

Ülemiste Study Tour Essay

We visited the Ülemiste City with Aleks, Tina, Jaakko and our coaches Timo and Liisa in mid October. The trip was organised as a part of the Nordplus Ülemiste City III Study Tour. The agenda for the trip consisted of discussing the challenges of work based learning in the smart cities. On the study tour there were students, coaches, lecturers from Latvian, Norwegian, Estonian, Finnish, Lithuanian and Danish universities.

Study tour

On the first day our group travelled to Tallinna Ülemiste. We found our way to the campus of the Tallinn Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences. Waiting for us was a classroom full of people and the Study Tour started with the opening words from Mrs. Katrin Sulg representing the development company of Ülemiste city, Mainor. Next the Customer Experience Manager, Mr. Teet Raudsepp gave us an introduction to the concept of the Ülemiste smart city. Welcome and introduction took about 2 hours and after that we got our hotel rooms about 10 minutes away from the campus. We had a few hours to gather ourselves. The evening was spent forming new friendships, eating pizza and getting to know the public transportation system in Tallinn. After networking dinner few of us students went to see some old town nightlife.

Next morning we got to visit local companies in small groups. At these companies we got a chance to see what they do and how they do work based learning. Some groups got a chance to shadow some key people in these companies. After visits, we got together and shared what we learned from companies. The afternoon was spent at the campus, where interesting lectures from local companies experiences with work based learning were shared.

In the evening we attended a tour of the Tallinn old town and ate a fulfilling meal of local cuisine, all arranged by the amazing Nordplus team.

All in all second day was amazing. It was interesting to see how local companies work and how they do work based learning.

In the final day we visited the North Estonia Medical Centre. It was interesting to first get a good look at the facilities and then hear about the hospitals' experiences regarding work based learning. The hospital had a program where students worked to become a nurse and at the same time worked in the hospital.

After the visit to the hospital. We gathered in the classroom to learn about the models other schools that participated in the study tour. After the presentations we had a workshop where we thought about subjects like: Is every company suitable for WBL? How to choose?, What kind of support / motivator / mentor the learning, employee needs?, What does mean a working student for a school (studying and working in the same field at the same time)?, How to bring together three parties – school, company, student – and start learning?, How to prepare and organise collaboration?, What it means for a company to have an employee working and studying in the same field and at the same time? Challenges? Benefits?. We presented our results with the whole group and shared our thoughts about each subject based on what we had seen during the study tour. After the workshop it was time to end the study tour and go home. But now before exchanging details with the people we met during these three days.

What we thought about the Study Tour?

What was good?

The study tour gave us a great insight into how companies can benefit from students. It was nice to hear some company representatives thoughts about how they can benefit from the theory students have access to. The cultural side was on the trip was also really interesting. It was really interesting to learn more about Tallinn and Ülemiste city. The company visits were really interesting and the fact that we were divided to the different companies based on our expertise and interests.

What could be improved?

We feel that there was not enough time reflect thoughts together with the whole group. Talking together about what we experienced would have widened everyone's knowledge about work based learning and talking together would have given the organizers a change to ask how the study tours structure should be.

WBL = Work Based Learning

The learning method that we were taught in the study tour was work based learning. In the Estonian context, it means that a person is working and studying in the same field at the same time. One week might for example, consist of two days of studying and three days of working. It offers the student practical experience of the field that the studies. In the other hand, companies can benefit from the knowledge that the student can offer by his or her studies, so it is a mutually beneficial relationship where both the student and the company learn and teach one another. It is also a way for companies to recruit students.

Another benefit for both parties is the possibility of employment after the program. The company gets access to workers who may already have more than a basic understanding of the job and the culture of the workplace. This is also extremely beneficial for the employees who can often get employed in the company right after their studies are finished.

WBL vs Proakatemia's model

In TAMK Proakatemia work based learning is at the center from the beginning. The students set up a company, usually a co-operative because of its flexibility in Finnish law. Through this company a group of fifteen to twenty students do projects either with companies or directly to consumers all around the world. In Proakatemia however, we are not told what it is we need to learn regarding a specific field of industry. We have to figure that out ourselves and it usually is determined by the projects or challenges that we face in the business world. This model, we feel is very good when it comes to the commitment of the students. As the companies are led by the team entrepreneurs themselves, there is a good opportunity to grow your skills in leadership. A team of around eighteen students with widely varying interests and motivations is hard for any one leader to handle effectively. Still, it has been shown in practice that this experience is actually really valuable outside Proakatemia, as the student will have a broad set of tools to solve any problem in a team in their professional career.

As students of Proakatemia, it was great to compare our experience to the programs that were demonstrated to us at Ülemiste. The models had much in common. Both were practical and teach real skills that can be applied straight to working life. There were also differences. In Proakatemia we focus more on the doing and learning from it. In the work based learning model that we saw, there was more of the theory part being applied to practice. In Proakatemia there isn't always a clear theory part. With this approach it is inevitable that the student face failure. But the students in Proakatemia have a unique attitude towards failure. We see it as an opportunity to learn. In the work based learning model that we saw, there was more of the theory part being applied to practice.

Summary

Work based learning is definitively the way to move forward. It may not be suited for every profession out there, nor should it be. The more practical the job, the better this method works in our opinion. Integrating work more broadly offers unique benefits to the students.

The challenge we see with this model comes from such aspects that are often harder to quantify or count as a part of a study program. A good example of such a topic is the life after study hours, socializing with one's peers. Although this part of studies are seldom advertised in any kind of brochures, we feel it is an integral part of the experience of our studies. These activities allow students to form interdisciplinary relationships and broaden their networks. This, we feel is of great importance later in life.

We feel it is in the favor of both the student and the company participating, to make sure that the students have ample opportunities for more broadly focused activities both in and off the curriculum. Even though it may seem frustrating and useless to all parties involved, spending time pondering the insignificance of one's life is actually very useful later in life. If a student by any chance happens to change their mind about the path of their career, it is better to act on it sooner rather than later.

Sources

Nordplus Ülemiste City III Study Tour: Challenges of work based learning in smart cities

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