

## ERFAHRUNGSBERICHT ÜBER STUDIENERFAHRUNGEN IN BAYERN

[Report on study experiences in Bavaria]

Herkunftsland [county of origin]:	Russia
Studium in Bayern [program in Bavaria]:	von [from] 2019 bis [until] 2023
Hochschule in Bayern [university in Bavaria]:	FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg
Studienfach [subject of study]:	Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures
Abschluss [degree]:	Master

### **Practical Experiences and Tips**

As I was applying for my MA studies in Germany almost 4 years ago now back in 2019, a lot has changed since then, and these changes (e.g. pandemic, war) have not made it easier for international students, especially those from affected countries, to study abroad. Therefore, I do not know how relevant my practical tips would actually be, but I will talk about my firsthand experiences as an international student from Russia in Germany.

It is always better to start planning your studies and stay abroad in advance due to the bureaucratic red tape and various challenges that come along this difficult pathway of becoming an international student in Germany. After making the initial decision to study in Germany, selecting the appropriate university and study program (I used the [DAAD](#) website for this), sending off your documents and finally being accepted and admitted to a German university, there are several practical milestones ahead.

As for administrative procedures, make sure whether you need to apply for a German visa. As a Russian citizen, I had to. The requirements for visas and residence permits are changing over time, which is why it is always better to check the updated information on the necessary documents on the official website of the German Embassy. You can also make an appointment directly there on the website (I had to wait approximately 1,5 months for mine). From all the required documents that I had to submit back in 2019, the confirmation of the blocked account was the most challenging one for me due to having to deal with the tax services in Russia additionally, who must be informed if a Russian citizen opens a bank account outside of the Russian Federation, and also having to transfer a relatively huge amount of money at once, which takes time, money (high transaction fees), and nerves. Currently creating a blocked account in one of the German banks is made even more complicated by the various economic sanctions, which hinder money transactions outside of Russia, by the unfavourable exchange rates of the ruble against the euro, and by the increasing amount of money that needs to be blocked (from 853 euros in 2019 to 934 euros in 2023).

It is also recommended to conduct a little preparatory research about the place of your future academic stay and how to get there. The FAU faculties are scattered amongst the cities of Erlangen and Nuremberg cities with the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Theology as well as the SDAC program itself located in Erlangen. Therefore, depending on your faculty's location, the choice of choice of dwelling place is to be made. In any case, the nearest airports to arrive at would be those in Munich, Nuremberg or Frankfurt am Main, both of which have good train connections to reach both Erlangen and

Nuremberg. In the cities, you can access various means of transportation such as buses, trams, or trains due to the student basic or additional VGN student semester ticket at extra charge, which you can get as soon as you are enrolled at the university. Besides the student tickets, you can always buy the usual single ticket from the bus driver, via the VGN app or at the ticket vending machines located at the train stations or bus stops. Both cities also have good conditions for bikes and scooters.

It is of a paramount importance to look for accommodation in advance. The FAU university does not provide dormitories for the students; rather it is the students' responsibility to apply to various dormitories in the area or to find a private apartment. I have already changed my place of residence in Germany three times, and at the moment I am living in a private dormitory. I used the following webpages to search for the accommodation:

- WG-Gesucht <https://www.wg-gesucht.de/>
- Immowelt <https://www.immowelt.de/>
- Facebook groups in the area: "WG & Wohnung Erlangen gesucht" and "Freie Wohnung / WG in Nürnberg & Erlangen".

The costs of living range from around 300 euros if you live in a student dormitory and around 600 euros for the private one-room apartments in Erlangen-Nuremberg area. Neither the dorm rooms nor private apartments are equipped with a PC. Nevertheless, you can always use one in one of the university's libraries or to bring a private one with you.

As for the leisure time, the university and faculties organize various events for students ranging from welcome days, additional guest lectures and workshops to concerts and student parties. You usually learn about them through the university's emails. The ones I joined personally several times were Sprachcafes and Sprachtandems organized by the Sprachzentrum FAU and Laufgelage. There are also external organizations such as different student dormitory clubs, Volkshochschule Erlangen (vhs) and for example, "Unterwegs e.V. Erlangen," who offer free of charge meals to students every Wednesday, organize English clubs, and other activities. There are also many sport options including university-based ones. Participating in various extracurricular activities of interest helps to establish contacts with other like-minded students. The university's libraries also provide not only perfect environment for studying but for the socialization with other FAU students as well.

