

Podcast - How to Hochschule



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How to Spend 24 Hours at HSRW - Part II

00:00:00: Stephan Hanf: Welcome to How to Hochschule, our audio guide about tackling life and work at Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences, one of the most international universities in Germany. So grab a hot cup of joe, put on your comfiest headphones and join us as we explore the world of Hochschule Rhein-Waal.

00:00:42: Stephan Hanf: Welcome, once again. As we inch towards the finale of our first season, we journey forward with our enthralling series 24 Hours at Hochschule Rhein-Waal. Over this quartet of episodes, we are threading through the pulsing veins of Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences with every stroke of the clock painting a new vista.

00:01:04: Stephan Hanf: And now we venture into part two, first light. So as the sun casts long shadows heralding the day, we invite you to delve deeper with me, your host, Stephan Hanf, into the daylight odysseys of Hochschule Rhein Waal. Today, our tale begins with the tender rays of dawn caressing the serene facade of HSRW in Kamp-Lintfort.

00:01:27: Stephan Hanf: In our first story, it's not only about bustling corridors and a hum of earnest discussions, it's about the awakening of a microcosm teeming with ideas and endeavors. The morning at HSRW is a blank canvas, waiting for the brushstrokes of our very first guest.

00:01:42: Dr. Margarita Spirova: My name is Margarita Spirova,

00:01:45: Stephan Hanf: who gracefully ushers us into the life and mind of a lecturer.

00:01:48: Stephan Hanf: With her, we delve into a world where every lecture hall resonates with the echoes of empowerment, especially for women amidst the realms of STEM.

00:01:56: Dr. Margarita Spirova: I had professor position for database management for four years here in University of Applied Science Rhine-Waal, but this position was not in your track.

00:02:11: Dr. Margarita Spirova: And now, uh, this was, uh, till end of August, and now I have sabbatical.

00:02:20: Stephan Hanf: How was the difference between working in a firm and working at a university?

00:02:25: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Ah, it is very different, of course. At a firm... In some sense after a few years, the task, the problems are standard in some sense for me. Okay. I understand in some sense, of course there are a noting there, development, but this is not in this volume, like in the At the university.

00:02:56: Stephan Hanf: Yes. Yes.

00:02:57: Dr. Margarita Spirova: And the university, to prepare such a course, I need to study really a big volume of literature, to decide to see similar courses, to decide. So what I can, um, include in this course and, uh, a big difference is the academical, uh, freedom. Uh, yes, of course. Uh, in firms, all depends on the customers.

00:03:27: Stephan Hanf: And what I think also interesting in your field, the technology 10 years ago, it's moving so, so fast. And even now, if I just look back like half a year before like AI, where like, uh, in the broad public, I think probably you heard about it many years ago, because it's not that new, but the possibilities are getting more broader, I would say.

00:03:52: Stephan Hanf: Is that something you also apply, like when something in the field, like computer science, is changing to adapt that to your courses?

00:04:00: Dr. Margarita Spirova: In computer science, for example, artificial intelligence, this is the developments for the, uh, second world war. Yes. Turing. Turing. Yes, yes. Turing. Now today what is very quickly that this is the power of computers.

00:04:19: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Yeah. This is in some sense for computer science, software development. And now they can be realized, of course. Where the, the computer are always power and power. Uh, we do not have exactly information. For example, Search in Google. How happens this? Not only in Google, in all search machine. This is black box or artificial intelligence.

00:04:49: Dr. Margarita Spirova: How function the algorithms? There are some logic to function, but this is in the company. This know only the people from the company. And especially when we have to teach this, we teach the basic principles of this thing. And I think the, um, now for the, this should be also, uh, for the, um, uh, research and society is very important to have some regulation.

00:05:24: Dr. Margarita Spirova: that we know how function the algorithms that companies offer us. And this can be made by a researcher. And, uh, to researcher to be... This is a new field of computer science research. To be like bridge between society and the companies. And also between, uh, society and the science. To explain to... society.

00:05:54: Dr. Margarita Spirova: What is this? How function? Is this dangerous? When can, when can be this dangerous? What should be made that we are protected from these things? This is completely new now today. There are no such specialists and in my personal research plan, I would like to develop in this direction.

00:06:20: Stephan Hanf: So that it's more knowledge.

