

Travel Report for Sten A. Olsson Foundation Scholarship 2020

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The thesis & reasons for going abroad

Our thesis focuses on challenges to AI adoption in small- and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Sweden, as well as solutions to these challenges. The purpose of the thesis is to identify challenges experienced by Swedish SMEs in adopting AI and, by interviewing companies and individuals with experience in AI implementation (mainly American ones), identifying recommendations on how to solve these challenges. The recommendations given by these American individuals and companies are then adapted to fit the context of the Swedish SMEs, i.e. to the Swedish business culture and to companies with fairly limited resources.

This is a qualitative study in which 10 interviews are held. Three interviews are held with Swedish AI aspirants, i.e. Swedish SMEs that have a wish to implement AI. The remaining six interviews are held with Swedish and American companies and individuals that have knowledge and experience of working with AI. These interviewees are referred to as experts, and it is mainly the American experts that we seek advice from, since we chose the San Francisco Bay area (and Silicon Valley in particular) as the focus for comparison.

We used the Sten A Olsson scholarship to travel to San Francisco to conduct the interviews with the experts. Even though the situation was peculiar due to COVID-19, we managed to hold all but one planned interviews face to face, which we are very grateful for.

Where we went and how we experienced the visit.

We started our journey with a stopover in New York where we spent a weekend. After that, we travelled to San Francisco where the interviews were held. We were lucky enough to have the interviews at different locations - both in the center of San Francisco, in Silicon Valley and at Stanford. Even though the cities were in the early stages of lockdown due to COVID-19, we feel like we got to experience the culture that the San Francisco Bay is known for. After conducting one of the interviews at Stanford, we were given a guided little tour on the campus by the interviewee who has studied there. It was very exciting to get to see the buildings, the museums and all of the sorority and fraternity houses and to hear the many stories about different buildings.

For most of our stay, we lived in the northern part of San Francisco. However, we made sure to experience the entire city both by walking a lot and by using the cable cars that the city is known for. We, of course, saw all of the main tourist attractions such as Alcatraz, the Golden Gate Bridge and the Painted ladies.

We are incredibly grateful for having been given the opportunity to actually go abroad and conduct the interviews face to face with the respondents. All of the people that we interviewed were very interesting to talk to, and we both feel that we left every single interview with a whole new level of inspiration. While it would have been possible to conduct the interviews online or via a phone call, it would not have been the same. We sincerely feel that by being there, seeing everything and actually meeting the people we interviewed, we got a deeper level of understanding of the culture that exists around San Francisco and Silicon Valley.

Answer the below questions for a short article (you can answer the first question individually)

What was the best part of going abroad?

The best part about going abroad was definitely to actually get to experience the culture in this very famous city. The fact that it is an area known for innovation, technology and creativity is something that almost everyone is aware of, but none of us expected that it would be so obvious once there. Also, being guided around Stanford was a memorable experience, not only because it was exciting to see the university from which so many successful entrepreneurs and scientists graduated, but also for the beautiful buildings and surroundings.

How did the time abroad contribute to your thesis?

The time abroad truly contributed to our thesis. One very important part of our thesis is to grasp the cultural differences between the San Francisco bay area and Sweden in order to be able to adapt the recommendations given by the American individuals and companies to a Swedish context. This would have been much trickier if we had not been given the chance to experience the San Francisco-area for real. Moreover, being able to hold the interviews face to face with the respondents allowed for a much more natural discussion which we believe contributed to a higher level of understanding and, in turn, to a higher level of quality of the thesis.