
Reflection on the Year Ahead: Why I Want to Study Abroad

At University College Cork, Erasmus is a vital part of learning a language. I am currently in the early stages of preparing to study for a year in Germany, with this comes expectations and aims that I wish to set for myself. Next year I aim to fully immerse myself in the German language and culture. Culture can be defined as a way of life of a particular group of people, this encompasses language, religions, arts, customs and social behaviour. With Germany's captivating history, rich culture and beautiful scenery, it is easy to see why it's a great choice for erasmus students.

During Erasmus, there are many chances to meet new people. However, it is said that one must have an international mindset when doing so. (Ryan, 2006: 21), as cited by Jackson (2010, p. 29) provides a description of the intercultural person as someone who is open to "personal expansion" and is "capable of negotiating the conflicts and tensions inherent in cross-cultural contacts." When I return home to Ireland, I would like to possess intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is the ability to behave appropriately and communicate effectively with people of other cultures. There are three stages that lead to intercultural competence. The first stage is intercultural knowledge, this is seen when we accept the cultural differences and we are respectful and curious toward the cultural difference. The second stage is the adaptation to the cultural difference, in this stage one is able to interpret others' cultural behaviour and change their own behaviour to communicate better with those of another culture. The third stage is integration of cultural difference this is when a fluidity between one's own culture and another culture becomes natural and is done without thought. I would obviously aim to reach the final stage and have the ability to integrate into the German culture however this often takes longer than a year. Therefore, I would be satisfied returning to Ireland having adapted to the cultural difference. I believe this can be achieved by socialising with locals, students from Germany as well as other international students. I am certain this is a skill I could also apply in the workplace as it allows employees to understand each other's cultural differences.

An important goal that I have set is to participate in an internship. I believe that going abroad for an internship is the perfect opportunity to enhance my CV, not only that but I would also like to improve my social skills and become more confident in an office environment. It is said that gaining professional experience abroad will help set you apart from other students that don't have the same experience, there is an extremely competitive global labour market and I wish to expand my global network that could contribute to my future career goals. Working with international peers can be extremely beneficial as different cultures have different ways of dealing with different problems and situations. I would like to have the ability to look at things with an international business perspective by the end of the internship.

I have a keen interest in travelling during my year abroad. Germany has an extensive network of buses and trains which makes travelling around Germany and Europe easy and accessible. I am determined to pursue my 'wanderlust' and discover new destinations, foods and meet new people in my travels. It is said that Germany makes a great base for exploration. Germany is in central Europe and therefore France, Austria, Italy, Belgium and many other countries are on your doorstep. This gives an endless amount of options for trips away at weekends and during semester breaks. I think it is important that I step out of my comfort zone and immerse myself in

the cultural diversity that exists. Germany has a long, rich and complex history which I would like to learn about first-hand. I would like to gain knowledge about the ancient Germanic tribes, the Holy Roman Empire right up until World War II and the Reunification of Germany. I believe that having an insight to German history and before going there develops a more sophisticated appreciation of culture and society.

I would like to come home from Erasmus as an independent and self-reliant individual. During the year abroad it is essential that one adapts to their new environment and develop personally. I am aware that I will face challenges such as the language barrier, keeping on top of my own household chores, cooking, planning my own trips and overall not depending on my family or friends. I would like to come home with the ability to budget, pay bills and limit my expenses.

O'Mahony and O'Reilly (2009) focus on the research of Armbruster's study of 24 German managers and describe the differences between Irish and German workers in great detail. In this study it is said that German workers and Irish workers have a different approach to timekeeping and a more relaxed attitude towards their work. (Hall, 1989) as cited by O'Reilly and O'Mahony (2009, p. 157) identifies the difference in perception of time between Irish and German workers as follows: Cultures which are monochronic in orientation view time in linear terms, tend to complete one task at a time, consider time as a limited good, stress punctuality, and emphasise the task over the person. Polychronic cultures, on the other hand, have a more cyclical approach to time, tend to do many tasks simultaneously, prioritise relationships over the task, and place less emphasis on punctuality.

I have always struggled with punctuality whether it is for meetings or arriving on time. In Germany, the rule of thumb is that it's better to be five minutes early than one minute late. I am aware of the importance of punctuality for meeting deadlines, assignments and eventually a skill I will require in the workplace. It is crucial to be dependable, reliable and consistent.