00:06:21: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Yes, public knowledge.

00:06:23: Dr. Margarita Spirova: What happens? Because now today, artificial intelligence, this is in some sense only negative in media. Of course, there are many problems, especially if this used from dictator states. But this depends from the society, from the, that we can protect from these things. Otherwise, this is incredible tool to improve our life and we, we have to use this for the medicine.

00:06:57: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Mm, for improving the life, for teaching, for the environment. We not, this is not only this negative sides of Artificial Intelligence, of course this is also one side.

00:07:12: Stephan Hanf: What you do here is, if I could understand correctly, you can explain it until a certain point to the students, but after that, then you can guess how they, for example, the Google search engine works or

00:07:23: Dr. Margarita Spirova: this is because to study how, for example, we have the Google, the search machine, Google, this is the only search machine that published many years ago, the algorithm, how to, this is the so called, uh, uh, page ranking.

00:07:42: Dr. Margarita Spirova: This is the founder named by founder of, uh, one of the founders, Larry Page. And now today, uh, Google say we do not use more this algorithm.

00:07:54: Stephan Hanf: That's the reason why they publish it.

00:07:56: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Datawarp machines do not publish anything. And I had a course, a search engine machine, SEO. And firstly, we study the foundation, there are some logic to make this a ranking, but the companies do not like to say how exactly this function because this is possible to optimize.

00:08:24: Dr. Margarita Spirova: For example, you have online shop and you can optimize if you know the algorithms, you So we can optimize that if somebody search something firstly on the first page come your online shop. This is a big branch in optimization of such websites, but we do not really know the algorithms that are used by search engine, uh, machines.

00:08:56: Dr. Margarita Spirova: The question is how to learn the students. They are fundamental principles.

00:09:03: Stephan Hanf: Uh, I mean, you have first semester students as well, right? So you even have to explain to them what the algorithm is.

00:09:09: Dr. Margarita Spirova: You can think, uh, cooking recipe. Yes. Firstly, you take eggs. Three eggs after this, you take the, you mix this. While this is also typical operator, while the color of the mixes here for the color, we have to give a number.

00:09:35: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Mm-Hmm, . What? What should be the colour? Mix well, or repeat some operation until. Uh, something happened. Uh, this, this is algorithm.

00:09:48: Stephan Hanf: Yeah. Until you have a end. And the end is like a cake or, yes.

00:09:52: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Uh, yes. Yes. Yeah. Oh, bake this until the temperature is 200. Uh, yeah. Or until the time is 30 minutes.

00:10:06: Stephan Hanf: Yes. So I think it's more or less agreed that mathematics is like the language of the universe, right?

00:10:12: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Yes, exactly. Many people consider mathematics as tools for the technique. Yes. This is right, but this is not the main side of the mathematics. You are right. This is, this is like universal language. Yes. My opinion is We do not need, uh, for example, in the, in the first year in the school, the children learn to calculate.

00:10:45: Dr. Margarita Spirova: This is, we need only the base of this, how to add, how to subtract, how to multiply, but to, to exercise, exercise Uh, one and seventeen multiplied it with, uh, this is, I think it is not necessary.

00:11:07: Stephan Hanf: That is you just, theoretical side of it.

00:11:09: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Yes. Much more interesting and I think also suitable that, uh, the so called graphs.

00:11:17: Dr. Margarita Spirova: This is, uh, mathematical structure that, uh, used also in the computer science. In the first year in the school, this can be learned. Even they, uh, they are experiments, and they are really good. In, instead to, um, to calculate, to develop the logical thinking, they should know what this means, but to have experience, to learn, a few years, this is really in the first, maybe, you do not remember, I also do not remember this exactly, but in the first years in the school, the children learn only calculate, and maybe, uh, not practical.

00:12:05: Dr. Margarita Spirova: I hate mathematics. This is not mathematics, this is calculation.

00:12:11: Stephan Hanf: What the machine actually is doing.

00:12:12: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Yes. And now today, it is not necessary to.

00:12:16: Stephan Hanf: Might be the same for writing code in the future? That it's a little bit the same, but you have to understand how to write code, but you don't have to write code?

00:12:23: Dr. Margarita Spirova: This is how to write. Now today there is artificial intelligence that helps us to write. That task to write code, this should be, I do not say easier, uh, but much suitable for the, uh, because they are very strong, uh, for example, they are libraries. Many problems, we can use these problems, they are codes, and we only use this instead to write.

