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February 19th 2018 to July 31st 2018
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Introduction

All IRIO students get the chance to do an internship as a part of the master’s program. The internship is a crucial connection between studying international relations and working in a professional organization related to the field of IR.

Having studied IRIO for five years, I asked myself regularly what my ambitions were once I would finish my studies. This question was hard for me to answer. One of the reasons for this was the interdisciplinary character of the program, which makes the possibilities after obtaining the degree tremendous. Furthermore, I had no experience in the professional world apart from an abundance of extra-curricular activities. This made it hard for me to identify my strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, it was hard for me to choose themes to which I wanted to devote my efforts to. Therefore I decided that the best way to find out what my strengths and weaknesses are, was to start participating in the professional world.

Work experience at DutchChain BV

In 2015 I started working for a young and ambitious entrepreneur: Rutger van Zuidam. His area of expertise was blockchain technology, a revolutionary digital technique which allows users to interact through the internet in a safe and secure way. He needed someone to support him in his activities. Rutger recognized in blockchain a potential to innovate society and to come up with innovative solutions to overcome societal problems such as public health, international trade and smart government solutions. He wanted to materialize his vision in a grand ‘hackathon,’ a three-day event in which everyone that is interested in blockchain would be given the opportunity to work on a blockchain prototype and present it to the world. The participants subscribe to a ‘track,’ hosted by an organization that brings in a case on which the participants would help. For example; the Ministry of Interior Affairs and Kingdom Relations brought in the case of a digital identity in which participants would build a solution which helps the ministry to administrate the personal data of all Dutch citizens. For one and a half years I worked for Rutger as his business manager, I helped him draft visionary documents and prepare the event. I started working for Rutger alone, but in the final months in advance to the hackathon I was member of a core team of ten people. The end result was the Dutch Blockchain Hackathon 2017, it was attended by 400 participants. Nine innovative start-ups were launched at the hackathon and are still in business today. The event was kicked off by HRH Prince Constantijn. Working for DutchChain was an unforgettable experience for me, I learnt what themes I was interested in and enthusiastic about: energy transition, innovation and European affairs.

Work experience at the Province of Groningen
After the first edition of the Dutch Blockchain Hackathon, I quit my job at DutchChain to develop myself further as a professional working on the abovementioned themes. Through my professional network I approached the Province of Groningen and started working there as an assistant project manager. I assisted Ilja van der Veen, a senior project leader working for the Province’s core team Energy Transition who was internationalization. Her activities were to launch innovative international projects in which knowledge is gained and innovative techniques are piloted. I assisted her in launching an Interreg North Sea Region-project together with German, Swedish, Danish, English and Belgian partners. Furthermore the Province of Drenthe requested my assistance to support the project managers of another Interreg North Sea Region project about blockchain technology. Furthermore I wrote my master’s thesis on the ERDF strategy and implementation in the region Northern Netherlands and Lower Saxony.

Own ambitions
I am very thankful for the chances I received at DutchChain and the Province of Groningen, the result for me was that I got to know my strengths and weaknesses and I learnt what themes I would like to work with. With that knowledge I set out my professional ambition to become a consultant in the field of regional and European Affairs, developing projects on energy transition and innovative solutions. At DutchChain I learnt that developing projects or events gave me a lot of energy and satisfaction. At the Province of Groningen I experienced what the potential of European programmes and funds are to accelerate innovative solutions. The European context appealed to me a lot, in this area I noticed that my background as international relations student was of added value.

I perceived the IRIO internship as an excellent stepping stone to achieve and materialize this ambition. I set out with the ambition to seek an internship that fits to my personal ambitions and strengths, hoping that I would be able to convince them to hire me at the end of my internship.
Chapter 1 – Preparation in advance to the internship

Preparation of applying for an internship

Thanks to my prior work experience I had a well-specified and clear idea of what kind of internship I wanted to do: namely at a consultancy firm that advises and develops projects related to energy transition and innovative solutions, within an European context. I started by performing some desk research on consultancy firms operating in this area which also offered internship placements. I paid close attention to the tasks interns were asked to do and to the conditions of the internship. These observations I converted into a score (rating from one to three pluses). The following list was the result:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name company</th>
<th>Location of head office</th>
<th>Conformity of tasks with personal preferences</th>
<th>Internship conditions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Deloitte Innovation</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>+++</td>
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<tr>
<td>European and Regional Affairs Consultants B.V. (ERAC)</td>
<td>'s-Hertogenbosch</td>
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<td>Hezelburcht subsidieadviesbureau</td>
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<td>Bureau Buiten</td>
<td>Utrecht</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bureau voor Plan-Advies-Uitvoering B.V. (PAU)</td>
<td>Groningen</td>
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<td>Quintel Intelligence</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
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Based on my desk research, I concluded that an internship at ERAC fits best to my personal preferences and had the most favorable conditions. Therefore I decided that ERAC would be my top choice.

Before I applied for an internship I wanted to deepen my knowledge about ERAC. If I was going to apply at ERAC, I wanted to make sure I knew everything what I could possible know about the firm. I did so in three ways:

Firstly I met some ERAC consultants during my work for the Province of Groningen (on network events etc.). I asked them about their activities, experiences and projects they participated in. Also I asked them their contact details, so that I could contact them again. Secondly, I looked up on LinkedIn if anybody I knew was working for ERAC. It turned out that somebody from my student’s association was working for ERAC. I contacted him and asked if we could have a chat about working for ERAC over a cup of coffee. Thirdly, I asked a number of
colleagues at the Province of Groningen if they had ever worked with ERAC and what their experiences were.

