

Report on Participation in Field Trip in Germany

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The overseas field trip to Germany was an excellent learning experience giving me the opportunity to broaden my understanding of various socio-economic issues confronting our society. The trip was organized in such a way that I get to delve into topics beyond the confines of my own research interest. In the end, I was able to gain a better understanding of various issues such as the status of the renewable energy market in Germany, gender issues in employment, and migration and the refugee problem in Europe among many topics. My interaction with various people dealing with these issues widened my perspectives and provided me a more grounded understanding of these social problems. Hearing the narration of the lived experience of those that are immersed in these topics gave me fresh insights that one rarely encounter by just reading books or articles about these problems.

Our learning journey started even before departing for Germany. We were tasked by our professor to contact people and organizations that we would like to interview and visit. Making initial contacts to organizations, setting up an appointment, and finally confirming details of our visit with these organizations honed our resourcefulness and ability to communicate with people from various background and level. In the end, our group was able to secure appointments with many organizations ensuring that our trip to Germany would be a productive one. These visits to various organizations complemented our equally interesting visits to Goethe University and Heidelberg University where we attended lectures and participated in a student workshop as well.

One particular highlight of the trip for me is our visit to the Frankfurt Economic Development GMBH- a government-linked entity tasked to promote Frankfurt as an investment destination. The organization provided us an overview of the current business environment of Frankfurt and outlined the strengths of the city that makes it an attractive destination for investors. One data that was shared to us that I found fascinating was the fact that about 40% of the local population in Frankfurt has an immigrant background making the city one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Germany- a reality that we were confronted with the first day we arrived in Frankfurt where one can see a number of Asian restaurants and groceries dotting the city. During the trip, we also visited the Yokohama City Representative Office in Frankfurt. The Yokohama City Representative Office was set-up by the Yokohama City government to encourage economic cooperation between Europe and Yokohama, attract business interest and European investment to Yokohama, support Yokohama businesses operating in Europe, and conduct information exchange between Yokohama and Europe among other functions. We met with Chief Representative Takashi Yanagisawa who gave us a comprehensive overview of the operations of their office and how they try to promote smooth relations between potential investors and the local government of Yokohama and the various incentives they provide to companies interested to invest in Yokohama. It was interesting to note how Yokohama City proactively seeks investments overseas by opening representative offices abroad which is not a usual practice by local governments anywhere. Given my research interest in state-business relations, the visit to both Frankfurt Economic Development Board and the Yokohama City Representative Office was very useful. The visits to these organizations allowed me to understand existing modalities used by governments to strengthen partnership with the private sector and the challenges that the governments face in ensuring a durable partnership with the private sector especially in encouraging investments.

As a student of the East Asia Sustainable Economic Development Programme, it was a privilege to visit the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Bonn, Germany and hear a representative of the UN talk about the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) and the progress being made by the organization in pushing for the adoption and implementation of the SDGs in all countries in the world. In addition to a lecture, we were able to ask questions related to the SDGs including its current implementation status, challenges countries face in implementing SDGs, and how to operationalize SDGs in different settings.

While not directly related to my research focus, attending a lecture about the history of migration in Germany by a professor from Goethe University and visiting a refugee assistance center by the trade union IG Metall were eye-opening experiences for me especially regarding the plight of refugees especially those coming from Syria and other distraught countries. We had the privilege of meeting a refugee from Iran and hear his personal story about leaving his home country and seeking asylum in Germany. It was an experience I will not forget as it puts a face on the stories about refugees I only read about in newspapers.

In addition to visiting various organizations, the field trip to Germany provided me with an opportunity to present my ongoing research in a student workshop at Heidelberg University. Through my presentation, I was able to solicit valuable comments and suggestions that I could use to improve my research. The workshop also gave me an opportunity to interact with other graduate students from Heidelberg University and learn more about their research and their life as graduate students in Germany.

In sum, the Germany Field Trip was an enriching experience both academically and also at a personal level. The interaction we had with various organizations and the lectures/workshop we attended in Goethe University and Heidelberg University provided me with a broader understanding of the concepts we learn inside the classroom related to sustainable development, state business-relations, and other concepts. Beyond these things, our appointments with refugees, organizations working on environmental justice, labor issues, and women empowerment reminded me to be engaged and not be apathetic to the various social issues our society faces.