00:13:00: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Artificial intelligence can say you for some problem, this is the most suitable language. And I know programmers that use this too, but I think that the job of programmers will be more interesting because this help of artificial intelligence and we can more think about the logical structure. Because when I was in the school, when one write code, only comma, this was the reason that the computer say It's all wrong.

00:13:44: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Uh, it is all. And then to, uh, the problem was to, to find if this is logical a mistake. If this is syntax mistake and the language is, are not today much useful in this, we do not think about syntax mistakes, but nevertheless, this is the problem. The syntax is problem, and very often the program does not function and the computer, uh, seeks the why, cannot see, ask other people to see the problem at the end.

00:14:26: Dr. Margarita Spirova: This can be syntax problem. Using artificial intelligence, uh, we do not have such problems, only to think about the logical structure, the idea of how we can solve the problem. Uh, and the other side is that the artificial intelligence, this is also codes. This should be written by programmer. In this sense, the job for this is my opinion.

00:14:57: Dr. Margarita Spirova: I don't know what happened in 10 years. It should be very interesting, but now today, and this is more possibilities for not only for IT people, but also now today, people from all areas need to have some, I do not say computer competence, coding competence, data competence. But they do not need to be a programmer.

00:15:29: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Using artificial intelligence, they can, uh, can use the knowledge they have. Because the job of programmer in the last year, this is in all possible area of our life. And the programmer, they do not know. all this world. They have to contact with people from this area and to write the codes and using artificial intelligence, the people from this area, uh, they can, in some sense, also write

00:16:13: Dr. Margarita Spirova: codes.

00:16:14: Stephan Hanf: It's just developing. These things are not clear yet, right? It's something that's in development.

00:16:19: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Of course not clear. Nobody, nobody know what happens tomorrow. This is not only society development or, development of the

science, the politics, wars, this changed our world. And now, extremely many money will be spent for military, not for education, not for research.

00:16:49: Dr. Margarita Spirova: This change also, in some sense, the development. Yeah. So for people who are also interested in, in this job, being a professor, especially women from outside of Germany, what is like the one thing in your career until now you learned the main lesson for people who were, who are in a similar, not similar, but in a position that they are also female, they're from outside of, Germany and they're interested in going into academia or being a professor, even in contrast to many country in Germany, this is not the case.

00:17:25: Dr. Margarita Spirova: One has postdoc position at university. And after this, in this university, one can uh, uh, became professor. This is not the case in Germany. The Germany every professor position will be announced and applicants are varied, the number of applicants and to have invitation, this is, uh, this is even good result.

00:17:56: Dr. Margarita Spirova: To have invitation. How many people, this is different, but usually five, six people. Mm-Hmm. Have invitation. Uh, the commission is, uh, 10, uh, 12 people after this days recession, uh, and after this other commission and so on. This is a very long process. Hmm. And to have professor position in Germany from, uh, outside, it is, uh, really very difficult.

00:18:31: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Uh, even, this is in law. Uh, that one has to have three years, five years experience, just a moment, three years as postdocs and two years in the industry. This is for this Hochschule professorship. Habilitation is necessary and without this condition.

00:18:59: Stephan Hanf: We won't get the position.

00:19:00: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Yes. But even if one has this, it is not so easy.

00:19:06: Dr. Margarita Spirova: It is not so easy, but I think if one is very driven, a few years post doc position in Germany, this is really good to know the system, to know here the people from the community, the language, the language also. I think my decision was to invest this year. I made also habilitation. I had six years as a postdoc and also habilitation and a few years in industry.

00:19:44: Dr. Margarita Spirova: I, I invest this to have a professor position, but one has to decide, because, uh, in Germany, uh, with, uh, doctor title after PhD, it is possible to have a really very good position in the industry, um, to make career, uh, with sometimes salaries are much higher than professors, especially in, uh, IT, in mathematics.

00:20:17: Dr. Margarita Spirova: It is important that to decide what I want to make career in the industry, to have very high position, uh, or to, uh, professor position and to make research.

00:20:33: Stephan Hanf: Yes. Yes. But to get to this place isn't that easy? That's, that's a big problem.

