



EXCHANGE REPORT

Name

Frida Öberg

Year and semester for
exchange

2024 Autumn

Exchange university

Delft University of Technology

Degree programme

Urbansim

An Autumn Semester in Delft, Netherlands

Before departure

The thought of doing an exchange semester had been on my mind for a long time, but I was still hesitant. It wasn't until the last minute, when I realized this was my final chance to do it with the support of my university that I applied. Today, I am very happy I did, though I would recommend other students to make this decision earlier to avoid unnecessary stress. I had set my sights on Delft a few years earlier, influenced by a former teacher from my bachelor's studies. I admired her honesty, efficiency, and straightforward way of communicating, and later discovered that she had completed her master's in Urbanism at Delft University of Technology (TU Delft). Naturally, these qualities shaped my expectations of the education there, and I can confidently say they were met. Once I was officially accepted by TU Delft, the search for accommodation and other preparations began. The university also offered Dutch language courses that students could apply for in advance, but I did not find them necessary, most of my friends ended up being internationals anyway. Fortunately, I did not need any vaccinations or a visa for the exchange.

Upon arrival

For personal reasons, I was not able to arrive in Delft more than a few days before the start of the semester. Still, it was enough time to settle into my new home, explore the city, and, most importantly, get a bike. I also attended the two mandatory introduction days, which were designed to familiarize us with the campus, faculty, workshops, and the programme in general. During these days, we were also introduced to the Bouwpub, the bar of the Bouwkunde faculty. Unfortunately, I missed the less formal introduction week held two weeks before the semester began. It was probably a great opportunity for people to connect and explore the different social activities on campus, though I did not find it difficult to do that during the first weeks of studies. POLIS, the student union for the Urbanism track, is definitely worth joining. Their WhatsApp group is a good way to stay updated on various social and educational events throughout the year. For example, during the first weeks, they organised two movie nights with pizza and beers, and they always arrange one study trip per semester to another European country.

Financials

Aside from the Erasmus scholarship, I received some extra money from CSN. This was a huge help in covering the travel expenses, but I did not find my daily expenses higher than in Sweden. Other than food and rent, most things are slightly cheaper in the Netherlands. If you live in Delft, like I did, you will not need public transport, but exploring nearby cities is worth it. Many of my classmates lived in Rotterdam or The Hague and commuted easily by train. A personalised OV card is a good investment since single tickets are pricey. There are various subscription options, like unlimited travel on

weekdays or weekends. To get the card, you will need a Dutch bank account, which you can set up for free (TU Delft provides info on this).

A bike is essential. Swapfiets is a great option for a semester, the price is €15/month for a rental bike with included repairs. It saves you the hassle of buying, maintaining, and reselling a bike later.

Accommodation

The most common way to find housing is through Duwo, arranged by the university. You will receive an email about it, and it is a good idea to sign up. However, their studio rents are quite high, usually over €700/month, so I looked for alternatives on Facebook and Kamernet. Fortunately, through a friend, I got in touch with a local Delft contact and found a room in a house with four Dutch master's students looking for a subtenant. I later realised how rare it is for an international student to secure housing in Delft (not a neighbouring city) outside the student housing system. So, I was lucky to live with friendly Dutch housemates in a well-kept traditional home, just a 10-minute bike ride from campus, for €482/month.

It's worth noting that "good condition" in a traditional Dutch row house often includes a small leak during heavy rain!

University and studies

The TU Delft campus is huge, I definitely did not see all of it during my stay. The Architecture and the Built Environment faculty, known as Bouwkunde, housed most of my lectures and studio courses. It offers four tracks: Architecture, Building Technology, Landscape Architecture, and Urbanism. While Architecture dominates the studio space, our Urbanism track had its own one-floor wing, shared with PhD students and teachers, creating an intimate environment. The semester was divided into quarters, and since I was there in autumn, I completed Q1 and Q2 of the first year. The master's tracks follow a strict schedule, with elective courses only available in Q4 (first year) and Q1 (second year). Since the graduation course spans three quarters, exchange students can only join in the first year, even if they're in year two at their home university. Courses were meticulously planned, with each quarter's schedule outlined in a detailed guide, specifying daily agendas and expectations. This structured approach, along with abundant resources of teachers, software, workshops, etc., was a major difference from KTH. While you receive a lot, you are also expected to produce a lot. It was not a laid-back experience, but being fully immersed in studies made it both intense and rewarding. The workload brought everyone closer, both to their work and to each other.

