Visit at TUL

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From the 24th to the 25th of March we visited the Technical University of Liberec, TUL. On our first day, we met with Karel Fraňa, the vice-dean for international and public relations, and Marcela Válková, faculty Erasmus Coordinator in the G-building. The building is the newest on campus and gave an impression of a highly modern facility.

Size wise TUL is about twice as big as Østfold University College (OUC). While OUC has about 5000 students, studying everything from teaching or nursing to economics or scientific subjects, TUL has a total of about 9000 students all focusing on technical engineering or economic subjects. This gives the university a completely different environment from what we have in OUC, most of the students at TUL “speak the same language”.

After our initial meeting with Mr. Fraňa and Mrs. Válková we had a workshop with students and staff from TUL. Hong Wu from OUC presented our school, Fredrikstad and Norway and some of the approaches OUC has towards learning, while the three students David Svabola, Tomáš Kořínek and Martin Boruvka from TUL presented their Masters and PhD theses. Norwegian student Lill Michaelsen also presented the importance of Concept thinking.

During the day we also got a tour of the mechanical engineering labs, where they investigate everything from the use of biomaterials in plastic to the amount of bio fuel versus gasoline in the fuel from the local gas stations. The students have even made their own car and they have a close relationship with the car producer Škoda. During this tour the mechanical engineering student from Norway and the two Norwegian faculty staff members were obviously impressed with the advanced level of technology and equipment of the facility. I was impressed myself. Coming from a non-technical study program I have never even seen half the stuff they had before, not even in our schools workshop.

On the second day we got a trip to the Ještěd mountain where the Ještěd tower, one of Liberecs main attractions, is located. From the mountain peak which reaches 1012m above sea level we could see all the way to Poland and Germany. We also got a great view of the alpine slopes Liberec has to offer. This trip was, for me, one of the highlights of the trip. The weather was great, the view was beautiful and the TV-tower was a very impressive structure.

During the workshop a discussion on cultural differences occurred, and it is clear that the Czech and the Norwegian students have different preferences when it comes to academic work processes. While we in Norway like to work in groups and have team-based projects, most of the Czech students are individualists and
prefer to work alone. This could be challenging in a prospective cooperation between students from TUL and OUC, but I believe both the Czech and the Norwegian students would have a great learning outcome from this cooperation. Maybe the Czech students will see the benefits we find working in teams give, and maybe the Norwegian students will learn new approaches to individual problem solving.

I believe that both TUL and OUC would benefit greatly from a cooperation/exchange program. For the Norwegian students, having access to the advanced technology TUL has to offer, would give great opportunities to expand their learning outcome. The impression I got during the visit was that OUC has a more “hands-on” approach when teaching mechanical science than TUL, and I believe the Czech students would benefit from a different approach than what they are used to. As the Hawthorne-studies proved (The Hawthorne effect), changing any variable in the working environment can enhance the productivity and efficiency of the worker (or student).
Lill Michaelsen presenting concept thinking

The three students David Svabola (Master of Science candidate), Tomáš Kořínek (Master of Science candidate) and Martin Boruvka (PhD. Candidate).
The TUL student-built car.

Analyzing fuel.
Plastic pellets made from 80% coconut fibre.

From the “thin layers lab”, Hong Wu takes a closer look at a thin material that is supposedly as strong as diamonds.
The Ještěd TV-tower.

Enjoying the view from Ještěd mountain. From here we could see both Germany and Poland.