

A Step Towards Becoming an In-Demand Human Resource
ISCO-OP at the German Sport University Cologne

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1. Purpose and Objectives of Internship

- To have a broad perspective and acquire a global sensibility
- To think and act on my own initiative
- To embrace my bilateral uncertainties based on clearly-defined intentions

2. Contents of Internship

The internship program was operated by two organizations: *Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln* (the German Sport University Cologne) and *Rhein-Kreis Neuss Haus des Sports* (Neuss Civic Sports Center). At the German Sport University I could engage in sports from an academic perspective by participating in university clubs and visiting the dsj (*Deutsche Sportjugend* or 'German Sports Youth') in addition to translating data on sporting clubs. At the Neuss Civic Sports Center I was involved in updating a sports club database and participated in sports club activities (such as aqua walking, aqua fitness, Pilates and calisthenics) as well as a children's camp in Schleswig. I also helped to make a register of names and manage a sports festival, and could experience sports management firsthand through both office work and physical activities.

3. Period of Internship: June 24-August 31, 2008

4. Overview of Host Organizations and Business

1) *Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln* (German Sport University Cologne)

Located in the city of Köln (Cologne) in the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen (North Rhine-Westphalia), German Sport University Cologne is Germany's only physical education university. Originally founded before the war as the College of Physical

Education in Berlin, it was rebuilt in Cologne in 1947 and currently has 6,000 students and conducts a variety of education and research at its 21 institutes and departments including the Institute of Coaching Science and Sport Informatics, the Institute of Sport Sociology, the Institute of Psychology and the Institute of Cardiology and Sport Medicine.

2) *Rhein-Kreis Neuss Haus des Sports* (Neuss Civic Sports Center)

The Neuss Civic Sports Center is a sports promotion facility catering for the city of Neuss in North Rhine-Westphalia. The Center provides assistance for the administration and promotion of sports clubs as well as holding various events and sports classes with the aim of improving the citizens' health and contributing to the development of youth through sport.

5. Impressions of the Host Organizations

1) Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln

(1) Contents

My internship at the German Sport University Cologne lasted for three weeks from the first day of my stay on 24 June until 20 July. Although I was officially attached to the university during this time, I was also permitted to attend several conferences and meetings and had many opportunities to visit facilities relevant to my study typified by the dsj. On campus I was assigned a postgraduate student room for my own use where I worked on the translation of English survey materials on Germany's sports clubs. The conferences were attended by representatives not only from Germany but also other European nations including the U.K., France, Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as political and economic experts whose keynote speeches allowed me to gain an insight into Europe's current situation and challenges. The style of the meetings struck me as very different to those in Japan, particularly in the way the participants held relaxed discussions over a meal in the way that only Europeans know how, in the proximity of the speaker and the listener, and in the forthright responses to questions even from the students. I also learned the importance of such candid questions even when addressing seemingly trivial matters.

The international conferences were held in English so I was able to understand the details being discussed but unfortunately the other smaller conferences and meetings were all conducted in German. This meant that despite the valuable opportunity these meetings presented, I was only able to comprehend the details from the situation and the

written materials provided and was unable to participate in any real depth. I am sure that the internship would have been more rewarding if I had possessed the language skills to enable me to converse.

(2) Self-assessment

In retrospect, I think that the majority of my stay at the German Sport University Cologne was spent engaged in passive tasks such as working on the computer or listening to others. While this may have been inevitable to a certain extent due to the content of the program, I still wish that I had engaged with the postgraduate students around me a little more, particularly while on campus. After all, casual conversation often leads to unexpected discoveries and inspires the pursuit of new ideas.

Nevertheless, the conferences and my visit to dsj provided me with many opportunities to meet people from a diverse range of fields. Although the fact that I was Japanese may have been somewhat unusual to the people I met, once we started talking they would respond courteously until I could understand the gist of what they were saying, no matter how trivial the topic. Until then I had assumed that asking someone to repeat themselves several times over was impolite even though I may not have properly understood what they were saying. However, this experience allowed me to realize that it was worse to try and hide my misunderstanding with vague responses when in fact I should have had the conviction to keep asking until I understood properly and this realization has actually given me more confidence.

2) Rhein-Kreis Neuss Haus des Sports

At the Neuss Civic Sports Center I was involved in updating a sports club database and participated in sports club activities as well as a children's camp in Schleswig. I also helped to make a register of names and manage the sports festival. At the office the only staff who could speak English was the supervisor so each time another staff member gave me a task I had to interrupt his work and ask him to interpret. Outside of the office, however, I participated in activities for the city's elderly and assisted with the running of sporting events and most of my time was spent either spectating or engaged in physical activity so I was able to perform these tasks more enthusiastically.

