

## Cross-cultural adjustment

Moving to a different place, let alone a different country, certainly brings a set of cross cultural adjustments. Coming from New York City, a multicultural place, I assumed that I would have no problem adjusting. Well I was wrong: Dutch culture is a lot different than American culture and it has taken me some time to get used to the way of life here. Here are my top three observations with a disclosure that these are from my personal experiences and that I'm not trying to stereotype Dutch people or categorize them as all the same.

1. Talking to strangers: the first thing I noticed about the culture here was that people seem more inclined to talk to strangers. Whether it be at Jumbo buying groceries or out at a bar, I've been approached more with friendly conversations than ever before. From my personal experiences, people in the U.S. tend to stick to themselves rather than talking to someone they don't know. If I go to a bar with friends, the group of us just mingle with each other. Strangers don't just walk over to your group to make conversation, but here they do. People will go out of their way to make small talk while ordering drinks, standing in line for the bathroom, on the metro, and even at a store checkout. I don't talk to people in line at Trader Joe's (an amazing supermarket in the U.S.) because everyone either has headphones in or just wants to get going...which leads me to my second observation.

2. A relaxed way of life: I'm not sure if it's a Dutch thing or a European thing in general, but the way of life here seems so much more relaxed. People walk slower, people enjoy their free time more, people don't seem to be in a rush, and they go out to lunch a lot. When I'm in New York, I walk down the street so fast that I don't even notice what's going on around me. Here, people are seem very lax about time, and in my opinion, appreciate being in the moment a little bit more. I've noticed people sitting at lunch places for an hour or two in no rush to get anywhere. I see people out for drinks more often and not stressing about what time they need to get going. Also, nobody is in a hurry to leave somewhere to catch a train because the majority of the people here bike and can just get up and go when they want. I've probably devoted too much of my time running to catch a train rather than staying in a conversation a little bit longer. I've also never been out to lunch during a work/school day, so I plan on doing so while I'm here.

3. Work/life balance: This one astounds me. In New York, I used to work at this really crowded restaurant where my day shifts were from 09:30 to 16:00. Do you know how many times I left at 16:00? Not once. I would have to wait for all of my tables to finish and pay, then I had to count my tips, do station work, and then I could leave... around 19:00. Places here open later, which I hope gives employees a nice relaxing morning, and close earlier, which I hope gives employees a good night's sleep. From what I've seen, many stores or restaurants I've gone to promptly lock their doors at the designated time they close. Nobody sits around and waits for their last customers to leave, nobody lets one more person run in really quickly, and kitchen in restaurants close around 21:00. I love this and I hate this. I love this because I think it's unfair for people to have to work longer than they have to. Everyone has a life they want to enjoy outside of work. I give businesses props for closing at the time they said they would close. But I also hate this because I'm used to 24/7 access to things, especially food, and it's frustrating being hungry when no places are open. It also scares me that I can't run to a bodega at 01:00 if I need something for an emergency (Band-Aids, Advil, etc.). I

think this reinforces what I said before regarding how people appreciate life differently than in the U.S. People work really hard during the assigned hours they need to work, and are more capable of leaving work at work instead of carrying it into their home lives. I feel like this balance is really healthy.

In terms of my adjusting, there have been things that are easier than others. I love to talk to everyone I meet, so it's been comfortable and easy for me to have conversations with strangers. I really enjoy talking to someone in line at a supermarket about which cheeses taste better than others. This aspect of Dutch culture has also made it easier for me to make an array of friends ranging from other students at the VU to random people on the number 5 tram. It's been more difficult for me to adhere to the relaxed way of life here. It's really great to feel relaxed more often but sometimes I feel like I'm missing out on a lot. I think that the extra hour spent getting drinks with friends could've been used riding my bike to a new place, or that walking a bit slower will erase an hour of sunlight from my day. This problem has gotten easier with time and I've finally started to feel comfortable doing things at slower paces (except walking). The hardest adjustment for me has definitely been the work and life balance now that classes have started.

Overall, these cross cultural adjustments have gotten gradually easier to get used to. It's been interesting for me to immerse myself in Dutch culture and observe the differences in life possesses here compared to the U.S., but things are still difficult. But difficult in a sense that everything closes early and I can never find food after 22:00, which has been driving me crazy... but I'm sure my body and my wallet will thank me for that in the long run.

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*Touring Utrecht, a buzzing student city in the heart of Holland, as part of the Semester in Amsterdam social program*