**Applying procedure and job interview**

The results of the abovementioned three activities were all very positive. I learnt that the area ERAC is working in was in line with my personal and professional ambitions. Furthermore I learnt that ERAC is providing ample opportunities for personal development, in the form of trainings, courses and counseling by senior consultants. At the end I decided that ERAC still was my top choice for doing an internship. At that point I applied. See my letter of application and resume in the annex, in Dutch (since I applied at a Dutch firm).

A week after sending my application letter and resume I heard that I was invited for an interview, with one of the managers of ERAC; William van den Bungelaar. I prepared myself well for the interview, I made sure I had a good elevator pitch about myself (who am I, what do I want to do, what are my ambitions what am I passionate about) and that I could explain solidly why I want to work for ERAC. During the interview I deliberately voiced my willingness to start working for ERAC after the internship. Moreover, William asked questions about my personal ambitions, why I wanted to work for ERAC and a couple of critical questions about how I would respond to the challenges of working as a consultant at ERAC. He was impressed about how much I knew about ERAC and ERAC’s activities.

William told me at the end of the internship that ERAC was happy to provide me an internship placement. Hence, the orientation, preparation, desk research and application procedure contributed to a successful result in the end.

**Housing arrangements**

With the successful application at ERAC the issue arose of arranging housing. Because of personal circumstances I wanted to be in Groningen in the weekends and wanted to keep my house there. Therefore I did not want to rent a house in Utrecht. Also, I wanted to find a low-cost house in which I could live for four days a week, which I could easily vacate at the end of my internship. Therefore I approached a number of personal friends who live close to Utrecht with the question if they would be willing to share their house with me for five months. Fairly quickly I found someone in my inner circle who was happy to have me. He is living in Utrecht, close to a railway station. We agreed that I would pay him a monthly fee (instead of rent) as a compensation for my residence.
Chapter 2 – Activities during the internship

General description of ERAC’s activities

ERAC (European and Regional Affairs Consultants) is a consultancy company based in ’s-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. The core business of ERAC is designing, developing and evaluating complex cooperation projects between triple helix parties. Specifically, cooperation projects within the regional or European context. The main clients of ERAC are regional government organizations (provinces, municipalities), knowledge institutions, regional and national cooperation institutions (regional development agencies, representative organizations etc.)

ERAC is often asked by triple helix parties to help them develop cooperation projects. One of the hardest elements of cooperation projects is to get all partners to agree on the activities within a project. ERAC is renowned for building solid partnerships in which all parties can realize their ambitions and strengthen each other with their knowledge and experience. ERAC has expertise on European and regional legislation and can help parties to connect their ambitions to relevant policies and makes sure that all project activities are compliant with relevant EU legislation, for example on state aid and procurement. Furthermore ERAC has elaborate experience in developing financing plans, thereby looking for relevant regional and European funds.

General description of my activities

In general, all interns at ERAC are supporting senior consultants in projects they are working on. For ERAC it is important that interns can work on projects that relate to their own interests and ambitions. On the other hand, ERAC attaches value to that all interns get to know all aspects of the firm’s activities. Within the projects I participated in, I was mostly responsible for drafting project-related documents, such as project plans, business cases, strategy documents and policy related texts. Furthermore, I analyzed EU regulations, directives and communications in order to apply this knowledge on the project’s activities, or test the project’s activities on compliance with relevant EU regulation. Also, senior consultants delegated tasks to me which I had to perform individually. Usually I was responsible for certain chapters or parts of a project plan or business case. I had to acquire information independently through desk research or through the client’s organization. Also I supported senior consultants through providing advice, feedback, relevant data or other project-related input, based on my activities in the project or my prior experience. Lastly I executed some daily activities such as administrative tasks and communicative tasks.

Practicalities
For my internship at ERAC I had to travel from Utrecht to Den Bosch on a daily basis. Apart from the head office in Den Bosch ERAC has ‘field offices’ in the Hague and Amsterdam. Furthermore ERAC often works at the office of its clients. Therefore, I traveled a lot throughout the Netherlands. I received a NS business card from ERAC with which I could make all trips related to my work at ERAC. Also ERAC gave me permission to use the business card to travel from and to Groningen each weekend.

One of the human resource policy pillars from ERAC is that the firm is a matrix organization. That entails that there is no hierarchy among ERAC’s staff. The kind of tasks each employee is doing is dependent on the seniority and work experience of staff members. Staff members are encouraged to work together, connect with all employees and ask for assistance if anybody has relevant experience or knowledge. One of the ways in which this concept is materialized is the workplaces at ERAC’s head office: there are only flexible workplaces divided among different isles to prevent that employees always choose the same spot and work with the same people. Staff members are encouraged to choose a different workplace isle every day and to vary in who you are sitting next to, in order to get to know all staff members. The rational behind this rule is that staff members connect more easily this way and when certain knowledge or experience is required people are easily able to find each other. The amount of workspaces is ample, it never occurs that there are insufficient workspaces for staff members.

Projects I participated in

In order to give a better image of my activities at ERAC, I selected five projects in which I participated. For this projects I will discuss my role, my activities, my contact with colleagues and clients and my experiences.

**ERDF (OP-Zuid) project SMILE**

SMILE is a project funded by the European Regional Development Fund, operational program Southern Netherlands. Within SMILE, the municipality of Tilburg, the University of Tilburg, an architectural firm, the municipality of Oisterwijk and Heusden work together to help ten neighborhoods within the region Hart van Brabant towards energy neutrality. The core objective of the project is to launch a ‘social lab’ in each neighborhood, in which the neighborhood inhabitants jointly decide on a strategy and action plan towards energy neutrality.

