

# Evaluation Report – Sebastian Bur

## Description, address and information about the employer:

### **- institution -**

Tallinn University of Technology  
Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance  
Ehitajate tee 5  
19086 Tallinn

### **- job title -**

Research Assistant

## Preparation and First Days

### - Finding a position -

When looking for an internship, I considered internship opportunities in the private sector as well as in the public sector. While my studies, I specialized in topics related to public administration especially public finance and public financial management. I have been at the end of my master program undetermined if I want to work immediately in private sector or if I want to go for a PhD. In the light of this consideration, I started to look for internship opportunities. I found via google a few consultancies with focus on the public sector which I could have imagined applying for but decided in the end to go for an internship in academia since I already did an internship in a consultancy with focus on the public sector in Germany. Through my master thesis, I obtained a good overview about scholars with who I share a common research interest and relevant academic networks. By this, I knew that at Tallinn University of Technology are interesting research projects and experts in the above-mentioned fields. My internship position was not among the open vacancies of the university and for that reason, I contacted the Ragnar Nurkse department with a general request if they would be open to hire an intern and if they would offer me the opportunity to integrate me in one of their research projects. After short time, I received an answer that one professor would be interested in an intern to get support in her current research project. We scheduled a Skype call, talked about the project itself, my skills and previous experiences, discussed possible tasks and fixed our agreement later in the provided Erasmus+ form. For that reason, I can't provide recommendations for future Erasmus+ traineeship interns how to find a position in Estonia but if someone is interested in academia as well, my experience regarding initiating contact was quite good.

### - Finding accommodation –

Frankly, finding a flat in Tallinn was the most difficult search for a place to stay I ever had. So far, I was used to look up local websites with flat offers but especially groups on Facebook. After a time, I got to know that the real estate market in Tallinn is very tensed because there are not enough flats for the given market demand. This had two consequences: First, there are almost no offers of flats in Facebook groups but rather only postings of people who are desperately looking for a flat. I never did such a posting, but I observed that to all these postings, always the same people replied. For me, that is not a sign that those respondents offer something really good nor that the initial postings with flat requests are really a successful strategy. Second, if you visit the local real estate websites like [www.city24.ee](http://www.city24.ee) or [www.kv.ee](http://www.kv.ee), you will find a lot of flats, but you hardly receive a response of a landlord. A few hints and aspects are to mention here. It is highly recommended to check either manually each hour or to activate a

search agent for your preferred flat features on those websites because time matters! After a time, I started to write down for how long the flat offer was already online when I responded to it and even screenshotted the offer because as fast as they appear as fast they disappear again due to the high number of requests.

This leads to the next advice: Don't write emails to landlords. I was writing most of the time within 15 minutes after the offers appeared and provided the landlords with detailed description of myself, but maximum every second mail got a response from the landlord and they always told me that I am at the end of the waiting list or couldn't make it on the waiting list because dozens of people are already in front of me. For me, that is a sign that calling would be better than writing.

If one only spends a semester or less time in Tallinn, this shouldn't be mentioned when contacting a landlord. I don't want to be misunderstood. I prefer always honesty over hiding information, but a typical response of landlords has been that they don't do short-term rentals and that I should check instead airBnB (which has almost no offers and if yes, more expensive than renting a flat). When leaving out the information about how long I intend to stay in Tallinn, I received more responses, but all landlords want to make a contract for one or even two years. That shouldn't prevent someone from signing a contract because the termination deadline is only one or two months so that nobody has to pay more than needed. I hesitated a lot to act like this but in the end, I found a very nice landlord whom I told (in a phone call!) immediately that I am only for short-term interested and it was fine for him.

He told me that short-term is in general not preferred in Estonia and that's why a lot of landlords would probably ignore my requests and in addition to that, a lot of Estonians would have problems with foreign tenants so that locals are preferred compared to foreigners. That is now of course not a scientific insight but matches to my experiences and what I heard from other people.

A general note must be made to features of the real estate market: A lot of flats are rented out via agents who demand a broker fee which is a normal procedure in Estonia but amounts up to two monthly rents which makes it quite expensive for people only looking for short-term. Another feature is that dormitories and the academic hostel offer shared rooms which is for people who are not used to this from their home countries a strange offer. However, I know that it is the same in Hungary.

#### - Starting in Tallinn -

The first thing everyone who intends to live in Tallinn for a while has to do is, to go immediately with your rental contract to the local district office to register your flat and at the following day to the Police and Border Guard Office to apply for an Estonian eID card.