### **Academic Experiences and Further Qualifications**

The SDAC program is an interdisciplinary program with an anthropology as its guiding field. During my MA studies, I attended courses offered by the SDAC in such disciplines as political anthropology, cultural philosophy, anthropology of decision-making, sociology, political science, human rights, etc. I could also attend FAU courses relevant to my study subject from other university's programs and departments. For instance, I attended the course *Sustainable Decisions. Cultures and Problems of Decision-Making in Organizations* from the sociology department and *Universal Rights for a Fragmented World? Principles and Pitfalls in the Philosophy of Human Rights* from the Human Rights MA program. I also took German language courses offered by FAU, participated in SDAC workshops, SDAC and IKGfF guest lecture series, BAYHOST seminars and BTHA workshop, methodology colloquium and attended the "Ukrainian-Bavarian Conference on Digital Education" organized by BAYHOST in summer 2022.

The SDAC program has its own mentoring program, wherein a lecturer can become a mentor for a student and assist and advise the latter with any challenges that may arise during their stay in Germany. There is also SDAC peer-to-peer mentoring program and the buddy program at the faculty's level both aimed at senior students helping the freshmen (I volunteered in both). Thus, the connections among students and the teaching staff at the SDAC are smooth and friendly. For example, I have regular meetings with my supervisor regarding my master's thesis. From the last semester, I also started to work as a HiWi (student assistant) for the SDAC.

Currently, I am in the process of writing my master's thesis in the discipline of linguistic anthropology on the topic: *The Situation of Udmurt Language Endangerment in Russia: An Ethnographic Account*. From December 2022 until January 2023 I conducted my fieldwork in Udmurtia, Russia. I had several qualitative interviews with the speakers of the language, language activists, shamans (the Udmurts are animists), Udmurt artists, governmental officials, etc. The results of my fieldwork and the related literature form now the foundation of my thesis. The methodological training in the form of lectures, seminars, and colloquium on ethnographic methodology, which I had prior my fieldwork, came in very handy.

To sum up, there were both positive and negative aspects regarding my studies in Bavaria. Among the positives, I studied many new disciplines and gained knowledge in fields that were previously completely unfamiliar to me, such as human rights, anthropology, sociology and Southeast Asia studies. That is definitely a plus of being in an interdisciplinary program. I have also deepened my knowledge in the subjects that I studied before (e.g. political science, cultural philosophy, China studies) and looked at the already familiar things from a different angle. Both old and new disciplines broadened my horizons and let me discover a field of linguistic anthropology, in which I write my master's thesis now and in which I want to develop academically further. Among other positive aspects were gaining international experience, volunteering, working with and learning from professionals in their respective fields, and conducting real fieldwork at the MA level for my thesis. Among the negative aspects were the situations happening in the world: the global pandemic and then the war, which coincided with my master's studies, affected me more than I thought and as a result prolonged my graduation. However, regardless of the negative side, I could develop myself both professionally and academically (even received the Hans-Wilhelm and Helga Schuessler Prize) as well as personally during this time. I am immensely grateful to BAYHOST for granting me the scholarship for the period of two and a half years, which provided me great financial help and opened new academic opportunities for me starting from letting me fully concentrate on my studies without having to look for means to sustain myself financially and to organizing additional seminars, workshops, and conferences.

### **Plans or Activities after the BAYHOST-Funding**

I plan to submit my master's thesis by the end of September 2023 and successfully graduate with a master's degree. After that, I plan to stay in academia and aspire to a PhD degree in the disciplines of linguistic anthropology or sociolinguistics. Although I would love to stay in Germany, especially in Bavaria, I will go wherever the prospective PhD program takes me.

Even though I would love to stay in Germany, and in Bavaria in particular, I will follow where the prospective PhD program leads me, meaning if I find one in Finland, the USA, Estonia, or any other country, then I will go there. However, I am also open to other possibilities, such as a second master's degree, internships, or gaining some work experience.

Bayerisches Hochschulzentrum für Mittel-, Ost- und Südosteuropa (BAYHOST)

Jahresstipendienprogramm des Freistaats Bayern

für Graduierte aus Mittel-, Ost- und Südosteuropa

