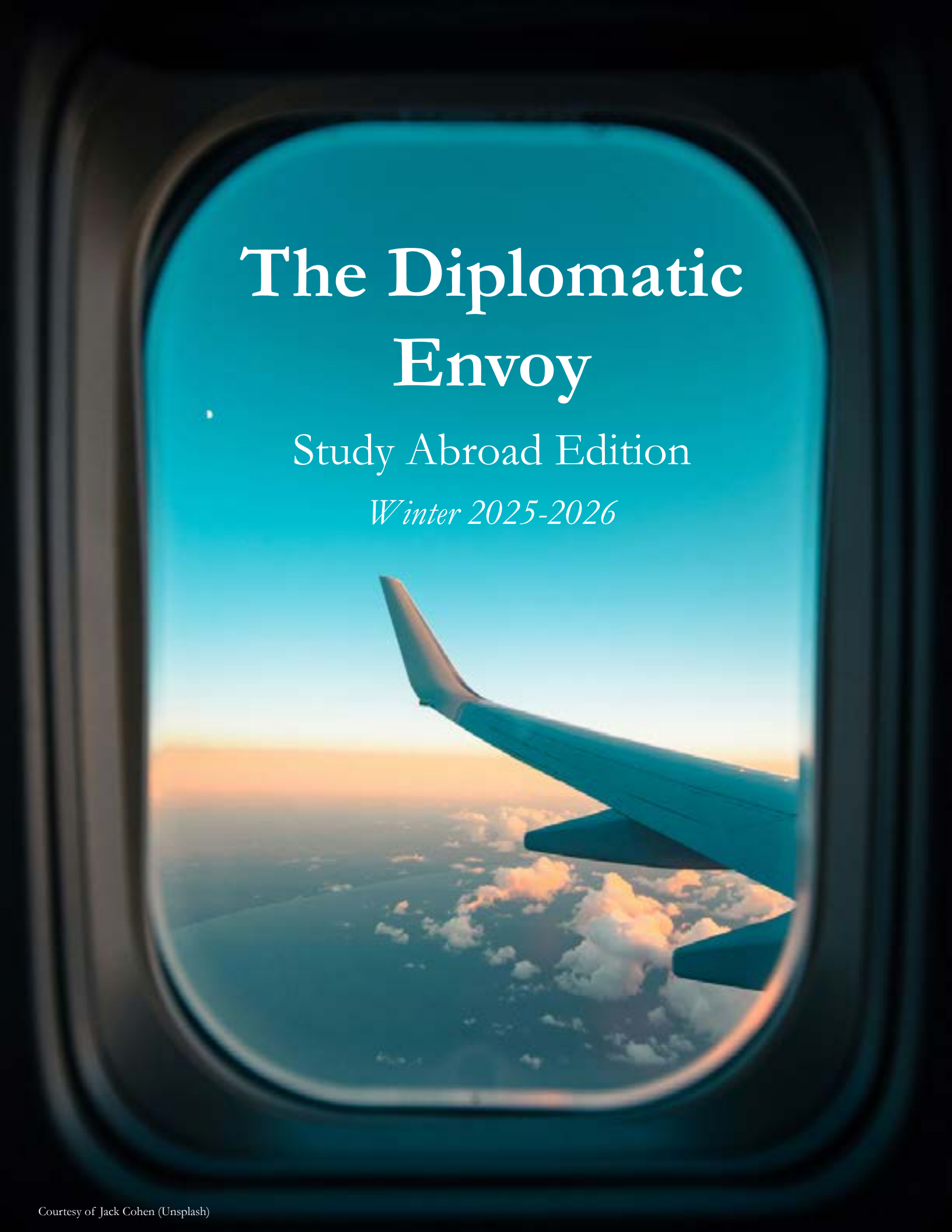
# The Diplomatic Envoy

## Study Abroad Edition

*Winter 2025-2026*



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# From the Editor
## A Note to the Reader

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read The Diplomatic Envoy's Winter 2025/2026 Study Abroad Edition.

Studying abroad offers the opportunity for students to experience other cultures, broaden their worldviews, and become more engaged members of the international community. Seton Hall University's recent expansion of study abroad programs to nearly 60 campuses in 24 countries has given students the opportunity to immerse themselves in transformative experiences while developing a diverse set of skills vital for diplomacy and beyond. Within this magazine, we bring you stories from six Seton Hall students whose study abroad experiences had a significant impact on their personal growth and global perspectives through the political upheaval they witnessed, the challenges they faced, or the unique intellectual opportunities they encountered.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, we hope you enjoy reading our Winter 2025/2026 Study Abroad edition. If you are interested in studying abroad, please reach out to the SHU Office of International Programs at studyabroad@shu.edu. To read more of our work, visit our website, listed on the back cover of this edition.

Hazard Zet Forward!

Yasmin Obeidallah
Managing Editor

SCHOOL OF DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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DR. COURTNEY SMITH
*Faculty Adviser*

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Allison Bennett
Julia Brown
Enja Barry
Will Coppola
Daniel Hing
Chloee Lynch

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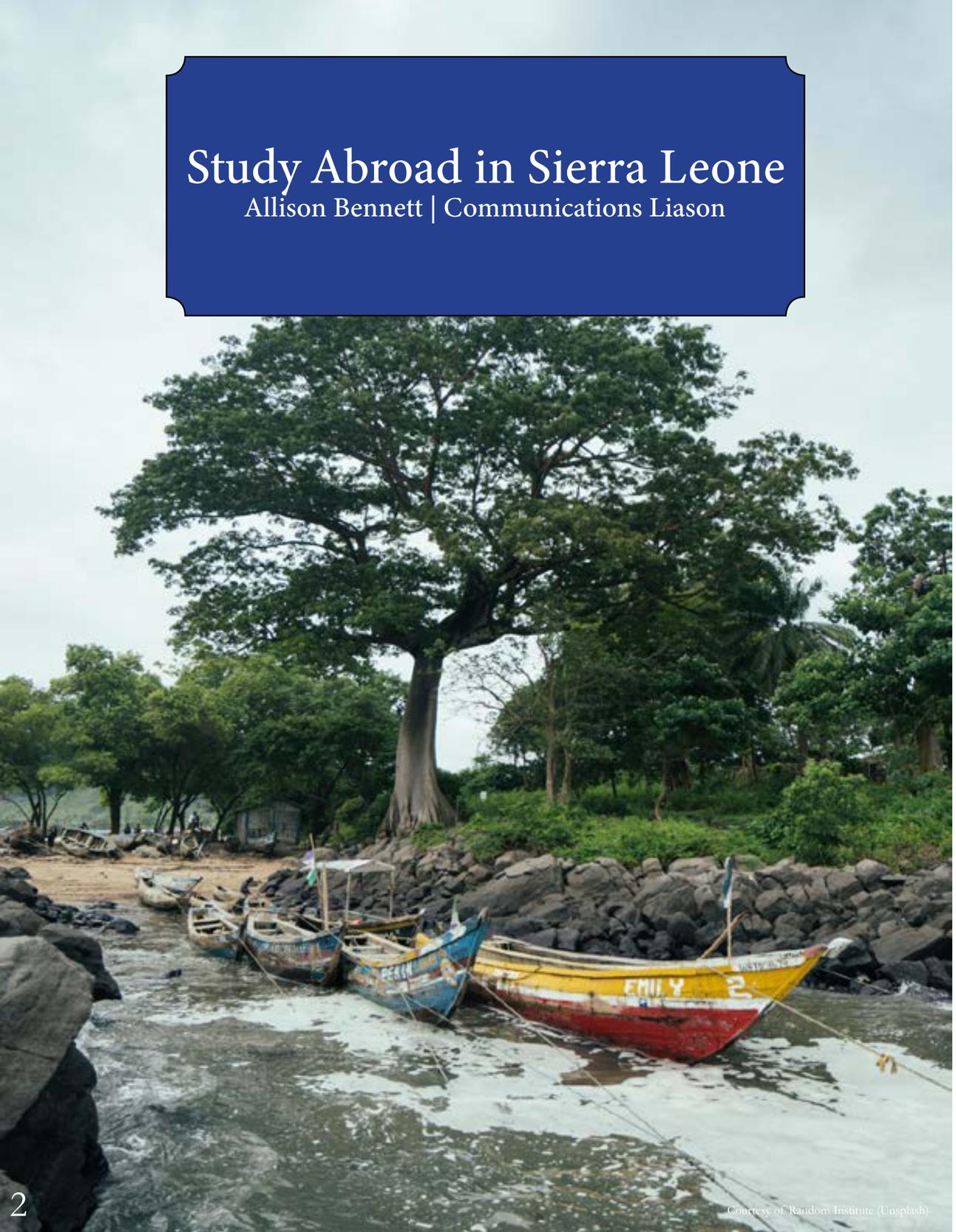
Allison Bennett | Communications Liason