The Tallinn University of Technology has a few video tutorials for people who recently moved to Tallinn and this topic is also addressed in one of the videos: <https://www.ttu.ee/studying/new-and-current-student/video-tutorials/>

For the eID card itself, an administrative fee of 25 Euro must be paid. It can be paid at the Police and Border Guard Office and doesn't have to be paid in advance. The card has a lot of advantages which an inhabitant of Tallinn should definitely make use of. A lot of people know that public transport in Tallinn is for free. This only applies for people with a registered residence who hold an eID. As the monthly ticket for public transport in Tallinn is 23 Euro, it is definitely worth registering your place. There are also other issues when this eID is useful. For instance, if one wants to have access to a library, he can either pay a small registration fee or enjoy a registration for free in case of having this eID card. It helps as well to make contracts like with an internet provider. I made an internet contract with Starman which was very

unbureaucratic. Other providers asked for Estonian eID or offered contracts with high fees if eID is missing.

An additional feature of the eID is to use it for public and private services. This is the digital story probably everyone has heard about Estonia. If someone wants to use this, he needs to buy an eID reader which can be purchased at Euronics store for 8 Euro (cheapest reader). It is absolutely possible to live four months in Estonia without using the digital features of the eID. On the other hand, it is highly recommended to use the opportunity to get to know 'the future' and how it really functions. I assume that the longer one stays in Estonia, the more sense it makes to get familiar with these features as they are frequently used by Estonians for instance to sign rental contracts digitally, notify the local government a change of your residence address or other things like this.

For using the public transport, a greencard is needed which is a plastic card with a chip and can be purchased at every R-Kiosk or post office in Tallinn. The card itself costs a deposit but it will be returned if one gives back the card at an R-Kiosk or post office. Every greencard has a unique number which is written on it. The holder of a card can connect his greencard on the website of the public transport company with his eID so that the use of public transport is for free. At the end of the mobility, one can return the greencard at the R-Kiosk at the airport.

## **My work and tasks as an intern**

### -My workplace-

My workplace has been the Tallinn University of Technology, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance. At this department, around half of the professors are full-time residents of Tallinn while the other half is only in town for their lectures or other periods significantly smaller than one year. The reason is that the department teaches most of its courses in block format meaning that a course lasts only one or two weeks but within that period daily. By doing so, the department has some non-Estonian professors teaching and researching in Tallinn who don't have to live the whole year in Tallinn. That was a new experience for me and by this, I haven't met some colleagues or only saw them a few times. Still, the work environment was very international with Estonian, German, Austrian, American, Norwegian, Nepalese, Latvian and Russian colleagues.

At the beginning of my internship, I receive keys to the floor of the department and a permanent work space in a shared office room was assigned to me. The room is usually offered to guest researchers or visiting PhD students of the departments. I had access to the university internet and to the library and was satisfied with this equipment.

### - Contact to my supervisor -

I had regular contact with my supervisor while my internship. We had several meetings time and frequent contact via mail in the periods when she has been abroad for teaching, research projects or conferences. Regarding the tasks of my internship, she was always a good mentor for me and answered all my questions and provided guidance. I received always immediately feedback to my delivered work. For administrative issues, the international coordinator of the department helped me.

### - My tasks -

According to my education as political scientist, economist and public administration graduate, I received tasks in which I could make use of my methodological and professional knowledge. The research project is about developments in fiscal governance in several countries in the European Union. My tasks were mainly related to two interview sessions. The one interview

session was already conducted so that my task has been to transcribe the interviews. By this, I got a deeper insight into the questions and areas of the research project and could connect answers from the interviewees with knowledge from my studies. My supervisor encouraged me to ask questions whenever they come to my mind and I had the chance to ask a lot of questions about how to conduct a research project and to ask her opinion about the given answers from the interviewees and discussing my own impressions and opinions with her. The other main task was the independent preparation of an interview session taking place in November. With my knowledge about the interview sessions which I transcribed and some guidance from my supervisor, I had to collect in the first round academic articles about this country related to the topics of the interviews and in a second round, compiling these articles in a comprehensive document and highlighting the current state of fiscal governance but also recent developments and future challenges.

