

My Stay in Mannheim

Mannheim, April 24th – June 3rd

Merel Ooms

My mother and my boyfriend said goodbye to me at Utrecht Central Station at eleven o'clock in the morning, on the 24th of April. We were leaving Utrecht with a group of eight Sociology students (another one still to come to Mannheim) from Utrecht university for a stay in Mannheim of six weeks. Only four and a half hours by train but still we were moving to a different place from what we were used to. After a short saying goodbye we were on our way. Laughing and talking about how it was going to be, excited by the idea that we wouldn't be in Utrecht for six weeks. Not a very long time of course, but still enough to perceive it as living somewhere instead of being on a summer holiday.

Our arrival in Mannheim was very pleasant. Three students from Mannheim university (Steffi, Maria and Tobias) were there to pick us up from the train station and bring us to Hafenstrasse, the place where we all lived. There we installed ourselves in our rooms (that were quite nice actually) and went into the centre to look around a bit and get ourselves some dinner. I immediately felt at home in this city. Even though it was different from Utrecht, or Eindhoven, where I come from, (e.g. the Turkish people in Jungbusch, the Brezel stands and robust housing in quarters) it also was kind of similar from my perspective.

At Monday we had breakfast (Brezel and gummibears) with Sladjana, the one and only who arranged all practical things concerning our exchange and was there for us whenever we had questions or remarks (at that time, we didn't know this last part). Also some German students from Sociology were there and two persons (PhD's?) from the US who were here to teach a course and make the German students more familiar with English. This breakfast was a very good introduction for a nice time to come.

In this first week we also went to the 'Thingstätte' in Heidelberg. Here the German kind of 'leftist' people celebrate the first of May. A very nice but also quite tiring trip brings you up the hill and there you find a beautiful arena with a big fire in the middle and all kinds of people that have torches, barbecues and lots of beer and wine. This was the beginning of a very fine evening to remember.

Apart from Heidelberg we visited a lot of places like Speyer, Strasbourg and Stuttgart. We also went to a 'Schneckenhof' party at the university. We went there with some students

of Mannheim university and they took care of us really well, making sure that we had everything we wanted. We had a wonderful night and danced a lot.

Next to these trips and parties we also put some effort in studying and reading articles for our courses 'Integration of Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities' and 'Values and Attitudes'. Integration of Immigrants was given by Clemens Kroneberg, who had just replaced Hartmut Esser in teaching this course. He had changed the line up so that it looked a bit more like what we were used to in Utrecht. This resulted in a very interesting course in which all of us had to present an article so that we could later discuss these articles under the professional leading of the teacher. Although he was very young, he was very proficient and a good listener as well as a good speaker. The topics we have discussed (e.g. assimilation theory, bilingualism, the burden of 'acting white', academic achievement among immigrants) were introduced very well and we all enjoyed these classes very much.

The other course in which we participated, Values and Attitudes, was given by Eldad Davidov. He came from Israel and lived in Frankfurt. He now had a temporary function in Mannheim. Davidov was focusing on methods, while our course wasn't necessarily on this topic. We all had to present for approximately one hour (which we weren't used to but was a good exercise) in which we discussed two articles of our own choice. Mr. Davidov listened and commented when needed.

All together, I had a wonderful and very pleasant time in Mannheim. I learned a lot at the university but also about Germany and what it is like to live in another country. I met new people and found out that it doesn't matter what language you speak or from what culture you come, in the end you can have a nice time with almost everyone. There were also people that were so nice that it is really worth staying in touch. For example Maria is coming to Utrecht this year to start her master so I will stay in touch with her, we are now emailing in Dutch so that she can practice her Dutch skills.

From this brief report it should be clear how I experienced my time in Mannheim.

It was an experience I wouldn't want to have missed!