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In Sierra Leone, the past is never distant. It lives in memorials, conversations, and the expectations placed on the present by international actors. From the first day of our spring-embedded program, it became clear that post-war recovery is not a linear process but an ongoing negotiation between memory and governance, but one that challenged everything I thought I knew about what "rebuilding" a country actually means. Over nine days in March 2025, what I learned in classrooms about post-conflict recovery, international intervention, and development stopped being abstract and began to feel deeply human, political, and unfinished.

To look back at the past, the Advocates for Human Rights report that Sierra Leone emerged from more than ten years of brutal civil war from the years of 1996 to 1999. This civil conflict received international attention for atrocities, such as forced recruitment of child soldiers, amputations, and widespread sexual violence. With an estimated 75,000 casualties, an additional two million were displaced. Human rights abuses came from every side of the conflict, including the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (ARFC), and the Civil Defense Forces (CDF). In 2000, the Sierra Leone Parliament passed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act to create the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was mandated to develop an impartial historical record of the conflict, respond to the needs of the victims, promote healing and reconciliation, address impunity, and prevent the recurrence of violence. The TRC finished its work in the spring of 2004, releasing its report and recommendations in November 2005.

What surprised me most was not the presence of international organizations or the visible markers of reconstruction, but the way Sierra Leoneans spoke about them. Recovery was not framed as something that had been completed or successfully achieved, but as something still actively debated. In conversations with students, activists, and officials, the language of "post-conflict" often felt inadequate, even misleading. The war may have ended over two decades ago, but its consequences continue to shape political priorities, economic opportunities, and relationships with foreign partners. often felt inadequate, even misleading. The war may have ended over two decades ago, but its consequences continue to shape political priorities, economic opportunities, and relationships with foreign partners.

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The tension between how Sierra Leone is described from the outside and how it is experienced within became a recurring theme throughout the trip. International narratives often emphasize progress, stability, and resilience, while local perspectives highlight inequality, unmet promises, and the uneven distribution of development. Rather than rejecting international involvement outright, many people we met spoke pragmatically about how to navigate it: how to leverage donor attention without losing agency, and how to preserve local priorities within global frameworks.

Being immersed in these conversations forced me to confront how easily well-intentioned policy language can obscure lived reality. Studying abroad in Sierra Leone did not provide clear answers about what effective reconstruction looks like, but it made clear that understanding recovery requires listening closely to those who are still living with its consequences.

I traveled to Sierra Leone with twelve graduate and undergraduate students from Seton Hall's School of Diplomacy and International Relations as part of the Sierra Leone Seminar led by Professor Fredline M'Cormack-Hale. For six weeks before departure, we studied post-war reconstruction through Sierra Leone's civil war and its aftermath, truth and reconciliation, liberal peacebuilding, and institutional reform. On paper, Sierra Leone is often described as a success story: a country that emerged from an eleven-year civil war and rebuilt its institutions with the support of international partners. Living there, even briefly, complicated that narrative in ways no syllabus ever could.

One of our first visits was to the Center for Memory and Reparations in Lungi, where we met Joseph Ben Kaifala, founder of the Memory Project. In theory, memory work is often discussed as symbolic, important, but secondary to economic growth or security. In practice, it felt foundational. The Center was not only a space for remembering violence; it was a space where narratives were actively being shaped, contested, and preserved. Memory in Sierra Leone is not passive. It is a political infrastructure.

That lesson deepened later that day on Bunce Island, one of the largest British slave castles on the Rice Coast of West Africa. Standing in the ruins, the distance between transatlantic slavery and modern international politics collapsed. Bunce Island is not only about the past; it is about how history structures present-day global inequality and whose suffering is deemed legible to the international community. As an American student of diplomacy, I was forced to confront how often international engagement begins after harm has already been done, and how selective that engagement can be.

Sierra Leone is frequently described as "post-conflict," but that phrase obscures the reality that political struggle does not end when guns fall silent. At the University of Sierra Leone, Fourah Bay College, where we attended a lecture and spoke with students, the discussion quickly turned from war legacies to unemployment, corruption, and generational frustration. The students we met were keenly aware of international perceptions of Sierra Leone and how those perceptions shape aid priorities, investment, and diplomatic attention.

Later that day, meeting with civil society organizations such as the Center

for Accountability and Rule of Law and the Budget Advocacy Network reinforced how essential local actors are in sustaining democratic norms. These organizations do not merely receive international support; they negotiate it, resist it, and reshape it to meet local needs. This challenged my earlier assumption that international institutions are the primary drivers of reform. In reality, they are only effective when grounded in local legitimacy.

Our visits to foreign missions, the Irish Embassy, Peace Corps Sierra Leone, and the British High Commission, revealed another layer of complexity. Each actor spoke passionately about partnership, sustainability, and local ownership, reflecting Sierra Leone's position of continued importance as a site of development cooperation, peacebuilding, and post-conflict governance. As a country often cited as a model of liberal peacebuilding, Sierra Leone remains closely engaged with international donors, multilateral institutions, and former colonial powers, particularly in the areas of governance reform, education, public health, and women's empowerment.

However, their mandates differed, sometimes sharply, reflecting broader geopolitical interests. Ireland emphasized long-term development aid and human security, the Peace Corps highlighted grassroots engagement and local communities, while the United Kingdom's role was shaped by its colonial legacy and ongoing diplomatic influence. These distinctions showed how development assistance is never neutral; it is shaped by donor priorities, domestic political pressures abroad, and unequal power dynamics rooted in history. At the same time, Sierra Leonean officials and civil society leaders demonstrated a clear awareness of this reality, engaging international partners strategically rather than passively. In this way, Sierra Leone occupies a complex space in international politics, as it is not merely a recipient of aid but an active negotiator within a global system that continues to shape its political and economic trajectory.

What struck me most was how transparent Sierra Leonean officials and civil society leaders were about this reality. Rather than viewing international involvement as inherently benevolent or exploitative, they treated it as something to be managed strategically. This reframed how I think about power in international relations: not as something exclusively held by donors or former colonial powers, but as something negotiated daily by states and communities navigating structural constraints.

Attending the High-Level Policy Dialogue Forum for International Women's Day was one of the most instructive moments of the trip. Panels featured government ministers, UN representatives, diplomats, and activists discussing women's political participation, education, and economic empowerment. Professor M'Cormack-Hale serves as president of the 50/50 Group, one of Sierra Leone's most prominent civil society organizations advocating for women's political representation. The 50/50 Group has played a significant role in increasing women's participation in governance through sustained advocacy for gender-inclusive policies. On the surface, it was a powerful display of commitment to gender equality, bringing together a wide range of actors who framed women's empowerment as central to Sierra Leone's democratic and developmental future.