#### - Other -

From the very beginning, I was integrated in the activities of the department. I was invited to participate at the weekly meetings of the PhD seminar, got invitations to guest lectures and PhD defences and was always invited to 'social events' at the department like birthday celebrations in the kitchen of the department or to Christmas events. I was absolutely accepted and integrated in the life of the department.

### **Living in Estonia**

#### - Living Costs -

The living costs in Tallinn are quite high. I was told that it is only a problem of Tallinn and that it would not be that serious in Tartu. In Tallinn, I felt that I paid as much for living costs as in Germany and by this much more than in Budapest. In my lunch breaks, I had the option to go to the restaurants at the university or to cook at home because I lived close to the university. I decided for the latter one because a meal in the restaurants at the university costs between 3.50 Euro - 4.50 Euro and includes only the main dish while at Corvinus university, this would include a soup and a dessert as well.

Going out in the evening seemed also rather expensive for me as a large beer was minimum 4 Euro and rather the exception. The rule was more around 5 Euro which is comparable to the price level of a large German city.

#### - Daily Life -

Living in Estonia was a very different experience to the places I have lived so far. I would describe myself as quite experienced travelling in Eastern Europe, but I have to admit that the way of life and how people are is different in the Baltics than for example in Central-Eastern Europe like Hungary. It is no exaggeration to say that people are in general less talkative which doesn't have to do necessarily with language skills and surprising unfriendly. People are very to the point and often without much talk around. In shops or in any seller-client-situation, you can experience a behaviour of the other person which would be considered as quite rude and unfriendly in other places in Europe. One shouldn't take this personal, but it is quite surprising at the beginning. However, it is more spread in the parents-generation than among younger people.

Also to mention, even though common knowledge and obvious, the bad weather in Estonia. All locals told me that I am in the worst time possible in Estonia. Actually, it was not that horrible from temperatures but a constant rain and daylight between 9am and 3pm is definitely a strange experience and at a point a bit depressing.

### - Free-time activities in Tallinn and Estonia -

Recommendations of free-time activities obviously depends on what someone does usually in his free-time. I recommend specially to consider the following activities:

#### Tallinn:

- Guided Tour through the parliament: English language tours are offered every Friday pre-lunch time and don't require a registration before.
- KUMU National Art Museum: A huge museum next to the Catherines Palais in Tallinn. It is definitely recommended also for non-art interested students. On the fourth floor is an exhibition about propaganda in the Communist time and some historical facts about the development of Tallinn like the building of the Mustamäe district in which I lived while my internship. The entrance fee of 6 € (students) respectively 8 € (non-students) is definitely worth the money
- Linnahall: A huge 'lost place' which has been used in the past as multi-purpose venue with a history going back to the 1980s Olympic Games in Moskow. It is no longer possible to enter but possible to go to the terrasse on the roof top which offers a good view over the harbour and sea
- Ski-Jumping Tower Mustamäe: It is definitely not a must-go but for me, it was an interesting fact that Tallinn has a Ski-Jumping tower and as it is not the most usual sport activity, it might be nice to see from close for some people
- Estonian Cultural Institute: This is a general recommendation. I got to know them from the "Exapts in Tallinn/Estonia" Facebook group. They organize a lot of activities to get to know Tallinn and Estonia. Although I never participated in any events, they seemed to have an interesting schedule.

#### Tartu:

- Estonian National Museum: The ticket price seems quite expensive regarding the 14 € for non-students respectively 10 € for students but it is a fascinating modern-style museum in which a visitor can spend four hours without getting bored getting to know everything about Estonia from the very early settlements till today's time regarding every aspect of life.

Besides travelling in Estonia, it is worth considering doing a trip with a ferry to Helsinki or going by bus to Riga (Latvia) or Vilnius (Lithuania). Other travels within Estonia are possible but in my opinion, it is sometimes difficult to go by bus somewhere and at the same day back again because the busses take quite long and don't go that often a day to all smaller cities.

### **Summary:**

My time in Tallinn was very interesting. My workplace was really international and the professors and PhD candidates are more international as it was in my study program at Corvinus or at my Bachelor university. I had a good support while my internship from all my colleagues and made very important experiences.

Regarding Estonia itself, it is an interesting country. Not just because its history but especially for me as a graduate of public administration studies who the state is considered and organized nowadays. The Erasmus+ traineeship scholarship definitely enabled me to make a very interesting experience in another country which is distinct from my previous experiences. I am glad that I had the chance to make these opportunities which helped me to learn more about my professional interests but also to widen my experiences in working and living in international environments.