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Half a year in Innsbruck and my experiences with IMPACCT

In the winter semester 2023/2024, the IMPACCT project gave me the opportunity to study in Innsbruck for a semester. As I had always dreamed of living in the mountains since I was a little girl, it was a dream come true for me.

When planning my stay, I was lucky enough to have the IMPACCT team by my side every step of the way. At the beginning of a semester abroad, you have a lot of worries. How should I plan everything? Will I find accommodation? Can I get credit for the courses at my home university? Thanks to the project, I was not alone with all these thoughts. At the meetings with the student assistant, we were told how to draw up a learning agreement, how to contact the lecturers and when to look for accommodation. Ms Nierste and Ms Schäfer were always on hand to help us with the actual application process at the host university. Thanks to this support, you never felt that you were alone with the planning. Ms Ermert's practical course provided a great opportunity to exchange ideas with the other outgoing students. Especially in the primary school teaching degree programme, it is currently still a rarity to go abroad for a semester, so it was great to be able to exchange ideas through the practical course.

When the planning phase was over, I had to attend intercultural training shortly before my departure. To begin with, I did not see the point in this. Why did I need intercultural training? I was only going to a neighbouring German-speaking country. But during the training we also learnt what makes us and our background special, how this influences us in our interactions with other people and how we can combat prejudices. These were all points that helped me in living in a shared space in the hall of residence. I lived in a hall of residence with 17 other international students. There were 15 differ-

ent nationalities sharing one kitchen, so it is particularly important to understand other cultures in such a situation.

The hall of residence situation can also be linked to my expectations of the semester abroad. For me, the focus was on becoming more open and self-confident. I wanted a new environment, to meet new people and surpass myself. As I started studying straight after leaving school, it was important for me to see something different before I started working as a teacher. I also saw many opportunities for my future career in the chance to spend a semester abroad. As teachers, we are also confronted with many different cultures every day. A teacher is also characterised by a self-confident manner and a particularly high degree of openness. It was precisely in these areas that I hoped to further my education.

I was very lucky to meet lots of nice people right at the beginning of the semester. I quickly made friends through the Erasmus events, the hall of residence and my courses at the university, with whom I was able to share this experience. The semester flew by. I explored Innsbruck and the surrounding area, went paragliding with the Erasmus group, tried my flatmate's Chinese food, tried to teach international students German, often visited the Christmas market and celebrated the Iranian festival Yalda with my friend.

During my semester, I had an 'interim meeting' with the IMPACCT team. This gave me the opportunity to talk about my experiences and adventures. We talked about the teacher training programme in Austria, which is structured as a bachelor's and master's degree. You can already work as a teacher there after completing your bachelor's degree. The internships take place during the semester and not during the lecture-free period. I believe this is better at JLU, as you can concentrate fully on the tasks of the internship during the lecture-free period. The examination phase in Innsbruck is a lot more relaxed than at JLU. Although you take a lot of exams, you can easily postpone an exam for 2–3 weeks to avoid stress. In Innsbruck you do not need a sick note for this, and you always have 3–5 attempts to pass an exam. This is ideal for me as a very nervous person during exams.

I really appreciated the close supervision offered through the project. When you go abroad via another project, you have to organise some aspects completely on your own. Thanks to the support, I

was never alone with challenges; there was always someone to talk to.

On the one hand, Innsbruck is a very young city and, thanks to the university, also an international city. On the other hand, Innsbruck is also a very traditional city. This is particularly evident in the many cultural events and attractions on offer. A fond memory of mine is the Museum Night, when you could visit all the museums all night long with one ticket. Shopping weekends were also popular when traditional live music was played in all the department stores.

Looking back, I have to say that all my expectations were exceeded. At the beginning, I was worried that I would not make any friends and would not feel at home in Innsbruck. In those six months, I did not only made friends for life, but also found a place where I feel very comfortable and where I grew beyond myself. Living together in the dormitory with my Chinese flatmate and our communal kitchen prepared me especially well for the heterogeneity challenges at primary school. I think I have learnt a lot from the semester, especially for my future career. I have become more open, more spontaneous, and more self-confident. These are all qualities that I can benefit from in my future career. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to gain this experience and to take part in the IMPACCT project.

IMPACCT is a project in which the well-being of the students and their experiences are of great importance. It is not about good performance, but about experience and personal development, which is great!

