

HAUTE ÉCOLE
EPHEC Social
activities and
acculturation

Spring 2017





Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, or shorter known as EPHEC, joined the Erasmus program in the year 1989, and now in 2017 the institution is happy to welcome students from over 100 different partner schools. Each year there are around 100 students, who spend a semester or an academic year studying in the institution. To help the students get to know each other, EPHEC, Belgium and its locals, the institution organizes a variety of different activities that students can participate to. This report will summarize some of the activities that took place in the spring semester of 2017.

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Jan 31st

Orientation days

The official start to the spring semester was on January 31st when students first arrived to the school and participated in the orientation days. The orientation was divided into two different dates; Tuesday January 31st and Wednesday February 1st. Tuesday's programme focused on getting to know the school, having a general introduction and getting to know each other. EPHEC provided the students a sandwich lunch, organized a team building activity and later the student's council took the students for a drink in a local pub. Wednesday's programme focused more on academic and practical information. The students were for example introduced to the institution's virtual applications and lecturers came to present the available Erasmus modules, so that it would be easier for the students to build up their schedules.



Thursday and Friday were reserved for individual meetings in the EPHEC International Office, so that students could ask about the courses, make their schedules and sign official documents such as the learning agreements, arrival certificates etc.



Jan 31st

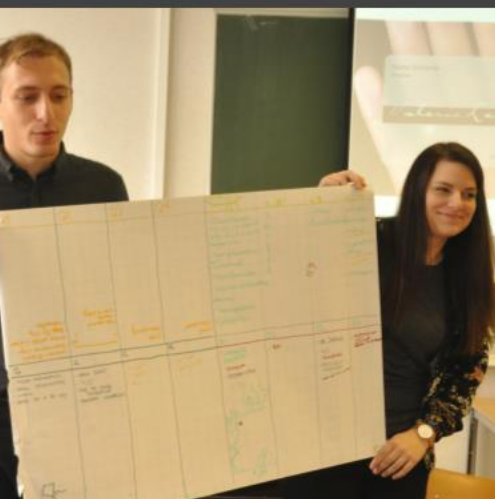
World café

The World café was part of the incoming exchange students' first orientation day on January 31st 2017. In the activity, students took part to discussions with topics relating to Erasmus exchange, Belgium and EPHEC and the objective of the activity was to get to know other students while discussing about important topics. This semester there were four different tables with different questions, and each table created a flyer where the students wrote down their thoughts and ideas.

For example in the culture table, students discussed topics on the following questions; 1. What do you know about the Belgian culture? 2. What are some of the similarities/differences to your own culture? 3. What are the best ways to adapt to a new culture? 4. How important is it for you to get to know the local students? And 5. What do you think is the best way to connect with them? Regarding the Belgian culture, students brought up various cultural aspects from food to artifacts and from history to the division of Belgium. The famous Belgian foods that students mentioned were for example fries, waffles, mussels, chocolate and beer. Being the capital of Europe, students found that especially in Brussels, the environment is very multicultural.

Coming to a new culture can be quite overwhelming at first and the students tried to come up with ways that would help the adaptation. The suggested methods were for example being open-minded and overall having the will to adapt. According to the students, it is good to do some research beforehand about the behavioral manners, rituals and customs of the new culture. It is also good to stay positive, meet locals, travel and explore the culture as much as one can, so it will become more familiar.

In the success table, the students talked about personal, academic and professional success and what is a successful Erasmus exchange period. The students discussed the different elements of success and summed everything up in the following way; "Personal success is the balance of being, doing and having. Being happy, independent, self-confident, healthy and social. Having time with friends, family, job and travels. Also doing our favorite hobbies and different experiences." "Professional success is about enjoying what we are doing, becoming better workers, setting specific goals and achieving them and also experiencing in real life, what we learned at school." "Academic success is to get to the final goal that is the degree, but in the process to having international experiences, learning different languages and skills, and enjoying every step of the way."



Feb 1st

Beer tour

As a social activity for the Erasmus students, on February 1st, EPHEC's International Office organized a small walking tour in the Brussels city center and a visit to a local brewery called Brussels Beer Project. During the walking tour students saw some of the city's landmarks, such as the Manneken Pis, the Grand Place and a couple of comic walls. In the brewery, students had the opportunity to taste some beers and learn more about the history of beer, the brewing process and the current situation of the Belgian beer market. What made the visit to the brewery special, was the fact that the brewery started out as a crowdfunding project and turned out to be a success among the community of Brussels' beer lovers.

"I wanted to see Belgian street art and I got to do it during the city walking tour. Because we got to go on this tour, it gave me an opportunity to see all the famous comic walls. Moreover, we got to explore another aspect of the Belgian culture, which is beer. Even though I don't drink beer, I found it interesting to see how beer is being brewed and how modern day breweries are operating. If we had had the opportunity to eat waffles as well, I would say that it would have been a very proper introduction to the Belgian culture."