Within the project I was supporting senior consultant Willem Jaspers. He is responsible for the overall project management on behalf of the consortium. Within the five months I worked on SMILE I was responsible for informing the consortium on strategies and action plans that other European municipalities or neighborhoods have used with regard to attaining energy neutrality. In order to do so, I performed desk research in which I studied policy documents
and evaluation documents. Also I visited an international congress in which regions convened to exchange successful strategies. At the end of this assignment, I delivered a handbook with successful action plans of other European regions.

Furthermore I drafted the progress report which every ERDF-funded project has to submit to the management authority of each regional operational program twice a year. In this document I reported on the progress the consortium has made the past six months, the financial affairs and the planning for the coming months. Also, I answered additional questions of the management authority. In these activities, I consulted regularly with Mr. Jaspers.

Lastly, I performed daily communicative and administrative tasks. Among other things, I prepared (the contents of) consortium meetings, I provided information where necessary and facilitated the internal communication within the consortium.¹

**City Deal Agrifood**

In 2016 the Dutch government released the City Deal-programme, in which Dutch cities are encouraged to work on innovative solutions to make them future-proof. On of the policy areas of this city deals is agrifood. Inspired by this programme, ten Dutch municipalities formed a consortium to collaborately strengthen the agrifood sector in the Netherlands (the work group ‘Voedsel op de Stedelijke Agenda’).² One of the topics the work group wanted to address is how agrifood related test facilities throughout the Netherlands can work closer together and can facilitate innovative SMEs in bringing their agrifood products/services to the market. In the Netherlands, there are some 60 so-called open ‘field labs.’ This field labs are equipped with high-tech technologies which researchers or firms need to develop innovative products, test or improve existing products or find new ways of producing products. However, the problem is that the facilities these field labs offer are to a high extent fragmented and not coordinated. This lack of coordination results in that some technologies are abundant whereas other technologies are not available within the current supply of field labs. This is a problem for SMEs who want to develop technologically advanced products. One of the objectives of the work group agrifood is therefore to better coordinate the supply and demand of field labs. In order to determine the starting point, the working group hired ERAC to research the existing field labs in the Netherlands. Within this assignment, ERAC was asked to map out all field labs and the facilities they provide. Also, the working group asked ERAC to research what the strategies, ambitions and challenges are of these field labs.


² More information on the workgroup: [https://agendastad.nl/city-deal-voedsel-op-stedelijke-agenda-succesvol-gelanceerd/](https://agendastad.nl/city-deal-voedsel-op-stedelijke-agenda-succesvol-gelanceerd/)
Within this assignment I worked closely with senior consultant / commercial director Huub Smulders - who has 20 years of experience working in the agrifood sector - and medior consultant Stephan Rebel (also my internship supervisor). Stephan and I were responsible for the survey among field labs, we approached field labs through the contacts of the working group City Deal Agrifood and asked them if they would like to participate in the survey. Subsequently we asked them to fill in a template with questions with regards to their facilities, management, strategy and challenges. This information served as the backbone of our report. Stephan and I processed the incoming data through the survey forms and were responsible for the communication with the participating agrifood field labs. Also we wrote large parts of the resulting report, in consultation and collaboration with Huub Smulders.

**ERDF Project development – ICO development fund**

ERAC was asked by regional development agency InnovationQuarter to support them in developing a fund for regional SMEs to develop an Initial Coin Offering. This is a blockchain solutions which allows firms or individuals to issue a blockchain equivalent of an Initial Public Offering. With an ICO, firms can sell ownership of a part of their product on the blockchain. The client wants to finance a share of this development fund with the European Regional Development Fund, therefore, it has to file an application at the regional management authority (in this case; operational program Western Netherlands).

Due to my work experience at a blockchain firm I was asked to assist. I worked on this assignment together with senior consultants Martijn van Dam and Pim Pellegrom. Within the assignment my tasks were to write parts of the project application: the specification of blockchain technology and specifically ICOs, the connection of the project with European, national and regional legislation, the connection with the RIS3-strategy and the operational program, the relation of this project to other initiatives with regard to blockchain.

The project application was submitted in the end of June. In the coming weeks it will be presented to the Committee of Experts who will decide on whether the project will be granted funding.

**State aid analyses**

One of ERAC’s areas of expertise is on European legislation with regard to state aid. One of the most important policy parts of the EU is the internal market. Within all EU member states, goods and services can be traded freely, capital and labour can be moved without regard of borders. But limiting trade barriers is one part of the internal market, the EU is committed to safeguarding fair competition and transparent rules and conditions in order to ensure a ‘level playing field’ for everyone.

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3 In Dutch: een initial public offering vindt plaats wanneer een bedrijf een deel van zijn eigenaarschap verhandeld op de (publieke) aandelenbeurs.
State aid (the act of government institutions financially supporting firms) can distort this level playing field significantly. Therefore, the EU has issued very strict regulation on when firms can receive funding from government institutions. However, not all government funding to private firms distort the internal market. For example, governments can fund research, societal projects or knowledge exchange for legitimate reasons. Therefore, EU legislation has a vast set of rules under what circumstances state aid is allowed.

ERAC is often asked by triple helix parties if cooperation projects are compliant with EU state aid regulations. As penalties on illegitimate aid are severe clients want to ensure that the proposed project activities are legal.

Throughout my internship I supported senior consultant Vincent Ketelaars (also general director of ERAC) in analyzing five project applications for state aid compliancy. The five projects concerned applied for funding from the RIG (regionaal investeringsfonds) of the Province of Groningen. I studied the European Commission regulation ‘general block exemption regulation’ to find suitable articles to argue why the project proposals are compliant with state aid regulations. My findings I presented to Mr. Ketelaars in a memo.

INTERREG North West Europe – reMUST
At the beginning of July ERAC was asked to support the consortium of reMUST in developing an interreg-project and to draft the application. Interreg is a part of the ERDF, within this program European regions cooperate to jointly tackle mutual challenges. Interreg program areas are for example the North Sea Region or North West Europe.

