

Carola:

Hello! You're listening Mattipedia, and I am your host today, Carola Lindholm and I'm a student of Digital International Business and today with me here is Damian, would you like to introduce yourself?

Damian:

Yes, sure. Hello, my name is Damian Santibanez. I am also a DIB Student - Digital International Business at XAMK, I should be graduating this year, hopefully.

I have a background of circus arts. I have a bachelor that I did in Stockholm.

And after graduating in 2018 and after I have lived in many different cities of Europe, I came and ended in Kouvola.

Very exciting cultural place, as you well know.

Carola:

Yes. Welcome, Damian and today's episode is all about culture and sport activities of XAMK and would you tell some, like particularly thing why you decided to come to XAMK?

Damian:

I was already living here in Kouvola and I saw that in this city there was XAMK and the opportunity to study. Also living in Finland and in everywhere else in the world, we hear a lot about Finnish education. And it was the middle of the pandemic also, it was starting. So, I thought, why not study at XAMK?

Carola:

That's a good answer. I would also answer the same way. Also, since the sport and cultural activities are the main subject today, would you like point out few things you have been able to participate during the years you have studied in XAMK since you're already a final year student.

Damian:

Yes, sure. So when I say that Kouvola is a cultural place to be, I mean it half in joke but also half true. I came to realize that there is a lot going on but it's very characteristic and different to other places because everything that happens, happens kind of underground. Or you need to be connected with the right circles or hear in the right moment that's something is going to happen. So that you that you know that it's happening. But the first thing that is helping some and that I see a lot of people being helped by it's the Youth services there is in Kouvola. They do a lot of activities and they are open if you are under 29 years old, which I think is the case for many of the students, that might be hearing us. And then it's a great place to go and get involved into the local social activity and cultural activity. So if you want to hear about what concerts are happening or what things are happening, sadly there is not a-, or it's hard to find online still and I know the city is working on it, but Youth places is very good place word to mouth, mouth of mouth, mouth to ear. I'm not sure what it's the saying, but it's a way to go here.

Carola:

Yes, I agree with you that it's easier to find things if you have already some places where to be like connected if you start as a student. And my personal background is more like in the sports field I used to like play competitive level sports for my whole age and I was able to continue my sports and hobbies while continuing my studies in XAMK. So do you have any kind of like personal experience of like, like

you said, you have the circus background. So have you been able to continue the things you used to do before your studies?

Damian:

Yes, considering, well considering that there was the pandemic in between that was quite a stop in the activities I could do anywhere and in that sense Kouvola was quite a nice place to be because somehow, we still had the freedom to do some things. So as a professional artist, I've been able to be still in contact with some venues and some little gigs here in Kouvola and also in other cities. But I had to take a step back when the pandemic arrived. And then little by little restart with involving myself and getting to know more people and getting to know what happens. I was also in exchange last summer so I didn't see and I know that when things happen here is in the spring and summer and in other time of the year there is not much. So I'm very excited waiting days next spring and summer to be able to do everything. But for example, I think it applies a lot if you are in a big city usually, this kind of activities find you, while here it's more the other way around, you need to be actively seeking for them. But I do believe that applies, who seeks find? For example, I at the beginning of this year I saw XAMK was offering some free courses and there was free dancing lessons. And that's quite amazing, like just for being a student at XAMK I could have free dancing lessons once a week. It's a great opportunity, but that is hard to find, so need to look for it.

Carola:

Yes, I agree with that. I also saw last fall semester they have, for example, free CrossFit classes. For me personally, I've been willing to go, play badminton many, many times during, the study years and XAMK is really offering good opportunities to do like various of kind of sports for students. As an international student, do you have any kind of aspects in Finnish culture or sports that you particularly enjoy compared to places where you have studied before or lived before?

Damian:

Well about the Finnish culture I enjoy a lot the level of freedom there is, in the sense that you can do what you want, and I feel more and more I find culture-related with what we were just saying, I find more and more this if you want to do something, look for it, look for it, look for it. And at some point, you might find it - and that is combined with the fact that this is a small town and if you don't find something you but you really want to do it, you might have the possibility of making it happen yourself if you know where which doors to knock. So that's something I really appreciate that possibility of being able to be active in the community and have a direct impact on what happens.

Carola:

Yeah, I I get your point. Yeah. I also agree with that in XAMK, we have opportunity to like to take part of the things. What is happening around you, but also if you have some particular thing you want to try or do, there is a lot of the people and connections you can use during your studies. For example, we have, like recruitment for new players for our team and we just asked a student union Kaakko - hey, can we come to the campus and keep a small event to recruit new players, and it was so easy to, there was nobody saying no, you can't come here with us. They are so open minded to every like new things and I really enjoy that part of being in XAMK. The next question would be like, as we pulled out already like participating in things but have you seen any sport games while studying in XAMK? Or have you been like in the games like KooKoo ice hockey games or basketball games or any other cultural events during your studies?