00:20:38: Dr. Margarita Spirova: My position was at this university, uh, uh, Rhine-Waal. I don't know, maybe because this is a relatively young university.

00:20:47: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Uh, there are many such position that are not tenure track. like my position, only for a few years. Yes, yes, yes. This is also stressful, of course.

00:20:59: Stephan Hanf: Of course, because then you have to...

00:21:00: Dr. Margarita Spirova: Yeah, have to apply. Sometimes it is possible to be extended, but this is difficult. This do not depend only from the faculty or university.

00:21:15: Dr. Margarita Spirova: It is dependent also from the province. But nevertheless, I think if one is very driven and want to make this, can find such position. And this is firstly, academical freedom, the work with young intelligent people. This is a really. I like this .

00:21:43: Stephan Hanf: As the sun climbs higher, we rendezvous back in Kleve. As you might know from last episode, especially from the episode called How to Innovate the FabLab isn't the only lab you can find on campus. Don't be surprised when you walk through the halls of Hochschule Rhein-Waal that you greet one to a whole group of people in lab coats.

00:22:17: Stephan Hanf: And we grabbed one of these people out of the laboratory and into our mobile studio.

00:22:22: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: So my name is Viraj. I come from India. And I'm working here as a postdoc.

00:22:29: Stephan Hanf: His narrative is a testament to the rentless spirit of inquiry that fuels the heart of HSRW.

00:22:36: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: So I did my engineering in biotechnology. Where you have to have a grasp over both chemistry and biology, not as per maths or physics, which I had to do, but you can get by, you can pass by and you can focus on other things.

00:22:57: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Yeah, that's what I did. I did my engineering in biotechnology. First year of engineering is same for all branches. So either you be from mechanical computer and so you go through first year. And you always have option to change your field. So you can be mechanical, computer science expert, or electrical.

00:23:19: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: That's the main motive behind it. But yeah, so you have those courses which are generally associated with computer science. So we had programming, language, database management, and so on. Not on the deep level, but just introduction. And on the basis of that, I started working in IT, like cliché, working in the IT sector.

00:23:43: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: I worked there for six or eight months. So I was working as a technical support engineer. I was providing technical support for job

seeking website in India. So like you have here, Indeed, StepStone, and you have people on backend who are working to make sure that if you go, if you do search on StepStone, you get what you're looking for.

00:24:09: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: So that was my main job to look for bugs, just technical support of the website. So you have to also have. lot of good conversation skills so you can interact with people and so on. And yeah, I wouldn't say it was biotechnology, but yeah, it's, it was what I got. And I think that was the reason that I, yeah, I stayed there for six to eight months.

00:24:35: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: And then I thought, okay, I need to do something else. And it's not what I want to do. Then I, yeah, I looked for options around Australia, New Zealand, US. and England were my first choices because those countries are easy for me speaking English. Those countries which I mentioned, they were a little bit expensive.

00:25:03: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Because you have to pay, I don't know, thousands of dollars to study there. And, uh, yeah, my parents said, no, uh, we cannot support that. And, uh, one of my friends, she used to study or she found in Ulm university. Uh, she'd studied microbiology there and she told me, okay, why don't you look for Germany, you know, I didn't have any idea what I would find in Germany, especially in terms of language.

00:25:32: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: I don't know why I had this thing in my head that all Germans will be speaking English. I have no idea. No one had told me that, but she told me, uh, you might have to learn a little bit. I learned A1 in India, which I later found out that it's not what Germans speak. That's totally different what you learn in India, German, the type of German I would learn there.

00:25:54: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Obviously you get few words, but, uh, type of conversation what you have in German, it's different. It's not A to, uh, B translation from English. So you have different thought process and you have to think in German when speaking German. I don't know. It was just a standard thing in my mind that Germans will be speaking English.

00:26:14: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: I have no idea because, uh, you grow up watching Hollywood movies and you never think that, you just think that English is probably standard, uh, throughout the world. Because in India, it is, unless you speak, just have normal conversation. If you're dealing formally to someone or even people from other parts of the country, you speak English because that's the common linking language, I would say.

00:26:42: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Yeah. So that was also my thought process that, okay, if I go. to Germany and I don't know their language. They don't know my language. So English would be somehow the common connecting link. And also it's a standard requirement. Initially, I looked for, obviously from my field, uh, biotechnology where I can get biotechnology or microbiology and so on.

