

ERASMUS REPORT

General Information

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Period of Study : August 2016 to February 2017

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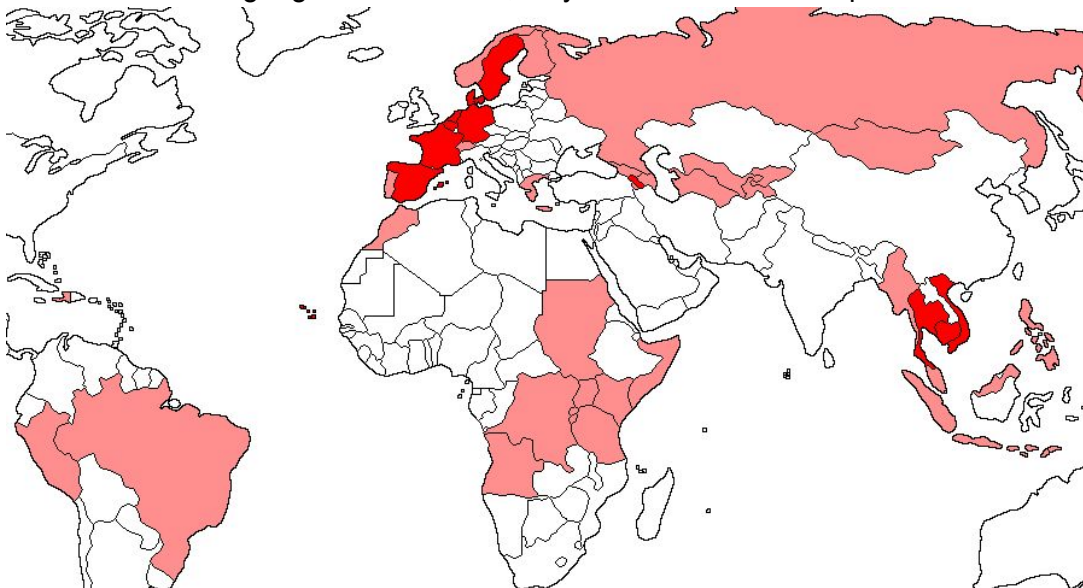
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Introduction

My name is I am 26 years old and I have been studying in Denmark, at KEA, for the past 3 years. I firstly studied Computer Sciences, and then Software Development. For my second semester of Software Development, I decided to start an Erasmus at the HvA in Amsterdam.

I am originally half from France, half from Belgium (from the dutch-flemish part). However, I was raised in various countries since my parents work for humanitarian organisation and since I am 18, I have been travelling all around Europe as well in order to study, work and learn new languages and cultures, as you can see in the map below :



In red : Countries where I live(d).
In light red : Countries where my parents, brother and sister live(d).

I explained that because firstly, I already worked in the Netherlands and in Amsterdam before actually doing my Erasmus there and also because I have then several point of comparisons and my experience of this Erasmus might be significantly different since I do not only rely on my experience in Denmark.

Actually, when I started this exchange program, I had the arrogance to think that I won't learn so much out of it and that it would be easy to study in a country I already knew. However, I quickly discovered that this experience will be actually full of new experiences and challenges and that there is a big difference between working sometimes in Amsterdam and actually living and studying there and experiencing the routine of the city on a daily scale.

I also thought that the Netherlands would be a mix between Flanders and Denmark since it is just between. However, even if it is very similar (Boats, Bikes, Biers, Bricks and all the other B's), it is actually slightly different. Dutch have a way of thinking and doing which is very unique for them and that I will have to learn to achieve my Erasmus properly.

My first week at the Hva was very exciting and so different of what I was used to in Denmark. Firstly in terms of scale. The Hva is huge. In Denmark I was used to be the all semester in the same room of the same little cosy building. In KEA, we are just a few thousands students, perhaps just around 5000 and as the different campus are smeared all around the city, it feels like we are just a few dozens in Lygten 37. (at least those who show up regularly). In the Hva, there are around 50 000 students.

The buildings are huge (between 7 to 12 floors) and they are organised in few large campus area where students are sharing their facilities with the Uva students which are 30 000. So counting everyone in the campus, we reached a number close to 100 000 students. It is really organised like a little city. There are shops and very cosy designed coffeeshops in the campus. They are very expensive, much more expensive than the KEA cantine and serve mostly fat and unorganic food, let's be honest. However, this creates a nice social life in the campus(es) which is very different of the Kantine of KEA. So, you can understand that it is difficult not get lost or overwhelmed during the first days. However, I must admit the Hva has been very very committed to make things easy for the international students.