Yet the forum also revealed the tension between representation and material change. Many speakers acknowledged that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without enforcement, funding, and cultural shifts. The presence of women in leadership, while crucial, does not automatically dismantle the structural barriers that limit access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity. This challenged a simplified version of feminist policy analysis I had previously held and emphasized the importance of intersectional, locally informed approaches.

A visit to Tacuhama Chimpanzee Sanctuary offered a different lens on sustainability and global responsibility. Founded to protect critically endangered chimpanzees, Tacugama operates at the intersection of conservation, education, and community engagement. What became clear is that environmental protection in Sierra Leone is inseparable from economic precarity. Illegal hunting and deforestation are not mere moral failures; they are survival strategies in a context of limited alternatives.

This underscored a broader geopolitical lesson: countries least responsible for climate change often bear its harshest consequences, while being asked to prioritize conservation over development. Seeing this dynamic firsthand made the abstract debate about climate justice impossible to ignore.

By the end of the trip, Sierra Leone no longer fit neatly into the categories I had learned, those being post-conflict, developing, and aid dependent. It was a place of political sophistication, cultural resilience, and unresolved struggle. More importantly, it forces me to confront the limitations of external analysis. You cannot understand governance by reading policy briefs alone, nor grasp peacebuilding without listening to those who live with its consequences.

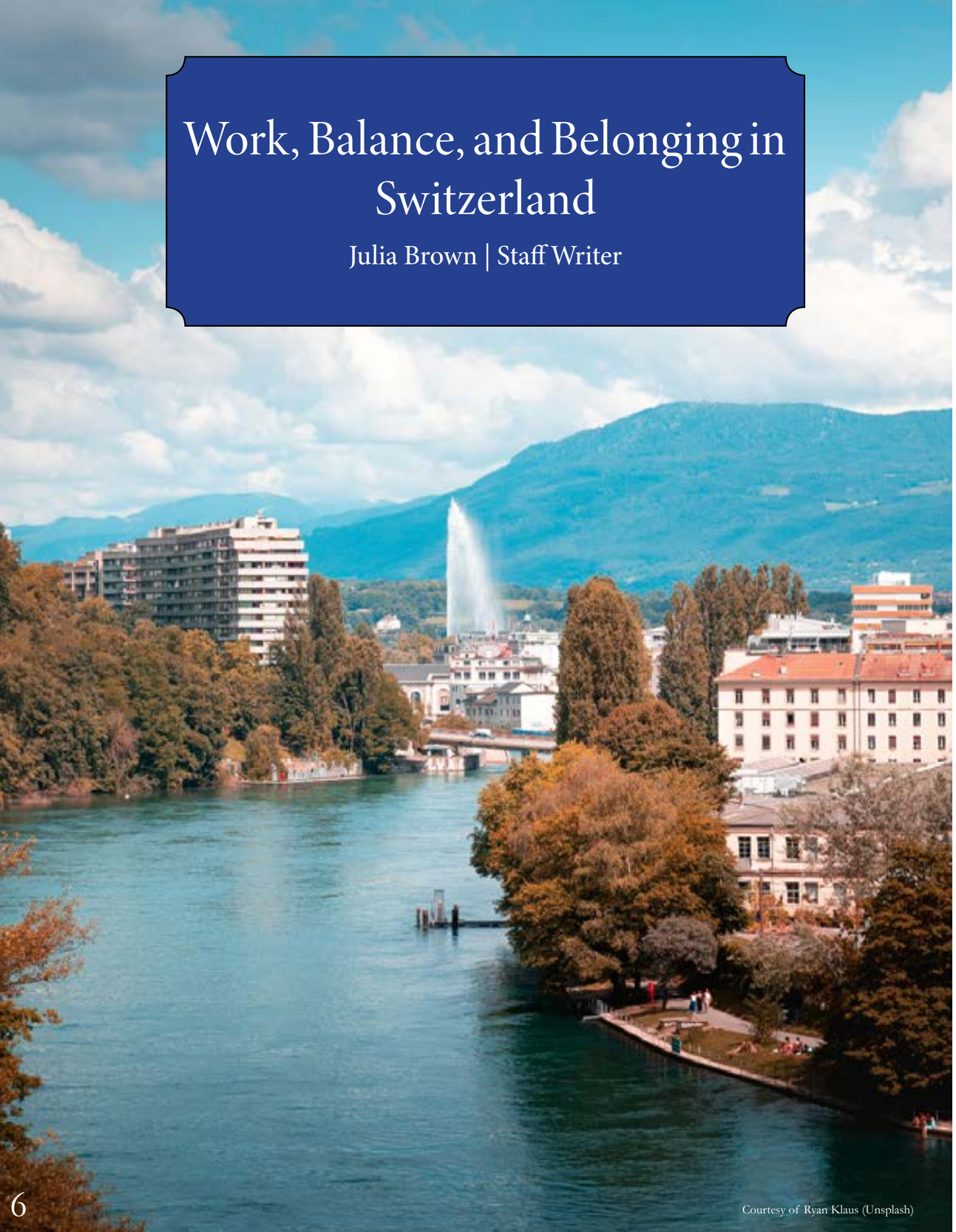
**You cannot understand governance by reading policy briefs alone, nor grasp peacebuilding without listening to those who live with its consequences.**

For students considering studying abroad, especially through the School of Diplomacy, the Sierra Leone Seminar offers something rare: an opportunity to engage with international politics not as theory, but as lived reality. It teaches humility about what we know, what we assume, and how easily narratives can flatten complexity.

Studying abroad did not make me an expert on Sierra Leone. Still, it did make me more attentive to power, memory, and responsibility, which are lessons that will shape how I approach diplomacy long after I leave the classroom.


Courtesy of Allison Bennett

*Contact Allison at allison.bennett@student.shu.edu*



# Work, Balance, and Belonging in Switzerland

Julia Brown | Staff Writer

Courtesy of Ryan Klaus (Unsplash)



At the beginning of my sophomore year at Seton Hall University, I decided I would find a way to live abroad during the Summer of 2025. As an only child with practically zero connections who is passionate about pursuing a career in conflict resolution, state-building, and gender-responsive development, I originally learned about the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) through an alumnus who did the fellowship years prior. However, I knew very little about the culture, my job expectations, and even where to find people my age before arriving. I hope that my experience can give you an idea of what is possible during your undergraduate career, as well as some travel tips and general advice.

I arrived in Geneva, Switzerland, after many failed methods of transportation out of Milan, Italy, at the end of June. I flew Gulf Air, a surprisingly inexpensive alternative to Swiss Air, and took a deep breath once the plane finally departed. As I was arriving on a Sunday, my place of work, the GCSP, was closed. They left my key and badge for the Picciotto Student Residence, housing they provided for me during my two-month stay, in a locker in Cornavin Station at the center of town. Communicating this to a French taxi driver outside of Geneva International Airport proved difficult despite a decade of lessons taken to learn the language. "Why didn't you take the tram so I could take a more expensive client?" He asked. Disoriented was an understatement. I would have ordered an Uber, but they are known for high wait times and even higher prices. Still, I paid $40 USD for a 3-mile trip. Geneva has a tram throughout the city, like the New York City Subway except more reliable, as well as a train to reach other cities. Luckily, students residing in Geneva can use the tram for free with proper documentation.

After retrieving my key and successfully using the tram to get off at a stop called "Nations," only three stops away, I forced my two suitcases into a tiny elevator to reach my fifth-floor studio apartment. My building was conveniently located directly across from the GCSP and Geneva Graduate Institute, a fifteen-minute walk from the United Nations, and a twenty-minute walk from the first museum I visited, the Musee Ariana, also free for students. The GCSP provided me with basics like bedding, kitchen necessities, and furniture. For laundry, I took the tram to a laundromat once a week. While in the U.S. I am known to rely on take-out, I quickly learned the importance of knowing how to cook. As a frame of reference, a McDonald's Happy Meal cost $14 USD, but I still highly recommend. COOP is the most expensive place to get your groceries, while Lidl and Aldi are cheaper. I found the cheese sections most intimidating as they were often the most expansive and all the labels were in French. I ended up buying the cheapest one I could find, labelled raclette, for 4 CHF labelled raclette. As soon as I unwrapped it, I knew it was a mistake. The smell was unbearable but as an unpaid intern, I could not waste it. I took a bite and immediately spit it out. Even as a cheese lover, I was not strong enough. I could not mask the smell either and had to run down the five flights of stairs to properly and permanently dispose of it. Even after coming back inside my now cheese-less apartment, the odor lingered.

