

**Erfahrungsbericht University of Limerick
von Sema Selbuz
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I had a couple of very nice months in both Limerick and at the University of Limerick.

Limerick is situated on the southern part of Ireland, close to the river Shannon and the Shannon Region. It is the third biggest city of Ireland. The university itself is very close to the city centre which you can arrive by bus. The buses depart directly from the bus station at the university. One tour costs 1,45 Euro and you get a ticket which you have to show in case of control.

Compared to our University of Applied Sciences, the University of Limerick is a huge place. There are many different buildings with many rooms and halls. The buildings are divided into several blocks and floors.

The best known building, Main Building, is the "core" of the university. Coming to the main entrance there are two staircases; one on the left, the other on the right. One of them leads to the further levels of the E-Block and to the International Education Division. This grand service helps all international students as well as Erasmus students. On the ground floor of the Main Building there is a big hall which is on the left to the entrance. It is used for exams, fairs, or for different projects like for aid organizations. Opposite to that hall, there are class rooms and toilets.

The other staircase goes to the other blocks. In the A-Block, there is the Language Centre of the university where you can get different exercise books on almost every language. Besides, there is a Language Laboratory which offers a huge number of DVDs, videos, and CDs which you can watch and hear and thus improve your language skills.

Also there are some classrooms there. Some definite classes in "English as a Foreign Language" I had in the A-block. English as a Foreign Language was an interesting and useful subject. I had four hours the week; two hours on Tuesdays, and two hours on Thursdays. One lesson was fifty minutes. We were about twenty people in the class and usually worked in little groups. That helped me a lot because I could share my ideas with the pupils. They were very kind and came from different countries.

Two students were from China, others from Spain, Russia, the Czech Republic, France, Austria and the Netherlands. We had a lot of fun since we did much oral work about several topics from environmental topics to health issues, from business to short stories or from grammatical structures to plastic surgery. Mostly we worked in little groups of three or four and presented the issues and results we learned from our projects.

Another subject I chose was Irish Language. I am glad to have taken the class because I recognized the big difference of the Irish Language to German, English, or French. The sound of the language is so different that I had to laugh quietly at the beginning of the class. All other students in the class came from America. Thus I had much contact to them because we worked much together. So I had also the chance to hear American English. In good weather we practised outside on campus which was nice since we had some fresh air at work. I made so many friends in a few months, I learned much more people than I do at our university.

I learned that many Irish people know Irish but do not use it as often as English. One reason is that English is more common. An Irish girl who was my room mate told me that this is because the subjects in schools and universities which are held in Irish are very hard to pass and therefore the students choose them in English. There was no exam at the



University of Limerick which was to pass in Irish, but at the Trinity College in Dublin for example, you can pass them both in Irish and English.

When time passed I got used to the language. It is very nice to hear and it is a pity that it is not spoken that much. The language is not difficult, but the spelling is quite difficult and has to be learned carefully. We practised so much for spelling because everytime we were asking ourselves, is it written this way or was it different? Many vowels come together so first you have difficulties to keep that in mind and second the word is pronounced differently than it is written. Some of the TV programmes like a few reality shows, the news or cartoons were broadcasted in Irish. I also recognized that my English skills improved with the time.

I liked the Irish people much. They love it to help and are accommodating. They are happy, nice, funny people and will walk with you to show something you didn't find. The population is slightly over six million and is young and dynamic. The largest city of the island is Dublin and the third largest is Limerick. The Northern part of Ireland with Belfast belongs to the United Kingdom.

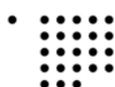
The Irish are famous with their beer, the Guinness. They love celebrations and drinking. Besides, they love it to dress up themselves and going to parties. Their music is beautiful. The most important instruments in the Irish music are the fiddle, the tin whistle, the hornpipe, the guitar, the melodeon, the Irish bouzouki, the harp etc. I also chose the subject "Introduction to Irish Music and Dance Studies". There we learned all the important musicians of the Irish Music Culture and many other things.