00:27:08: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: And, uh, yeah, I saw bionics. I was like, what is it? Because. There was one university or two universities in whole Germany offering this course. One was in RWTH Aachen at that time and one was Hochschule Rhein-

Waal. I was like, what is it? I didn't have any idea how good Hochschule will be and so on. So I went through different blogs and I saw that, okay, in Germany you have certain standard

00:27:43: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: of university, whether you go to one Hochschule or any university, you should expect that they will be at certain level, which is good. So I said, okay, another friend of mine, he also got admitted here. And, uh, so. So yeah, I landed here, I applied, I was accepted, and then I went to the usual visa process and took three, four months and I got my visa in September, 2013.

00:28:14: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: That was the first time I actually traveled outside of India. I had some reservations like how it will be, how will I manage and so on. Yeah, as I said, like, I didn't have, I don't know, fear to go out because I was confident. Okay, if I can speak English and I have some money with me and I can go by around the world.

00:28:35: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: I don't know. That's what I had in my mind. And I did that. And I came to Germany. And landed in Emmerich, I mean, I, because at that time it was like, it was really hard to get student dorms here. I applied, I think three or four weeks before, and I was put on the list, which had 100, 200 students before me. I tried to look for student apartment.

00:29:00: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: It was also hard because I don't know, uh, I was writing from India on Facebook. You get the invitation and the first question guy asked, do you have a room for me? And I'm going, and, uh, So I didn't get a lot of replies. Some replies I got and they were like, okay, uh, we don't have place and so on. So I contacted, uh, international center in university at that time.

00:29:26: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: So they were helping students to get apartments because that time it was an issue because Cleve was not ready to accept a lot of people coming in. And. Coming from Delhi or like Ghaziabad and you land in Emmerich, and I was like, wow, where did I come? Like, you know, at seven o'clock it was dead. It was dark in September.

00:29:48: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: It always already started to, the days getting shorter and it was dark seven o'clock. I thought, okay, I will probably rest and go out, just roam around the city. Everything was closed. That was like a shock for me. I called the guys who picked me up from the airport and I was like, I don't know what to do.

00:30:10: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Can I get food here somewhere? Luckily there was a McDonald's and I went there, had some food and yeah, then it was. Uh, big learning curve to find out which bus to take to be to the, to come back, come to the university because it was also Emmerich like part of Emmerich, which is not in the city center and you get away from it.

00:30:37: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Then you have even less connections and, uh, yeah, it was nice. I had a few students also from a university. Who also came to the same apartment and yeah, I made friends with them. One of them is still my friend. Nice guy. Yeah. So that way it was easier to have people around because we didn't know anyone there.

00:31:05: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: And to come to Kleve every day, especially in the evening, it was a risk that you miss your bus. And, uh, we had no idea what we would do. Walk 10 kilometers or, uh, exams. I was, uh, really surprised that you can, you have to register for your exams. I missed, first semester I missed two or three exams because in India it's a standard procedure if you're in first semester.

00:31:32: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: You have to give all your exams for first semester in first semester. If you do it on second in second semester that means you have failed in first semester and you have to repeat in second semester but here it's not the case and this I found out after one of my friend told me that why didn't you register for that exam you have to do it and deadline was already over and that way also as I already mentioned how the questions are what you expect from them wasn't expecting it at least at the master's level.

00:32:05: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: I was expecting it to be more focused. But it was really varied, that you have different subjects, but fundamentals in the sense that just skimming through it, not going deep, which I didn't expect at the master's level, but it was like this, I thought probably, I think probably it's like that. There was more, little bit wiggle room, like you want to have, you only want to give two exams.

00:32:33: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: You give two exams, you take three later. That was more, I would say, more surprise. So my thesis supervisor, he told me that, yeah, what you're doing in research is nice, but you always have the option to take it to next step. And, uh, you don't have to stop here. And, uh, yeah, we decided, why not? Then there is research department and they started, just had started this program where you can write your own proposal and apply for the grant from the, uh, university.

00:33:10: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: But the problem was that, uh, Hochschule does not have affiliation to award you PhD thesis. So. During my master's, I was doing research, so I had a collaboration with one professor from Marseille, and we wrote a research article together. So, I spoke to him, okay, what do you think about it? Is it possible that we continue the same subject, go further in the field?