Because Geneva directly borders France, most people speak French. It is not rare to encounter service workers, at cafes, on the trains, or at Gelatomania, who do not speak English at all. Geneva is an international city. Most college-aged people around in the summer are interns from other countries. Out of all the people I encountered, only one person my age was a Swiss native.

All the members of the Global Fellowship Initiative, the program I was participating in, had retired from their primary careers, including but not limited to: the U.S. Department of State, Doctors Without Borders, World Wildlife Fund, and various universities. It was not until my second week that I realized I needed to make friends. I met two girls around my age on the app Bumble BFF and one of them, an American preparing for graduate school in the U.K., was subletting from a Geneva Graduate Institute student in my building. The Geneva Graduate Institute student in my building. The Geneva Graduate Institute, a popular international affairs graduate school, is next door to the GCSP. It was in fact so popular that a recent Seton Hall School of Diplomacy graduate preparing for classes to start in the fall got coffee with me nearby.

With my newly acquired friends, I went to the Bain de Pacquis, a "private beach" with weekly yoga classes (in French, of course) and a popular restaurant for locals. A "private beach" in Switzerland is code for a pier in front of Lake Geneva and typically costs 2 CHF per day to enter. Fondue for one, at least here, is enough for two and only comes with cheese and bread – no vegetables. Bars require a 5 CHF deposit even if you don't want to keep the tab open, but you will always get it back if you ask before leaving.

I was lucky enough to have a fan in my room already, but nearly every day I saw someone leaving a store with a box containing a new one. To my knowledge, residents of Geneva are not allowed to have air conditioners, and if they are they must follow extremely strict rules. Clearly, when these rules were determined the climate was much milder as it was over 90 degrees the majority of my stay. I would sweat on my way to work, but I walked more than I did when I lived in New York City. I would call my mother or friends from home and walk around for an hour. The sun did not set until around 10PM, but I felt safe enough afterward to walk to the McDonald's twenty minutes away. Geneva is known for being one of the safest cities. When I lost my wallet, I was assured it would probably be turned in soon. "There's no reason it wouldn't be," said a police officer at Cornavin Station who was aware my credit cards were inside. While it wasn't turned in, which did not surprise me, I wonder if the $30 USD minimum wage was a contributing factor to that mentality.

When going to the Montreux Jazz Festival, I realized how expensive it is to leave Geneva, much like that $16 toll when driving from New Jersey into New York City. My friend purchased a

summer student travel pass for around $220 USD, and while I could not afford it, the SBB offers a tandem pass for $25 USD when traveling with her. We went on a hike in Kandersteg, the furthest east I went, and the difference between the French and German influence was obvious from the architecture and the accents and the body language of the people I encountered. When my mother came to visit, we took a trip to Annecy, France, only one hour from Geneva. Ironically, I found that more people spoke English here than Geneva, but the town was equally international with many people on vacation from the U.K.

I joined the United Nations Beach Club, for employees and interns to international organizations, and the Geneva Interns Association. When making plans, going to the lake is everyone's first suggestion. Arrival times were rarely prompt.

When passing the United Nations Headquarters, there would be a Pro-Palestine rally every weekday in front of the Broken Chair sculpture by Daniel Berset in support of the Ottawa Treaty. Ukraine withdrew from this treaty on June 30th, joining Poland, Finland, Estonia and Latvia, out of concern for Russian military assaults. At work, we often discussed the backsliding of international law and the rejection of it by the United States under the Trump Administration, which is credited as a major contributor. When you are the only American in the room, it can be difficult not to feel at fault. I have heard many arguments suggesting that if the American people were truly unsatisfied with their nation's foreign policy, they would revolt against it in some way. I would argue that not many people want to become martyrs. However, I do firmly believe that international cooperation is possible. I also firmly believe that the majority of people across the globe are in favor of international cooperation. The key is finding a way to serve mutual interests, but I worry that only those already in positions of power are capable of moving us in this direction.

I found Swiss politics difficult to understand. People were more concerned with their canton representatives as opposed to their federal government—a stark contrast from the United States. I encountered an equal number of individuals in support of and against President Trump. Individuals I met who were not involved in international relations thought that President Trump was loved by the American people, as "the majority voted for him." Voting seems to happen often in Switzerland, for elections, laws, and even enforcing petitions. While voter turnout is lower than in the United States, this is attributed to selective participation as voting occurs more frequently. In Swiss direct democracy, citizens can advocate for their causes individually and collect signatures to challenge any law they wish. I believe this may be a source of confusion, as the U.S. population is mostly reliant on our representatives to advocate for us.

**...the majority of people across the globe are in favor of international cooperation. The key is finding a way to serve mutual interests...**

In television shows I watched as a child, when two characters got into an argument it was common for a third character to jokingly refer to themselves as Switzerland. I believe Swiss neutrality is something we poorly understand. Dating back to 1815, Swiss political neutrality refers to their decision to refrain from involvement in armed conflict. However, they can still issue economic sanctions against warring states, like Russia, and support humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts.

My trip taught me a lot about how to navigate the world, as well as how the international community perceives Americans. As a Diplomacy student, this experience allowed me to practice my lessons in cross-cultural negotiation and see many of the different careers available to those committed to human rights. By speaking with experts on issues that matter to me and seeking guidance on what steps I should take following my graduation from Seton Hall, I am confident I am on the right path. My most important piece of advice is to seek out connection. Sending LinkedIn invitations is not enough. Every relationship you build is powerful and can bring the world closer together.

