

Dear selection committee of the Arenberg-Coimbra Group Prize,

My name is Katharina Wenderott and I graduated with a master's degree in psychology from the University of Göttingen in August 2020. I wrote my master thesis about the job demands of nurses, which proved to be increasingly relevant due to the existing Covid-19 pandemic. I would like to outline how my Erasmus semester at the University of Granada benefitted my thesis, enabled me to reach the top grade and contributed to the overall success of my studies.

When I applied for Erasmus in 2018 a key objective was to improve my language skills and to experience the Hispanic culture and the country. Academically, my motivation was driven by my curiosity in research topics not offered by my home university. My goal was to learn how psychological research is done in another country and whether there are cultural differences. Furthermore, I was excited to gain a broader perspective on areas and ways of thinking in psychology through new and different teaching methods, new lecturers and input from fellow students who did not complete their bachelor's degree in Germany.

As a result, I chose the University of Granada as my preferred host institution, as it offered a variety of new and fascinating modules. Also, it is one of the universities which receives most Erasmus students in Europe, so I expected not only to get to know the Spanish culture but also to learn about many more countries and cultures. The University of Granada emphasizes the aspect of offering an enriching and culturally diverse learning environment. The fulfilment of these promises has been recognised, as the University was voted one of the best Spanish universities by international students. Besides the international aspect, my scientific curiosity was also a driving force for my stay abroad, so it was fitting that the university ranked in the top 5 universities in Spain for scientific research.

While studying in Granada I took a Spanish course to reach the B2.1 level (CEFR) and to ensure that I was able to make the most out of the other lectures and my time living in the country. This class also allowed me to complete my Unicert II Spanish certificate when I returned to Göttingen. To further integrate myself within the community I was living, I joined a local scout group and volunteered as a leader of the children between 7-10 years of age. This enabled me to learn more about the daily life of children and families in this country and therefore expanded the cultural experience during my stay.

To fulfil my academic ambitions I mentioned above I chose subjects that were not offered at my home university. One module I chose was community psychology, as it was something I had never heard of before. Due to my own experience in volunteering and the importance of being an active member of ones surrounding I was curious to immerse myself in this topic from a scientific point of view. During this lecture, I was surprised by how many projects and facilities can be reviewed from a community perspective. Also, it reinforced my opinion on the importance of social commitment to our surroundings, and I believe it should be more valued and actively promoted. I also attended the course psychology of ageing which was a good addition to my studies, as I had already taken children and youth psychology at my home university and even did an internship in this area. It was very interesting to look at a different stage of life and its particularities.

Another subject I took was health psychology, which had a lasting impact on me as I decided to write my master thesis in this field. The subject opened up the very wide field of research to me and amplified my interest in it. Furthermore, it raised my awareness about the importance of preserving health, especially regarding workplaces as we spend a major part of our life there. The lecture also addressed the Spanish health care system which was very interesting in combination with the input from fellow Spanish students, this made me curious to find out more about existing structures and research in Germany.

Apart from the new content, I benefitted from a very different teaching style at the University of Granada. In Spain, there was a stronger focus on group projects and self-administered learning with regular follow-ups. Especially the broad variety of group projects in every subject taught me a lot about teamwork and structuring work efficiently. The groups mostly consisted of international students and Spanish native students, so there were language barriers, different background knowledge and different approaches to group work to overcome to make the project work and to achieve a good group result. For me, the work in multicultural teams was challenging but enriching as it opened up the possibility to learn from each other and also more about yourself. It helped me to realize which structures and ways of communication in groups are important to me and that I have to address these aspects at the beginning of a project so that there is a shared understanding of how the process is going to be. I believe that experiencing different cultures can make you a better person and to open up this possibility to more people upon my return I joined the international workgroup in my scouting association which operates throughout Germany to promote and facilitate international projects and encounters.

Another experience of studying in Spain that affected me was that most of my lecturers were young women, which is very different from Germany as women are underrepresented in the scientific area and most of my lecturers were men. For me, it was very beneficial because there was a different relationship between students and teachers. It impressed me how the teachers in Spain managed to create a positive work environment by being relaxed and approachable while still ensuring that the learning objectives were fulfilled. Also, these young female professors were very enthusiastic about their field of research and always open to explain and talk more about it, that it was inspiring to be their student.

Upon my return to my home university, it was time for me to apply to the different departments of the institute of psychology to write my master's thesis. My first choice was the social and communications department as it combined my research interests in teamwork, group processes and health-related topics. More importantly, they work in cooperation with the University Medical Center Göttingen (UMG), which matched my wish to gain a deeper insight in the German health care system that arose as a result of the lecture of health psychology in Granada.

