

Aaron Wiedemer
Abroad Reflection
Austrian Marshal Plan Foundation

Penn State -> TU Graz

- General impression of your research stay abroad

It was an absolute honor and a dream to have come to Graz. Even in the throng of a pandemic I still managed to have, and I do not say this lightly, a life changing experience. I got to see things I would have never before, do things I can do nowhere else, and meet life-long friends.

It was an eye-opening view in a completely different world from what I know an ocean away, but after a while it also become home. There is a certain unspecific “fantasy” about being abroad that many people think being abroad is like, the type that is peddled by influencers, but the reality is such a deeper, more challenging, and really in all ways a more wonderful experience.

I never quite experienced the dreaded “culture-shock” that I was told so much about, but being in Austria was difficult at times. Simple things like talking or going grocery shopping become a lot less simple when you find yourself not being able to read or recognize anything you are looking at and barely knowing a word to speak to anyone. But getting to learn the language, the culture, and how to navigate has broadened my understanding and empathy. I think the greatest gift of being abroad was a newfound sense of confidence to go anywhere and do anything.

- Quality of the host institution

Working in TU Graz was honestly a blast. In my first week, some of the graduate students gathered on the roof of the building to celebrate another students’ masters defense and not knowing me at all, I was immediately invited and welcomed in. This was my experience with a lot of things, and everyone was so inviting, generous, and helpful.

- Contacts within the host institution, inclusion in the organization

I also have to mention the absolutely world class support I received at TU Graz. I would have been completely lost if it were not for the amazing Karin Leber and the international team at TU

Graz. And of course, I have to mention my mentor Erich Leitner, who was so kind and supporting of me the whole time (and, he knew where all the good places for food were).

- Recommendations for future Marshall Plan students and fellows

Just, go. Those are the words I'd live by if I were to do it all again. Go on adventures, book a train the night before to somewhere you've never heard of and cannot pronounce. Meet everyone you can, go get lunch with a complete stranger (even better if you don't speak the same language), and just do everything. It can be uncomfortable, it can be intimidating, but believe me if you just go and do you will be grateful for it.

- Contact email after completion of research stay

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