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KRAKÓW EXCHANGE REPORT

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Introduction:

I went on exchange in my third semester when studying Architectural Technology and Construction Management at KEA.

I always knew I was going to take a semester abroad as I wanted to experience other cultures and ways of studying and living. I decided to go to Kraków for different reasons; I wanted to stay within Europe to be close to my husband, family and friends and be able to see them occasionally, during my semester. Going abroad with the Erasmus Programme also meant less planning and expenses, which at the time was the best fit for me.

My decision landed on Poland, as it is a country, I knew little about, but had heard good things about from friends and colleagues. I also knew Poland to be a cheap country to live in and knowing I would be paying double rent while studying abroad, that was a huge advantage.

Academic experience:

Cracow University of Technology in general:

Cracow University of Technology or Politechnika Krakowska is a big school with different faculties such as Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Architecture. I attended the last-mentioned faculty, Architecture, as it is most related to my original studies at KEA.

The faculty of Architecture has three different campuses in various locations around the city. One is located inside the Old Town and city centre; the second is around a 20 min walk from the first

campus; and the last campus is located an hour away from the city centre by walking (you can take public transportation in half the time). It can be slightly confusing to find your classes in the beginning as you are not provided with a map of the campuses and everything in the schools are written in Polish. That everything is written in Polish is a continuous problem as it can also be quite difficult to find information online in English about the classes etc. But do not worry too much, as you can ask around or contact Justyna, who oversees the exchange students. Justyna is very friendly and helpful. She and her office-colleague, Paulina, will help you with anything you need, which is a nice comfort.

From home you will have chosen subjects and filled out the learning agreement but be almost a 100% sure you will need to change a few courses within the first weeks of arriving. Unlike at KEA the courses you take are not related. Many classes are overlapping and will be taking place at the different campuses, so some courses you simply cannot attend. It is however allowed to leave 15 min early or arrive 15 min late to class because of this overlapping – as long as you inform the professors.

Another good thing to know about the courses at Politechnika is that the projects you will be doing is most likely individual. It is rarely in groups like you are used to at KEA. I was actually looking forward to this for a change before going, but I ended up missing the groupwork quite a lot.

Choice of courses:

Below you can find brief information about the courses I attended during my stay in Kraków.

Building Structures:

In this class you will work individually on a topic selected by you, related to building structures. I for example choose to research high-rise wooden structures, but you could also choose to continue a previous project from home and calculate forces etc. The classes are mostly consultations and takes place once a week. The course will end with presentations of the projects.

In this course you can decide between 2 and 8 ects points, depending on what you need and how much work you want to put into it.

Building Construction System:

This is the course most similar to what we do at KEA. You choose a project and make plans, sections and details with all the relevant information. You will meet the professor once a week for consultation. Unfortunately, not every week the professor will have time to consult you, as there are many in the class, but he has an assistant that can advise you instead.

In this course you can also choose between 2 and 8 ects point. The more credits the more difficult and bigger project you will have to do. The class ends with a hand-in of your work printed on paper.

Freehand Drawing I+II:

Drawing I is, like the name suggests, a regular drawing class. An assignment is provided each week and you will have the class to draw it as good as you can. The teachers focus on perspective drawing, drawing technique and creativity and will always give you feedback. It is a nice class if you want to improve your drawing skills like me. I feel like I have learned a lot.

Drawing II is more like a painting class. Here you paint various sculptures, draw with ink, use the tracing method etc.

Both classes are once a week and officially last 1,5 hours, but if you do not have other classes you



Figure 1: Drawing II, Painting from class

can stay longer.

Be aware that the local students are incredibly talented, and it can be a bit intimidating at first to draw and paint next to them. But we are not evaluated the same, as they have had 1,5 year prior to practice. The teachers will always find something positive about your work though.

