

# Transcript

[Interviewer]

Hello and welcome to the final installment of the Ullandhaug exchange for this year, the autumn semester of 2023. I'm Nina, and with me we have two international students who have been studying with US for the past three. Months or so, and I'll let them introduce themselves.

OK.

[Petra]

I came from Hungary. I am 23 years old. Yeah, basically these. These are the important information in this podcast.

[Interviewer]

Hmm.

[Anika]

And hello. I'm Anika. I'm from Slovenia and I'm 25.

[Interviewer]

OK, So what is your program? Back home, what do you study back?

[Petra]

Home in Hungary, I'm studying the teacher training program like here.

[Anika]

Yeah, same for me. I'm so I am working on getting a masters in English, specifically in the pedagogical program.

[Interviewer]

OK. And what made you decide to go on an Erasmus exchange?

[Petra]

Well, actually it was kind of an easy decision for me because I wanted to see something different than in Hungary, because the education system, I mean, not just the university education system but the primary and the high school education system is totally different than anywhere else. So basically this this was the major reason to come to the Erasmus.

[Anika]

Yeah. So I have been wanting to go on an exchange for a while, but then COVID happened right when I would first be eligible for it. And then there were two to three years of just nobody quite knowing what's going on. So then I figured it was no time like the present to go on an exchange. And yes, the major reasons were basically what Petra has already mentioned so. Our school system is kind of a mishmash of many European systems, so I wanted to see how it is a bit further up north and see what's different, what's similar and so forth

[Interviewer]

So was the UiS your first choice or was this just by luck or some other way?

[Petra]

I was thinking about Germany as well, but I decided to come in Norway because of the Nordic education system, so it was the main reason to choose this university.

[Anika]

Yeah, it was my first choice. It's actually a bit of a funny story if we have time for it. Always I we were participating in a webinar for our basically the course we had had on children's literature and it was a webinar by fella about children's literature going digital and a professor from Stavanger had a really interesting presentation so. I looked up some more of her (Natalia Kucirkova) work. I listened to some of her podcasts, and I read some of her articles. So when Stavanger popped up on the options for for an exchange, it was the first thing I looked into in more depth, so I was really glad to get this opportunity.

[Interviewer]

No, that's perfect. But did you follow up and did you get to see her here?

[Anika]

No, unfortunately not. But I met you and Cecilia, so I was able to get basically what I was searching for. So.

[Interviewer]

OK, so. So you mentioned that this like Nordic education has this very, probably almost now, a mythical status among the educators in the rest of the world or Europe. So were your expectations met?

[Petra]

Actually I didn't have any expectation, I think, because I just knew that it will be completely new and different from the Hungarian one. So I came without any expectation, so I wouldn't say because of that, this match with each other, but it was

definitely useful and beneficial because I saw something very different and in a good way different. So, it was much more flexible than in Hungary. And it was really good to see that the teaching could be done differently and in a better way than in Hungary. If I can say this. So yeah, it was good to see these things here more specifically and not just read about them.

[Anika]

I was actually quite surprised because in terms of the the material and maybe the the classroom organization, it's very similar to what I'm used to. It's more just the the general organization of the education system, like how the brakes were organized, how students are grouped into classes, the teachers themselves. Because in Slovenia you usually have one teacher per subject and then you only have that teacher for that subject. But here you have the same teacher for English, for social sciences, for math. So it's that was kind of the thing that surprised me.

[Interviewer]

And when you think about this experience here and the experience that you got through the Erasmus exchange, where does it fit in your future career? Where do you fit benefiting your career?

[Petra]

Well, I am planning to move to Norway, so actually it's it's in my career.

[Interviewer]

Right.

[Petra]

But if I wouldn't move here, it would be a really nice. It was a really nice experience and if I had the chance, maybe I can give something new to the Hungarian system as well. Or if I teach in a private school, maybe there are much more possibilities to use these things there.

[Interviewer]

Mm-hmm. Hmm.

[Petra]

So these things completely fit in my career and my plans.

[Interviewer]

OK. OK.

[Anika]

Yeah, it is. Especially the, maybe the new good practices that we encountered here, especially in terms of how the teachers interact with the students and maybe because here I feel, it's much more directly the contact, I mean the contact between teachers and students, it's much more directive and with like parent-teacher conferences - the student is present there and they're the ones presenting basically what their experiences have been so far. So that's something that

[Interviewer]

Hmm.