Applying for interreg funding is not easy: a project has to specify very clearly in the application form on what problem it wants to deliver a solution, why this should be done transnationally and how the project activities will be structured. Furthermore, Interreg has many complicated and specific regulations. ERAC has ample experience in designing interreg projects and drafting project applications.

The consortium of reMUST consists of a number of social housing companies, two regional government bodies, two municipalities and three distributed system operators based in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. When ERAC was hired, the consortium was in crisis because they were failing to agree on the objective of the project and its core activities.

My role in the project was supporting senior consultant Yolanda Mout. She is an expert on interreg, provided advice and steering during one of the consortium meetings and thereby revived the consortium in one the work meetings. However, at that moment the deadline for application was already extremely close. Therefore, Yolanda compiled a ‘writing team’ consisting of four staff workers from the partner organizations. This writing team was invited at the ERAC head office in Den Bosch. Yolanda herself was assisted by two ERAC staff workers, medior consultant Stephan Rebel and myself. Stephan mainly worked on the project’s budget and other calculations, I mainly worked on the contents of the application form.
working closely with the project partners to get the necessary information or texts. Also I supported Yolanda in strategic decisions and managing the writing team.

Supervision during the internship

ERAC appointed medior consultant Stephan Rebel as my internship supervisor. He has ten years of work experience as a consultant, at three different employers. Stephan and I regularly planned evaluation meetings to discuss the progress I was making and to evaluate my role within the company and within specific projects. Moreover we tried to work together on assignments as much as possible, so that Stephan could work with me and thereby be better able to evaluate my performance. Most of the time I worked independent from Stephan, working on other assignments. These assignments we discussed as well during the evaluation meetings.

Cooperation in a professional team

Generally I experienced working with other ERAC consultants as very pleasant. Working in a professional environment appeals to me. Senior ERAC consultants appreciated my efforts on assignments, which resulted in many requests to support consultants in their projects. As ERAC is a matrix organization, ERAC employees do not have a manager under whose authority they work. ERAC employees do have a team leader, which evaluates their performance, monitor their efficiency and safeguard their capacity. Interns only have an internship supervisor, who has a similar role as a team leader to them.

I experienced the cooperation with other ERAC advisors as very pleasant and productive. I find it hard to further elaborate on this, because I think my ERAC co-workers are better able to describe how they experienced working with me. For further elaboration on this matter I therefore would like to refer to the evaluation form to be completed by Stephan.
Chapter 3 – Reflection on the internship

Personal experiences of working at ERAC
In general I experienced my internship at ERAC as very positive. I think the field ERAC is operating in is very interesting. I appreciate the complexity of triple helix cooperation projects. It is intriguing to see how truly committed triple helix parties can form a valuable and strong project. Also, it is very interesting to build consortia and get all the parties to agree on a common objective and action plan. Furthermore, I like the type of clients with which ERAC is working. The advantage of ERAC is that they work with a diverse set of clients: regional government organizations, knowledge institutions, NGOs and cooperation organizations. ERAC also has a department which works exclusively for innovative firms, this is also an interesting group of clients in my opinion.

Most assignments that ERAC receives aim to realize a certain societal impact: with regard to energy transition, innovation, agrifood, public policy, European affairs or research and development. The societal orientation of ERAC’s activities fits very well to my personal convictions and ambitions.

Personal learning points
My objective during my internship at ERAC was to develop and improve my professional, communicative and advisory or consultancy skills. I want to use this paragraph to evaluate to what extent I have grown in these field during

With regard to my professional skills I wanted to develop my sense of ownership (feeling responsibility for your tasks, being a task-owner, work independently), my sense of urgency (ability to judge what task is most urgent and what can be done later) and my sense of time (deliver the agreed results within the agreed timeframe). In advance of my internship at ERAC I had worked already for two and a half years so I did not start to develop these skills during my internship. Anyway my internship did help me significantly to further grow in this skills. As the work as a consultant can be really busy and time-intense, I had to deal with a great deal of tasks in different projects. At the end of my internship I feel that I have grown in this skills over the past five months significantly: the more one works in a high-pressure environment the better one is able to master these skills. Due to my work experience at ERAC I am confident that I master the outlined professional skills better than in advance of my internship.

With regard to my communicative skills I wanted to develop my ability to present large amounts of information coherently, either written or verbally. During my internship I had to gather and analyze information very frequently so therefore I was able to work on this skill often. I did not present very frequently, so therefore I did not practice very often on my verbal presentation skills. I did however present my work in internal meetings or to clients, so in a
different way I was still able to work on this skill. Furthermore I was involved in a few European projects in which English is the language of choice, so I was also able to work on this skill. Overall I think that I have grown in my communication skills thanks to working in a high-pressure and very professional environment like ERAC. I feel that I have made significant progress on this area. Due to the flying hours I made, ERAC provided me the opportunity to further develop my communication skills, either internally and to clients. When I started at ERAC, the consultancy business was entirely new for me. Having worked at a start-up and at a government organization, I did not have any experience with consultancy. Working with a high-quality and renowned consultancy firm like ERAC provided me the opportunity to experience the consultancy business. Moreover, working with ERAC and its assignments offered me the opportunity to deepen my knowledge in the field of European affairs and regional policy. Within the assignments for the reMUST-project, City Deal Agrifood, SMILE and the ICO development fund I learnt how complex collaboration projects are developed and implemented. Furthermore I gained valuable knowledge on how consortia composed of triple helix parties are formed. Also I had the opportunity of putting my academic skills into practice in a professional environment through analyzing large amounts of information and present this information in written text.