00:33:41: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: And, uh, he really liked the idea. And, uh, so we had to find a common denominator where we can use the setup or technology what we have here and the technology, what we had there in Marseille. Yeah, I worked on it. I wrote a research proposal to get the grant. Everything worked out. So that was the journey, how I like started.

00:34:11: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: And there were some issues at that time. Because as I mentioned that it was relatively new, so our university didn't have guidelines or guidelines for French university were different as guidelines for German university. So there was a lot of exchange or different stuff with administration, which I had to go through.

00:34:42: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Yeah, but I would say it was a learning experience. We received from NRW. So in NRW, in our university, there are a few professors who got the Promotionsrecht. It's the right to hold a PhD student without the affiliation of another university. And the, this PhD will be granted by the NRW as authority. Yeah. But still it's the, it's not, I would say, established universities.

00:35:18: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Different universities, they have their own budget. So, I want to have 10, 15 students, they divide the budget, you apply to them. But in, at the moment, still in our university, it's like you have to write a proposal yourself as a student, and it's not structured PhD. So you make your own milestones and your own deliverable packages.

00:35:45: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: And, uh, if with your supervisor, you have to apply for the money. And, uh, it's like you have a lab, you have a group and this group gets X amount of money. from the department. On the basis of that money, they advertise a position. But here, it's different. So, you come as a candidate to a professor who has the right tell them you're interested this is your idea.

00:36:16: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: If everything works out, you work through the research proposal, and then you look for the grant. There are different options, different funding bodies in Germany. You can choose according to your topic, and that's the way it is here. But it's not that you have to also need to have a second university. And it gives you more independence.

00:36:43: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: Because as per my experience, I can say that it's a little bit tricky to have three people as your supervisors because they have their own ideas and they want it to be the way they want and to make them come together on the same table. It's a tricky so you can have a discussion with your supervisor.

00:37:14: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: It's okay. But when two supervisors have discussions. Yeah, that's uh, with that system, it's their opinion. It's like something, uh, written in stone. So it's ten commandments. Even not to you. Uh, like, among themselves. They hold their commandments close to their chest. And they show it to the other guy.

00:37:36: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: I want it this way. There is your second supervisor. I want it this way. There's a third supervisor. I had the problem. I had three supervisors and the third wanted like, yeah, I want it this way. But one thing I really like in Germany, it's like, I can always go to another university and use their stuff.

00:37:56: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: This is what I find. Okay. You have to pay for it. A lot of money. There is always a possibility and there is always a possibility to go to actually any lab in the Europe, which I like. I get to travel to Many countries, meet a lot of people all around Europe. In India, it's really hard. I like being here in Germany.

00:38:21: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: I also have a girlfriend here. If we think about in future, I don't know. 10, 15 years or even 20 years down the line, we might move, get a place somewhere away from the city. I grew up in a village, so I like to be, even though there are a lot of people in village, but it's like relatively calm as compared to the city.

00:38:44: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: So I like to be in a calm place. And I think that's also one of the reasons I really like to be in Kleve, because I would say it's a town for Germany, but for India, it's a small village, limited amount of people. Uh, a lot of greenery around this early like, yeah, and in our village also, you have the same thing.

00:39:03: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: And, uh, here I get to travel, especially now when our project is between three European countries. So there is always a travel. You meet new people, conferences. You get new ideas. You think, okay, here's a nice idea. Probably I can develop it better and always get feedback from people. So it's nice. You like being a researcher.

00:39:29: Dr. Viraj Pratap Nirwan: You get to meet a lot of people who think like you and who can actually. Make you even think better.

00:39:46: Stephan Hanf: And when the

00:39:49: Stephan Hanf: morning matures into bustling noon, the heart or perhaps the stomach of the university becomes a cauldron of diverse culinary tales. It's here in the Mensa in Kleve amidst the aromas of different cuisines, the different voices converge, sharing stories that are as diverse as the food that binds them. Hi, now it's a different time of day than we had the last time we thought

00:40:19: Stephan Hanf: Maybe bring along someone who we met before. So we drag along Joost again with us. Hello Joost.

00:40:27: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Hi, good morning.

00:40:29: Stephan Hanf: Good morning. And we have someone with us who you might recognize from his voice before.