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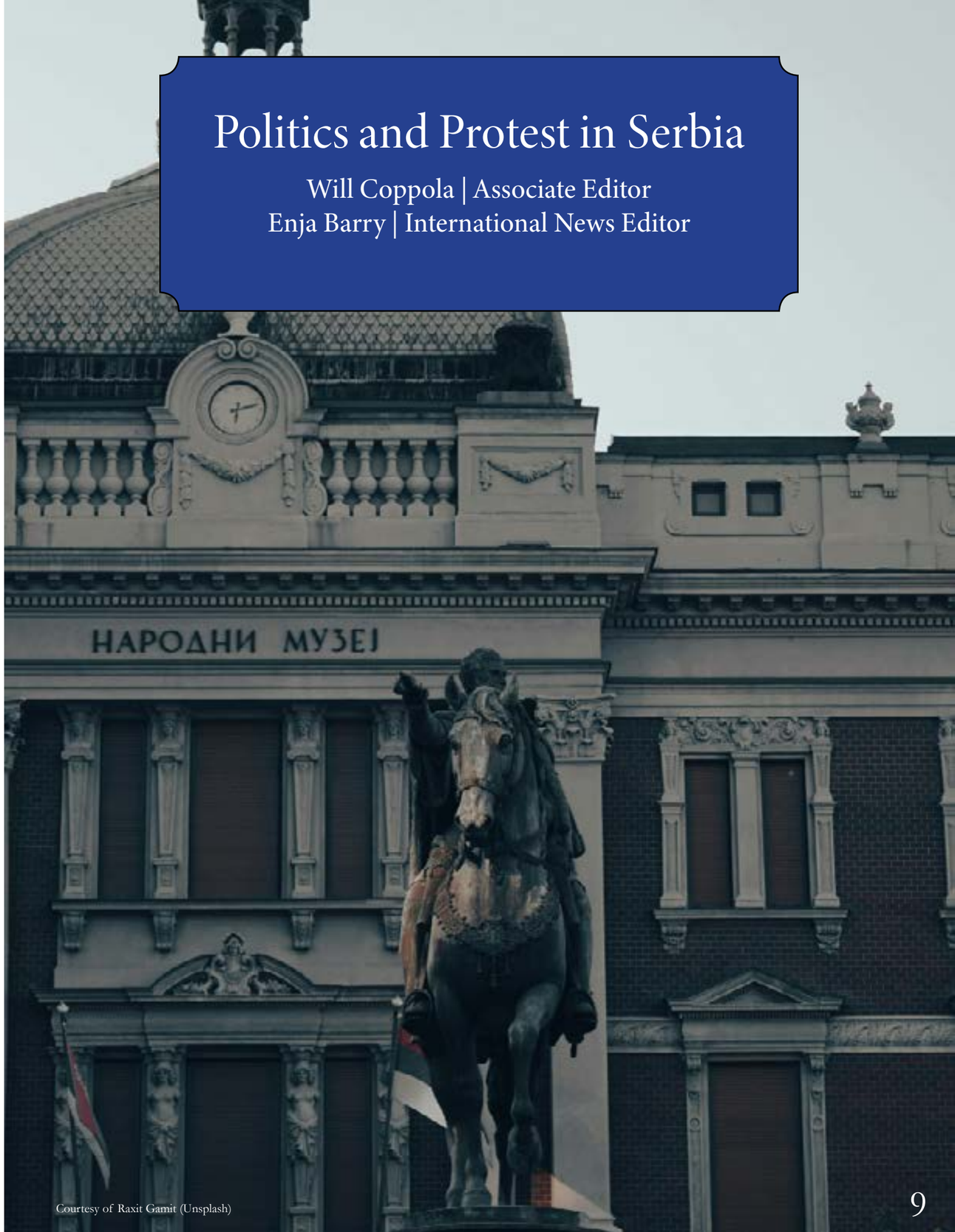
Courtesy of Julia Brown

*Contact Julia at julia.brown@student.shu.edu*



# Politics and Protest in Serbia

Will Coppola | Associate Editor
Enja Barry | International News Editor

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## Will's Experience

This summer, Enja Barry and I had the unique opportunity to visit Serbia as part of a spring embedded trip offered to us through Seton Hall. It was the end of our freshman year of college, and we were looking for an adventure to cap off such a transformative period. Going to Serbia gave us the chance to go on that adventure. Over the course of two weeks, we became immersed in a culture of history and remembrance, completely alien to what we had been accustomed to growing up in the U.S.

In both Belgrade and Novi Sad, the presence of history was omnipresent. No matter where you went, there were constant visual reminders of the many events that made up Serbia's tumultuous past. Each building, memorial, and graffiti tag served to weave a story that was ingrained into the collective consciousness of the Serbian people. Perhaps no event or topic loomed larger in this collective memory than the independence of the southern province of Kosovo. Even though over 90 percent of Kosovars are ethnic Albanians and fought a long and costly war for independence during the 1990s and early 2000s, many Serbians felt that the nation was an integral part of Serbia and saw its independence as betrayal. The Kosovars, on the other hand, believed that they deserved their own nation, just like all of the other successor states to Yugoslavia.

Travelers to Serbia are made aware of this sense of betrayal almost immediately. Not five minutes after our group left the airport, we passed under a bridge that had the phrase "KOSOVO IS SERBIA" spray-painted in striking black letters. More importantly, it was painted in English, a clear reminder to the world that the Serbians had not forgotten Kosovo, nor the wars of the 1990s and 2000s. This kind of political graffiti, whether in English or Serbian, was everywhere. You could not walk down a street without seeing the phrase "Kosovo je Serbia" (Kosovo is Serbia) or "Smrt NATO" (Death to NATO). Prominently displayed in Belgrade's Republic Square was a large banner declaring that "The Only Genocide in the Balkans was Against Serbians." Hanging on the walls of the Petrovaradin Fortress in the city of Novi Sad was an outline of Kosovo with the ever-present "Kosovo je Serbia" inside of it. In the middle of Belgrade, the bombed-out ruins of the Yugoslav military headquarters were intentionally kept as a permanent reminder of the violence visited upon the city three decades ago.

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This sense of a great historic wrong was inescapable in Serbia. Most conversations we had with Serbians tended to eventually veer towards Kosovo or the NATO bombings. Strikingly, these conversations never felt like rants or personal attacks towards us as Americans; rather, most people were just trying to tell a story that the world had never listened to. When we met young Serbians, the conversations would often begin with comparisons of each of our home countries, debates over who was the greatest basketball player of all time, and complaints about our college workloads. Inevitably, they would transition into debates over American foreign policy and what they saw as the United States' imperialist past. While I could not agree with their interpretation of history or some of their more conspiratorial views, their belief that Serbia was the world's perpetual underdog was undeniable. Many felt that NATO and the west had ganged up on Serbia, mainly because Serbia would not "submit" to the west. The breakup of Yugoslavia was often brought up, with the claim that both Bosnia and Croatia had sold themselves to the West in exchange for wealth and land. Russia was propped up by some as a rebel against this order and a champion of the underdogs, which was then used as a justification for the "US controlled" Ukraine. Other students we met viewed the NATO bombings in a negative light but still saw American democracy as something to look up to. They were proud of their protest movement and were eager to share their hopes for a democratic future with us and were eager to learn how we felt about the state of American democracy.

**They were proud of their protest movement and were eager to share their hopes...**

Just as present were the countless memorials to Serbian resistance in both World Wars. By chance, Enja and I stumbled into an entire neighborhood named after Gavrilo Princip, the Serbian nationalist whose assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand triggered World War I. The monuments to the Serbian struggle in World War II, on the other hand, were everywhere. Fascists from all over Europe had brutalized the Serbian people. In Novi Sad, we visited a haunting memorial to the Novi Sad Raid, a massacre of thousands of Jews, Serbs, Roma, and other dissenters by Hungarian fascists. We heard a personal account of the carnage from our professor's husband, whose grandfather was killed in the raid and whose grandmother narrowly escaped murder. But pride in resistance often went hand in hand with commerce of tragedy. All over Belgrade and Novi Sad were monuments to the heroic resistance fighters who fought against the Nazis. The towering Spomenik Sloboda (Freedom Monument) in the Fruska Gora national park commemorated both the brutality of the Nazi occupiers and the heroic efforts of the Serbian rebels. At the Museum of Yugoslavia, the ornate tomb of Josip Broz Tito, the communist resistance leader and father of post-war Yugoslavia, served to honor the leader of the resistance. Even when talking to younger people, we would hear incredibly detailed stories of grandfathers who fought off Italian fascists with shovels or took out Hungarian occupiers with hand grenades. There was a sense that this story of national resistance was intimately passed down from generation to generation.

No matter where you went or who you talked to, there was a constant sense of pride about how the great powers of the world, including the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Nazis, and the United States, had all attacked the Serbians, and the Serbians had endured. This sense of pride gave the Serbians an incredible love for their country, a love that was shared with us as we met and interacted with Serbians from all walks of life. But with this love came a deep feeling of anger, a feeling that those in charge were leading the great Serbian nation astray.

## Enja's Experience

As for my experience in Serbia, it was slightly different. I had stayed longer than the rest of the group, living with my family in Zemun, a part of the capital city of Belgrade. While there, I attended several protests with them, taking part in Serbia's largest protest movement in the small country's history. The unrest began shortly after a train canopy collapsed in Novi Sad on November 1, 2024, the second largest city in Serbia, located in the autonomous Vojvodina region. Balkan Insight states that 16 people were killed in total, and the event shocked the country and spawned mass protests beginning in Novi Sad and soon engulfing the entire state.