Reflection on cooperation in a professional team

In general, I experienced working with the ERAC staff as very positive. I think that the ERAC employees are very talented, dedicated and high-skilled. As someone with relatively few experience in consultancy working with ERAC’s staff was very inspiring and valuable.

In the assignments I had the opportunity of working on, I was generally working with one or two ERAC staff workers. Every assignment ERAC works on is led by a project leader, being a senior consultant, who is supported by ERAC staff workers, being mediior or junior consultants. Because I had quite some work experience in advance of my internship at ERAC, working for a project leader or general manager was not new to me. From my previous experience I know what is important when working in a team: working independent, being a problem owner, communicate clearly and regularly on the progress and deliver a high-quality result. I believe that throughout my internship at ERAC I have been able to deliver those core values of working in a team. After each assignment I asked the project leader how he or she would evaluate my performance on the assignment. On all assignments I received positive feedback.

Reflection on working independent and autonomous

As already mentioned, I had some work experience before starting at ERAC. Therefore I was already used to working independent and autonomous. I prefer a variation in working alone and working with a team. Also, I like when I am responsible for delivering entire parts of an
assignments instead of small pieces. Having such responsibility helps me to think like a problem-owner and deliver high-quality results. I communicated this in advance of an assignment to project leaders, who as a consequence delegated substantial parts of an assignment to me. I appreciated this very much and it helped me to deliver better results.

Furthermore, I believe that when working independently the same core values apply as when working in a team: be a problem-owner, communicate clearly and regularly and deliver high-quality results. I personally believe that I have been able to deliver these values in the tasks I had to work out independently. Also I asked the project leader involved regularly how he or she evaluated my performance. On all assignments I received positive feedback.

On what areas do I want to develop myself more

Throughout my internship I also learnt a lot on what areas I want to improve myself. I think that the degree program of IRIO is very valuable and gives a graduate an abundance of useful experience when working in the field of European and regional policy or projects. However, I also discovered areas in which I deem my own knowledge as insufficient. For me these were the following:

Firstly, I would like to develop my knowledge on financial affairs and business administration. In developing cooperation projects, one of the most important things is the project’s budget. Through my prior experience at DutchChain and the Province of Groningen, I had some learn-by-doing experience on drafting budgets and assessing financial documents. However, I feel that I lack the knowledge to be truly able to see important details in financial documents. Furthermore, I think that I could become a better consultant if I had deeper understanding on financing plans, project budgets and business cases. Therefore I have the ambition of following courses on business administration and financial administration in the future.

Secondly, I would like to develop my knowledge on subsidy and tender regulation. A large part of ERAC’s activities is focused on developing projects for triple helix parties consortia. If a consortium wants to finance a certain initiative or product, it has to comply with subsidy regulations. Additionally, if a consortium wants to buy a certain good or service costing more than €30,000, this is called a public tender and all sorts of strict regulations apply in order to safeguard fair competition. The regulations on subsidies and tenders are very strict, therefore ERAC is frequently hired for its expertise on this area. Therefore it is my personal ambition to increase my knowledge on these fields, so that I am able to advise clients on these topics. In order to materialize this ambition I want to follow courses on subsidy and tender regulation.

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Connection placement and degree program
The core focus of the IRIO degree program is to help students become independent scholars of international relations. Throughout the degree program, students are lectured in international economics, international and European law, international politics and international history. But more importantly, students are taught how to critically think and to present their personal ideas in coherent and well-structured texts. The knowledge I gained and the skills I mastered throughout the IRIO degree program have been invaluable to me. They form the foundation of my professional skills and have helped my through the previous jobs I had.

ERAC is working on the (inter)regional level of the international system. My knowledge on European law, policy and governance has been very helpful during my internship. It has helped me to better understand the context in which involved triple helix parties are operating. Moreover, it helped me to critically assess policy documents and business cases.

Furthermore the academic skills I gained throughout the IRIO program have been extremely helpful when working for ERAC. Within the degree program I was trained the skills to assess vast sets of information and the skills to translate this information into coherent texts. The internship at ERAC however offered me the opportunity to apply this academic skill into practice in a professional environment. It was very helpful for me to lean on my previous experience with analyzing information and writing papers. ERAC is expecting a very level of quality from any written piece, the experience I gained while studying IRIO helped me significantly to deliver that level of quality.

Lastly, the IRIO degree program helped me to think individually and critically. This skill helped me significantly when I had to analyze or assess vast sets of data and to present my own opinion on them. Also it helped me when we faced strategic decisions in the project development phase.

Chapter 4 – Career orientation
When I started to search for an internship suited to my preferences, I already knew what my professional ambitions were. Namely, to work for a consultancy firm that works on developing cooperation projects within the regional and European context. The IRIO internship has served as a way for me to discover if this ambition is truly what I want.

At the end of the internship I can conclude that working with ERAC suits very well to my personal preferences as well as my professional ambitions. ERAC is a renowned and high-
skilled consultancy firm that works on intriguing projects and with interesting clients. Also, I enjoy working at ERAC and with its staff.

Therefore, I communicated to ERAC’s management team that I would like to apply for a full-time job at ERAC after the end of my internship. In a personal conversation together with senior consultant and manager William van den Bungelaar I was told that the management is very happy to offer me contract at ERAC.
Conclusion

The IRIO program focuses on the complex and interdependent system of international relations. Interaction within this system is taking place on many different levels. One of the areas I struggled with when studying IR was the enormous scale of the field IR is studying. For a 24-year-old individual like me it is very hard to influence complex international topics such as trade wars or international security tensions. When working at the Province of Groningen it struck me that when working in an (inter-)regional contexts, one is able to make a small but significant contribution on areas I feel personally involved with. The two Interreg projects I had the privilege of working on are contributing to innovation and the energy transition. I learnt that regional triple helix parties can achieve powerful results when working together. This experience was the reason for me to set the ambition of working on regional and European projects. Working with (inter-)regional projects gives me the feeling of being able to truly contribute to something valuable in society.

