

Report

**Research and Study Stay
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada**

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I was granted a scholarship by the “University Alliance for Sustainability” for a 3-month research and study stay at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. In the context of social sustainability I conducted research for my Master’s thesis and audited two courses in the department of sociology.

Arrival and Organization

As soon as I arrived in Vancouver, Wendy Kang from the International Office invited me to talk about my upcoming time at UBC. She did not only register me as a visiting student but also enrolled me in the courses I chose in advance. Furthermore, she was of great help when it came to organizing administrative things, such as student ID card, Compass Pass for public transportation, medical insurance, etc.

Master’s Thesis

I spent most of my time at UBC on conducting research for my Master’s thesis. In the light of *Zeitwohlstand* I analyzed in how far characteristics of the late (or second) modernity, such as globalization, individualization and digitalization, shape social time. This research shall serve as a stepping-stone for more detailed research about how a society based on *Zeitwohlstand* might look like and how it can serve as an alternative to a society based on material prosperity.

My goal was to finish at least two thirds of my thesis while being at UBC. In the course of working on it I not only broadened my knowledge about sociology of time but also about the often forgotten social aspect of sustainability. When dropping the term “sustainability” most people intuitively thought of ecological sustainability. By explaining that sustainability is actually a three-fold concept – consisting of ecological, social and economic sustainability – I developed the capability of transmitting the holistic concept of sustainability in an understandable way to a variety of people with different backgrounds.

Now I am even more convinced that I want to dig deeper into my thesis’ topic by pursuing a PhD. I very much appreciate discussions about *Zeitwohlstand* with native English speakers because (to my current knowledge) there is no English equivalent

yet. Hitherto I am not quite sure which proposition captures the meaning best but suggestions include *time prosperity*, *time well-being*, *time welfare*.

Courses and Research at UBC

It was very hard to get accepted in classes due to the last minute organization of my stay. Because of the short notice it was not possible to enroll in graduate courses anymore. So, I audited two undergraduate courses to receive additional input for my Master's thesis.

My supervisor was Amy Hanser of the department of sociology. Unfortunately, opposed to my expectations, she did not have any ongoing project to help her with at the time of my research stay. However, Sylvia Fuller's course "352A – Organization of Work" happened to provide me with a lot of relevant material for my Master's thesis. The other class I attended was "260A – Technology, Work and Society", lectured by Mr. Prabhsharanbir Singh in which I received a lot of input as well. Having a background in philosophy Mr. Singh's interest for my research lead to multiple stimulating and inspirational one-on-one talks.

Due to the small ratio of students per teacher (4:1) the relation between teachers and students is really close. Coming from FU Berlin this was a very unusual, yet very welcoming experience for me. I really benefited from these circumstances since both of my teachers were not only always available for me via e-mail but also supported me a lot with my work and encouraged me to push the envelope.

Additionally, I especially value the insight into a North-American university as well as the different approach towards science in general.

Sustainability in Vancouver and at UBC

Sustainability is a big topic in both the city of Vancouver as well as at the University of British Columbia. It is the city's plan to be the greenest city by 2020. First and foremost, Vancouver is the only big North-American city that does not have a city highway. Furthermore, land owners benefit from a land tax exemption if their un-built land is used for urban gardening projects. Other initiatives include several car sharing services with preferential parking, waste separation, rooftop gardens, a well developed public transportation network, etc.

In consideration of social sustainability Vancouver makes just as much of an effort. Its citizens, also called Vancouverites, are very inclusive regardless of ethnicity, English language skills, sexual identity, physical and mental abilities, religion, social background, etc. That was something I could feel in everyday life. In addition Vancouver's authorities are very conscious and respectful about the city's origin; in 2014 they acknowledged that the city sits on unceded land of the First Nations Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh. One project that particularly attracted my attention was the Woodward's building, a former department store in downtown Vancouver. It was recently rebuilt into an integrative community building that houses privately owned apartments, 100% state-funded social housing units for the poor, a multitude of stores and a public space for community events. Its goal is to bring together peo-

ple from different social backgrounds and provide the local community with a space for interaction.

Sustainability is a very important topic for the UBC, too. Campus initiatives span across waste and recycling, ecological food, green architecture (e.g. Centre for Interactive Research on Sustainability), transport, etc. With regard to social sustainability, UBC hosts various cultural centres and puts a lot of importance to diversity, gender and race equality, and community engagement. In addition to campus initiatives, there is a lot of effort being put forward by students themselves. One student initiative, the “Student Environment Center” (SEC), held one of their big networking events in the beginning of my stay. During this event I had the opportunity to learn about sustainability at UBC, to network with active students, and to meet other incoming students funded by the “University Alliance for Sustainability”. All the SEC members were not only very invested in learning more about the newly established university alliance but also very eager to have us in their weekly meetings.

Conclusion

I am really happy that I was given the opportunity to undertake research for my Master’s thesis at UBC; mainly because of the inspiration I received through my teachers and their eagerness to push me further. With regard to sustainability Vancouver and UBC offer a great environment to broaden one’s knowledge – both theoretically in terms of scientific input as well as practically because of the variety of bottom-up initiatives.

Also having had the chance to compare the German with the American university system as well as their respective approach towards science in general was of great value to me. Personally, I not only broadened my scientific and cultural horizon but also learned how to make my research more accessible through developing the ability to communicate my results more effectively.