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IPE Evaluation
SCAN/Design Scholarship to Copenhagen, Denmark 2007
Institution: Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts
Department 1

1. Arrival Overseas/On-Site Orientation

I arrived in Copenhagen in January and had roughly three weeks before my program started. However, I participated in the 3- week language course held by Studioskolen through the University of Copenhagen. This was a great program for an introduction to the Danish language, and it also provided orientation events such as site seeing tours, movies, activities, etc. I highly recommend participating in the three week language course. I also met many friends through that 3 week course that I spent time with throughout the semester.

The institution that I attended, the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, had no orientation or introduction of any kind. I relied solely on asking fellow classmates to answer my questions and find my way around. Their international coordinator gave me a packet that said where to meet on the first day and my computer login-code for the school but that was it.

2. Academics

I went to the Royal Danish Academy knowing that it was an urban design program and that the student body was comprised of architects. In spite of the fact that I am not an architect, I was excited to participate in the program, learn about urban design, and gain some new skills that would compliment what I had already learned in UW's graduate urban planning program. While I did learn a bit of urban design at the Royal Danish Academy, I was generally very disappointed by the instruction, teacher/student relations, and felt that the majority of my work at the institution was a waste of time. On the other hand, the students at the school and my overall experience in Copenhagen/Europe was incredible and for that I feel extremely lucky to have participated in this opportunity.

The academic setting at the Royal Academy was very different than that at the University of Washington. For the first month or so of school, there were a lot of lectures (almost all in Danish) and some group work and presentations. The remaining months of school were spent working individually on creating a master plan for Nordhavnen. Every two weeks, there were presentations/critiques to a panel of teachers. I thought that presentations every two weeks was too much and that the critiques were too formal; other students agreed with this assertion. Students spent too much time creating presentation materials and not enough time developing the quality of our work.

While working individually on our projects, each student was assigned a teacher to come in several times a week for at least a half hour to discuss your work and progress. The teacher assigned to me, Dan Stubbegard, never showed up for the first two months and then when he did start showing up, he only spent about 5 or 10 minutes every two weeks with me discussing my project. Being an exchange student, the only student that was not an architect, and who had no architecture background, I found it extremely difficult to have no guidance from a teacher-especially when he knew my background. He was obviously not invested in helping me learn and grow, and I felt lost regarding the direction of my work during the duration of the semester. He even discouraged me from creating a master plan-the ultimate goal of the assignment-and all of the teachers asked why I had not created a firm master plan in my final critique. In addition, nearly all of the student presentations were in Danish and so it was extremely difficult to learn much from other student's work.

If I had had a different teacher to work with and had more of a background in architecture, I would have learned a lot more from this experience. I would continue to encourage students from the UW's Urban Planning Department to go on this program if they are interested in urban design, but would prepare them for the weaknesses of the institution/program. I would also suggest looking in to urban planning/architecture programs at the University of Copenhagen, as I have heard that their programs are well respected.

I also went to Copenhagen on the Valle scholarship to do research for my master's thesis on bicycle commuting. I had emailed a professor at the Royal Danish Academy prior to leaving Seattle and he had agreed to act as a mentor for my project while in Copenhagen. Upon arriving in Copenhagen, I emailed the teacher several times about meeting and his first and only response was something to the effect of, "I hope you're not expecting me to get you a research office because we don't have any extra space". I was not expecting nor had we ever discussed a research office over email, but it didn't matter because he never responded to my emails again. Nevertheless, I interviewed a Copenhagen city planner in charge of cycling and he was extremely helpful. My classmates at school were also helpful in connecting me with cycling resources and I was successful in completing my research goals.

3. Housing

I lived a flat in Frederiksberg with Frances Hofland, an extremely kind and hip 73 year old women. I paid 1400 DKK a month, the cheapest rent of anyone I had met, and had a fabulous living set up. I had two large adjoining rooms to myself and we shared the kitchen and bath. The few downsides to living with Frances was that she was a smoker, had no internet access, and had a rotary phone. I ended up using internet either at school or at the WI-FI coffee shop near the apartment. A rotary phone does not let you used a calling card for international calls, so my family friends had to set up appointments to call me at the house. The flat was about a 20 minute bike ride from the center of town and 30 minutes from school, farther than most of my classmates traveled, but I did not mind. I would definitely recommend renting from Frances Hofland.

4. Program/Exchange Site

The Royal Academy has a very small, friendly campus. It's comprised of renovated military buildings and has a great library for architects and several small canteens. The student life there is different than what most expect from American Institutions. There is no gym, no student lounge or student center, very few "school activities, lectures, etc", and the nearest eateries are about a 10 minute bike ride away. The Royal Academy is also fairly isolated on Holmen, whereas the University of Copenhagen is scattered throughout the city.

5. Health/Safety

I had no health or safety concerns while in Copenhagen. I went to the doctor once using my card for the Danish health system and it was a free doctor's visit. All health care is free there under the Danish system.

6. Cultural Aspects

I found the first few weeks/month of school difficult because there was no introduction of new students nor orientation to meet exchange students. Danish people in general are much more reserved than Americans, so meeting Danes was difficult. I easily made friends with all of the exchange students once we introduced ourselves and got to know each other. I was very disappointed that there was no activity/ies organized by the school to meet the exchange students in my department and other departments.

Other cultural differences:

- you need a Danish credit card to pay for groceries in every grocery store and you can't get a Danish credit card unless you are staying there for at least a year (at least most banks won't give you one for under a year's stay). So, always have cash with to pay for groceries and most other things too.
- by a bike when you get there. I bought one off a sign posted in the University of Copenhagen but there are also bike shops that sell used bikes. Lock your bike.
- Grocery stores and almost all shops are not open on Sundays, only open until 1pm or 2pm on Saturdays, and close around 5pm or so on the weekdays.
- the Black Diamond library is a great place to study.
- everyone there smokes-be prepared
- it is extremely expensive-be prepared

7. Financial

- a. Before you go, get a bank draft note for enough money to get you through the semester. Set up an account in Denmark with the bank draft note when you get there. Otherwise, you have to pay horrible fees to transfer money, change the currency, etc. I did not know to bring a bank draft note and just used ATM machines and incurred a \$2 fee every time I took money out (take out as much money as you can at once).
- b. I spent anywhere from 2,000 to 2,500 DKK per month including rent and food. My rent was extremely cheap at 1400 DKK per month-most people paid 3000

DKK. Food at the grocery store is very affordable. I almost never ate out in restaurants, went to pubs or coffee shops because it's too expensive. You need money to buy a bike or a monthly metro pass.

- c. If you bring your cell phone, make sure that it is a GSM phone so that you can buy a SIM card and use that phone in Europe. Otherwise, you will have to buy a cell phone there.

8. IPE Administration

The UW IPE office was fabulous in all of their services. When our first SCAN Design payment was late in getting deposited, the office was right on it and took care of things immediately. The administration also came to Copenhagen to check on us which was great and I think all of the SCAN Design fellows really appreciated visits by Marianne Stecher-Hansen and Anni Fuller. The IPE office also arranged for Marianne Stolen to be our UW liason in Denmark, and she was a fabulous liason. Marianne Stolen took us on a trip to Oslo for a few days, took us to the Louisiana Art Museum, invited us to her house for dinner, and was also in touch for any questions or problems we had.

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