When working at the Province of Groningen, I noticed that consultants are often the ‘glue’ between such cooperation projects: they have the experience and the network to set a consortium in motion and to steer the project towards success. Moreover, in my opinion complex cooperation projects require an neutral, independent and experienced project developer that is able to unify strongly divergent demands and preferences. Playing such a role fits very well to my personal ambitions and preferences. Therefore I decided that I want to work for a firm that is working in the field of project development within a regional and European and has abundant experience in it.

I am thankful for having the opportunity to do an internship within the IRIO degree program. It has helped me significantly to determine my career ambition and provided me the opportunity to check if my ambition of working for a consultancy firm in the regional and European context is truly what I want. Moreover, it granted me the opportunity to prove myself as someone who is able to work on the complex assignments of ERAC.

If any IRIO student has more or less similar ambitions or preferences with regard to the IRIO internship as I had, I am available for any questions or recommendations with regard to working as a consultant or working with regional and European collaboration projects. Also, ERAC is always open for ambitious interns. I would be happy to tell someone more about ERAC and its activities.
Betreft: Motivatiebrief J.L. Sturm
Datum: 8 november 2017

Geachte mevrouw Van Dorland,


Ten eerste ben ik zeer geïnteresseerd in de Europese Unie en specifiek de regionale beleidsinstrumenten van de EU. ERAC geeft advies over internationale samenwerking en het benutten van de regionale beleidsinstrumenten van de EU, mijn interesses sluiten daarom goed aan bij de werkzaamheden van ERAC. Voorafgaand aan het schrijven van mijn masterscriptie heb ik een werkstage gelopen bij de Provincie Groningen, mijn rol was het ondersteunen van senior projectleider Ilja van der Veen in het opzetten van het INTERREG-B project 'Essential.' Het project heeft als doel om de randvoorwaarden omtrent de implementatie van smart grid technologie te verkennen en om vier pilots op te zetten die gebruik maken van deze technologie in de verschillende deelnemende landen. De Provincie Groningen is hierbij lead partner en heeft deelnemers uit vier landen: Duitsland, Denemarken, België en het VK. Mijn werkzaamheden waren het netwerken voor (internationale) partners, communicatie met geïnteresseerden en het ondersteunen in het schrijven van de projectaanvraag. Bij deze werkzaamheden heb ik Yolanda Mout en Luc van Raaij ontmoet op de INTERREG-werkconferentie in Göttingen, mede door die gesprekken is mijn interesse voor de werkzaamheden van ERAC ontstaan. Via Yolanda ben ik voor mijn werkzaamheden voor 'Essential' in contact gekomen met Willem Jaspers met de vraag of hij ons kon helpen bij het vinden van Duitse partners.

Na mijn werkstage bij de Provincie Groningen ben ik gestart met het schrijven van mijn masterscriptie. Hiervoor leek het mij een mooi idee om dit onderzoeksproject voor een nuttig doel te gebruiken. In samenspraak met de Provincie Groningen heb ik toen besloten om mijn stage te verlengen en een onderzoek te gaan verrichten dat voor de provincie van nut is. Mijn masterscriptie is een vergelijkende analyse van de regionale strategie en implementatie van de regio Noord-Nederland en de regio Niedersachsen ten aanzien van het Europees Fonds voor Regionale Ontwikkeling (EFRO). Dit onderwerp heb ik gekozen vanuit mijn interesse voor het regionale beleid van de EU en het raakvlak met de Provincie Groningen. Ik rond mijn masterscriptie in eind januari 2018 af. Gaandeweg mijn onderzoek is mijn interesse voor het regionale beleid en de mogelijkheden op dat gebied sterk toegenomen. ERAC geeft advies aan bedrijven, overheidsinstellingen en kennisinstellingen over hoe zij de regionale beleidsinstrumenten van de EU kunnen benutten en adviseert ERAC bij het (opzetten van) grensoverschrijdende samenwerking. Het lijkt mij erg leuk en interessant om aan deze werkzaamheden een bijdrage te kunnen leveren.

Ten tweede spreekt het werken als consultant mij erg aan. Consultancy heeft al langer mijn interesse omdat het veelzijdig, prestatiegericht en projectmatig werk is. Ik heb geleerd van mijn twee vorige banen dat werken op projectbasis en met een duidelijk doel voor ogen goed bij mij past. Mijn werkzaamheden bij de Provincie Groningen gaven mij veel energie omdat ik het leuk vind om te netwerken en om mensen te enthousiasmeren voor een project. Ook past het goed bij mij om prestatiegericht te werken, als de prestatie eenmaal
neergezet is geeft mij dit grote voldoening. Dit geldt ook voor mijn werkzaamheden bij de Dutch Blockchain Hackathon, hierbij was ik lid van het kernteam dat de Hackathon organiseerde. Ik genoot er enorm van om in nauwe samenwerking een dergelijk groot en ambitieus project te organiseren. Verder werkt ERAC met een breed scala organisaties vanuit zowel de publieke als private sector, het veelzijdige karakter van de klanten van ERAC spreekt mij enorm aan.