Damian:

At the beginning of my studies, it was through a circus gig actually, I had the opportunity to go to the Lumon arena to see a KooKoo game we were working there, but we could see the game and it's quite an experience. I will advise anyone who haven't been to ice hockey, to give it a shot. There were fireworks, fire, fights, I don't know and much noise. It was really different to what you will expect on any social cultural activity here. It was very, very exciting. But through XAMK, sadly I haven't had yet I think opportunity to see some sport. Or I'm not even sure if we have a team on something, on some sport. What about you?

Carola:

Yeah, we don't have team yet in in Kouvola area, there is actual American football team in Kotka who is taking part of the university like a league. That's the one thing I would really like to have more in the future, like that kind of maybe from the North American Universities that style that you have your school teams, more. That would be really fun experience for the students to, like, pull up their own team and compete against other school that will be really, really fun. I think we have covered a lot of our today's topics, but like I have a few more questions for you. There is a quick question - If you would give yourself from the first years studies some advice, what would it be like? The person you were at the first year starting studies in Kouvola and XAMK?

Damian:

That's a good question related to what we were talking before, actually I would definitely tell myself: stop complaining and go and look for it, because it might be nearer than you think. I feel a lot of people spent, including myself in first year, a lot of time complaining about the city, when some expect that it is don't come across, it was not like the Imagine. They don't look for what there is to offer, what is there. So I would say that like put less attention on what you expected and more attention on what actually is there would be my advice.

Carola:

Yeah, that's a really good answer. And I stand behind those words also, because when I started my studies in XAMK, I already had my access to continue my competitive sport, but besides that I was kind of looking forward, places where you meet other students and have activities to do, and I remember forcing myself to, kind of like not complaining and to start to looking for those places where we can go, like for example, that, that badminton thing when after the call it was kind of over where we were able to like see each other. I remember where we go many, many times to play badminton together. And that's still one of my best memories of the whole school year because it was super fun and like everyone was laughing at themselves and each other because. No one, any of us, didn't even at first know the actual rules but we were having so much fun together and I still have the memory of that clear in my mind. You have something?

Damian:

Yeah, if I can add on that also, I totally agree in the sense that if we that are the COVID generation have found a way to have activities and have fun here, I don't see how it would be harder now. So, I don't think there is any excuse.

Carola:

Yes, if there is that something that not already existing what you want to do or try, there is so much help coming from the XAMK and Kaakko and school related parties who are willing to help to build the things up and help if you want to try something new sport or whatever. So, there's like always somebody who

is willing to help you and get started with it. For example, I was like one year I was part of the student union board and I was like taking part of the sport and leisure activities during that way I was able to affect the school atmosphere, and I think that's also good advice to first year students to be brave and have the guts of the-, if you have the moment just take the moment on your own hands, start doing things because that's the good way and maybe the only way to make things happen like you also said. Maybe the final question for today and it's for the future: Do you have any expectation or is there any upcoming events you are looking forward to XAMK have or would you like to see something specific things to be organized?

Damian:

Yeah, well, for starters, it comes to my mind, the first thing is that it's kind of cultural, because it's a social gathering, but I will be in the organization so I have to mention the *Ship festival that is upcoming in May. But more culture, or culture oriented - I know the city is working right now in the cultural strategy for the next years to come, so I'm very excited about seeing what that's going to have inside it, what's the content is going to be. Then I'm also excited because I'm going to be part, I didn't mention before, I'm working in the theatre of Kouvola, and I'm going to be part of a production of a cabaret show there. It's upcoming next spring, so that's definitely something I'm looking forward for. That excites me a lot. Another ways, as I say this spring and summer and everything - festivals and things that come with it, I'm so ready to enjoy it because I was not here last summer.

Carola:

Yeah, there is a lot of things happening during spring, so I'm kind of jealous that I already finishing my study soon, so I think I still have to stay a little bit longer so I can take part of so many things. The thing I'm really like looking forward to is overall, XAMK cooperation with the sport, local sport clubs and, sport events, they are planning to have. They already have, few of those during the fall semester. And also, I have to mention when I was - I think it was 2021 when I applied for XAMK Sports sponsorship program, and I think that's a really good opportunity for a students who are thinking, if they are already competing in any sports that they want to continue there, like competitive level sport. So XAMK is offering this sponsorship program to competitive athletes to apply and they are giving the sponsorship. You are able to tell about your sport on some XAMK medias on cooperation between athletes and the XAMK itself.

But yeah, do you have any last words you have or something else on your mind you want to say?

Damian:

Not really, just thank you. Thanking the team that is behind this for this invitation, this is a first time in a podcast so is somehow a dream coming true. So just that. Thank you.

Carola:

Yeah. Thank you too for coming and thank you also team trusting me to be the host. This was also my first time being host for our podcast, so I'm grateful for this opportunity. So, here was everything for today. Thank you, Damian for visiting this podcast and thank you everybody who was there during the whole episode and thank you, see you, hear you in the next episode!