



REPORT FOR HAW @ INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP ABROAD

Thesis at University of Minho

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Introduction:

The HAW International Research Scholarship serves as a gateway to an immersive exploration of knowledge and skills, steering research and development endeavours toward individual interests. Tailored for applied science institute students, this scholarship propels participants into a realm of collaborative research activities, fostering international partnerships with academic institutions. Personally, this opportunity beckons me to delve into a thesis project anchored in my research interests, unfolding amidst an international milieu of seasoned professionals. The anticipation of a six-month sojourn abroad has, in itself, reshaped my perception of the European professional sphere, instilling a newfound confidence and invigorating my academic pursuits.

Pre-departure Preparation:

The initiation of the application process for the HAW International Research Scholarship in October signals the commencement of a meticulous preparatory phase six months prior. Spanning a comprehensive 45 to 60 days, this intricate process demands the assembly of essential documentation, including Curriculum Vitae, Cover Letter, an acceptance missive from the host university, and a preliminary thesis project outline. The application dossier extends to encompass academic records, letters of recommendation, proof of English proficiency, and personal particulars. The unveiling of results in November 2022 afforded a strategic window for readying myself for the impending thesis semester, scheduled to commence in April 2023. A subsequent alteration in the host university extended my preparatory timeline, ultimately leading me to select the University of Minho in Guimaraes, Portugal—a decision that promised a summer of scholarly pursuits in 2023.

Despite the scholarship's omission of provisions for accommodation, visa facilitation, and bureaucratic formalities, a meticulous 1.5-month endeavor, complemented by the guidance of departmental professors, resulted in the completion of these essential tasks. The scholarship, nevertheless, underwrites the financial aspects, allocating 550 euros for travel expenses and 950 euros per month for the entire thesis semester.

Destination Overview:

The University of Minho, nestled in Guimaraes, Portugal, unfolds as a venerable institution celebrating its 50th anniversary. Embracing two campuses—one in Guimaraes and the other in Braga—the university resides within a UNESCO World Heritage site, steeped in cultural opulence and historical eminence. Guimaraes, often hailed as the 'birthplace of Portugal,' boasts a medieval castle and a nearby duke's palace, creating a harmonious backdrop for academic pursuits. The city's accolade as the EU Commission's 'most green city of the year' adds to its allure, with dense greenery, forested expanses, ancient civilizational sites, and mountainous terrains embracing the city.

Academically, the University of Minho stands as Portugal's largest sustainable educational campus, encompassing 12 schools and institutions, including the esteemed School of Architecture, Art, and Design (EAAD). The academic landscape extends to a dedicated research laboratory, Lab2PT, specializing in architecture and urbanism.

Academic Experience:

My academic sojourn at the University of Minho unfolded in a truly phenomenal manner. Extended an invitation through the research cell of the Department of Architecture and Urbanism, guided by Prof. Cidalia Silva, my experience with professors and colleagues alike was marked by a warm embrace. Given the independent nature of my thesis project, I enjoyed unrestricted access to various university spaces. The crafting of my academic curriculum, facilitated by Prof. Marc Kirschbaum from SRH Hochschule Heidelberg and Prof. Cidalia Silva as my supervisors, involved the meticulous selection of a location aligned with my research interests—a primary school in Pevidem, Guimaraes. Regular presentations, reviews, and site visits punctuated my progress, with additional engagement in extracurricular activities for local school children through a local NGO.

Living Arrangement:

Navigating life as an international student in Guimaraes unfolded as a delightful adventure, particularly in terms of shared accommodation. A short-term lease on a shared apartment near the railway station, facilitated by an exchange student at the host university, unfolded as a strategic decision. The apartment's remarkable features—its location, dimensions, and layout—contributed to a culturally rich experience. Shared with roommates from Brazil, Africa, Italy, and Germany, the living arrangement proved to be an invaluable avenue for cultural exchange. The apartment's proximity to the city center heightened the allure, allowing for evening strolls amid historic buildings and culinary exploration. The experience culminated in a vibrant five-month period of cultural immersion, with opportunities for shared experiences, discussions on diverse cultures, and mutual learning.

