the exposure to Belgium's entrepreneurial ecosystem was invaluable. Belgium has a thriving startup scene, and during my stay, I had the opportunity to attend networking events and workshops organized by local innovation hubs. This allowed me to meet Belgian entrepreneurs, attend guest lectures, and get firsthand insights into the challenges and opportunities that startups face in the European market.

In addition to these networking opportunities, the group projects I worked on at university gave me the chance to apply what I had learned. For example, during the **New Product Development and Launch** course, our team developed a product concept, conducted market research, and created a launch plan. These practical projects were crucial in preparing me for the entrepreneurial challenges I will face after graduation.

Challenges Faced

While my Erasmus experience was overwhelmingly positive, it did come with its challenges. The most significant challenge was adapting to the local academic system. The expectations, grading system, and workload at Université de Namur were different from what I was used to in Poland. The focus on independent learning and practical applications required me to adjust my study habits and time management.

The **language barrier** was another hurdle, particularly outside the academic environment. While I had a basic understanding of French before coming to Belgium, living in a French-speaking city like Namur required me to quickly improve my language skills. Though this was initially daunting, it turned into one of the most rewarding aspects of my exchange, as I left Namur with a much better grasp of the French language.

Conclusion

My Erasmus exchange at Université de Namur has been one of the most valuable experiences of my life, both academically and personally. The knowledge and skills I gained in **Innovation Management, Technology and Sustainability**, and **New Product Development and Launch** have provided me with a strong foundation for my future career in entrepreneurship. Additionally, the personal growth I experienced—learning to navigate a new culture, language, and academic system—has equipped me with the confidence to tackle future challenges.

I am deeply grateful for this opportunity, and I would highly recommend the Erasmus program to anyone looking to expand their horizons. The friendships, professional connections, and memories I made during this exchange will stay with me for years to come, and I am confident that this experience has prepared me for whatever comes next in my entrepreneurial journey.

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