The Novi Sad train station, and specifically the canopy in the front of the building were renovated from 2021 to 2024, as a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as reported by the Associated Press. BRI projects have been frequent throughout the Balkan region and much of Eastern Europe, especially in Serbia. Protesters and critics have pointed to this reconstruction as the reason for the canopy collapse, as many claim that several corners had been cut and regulations not followed in pursuit of finishing the construction quickly and cheaply. The movement has further evolved to calling out widespread corruption within the Serbian government and pushing for elections to be held.

**The movement has further evolved to calling out widespread corruption...**

Demands from the movement have included a full investigation into the collapse, the reconstruction, and all officials involved, both Chinese and Serbian. The government has instead responded with increasing violence against the protesters, with over 100 protesters to date being injured from police violence against them, according to Al Jazeera and BBC News. In one instance, according to CNN, police used a sonic weapon against those participating in a silent vigil, causing a dangerous stampede to escape the sound. Additionally, a counter-protest movement has risen up, with suspicions from the public stating that many of them are paid by the government or even include police officers. A camp for these counter-protesters was constructed outside the House of the National Assembly, dubbed ćaciland.

On one of the days while sightseeing with my cousin, we accidentally crossed into ćaciland, and were quickly approached by the police officers. Thankfully, my cousin spoke Serbian and was able to get us out of the tense situation, yet it brought up questions of the authenticity of the counter-protesters' movement if they were the ones being specifically guarded by the police, instead of the protesters that they were actively attacking.

My cousin and her family have attended countless protests since the start of the movement yet are wary of posting their attendance on social media due to the potential governmental blowback. Despite this fear, they have continued to attend protests as well as a significant portion of Serbia's population. The sheer percentage of the country participating in the protests is staggering, with the largest occurring in the nation's capital, drawing in over 5 percent of the entire population at one single protest, with at least 325,000 people, according to BBC News.

Since the media is heavily censored and mostly state-controlled, organizing these protests happens primarily over social media, especially Instagram. Several pages, mainly the 'Samoorganizovana Grupa Studenata Blokada' page, have garnered almost a million followers, showing the widespread movement in a small country of just 6.5 million people. Protest dates, locations, and footage are spread through these pages in an effort to subvert the oppressive governmental control over traditional media. When my family and I went to the protests in Zemun, we relied on these pages to find out when the events were.

A key aspect of the protests and larger movement is its emphasis on non-violence. All those involved, including those at the demonstrations, are constantly reminded to stay peaceful in their actions. While participating in the protests, I heard the chants and rallies stating things like "strength through peace" and "pumpaj," roughly translating to "pump it up." They were also an incredibly family friendly event, with the Faculty of Agriculture students who were leading the protests bringing out different bugs and snakes for the young kids to see, almost like a petting zoo, along with giving out free food and merchandise.

Another aspect of the protests has been the student blockades. Beginning following the canopy collapse for the entire 2024-2025 academic year, almost every university within the country had been blockaded by the students, stopping all classes and only allowing students into the buildings, as reported by Sarajevo Times. Our study abroad group was actually allowed access to one of the blockaded buildings, where we met with some of the Serbian students, with us most likely being the only Americans allowed past the blockade, as we had to gain special approval from the student protesters.

**...likely being the only Americans allowed past the blockade, as we had to gain special approval...**


Courtesy of William Coppola and Benjamin Barry

Overall, my time in Serbia was certainly made wonderful by indulging myself in the local culture through the food, music, and art, but the most transformative part was seeing how a populist protest movement has motivated an entire population. While starting with the students, it has expanded to the lawyers' union going on strike in support of the protesters, to the farmers who have driven their tractors from around the country to protect the students from the police, and it has truly engulfed all aspects of society. Yet the energy of the people there is incredibly lively and excited for change. My relatives there have told me that almost nothing happens in Serbia without corruption, yet this time it seems that that saying may be flipped on its head, with the biggest protest movement in the nation's history.

*Contact Will at william.coppola@student.shu.edu*

*Contact Enja at benjamin.barry@student.shu.edu*



# Experiencing Swiss Culture Through Public Transport as a Student Studying Abroad

Daniel Hing | Staff Writer

Courtesy of Jack Ward (Unsplash)

Watches, chocolate, banking, cheese, and of course, breathtaking mountains and landscapes. These are some of the things that immediately come to mind when one thinks of Switzerland, not to mention how notoriously expensive it is to live there. For me, however, my favorite aspect about living in Switzerland was the ease at which I was able to get around. Having lived in car-dependent societies all my life, I had not realized how refreshing it could be to rely on a reliable public transportation system that made travelling effortless.

When I was picked up by a fellow student at Geneva Airport, we walked towards the bus terminal to head over to my accommodation. As I stood there with three large suitcases and a backpack, I questioned to myself whether it would not have been easier to take a taxi to the student residence, instead of standing around waiting for a bus that I assumed would not be designed with dedicated spaces to accommodate my luggage. This is a thought that I would never have today after living in Geneva for five months.

Before Switzerland, I had lived in three different countries, and all had poor public transportation systems. In these nations it would always be more efficient to just take a car, especially when leaving a major transit hub such as an airport. I had travelled around Europe before and was aware that quite a lot of European countries have excellent public transport systems, but I had never experienced anything as efficient as the public transport in Geneva.

The bus that picked us up at the airport was large, long, and conveniently designed with two standing sections at the front and middle with adequate space for my luggage. These spaces also allowed for people with bikes or wheelchairs to be easily accommodated, highlighting how inclusive the system was. My initial concern when taking the bus was having to pay a fare at the front of the bus then struggling my way through the aisle with my suitcases to find a place to stand or sit. However, Geneva's public transport operates on a trust system, meaning that there was not a need for me to pay the driver when boarding.

Because passengers do not pay upon entry, the bus was equipped with four doors, allowing passengers to easily hop on and off in a quick and efficient manner. One of these doors was conveniently located right near the standing section, making the process of boarding stress free. This was my first introduction to public transportation in Switzerland, and as I return to New Jersey, it is the single most aspect of Swiss culture that I will miss the most.

Anywhere that I needed to go in the city was easily reachable via public transport. My journey to and from school every day was by bus. If I had to go to the supermarket, I would take the bus. If I wanted to go to the city centre, I would take the bus. Public transport is frequent and efficient and there is really no need to own a car. Whether it be the bus, tram or even water taxi, there was almost nowhere in Geneva that you could not reach without using the public transportation system.

**Whether it be the bus, tram or even water taxi, there was almost nowhere in Geneva that you could not reach without using the public transportation system.**

I mentioned earlier that when I first used the bus at the airport, there was no need to pay the driver because of a trust-based system. This system is dependent on passengers either already having a local public transportation pass or purchasing a ticket in advance for individual rides. Ticket inspectors from Geneva's public transport authority, Transports Publics Genevois (TPG), will occasionally board buses or trams to check that everyone has a valid pass or ticket. Those who fail to provide one will face a hefty fine of 100 CHF, and a risk of being blacklisted if you are a repeat offender. This system was shocking to me at first, as I do not come from a society with such a high level of trust. But as I spent more time in Geneva and experienced more of how the society works, how rules are implemented and how people act, I can see how this works for Swiss people. I think this system really highlights the uniqueness of Swiss society, specifically the high level of trust placed on citizens to be honest and pay for the public transportation services. The implementation of such a system would likely be difficult for other societies to replicate, as such a high level of trust is not common in most societies around the world, even other developed European nations.

In terms of cost, TPG's services can be quite expensive, prices vary depending on the pass and can reach up to 500 CHF per month. For students, this can be a financial burden. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to not have to pay anything as public transport is free for Geneva residents under the age of 25. This made living in the city a lot manageable as I was able to save a considerable amount of money.