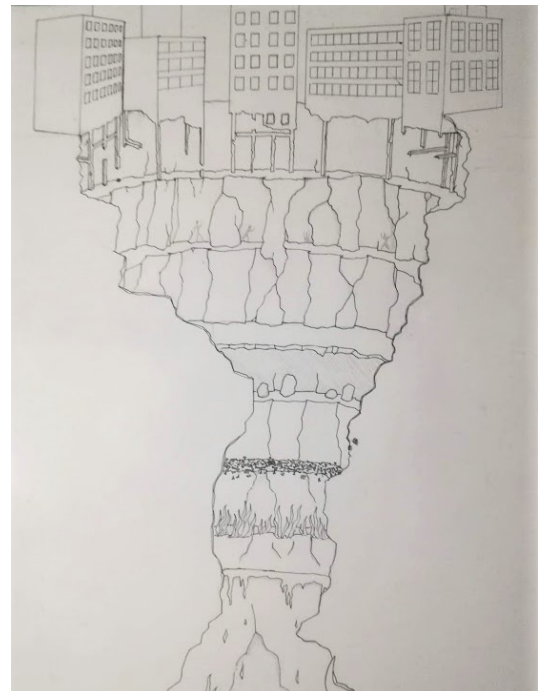


Figure 2: Drawing I, Drawing inspired by Dante's stages of hell, exercise

Sculpture:

This course is a three-week intense course during the semester. In these three weeks you will have classes 3 times a week. You work with clay and will create two different sculptures. I am unsure if the assignment is the same from semester to semester, but we had to first create a dynamic, realistic sculpture, and then after finishing it, change it to become an abstract sculpture. As a final assignment we had to photoshop our sculpture into a picture as if it was placed in real life. It was a fun class, very different from the other courses.

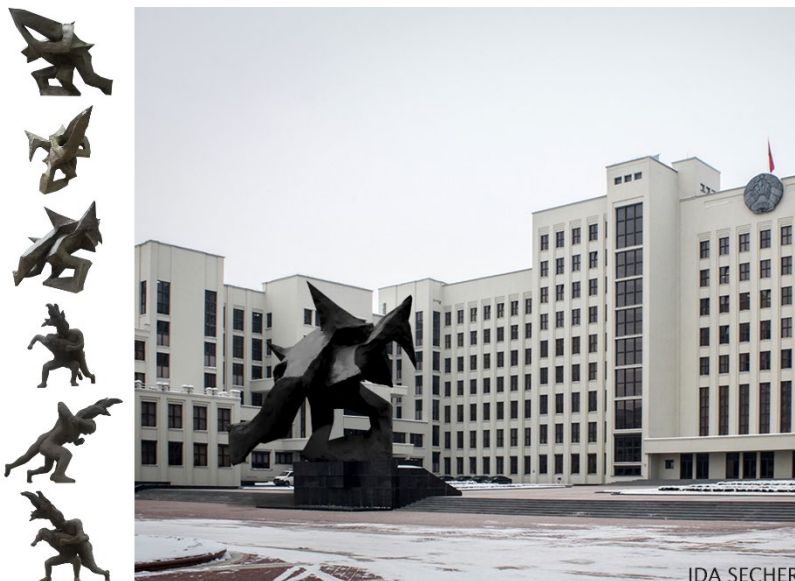


Figure 3: Final assignment for sculpture class

Protection of historic urban complexes:

In this course you will be working with a smaller historic town close to Krakow. You will be writing a report discussing issues regarding the historic buildings and relics in the town and how to protect them/make them more attractive.

You will have consultation once a week, but you are only required to show up a minimum one time for this. The course is shorter than the other courses as the hand-in of the report was due 1,5 month after semester start.

It is a nice course as you get the opportunity to go outside Krakow to towns you otherwise probably would not have heard of. You also learn a bit about Poland's history during your research.

The professor is very friendly and will happily give you advice not only on your assignment, but also on what to experience in Krakow /Poland while being there.

Preservation of Monuments and Revalorization II - Archeotecture:

In this subject you will work in a small group with one of many neglected historic sites around Kraków chosen by the two professors – one architect and one archaeologist. For this site you will first analyse it and then propose how to make it more attractive for both locals and tourists. In the class you will also visit some of the sites with the professors, which means getting the opportunity to experience otherwise closed areas for public, which is very interesting.

The concepts you propose for your site will be presented on two to three posters that you create. It will be an advantage to know photoshop for this as the professors can have quite high expectations for your presentation of concepts.

The course will end with a presentation of your analysis and concepts.

