

My semester at KP (Københavns Professionshøjskole)

This is a short recollection of my experiences with participating in the Erasmus+ exchange program from August 2024 to January 2025. My home institution is Alice-Salomon-Hochschule in Berlin, where I study a social work master's program. At the receiving institution, KP in Copenhagen, I enrolled in Bachelor courses in Social Work. I chose Copenhagen for my exchange semester because I already lived there during another student exchange five years ago, knew and liked the city and had some friends and connections there. This was important to me as I didn't feel I had the capacities to build an entirely new social network, especially not considering that as a queer/trans person, many places and people are exhausting to navigate at best and unsafe at worst, so I wanted to come to a place where I already knew what to expect and where to find community. I also speak Danish and wanted to use this opportunity to improve my language skills.

The administrative preparations before the exchange were challenging for me, though I have to say that this was not in any way caused by ASH or KP – both of the institutions were well organized and reminded me of upcoming deadlines in a helpful manner. One difficulty was that my passport name at the time didn't match with the one I am using, and that Denmark does not recognize neutral gender markers. This resulted in some extra effort, which unfortunately continued throughout my time at KP: the digital exam tool had the wrong name registered and printed out for everyone to see, which I experienced as a breach of my privacy. For future (trans) students in that situation, I would recommend to explicitly request that the information is handled confidentially to avoid outings / to be able to file a complaint in case they happen.

Personally, my favorite mode of travelling between Berlin and Copenhagen is Flixbus. It is fairly cheap and has the advantage of being able to take my bike, which I can certainly recommend for Copenhagen as it has good bike infrastructure and public transport is expensive (although students should be mindful of the winter months in which Flixbus does not transport bicycles).

The accommodation KP offered me was a student dorm in the outskirts of the city for around 1000€ monthly rent. I was privileged enough to decline that offer and rely on personal connections/ Facebook groups instead, through which I found a flat in a very good location and for a much cheaper price. Nevertheless, it was over 600€ rent, but I think this is amongst the best options Copenhagen can offer.

Since I already knew the city, I had an easier time finding my way around than most of my classmates. Still, I severely underestimated the culture shock of (a) moving from a big flatshare to living alone and (b) being in a group of random international students whose political affiliations and personal interests I didn't know, instead of my known social environment. I could feel myself being distanced and careful in the interactions, because I didn't know e.g. if they were experienced in interacting with nonbinary persons. It got a lot better over time and I think if I had been less sceptic from the beginning, it could've been much faster. I also got the feedback that I taught both teachers and fellow students a lot, which can be a nice experience but also something that is good to be aware of when you are choosing to go abroad as a marginalized person.

KP did not have many courses to choose from. In fact, all the international Social Work students were enrolled in the same two seminars. There was also an Early Childhood Education and a Teacher's branch, but the decision which one to attend had to be taken in the application already. All offered seminars account for 15 ECTS, so it is also not possible to do something small in addition. I did go to a few lectures at another university just for fun; I don't know whether it would have been possible to enroll as a guest and take an exam.

The first seminar was on working with vulnerable youth in urban areas. It was taught by a group of four teachers, had many excursions and experimental teaching methods. Coming from a very political branch of social work, I LOVED this. The material was challenging but interesting and the teachers were great. Being a freelance workshop teacher, it was also right up my alley regarding my professional aspirations.

The second course was about human trafficking. In groups of 5-7, we had to plan a project to combat this issue in a field of our choice. It was okay, but overall way less enjoyable. We didn't have many classes, so we didn't see the other students much, except for our working groups with which we spent a lot of time. We had some issues in our group because we weren't very compatible, which made the work rather annoying. Furthermore, it was a requirement that every group has at least one international student, so we were all split up (which I didn't mind – I enjoyed getting to know and working with a few more Danish students, but it also meant that I couldn't switch groups anymore without breaking up the whole group). I still think I learned a lot of valuable lessons in that module.

I'd say my free time was mostly occupied with sports, events like creative clubs and theater, and meeting other people for dinner or boardgames. As much as I hate to say this, Facebook was an important resource to find some nice events. Other than that, it helped to go to some info fairs in the beginning of the semester where different clubs presented themselves, and to regularly check notification walls for cool events. There are a bunch of culture houses in the city, e.g. Huset (with a boardgame café, cinema and restaurant) or Studenterhuset (a student café with events such as a language exchange meeting or concerts). Since I lived alone, learning to go out of my apartment and work in a café/culture house really changed my social life as I got to know more people and knew that I didn't have to be alone unless I wanted to.

Many of my classmates were mostly socializing in the Erasmus/student environment, but I really wanted to also spend time with people that live in Denmark more permanently. I'd say that I succeeded in that and have now quite a good social network in Copenhagen. I participated e.g. in a theater play and a sports club and am now happy to have the opportunity to visit friends in this city whenever I want. Being a freelance worker, these connections might also help me earn my living in the future – we have been talking about applying for paid performances or conducting workshops with the theater group.

In general, I think I have learned a lot about myself during this exchange. Comparing my reactions in different social settings was super interesting and made me reflect on my prejudices, fears and challenges. At the same time, I also realized a few things that I am quite good at, which boosted my self-confidence. Going forward, there are some things that I am now able to communicate better (like realizing when something is difficult for me) and some things I want to work on in relation to other people. I got to know great people who I will keep in my life as friends and role models, and who are now a part of my life journey. I also learned how to live alone and structure my life, and how to get the support that I want/need. I am excited to see what the future brings for me with these new insights and perspectives.