- Evgeny, Russia

"I liked the beer tour because it was cool and a good way to get to know each other. The tour also introduced us to the city and the culture. I especially liked the city art and the Manneken Pis that we got to see during the walk. Even though I am not a beer drinker, the beer tour was a fun thing to do."

- Niels, The Netherlands

"For me the beer tour was an interesting activity, as I have never visited a brewery before. I am not really a fan of beer but it was fun to taste the different products and learn how much you can alter the flavour by just changing the hops or the grain. I also learned about the IBU and EBC that tell about the bitterness and the colour of the beer: The higher the numbers, the darker and the bitterer the beer is. Out of the different beers we tasted, my personal favourite was a very light coloured beer that focuses on the hops and tasted really fruity."

- Sara, Finland



Feb 9th

International panel

The panel discussion on February 9th was part of EPHEC's first year International Trade students' Intercultural communication course with an objective to learn more about other cultures and understand about one's own cultural identity. In the panel discussion, five of EPHEC's incoming exchange students talked about their Erasmus exchange program experiences and answered questions that were presented to them by the interviewers or the local students. In the 30-minute panel discussion, they for example explained why they wanted to go on an exchange program, what preparations they made before arriving to Belgium and what cultural differences they had already noticed. The participants all represented different nationalities and were coming from Hungary, Russia, Austria, Mexico and the Netherlands Antilles and therefore the experiences were quite different for everyone.

Each panelist had their own personal motives for going on an exchange, but the general motives for all were to get to know other cultures, to be more international and to grow as a person. For cultural differences, the Belgian way of greeting one another, as in exchanging cheek kisses, was found strange and out of the panelists comfort zone. Also the public transportation was different for example to the panelist coming from Hungary and the Austrian panelist was delighted to find fries everywhere.

The panelists were also asked about the activities they would like to do with the local students. Some of the exchange students were for example interested in participating to different societies with the local students, such as football, IT or dancing. Also travelling inside and outside Belgium was mentioned to be something that would be nice to do with the local students.



Feb 15th

Tandem project

The Tandem project is a new recurring project where EPHEC Erasmus Cross-Cultural Business Management students and EPHEC E-business students work together with students from the Artevelde Hogeschool in Ghent. The objective of the project is to learn about cultural differences and cross-cultural communication while providing a great opportunity for students to collaborate. This spring semester the project was launched on February 15th and continues till the beginning of May.

During the project, each team works on a specific cultural value and creates a visual and informative poster about it. One part of the project is also to organize a culture fair to which the students of Ghent are invited to participate. In the culture fair, teams have their own country booths, where they introduce their country and its cultural aspects to others. This semester the fair was held on March 7th and there were 26 booths and 15 different countries were represented. These countries were Belgium, Suriname, China, Brazil, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Spain, Turkey, Luxemburg, Ireland, Mexico and the Netherlands Antilles. Each booth was very well prepared and students introduced their cultures for example via quizzes and games and provided some foods for the visitors to try.

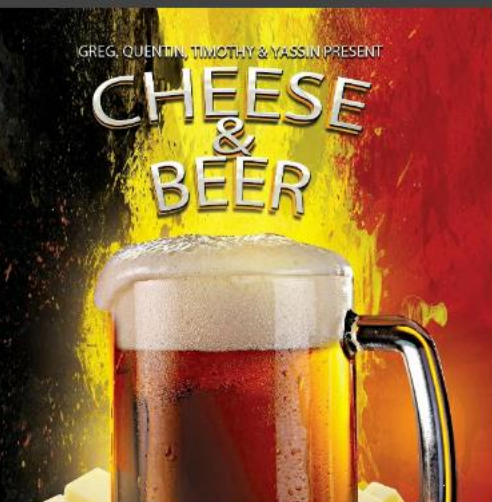
Leyla, an exchange student from Mexico City, presented her home country in the booth she prepared and visitors kept her very busy with questions about the culture. The booth was decorated with different coloured ponchos, Mexican magazines and typical Mexican sweets. For example she showed us a lollipop that you eat with chili powder and we tasted a delicious marzipan peanut candy. She chose to present a little bit of various different topics: piñatas, pyramids, territory, traditions and food. She told that preparing the booth was easy and she was happy how it turned out but at first she wanted to go even bigger with the decorations.

Leyla thinks that organizing a culture fair is a good idea and she really liked being part of it. According to her, it is a nice way to get to learn about other cultures and especially the ones that her friends at EPHEC are coming from. In her home university it is also common to get to know other students' cultures. After she would finish holding her own booth, she planned to visit all the other booths at the culture fair to get the most out of the event.





The various Belgian booths introduced the visitors to several different aspects of the Belgian culture. One booth for example presented the cartoon industry, while others focused on the Belgian cuisine, immigrations impact on the country and the Belgian film industry.



