Study Report Fall Semester 2017, IUPUI

In the Fall of 2017 I spent the semester at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis. This exchange was a part of my MA Euroculture. I applied for a semester outside of Europe (we could choose between Pune, India; Mexico City; Osaka, Japan; and Indianapolis, US) and I was one of the five Euroculture students that got this opportunity. Studying in the US was a different experience than what I was used to in the Netherlands. I had four courses which I shall briefly outline, and then I will tell something about the general feeling I had both at the university, and in the city.

Firstly, I chose a course called ‘Ethnic Identity,’ which was an undergraduate course. In order to comply with the standards of a master degree, I had to do extra readings and an additional presentation. The course was very interesting, although contributions of American students were often highly personal, which did not always add something to the general discussion.

Then, I had a course called ‘Political Geography’ in which I was familiarized with software called ‘ArcMap.’ The classes consisted of one hour of discussion according to what the assigned readings of that session were, and then we could work on making our own maps.

The most interesting class for me academically was ‘Public History,’ a course of a prestigious master at IUPUI. In this class we were put to bring our knowledge and expertise into practice. For example, we worked in the archives of the Indiana Historical Society, documenting the archival material of the LGBT communities in Indianapolis from the 80s and 90s. This was part of an overall bigger project which we did (and was still ongoing after my departure) for Indiana Humanities, an organisation that brings people of Indiana into contact with history and literature (and more) and encourages them to think critically. This practical side of my studies in Indianapolis was highly valuable to me, and it inspired me in my choice of thesis.

Finally, the five of us had a group project in which we did research to European migration groups that had settled in the Midwest in the US, and how they negotiate their identity in the area that they live in. I did research to the Dutch so we went to Holland in Michigan and visited the Van Raalte Institute, the Holland Museum, and the Holland-themed parks and public places around the city. We went to Cedar Rapids for the Czech community, Minneapolis for the Swedish community, and Chicago for the Polish and Italian communities. Euroculture provided funds for us to cover the trips (renting the car, paying for accommodation) which familiarized us with a big part of the Midwest.

Overall, studying at IUPUI added a lot to my master degree. The facilities at the university were excellent, the professors were helpful and interested in us as Europeans (we bring in a different perspective which must be valuable to our fellow American students as well!) and it also broadened our own views on both the United States and on Europe. It was a shame there were not many Europe-oriented studies, although there was one about European history in the twentieth century. However, here in Europe at university I have discussed this period in history many times already. A study that goes beyond the standard history classes, or a discussion group about the relations between the United States and Europe would have been interesting.
In this last paragraph I would like to say a word or two about Indianapolis. The city is very different than the average city in Europe. It was my first time in the US, and I found out why every American has a car. What I was used to in the Netherlands, to step on my bike and arrive at an Albert Heijn in five minutes, underwent a shock when it became clear to me that it was difficult to get fresh fruits and vegetables without owning a car. Super markets are spread out. It might be easier if you own a bike, and few people do bike, but the city is largely car-oriented. So what we did is when we came back from trips with a rental car, we passed by a major super market in the outskirts of the city and bought groceries to last a couple of weeks. We also made use of Uber in order to do groceries (and to get to places).