

Interview mit einer internationalen Studierenden in Graz: „Das Leben wird langweilig, wenn man alles hat“

Mitte Mai trafen sich im Rahmen des Bürgermeister-Empfanges ERASMUS-Studierende der Grazer Universitäten im Grazer Rathaus. Vizerektor Bernhard Hofmann-Wellenhof nahm in Vertretung für die TU Graz daran teil und wurde so Ohrenzeuge der Dankesrede von Martina Bednáriková, welche die gebürtige Slowakin im Namen aller ERASMUS-Studierenden vor den Festgästen hielt. In berührenden Worten sprach die 21-Jährige über ihren Auslandsaufenthalt in Graz und gab so einen sehr persönlichen Einblick in das Leben einer Austausch-Studierenden.

Vizerektor Hofmann-Wellenhof bat Martina Bednáriková daraufhin um ein Interview.

Bernhard Hofmann-Wellenhof

Martina, you held this wonderful speech at the mayor's reception in the city hall of Graz. Why did you come to Graz?

When I was here for the first time in the context of a summer school, I participated in one competition. I had to write a report – and I won. The prize was this scholarship.

You mentioned in your speech the words “sometimes you win ... and sometimes you learn”. Usually, one would expect “lose” instead of “learn”. Is losing impossible?

I think it is not losing that people actually experience in the course of their lives. It is rather a lesson they learn. Whenever I lost something, I figured out later it had actually been better for me to lose it because I learned and gained much more afterwards. When I wanted something and I did not get it, I was disappointed; but looking back I realized it was much better for me as a person.



Martina Bednáriková im Interview mit VR Bernhard Hofmann-Wellenhof

You also mentioned “freedom of the mind”. Is it special here at Graz or similar at your home country or anywhere in Europe?

I cannot compare it to other countries, because my experience is restricted to Graz and Austria. I did not stay anywhere else for a longer

period of time. The situation here in Graz is to some extent different from my home country. In Slovakia we are focusing more on the theoretical knowledge – it is more institutional and less personal. In Slovakia there still prevails the old system where it is expected to follow

Die Dankesrede von Martina Bednáriková

It is said that life is all about making choices. Sometimes you win ... and sometimes you learn. But it's not what happens to you that determines how far you will go in life; it is how you handle what happens to you.

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Martina Bednáriková, I am from Slovakia and I have been honored to speak to you on behalf of all exchange students about our stay here in Graz. Besides making the best decision in my life by coming here, I would like to tell you about four things that have made my stay special.

The most important one is freedom. And I do not mean only the personal freedom I acquired after the arrival here but rather the freedom of the mind, that diversity of opinions and the independence of thoughts of all the students here.

It is also the focus on a number of diverse ideas that has made my stay special as well. At the University, we all have been invited to maintain a critical approach. However, we have been first and foremost focused on the strength of character, development of humanity and respect for the diversity.

Everybody knows that exchange is not only about studying. It is all rather about people and interaction. Having the chance to meet so many different people with so many diverse backgrounds does not happen often.

And finally, we have had a lot of fun this semester as well! Studying, going out, doing a lot of travelling, eating together and just socializing ... these are the things that really connect people.

I would like to thank you for giving us this opportunity. Although it has not always been easy, we have to remember that oaks grow strong in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure. And I learned that it is not important to see the whole staircase, just to take the first step. Thank you!

the rules in the first place, but the situation has strongly improved, especially over the last five years. Yet, it does differ very much in the offered programs such as summer schools etc. In Slovakia the education is more theory-oriented; however, it also depends on the university. My university, the Comenius University, is the oldest university (established in 1919) and that is why the system is still strict.

I was also impressed by your speech when you mentioned that thanks to our university you have been focused on the strength of character, development of humanity, and respect for the diversity. Can you explain this in some more detail? What about gender issues?

At home, I have never realized any gender problem so far due to the fact that I am a student. But yes, it does become an issue when women having a family try to get a job. My mother stayed with us for 15 years. Now it is almost impossible for her to get a job – although she has studied Chemistry and holds a university degree. When it comes to humanity, I believe (from what I have learned) that every-

body can make a contribution and that everybody should live according to his/her principles.

“Studying, going out, doing a lot of travelling, eating together and just socializing ... these are the things that really connect people,” is an abbreviated quotation out of your speech. Is this compliant with ERASMUS?

Yes, I think this also belongs to the purposes of ERASMUS. To gain international experience changes a person's life. ERASMUS has changed my life and also my way of thinking.

“It has not always been easy ... diamonds are made under pressure.” This sentence deeply impressed and moved me. How can we in Graz improve ourselves to possibly make the stay of the ERASMUS students easier but still keep some pressure in order not to lose the diamonds?

It does not depend on the institutions, it is more personal; however, it is impossible to avoid all problems. They would occur everywhere; even at home it would be the same. This refers to the whole life. At the beginning, it was not easy to come here. I had to face a lot of difficulties; however, only when facing difficult situations

Im Fokus: Martina Bednáriková

Die 21-jährige Martina Bednáriková bleibt im Rahmen ihres ERASMUS-Studiums bis Sommer in Graz. Danach hofft sie auf ein Stipendium, um ihr Masterstudium in der steirischen Landeshauptstadt zu absolvieren. Im Interview mit Vizerektor Hofmann-Wellenhof spricht die Slowakin über ihre – nach anfänglichen bürokratischen Hindernissen – durchwegs positiven Erfahrungen, die sie mit ERASMUS in Graz gemacht hat. Im Vergleich zum Studieren in ihrer Heimat hebt sie die geistige Freiheit hervor, die sie in Graz verspürt. Auch wenn sich die Situation in den letzten fünf Jahren sehr verbessert habe, sei das Studium in der Slowakei meist sehr theoretisch, regelgläubig, institutionalisiert und weniger persönlich. Bednáriková stellt fest, dass ERASMUS ihr Leben und ihre Art zu denken verändert hat. Ein wesentlicher Teil der ERASMUS-Erfahrung sei es auch, zu reisen, gemeinsam zu essen und Zeit miteinander zu verbringen – alles Dinge, die Leute verbinden. So sieht sie Internationalisierung als Instrument, durch das man andere Menschen und Kulturen kennenlernt und Rassismus verhindert. Und was sie auch gelernt hat: Gemeinsam als Team kann man mehr erreichen als der/die Einzelne. „Graz, das ist ...“ ergänzt sie demnach auch mit: „der Ort, an dem meine Träume wahr werden“.

you can grow. I believe that people with a difficult childhood could often achieve more. Life becomes boring when you have everything. Referring to my stay, the most difficult procedure was the huge amount of paper work here and at home (e.g. too much administration when I went to the offices etc.).

How important do you consider internationalization for universities?

Internationalization is great; it is the best thing you can do. It is great when different people meet each other and encounter different cultures. Similarly, it is important to prevent racism. I met so many different people from so many different countries. I never realized how close I can be with the people from countries so far away. Together, as a team, we can achieve more than individually. Internationalization is a tool to learn quickly how important it is to cooperate.

An Italian, whose relatives still live in Rome, got an employment in Graz and told me: “Graz, this is the city of my dreams!” What is your statement?

Graz, this is the place where my dreams come true. ■