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Erasmus in Porto, Portugal

FAUP (Faculdade de Arquitectura Universidade do Porto)

Courses:

Project 4 - 21CP

History of Portuguese Architecture - 12CP

Drawing 1 - 12CP

Architecture and Cinema 3CP

Portuguese Intensive Course 6CP

Application process and arrival

Olá! My name is Nadja and in my 4-5 Master Semester at FB15 I decided to do an Erasmus Exchange in Porto in Portugal. After getting the confirmation of my home faculty, we were supposed to start our application process with the Faculty in our host country. I had to wait for two more months until the University of Porto send the link for the application. As anything and especially exchange programs weren't really sure to happen that year because of the Pandemic, I spent the whole summer wondering. I tried to navigate myself through the website of the



Architecture Faculty of the University of Porto (in short FAUP) in order to find suitable courses, which we already had to choose for the application at FAUP. It

took some time and the study plan wasn't yet updated, I made a list of the ones that seemed interesting and suitable. It was possible to change them upon arrival anyway. For Erasmus+ we had to have 24 ECTS per semester. So I chose courses for 54 ECTS for the whole year. Beginning of April FAUP finally opened the application process. One tricky thing was, that FAUP only has annual projects. Which was the



reason why i mostly had chosen subjects for the whole year with a lot of credit points.

After my application to FAUP in April I had to wait until mid July for an answer. Maybe that is how long it usually takes them or due to the Pandemic.

But it was a very close call with arranging moving out of my room in Darmstadt and planning this year in general. Overall the contact with the faculty was kind of slow, but it all worked out in the end.

In September i finally made my way to Porto. I arrived there beginning of the month. Because at FAUP everything starts moving really slowly, i spent my time in the first weeks exploring the city and meeting new people, mostly the ones doing Erasmus at FAUP. We organized a WhatsApp Group with 80 people and had a few meetings before all the people kind of chose their smaller groups to hang out with. I also made a few friends beside the Erasmus students, but it is kind of tricky if you don't speak the language properly. That's why i always would highly recommend to start learning to speak the language as fast as possible. (Best is doing an Intensive Course which is offered by the UP)

Studying at FAUP

In October classes at FAUP started properly and everybody spend two weeks checking out courses and adjusting their schedule.

Most of the Erasmus took courses of the 4th year, like Project 4. Because it is an individual design of a public building and suitable for Master Students.

A popular course that Erasmus students tend to do is Desenho 1 - Drawing 1, the intensive course in drawing from the 1st year. Drawing in general has a high priority at FAUP, so I would always recommend it for people who really want to improve their drawing skills and try out different mediums of drawing. I have to mention that it nearly couldn't take place for us, because the schedules of the 1st year were colliding with the one of the 4th year. After weeks of talking to different drawing teachers they found us a way to participate at the course.

The third of the big annual courses I participated was History of Portuguese Architecture. A lot of people say it is the most stressful and elaborate course of the 4th year, because it contains a theoretical part (including 2 exams + a travel sketchbook) and a practical part (a research of a historic portuguese building, organized as group work with weekly meetings with the teacher and self organized excursions). The Portuguese are even a bit scared of it because the teachers are strict and have high expectations. Nevertheless I really enjoyed the course because you get to know the architectural heritage of the country and one more reason to travel around. Also the head teacher is fluent in German what allowed me to write all the exams in German. It was a great help. Also if the lectures are all in Portuguese, she gave us 2 extra English classes for the exams.

Besides this I ended up joining the architecture and cinema course, one of the more creative classes of the optional courses and my favorite one. The main task besides the lectures is to produce a short movie in a group work and an individual research on a film.

Also I decided to do the Portuguese Intensive course in March at the Faculdade de Letras (FLUP; which is right besides FAUP), to improve my language skills. It's a fact that life is a lot easier at university if you understand and even

speak Portuguese. Most courses are held in Portuguese. There are a few courses that are held in English. But these are usually only the optional courses. If you stay for the whole academic year, you have to take the annual courses in order to get a certain amount of credit points.

However, I was lucky with all my teachers, who always spoke English with me. Also, all the students around you speak fluent English, so you could always ask in case you didn't understand something. My knowledge of Portuguese doesn't go beyond a basic vocabulary, but I was still able to study at FAUP successfully for a year. So don't be afraid to apply!

As you can see I can say a lot of positive things about the school in general, but after a while I could also see some negative sides. The outstanding reputation that the university has had for decades through Siza, Souto de Moura and other well-known graduates is obscured by some of the shortcomings that I expect from a university in 2022.

One aspect of this is the fact that the university and teaching is almost exclusively dominated by male architects and references. Very frustrating as a female student who comes from a rather more emancipated faculty in Darmstadt. There is a clear lack of cultural and gender diversity in the module options and teachers. Of course, this is reflected in the teaching.

Since the teaching staff are mostly graduates of their own faculty, the teaching thus goes round in circles. There is little international influence from outside, which increasingly limits teaching methods and architectural views.

There is also a strong sense of hierarchy between teachers and students. I found discussions at eye level lacking at many ends.

This experience was all the more instructive for me with regard to my studies in Darmstadt, where as a woman I have rarely had the feeling that I am taken less seriously than my male fellow students.

Although many of the Portuguese students have come to terms with these shortcomings, I certainly did not let myself be impressed by this and still successfully completed my year abroad there with self-confidence.

Living in Porto

I really enjoyed the year and the relaxed atmosphere of Porto in daily life. I am the first TU Darmstadt student from the architecture Faculty to go to Porto since 2016, I guess because of the language barrier.. In my opinion it should not be at all a reason to not apply because it is in fact a very popular Erasmus location and a magnet for creative young people. The diversity of the city, the location on the river and the proximity to the sea, the honesty and openness of the people, the nightlife etc. are outstanding features. There are nice museums, parks and so many viewpoints everywhere around the city! The culture is in every sense completely different to ours, I would say more chilled and easy. Everything revolves around food, meeting outside with friends, going the beach. Porto has the perfect size and so many cultural things to offer!