One of the example I can give was that a mentor Student, Sam, was in charge of welcoming us at the airport and to inform and assist us with all the different arrival steps (registering to the city, and so on...). It was something very new for me because I am used to be abroad on my own. I almost felt a bit embarrassed by so much assistance but I guess this made my stay much easier and I could focus more on the upcoming school program.

I.a.Experience at the host university : Subject studied

The program I followed in Amsterdam was a thematic semester called "Internet of the Things". So obviously, it is focused on IOT technologies and design. In our program, everyone came from very different backgrounds. Some students had hardware experience, some software experience, some business experience and so on. So it was a very interesting crowd since everyone could share and learn from everyone differences. But I must admit it was also very challenging for the school to design a program that can satisfy everyone in terms of learning goals and where everyone could use what he/she has learned before. I will go more in details with that later in this chapter.

So our main discipline was to create with our group an IOT product for a client, and this should be the spine for the all semester, the other disciplines turn around this main subject. This sounds very similar to the Danish way however, only in words. Actually, I must admit that in KEA, probably because there are fewer teachers and disciplines, it seemed much more successful to create a coherent program where every disciplines helps the student to achieve a single project. In the Hva, there are much more disciplines and most of the time, what was learned in a lecture did not help the project at all, it rather created more work which was not connected with the final goal. I find it a bit disappointed and a bit frustrating since I would have like that, like in Denmark, all the working hours output a big fancy final project rather than a small project and many small assignments without any relationships to each other. However, the teaching team is totally convinced that they have the best solution. (that makes them very similar to the Danes somehow)

Beside the main project then, we had several disciplines divided into two modules. This means that during the first period of

the semester, we had 5 lectures which required a final assessment in the middle of the semester and then 5 other disciplines during the second half of the semester. So we actually have 2 exam period into 2 sub-semester. If I am right, KEA used to have a similar program structure where modules follow each other along the year.

The first module was Human business which was divided into Ethics on one side and Intercultural communication of the other side. This was from far away the most interesting module for me. The Ethics module put emphasis on IT ethics, and more specially IOT ethics. For example, all the ethical questions a developer need to ask himself when dealing with user data. This course consisted of group presentation, individual assignment and a group final assignment on Ethics subjects related to our IOT project.

The second part was focused on Intercultural communication. It was very similar to an ethnology lecture and it reminded me many memories from back when I was a history and archeology student in France. The lecture mostly focused on Geert Hofstede's works. It was a subject we overviewed during one lecture at KEA, but this time we had to learn it during several weeks and more in details. This is very far from a regular IT lecture expectation but I think it was more than necessary to learn it. I think in the context of globalisation, it is really important to learn from each other cultures and differences and I have a lot of respect for the HVA for teaching us this material. Every one from any educational field should have this lecture. It is a pity they don't put more effort on it in KEA, since I think it is there more necessary than anywhere else I have been. Seriously.

Another module was Visualisation and application. The first part consisted of learning how to visualise data in a coherent way. So, basically, to make nice charts. It was very interesting to learn more about it. I think most of us will need to regularly draw charts during their future careers and so it sounded necessary to teach us the golden rules of data visualisation. On my side, I was comfortable with the subject since I started to be very interested in 3D modelling since I moved to Denmark. Mostly because it was one of the few affordable hobby I could aim to in Copenhagen. Neverendless, what I learned from this course will help me a lot in my 3D modelling activities.

The second part of this module was really different. So different actually that I still wonder why they are part of the same module. The course was very similar to KEA's Software Integration course. We had several lecture about the basics of internet and web services and we were required to make a project involving a website, a webservice... This was one of the most difficult lecture for me. In KEA we only use one programming language, JAVA and we also never had any lectures about how to make a frontend. For this lecture, I had to do a program using Php, Html, java, arduino, Sql, javascript...many of these languages were very new for me and were never thought in KEA and it was difficult to explain to the HVA that I had to learn these languages first before making my assignment. This created a lot of stress but I could catch up my skills delay on time.

Another module was the Creation and User Design. The creation and user design course aimed to teach us the basics of user design and design thinking in general and how to shape your process methodology around user experiences and needs. It was from far away the most unpopular course among all the students. Mainly because the students of the HVA were mostly focused on the technical aspects of the course and where absolutely not interested in Design or User experience. This created a lot of cynism between students and teachers.

However, even if I am really interested in Design and User thinking. I actually think it is my favorite aspect of IT with process methodology, this course was not a good experience for me. I think this course is very useful for students that have no knowledge of design and process methodology. So they can start to make requirements based on user stories and user mapping. This is fair enough. But after 3 intensive years in KEA studying in details all the aspects of this discipline, it was very frustrating to have to re-assist to this, specially because the subject was very simplified compared to the KEA program. It was a bit like having to learn how to read while knowing how to read already. I must also say that as the students were mocking this class, it created a very unproductive atmosphere in this course where both students and teachers were cynical towards each others.

