

Jasmina Andrejc z Gimnazije Slovenj Gradec je raziskovala študentske migracije v okviru EU. Njen prispevek zaključuje izčrpen intervju z mariborskim študentom v Avstriji.

## IN SEARCH OF KNOWLEDGE ABROAD

by Jasmina Andrejc



Figure 1

Studying abroad is gaining knowledge in a foreign country while meeting new people, getting to know new cultures and expanding your horizon. Not many students from Slovenia choose to study abroad. Studies suggest that only around 8% of them decide to gain an education in a foreign country. The percentage is not necessarily small especially for a country such as Slovenia however, it could be a lot higher.

Studying abroad comes with its benefits and weaknesses, as all things do. It supports growing a social network and enables students to build new friendships all over the world. It simultaneously introduces students to potential employers and enhances their social platform.

It is also a major factor in developing one's language skills as you are almost pushed into an environment that uses a certain language and one must communicate to live a proper life. Studying abroad I also associate with getting to know new cultures

and their habits. That includes adapting to it and accepting it as a part of who you now are.



Figure 2

All that and travelling the world, seeing it in all its beauty? Sounds too good to be true. Well, studying abroad also has its drawbacks. For instance, if you are an introverted person, it will probably take you more time to adjust to the new social life and the world surrounding you. We also cannot forget about the

living situation and financing it on your own. Students in Slovenia can apply for scholarships such as Ad futura. A big help are also programs such as Erasmus+, ASEF Junior Fellows and some others.

I interviewed Philip, a 24-year-old student from Maribor, who has been studying abroad, in Austria, for the last 5 years. I asked him about studying abroad, what he sees are its benefits and possible drawbacks.

### **What university are you attending, what is your Master's?**

“The university that I am attending is FH JOANNEUM University of Applied Sciences in Austria. I have studied there for the past 5 years. In the first three years I did my bachelor's degree in Health Management in Tourism. I enjoyed this study programme a lot, due to its wide spectrum of knowledge which has been provided. For the last two years I have been continuing my studies in the master's programme of Health Tourism and Leisure Management. I will have finished this programme this summer.”

### **Why did you choose to study abroad and expand your knowledge in a foreign country? What are the main benefits in your opinion?**

“The main reason why I have chosen this path is because of my knowledge of the German language and because I could not decide on a study programme in Slovenia. I have searched both countries, yet the only university that offered a study programme with a combination of study fields was the FH JOANNEUM. My friends and family also had a big impact on me, because they were certain that the school system in Austria is much more sufficient and efficient compared to the one in Slovenia. This is also one of the first experiences I have made there. In the past five years I have seen and be able to compare the system when talking to my friends who study in Slovenia and there are major differences in how knowledge is

being provided and students and professors in Austria cooperate. I have also always had the feeling of community, meaning the students were not studying for themselves but rather helping each other along the way. It has made the whole process and time there much easier.

Along with the differences of how the Know-How is provided, one of the main differences is that the professors try to share their own knowledge and provide hand on examples as well as ways of how to apply this knowledge. It is not just theory, but we get our hands dirty and try stuff out. And finally, it has always been a pleasure telling others that I study in a foreign country and watching their expressions.”

**Was there a cultural shock when you first started studying abroad? How did you adjust to a new culture?**

“For me personally it was not a major culture shock, because I was born and raised in Austria until my 8<sup>th</sup> birthday. Therefore, I have always known the language as well as some customs and culture. Yet, when I came back to Austria to do my bachelor’s degree, I have found out that there are more similarities than I first thought. Of course, there were differences to which you must get used to, but when you embrace them life there becomes beautiful. Getting to know



Figure 3

the language better, the people and their customs as well as other traditions is like discovering a whole new world all over again. I have always been more open to such experiences, but I have friends there who do not like the culture or do not want to embrace it for themselves and they do not have such a good time as I do. If someone decides to go abroad, they must understand that the country and culture will change them and not the other way around. I believe this is the fundamental decision one must make if they decide to do it. Not being able to change means not being able to survive.”

