

Matěj Moravanský

My Erasmus stay in Munich (summer semester 2021)

My Erasmus stay at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität started during the second spring of the epidemic. In the summer semester of 2021. Therefore, my experience with LMU and Munich could be quite specific, but I enjoyed an enriching study stay despite all the restrictions and difficulties of the epidemic. I hope this report provides valuable information for all LMU incoming students, especially for history ones.

Preparation and formalities

I highly recommend „Studienvorbereitungsprogramm“, which provides all needed information about orientation in Munich, Deutsche bureaucracy and student life at LMU and an intensive German language course. I would have been lost without it! LMU international office and employees of university dormitories „Studentenwerk München“ were supportive and excellent in communication (also in English). Do not hesitate to contact them. One mistake is often repeated. It is “Rundfunk-beitrag” issue. That is a special fee for television and radio service, and it is mandatory to pay the fee, even if you do not use any of the services.

I made one mistake with the date of my arrival. Due to the epidemic situation, I postponed my arrival in Munich to the first week of the semester. So I did not have enough time to connect with my future schoolmates and meet them, getting familiar with the university and the city. Maybe my stay could have been much better if I arrived to Munich one or two weeks before the start of the semester.

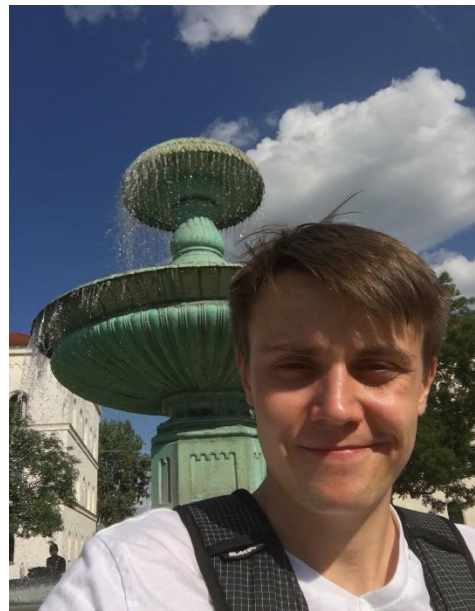
My courses

My schedule was not overfilled at all (I had one language and four history courses). However, teachers had high requirements, especially regarding reading, writing, and commitment during classes, so preparation for it took a lot of time. Moreover, I wrote my bachelor thesis during my Erasmus and attended some online lectures at Charles University. Therefore, I did not miss a fuller schedule. Without all my courses taking place online, it would not be possible to handle them.

These are my courses:

Lektürekurs zur Geschichte des östlichen Europa im 20./21. Jahrhundert (Lektürekurs) - Martin Schulze Wessel

Martin Schulze Wessel is one of the central figures of „Historisches Seminar“, and his „Lektürekurs“ (intensive reading seminar about a topic which is close to teacher's research priorities) was for me one of the main points of my stay. His research on east-central Europe, for example, Prague spring 1968, activities in Collegium Carolinum, and many recommendations from teachers from my home university encouraged me to enroll in the class.



Geschwister-Scholl-Platz

It was my only course taught in German, and the majority of my classmates were on a higher level of studies, mostly graduated. The course took place once a month and consisted of reading three books which we discussed in meetings separately and under the moderation of professor Schulze Wessel. What struck me was the ability of students to think about readings on their own, search for new perspectives, and reflect critically on the book. It was a unique combination of active questioning students and supportive teachers who would not claim the truth but would encourage us to ask better and better questions. Professor Schulze Wessel also invited a host to our class, Yuri Slezkine, author of the book „The House of Government“. Therefore, we had the opportunity to talk with Slezkine about the revolution's dynamic and discuss his approaches to historical research. So, Schulze Wessel's course was excellent training in historical questioning. Due to his openness, experiences, and contacts through the academic community, we could look into respected historian craft.

Conceptualising the Micro-Macro Links in Social Sciences and Humanities (Lektürekurs) - Kornelia Kończal

Kornelia Kończal taught another „Lektürekurs“ I attended, and the course focus was to get familiar with methodological approaches in connecting macro and micro perspectives in humanities. We discussed the topic from three perspectives: history, anthropology, and sociology.

