

Reflection: Istanbul

The IMPACCT project offers student teachers a unique opportunity to experience a semester abroad in a special way. With a structured programme that combines professional and intercultural preparation, on-site support and final reflection, it goes far beyond a normal exchange semester. From the very beginning, a special focus is placed on comprehensive support that assists and accompanies the students throughout the entire period. For me personally, this support was a great help and enabled me to experience my semester abroad not only in a professionally enriching way, but also in a safe and well-organised manner. Special thanks go to Ms Wiebke, whose tips and advice supported me at every stage, whether it was during the planning phase, during my stay in Istanbul or during the follow-up.

The combination of professional preparation and intercultural training proved to be enormously helpful. The events and discussions beforehand enabled me to familiarise myself intensively with the upcoming cultural exchange and prepare myself for a wide range of situations. The intercultural training not only gave me an introduction to the culture of Turkey, but also sensitised me to the diversity within and between cultures. I particularly appreciated the opportunity to ask questions, clarify uncertainties and receive support with formal matters, which made the entire process much easier.

The project context and the targeted preparation gave me a clear advantage over other students who had their experience abroad without such support. I already felt more confident and better prepared when I travelled to Istanbul. Even though I have Turkish roots and already know the country a little, I was able to gain many new perspectives on the culture thanks to the intercultural preparation. Especially as someone with a dual cultural background, it was interesting to observe how different everyday life and interaction in Turkey is compared to Germany—there are also many differences

between people with Turkish roots who grew up in Germany and the locals in Turkey, which are often not obvious at first glance.

My expectations for the semester abroad were high, and I can say that they were more than fulfilled. My aim was to really get to know the life and culture of the host country, both in terms of daily life and studying. This opportunity gave me a deep insight into the Turkish way of life and helped me grow both personally and professionally. Studying at the host university differed in many ways from the experience at JLU, and I found many similarities and differences between the two institutions. One important difference was that at JLU we often covered topics in the first semesters that are not introduced there until later. This gave me the opportunity to deepen my knowledge and expand it in dialogue with the local students.

Another central aspect of the IMPACCT project is the preparation given for working in heterogeneous classrooms. The intercultural exchange within the project sensitised me to the fact that cultural diversity exists not only between different nationalities, but also within a group of people from the same background. I realised that you cannot simply judge people by their origins, as each individual has their own perspective and way of life. This realisation will be of great importance for my future work in the classroom, as it is about recognising and appreciating diversity and differences—even if all students come from the same country.

Looking back, I can hardly see anything to criticise about my participation in the IMPACCT project. On the contrary, the comprehensive preparation and guidance were a unique advantage that students without this project context often did not have. The project enriched me in many ways and gave me a valuable perspective on living and studying in another culture, not only academically but also personally.

In terms of cultural and historical experiences, the semester abroad in Istanbul was extremely inspiring. Together with other students, we made it a habit to visit a new mosque or museum every Friday. Istanbul, known for its impressive architecture and many cultural sites, offered us a wealth of opportunities to discover the city's rich history and culture. We also explored other sights, such as the Princes' Islands, and experienced unforgettable moments to-

gether. These trips were not only culturally enriching but also led to close friendships that I still maintain today.

In addition to Istanbul, we also travelled to other parts of Turkey and discovered a variety of cities, including Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Rize, Trabzon, Giresun, Ordu and Samsun. Each of these cities offered its own cultural treasures, traditions and scenic highlights, and we were able to make memories on these trips that will stay with us for a lifetime. The hospitality we encountered everywhere was simply incredible. It was impressive to experience how warmly we were welcomed in every place and how proud the people were to share their culture and cuisine with us.

A particular highlight of these trips was definitely the Turkish cuisine. Whether regional specialities from Hatay or the typical desserts from Gaziantep, the food was simply delicious. Turkish cuisine is known worldwide for its variety and intensity of flavours, and we really felt it—even on the scales! After each trip, we felt like we brought a few extra kilos back with us, which just goes to show how much we enjoyed the food.

All of these experiences—the people, the culture, the landscapes and the incredible cuisine—had a profound impact on me and gave me new appreciation of the diversity and hospitality in Turkey.

The semester abroad was greatly beneficial for my future professional life. The experiences I had and the friendships I made during this time have enriched my network and motivated me to explore new avenues. Many of the friendships extend to different cities in Germany and beyond, which has meant that I have travelled a lot within Germany since my return. Meeting up with former fellow students in cities like Frankfurt, Cologne, Bremen and Berlin is still an integral part of my life today.

Overall, my semester abroad was an unforgettable time that broadened my horizons and gave me a lot of valuable experience for my future career as a teacher. It was enriching in every way, and I am grateful that I was able to take advantage of this opportunity through the IMPACCT project.