Courses

I could not choose individual courses, only the track and Urbanism seemed the best fit for my KTH programme. The curriculum included four courses, each lasting one quarter, with two running in parallel: a 10-credit studio and a 5-credit theory course.

The first studio, AR1U090 R&D Studio: Analysis and Design of Urban Form, focused on city-scale analysis through method workshops, group work, and an individual design proposal. We produced new maps and drawings weekly, constantly shifting between scales and alternating between group and individual work. In the end, we compiled our project into individual atlases. It was rewarding to see how much we had produced, though the pace left little time for in-depth exploration. Running alongside it, AR1U121 History and Theory of Urbanism complemented the studio with lectures, group work, and an individual essay linked to our studio projects.

In Q2, the AR1U131 Sustainable Urban Engineering of Territory (SUET) course was completed before the studio really began. SUET covered topics like microclimates, biodiversity, and geothermal energy, while group research focused on ecology, energy, water and soil along with urban systems. The aim was to develop a position on sustainability and gain technical knowledge as a foundation for the studio. The second studio, AR1U100 R&D Studio: Designing Urban Environments, shifted focus to the

neighbourhood scale with a socio-economic approach. This time, the project was individual, and compared to the Q1 studio, we had fewer lectures and workshops, allowing more time for detailed design work.

City and country

The culture of the Netherlands is quite similar to Swedish culture, so there was no major chock. The people are friendly and perhaps a bit more straight forward than what I was used to. It was easy to travel to other cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hauge, Utrecht, Leiden and the list goes on. I really urge future exchange students to take advantage of this. Especially in the beginning of the semester before the final deadlines are coming up. Also, if there is nice weather, go outside and enjoy it because it rains a lot.

Leisure and social activities

Even though Delft is a small town there are a lot of things to explore. I enjoyed walking in the centre or around De Grote Plas which is a green area with a lake in the northeast part of Delft. Pottery is a big part of the towns history and happens to be a hobby of mine. Even if you are a beginner or advanced this is something I recommend doing. X is a big student association which offers pottery courses, but also other activities, such as sports. They do not have many spots for pottery though, so I went to a studio called *Potterij onder de moerbeiboom* and it is run by a friendly and helpful Dutch man in the city centre. Otherwise I spent most of my spare time hanging with friends from the university or my house, preferably in a bar, which there are a lot of in Delft. Also, the faculty has its own bar, Bouwpub, which is open every Tuesday and Thursday, 17-20. This is an important social meeting point where I got to know many of my friends.

Sustainability

The Bouwkunde faculty encouraged sustainable living, and the canteen and café mostly served plant-based food and made waste sorting easy. Also, the households were good in sorting their waste and on the streets there are bins dedicated for specific waste. Traveling by bike is made easy thanks to the planning and the fact that the country is flat.

I did not travel by train to the Netherlands due to several reasons, the price, the time and the convenience. If I would have travelled to and from Delft with a bit more marginal, I would probably have done it and made it into something fun. For example, it would have been interesting to stop in Hamburg for a day or two.

Other recommendations and observations

Lock your bike twice and on the dedicated bike parking, otherwise it might be removed.

The Carpaccio baguette at Jumbo (the supermarket) is a tasty and price worthy lunch for days when you do not have time to prepare a lunch box.

On busy days, always buy as many beers as you can carry at the Bouwpub because otherwise you might have to stand in line for a long time.

A final tip is to go up the tower in the new church, from up there you can see all the way to Rotterdam and get a good view over the surrounding polder landscape. People afraid of heights are dismissed.