Post-Socialism in East-Central-Europe: Socio-Economic Approaches (Übung) - Kornelia Kończal

The topic of post-socialism in central Europe has interested me before my Erasmus stay, but after this course at LMU, it became my "passion" and one of my research topics. There were many happy circumstances: a group of exciting and diligent people from various parts of Europe, a provocative topic, and an excellent teacher. Almost every one of us was from some postsocialist country or knew something about it. Thus we could share our life experiences and many insights. As a citizen of former socialist Czechoslovakia, it was terrific to hear other stories of „Annus mirabilis“ 1989, not only the story about the peaceful Czechoslovak velvet revolution and relatively „successful“ building of capitalism. Stories instead from Poland, Hungary, the former soviet union, or East Germany are so different. It is unique to discuss it with locals who have their own experiences and reflections on the situation in 90'.

What was interesting was the organization of the course. As the first part of the seminar, we attended the Opening Week of the Research Center for the History of Transformation (*RECET*). At this online conference, we heard a lecture by professor Jürgen Kocka and many other talks from varied scholars on transformation problematics. The second part of the seminar consisted of working with data and statistics. Dr. Kończal arranged a workshop with a lecturer from *wiiw* - The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Mario Holzner. Thus, we worked with texts and various economic and sociological indicators, creating charts, interpreting them, and putting data into context. And after this all-around preparation, we had to prepare a presentation about one of the postsocialist countries and prove new skills in practice.

Amazing was the constant stream of texts, recommendations, tips for various authors, and generally sharing inspiration from Dr. Kończal. She has supplied us with many inspirations that I will absorb for the next few years. Dr. Kończal provided us with some historical topics, but she invited us to history as a research discipline.

Ostmitteleuropa denken: Geschichte, Politik und Kultur (1848-1989) (Vorlesung) - Felix Jeschke and collective of members of the Zentrum der Osteuropa-Forschung, LMU, München and Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague

The lecture „Ostmitteleuropa Denken“ (Thinking East-Central Europe) covered various topics, and classes were held by different scholars. What is worth emphasizing was comparing central European regions through state borders and finding something as a transnational perspective on central Europe.

Outside university

Many traditional ways to spend your time during Erasmus were banned because of epidemic restrictions. I could not meet up with my Erasmus schoolmates and did many activities independently. Regardless, I have begun exploring the city soon. On my first journey to the city center, I came across



Weißer Rose memorial before the LMU

a small vitrine near the main LMU building on Geschwister-Scholl-Platz. The vitrine with information about the resistance group „Weiße Rose“ amazed me. The whole rest of my stay, I gathered information about it, watched films, read articles, translated their leaflets („Flugblätter“) from German to Czech, and also went for a walk through places connected with Sophie Scholl, her brother Hans and other members of the resistance group organized by „Weiße Rose Stiftung“. It brought me to NS-Dokumentationszentrum and the streets of Altstadt or Schwabing and put the whole city in a different light. Nevertheless, I did not understand Munich as some „dark“ city, instead I perceived the city as a specific meeting place of various influences, stories, and movements of history.

I could feel this complex atmosphere of Munich, for example, on my many visits to Alte Pinakothek. Alte Pinakothek is one of the most important galleries in the world, and you could spend hours looking at paintings of old masters as Dürer's The Four Apostles, Bruegel's landscapes, or two Raphael's Maddonas and his „Heilige Familie“ (Canigiani Holy Family). My first live contact with paintings of that high level and my visits to the Pinakothek left me with extraordinary experiences.

Munich is not only a city but also a part of Bayern. Because of my timetable, it was impossible to discover a more significant part of Bayern, but I made a few journeys to the Alps. After three or four hikes, I fell in love with Walchensee; swimming in its crystal clear water was one of the best moments of my spring in Munich. The Alps are close to Munich, and also in lousy weather, you can see high mountain peaks on the southern horizon. I highly recommend a trip to the Alps! It is easy; just take one of the many cheap trains to the mountains and steep uphill!



Hiking in Garmisch-Partenkirchen

What was remarkable was a program for Erasmus students organized by the university. When the government reduced restrictions, it became possible to attend various sports events and trips to the other cities around Germany. I found many friendly people, but I felt much better with my classmates from seminars and lectures from Historisches Seminar. We had the same field of study, interests, and questions for thinking. After a few weeks in Munich, I understood that the Historisches Seminar is like a factory for academic degrees and a collective of students and teachers. Unfortunately, I did not have enough time to become a part of this collective, but one relationship remains with one of my colleagues from Dr. Kończal's seminar. We still keep our correspondence, and what is interesting, is she writes in the Czech language and me in German.

If I can balance my Erasmus stay, it was an experience exceeding my expectations. I hope that there will be a chance to revisit Munich and LMU. And I doubt that there is a better place for studying for students interested in central Europe - you can experience it in the streets of the city and think about it with your classmates and teachers.