[Anika]

Is not in the forefront as much in Slovenia, so it's something I think we could benefit from a lot. So it's things like that, basically. Yeah.

[Interviewer]

So you're not not moving to Norway?

[Anika]

Current plans point to no, but you never know. OK, So what are the plans when you go back home? Finish up my Masters degree and then. I haven't quite this... I would like to teach actually, but I would also like to to get a PhD. So perhaps maybe teaching for a few years and then taking what I've learned in practice and making a PhD out of.

[Interviewer]

So be on a lookout. There are PhD positions in the making. So maybe even here. So just. Yeah, keep track, keep track. So why should anyone apply for an Erasmus exchange? Based on your experiences?

[Petra]

Well, definitely because of the friends. I think because you can build new friendships relation which can be useful in the future as well. You get tons of experience, especially good ones seeing a different culture, people... I think it has all the benefits going on Erasmus.

[Interviewer]

Hmm.

[Anika]

Yeah, I think that that plunge out of your comfort zone and especially and maybe, like, I'm not a terribly extroverted or social person. So this was something that I was worried about when I came here. But I think it really helped me because now it's basically just

you and you know that if you aren't going to make that extra effort no one will in your case, and I think that really helped my personal growth and personal development. So I would, especially if one's maybe a bit afraid of how it might go, or like if they'll meet anyone to talk to, or they'll just be alone, I think there's a very slim, practically minuscule possibility of that happening, because you will find people and you will connect with them and it can be incredibly enriching

[Interviewer]

Yeah, that's that's nice to hear. And what would be the benefits that you bring to the local students here?

[Petra]

What I bring to the local students? Well, for example, that we can share the different things about our culture. I remember when we at the university, we did the Hungarian teaching thing - and it was very funny. See that the other people kind of struggling with the pronunciation of the Hungarian, which is obvious.

[Interviewer]

Kinda completely, yeah.

[Anika]

Yeah, no need to throw us under the bus and you know. We tried our best.

[Interviewer]

No, that's true, that's.

[Anika]

Yeah. True. Yeah. No.

[Petra]

Yeah. So. Sharing the cultural things and be more aware about each other, I think.

[Anika]

Yeah, maybe putting Slovenia on the map, literally for some people. Because I was, it was hilarious how many people either mixed us up with Slovakia or didn't know we existed at all that well. I thought that was more stereotype about Americans, but no. So but yeah, just. I mean, an Erasmus is a two-way exchange. Basically because not only do we get to see more of the culture, but we also bring our little pieces of Hungary and Slovenia here and hopefully our classmates would have learned something new. Hopefully they have a positive view of our countries now and they maybe also see kind

of the things that Norway does differently, and it's then up to them to decide whether that's a good thing or maybe they can, they can adapt something from us.

[Interviewer]

Yeah. It's good to become aware of other things being there and other ways in which you can do certain things. So is it difficult to get to know Norwegians?

[Petra]

Firstly, yes, because if you aren't open for them they won't start the interaction with you. But after I think the first interaction they are very open with you. At least this is my experiences.

[Anika]

Yeah. I think with most of our Norwegian classmates, it was maybe like that first week, maybe before we broke the ice and then we got invited to lunch and we were. I think they made a very, like, conscious effort to include us in, in the happenings which was very welcome. But in general, like I, I think I was one of the few people on an exchange who didn't quite mind maybe this respect for personal stages because like it a lot. And when I heard like there's I think there's this joke about How do you know that the Norwegian is extroverted: that he looks at your shoelaces, and not his own or? Something like, yes. Please do not talk to me if you don't need to, so.

[Interviewer]

OK. So the different expectations and different meetings, I would say. So in general, how was the student life then during these these few months?

[Petra]

I think it was active. I mean at the university there were many programs that we can participate if we want, if we want and with our group, I think we also had the chance to to hang out together. But there were many things to do besides. hanging out. So I mean, we needed to study as well. So it's not just fun, there is no mistaking.

[Anika]

Hmm. Yeah, it's for me, especially because I lived in a student dorm on campus, so everything was within arm's reach: the board games, the waffle Monday, everything like that. So it was really nice that there was, I think, something happening practically every week. So even if maybe you didn't have time on this day, there was something else like two days after that or the next week. So you had a lot of options and that was very welcome.

[Interviewer]

Yeah, that's that's good to hear. So do you think that the UiS should do something differently or something more in that respect?

