

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name****Year and term for exchange**August Junge Halvorsen2021 Autumn**Exchange university**Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zürich (ETH)**Degree programme**Master's Architecture

## Swiss Precision



The architecture department at ETH

### Before departure

There was something about Swiss architecture that spoke to me. A confidence in materials and form which I rarely found in contemporary architecture. I saw it in the vernacular cabins of wood, in the bank buildings of stone and in the contemporary houses of concrete. A strong compassion for the structure and its parts. I wanted to spend a semester at ETH Zürich to begin unravelling the mysteries of Swiss architecture which I found so fascinating.

### Upon arrival

The first thing that struck me was the extreme precision of everything. The airport, the train station and the streets were all immaculately clean. I also remember I was surprised by the high humidity and warm temperature that September evening. It was still summer in Switzerland. I arrived two weeks before the semester started to take part in the German language course. This was a good way to meet people and to get to know the city. Some of my closest friends I met during this course. I recommend spending this time wisely and to see as much as possible because there is not much time for sightseeing during the semester due to the high workload.

### Financials

Before leaving for Switzerland, I was notified about two scholarships that I could apply for. The first one being the SEMP scholarship which is handed out by ETH and the ERASMUS scholarship which is handed out by KTH. Because I could only choose one of the two, I chose the ERASMUS scholarship as

the amount is slightly higher than the SEMP scholarship. But one thing to consider is that the SEMP scholarship is disbursed once whereas the ERASMUS scholarship is split up in one payment at the start of the semester and one after the exchange period is finished. Therefore, the actual amount you can spend during the exchange is less with ERASMUS than with SEMP.

### **Accommodation**

I signed up for accommodation through the ETH website. This was very easy and required only to fill out a form. Around July I was offered a room which I accepted right away. It was close to the school, only 15 minutes with the bus. The building was nice with exposed concrete. We were 160 students sharing a kitchen which was overwhelming in the beginning but after a while I got used to it. It was mostly exchange students staying in the house, so therefore a great way of meeting people from all over the world.



View from my walk home from school

### **University and studies**

In many ways ETH and KTH has strong similarities. They are both technical universities with multiple departments specializing in different fields. This opens the opportunity to collaborate across disciplines and access resources and information which would otherwise be more difficult. Experts from other departments gave lectures and tutorials during the semester.

### **Courses**

For courses, ETH offers a variety of different ones. As an exchange student you can choose courses from both bachelor and master level. I recommend having a look in the course catalogue which is available on the ETH website. Whereas at KTH one chooses a design studio mostly based on a topic or method of interest, at ETH the design studios are based on the work of the professor. I chose the studio of Anne Holtrop because I am fascinated by the way materials become such an integral part of

his architecture. This is also true for his design studio at ETH where the students examine in depth one material per semester. We investigated water as a potential building material.

### **City and country**

The fact that Switzerland is known for high quality is not by chance. People take much pride in their work. I believe the job is a larger part of the Swiss persona than the Scandinavian one. This mentality penetrates society at all levels. Whether it is universities, public transport, watches or architecture, Switzerland ranks among the best in the world. On a personal level, Swiss people are also among the sincerest I have met.



View from the chalet we stayed during seminar week

### **Leisure and social activities**

As a student of architecture much of the time is spent at school and therefore the school building itself becomes a place of gathering during and after school hours. The “seminar week” which is organised for all architecture students was a nice opportunity to meet professors, assistants and fellow students in a more informal environment than at school. There are gyms at school that are free to all students. This is of course a great place to recharge and meet new people. The city of Zürich is also beautiful to enjoy by foot. The riverside walk along Letten is a favourite of mine with the architecture book shop “Hochparterre” situated right next to it.

### **Sustainability**

My plan was to take the train from Stockholm to Zürich but since there was a train strike in Germany, I had to fly parts of the trip from Hamburg to Zürich. Once in Switzerland, the public transport system is impeccable. During my stay I travelled all over the country with train. It is therefore easy to travel sustainably in Switzerland.

### Other recommendations and observations

Although the workload at ETH is high, it is important to also see some of the country. Because I had my accommodation until end of January, I was able to travel after finishing my exams. As a student of architecture Switzerland is a pleasure to see both for its buildings and for its fantastic landscape.



Vallis Albula, Graubünden



La Congiunta by Peter Märkli