Transport in Geneva is great – the buses, the trams, you name it – and this is synonymous among all cities of Switzerland, from Geneva to Zurich to Lugano. However, the peak of Swiss transport undoubtedly has to be the train system. Once you use Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) for the first time, it will be hard to ever go back to any other train service. The Swiss have engineered a railway system that can take you anywhere across the country, regardless of the region. The population of Switzerland is scattered across the country in small towns, hence, most people that work in the major cities need consistent train service in and out of their towns and these trains make connectivity simple. It is also not to be underestimated how many people use these trains daily; it is evident that it is the preferred method of travel by residents and a way of life for Swiss people.

My first experience using a Swiss train was on a trip from Geneva to Zurich. I arrived at the platform at 9:30 am for my 9:35 am departure. It was here where I learned about the amazing punctuality of these trains. The train pulled in at 9:33 am and departed Geneva's Gare Cornavin station at exactly 9:35 am. While this does not sound extraordinary, what astonished me is that we were able to arrive and depart every stop on the way to Zurich exactly at the scheduled times indicated with no delays. The journey included stops at major cities, with large stations where hundreds of people boarded and disembarked within minutes and yet, there was no disruption to our scheduled times of arrival or departure.

The experience onboard the train was equally impressive. The train cars were clean, quiet and well designed with adequate storage space for passengers to store their luggage. You can tell that they were thoughtfully designed, as many trains come equipped with family zones with play areas, quiet zones, business zones and restaurants. The journeys are also extremely peaceful as you are met with the gorgeous scenery of the Swiss mountains and countryside going from region to region, making your trip not only efficient but enjoyable.

Public transportation in Switzerland provides a shared space for people from all walks of life. On buses, trams and trains, I often encountered professionals, families, students, and elderly individuals all using the same system in a well ordered and respectful manner. One of the most memorable observations was seeing highly skilled professionals such as lawyers, doctors and bankers utilizing public transportation over private cars. Many passengers used their commute to and from home to work on their laptops, or in the case of students, utilizing the time to do homework.

In contrast to the United States, where commuting typically involves driving, this time is often spent sitting in traffic for hours during rush hour. As a result, people are more likely to bring their work home, leaving less time for relaxation or spending time with their loved ones, ultimately decreasing their overall quality of life. Observing everyday interactions among people on the trains, buses and trams helped me to realize that Swiss public transportation is not only a way people can traverse the country, but also fosters a public environment that emphasizes equality and respect for everyone, enhancing quality of life.

While using the public transport, I did ask myself how environmentally friendly these trains were to use. I was shocked to learn that all "s SBB trains are powered entirely by electricity from renewable sources," according to Swiss federal authorities. This is quite an amazing accomplishment and should be praised. There are only a handful of states that can boast having a fully electrified railway system, and few have such an expansive network of rail lines as Switzerland. Compared to North American countries such as the United States and Canada where greenhouse gas emissions are incredibly high, it is welcoming to see societies that can reduce their carbon footprint via public transportation.

**...it is welcoming to see societies that can reduce their carbon footprint via public transportation.**

As I was in the uber home after arriving back in the United States, it dawned on me that this was the first time I had been in a car in five months. After using public transportation everyday during my time in Geneva, it is going to be strange for me to drive to school on a daily basis again. I became passionate about public transportation while living in Geneva, and plan to do more research on how such a great system can be implemented in other societies. I truly believe that efficient public transportation makes people's lives easier and can contribute to increased happiness and greater quality of life.

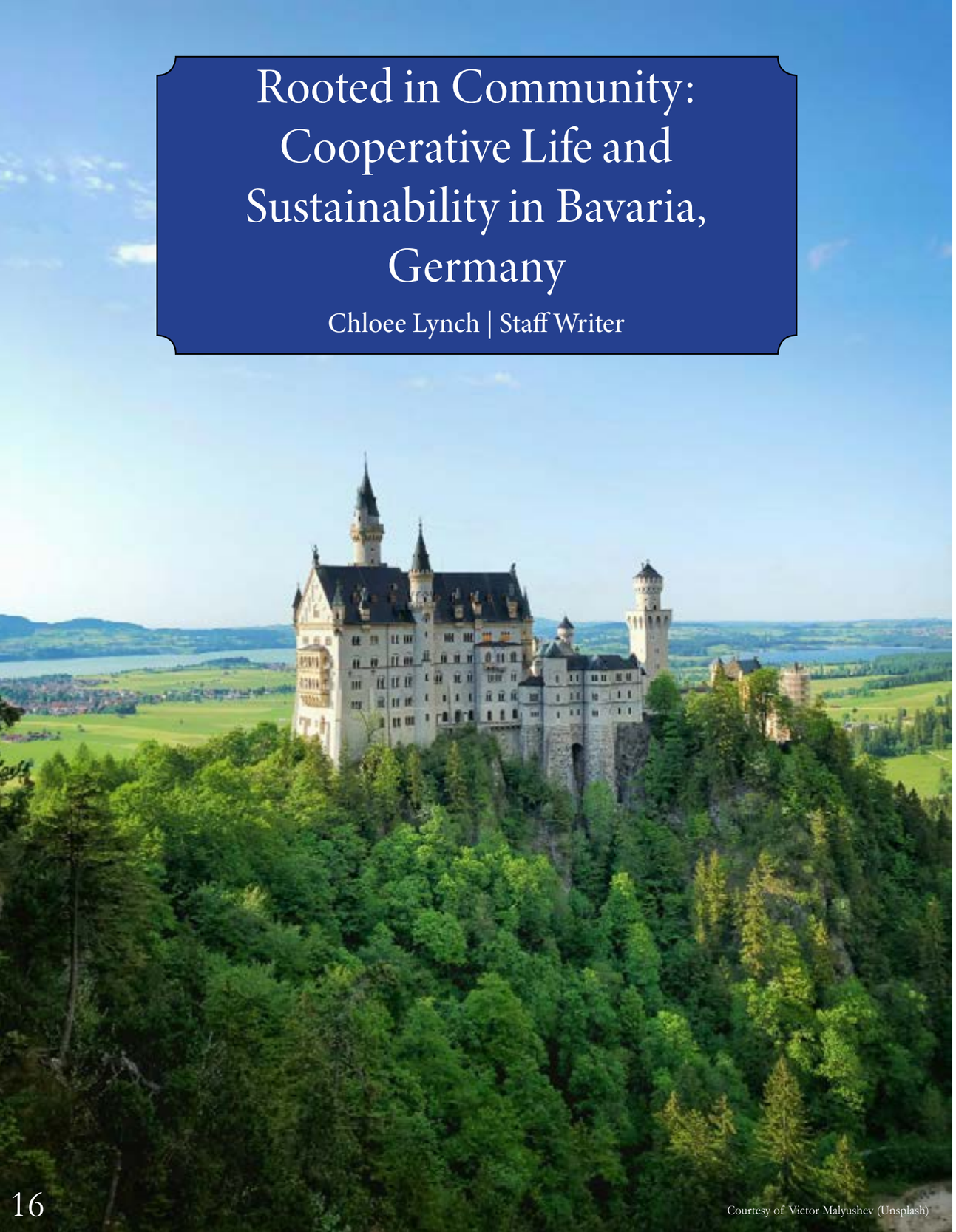
**...public transportation makes people's lives easier and can contribute to increased happiness and greater quality of life.**

Courtesy of Daniel Hing

*Contact Daniel at daniel.hing@student.shu.edu*

# Rooted in Community: Cooperative Life and Sustainability in Bavaria, Germany

Chloee Lynch | Staff Writer



Courtesy of Victor Malyushev (Unsplash)



When I entered Bavaria, the one phrase I was immediately introduced to was 'Grüß Gott,' and I was told that when I replied with 'Guten Morgen,' they instantly knew I was not Bavarian. Grüß Gott is a common greeting meaning 'God bless you' in German and is the standard hello in southern Germany. This introduction, however, is distinctly regional and traditional; saying this phrase in Berlin, for example, would be understood but seen as old-fashioned and southern. Germany has a rich past of its formation, coming together from over three hundred prince-states during the Holy Roman Empire (HRE), to the German Confederation in 1815, and eventually the proclamation of the German Empire in 1871, and so on. The Bavarian region was prominent throughout all the changes as one of the founding members of the Confederation and the third-largest German state. Bavaria has a distinct culture compared to the northern part of Germany, retaining its traditional and religious elements over time.

