

DARAH DE OLIVEIRA LEONEL

Country of origin: Brazil

Programmeme: Master Transportation Sciences, specialisation Mobility Management

Graduated: 2020



Darah is a native of Sau Paulo, Brazil who graduated from Hasselt University with a Masters in Transportation Sciences. She is currently working at TR EN MO, a Transport and Mobility Consultancy company in Portugal. Due to the covid crisis, she is stuck at home and telecommuting for work. But she's not letting that get her down, as she's always excited to talk about her experiences at Hasselt and the special relationship she has with the faculty, people and the unique culture there. We got a chance to talk to Darah about her time at Hasselt and her insights about mobility.

Why did you choose the Master of Transportation Sciences at Hasselt University?

I got my civil engineering degree in Brazil, and there the degree has 4 parts, one of them is mobility and transportation, which happens to be my favorite part. Initially, I thought I would specialize in logistics because that is where all the jobs are, but then I wanted to directly impact the lives of people through mobility and transport planning. I come from Sau Paulo, which is a huge city with lots of traffic congestion. I understand the difference in quality of life between a 1-hour commute and a 15-minute commute. I want to improve the lives of people by impacting their mobility. There are not a lot of universities that offer a masters in transportation and even the ones that do, focus more on logistics. Hasselt is one of the rare programmes that focuses on the mobility side of transportation. And I am glad I chose this programme, because I feel the faculty and I share the same passion for mobility. In addition, my fear was that the knowledge imparted in the coursework would be purely academic, but to my delight I could see that every concept in every class could be applied to real-world problems.

What are some of the other highlights for you regarding the programme?

I loved the number of summer programmes on offer. I took two programmes, one in the summer and one in the second semester. We went to Aachen, Germany to see innovation in the city lab. It was a memorable experience. Another programme was about Cross Border Mobility and all the issues that come with it. For example, Hasselt is right next to Maastricht, the Netherlands. Which country will pay for the mass transit between the two cities, which country will manage the system? We did surveys in both cities, to figure out the needs of both sides. I learnt so much and made so many friends from different parts of the world. Experienced different cultures, ate so many different types of food, it was amazing.

Tell us about Hasselt and what you miss the most about it?

You mean besides the Beer ☺? I don't know if it's possible now due to covid, but the Jenever Festival happens in October every year. For two days, you get to experience the traditional foods, there are music bands on the streets, you can drink a lot of beer with jenever, it's utter craziness. And I love the "frietjes", which are French fries, but not really French, rather Belgian fries.

How has this programme impacted your views about sustainability?

In my view, the general European view about sustainability has to do with electric something, electric cars, electric bikes, buses, trains etc. But I disagree with this idea, since most of the

energy produced in Europe is through coal, which is a high source of pollution in and of itself. However, in my view, sustainability throughout the world can be achieved through innovation, specifically MAAS (mobility as a service) or shared mobility. This frees the individual from ownership of a means of mobility. It also allows the freedom to choose the mode and method of mobility; you can choose to bike, or e-bike, to carpool, ride hail using Uber etc. These are ways to achieve sustainability in the realm of mobility.

Why should a person interested in mobility choose Hasselt?

This programme is great for anyone interested in road safety and mobility. This is not a programme to learn about logistics. If you like working with people, this is the programme for you. If you want to learn about goods transport, money, then maybe it is not the right course for you. The university is a great place to learn, there is a lot of support for students. Even in the middle of the covid crisis, the communication systems, and other support was great in helping me achieve my goals. Especially, during my internship in Portugal, I was able to do presentations in Belgium. The university faculty and staff really helped me stay focused on my tasks and not stress about the ongoing covid crisis. All the course work was appropriate to my work.

And Finally...

It's important to know people outside of your area of specialization, especially the international part of the university. There are a lot of opportunities to socialize, to get support. So my advice is to find things you need, or get rid of things you don't need. I would recommend non-natives to stay in Hasselt instead of Diepenbeek. Because Hasselt is small yet Diepenbeek is even smaller 😊. It's better to stay in the center of Hasselt. It is much more fun.

