I was always interested in Nordic countries, such as Denmark or Norway and therefore it was always on high priority to visit Sweden, in particular Stockholm, as well. Since if never been there and a friend of mine and fellow student did a three month traineeship in Uppsala I decided to visit him during this time. There I got the chance to visit with him the Ångström Laboratoriet, where he did his traineeship and meet his supervisor. Luckily Prof. Sascha Ott was there as well and he introduced me in his scientific field and offered me to do my master thesis at his working group, after discovering my great interest in phosphorus chemistry and going to Sweden for half a year.

I expected to learn a lot more techniques for preparation and analysis of synthetic molecules based on phosphorus. Furthermore how to decide which synthesis is useful and how to prepare different compounds itself was on the agenda to learn. Luckily I could obtain all the skills I expected to and even a few more unexpected, like discussing in scientific English or presenting results and work in English to a bigger group of colleagues and superior.

Since my working language was English and my result at the language test was C2 I didn’t explicit prepare for the working language, but I took part at an intercultural training program and therewith I tried to learn a bit of Swedish to come in contact with local people more easily. This learning progress was done self-educating without any special courses. For the work itself I studied papers related to my thesis and in particular those published by the working group of Prof. Sascha Ott.

I did my exchange in Sweden to finish my Master studies by writing my thesis. Therefore I had to work on my own project supervised by the working group in
Sweden but graded by Prof. Karaghiosoff in Munich. The project was split into two parts. First I had to synthesize a literature known molecule in a six step reaction and therewith prove the published procedure. I had to work out the setups for the synthesis on my own and analyze quantity and quality. For that I had to learn how to use specific analytical instruments, such as phosphorus NMR, carbon NMR and high resolution mass spectrometry.

The second part was the synthesis of an unknown molecule and the characterisation of the electronic and optical properties. Therefore I had to find a synthetic route giving a good yield and good quality. Afterwards I had to purify and analyze the compound. Part of it was to do the measurements on my own, so I had to learn how to use all the instruments and work with them independently. In addition all the results were presented in monthly group meetings by using short slide shows and afterwards the results and methods I used were discussed by the group.

In the end I had to write the final report by using all the information I gathered during the traineeship.

Although the chemistry itself (phosphorus chemistry) was new and I never work in this field I could use a lot of experience I obtained during my years as a student at LMU. Since the synthetic chemistry in inorganic is not that different from synthetic chemistry in organic I was lucky for having so many intern laboratory courses during the studies. All the working techniques were known for my and therewith it took me just short time to get used to working in this new field. Additionally I could use all the theoretical background I was taught in Munich for knowing what to do and explaining what happened. Moreover all the theory behind the analytical instruments was part of my education as well so it helped me a lot.

In March our group hosted the EWPC (European workshop of phosphorus chemistry) and I was part of the organisation committee.

I had to help preparing everything necessary for the conference before it starts and then help during the conference with tasks such as registration.
My daily hours were approximately nine with 30 min lunch break. All together it was more than 40 hours a week without any holidays. So it is easy to say I was fully occupied it didn’t feel like I was working way too much. My colleagues in the laboratory thereby helped a lot. It felt like they were more friends than just colleagues and by that I had a lot of fun during work as well. All the other colleagues were super friendly and welcomed my pretty fast. In total one can say it was great to learn that much while having a great time.

To get in touch with Swedish people unfortunately is not that easy. In general they are more or less really shy and not that talkative. Additionally there were just two Swedish people employed in my department beside the professors. That’s why it took some time to get to know people living there and when knowing them it gets hard to become friends since they know that you are going to leave soon. But a good way to get people to know or spend some time is to become a member of a nation. I would recommend everyone to do that. You get cheaper drinks, if you want to go out with friends for a beer, you can go for fika (Swedish breakfast) in the morning or you can be a member of any activity group, e.g. drama, singing, sports, football or quizzing.

If you for example have friends from university and they know local people use the opportunity and try to meet these people, because when you get introduced by friends it makes it a lot easier. I would also recommend to go to as many Erasmus activities as possible.

In winter there is a lot to do spend time beside work in the university. I would give the hint too try winter sport you can probably not do everywhere like cross-ski, curling, ice-skating on lakes outside of the city or skiing.

Since I was in between the semester it was not sure that I can get an apartment from university respectively one of the Erasmus flats. Therefore I looked for a flat
online using facebook groups and forums. By writing to people personally I could find someone who was renting his flat for the exact same time as I wanted to stay. Luckily he was doing his postdoc, in chemistry as well as me, in France for the exact same amount of time as I needed a flat. By skyping und writing via facebook I could arrange all the details, so I could move in at the same moment I arrived in Uppsala. I had one flatmate everything worked fine with. Summing up I can say looking for a private flat is worth it if one start the exchange irregular. It is a bit more expensive but with a bit of luck you have a bigger and nicer place then a shared corridor. Beside that one can always look for a flat in a nation.

I would recommend at this point to buy a bike as soon as you arrive, since everything, even working places outside the city, is easily accessible by bike in less than 30 minutes. In the beginning it can be cold especially in the winters but it is worth it, especially because the bus tickets are not that cheap.

The Swedish people actually have good working hours, at least in academia. I could start working when I wanted to but in general just a few people started working earlier than 9 o’clock. But they stayed till 6 o’clock in exchange. For them it is really important to follow rules without complaining about them, but they still don’t forget to enjoy life, e.g. they love fika. They have no problem stop working, nevertheless it is busy at this point, and have a break with colleagues. And on one day a week the hole department gathers together to have fika and be informed about the upcoming events and seminars. Thereby every new employee has to introduce themselves, what generates a really familiar atmosphere. Unfortunately the language that is used for everything is Swedish. As mentioned before there are almost just foreign people working there with small Swedish language skills. In addition people you meet in private switch immediately to English as soon as they realise that you are not sure about your Swedish, since their English is almost perfect.

The traineeship helped me to learn how to work on your own as a researcher. That is a necessary skill for me, because I want to do my Ph.D. after I am done with
studying. Therefore the exchange gave me exactly what I wanted to obtain, with being able to be abroad and still manage to be productive while having a good time.

Universitet Uppsala is always up to get new trainees from all over the world and I would give everyone the advice to go there for an exchange. Both country and university are just lovely places.

To my regrets I was not really part of the Erasmus family, since the person in charge didn't send me one email for a single Erasmus event. So I always had to look myself to get in touch with other students from the Erasmus program.