

## MidStay paragraphs

What I thought was going to be an uneventful (and cold) MidStay in Helsinki turned out to be, while still cold, some of the best days of my life. I guess it all started waking up at 4 AM in Brussels to catch an early flight to Helsinki. Before I left my apartment, I debated whether to grab my gloves and toboggan, but I ended up taking them just to be safe... Thank God. As the plane was about to land, the other KU Leuven students and I were glancing at each other with giddy. The ground below was a pure white as far as you could see.

Trekking from the airport to our hotel that first day was an adventure to say the least. I was trying to quiet the voice on my head telling me to start a snowball fight all while going in countless circles, taking multiple trams, and asking many strangers how to find Töölö Towers. I think part of the problem was that we were pronouncing it like "Too-loo" when it was really "Tuh-luh". But we made it nonetheless!

After eating some Korvapuusti (Finnish cinnamon buns) and Piparkakku (gingerbread cookies) at a local bakery with new friends, we got ready for our city tour. Transfixed by snow and each other, we laughed together as we passed Finnish sculptures, libraries, gorgeous architecture, saunas, and an oceanic fortress emerging from a gently frozen Baltic Sea. The night came to close after devouring, I mean, partaking of reindeer and traditional fare from Finlandia in a restaurant with views of a neon downtown skyline.

The next morning, we all presented our research. And I am not lying when I said that I was intrigued by every single presentation. We only had two minutes to present a one-slide presentation, but we had fifteen minutes to discuss our research further. Projects ranged from opium conflicts in Afghanistan to determining the invariant mass of the Higgs-Boson. My project focused on determining how climate change will affect countries' future incentives to comply with international climate agreements; it perfectly combined my interests in economics, international relations, and sustainable development. Talking about my research in the discussion and hearing others helped us all to become close friends very quickly. Being from the University of Tennessee, it was nice to meet a student from the University of Kentucky, even though our football teams played each other that Saturday. I got to trash talk a little bit since Tennessee won of course, but we called a truce and enjoyed the rest of MidStay. After our presentations, the gracious hosts of the University of Helsinki treated us to lunch and discussed opportunities for graduate school. I don't know if I could handle the cold, but the opportunities seemed endless especially since most graduate programs (not just in Helsinki but in Europe as a whole) are in English.

Later that night, I got to meet up with my university's Director of Undergraduate Research since some MidStay events were paired with research and study abroad faculty from the U.S; conducting site visits. At our final dinner, a grand feast would be an understatement, we mingled with the EuroScholars consortium and talked about all of our experiences at a top European. After a final toast and with our bellies full, we all generally decided it was time for karaoke. Everyone participated-the students, the site visitors, and consortium members...and everyone embarrassed ourselves to renditions of "Bohemian Rhapsody", "Single Ladies", "Don't Go Breaking My Heart", and the like.

Shivering, sweating, and sometimes sprinting, my MidStay came to an end in a traditional Finnish sauna by the sea. Facing my fears and millions of chill bumps, I was brave enough to jump through a hole cut out of the ice into the 30-degree Baltic with a couple of my new friends. I wish you could've seen us racing back to the sauna. In sum, these are the types of the

experiences that make you-that I dreamed about-and I got to do all of these with friends I will have for a lifetime. I'll never forget Helsinki and the memories we made there.

*Tyler Hounshell ( KU Leuven / University of Tennessee-Knoxville, F2016)*