**Have you experienced any difficulties when living abroad, such as having trouble fitting in, being homesick or experiencing a language barrier?**

“As said, I have already lived abroad where I learned the language. However, when one does not use the language regularly some difficulties may appear. So, I had some problems when I first came to Austria to study. I knew German very well, yet



nobody prepared me to all the different accents that would be there. They were the hardest part of moving abroad, yet once I learned to use it, it became so much more fun to be there. Now, when I speak German, no one knows I come from Slovenia.

Otherwise, being homesick is always a part of moving away. I had the luck that I did not have to drive a long way home. But since I enjoy the time in Austria so much, I rather become homesick of Austria when I am home and not vice versa.”

### **What is your living situation? Are you staying in a university dorm?**

“The place I study is called Bad Gleichenberg and it is a very small community. So being able to live in a big residential house was not an option. Luckily there is a student dorm where almost all students of the school live. It is a small town to say, with only students from one school. It is perfect because everybody knows everybody and life there is just simple. The student dorm is also very different to the ones in Slovenia. This one is equipped with a gym and sauna, there is breakfast provided every morning and once a week your room gets cleaned by the cleaning ladies. It is of course a bit more expensive, but you have everything you can wish for.”

### **Would you recommend studying abroad to younger students that are continuing their education paths? What would you say makes studying abroad better than gaining knowledge in your own country?**

“Yes, I would definitely recommend it. I prefer it for all the reasons I have mentioned before, but what I find most important is the personal growth that comes with living and studying abroad. I grew so much as person; I have experienced so much situations that will follow me through my lifetime and all thanks to the decision that I went to study abroad. I do not want to say that it is not possible to gain those experiences in your own

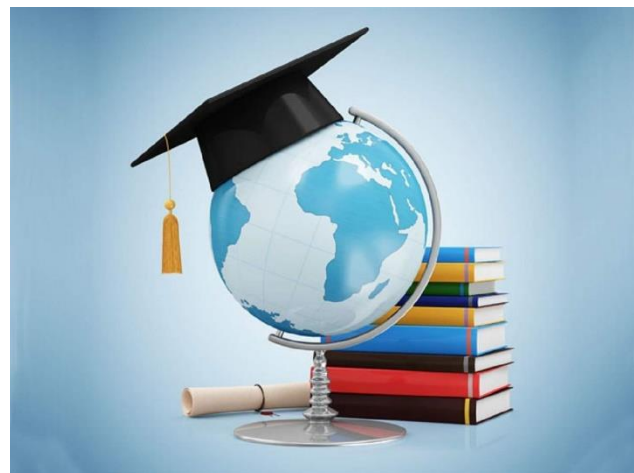


Figure 4

country, but it emphasizes them so much more. And if studying abroad is not something for you, then I would recommend considering doing a semester abroad in the ERASMUS programme or FREEMOVER. I have to say I learned for life and I am eager to know what the future holds for me. “

## **What is something you would want the students who are planning to study abroad in the future to know?**

“One thing that is, in my opinion, the most important is not to be afraid. And I mean it in the broadest of sense you can imagine. I have learned that most people are nice therefore if you have any questions, they are more than willing to answer them. So do not be fearful to ask questions or ask for help. Now in the times of the pandemic most schools abroad offer virtual open houses where you can attend online and listen to presentations and ask questions. If someone is interested, I would highly recommend attending those because you can learn more from that than only reading about it online. Secondly, if you find yourself having second thoughts it is always good to ask if there are already students that come from Slovenia. Chances are, there will be, because there are more of us out there than one can imagine. And a conversation with someone can always be a turning point or a helping hand.

And lastly, it is always good to try. Not everybody always succeeds, but in order to win you have to try. And I see it this way: I can only win or learn, there is no fail in trying.”

All things considered, studying abroad is a good way to meet new people, make friends, connections and to widen one’s horizon.

### ***Sources***

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### ***Photos***

**Figure 1** <https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fi.imgur.com>

**Figure 2** <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fmfdps.si>

**Figure 3** <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fstrategicpsychology.com>

**Figure 4** <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fm.economictimes.com>