◆ Updating the sports club database

(1) Contents

Sports clubs in Germany have deep-rooted cultural significance and each club maintains

a wealth of data from the number of years since it's founding, the number of sporting events, the number of members, its membership fees and event information. The Neuss Civic Sports Center which is a host organization in the current internship program is responsible for collating all of this data.

The database provides easy access to anyone with an internet connection and is a useful way for people to locate a sports club of interest. The information from sports clubs is continually changing so I was involved in cross-referencing those details to update any changes. Japan does not currently possess such a system so I hope that it can learn from Germany and set up something similar.

(2) Self-assessment

As mentioned above, clubs in Germany act as a forum both for exchanges between citizens and for education and I could certainly see that they also act as a source of emotional support. In order to process the immense volume of data I used Excel as well as the statistical processing software SPSS. Even though the displayed language was different, the operating methods were the same so it was useful to be able to perform basic SPSS operations without any constraints.



◆ Participation in sport club activities

(1) Contents

The sports clubs offered many programs for the local elderly population which differed in terms of location and content depending on the day. Participants would register their names and pay a fee beforehand and eagerly looked forward to their weekly programs. The first activity I experienced was aqua walking, where participants attach a belt around their waist and exercise while half-submerged in a deep pool. The minimal physical burden on the waist and knees and the refreshing feeling of being in the water

made this program popular in all of the regions where it was held. The aqua exercise is the same as that performed in Japan but I felt that it was more active than the Japanese version and placed a greater emphasis on dance elements. Both of these programs are performed in the water so the participants have their heart rate measured both before and afterwards. The programs were also quite thorough with the instructors directly asking the participants about their physical condition and, on occasion, advising them to refrain from participating. I therefore felt that I was witnessing what could be described as the ideal embodiment of sports club management in which anyone can participate with peace of mind.

The calisthenics and Pilates programs were conducted in hospitals and participants would perform stretches in time with soothing music. Paying attention to their breathing while loosening their muscles, the participants would finish the program feeling refreshed. The aim here was to allow the participants to exercise at their own pace rather than working up a sweat and I could easily tell that classes like this were popular.

My experience of these various programs was a good opportunity to learn different instruction methods to those used in Japan. While some of the movements were similar, I thought that the idea of constantly moving to the rhythm of the music was a more up-tempo approach to the one taken in Japan and was impressed by how all of the participants were constantly smiling and enjoying themselves together with their friends.

(2) Self-assessment

I only experienced the various programs from the perspective of a participant so I am unable to make a self assessment. However, my strongest impression after experiencing the programs firsthand was one of great enjoyment. That is probably because even though I could not understand German, I could see that the instructor was constantly communicating with each of the participants in a very positive way and skillfully keeping them motivated so that they would not lose interest.



Given the opportunity, I would like to use this experience to provide similar instruction to provide a safe, well thought out program that would keep the participants smiling.

◆ Participation in the Schleswig children's camp

(1) Contents

Every year during summer vacation a long-term camp is held for children aged between 10 and 13 years in the port town of Schleswig situated in northern Germany close to the Denmark border. The children who attend this camp spend three weeks living together and getting to know each other for the first time in the mountains without any television or games. I first heard about this activity during a visit to dsj and became very interested and, although I participated only in the last three days, I found myself on the bullet train from distant Cologne in anticipation of seeing the camp's activities.

This camp called 'Weseby' gathers together 130 children to take part in various activities and sleep in group tents. Each day's schedule was posted on a notice board and, apart from the time specified for activities, the remainder was basically free time including showers. Whenever an announcement was made, the theme from Rocky was played and the children would gather in the square. I was very impressed by how the children would respond to the call of 'Weseby' with a password. For three days I stayed in the same tent as the children, played sports with them and taught them elements of Japanese culture including origami and ayatori (cat's cradle) in what was a meaningful exchange.

(2) Self-assessment

This camp was a complete about-face on the camps I had experienced in Japan, where the camps tend to be short and the participants, who are constantly kept busy adhering to a schedule, often leave on the final day feeling totally fatigued. However, at Camp Weseby the children were all very excited and full of energy and found games to play of



their own accord despite being in the mountains without any television or entertainment provided. Unfazed by the sudden appearance of a Japanese person in their midst, the children took an interest in me calling out "Ko, Ko!" and asking me to teach them to read Japanese and play ayatori and do origami. The children had only started to learn

English and we each had trouble conveying what we wanted to say but this language barrier may have in fact provided the impetus for the meaningful exchange which we shared. I found myself learning from their abundant energy, their trusting and genuine attitudes and their ability to devise ways to play and have fun.