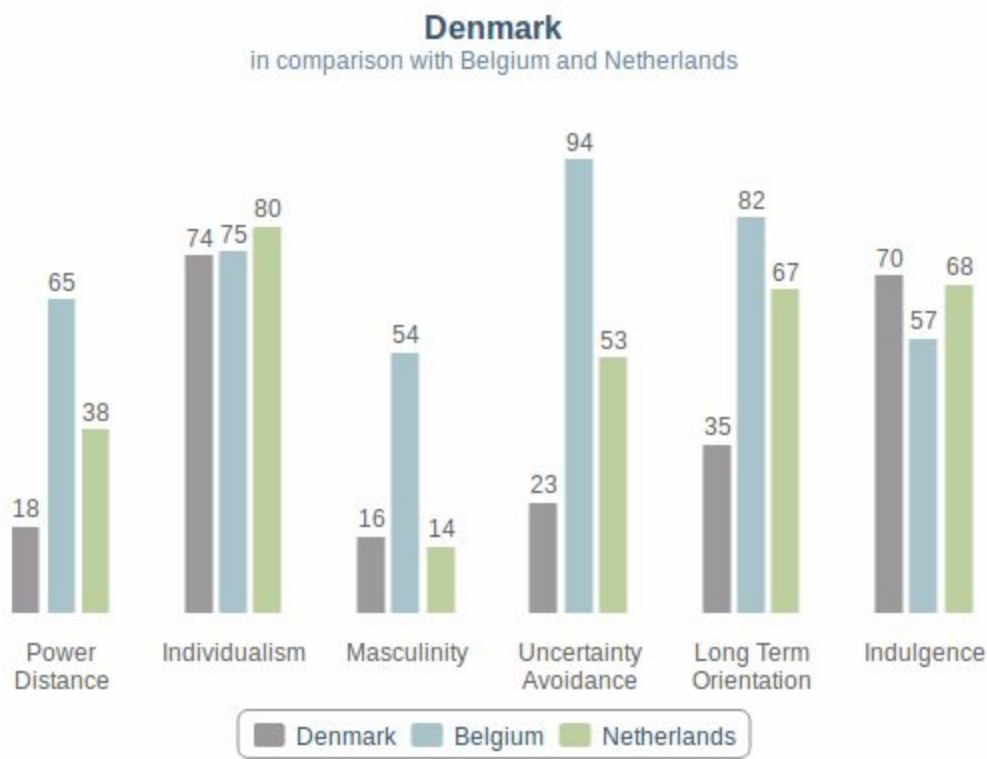
The last module was much more related to the IOT subjects. It consisted of platform and sensors communication. The first part required us to make a small IOT device and to make a research report based on it. That was interesting since that was what I signed for when I read "IOT" on the program. However, it was difficult since we did not had any sort of lecture or tutorials about IOT. We had to learn how to do it on our own and this was very challenging for me. I am a Software Development student, so I never had to handle any hardware, and now I had to do a all IOT product without help. However, I could make it and I learned a lot out of it. The Dutch are very proud of their "Pro active" system where student are expected to be proactive at learning on their own and where teachers are more expected to correct assignments rather

than attending traditional lectures. I imagine it is cheaper that way for the schools.

The second part of this module was very similar to KEA’s system integration where we were taught the basics of web and servers such as Rest, Sockets.. And so on. With perhaps more emphasis on connectivity and networking such as Bluetooth...We had to do a small practical assignment, an IBeacon with a raspberry Pi and we also had a written test. I am a bit confused about this written test because the teacher just gave us 50 questions and answer to learn during the semester and the only thing we had to do was to learn it by heart and be able to write it down during the exam. So, to pass the exams, we only needed to learn the answer, it was not checked if we actually understand them.

I.b.Experience at the host university : Teaching methods, teachers

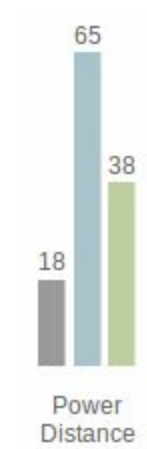
I think before I start to speak about the teaching methods and the teachers more in details, I should make a point on the cultural differences between Denmark and the Netherlands because I think it can explain a lot. For that, I will be glad to use the material from Wilko Oksam Human Business and Intercultural communication course. Wilko Oksam taught us the different cultural compasses stated by Pr. Geert Hofstede. In the frame below you can see the parameters result for 3 countries : Denmark (where is my home school), Netherlands (where is my host school), Belgium (I am half flemish and I firstly thought holland was similar to Belgium. It was right, but they are still very different as you can see). I think it is interesting to have a tri dimensional approach since I am not Danish myself.



