

Student of the Institute of Civil Engineering about participation in the Erasmus+ project and studying at the University of Luxembourg

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is one of the smallest states in Europe. It borders Belgium, Germany, and France, and its inhabitants usually speak three languages: Luxembourgian, German, and French. In 2003, the University of Luxembourg was founded in Luxembourg, where today students from 125 countries study. Anna DONTSOVA, a student of the Civil Engineering Institute of St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, also went there for the fall semester within the Erasmus+ project. Anna spent six months studying in the «Design of unique buildings with the principles of sustainable development» program. She participated in individual and project work, gained many useful acquaintances, and impressed Luxembourg professors with the knowledge received at Polytechnic University. Read about this and more in our interview.



— Anna, is this your first trip to study abroad?

— Yes, it was my first experience, but not my first attempt. When I was in my last year of undergraduate studies, I passed the competitive selection for the international double degree program with Saimaa University in Finland. But then, for a number of reasons, I declined to participate. Now I even wonder how my life

would have turned out if that trip had taken place.

— What was your reaction when you found out that you were going to study in Luxembourg?

— I knew almost nothing about that country, but now I think it's the best country. The fact that I am learning German was of course a great advantage.

— How long were the preparations for the trip?

— About half a year. Luxembourg is a very small country, not very popular for tourism. Therefore there is not much information about it on the Internet, and in many respects I had to understand myself, in particular, to study the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg. Funny thing is that I started to make a list of things for the trip a few months in advance, but still was gathering the day before departure. Because of the pandemic, I didn't believe until the last week that I could go abroad to study.

— Do you remember how you felt in the first days of living in a new place?

— In the first days I felt like a robot — so thoroughly concentrated on everything. When I flew to Luxembourg — by the way, remember that there are no direct flights to Luxembourg — I was terribly afraid to miss first the bus and then my stop. It seems funny only until you realize that the next stop would only be in France! Then I did the paperwork, registered at the commune, participated in the first day of the semester, checked into my dorm, got a bank card and SIM card, and got a coronavirus shot so I could travel freely around Europe. At the same time, I was euphoric about new experiences and sensations. I loved everything that was going on around me!



— What was the hardest thing for you about adapting?

— Even though I immediately felt in my place, I would like to talk about some points. For me, adaptation consisted of thinking about my every action, every word, in terms of national, cultural, and even legal features of the country. What if what I am used to is not polite or allowed at all? What if I might have accidentally offended someone? Fortunately, I did not find any particular cultural differences. Luxembourg is a multicultural country, and also one of the safest. Even at night on a dark street, you feel safe here.

— Tell us about your dormitory. How was your life arranged? Who were your neighbors?

— I was very lucky with the dormitory. In my case, it has 's the apartment type. Each apartment has four rooms, bathrooms, a common kitchen-living room with all the necessary appliances. The rooms are high-ceilinged and spacious. My roommates were also great — two female students from Germany who were studying psychology and a student from Cameroon who was studying economics. We often spent time together and sometimes had parties where our friends came.

— What are your impressions of the university campus?

— The University of Luxembourg has three campuses: Belval, Kirchberg, and

Limpertsberg. The Belval campus is close to my dormitory. It used to be the site of steelworks, and there are many reminiscent of that. For example, there are cafes and offices in the former shops, and the largest shop houses the university library. It looks very futuristic. The campus itself is equipped for people with limited mobility. The buildings have elevators and escalators, the classrooms have lots of technology, and you can also write directly on the walls with markers. At the Belval campus, I mostly met with faculty members, and classes were held at the other campus, Kirchberg. It is close to the European Parliament building. The campus buildings were built in the spirit of constructivism in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite their age, the interior here is very modern. The classrooms are equipped with everything you need, there is a canteen, study areas with desks and chairs and sitting areas with armchairs and sofas.



— How did you study? What subjects did you study?

— At first, we studied in a mixed format, but closer to mid-November the university switched completely to full-time mode. In Luxembourg, I had four disciplines that were analogous to my subjects in the Polytechnic curriculum. For all subjects, I had to complete a project for credit, so I had a total of three group projects and one individual project. I also studied two other subjects remotely at SPbPU: heat and mass transfer in continuous media and the basics of heat supply and ventilation.

— What did participation in the Erasmus+ project become for you?

— At the very least, participation in Erasmus+ brought me invaluable life experience. I tested my strengths and abilities, learned to live in another country, cope with all the new bureaucratic procedures, understand the laws in a foreign language. More than ever, I realized that the only person who can get me out of all the difficulties — it's me. For the first time in my life, I went on a solo vacation — after all the exams I spent a week in Portugal, Spain, and France. The Erasmus+ project allowed me to look at my life from a different perspective — this also applies to everyday life and academic work.

If we talk about more practical things, thanks to Erasmus+ I have made a lot of new acquaintances. I think I was able to impress with my knowledge the professors I interacted with at the University of Luxembourg. At the end of the semester, I received two offers to continue my research at the university.



— What advice would you give (or not give) to students who also want to study abroad?

— Based on my experience, I would advise students not to plan exchange trips in their junior year when they have too much of a course load. There is a chance that many of your subjects will have no counterparts at a foreign university, and you will have to spend a lot of time and effort to find a way to study them

remotely. It is a very serious workload.

At the same time, I would like to say that no matter how scared you are of taking a step into the unknown, do it. Apply, apply, get involved in any student movement that you can, because studentship ends quickly. But at the same time, look at the world without rose-colored glasses. Be prudent: check your documents, double-check everything, think through your options in advance in case of emergencies.

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