Ten derde ben ik gefascineerd door innovatie en technologische ontwikkeling. Tijdens mijn periode bij DutchChain Systems heb ik gewerkt met een innoverende systeem genaamd de ‘Stadgerspas’ om minimuminkomen-regelingen slimmer te regelen met behulp van blockchain technologie. Ik vond het geweldig om te zien hoe deze revolutionaire technologie een complex systeem veel eenvoudiger voor betrokken organisaties maakt en makkelijker in gebruik voor de doelgroep. Voor the Dutch Blockchain Hackathon - een open innovatie programma met als hoogtepunt een driedaagse hackathon met 400 deelnemers uit 12 landen georganiseerd door Rutger van Zuidam - heb ik veel verteld en geschreven over de mogelijkheden van blockchain technologie, ik vond het fascinerend om betrokken te zijn in het proces van uitproberen waarin blockchain technologie kan bijdragen aan hedendaagse maatschappelijke problemen. Overigens heeft de Dutch Blockchain Hackathon voor de tweede jaargang ERAC ingeschakeld voor advisering en ondersteuning bij het verkrijgen van subsidie vanuit het EFRO. Naast blockchain technologie heb ik een sterke interesse voor het gebruik van duurzame energiebronnen, Internet of Things en zelfsturing. Van Joost Ruijter begreep ik dat ERAC sinds enige tijd een tak heeft die zich bezighoudt met adviseren over innovatie en nieuwe technologieën, deze tak van werkzaamheden spreekt mij enorm aan.

Ik zou graag bij ERAC stage willen lopen omdat ik op zoek ben naar een prestatiegerichte omgeving waarin er veel interactie is met collega’s, klanten en betrokkenen. Ook vind ik het fijn om te werken in een omgeving waarin ik kan werken aan een breed palet aan taken omdat ik het fijn vind om afwisseling in mijn werk te hebben. Ik kan goed zelfstandig en oplossingsgericht werken, ik ben mensengericht en ik vind het leuk om complexe problemen of taken met inventieve oplossingen aan te pakken. Ook vind ik het leuk om een organisatie naar buiten toe te vertegenwoordigen en vind ik het ik erg leuk om te netwerken met een bepaald doel. Mensen omschrijven mij als een doorzetter, een harde werker en als iemand met een positieve instelling. Ik denk dat mijn persoonlijkheid goed bij ERAC past omdat het voor ERAC belangrijk is dat werknemers open-minded kijken naar uitdagingen om vervolgens organisaties efficiënt en gericht adviseren en/of ondersteunen.

Om bovengenoemde redenen zou ik daarom graag willen solliciteren bij ERAC op het lopen van een werkstage. Graag zou ik mijn motivatie, vaardigheden en eerdere werkzaamheden verder toelichten in een kennismakingsgesprek.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Jelmer Sturm
Curriculum Vitae

Personalia

Naam: Jelmer Sturm
Geboortedatum: February 1st, 1994
Nationaliteit: Nederlandse
Adres: Saffierstraat 198, 9743 LN Groningen
Telefoonnummer: +316 20029152
Email adres: j.l.sturm@live.nl
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/jelmer-sturm-39253a134/
Twitter: @jlsturm1

Profiel


Opleidingen

Vakken:
- Verdieping in de theorieën van de Internationale betrekkingen
- Internationale Veiligheid
- Onderzoekscollege ‘Het verleden en heden van het Nederlands buitenland beleid.’
- Onderzoekscollege ‘Cultuur, angst en onzekerheid in hedendaags Europa’
- Masterscriptie i.s.m. Provincie Groningen: “Strategie en implementatie van het Europees Fonds voor Regionale Ontwikkeling in Noord-Nederland en Niedersachsen: een comparatieve analyse.”
- Masterstage bij ERAC B.V. (zie ‘werkervaring’)

2012 – 2016 Bachelor of Arts Internationale Relaties en Internationale Organisatie, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
Vakken:
- Geschiedenis van de Internationale Betrekkingen
- Theorieën van de Internationale Betrekkingen
- Beleid en bestuur
- Internationale economie
- Internationaal recht
- Europees Recht
- Spaanse taalvaardigheid (ECFR b1), Franse taalvaardigheid (ECFR b1)
- Minor Ondernemerschap: Introductie ondernemerschap, introductie bedrijfskunde, zelf ondernemen.

2006 – 2012 Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (VWO), Gomarus College Groningen

Profielwerkstuk: “Rechts-populisme in Europa”
Vrije keuzevak: Spaanse taalvaardigheid

Werkervaring

2018 - Stagiaire bij European Regional Affairs Consultants B.V. (ERAC)
Vanuit de opleiding Internationale Betrekkingen mag ik zes maanden stage lopen om werkervaring op te doen. Voor deze stage heb ik gekozen voor ERAC omdat ik graag kennis wilde maken met consultancy, ik ben hier begonnen op 19 februari 2018.

ERAC B.V. wordt veel gevraagd om organisaties te ondersteunen bij het ontwikkelen en realiseren van (samenwerkings)projecten en beleidsstukken. Ook helpt ERAC organisaties om financieringsmogelijkheden vanuit de publieke sector of vanuit de Europese Unie te benutten.

Mijn rol bij ERAC is het ondersteunen van senior adviseurs. Ik ben onder andere betrokken geweest bij:

- City Deal Agrifood: twaalf gemeenten met een duidelijke agrifoodsignatuur hebben de handen ineengeslagen om de agrifoodlabs in hun regio beter met elkaar te verbinden en op de kaart te zetten. Mijn rol hierbij was het meeschrijven aan het rapport en het mede uitvoeren van de inventarisatie.
- Brainport Eindhoven: Brainport Eindhoven is een samenwerkingsverband dat de technologische activiteiten in en rondom Eindhoven versterkt en de belangen van de regio behartigt. ERAC voert een opdracht uit om de in de regio aanwezige testfaciliteiten beter met elkaar te verbinden, hiervoor voeren wij een inventarisatie uit en dragen wij suggesties aan.
- SMILE: vanuit de gemeente Tilburg heeft ERAC de opdracht gekregen om sociaal-maatschappelijk innovatielabs in tien wijken in de regio op te zetten. Binnen deze labs mogen bewoners beslissen op wat voor manier zij hun wijk kunnen verduurzamen. Ik heb onderzoek uitgevoerd naar aanpakken van andere regio’s en hiermee advies aangedragen. Ook ben ik betrokken bij het opzetten van de bijeenkomsten in het kader van dit project.