So, to summarize, you can see that they are similarities. The 3 countries are culturally highly individualist. This means that there are no interdependence between society and their members among members. So the “I” is from far away more important than the “we”. There is a high preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. At school or work, small talk is kept at a minimum and there is no need to create relationship between team members, communication form is very direct as well. So in all three, the consequence is that it is more easy to launch a new team/project since people are not expected to befriend since they do not expect themselves to have friendships.

The indulgence is also very high in all three countries. The indulgent dimension means the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses. Perhaps because of individualism, the indulgence is relatively high since people are not connected to each other they do not need social restrain. So they have a great willingness to realise their impulses and desires with regard to enjoying life and having fun first. In that case, personal happiness and personal leisure is more important than the homework and the work performance in general. An example is that both Dutch and Danes finish their school day or work day very early in order to run to their after work activities.

Finally, both the Netherlands and Denmark have a very low masculinity index. This has nothing to do with gender equality !!! It is more about a set of values which is rather more masculine or more feminine. For example, Belgium, which ranks pretty high because Belgians focus on competition, achievement and success. However, Dutch and Danes are more driven by their quality of life and signs of success or standing out from the crowd is not admirable. In a school context, it means that student project conflicts and problem in general are resolved by compromise, negotiations, flexible work hours and a lot of free time. Both Dutch and Danes are famous for their endless discussions to reach everyone consent. In Belgium it is different, if the negotiation takes too long, the hierarchy will launch a vote.



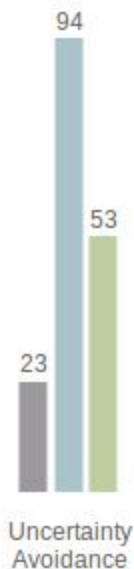
So now that we spoke about the similarities. Let's go with the differences. As we all know, Denmark, and consequently KEA have a very low power distance. Which means the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions expect and accept that power is distributed equally. Indeed, Denmark is the country of Europe where the power distance is the lowest. Power is decentralized and managers count on the experience of their team members. In workplaces, but also at KEA, it means that the atmosphere is very informal with direct communication between everyone on the first name basis and KEA student expect to be consulted by their teachers. I must admit I really love this and I really got used to it. In KEA, perhaps also because it is a very small school, I really appreciate to be able to just knock on the teacher room when I have a question or just have a random conversation with the teachers during the break. Also, as the school is smaller, teachers have a better knowledge of who we are as student and are more capable to monitor our progress. It is also very nice to be able to stay in the same room the all semester and to settle in there our documentations such as physical backlogs and burndown charts on the wall.

The school mentality in the Hva is very different because the power distance is much higher and also because the school is much bigger. Each lecture is in a different building so I felt I spent more time walking between my lecture that actually learning. Also, as there are so many students, there are not relationships between student and teachers and there is consequently much more distance between them. It is not Belgium or France, but power distance is still pretty high in Holland. This affected a lot the way of teaching and behaving.

High power distance means that hierarchy inequalities are common and accepted. Teachers had a lot of privileges but were often inaccessible. Teachers expect the student to be more formal, perhaps not in speech but in behaviour. They do not expect us to make any suggestions concerning the lecture. They might consult us for their own curiosity but do not expect it will be taken seriously. An example I have about it, is once our Creation and User design asked her to evaluate our lecture. Students were not satisfied with many points and she became furious about it. She told us that it was not our place to evaluate her job and program choices and that no matter what we needed to follow her directives. It created a lot of frustration because why would they ask our advice if they actually do not want to build on it ?

Also, the way information is controlled is also associated to power. While in Denmark students receive all the information at the beginning of the semester, dutch student receive them step by step and only when the teachers decide it. I remember teachers, specially for the semester project, which were giving us the requirements of the project step by step, and only when the requirements from the last iteration were achieved. It made any long term planification impossible I must say. But it helped the teachers to have a total control on our project while in Denmark teachers would have let us do until the exam. Another example concerning the different power distance is the way the lecture are attended. There not real participation from the student, even if the dutch are very glad to repeat that "Dutch students should be pro-active". Actually, in the facts, lecture are very traditional with one teacher speaking and students expected to listen and remember. There are no dialogs between teachers and students like in Denmark.