For instance we learned and listened to the Sean-nós song tradition. This is a highly personalized vocal art form which has been passed from generation to generation of Irish singers. Sean-nós means old-custom, or old habit. It is an unaccompanied solo song tradition with a very free flowing melody line and therefore it is almost impossible to notate the line. There is much ornamentation between the notes which are so difficult to sing. The songs are sung with throat and the singers can make glottal stops. You have to get enough mature to understand the meaning of sean-nós since it is very personal and emotional.

The singer performing sean-nós would not make any facial shows or dance. He/she sings with detachment; the eyes are usually closed, heads are raised or thrown back, or even turned towards the wall or lowered. To have a grand voice doesn't mean to be automatically a good sean-nós singer, since beside a good voice, it is crucial to convey the meaning of the song. The meaning must be internalised by the performer and the meaning is to be conveyed to the audience.

Furthermore we learned that Irish Traditional Music is the oldest dance music and song in Ireland. The music is mostly non-literate, which means that the ability to read notation is not required or an inherent part of music. The traditional music comprises thousand of songs, tunes, airs. Certain tunes are commonly known, some others not. Music by performers is learned by listening, but predominantly by active participation.

There are different instrumental styles in the Irish Music. These are the Donegal style, North Connaught, East Galway, East Clare, West Clare, and Sliabh Luachra. The Donegal style is a fiddle tradition. Iconic player was Johnny Doherty and others like his brothers Tom Doherty and Simey Doherty, then The Campbells, Con Cassidy, Dinny McLaughlin and James Byrne. The Donegal style is to be recognized by its fast, staccato style, and that without much ornamentation. So every style has certain features as well as instruments from which you recognize it.



Campus life is so vivid and busy that you don't have time to get bored. The study week started on the 28 January 2008. One semester takes fifteen weeks and there are always new "periods" within the semester. The first week, for example, is the orientation week. Once there was RAG Week The teachers are very kind and young. The youngest I met was 23 and the oldest about 37. There are both national and international students studying at the University of Limerick. The international students come from very different parts of the world like from USA, Canada, Japan, China, Russia, the Middle East, India, and the Eastern Europe.

Irish students were going to their homes at the weekends, so it was very calm from Friday to Sunday. I was living with three Irish students and one student from Taiwan. Thus I often went to the library at the weekends or to the city centre. Otherwise you get bored if you stay home, because almost nobody is there. Limerick has a beautiful city centre. There are superstores like Spar, Arthur's Quay or Tesco. Here you can find everything from food to magazines. The best thing is that you can find fresh, delicious fish and meat products. And they are cheap. There are also big stores like the Penneys' where you can find nice, cheap fashion. But there are also other big stores which are quite expensive but stylish anyhow.

There is a grand spending capacity on the market. People do earn well and buy well. The fashion is modern and the food is very tasty. Many Irish don't mind small coins. Anywhere on the street you will see coins of 1 cent, 2 cent and 5 cent. One day I even found 10 Euros!

At the university, there are many undergraduate and postgraduate students studying at several study programmes. These are Business Studies with accounting, management, public finance, economic environment. Other programmes are Education, Engineering, Law, Humanities, Informatics and Electronics, Science, Sports, Language Studies, Forestry etc. The languages within Language Studies are German, Irish, English, French, Spanish, and Japanese. Within English the subjects are English as a Foreign Language, Twentieth Century English Literature, Language and Culture, and Irish Language which I chose, then Renaissance English Literature, Augustan Literature, Nineteenth Century Studies, Contemporary Irish Writing in English, Feminist Theory and Literary Texts.

In French there are subjects like French Language and Society 2, French Language and Society, French for Business etc. In Irish Language there are Irish Folklore, Irish Language and others held only in Irish. In German there are German Language and Society, German for Engineers, Germany past and present, German Language, Culture and Society, German text, writer and reader, 19th Century German Literature, German for Business and so on.