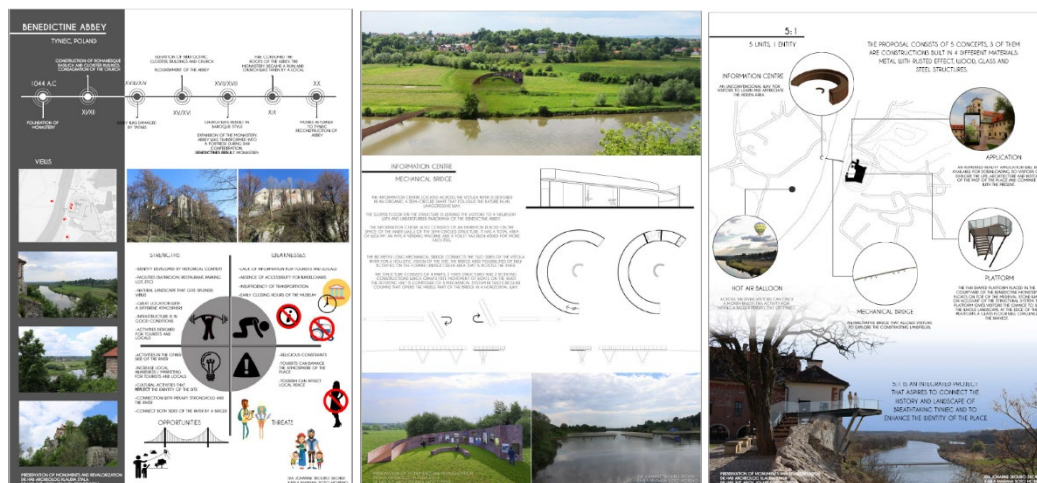


Figure 4: Final posters for Preservation of historic buildings and monuments class

Urban Design of city centres – Theory:

This course is a small intimate class, where you discuss different city centres and their identity with the professor. It is required you attend the discussions in the class as participation is a big part of the course. Besides this you will be researching a city centre chosen by you. We for example had to look at the city centre identity in the past, present and future, but the assignment changes slightly from semester to semester.

Classes are once a week and, in the end, you will make 10-15 min presentation about your findings.

History of Polish Architecture:

In this class you will learn about different architectural styles like Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque etc. Classes are once a week and will start with 20 min of theory in class followed by a 1 hour walk in the city, looking at examples from the style discussed in class.

The teacher is very driven and has great stories from the different sites you visit.

This course also arranges a trip during the semester, where you will be visiting different countries by bus for a week looking at architecture. I did not attend myself, but everybody who went loved it and recommended it.

Urban Design (Project):

I choose this course as I wanted to work with a bigger project during my semester. This course was for 4th year students, but I was told I could probably do it, I just had to inform the professors I was only 2nd year myself. I was excited for this class as it was my only class with local students, but already the first class was disappointing. The professors were not prepared for international students, and the Polish students had already started one week prior. Everything was in Polish and it seemed like the professors were fighting not to get any of us in their group. In the end we were divided into groups, but with very limited information. Each class was the same, waiting almost 2 hours till the end after all the local students had gotten feedback, just to get unclear assignments. The very long project description was also written in Polish. After three weeks all international students I was in group with decided to drop the class. For me it was just not relevant enough to continue and the level was too hard.

I cannot recommend this class, and if you want to take a project course, be sure to choose one at your level or lower if possible.

Cultural/Personal Experience:

Kraków in general:

Kraków is a very beautiful city with a lot to offer. Most things happen in or around the Old Town, which is the city centre. Here you find restaurants, cafés, bars and clubs, museums etc. The old town is, like it suggests, the oldest part of the city with original, historic buildings dating back to the Romanesque architecture. There are a lot of history, traditions and stories surrounding Kraków which makes a very special city with a unique atmosphere that is worth experiencing.

There are also things outside the old town worth visiting. The Jewish Quarter, Kazimierz, is a very festive and lively neighbourhood with a lot of places to enjoy.

Furthermore, Kraków has beautiful surrounding nature like the Zakrzówek lake or for a day/weekend trip the Tatra mountains around Zakopane. Inside Kraków you also find 3 mounts that provides you with a panoramic view of the city – a nice place for picnics with friends.

Another good thing about Kraków is that all these many restaurants, cafés, bars, museums and trips that will be tempting to try is all affordable as the prices are cheap. I had a great time experiencing this city.

Tip: If you are there in the summer and like ice cream you should try the place called “Good Lood”,

they serve two new flavours of ice cream every day and it is delicious and cheap.



Figure 5: Old Town in Kraków, Main Square

Social:

During your stay in Kraków the ESN organization for international students will make sure you have something to do every weekend if you feel like it. They host events and trips of all kinds from parties to sports and games to trips around and outside the city which gives you plenty of opportunities to meet new people.

Practical Experience:

Application Process:

The application process for Kraków went very easy. Everything was filled out online and I got a fast answer of acceptance, which was very positive.