The project I joined to write my thesis was addressing the job demands of caregivers, as the university clinic is trying to improve their working conditions. Caregivers make an indispensable contribution to health care, and the current Covid-19 pandemic has brought the work of nursing and the conditions under which it takes place into the focus of political and

public attention. However, even before the pandemic became the predominant topic of public discourse, the key role of nurses in health care systems was evident and so important that the WHO declared the year 2020 as the year of the nurse and the midwife. Furthermore, despite the relevance of this profession, there is a shortage of trained nursing staff in Germany because, for years, the number of nurses who left the system due to retirement age or dissatisfaction with the profession was greater than the number of trained entrants. According to the Hans Böckler Foundation (2020) and a representative survey by the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB), only improved working conditions and increased wages can remedy the nursing shortage in the future.

To relieve the nursing staff and improve working conditions, a Norwegian company is developing a new type of patient bed. This bed has various functions designed to support nurses in their work, such as different adjustable positions to reduce the physical effort when moving patients, automated vital signs recording and fall prevention. During the next year, the prototype will be tested at the UMG. To evaluate whether the bed can contribute to the reduction of nurse burden, my task was to develop a survey instrument that records stressful activities of nursing staff and their effects.

The developed questionnaire, which was answered by 389 nurses from different wards at the UMG contained questions about job demands of nursing activities at the patient's bed, stress, burnout, health status, satisfaction with their work and the quality of care as well as their assessment of the UMG's perceived organisational support. As a result, I found the expected correlations between stress and strain and the satisfaction of the nursing staff. Both the state of health and the perceived organisational support was directly related to the demands and satisfaction of the nursing staff. All in all, my thesis showed the first approaches to improve the working conditions of nurses in the UMG. The introduction of the new bed and possible further measures by the UMG offer the opportunity to value nursing as the backbone of the health care system and to improve the workload of this highly relevant occupational group. Among other things, this could help to counteract the early departure from the profession and the effects of the nursing staff shortage at UMG.

There are various aspects of how my learning experiences from my Erasmus semester helped me during my master's thesis. Taking the subject of health psychology led to my choice in writing my thesis in this field as I realized the importance. My objective was to acquire a deeper understanding of our health care system and to contribute to improving existing work conditions. Nursing shortages and the precarious working conditions of caregivers are not only a problem that is affecting Germany or western countries, but rather a global issue. Therefore it is even more important to enhance and facilitate the exchange of ideas and solutions on an international level. For me, this is also associated with increased collaboration between practice and research to strengthen the health care system, which - now more than ever - should be a goal of our society. As we are experiencing a pandemic, the exchange between countries can also help to find the best solution.

While I was writing my thesis, I worked in cooperation with an interdisciplinary team which in my opinion is not that different from international groups, as there are different backgrounds

and perspectives to consider and work with. The group projects during my Erasmus semester raised my awareness for this and enabled me to develop the necessary intercultural skills to integrate different views while at the same time explaining and reasoning my position.

The group projects in Spain targeted almost all steps of conducting research. Thus the perspective of having done most of the tasks already though in a smaller format, in a different context and more importantly in a non-native language raised my confidence and motivation while working on my thesis. Also, it helped a lot that my lecturers showed a lot of interest in our work and gave very detailed feedback so that I was able to learn from mistakes and improve myself.

At the moment I am volunteering for three months at the World Scout Centre in Switzerland where I am working together with an international team to bring scouts from all around the world together and to empower young people in the creation of a better world. My Erasmus semester showed me how much I enjoy discovering a new country and to meet people from all over the world. So I took this opportunity to donate some of my time to one of the world's biggest youth organisations and to pass on the joy I had through Erasmus and other international exchanges to young people while at the same time further developing my intercultural skills and understanding of different cultures.

While being in Switzerland I am applying for job positions as a scientific assistant to start my PhD. Since my Erasmus semester, I am planning to continue my career path at university as I was lucky to experience how enthusiastic my young professors in Granada were about their fields of research. This inspired me so much that they acted as role-models for me, and shaped how I would like to work in the future. Additionally, writing my master thesis about a project to improve working conditions sparked my enthusiasm about how technical innovation could change and improve work-life in the future. I am convinced that this field of research will become increasingly important and indispensable in the future to master the challenges of an increasingly digital professional life. This makes it all the more important to scientifically evaluate and optimize these interfaces. For this reason, I would love to dedicate my time during my PhD to research in this field especially considering the mental health of people interacting with new technical systems. Also, I believe it will be even more important in the future that teams spanning different disciplines and diverse cultural backgrounds can work together to achieve the best outcome possible. Regarding this, I would like to take the opportunity again in the future to go abroad for a research stay, as I would like to actively promote and help shape the exchange between universities in different countries during my PhD.

Overall my Erasmus semester expanded my horizon in regard to new research areas, scientific procedures and social skills. It highlighted the necessity of intercultural cooperation to solve problems of modern society which are equally existing across the world. Due to my experience during Erasmus and my thesis, I found a research area which motivates and inspires me and therefore my time in Granada was an extremely valuable signpost for my future.