Professional Development:

Beyond the confines of academia, the HAW International Research Scholarship unfolded as a catalyst for profound professional development. An opportunity to volunteer with 'ProChild Colab,' a local NGO, that transcended language barriers to create collaborative and engaging activities with young children. The experience not only enriched my understanding of research methodologies but also provided insights into the cultural nuances of Guimaraes. Engaging with various urban layers and perspectives broadened my comprehension of the architectural styles prevalent in northern Portugal.

Thesis Project:

Allow me to briefly describe my project, "InterScape Renewal," which focuses on reimagining the in-between spaces within a school environment, with a specific case study of EB1/JI Primary School Pevidem. This project delves into the impact of the physical built environment on child development, considering both cognitive and physical aspects. It draws on the psychological concept of nature vs. nurture in shaping an individual. In addition, I conducted extensive research on the city's surroundings, educational projects within the city, the physical environment of Pevidem, and the school itself. Engaging in co-curricular activities with school kids through the ProChild group provided valuable insights into the school environment. I also organized a workshop with the school children titled 'Pick, Pluck & Play' to better understand the connection between nature and children. My project centers on the edges of the school, which are the in-between spaces connecting the school building and the surrounding site. By establishing physical and visual connections between the school building and the outdoor premises, my minimalist design approach aims to create significant positive changes.

Personal Growth & Challenges:

The metamorphosis from an Indian international student in Germany to a resident of Portugal marked a unique phase of personal growth. Overcoming the initial challenges of isolation, forging new friendships, and navigating the intricacies of daily life became pivotal aspects of this transformative journey. The experience fostered resilience, intercultural competencies, and the acquisition of essential life skills. Challenges, such as navigating local transactions, evolved from being daunting to enjoyable experiences. The initial solitude transformed into a vibrant existence as I integrated into campus life, embraced volunteer work and explored the northern Portugal region.

Travel Experience:

The freedom afforded by an independent thesis project unfurled a tapestry of travel experiences, encompassing over ten cities from the extreme north to the south of Portugal. The versatility of Portuguese transportation, including trains, buses, and flights, facilitated the exploration of cultural gems in cities like Braga, Aveiro, Sintra, Lisbon, and Faro. Noteworthy was the participation in an open house on architecture in Porto, providing an enriched understanding of architectural masterpieces. From the exploration of cities to immersive experiences during Portugal's Youth Week in Lisbon, the travel experiences became a kaleidoscope of diverse cultural encounters.

Conclusion:

In summation, the HAW International Research Scholarship has not merely been an academic pursuit; it has been an odyssey—a journey that added a prestigious feather to my academic cap and unfurled wings for an exploration of a new country. The experiences, both professional and personal, woven into the fabric of the past six months, are indelible. Whether it be engaging with Portuguese children or inhaling the fragrance of vineyards, the learning experience at a European public university has forged connections destined to endure a lifetime. Portugal, now my second home in Europe, holds a special place in my heart, and I express profound gratitude to this scholarship for transforming this dream into a tangible reality.

Recommendations:

To future aspirants of this scholarship, I extend a resounding endorsement for the unique experiences, academic enrichment, and cultural exposure that await. Beyond the stress of crafting the perfect project, the thesis abroad offers a gateway to lifelong connections, learning, and exploration. The financial support provided by the scholarship should be embraced not merely for academic pursuits but as a means to infuse the journey with fun and lasting memories.

Acknowledgments:

In expressing heartfelt gratitude, I extend my thanks to both my host and home universities for facilitating this transformative opportunity to pursue my thesis abroad. The professors encountered along this journey have been true mentors, guiding me through the labyrinth of academic exploration. A debt of gratitude is also owed to friends and family for their unwavering support and steadfast presence in all my life decisions.