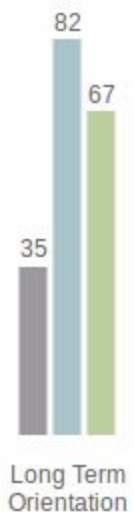
For me, a negative consequence of this high powered system is that students do not feel responsible of their work. They would not really have something done until the Teachers actually ask them to have it done. In that sense, I found dutch students much more childish and less professional than the Danes. This does not apply only to the lecture themselves. In Hva, it is normal to see students playing with the buttons of the lift or playing with the toilet papers of the toilet. Personally, these are things I have not seen since high school. It made things very complicated during the project because my dutch teammates were not keen to do anything that was not mandatory. For example, they would not accept to do basic risk analysis or project estimations because this was not mandatory. However, everyone knows that this is really necessary to start up any kind of project ! On the other side, I really had the feeling that teachers do not trust us. There are guards and lockers everywhere first and secondly they take as granted we will not do our best, which was a bit unmotivating. In Denmark it is very different, teachers respect and believe in you until you have disappointed them while in Holland, they start by believing you are not doing your best until you have actually showed them you worthed it. And it is a circle, the less the teachers trust the students, the least the students are responsible and so on...



One of the biggest difference is the uncertainty avoidance, and we will see that this has big consequences in the teaching environment comparatively to Denmark. Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these. In Denmark, and thus KEA, the uncertainty avoidance is very low, which means there is no need for a lot of structure and predictability in the work/study life. Plans are changing overnight, new things pop up and Danes are fine with it. Curiosity is natural and is encouraged from a very young age. The combination of very high individualism and curiosity is Denmark's driving force for innovation and design. Danes do not hesitate to share their doubt or to do not know something. It is okay to say "I dont know" and the Danes are very comfortable in ambiguous situations. This is something, even as a Flemish/French, which I really got used to. For me it is important that everyone think out the box and that everyone shares their doubts and limits. It makes it much easier to adapt a project and a team to everyone and to boost creativity.

The Netherlands, like my country, Belgium, exhibits a slight preference for avoiding uncertainty. This means that Dutch, and then the HVA, maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. It is a bit the Dutch/Flemish "Jante lov". Dutch have an emotional need for rules, even if rules never seem to work. For them, time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted, security is an important element in individual motivation.

This has quite heavy consequences in the school. Contrary to KEA and Denmark in general, I had the feeling that personal initiatives and creativity was absolutely not rewarded. Teachers really hate when you don't stick exactly to the requirement. They do not hesitates to fail you if you would write just one little paragraph which was not mandatory. Also, Dutch are obsessed by punctuality. In Denmark, if you come late, (of course not every day), teacher will be flexible and will even help you to catch up. Coming late in holland would be an insult. Teachers, and Dutch in general can be really rude if you show up late. (And no one wants to meet an angry dutch, believe me)



The last big difference between the dutch and danish system is long term orientation which is how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future. The Danes have a very short term orientation which means that the Danish culture is normative. People in such societies have a strong concern with establishing the absolute Truth. They are normative in their thinking. They exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results. At least following the Geert Hostede's work seen in our lectures. I think anyone who has lived in Denmark can affirm that they quickly got used to hear the word "standard" and that the right standard seems, in Denmark, to be the absolute solution and point of comparison of anything. From bread to phd's. In my program by KEA, I think this results a very big emphasis on the process methodology in the program.

In Hva, even if all teachers agreed on the necessity of using a process model, it did not seem to really matter for the grade many students, including my group mates, did not even want to hear about it, which was a bit frustrating for me since it is my favorite subject. This difference would make sense since Holland has a very long term orientation, which means that it has a pragmatic nature. In societies with a pragmatic orientation, people believe that truth depends very much on the situation, context and time. This was a bit disturbing for me, since I was use to Danish system, that what meant the teachers could just change from a day to another...Dutch and pragmatic culture, still following Hostede, show an ability to easily adapt traditions to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness and perseverance achieving results.

So to summarize all this. In appearance, the Dutch way at Hva and the Danish way at KEA are teaching methods which seem to be very similar : small classrooms, group project, informal relationships with the educating team. However, as soon as I started my semester there I could realise some important difference which take root in the culture differences but which is increased by a very different study environment (Huge campus, no possibilities for a personal space to sit and study...).

I.c.Experience at the host university : Learning outcomes

Based on the following chapters, I could have plenty to say concerning my learning outcomes. The first thing was the program. The program was really different from the program at KEA. Firstly, this was not the same program idea from start. The semester was a thematic semester of IOT while in KEA I studied Software Development. In the IOT class, we all came from different education, from business to hardware. So it was very hard to actually understand, for me and everyone, since we all had very different level for all the disciplines. I never did hardware for example, and the hardware course were then very challenging. I was a bit in panic at the beginning but hopefully, I am now very glad to have made it to have learn so much out of it.