[Petra]

Yeah, the university should start the women basketball team because they have just for the boys and it's really bad.

[Anika]

It was yes. Petra was very personally affected.

[Interviewer]

By this.

[Petra]

Yeah. Yeah. So, but just this one.

[Interviewer]

OK. Noted!

[Anika]

A tiny, tiny gripe, which wasn't even really of a problem at all, but on the SiS app sometimes some of the events were just in Norwegian, not also in English. I mean Google Translate and everything exists, so it wasn't a problem, but if someone had it only on the English settings, I think they probably missed something. Just because they weren't added to both sides so.

[Interviewer]

So something to keep in mind. So, are there any funny stories that you will bring back home? Some things that you could share, possibly with us now before we finish?

[Petra]

I don't, do you have?

[Anika]

I mean, most of mine are related to like where people thought Slovenia was. And I mean, I've heard everything. I've heard that we were part of the Soviet Union, that we were original Italy, that we were, someone tried to place us in Asia, which was the first for me, so. No, but just I don't know. Baking Christmas cookies with the girls was a very fun experience, and I feel like it was unfortunately quite close to the end of our exchange, but I think that helped us in a way because we were familiar enough with each other that we could joke around and laugh about it. And.

[Anika]

I mean it. It was really nice. Not just because of the cookies and the sugar rush. But in general.

[Petra]

I don't know. I can't highlight one, I think because many, many things happen. So it's really hard to just highlight one thing. But for example, the practice, what we what we did, for me it was a really nice experience to meet really young learners who can speak in English.

[Petra]

Quite well so. Yeah, maybe this.

[Interviewer]

Yeah. And did you get, because you said you had to work and you had to study, so did you get to travel around a little bit and see a little bit of Norway?

[Petra]

Yeah, actually we did a trip yesterday together to Bergen. So it was really nice.

[Anika]

She says that now, but I had to listen to a lot of. Complaints on the way. No, but yeah, it's really I think it was a more or less OK balance between the the time we had to to explore and to do things on our own. But I mean, of course this is a university exchange first and foremost. So I don't think it was, I mean it was by no means unreasonable the amount of work we had to do and I and I'm glad for it because we

[Anika]

We... I personally encountered a lot of new literature, new articles, new research that we didn't cover in as much depth at my studies. So I was very grateful for it.

[Interviewer]

Good. And are there any final thoughts that you would like to share, something that I failed to mention and you are dying to tell us? Maybe we covered everything?

[Petra]

I don't know, you want to say something?

[Anika]

Maybe just regarding - we mentioned the practice a few times now. It's just maybe something that I would encourage anyone doing for the logical exchange, to look into

more maybe, contact the the study advisors. Because for us, I mean, for me it was a bit of a surprise. I only learned about it when I came here - and it wasn't an unwelcome surprise, but maybe if someone had already done their practice, or maybe the practice was not included in their study program. I think this is one aspect that I would heartily encourage them to do more research on.

[Interviewer]

Hmm.

[Anika]

Because the Norwegian education system is specific in certain ways, and I think it would be good to go into it as prepared as you can be just so you aren't surprised by anything from the language barrier to the organization.

[Interviewer]

Hmm. So yeah, that's that's a very good point I think. And and I think that maybe practice is where you actually see the education, like, at work, not just like a list of the documents and and maybe second-hand stories, but you really are there in the mix. And you survived? Yeah.

[Anika]

No, it wasn't like it. As we've talked with you about it, it it had its challenges, especially the regarding the. I mean, of course, we are in Norway, so everything is in Norwegian, but just for us, maybe for exchange students or for non-Norwegian speakers, we might have benefited more from maybe not participating in social sciences, but I don't know being able to talk to other teachers or to the headmaster, do something like that. So that's maybe also food for thought for UiS.

[Interviewer]

Hmm hmm.

[Anika]

To maybe organize it a bit differently.

[Interviewer]

Yeah. Yeah, definitely so.

[Petra]

Or just learn the Norwegian language first and after that come here.

[Anika]

I mean if you managed to teach me Norwegian in two months, then I would. I would pay any amount of money you want.

[Interviewer]

Well, start early then I think. OK, so thank you both for setting aside some time at the very end of your stay here. I hope you will stay in touch. And I know that the teacher education program always benefits from international students and it benefited this year as well. So thank you for being with us. Thank you.