2017 – 2018 Onderzoeksstagiair en Assistent Projectleider, Provincie Groningen
Bij de Provincie Groningen heb ik negen maanden stage gelopen waarin ik mijn masterscriptie geschreven heb en als assistent projectleider meegewerkt heb aan twee projecten.
Het doel van mijn masterscriptie was het opzetten van een onderzoek dat maatschappelijk waarde toevoegt. In samenwerking met de Provincie Groningen heb ik een onderzoek opgezet naar de strategie en implementatie van het Europees Fonds voor Regionale Ontwikkeling. Ik heb hierin de strategie en implementatie van de regio Noord-Nederland en de Duitse regio Niedersachsen met elkaar vergeleken. Hiervoor heb ik beleidsmedewerkers, projectleiders, managementautoriteiten en begunstigden geïnterviewd.

Naast het schrijven van mijn scriptie ben ik als assistent-projectleider betrokken geweest bij het opzetten van twee INTERREG-VB projecten. Het eerste project - ESSENTIAL, onder leiding van Ilja van der Veen - richt zich op het verkennen en implementeren van smart grid technologie binnen de Noordzee regio. Het tweede project - BLING, onder leiding van Tineke Smegen - richt zich op het opzetten van vijf pilots waarbij overheidsdienstverlening verbeterd wordt met behulp van blockchain technologie. Mijn rol hierbij was het netwerken voor partners, het mede-opstellen van de projectaanvraag, het meedenken over de vorm van het project en het mede-opstellen van de projectbegroting.

2016 – 2017
Projectondersteuner,
Dutch Blockchain Hackathon B.V. en DutchChain Systems B.V.

Het World Economic Forum noemt blockchain technologie als één van de zeven technologieën die de wereld het meest ingrijpend gaat veranderen de komende decennia. Blockchain is in meerdere gebieden toepasbaar, bijvoorbeeld in overheidsdienstverlening, energietransitie, smart industry en de zorg. DutchChain stelt zichzelf als doel om maatschappelijke waarde te creeëren door het bouwen van Software-as-a-Service pakketten. Ook wil DutchChain het de ontwikkelingen op het gebied van blockchain verbinden, versterken en versnellen door het organiseren van de Blockchaingers Hackathon (voorheen Dutch Blockchain Hackathon) en de Dutch Blockchain Conference.

Binnen DutchChain was ik betrokken bij twee activiteiten:
1) The Blockchaingers Hackathon (voorheen Dutch Blockchain Hackathon): een negen maanden durend open innovatie programma met als hoogtepunt een driedaagse hackathon. Tijdens deze hackathon worden start-ups, studenten, corporates, MKB-bedrijven en overheden uitgedaagd om een toepassing te bouwen met behulp van blockchain om hiermee een maatschappelijke uitdaging op te lossen. Ik was onderdeel van het kernteam van dit programma. In de voorbereidende fase heb ik marktonderzoek gedaan, een verkenningsdag georganiseerd en de business manager en community manager ondersteund. Tijdens de hackathon was ik verantwoordelijk voor het uitvoeren en aansturen van een breed scala aan praktische zaken en was ik het contactpunt voor alle crew. Ik heb veel geleerd over het concreet maken en in praktijk brengen van een visie. https://blockchaingers.org.


2014 – 2016 Persoonlijk begeleider en afdelingshoofd ad interim, GSGplus
GSGplus begeleidt en ondersteunt middelbare scholieren met hun huiswerk en sociaal-emotionele ontwikkeling. Mijn functie was begeleider, in die hoedanigheid schreef ik persoonlijke ontwikkelingsplannen samen met de leerlingen en heb ik hen begeleid in het realiseren van de gestelde doelen. Verder ben ik twee keer op interim-basis vier maanden
afdelingshoofd geweest. Mijn verantwoordelijkheden waren het aansturen van het team, het voorzitten van de afdelingsvergaderingen, het formuleren en evalueren van de visie van de organisatie in samenwerking met het managementteam.

Nevenactiviteiten en vrijwillige functies

2018 Public funding Jedi tijdens de Blockchaingers Hackathon 2018
Het ondersteunen van teams die deelnemen aan de Blockchaingers Hackathon in het ontwerpen van hun business model en financieringsplan. Tevens heb ik teams geholpen om zich te oriënteren binnen het publieke en Europese subsidielandschap.


2015 Projectcoördinator Sport Outreaches in Frankrijk, Athletes in Action


2014 Introductiecommissie, verantwoordelijk voor financiën en acquisitie, Navigators Studentenvereniging Groningen.


2012 - 2016 Reisleider en zeilinstructeur, Crossroads Actieve Vakanties.

2010 - 2012 Lid centrale medezeggenschapsraad, Gomarus College (acht vestigingen)

2008 - 2010 Lid lokale medezeggenschapsraad, Gomarus College Assen.

Andere vaardigheden

- Ervaring met Microsoft Office, Google Drive, Moneybird, Freshservice, Hello Lily, Eventbrite, Trello en Exact Synergy.
- Deelgenomen aan seven ‘energy learning activities’ van de Energy Academy Europe. https://www.energyacademy.org/energy-learning-activities/
- Deelgenomen aan acht cursussen over sociaal-emotionele ontwikkeling en leerlingbegeleiding bij GSGplus.
- Deelgenomen aan, en meegeholpen met het organiseren van drie masterclasses over regionale economie bij de Provincie Groningen.

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