

Changes in My Career Path with the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Opportunity

There are moments in life that quietly redirect the entire trajectory of one's future. For me, that moment arrived in the winter of 2019, when I boarded a flight to Augsburg, Germany, as an exchange student at Hochschule Augsburg — Augsburg University of Applied Sciences. What made that journey possible was not merely ambition or curiosity, but the concrete financial support of the ASEM-DUO Fellowship. Without it, what became the most transformative chapter of my life would simply never have happened.

I was a student majoring in Civil and Environmental Engineering, a field I had chosen with a practical mindset — to understand how infrastructure shapes and sustains society. However, funding a semester abroad was a significant financial challenge. With no support from my parents, I had been saving money through part-time jobs, carefully setting aside every extra hour of work toward this goal. Even so, the costs of international living, tuition, and traveling were daunting. The ASEM-DUO Fellowship bridged that gap in a way nothing else could have. It did not merely fund a semester abroad; it funded the beginning of a new version of myself.

An Unexpected Academic Awakening: From Engineering to Entrepreneurial Thinking

To qualify for English-taught classes at Augsburg University of Applied Sciences, I enrolled in courses outside my engineering discipline — in the business and marketing field. What began as a practical compromise turned out to be one of the most formative decisions of my academic life. Through Fundamentals in Business, Energy Economics, and Cross-Cultural Management, I encountered ways of thinking my engineering curriculum had never offered: how to see problems as opportunities to create value, how infrastructure connects to global markets and sustainability, and how cultural systems shape the way people work and relate to one another.

Collectively, these courses gave me a new kind of literacy — the vocabulary and mindset to understand client relationships, business strategy, and the human logic behind design decisions. The entrepreneurial thinking I encountered felt not like a departure from engineering, but like its missing dimension. Those ideas took root in Augsburg and have continued to shape how I work ever since. My time in Germany also marked the beginning of a lasting commitment to learning German — driven not just by professional ambition, but by a genuine respect for the culture that had given me so much.

Travel as Education: Encountering the Human Dimension of Space

Beyond the classroom, my time in Germany was a continuous education in itself. I traveled extensively throughout small German towns and cities, absorbing the architectural rhythms, public spaces, and urban textures that differed so distinctly from the Korean cities I had grown up in. I also ventured into neighboring European countries — Italy, Switzerland, and Spain — each of which offered a unique lens through which to understand how built environments reflect and shape cultural identity.

Walking through the piazzas of Italian cities, the clean modernist lines of Swiss urban planning, or the vibrant streetscapes of Barcelona, I began to see cities not simply as engineering problems to be solved, but as living, breathing environments built for and around human beings. The question that began to occupy my mind shifted from 'How do we build structures?' to 'How do people experience the spaces in which they live?'

This shift was subtle but seismic. My engineering background had trained me to think about load-bearing capacity, material resistance, and functional efficiency. But exposure to the richly humanistic traditions of European cities expanded my framework entirely. I started thinking about behavior patterns, emotional responses to architecture, the sociology of public space, and the narratives embedded in urban design. My interest in Civil and Environmental Engineering was not diminishing — it was deepening and widening, now encompassing the human beings at the center of all built environments.

A New Academic Direction: Bridging Engineering and Architectural Design

When I returned to Korea, I carried this expanded perspective with me. I made the deliberate decision to pursue Architectural Design as a double major alongside Civil and Environmental Engineering. This was not a decision I had anticipated before going to Germany — it emerged directly from the transformations in my mind that my exchange experience had catalyzed.

Through Architectural Design, I immersed myself in the study of cities, buildings, and the complex relationships between people and space. I explored how architectural decisions influence human behavior, how spatial design shapes emotional experience, and how the intersection of functionality and aesthetics creates environments that can elevate or diminish quality of life. Studying alongside engineers and designers gave me a genuinely interdisciplinary education — one that positioned me at the intersection of technical rigor and humanistic imagination.

My Civil and Environmental Engineering background equipped me with deep knowledge of infrastructure systems, structural mechanics, and environmental engineering — the foundational logic of how the built world holds together. My Architectural Design studies enriched this technical foundation with design sensibility, cultural literacy, and a user-centered approach to space. Together, these two disciplines formed the basis of what I consider my core professional identity: a hybrid thinker who operates fluidly between the technical and the humanistic, between systems thinking and spatial storytelling.

This dual formation — which I might describe as the integration of STEM and the humanities — became the defining characteristic of my professional value. It is a type of literacy that is rare and increasingly necessary in a world where great spaces require both engineering precision and deep empathy for the people who inhabit them.

From Student to Professional: Building a Career at the Intersection of Space and Experience

The career I have built since returning from Germany is a direct expression of the vision that my exchange experience helped me articulate. I began by gaining hands-on experience at a startup specializing in spatial planning and consulting, where I was involved in projects that required both analytical rigor and creative spatial thinking. Working in a startup environment also reinforced the entrepreneurial mindset I had begun developing through my business coursework in Augsburg — I learned to operate with agility, to take ownership of projects, and to think resourcefully in the face of ambiguity.

I subsequently moved into a role at one of South Korea's leading integrated advertising agencies where I work as a planner specializing in customer experience spaces. My work spans both online and offline environments, encompassing the full spectrum of how brands communicate with their audiences through space, design, and experiential storytelling. In this role, I apply everything I have learned: the engineering knowledge to understand structural and

technical constraints, the architectural sensibility to design spaces that create meaningful human experiences, and the business acumen to understand the strategic objectives that drive each project.

As I approach my third year in this role, I am struck by how coherently my career trajectory has developed — and how directly it traces back to the transformative experience that the ASEM-DUO Fellowship made possible. The scholarship did not simply fund a semester of coursework; it funded a fundamental reorientation of my intellectual and professional identity. It gave me the opportunity to encounter a wider world, to see how different cultures inhabit space differently, and to discover that my deepest professional calling lay at the intersection of engineering, design, and human experience.

Looking Ahead: Gratitude and the Next Chapter

The story that began in Augsburg in 2019 is far from finished. As I approach my third year as a customer experience space planner, I find myself drawn back to Germany — the country that first opened my eyes to a life lived at the intersection of disciplines, cultures, and ideas. I am preparing to apply for the IMES (Innovation Management, Entrepreneurship and Sustainability) program at Technische Universität Berlin, a program that sits precisely at the intersection of the passions my ASEM-DUO experience first awakened: entrepreneurial thinking, sustainable innovation, and interdisciplinary project leadership. Returning to Germany is not simply a career move — it is a return to the place where I first discovered who I wanted to become, and a commitment to continuing that journey with greater depth and ambition.

Reflecting on everything — from saving up through part-time jobs to standing where I am today — I feel an immense sense of gratitude toward the ASEM-DUO Fellowship. It fundamentally redirected my career, expanded my intellectual horizons, and gave me a vision of the professional I wanted to become. I carry that opportunity with me every day, and I intend to honor it by continuing to grow — on a global stage.

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