Beside the technical part, there is the fact that I learned how to study in a different system. When I arrived in the Netherlands, I thought what I learned in Denmark was the only right way. Also, I had good grades at KEA, so I was very stubborn with what I learned in my home school. However, even if it took me a difficult time of adaptation, I learned at Hva that there was many ways, and the Danish/KEA one was only one of them. And I am very happy to have learned both, I think it will be a serious tool in my skill package for the future.

When I take distance to it, I still must admit that I am more comfortable with the danish way on one hand, because I have there much more freedom and the atmosphere is more informal and less stressful and teachers are always happy to help but not overwhelming you with requirements. The exam scheme is also very simple and it is easy to achieve good grades if you do your job. Following my own personality, I have the feeling that I work better and harder if I feel trusted and if I have the freedom to implement my own ideas in the project I am working on while I become quickly lazy and cynical if I have the feeling of being constantly monitored and if my personal initiatives are put into competition with better ones. But some people are boosted by what kills my mood, so it really depends of what each individual/student prefers.

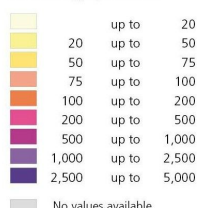
I found the dutch way much harder, teachers always seem overwhelmed and cannot really help. As they always say "In holland, students have to be pro-active", which seems to mean "I don't have time, google it". Also, the grading is very strict, while a 12 is easy in Denmark, a 10 is already very hard in the Netherlands. Also, beside the project work and the lectures, there are much more assignments. I think anyone can say that the workload is pretty heavy compared to Denmark and the requirements are harder. The positive side of it, because there is one, is that I have the feeling I challenged myself much more and consequently, I learned more. So difficult to say what is the best "Comfort & Innovation" or "Performance & Quality"...

II.a.Social and cultural experience : What to do in the city ?

Actually, since I have been elaborating so much about the socio-cultural aspect in the previous chapter, I might say it is difficult to say more. However, there is a lot to say about Amsterdam itself.

I think a good way to start is to remind what is actually Amsterdam. Amsterdam is the cultural capital of the Netherlands, however, Rotterdam is the economical center and largest city and The Haye is the seat of all the political institutions. (which makes me wonder why Amsterdam is the capital city then ?)

Inhabitants per km²
for two-digit postcodes



(left) Den Haag, (right) Rotterdam



What is good about it is that all the office, suit&tie business man and politicians are not in Amsterdam, even not the queen. So basically, Amsterdam population is mostly constituted of workers, students and families. And this perhaps creates this open minded and dynamic atmosphere proper to Amsterdam. Also, Amsterdam itself is just a bit bigger than Copenhagen, it actually lies in one of the most populated area in the world, the Randstad, which has 7,5 millions inhabitants. Which is itself next to the Flemish Diamond (Brussels, Antwerp metropolis) which has 6 millions inhabitants, which is pretty close from Lille-Kortrijk agglomeration (3 millions) and also next to the german Ruhr which has 12 millions people. So, rawly 40 millions inhabitant for the same size of Denmark. So even if Amsterdam is pretty small (around 2 millions inhabitant), it will feel like a world city like Brussels, London or Berlin.



No matter what day is it, there will always be something to do and the streets will be always crowded. This actually makes the city much more entertaining and also safer than Copenhagen, almost nothing can happen to you in the city center if you walked at night because there are always people and policemen around. Also, we should not forget that the Netherlands used to be much bigger than what they are today and so they still have a very big cultural influence, at least in countries where dutch is spoken (Belgium, Surinam, South Africa...). So this means that on a cultural point of view, Amsterdam is much more than just the capital of the Netherlands. The city is very influent and is constantly blossoming of culture from all over its circle of influence. And, as an exchange student, it really gives more energy to be in the middle of somewhere that matters and worth it.

One of my favorite aspect in Amsterdam is that it is very multicultural. Copenhagen is very monocultural, perhaps the most exotic thing you can ever buy in Denmark is a Kebab or Thai take away. The netherlands are very different, most of Amsterdam population has foreign origins and the dutch have always embraced cultural influences from their different minorities. People really seem to coexist together and it makes the city so rich and international. The best advantage is the food. Dutch food is extremely boring, and even the Dutch agree on that. It is more or less the same than the Danish food, which I love, but without any sauces or spice and most of it is steam cooked. Dutch are very happy to have one of the most healthy food in the world but no one eats it. Indeed, the city is full of delicious restaurants from all over the world, such as Indonesia or Malaysia. Beside of the food, you also have a lot of cultural spot, like Chinatown, the jewish neighborhood, many expositions from different cultures. It really is an open minded and a world city.