00:40:34: Hariharan Arevalagam: Guten Morgen, it's Hari.

00:40:37: Stephan Hanf: And we thought about normally the day starts with getting something to eat. Or the middle of the day, at least.

00:40:44: Stephan Hanf: So I think I'm a bit unusual because I don't do any breakfast or lunch. Normally I only go for dinner, but I think what we would do right now is we do brunch or what is, because it's not really, it's. We had breakfast.

00:40:58: Dr. Joost Kleuters: I don't do breakfast either. Although I do coffee, obviously.

00:41:01: Stephan Hanf: Yeah.

00:41:02: Hariharan Arevalagam: I also do not have breakfast.

00:41:03: Dr. Joost Kleuters: That's a reason I think we, we agreed on meeting here at this time. Yeah. We're at the Mensa. That could be a good place for brunch. Although to some Germans, it's also a good place for lunch and having a warm meal. That's what most people do here.

00:41:18: Hariharan Arevalagam: All right. So when you walk into the Mensa. You will see that there's a rectangular space that is covered off with a fence, electric fence that goes up at 11.

00:41:26: Hariharan Arevalagam: 30 when lunch starts. And inside you have different stations that serve different meals. You start with the grill station, which is closed today. Um, it used to be open every day before Corona. And then you have Essen Eins and Essen Zwei, which are two different things. And then you have all the, you have the salad bar and you have the snack bar.

00:41:46: Hariharan Arevalagam: And then you pay and then you have very comfortable seats to choose from. And there you go. That's the Mensa in 20 seconds.

00:41:53: Stephan Hanf: Yeah. What about where you grew up? Was breakfast? I think breakfast is a very German thing, right? Getting up, coffee, Butterbrot, bread with butter and sausage.

00:42:03: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yes, because they get up early as well.

00:42:05: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah. And they start early, like 7. 30 in the morning. And like breakfast. Need to be ready for the day.

00:42:11: Stephan Hanf: Yeah, egg and all of that. So I think that's really German. So all of us are quite unusual, at least. In, in a sense that very un German, that we don't do breakfast. What about where you grew up? Is breakfast...

00:42:24: Hariharan Arevalagam: Yeah, I mean, I think everyone has breakfast everywhere. It's just that the type of food we eat might be very unusual for you. Because a very popular breakfast in Malaysia is rice. Rice for breakfast, rice for lunch, rice for dinner. That's how it goes. But of course we also have toast and stuff like that.

00:42:45: Hariharan Arevalagam: But... It's much more normal to have a big warm meal for breakfast and then another big warm meal for lunch and dinner.

00:42:55: Dr. Joost Kleuters: What I didn't know before I came here is that Germans may have rice for breakfast as well.

00:43:00: Hariharan Arevalagam: Really?

00:43:00: Stephan Hanf: I know what you mean.

00:43:01: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah, Milchreis.

00:43:03: Hariharan Arevalagam: Ah, I hate that.

00:43:04: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah? With your background.

00:43:06: Dr. Joost Kleuters: It's very sweet.

00:43:07: Hariharan Arevalagam: Yeah, I don't like sweet stuff. I tried it once in Germany, maybe in my first year. Really wasn't a fan.

00:43:13: Dr. Joost Kleuters: It's especially this time of year, right? In the fall, winter, you have some, I don't know, a little sugar on it.

00:43:18: Hariharan Arevalagam: I think I tried it here actually, over there, over on that stall there, the furthest in the Mensa.

00:43:23: Hariharan Arevalagam: I think it was my first semester, which was winter. And I think that's when I tried Milchreis, and I didn't like it. Because they usually have sweet stuff over there.

00:43:31: Stephan Hanf: Actually, I like Milchreis. Yeah, but not in the morning. Like, like I said, I'm not like a breakfast person, but, but it's more like a sweet stuff with cherry.

00:43:40: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah, cinnamon.

00:43:40: Stephan Hanf: Cinnamon. Yeah, that's, that's mostly it. Yeah. Is that very German. I didn't know that. Was that like the first food you ate here that was very German to you? Or what was it?

00:43:50: Hariharan Arevalagam: That was very German. I don't remember. Probably something from the Mensa. I just ate whatever they had. I can't remember.