I was although surprised by the youth of the staff who operated the camp. Supervised by the camp director, the majority of the staff were high school students or younger, a situation which I found quite stunning simply because it would be inconceivable in Japan. Still, I could not hide my surprise at the way in which they accommodated and responded to the children with unconventional ideas, unhindered by time constraints. My experience at the camp motivated me to think that I too was capable of something and inspired me to greater action and has proved to be a positive influence on my approach to subsequent internships.

◆ Preparing a name register & assisting management of the sports festival

(1) Contents

I was responsible for drawing up a register of names for the elementary school children participating in a sports festival (eight athletic events) as well as assisting in its management. Participation was open to schools or sports clubs and applications were received by fax so my job was to enter the handwritten details on these faxes into Excel format. I also drew up a points distribution chart while referring to the previous year's version as the points which could be acquired in each event differed for boys and girls.

I also helped to prepare early on the day of the sports festival and was mainly in charge of passing the recorded awards list to the organizers. Unlike Japan, the sports festival did not feature any extravagant ceremonies at the opening or close or when presenting awards and I was quite surprised at how suddenly the proceedings commenced but it was a very good opportunity to learn how these types of regional events are operated.

(2) Self-assessment

When preparing the registry of names I would decipher the handwriting on the faxes and type it into an Excel file and this is where I had trouble with German, and mistakenly inserted given names instead of surnames on several occasions. Normally I should have been in charge of coordinating this task but the supervisor cross-referenced all of the faxes to make sure that the details had been entered correctly so I felt that unless the intern is at least able to manage everyday matters in the language of the host

country then neither the intern nor the host can expect to achieve a fulfilling internship.

8. Overall Self-assessment and Analysis

To be honest, I found myself quite envious of the way in which German society allows anyone with the enthusiasm and the ability to get involved and to earn recognition. In Japan those with age and experience are almost always afforded preference although this is in fact a reflection of just how much emphasis Japanese society places on individual responsibility. Through this internship program I learned not only how to be more independent and forthcoming but also how to hold firmly to my opinions no matter what the circumstances as well as the importance of expressing myself on the basis of this intent. Particularly outside of Japan I think that unless you assert yourself, you are simply overlooked. Compared to before the internship I feel that I have become more motivated to get involved in something even if it is only of slight interest and to just give it a try without worrying about what other's might think. I am therefore certain that this ISCO-OP internship program has been a very valuable experience for me.

9. What companies & government agencies are looking for in an ISCO-OP intern

At the very least, I think that the intern's ability to handle everyday life in the language of the host country should be prized above all else. The reason is that, except for special circumstances, all matters are constantly conducted in the language of the host country. Even though English is said to be the global language, there are limits to having everything interpreted point for point both in terms of time and content and there is no guarantee that everyone will have a handle on English.

Next I think that particularly those ISCO-OP programs conducted overseas require interns who have their own opinions and are independent. This is probably the same in any country but especially outside of Japan, supervisors may not be able to look after an intern by organizing detailed schedules, constantly monitoring his/her progress and assigning tasks on a continual basis as is the case here in Japan. Even if an intern is not completely fluent in the language, it is essential to ask questions whenever you have uncertainties rather than simply remaining in the dark. The key is to identify where your own interests lie and where you can put your talents to use. I think that it is vital for interns to ask themselves what they hope to achieve while overseas by drawing on their experiences in Japan.

Finally, I feel that it is important to have a broad perspective fueled by curiosity. An open mind is essential in order to absorb a great many things and without this trait, interns will be hard pressed to notice any real difference from Japan and will only experience half of the surprises and discoveries that they may have otherwise enjoyed. It is my wish that interns should constantly seek new discoveries and attempt to delve ever deeper.

10. Overall impressions of the ISCO-OP internship program

Working overseas is a chance to see just how far your strength will carry you and to highlight your own shortcomings. Of course, challenging yourself in a new environment where the language and culture is completely alien takes time so I would personally like to see interns prepare and plan for this program not as though it were an ISCO-OP internship but rather as if studying abroad. Assuming that interns perceive the program as a type of overseas education, I think that would be preferable to depart early in order to become accustomed to the local language and culture and prepare themselves emotionally and then to participate in the internship for at least three months and four months at most. While it may sound unreasonable, I think that potential interns should consider extending their graduation at NIFS-K by about six months to a year before attempting the internship as this would enable them to engage in program more positively. I believe that the program warrants such a consideration.

The program also offers a valuable opportunity to experience life abroad. I was able to spend my off time during the internship exploring different parts of the country and engaging with the locals. We all share the common trait of humanity so even the presence of language barrier is not enough to stop you from making yourself understood if you have the will to communicate, and chances are the person will show an interest in Japan. These experiences have had a very positive and stimulating effect on the person I am today.