This past summer, I interned at KlosterGut Schlehdorf, a sustainable farm in Schlehdorf, Germany, located in the Oberbayern region (Upper Bavaria), which is deep in the Bavarian Alps. In the 12th century, Kloster Schlehdorf, meaning The Monastery of Schlehdorf, was established in Schlehdorf, influencing the lives of the village and all inhabitants. According to the Klosterbräu, the town was mainly built around the monastery, with the surrounding village serving the monastery's needs. The church was the center of the village throughout history, once being burnt down, but restored by the Dominican Missionary Sisters, who have cared for the Monastery since 1904. In 2012, the Dominican Missionary Sisters leased the land to KlosterGut to manage the agricultural properties and foster cooperative communities. The towns I visited surrounding Schlehdorf all echoed similar histories, with the town's Monasteries serving as a means of organizing the region and becoming a village center. My internship focused on two goals: researching agricultural sustainability techniques and investigating community-based living.

KlosterGut Schlehdorf has a Naturland Certification, a major international association for organic agriculture whose standards go far beyond EU organic rules for farming production and product. Throughout Germany, about 4,800 farms hold this award which stretches over 60 countries. KlosterGut's goals align with the Naturland values of a holistic, sustainable, and climate-protecting farming practices. In my experience, everyone I met and everything the farm did was steeped in sustainability. All the coffee grounds from the café went to the plants around the café for nutrients. Every weed torn up went into a massive composting feature with food scraps from all kitchens. Very little machinery was used by the workers on the actual vegetation, as they found they could collect more with hand tools and hand picking instead of the faster machine options, which would damage or miss produce. Naturland is a large participant in international projects focused on research, education, and sustainable development, collaborating numerous times with the European Union, food security initiatives, and the International Fair-Trade Charter. My internship gave me a better understanding of the climate and sustainability policy happening in the EU and partially of the UN. Classes discussing International Relations focus on policy that has already been taken to the top of the demand chain – at KlosterGut I was able to see the bigger picture of how these policies affect those on the ground. When reading about different objectives happening throughout the world it is easy to gloss over the numbers counting into the thousands, to forget the people at the very bottom who are initiating this change.

**...it is easy to gloss over the numbers counting into the thousands, to forget the people at the very bottom who are initiating this change.**

My living arrangements varied from what a typical study abroad student experiences. Most people who worked on the farm lived on the farm in a co-operative, I was placed in my own room with a shared kitchen outside my door. Cooperative living reminded me somewhat of college but there were distinct differences. First, the closest age to mine was a 27-year-old woman from Northern Germany who was there for two months who wanted to better connect with nature and have a break from the city. Besides her, I made friends with many people, Omas and Opas, whose grandkids would visit occasionally. Being across generations was not uncommon though due to Germany's history of cooperative living. Cooperative housing is a reemerging trend in Munich and the surrounding areas. Munich is known as one of the most expensive cities in Germany to live in and due to its extreme popularity, it is not surprising it is currently having a housing crisis. According to the Urban Institute Initiative, Munich's innovative policies are utilizing cooperative housing as an antidote to gentrification. The UNECE in #Housing2030, analyzing effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region, praises Munich's "Socially Just Land Use" in their analysis on effective uses of scarce resources, referring to land specifically for Munich, for affordable housing.

The UNECE focuses on how when Munich offers publicly held land they favor solidarity-based concepts such as cooperative housing corporations. The current split of city land is 50 percent social housing, 40 percent Konzeptioneller Mietwohnungsbau, and 10 percent of joint building ventures. "Konzeptioneller Mietwohnungsbau" roughly translates to conceptual rental housing development which refers to a holistic approach to the construction of rental properties that emphasize social aspects and sustainability. To compare, America's rental scene focuses on constructing individual units for people while Munich is focused on multi-faceted residential projects creating community. Additionally, Munich no longer sells their land but rather grants leaseholds

which allows the city to maintain its influence in urban development while utilizing all possible residential spaces.

I noticed that a major sustainable and community-based lifestyle was everyone's use of public transport. The farm provided me with a bike to get from one town to the next; the closest food market was in the next town, about three and a half miles away. However, along the roads, there was always a biking lane separated from the main road by a barrier, usually of grass. Everywhere I went, there were more bicycle racks than parking spots for cars. I saw more bicycles during my time than cars, and if I was unable to bike one day due to time, there was a public bus twice a day. Schlehdorf had just over one thousand people, and there were designated buses for the town. This was a stark contrast from my hometown, Hershey, PA, where the closest bus stop is estimated to take me over an hour and a half to walk there, along a highway. The major difference seemed to be that the towns were built around the inhabitants and fostered a close community; there were few to no barriers to why someone could not attend an event or festival, and there were multiple ways to get somewhere without depending on a car, gas money, or having a driver's license. In addition, all businesses throughout the community would hold free or low-cost events to further cement their community. Every Sunday, KlosterGut would have a community luncheon that I was tasked with helping prepare. Two other workers and I would cook a vegetarian meal open to all the workers and any members of the village to enjoy in the Sommerküche.

When preparing myself to live abroad in Germany, I was not aware of how different the Bavarian region would be from my expectations laid out by German classes. Being from Pennsylvania, it is no surprise I am familiar with the Pennsylvania Dutch, which is a blend of German and English cultures. Due to this influence, German from Middle School to High School was common in my area. I have been studying German since 8th grade, which inspired me to continue my education as a German minor at Seton Hall. In all these classes, Hochdeutsch is taught, which is the most common dialect in Germany. However, in Upper Bavaria, their dialect is known as Bairisch (Bavarian). The Language Closet explains how Bairisch is split into three main subdialects, further divided by areas, and is distinguished by grammatical differences, and Bavarian verbs featuring an optative. An optative sets the speaker's mood towards that action; for example, would be that an optative conveys the speaker's hopes that an action happens or not. In standard German, this grammatical mood does not exist; however, it can be found in languages like Albanian or Kazakh. When I first arrived in Munich I had to take one flight, two trains, and a bus to enter Schlehdorf, which I also made with no issues. However, when traveling, nothing goes perfectly according to plan, and I ended up on the wrong bus with three hikers who were curious why an American girl would want to spend her summer in Schlehdorf, Bavaria of all places. While speaking with them it was the first time, I heard Bavarian and I realized I was in for a time. In the city center of Munich, language was of little issue because major cities usually use standard German and English is commonly known. Even in smaller towns, I was able to get by due to everyone knowing standard German and just mixing in some Bavarian. I was unsure for a while if I was simply not understanding people or lacking vocabulary, until another volunteer on the farm was from a town about six hours north of the farm, and could not understand some words either, because they were unique to the Bavarian dialect.

My time abroad was different from what I expected, but I learned more than I ever could have in a classroom. I was challenged with a language barrier, different living styles, and knowing no one in the country. However, I would not trade my time in Schlehdorf, Germany, for a more conventional time abroad. This experience allowed me to learn about my language of study that would not have been uncovered and brought to my attention how easy and simple changes can lead to a more sustainable lifestyle. Additionally, I was able to connect with people across the world with whom I have stayed in contact to this day. On one train, I met an elderly lady who knew English from playing with the children of American military officers during the occupation after World War II. After talking, she gave me her home address so we could exchange letters even when I am back in the States. We have passed many letters between her and me, a person whom I would never have been able to connect with or learn from without going and living abroad.

Courtesy of Chloee Lynch

*Contact Chloee at chloee.lynch@student.shu.edu*




Courtesy of Seton Hall Students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