Having much stuff the students work very hard to pass their exams. The library of the university offers huge space and various facilities to the students. From information desks where you can get some help to a big number of computers; from books and magazines to studying desks, everything is there. The library is very full during the week. Also at weekends many students work here.

First when you get into the library, there is a restaurant on the right where you can get lunch or have a drink. The prices are a little high however. If you wish to go directly to the library, you'll pass the restaurant, and the door to the library opens automatically. Straight in front of you, there is a big hall where you can find daily newspapers of different languages. Also you'll see books and magazines about economy, history, geography, religion, about the Irish culture and about other cultures, some magazines about the yellow press, big studying desks, and a big imitated dinosaur. If you leave the hall and go

to the left, there is another huge room with studying desks and desks where you can connect up your notebook.

Going to the right you'll see the computers which are available to all students in a huge number. There are also many security guards working in the library with violet uniforms who safeguard the organisation of the library. Going up the staircase you'll get to the second floor which is also very big. From there, there is also a third floor upstairs. The stuff you can find at the library is huge. You have to search at the computer desk to see the bookshelf of a book. And sometimes it is not easy to find having so many bookshelves.

My subjects at the University of Limerick were "Language and Cultural Studies", "Irish Language", "English as a Foreign Language", "Introduction to Irish Music and Dance Studies" and "Twentieth Century English Literature." On Mondays for example, I had two tutorials and two lectures. At the University of Limerick, each subject comprises a fixed number of lectures and tutorials. As an example, the subject Twentieth Century English Literature comprises two lectures and one tutorial. So these are three lessons for that class.

Each lecture and each tutorial takes fifty minutes. The lectures are held in lecture halls or lecture rooms, where all students of this subject will take part. The tutorials are held in smaller classrooms dividing the number of students into small groups. Every group has the same tutorial within his/her subject, but on different days. Having the tutorials beside the lectures, the students have the opportunity to ask questions and review assertive topics shown in the lecture. In some subjects it is the same teacher who teaches both lecture and tutorial, in others they do change. The teachers are very kind and accommodating.

In every subject we had to write essays. This essay period was before the exam period. We had different topics on which we had the opportunity to write the essay. In 20th century English Literature for instance I composed my essay about "Heart of Darkness" of Joseph Conrad. In Irish Language I wrote about the Blasket Islands of which I learned to be on the Atlantic Ocean and which belong to County Kerry in Ireland. It is an island group of six. The Irish names of the islands are Inis Icíleáin, Inis Na Bró, An Tieracht, An Blascoid Mór, Beiginis, and Inis Tuaisceart. The names of the islands have been anglicized as Inisvkillane, Inishnabro, Tearaght Island, The Great Blasket Island, Beginish, and Inishtooskert. The Blasket Islands were inhabited until 1953 by a completely Irish speaking population. After this year the Irish government decided to evacuate the islands since there was no guarantee for the safety of the islanders due to the hard living conditions, also based on bad weather. It is not possible to live on the islands anymore. Today there are many hotels which are in the near of the islands. Several tourists from all over the world are visiting the islands, the Great Blasket is the most visited of them.

The Great Blasket Island was an island of stories. It was home of three noted Irish writers: Tomás Ó Criomthain, Peig Sayers and Muiris Ó Súilleabháin, whose name is anglicized as "Maurice O'Sullivan". Their works were all written in Irish and all been translated into English, as well as other languages. They were famous storytellers.

After the great famine in Ireland which lasted from 1846 to 1850, the number of 150 of the living population on the island declined. Later the population began to grow and reached the number of at least 176 people. Before the evacuation in 1953, people had begun to abandon their lives on the islands.

I lived in Kilmurry village on campus and there were tennis courts, a big football field, and a running field. The University Sports Arena is very near to the Kilmurry Village. So it was practical for me to take part on sport programmes as well. I went swimming, dancing and practised pilates. I am really happy because I improved my swimming and dancing skills and became more energetic with pilates.