So, as I said, the city is full of museums and cultural spots. There are also plenty of small galleries and designers a bit everywhere in the old city. Amsterdam is also very famous for its coffee/bar culture. They are usually divided into 2 types. Firstly you have the "white cafes" which are bright, modern and clean. It is more the kind of place where you can come to have a warm drink and study on your computer. They are very similar to those you can find in Copenhagen, however, the big difference is that it will be much cheaper, and specially, the staff will be very polite and service minded. Beside of it you have the "Brown Cafe" which are more old fashion traditional dutch pub. It is usually very loud (Dutch speak very loud) and it is more the kind of place where you go for a beer with friends. It is a bit similar to the pubs of Copenhagen, however there is quite a big difference. In Dutch culture, like in most of western europe, it is not socially acceptable to drink too much. Contrary to Denmark, being drunk in a public space won't be considered as funny for anyone and will generally end up in trouble. You won't see herds of drunk people in the sunday morning's streets like in Scandinavia. People are much more aware of the alcohol risks. Personnally, I really appreciated, it makes the streets much safer and cleaner. On the other end, since drugs are common in Amsterdam, there are some quiet big issues with young tourist taking drugs everywhere in the city. This is a serious problem, specially when they start to bike.





As I said earlier, Amsterdam is close from everything. In Copenhagen the situation is more complicated, because if you want to see something else, you directly need to plan holidays since the closest big cities like Hamburg or Stockholm are still very far away. In Amsterdam, you can quickly reach many interesting big cities like Rotterdam, Den Haag, Antwerp, Brussels, Utrecht... There are really so much to see. What is really nice is also to go to the dutch country side.

The surrounding of Amsterdam are full with picturesque woodhouses village where you can really discover what dutch meet by "Gezellig". It is impossible to translate it in English, it express a feeling of cosyness and pleasantness. Danes would call it "hyggelig", Norwegians "koselig", Germans "gemutlich", French "chaleureux". I think it is a pretty common word in many languages but Dutch, like the Danes, are convinced that it exists only in their languages and the best make them mad is to remind them that it is nothing unique from Dutch. So as I said, you can have a very "gezellig" afternoon in small villages where you can enjoy local products such as old cheese, herring or ryebread...

II.b.Social and cultural experience : Find friends and networking

Firstly, it is very easy to make new friends and new networks in Amsterdam. I remember when I started to be a student at KEA. I was not yet in Software Development but in Computer Sciences, I was very disappointed that there were two different classes. There was the Danish class and the International class. So, already, structurally, the school did not expect the locals and the expats to study together. Also, there were some quite big difference between both. For example, the danish students were proposed to do project for companies and were consequently able to learn more out of real world situations and to start making networks with real companies. However, the international class was doing projects that had no real client and did not had the same opportunities. This was absolutely not the case in the Hva, the classroom where totally mixed and the international students were also proposed to make projects for real clients. I have made more connections in 5 months in Hva than in 4 years at Kea to be honest.

It is also much easier to socialize with the locals. I might say I was advantaged because I already spoke fluently dutch. But the dutch students were very welcoming towards us. We really could build very nice friendship and great cultural exchange. Also, contrary to Kea, the groups were composed from both Dutch and International students. In Kea, it is very rare to have so mixed groups, students are not really keen to socialize between international and locals, even in the school restaurant. It was probably the nicest part of my trip to the Netherlands, I really feel like I was first a student and an inhabitant of Amsterdam, people never asked me to justify my background or to thanks them to tolerant I was in there country, while, to be honest, in Copenhagen, I mostly felt like a burden. Amsterdammers are really welcoming, social, ready to help and in a good mood. Beside of that, there are also the other Erasmus students which shares very similar experiences and consequently form a very strong group. We were always helping each others to understand the dutch system or to organize excursions. Also, the Hva really put emphasis on student socialization and organised us many events.

III.a.Practical experience : Travel and stay in Amsterdam

Travelling to Amsterdam was really easy. Schiphol Airport is one of the biggest and best organized airport in the world. You have a lot of direct and cheap flights from Norwegian or Transavia. Also, KLM is flying everywhere, it is more expensive since it is a national and prestigious airline but they offer one of the best service as well. Inside the country, the Netherlands have one of the most sophisticated and operational transport system I have seen so far. Even in a very small village like Marken you will be able to takes a bus in the middle of the night. Amsterdam also has an impressive system of ferry, metro, S-train, tram, buses. And of course, everyone is biking everywhere and to everywhere. For obvious normative reasons, Uber is absolutely prohibited and Taxis are unaffordable, so I would not recommend it.

