

Hei Finland –

Erasmus Job Shadowing in Kerava
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Job Shadowing in Finland, or: Of Milk Machines, Saunas and Free Libraries

After arriving late in the night, I woke up to a typical Finnish fall day: 8°C, partly cloudy, minor wind gusts. Suvi, from *VisitEDUfinn* waited outside and since the fridge in my Airbnb apartment was empty, I skipped breakfast, put on my winter jacket and went outside to meet her. On the way to the bus, which runs to the train station, we got to know each other and our respective backgrounds. A few days before the start of the trip, *VisitEDUfinn* send me a “Finland Welcome Package” with information about the country, its citizens and especially the high-praised education system, so Suvi’s information built on the knowledge I gained reading the electronic brochures ahead of the visit.



Side note: What on earth made me come to Kerava, a small town just north of Helsinki? Well, starting this year, the “Immanuel-Kant-Schule” in Leipzig has an Erasmus+ accreditation which enabled me to carry out a job shadowing program here in Finland, and Kerava High School (KHS) answered the call.

Suvi, fortunately, lend me her second HLS card - the Finnish transportation company - so I could ride the bus and subsequent train with her without having to pay right away. I put more money on it the next day.

Exactly at 9:35 a.m., after the first set of lessons, we walked into the school and went to the teacher's room. There Hilkka, a teacher of Biology and Geography, and Pertti, the headmaster, warmly welcomed me. After receiving and going through my schedule for the week, Hilkka and me set off to explore the school, its rooms and surrounding area.



Kerava Lukio (KHS) is a Finnish upper secondary school - comparable to the German Sek. II in a Gymnasium - where 45 teachers prepare 600 students in a three-year program

for their matriculation exams; the Finnish "Abitur." Finnish students spend 190 days a year in school, similar to the time in Germany. However, their summer holidays are a lot longer. They run from the beginning of June till the middle of August, altogether 10 weeks. That's because people are to make the most out of the nicest time of the year in a country with a long, cold and dark fall and winter.

Finnish education, especially in upper secondary school, relies on a high-level of self-responsibility of its students. Depending on their interests and strengths, they are free to choose from a variety of courses. Only a few, Finnish, Math, a second language and a social science subject, are mandatory. The individualized education program also depends on the subjects students want to write their matriculation exams in. Here, Finnish, Math or

Swedish, a natural science, and a social science subject are to be taken. Optional tests are allowed, hinging on the entry requirements of their subsequent study fields at university.

Ahead of my stay I read that Finnish people drink the most amount of coffee per capita in Europe, like to talk about the weather and are only talkative while in the Sauna or after winning a match of ice hockey. The last point, though, I could proof wrong: Most of the teachers and students at KHS, after a few moments of eyeing each other, were very interested in me and my background and I had a great time of exchanging talks and laughs these five days.

There are quite a few differences to German schools that I noticed during my stay: Everywhere in Finland, school lunches are free for students. This is part of the Finnish promise of equal opportunities for everyone regardless of social and financial background. Moreover, cafeterias in school feature, next to water fountains, milk machines - and at KHS, over 80% of students and teachers prefer milk over water with their lunch. Also free are libraries. Up to university level, students can read the latest novels, watch movies or listen to records without paying any fees. This is both remarkable and beneficial, as it places reading at the center of a young person's life. Also remarkable: Finnish schools offer student and career counselling 1 on 1 with trained professionals (1 counsellor on 200 students), free dental care, and employ school nurses, social workers and psychologists.

Another distinctive feature of Finnish education is its inclusive nature. Special education needs are met by trained experts who co-teach lessons and thus enable students to learn and benefit from each other in a shared environment. A situation I'd love to see in Germany on a broader scale as well.

Furthermore, a school year is organized in five distinctive periods, within a period students have the same classes, and at the end of each period there is an exam week; I am not quite entirely sold on this model yet. Grades range from 4 (worst) to 10 (best). The Finnish school system as such is organized similarly to the German one, except students learn together a lot longer. They are first separated after 9th grade, here they decide whether to attend a vocational or an upper secondary school, you can also incorporate classes of both schools in your individualized education plan. Vocational schools stress practical and job-related courses, whereas upper secondary schools mainly focus on academic learning.



All first-year students in upper secondary school receive laptops and electronic school books for free. After that, they have to buy their own books and - depending on the city and its allocation of resources - either continue to enjoy a free laptop or pay a small fee for it.

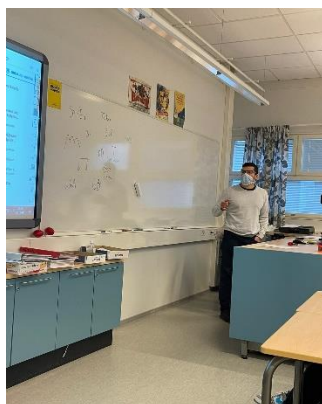
On to Kerava High School and its specialties: Well, let's start with the cherry on the cake here - the teachers' room features a grant massage chair. If teachers have some time between or after lessons, they can sink into this black leather beauty and have their feet, legs, bottom, back, neck, arms and hands kneaded, thus, recharging their battery to continue to tackle life afterwards. Truly magnificent. Another



technical forte is a transparent and noise-cancelling phone box: If teachers need to call parents they can be sure to have a private and quiet atmosphere without having to walk very far. Attached to the teachers' room that also features a host of comfortable chairs, among these a rocking one, couches, and a fully equipped kitchen with a long kitchen counter, is a quiet room with work spaces for all teachers.

When leaving the teacher's room and walking through the hallways, you notice many work areas and couches for students to sit and work on during breaks and lessons. The cafeteria, which is located in the center of the two-story building, also features two ping-pong tables for students to play on during breaks and after school.

When you enter the classroom you can find, next to a digital and non-digital whiteboard, among others, a document camera. This instrument has tremendous educational upside and I will heavily campaign for their installation in our school as well.



Next to a school partnership with the Stephaneum in Aschersleben, Saxony-Anhalt, KHS also has a handful of exchange students. Together with their recent Erasmus+ accreditation, this makes KHS a perfect place for individual teacher and student mobility.

What else did I take away? Well, to always look at the number of the bus line before entering, that Finnish people, after you spent a little time with them, are very open-minded and warm, and that language is a superpower (Riitta, you are right)!

Näkemiin Finland and KHS, thank you for opening your doors to me. Until we meet again, keep a song in your heart.