During the application process online, they also offer you a room in a dormitory and a possibility to attend Polish classes. I recommend you accept the spot in the dormitory as a safety even though you intend to find your own place. You can always cancel the dormitory.

As for the Polish lessons, I accepted the offer as I wanted to learn the basics of Polish language while I was living there. Unfortunately, I learned after arriving, that the Polish classes were offered in the daytime while you have your selected courses at the school. I was therefore unable to attend. But I advise you to sign up for it and see how it fits with your schedule after arriving.

Accommodation and expenses in Krakow:

Like I mentioned you are offered a room in a dormitory when applying. The dormitories are placed a bit outside the city centre, some further than others, but they will give you a good opportunity to meet new people as the majority of your fellow students will stay there. You will most likely be sharing a bedroom with another person and a kitchen with three others. To stay in the dormitory cost under 400 zloty (<700 kr). I heard of a person paying for both beds in a bedroom, so she would have it for herself. That might also be a possibility if you want more privacy.

I did not stay at a dormitory as I prefer to have my own room. I found a room on Facebook in the group "Erasmus in Kraków 2018/2019" (now it is probably "2019/2020"), but you can also have a look on sites like olx.pl or other Polish "real-estate" sites. The price for a room depends on how close to the city centre you want to stay, but around 800-1600 zloty is possible. I stayed in the city centre, right behind the main square and paid 1550 zloty/month with utilities.

A third option is renting a whole apartment, which is possible for around 2000 zloty and up again depending on location and size.

In general, everything is just cheaper in Kraków and you will spend less money on food in a month, especially if you cook yourself. Some supermarket names are Biedronka, Carrefour and Auchan, which is the biggest. You can also eat out in restaurants for 20-30 zloty for a main course which is around 35-50 kr, just to compare with Danish prices. (If you have lazy days where you just want to order in, you can also do that with UberEats and Pyszne.pl for a little extra for delivery)

Transportation is also cheaper in Kraków and you can buy a travel card for, I think, around 200 zloty for the whole semester to travel freely. I did not buy this as I lived close to everything and enjoyed walking + the bus to the campus far away was free do to roadwork the whole semester (this might also be the case for next semester). To figure out how to get around with public transportation you can use: "jakdojade.pl", which is like "rejseplanen". It works in English.

Places to go:

Restaurants:

- Przystanek Pierogania (Cheap dinner, Polish pierogi and soups)
- SLCO (Korean)
- Wietnam
- Mezzelians (Libanese, mezze)
- Moja (breakfast)
- Zen Sushi (All-you-can-eat in weekdays 12-17)
- Ramen People
- Charlotte (breakfast)
- Miskin Na Lea (Hawaiian breakfast bowls)
- Bistro Bene by Tomasz Leśniak (breakfast)
- Zapiekanka (Polish street-food) from the market square in Kazimierz

Ice cream:

- Good Lood
- Emil kreci lody (try their black sesame ice cream)

Bars/cafes:

- Absurdalia café (great homemade lemonade and ice tea)
- Re bar (cosy garden, beer, cider)
- Domowka café (boardgames, snacks and beer)
- Entropia (beers, cocktails and shots)
- Alchemia (cosy place. Also has good food)
- Szototo (only shots on the menu)

Shops:

- Rzeczy Same (prints and arts from Poland)

Places:

- Zakopane
- Zakrzówek lake (Swimming is allowed)
- Basen Otwarty, Krakowianka (Outdoor pool for warm summer days. Only open in the summer)
- Krakus Mound
- Tyniec Abbey (Beautiful monastery outside Kraków. Take the water tram there)
- Wieliczka Salt Mine (Book a ticket from home before going. Do this with most places/museums)
- In Kraków some museums have free entrance once a week. For example, the Rynek Underground History museum, which I can highly recommend, has free entrance on Mondays. Check online if the museum you want to go to includes in this deal and on which day of the week it is free.



Figure 7: Zakopane



Figure 6: Zakrzovek Lake

Conclusion:

Overall, I have had a great time in Kraków. There were things that were better than others of course, but I would recommend going. The courses I took were more creative and taught me how to look at buildings from a more architectural standpoint. So, if you are not into this part of the subject, you should not go to Kraków. If you do want to learn more about this however, it is a good place to go, not only because of the teachers, but also because you get to work with actual architectural students from around the world that will give you a great perspective.

Furthermore, staying a semester in Kraków gave me a lot of freedom to experience and see things, that would not have been possible in Denmark due to the prices.