Before the culture fair, each booth prepared an invitation that was sent out to the guest students from Ghent. After the culture fair students continued their day with a team building activity in which the Erasmus, E-biz and Ghent students got to know each other and discuss the Tandem project.



Feb 18th

Hergé museum

A visit to Louvain-la-Neuve was organized in the CCBM course on February 18th with an objective to learn more about the Belgian culture when it comes to the cartoon industry, Tintin and Hergé. Comics are especially considered to be an integral part of the Belgian culture which is why the visit was a great opportunity to get familiar with that aspect. The main activity of the visit was the Hergé Museum where all the students got to learn more about the talented Belgian cartoonist and storyteller who influenced the industry a lot.

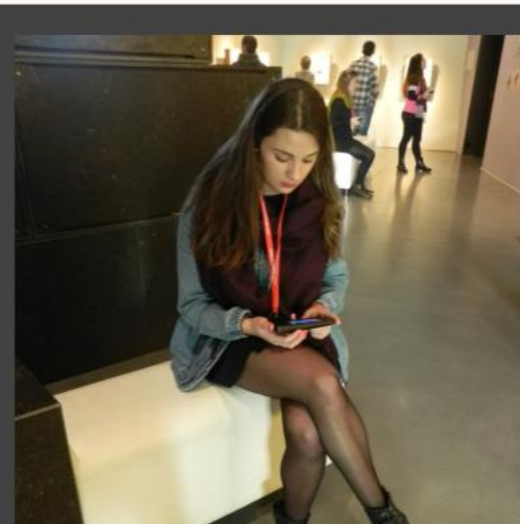
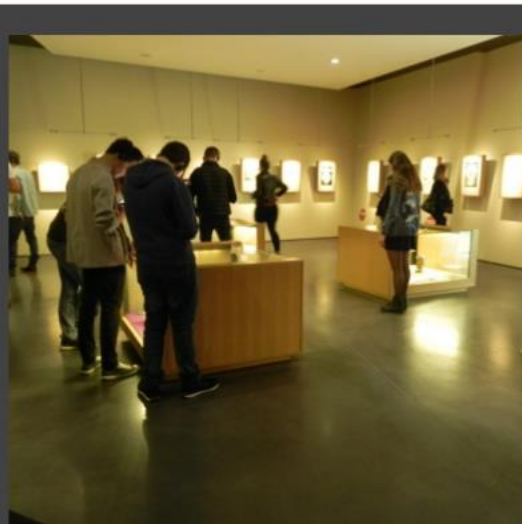
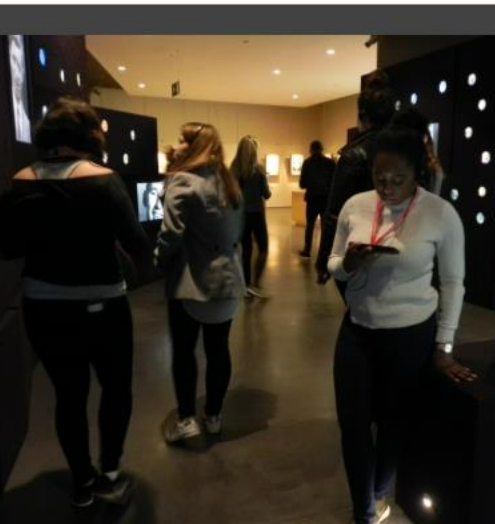
In the museum, students had the opportunity to freely explore the exhibition with an informative audio guide and also admire the architecture of the building. The different rooms presented for example the life journey of Hergé, his different works and of course Tintin, his most famous character.

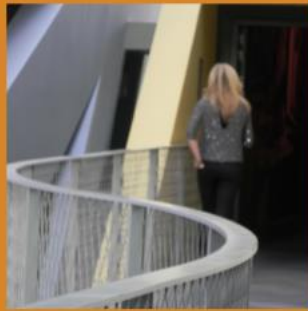
Some students found the museum and its exhibitions very fascinating as they had grown up reading the Tintin comics. Some students on the other hand were not that familiar with Tintin before the visit to the museum, though many were delighted to find Tintin comic books in their own language from one of the exhibition rooms. After the museum visit, the students had a quick walk in the city center of Louvain-la-Neuve and joined together at a local cafeteria to socialize and to have a drink.

After spending some time in the cafeteria, students were free to choose whether they wanted to explore the city more or travel back to Brussels. Luckily the weather was warm and sunny so it was a good opportunity to see more of the small university city.

"I enjoyed the visit to the Hergé museum because it is connected to my childhood. I used to read a lot of The Adventures of Tintin. The visit also allowed me to get to know the Belgian comic book culture and it was good to walk around Louvain-la-Neuve with the whole class."

-Niels, The Netherlands





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