The University Sports Arena which is also on the photo is really big and well organized. Inside there are three huge basketball halls, three fitness rooms, one large running circle and one huge swimming pool. Besides there are several change rooms for men and women, two squash rooms and rooms where you can find pictures of famous Irish sportsmen with their original signs and shoes, uniforms and so on.

Other villages except the Kilmurry Village are Plassey Village, Dromroe Village, Thomond Village, and Cappavilla Student Village. However the villages are a bit expensive and some of them are not that clean. The rooms and bathrooms are clean but the citchen was in some houses a mess. The Cappavilla Student Village is the newest one and is like a luxe hotel. Also inside it is very comfortable and clean. You can access the rooms not by keys, but by using a card. I had a friend from Chicago whose name was Mary Joe. She showed me her village and I was really astonished since it was so beautiful. The villages even have some balconies.

Our village was widely clean because only one of the Irish students was cooking. The guy from Taiwan cooked regularly and he was really dirty. It was always me who took out the garbage; if I had not done, nobody would and all the garbage would be on the ground. I also cleaned the citchen which nobody did. I cleaned the bathroom which I shared with the other two Irish girls. We were staying upstairs, and the two men were staying downstairs. The girls names were Laura and Tara. They were both nice people. Laura was studying Law and Tara studied Sports. Tommy, the Irish guy studied Economics and Hao-Shueng studied Classical Music.

I also had a Language Exchange partner. So if you have a language to exchange you can do that. I put my name on the list that I speak German and wanted to learn more about the Irish language. After two days or something the Language Exchange Centre found an Irish guy who wanted to improve his German and taught Irish. So we contacted and met. His German was better than my Irish. But we could cope with each other. He was very friendly, very much interested in plains and wrote a dramatic play for the drama class of the university. His name is Tadhg. So we met one time per week for one an hour, practising German for half an hour and Irish for another half an hour and my Irish became clearly better.

After he told me that the Career Service of the University of Limerick had found a traineeship for him at Daimler Chrysler in Stuttgart. I told him that I had also moved to Stuttgart and that it was chance that he would also come here. He told me he would contact me when he is there. After my return to Germany and staying a few days in Cologne I came to Stuttgart but heard nothing from Tadhg. Then one day which was two weeks ago, I went shopping in Bad Canstatt and wanted to take a supermarket trolley. I looked just in front of me and saw Tadhg trying to rent a trolley as well!

I just looked at him not really knowing what to say. It was a bit funny. Then I just said "Hello". He looked at me and was really surprised to see me. I really had to laugh since it was always the chance when it came to Tadhg! We talked a bit and he said he had needed time to contact cause he had not settled yet. He now lives in Stuttgart as well and we arranged to meet one day.

I had also chosen the class Language and Culture at the University of Limerick. There we saw the Sapir Whorf hypothesis which claims that language shapes thought and thought shapes the language. According to the linguistic determism, the language constraints thoughts; thus a thought expressible in one language may not be expressible in another. The linguistic relativity says that spakers of different languages think in different ways.

So as an example Eskimos have twenty different words for the word snow and make finer discrimination between the types of snow than English. They think about snow so much that they discriminate their thought into twenty different words. Hopi, which is an Indian ethnic have no vocabulary or grammatical forms to express time, and hence have no conception of time as a cyclical entity. Dani who are an African folk have only two number words and no ability to count or manipulate number. This approves that they don't have so many words like the English because they don't have it in thought.

We had other themes as well like the relation between politeness and gender. We presented our essay in this subject orally working in groups of five. Our group's topic was the relation between politeness and gender, so how women behave and how men behave etc. We learned that women are more polite than men due to social and psychic reasons. Men on the other hand are manipulated by the emancipation of the women and don't know how to behave since women would like to see themselves emancipated to men.

All in all I can say that it was an interesting semester and I learned so much about the things. I am really happy to have gained these experiences and that I learned so many people. Sometimes I miss my friends there but then I think that most of them are also in their homes now and then I take some comfort.