Moving is easy, however, staying is much more complicated. It is really difficult to find an accomodation in Amsterdam, even more difficult than in Copenhagen. The reason behind it is the tourism and also the fact that everybody wants to live in Amsterdam. As a foreign student you have two possibilities, trying to find a place on your own or being helped by the Hva. The Hva has partnership with housing companies. This is very useful if you don't have experience looking for appartments abroad but I must say it was a bit disappointing. Firstly, it is very expensive, you need to pay a fee of 500euros for the company to treat your application. Beside of that, the company, a bit like the danish KKIK, will look for a room and will propose you offers. If you refuse the offers, you cannot be refunded. Unfortunately, I decided to refuse their offer and to lose 500euros. The company was proposing me a very expensive room very far from the center. It would have been the same than doing an Erasmus in the suburb of Copenhagen and I wanted to experience the life of the center of Amsterdam.

So I took the risk to look for a room on my own. And then I found a very good offer, for the same price and quality than the School's offer, but in the heart of the old Amsterdam, at the canal side and in a very nice old building. Nothing I could compare with a 90's prefab building of the deep suburb. I also did not want to trust the housing company because both in France and Denmark, I had really awful experiences with student housing. The building were always dirty, old, cold, noisy with a bad internet connection if any, and always located far away of any nice places. However, as I met many friends among the student, I could see the dutch student housing and I must admit they were awesome. Even better than I experienced in Sweden. The room were really huge with a lot of personal equipment, brand new, nicely decorated and with very modern and clean facilities. It was like being in the most modern suburbs of Copenhagen. However, it was indeed really far from the school and the center, and less cosy than my traditional dutch room at the canal.

So if you move to Amsterdam I would recommend you to only look for your own room if you speak dutch and know how to look for it and if you have a lot of time and energy. If you prefer to take it easy, you can apply to the housing company provided by the school, however, you might pay a lot and live like an hermit far away of anything that would make this trip interesting.



III.b.Practical experience : Costs and daily expenses in Amsterdam

As I said above, staying somewhere in Amsterdam is really difficult and expensive. I was paying 675euros (5100dkk) for my student room and I did not have a kitchen. It sounds very expensive but for the inner city, I was actually really lucky, I have many friends that pay more than 1000euro for the same. I had a very generous and fair landlord, perhaps the most friendly and honest landlord I ever had ! The daily expenses are just a bit cheaper than in Copenhagen, however, as the rents are quite higher, I would say that the daily expenses are more or less the same than in Denmark. Also, eating or going out can be quite expensive. Amsterdam is one of the most touristic city in the world and the prices for leisure activities are adapted to tourism. Which means that you shall not be surprised to pay up to 40dkk for a small beer.

Beside of that, the public transports cost more or less the same than in Denmark. Hopefully in my case, I was living in the center and only 40 minutes walk from the school so I almost never purchased metro tickets. However, I imagine it becomes quite expensive if you live in the suburb.

Finally, you need also to consider the expenses related to the school. Officially, the school is free but there are a lot of side expenses. For example, the hardware related courses require some hardware devices and material that you will need to find yourself. Depending of the project you are doing this can be quite expensive. Also, the school has very nice cafe and restaurants to eat which provide much better quality and choices than in KEA but the drawback is that they are much more expensive than in KEA. A coffee at the HVA will cost the same than a coffee in town. So be aware to fill in your own coffee and sandwiches at home before going to school.

To summarize, I would say that if you do not eat organic products (BAD !) and if you do not go out too often (VERY BAD!) and if you avoid shopping (UNTHINKABLE !), you will need a budget of 10 000dkk a month to be comfortable. So, if you receive SU and the Erasmus grant, you won't have that much but it will be possible. In my case I am a foreigner and I quitted my job for this exchange so I was not eligible for receiving SU. Consequently, I finance all this trip based on the grant and mostly on my saving money. I had a very tight budget then, and I had to forget about breakfast and public transport, which was not always funny, specially in the winter. But that was my own situation and choice, with a regular income from your job, or parents, or SU, it is an affordable experience.

Conclusion



When I decided to study in Amsterdam for one semester, I did not really expect to learn something really new. I already worked in Amsterdam in the past when I was steward and I lived in similar cities like Antwerp or Copenhagen. So I was pretty used to B's (bricks, bikes, beers & boats...). However, I must say that it appears to be a very surprising city. Of course Amsterdam is similar to any capital of north-western Europe, but there are so many unique things, things that you neither can find in Flanders or Denmark. Just Dutch things.

Dutch have a very unique way to see life and attend school and daily life and Amsterdam is really a jewel, a perfect mix of a old picturesque city and a dynamic and modern capital. Copenhagen and Amsterdam are very similar but still so different. They are a bit mirrors of each others, examples of what both could have become starting from the same root. Copenhagen became this quiet, organized and innovative capital while Amsterdam became this crowded, dynamic and cosmopolitan world city. I would definitely recommend the exchange program to anyone.