00:43:58: Hariharan Arevalagam: Nothing really stands out.

00:43:59: Stephan Hanf: Is there something that you really like? Typical German would say, I could, in German you would say, "Ich kann mich da reinlegen". I could lay in it.

00:44:08: Hariharan Arevalagam: Ah, Jägerschnitzel. Ah. For sure.

00:44:13: Stephan Hanf: Is it German?

00:44:13: Hariharan Arevalagam: Well, the Jägerschnitzel would be German, I think, because I've had arguments about this with an Austrian person who said that you should never put any sauce on your schnitzel.

00:44:21: Stephan Hanf: Oh yeah, that's true.

00:44:22: Hariharan Arevalagam: And I think the German way is the one with the sauce and stuff like that. I'm not so sure. When I was living in the South, that was one of the best things I ever had. Jägerschnitzel.

00:44:35: Stephan Hanf: Yeah, I think you still, I think you get it more or less everywhere, but like the quality of the schnitzel is probably different.

00:44:43: Stephan Hanf: It's more a southern food, I would say. I'm not quite sure, to be honest, but what about you, Joost?

00:44:48: Dr. Joost Kleuters: I don't know, going back to the Milchreis, because I just Googled it. It would be rice porridge, or in China and Asia, you would have congee. Would you have that at Malaysia as well?

00:44:58: Hariharan Arevalagam: I think it's more Japanese thing.

00:45:00: Dr. Joost Kleuters: It can be salty or sweet. More Japanese.

00:45:02: Hariharan Arevalagam: I mean, no. Rice porridge. Yeah, yeah. That, that I know of. We have it in Malaysia as well. You can get it in McDonald's in Malaysia actually. It's pretty good.

00:45:10: Stephan Hanf:

00:45:10: Stephan Hanf: Really? In McDonald's?

00:45:11: Hariharan Arevalagam: Every McDonald's has like their own regional things, right? In Malaysia, in KFC, you can get chicken rice.

00:45:17: Hariharan Arevalagam: They all have their regional twist everywhere, I think. The porridge that they, the rice porridge they have in McDonald's is actually pretty good. Very unexpected. But yeah.

00:45:29: Stephan Hanf: What was your very German food the first time? I mean, you probably not went the first time to Germany when you started working here, but...

00:45:38: Dr. Joost Kleuters: I have no idea.

00:45:39: Stephan Hanf: I can say what it's like. The first Dutch foods... I ate that wasn't, I find out later that it was actually Dutch because I thought everyone knows that food and went outside of, well we're in a broader region, nobody knew what it was. It's the, in German it's Fleischkroketten, Krokantje, Bitterballen.

00:45:57: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah, yeah.

00:45:58: Hariharan Arevalagam: Yeah, so you know what, I went to Nijmegen and then they had these, they look like vending machines but they're not really. Like you put in some money and then you can take like the food out of it and they have this like hot. Deep fried things like, like a chicken stick. What'd you call it? Like a Kip something.

00:46:15: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Whatever meat leftovers you have, right. You deep fry it and then you put it in one of those vending machines, like a wall with small boxes that I'll heat it up. So you get like a half warm, deep fried. And that has a very long tradition in the Netherlands. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Don't find it anywhere else in the world.

00:46:33: Dr. Joost Kleuters: I don't know who came up with it.

00:46:34: Stephan Hanf: Germans. I know the story about it. Yeah. Yeah. Germans came up with it, but they didn't, I don't know really why it stopped. I think the

maintenance was too complicated and it was so successful that you have restaurants like this also in America, but they figured out it's more like the McDonald's, right?

00:46:49: Stephan Hanf: It was much more cost efficient if you don't have small windows. We'll only have a restaurant that's really fast preparing food. That was the main goal. But the Netherlands, as far as I remember, it was because the kind of food that is really popular in the Netherlands, it's easier to reheat again and again or to be heated like a bitterballen.

00:47:11: Stephan Hanf: Yeah. So that's the reason why it was successful. It's still going on in the Netherlands.

00:47:14: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah. It's very fatty. So it's usually something that you have very late at night when you get out of the pub and you're a little drunk and you just want something fat. So that's... Maybe that's, that's the niche that it's proper for, I don't know, but it's, yeah.

00:47:28: Hariharan Arevalagam: I think in Germany, it's also a thing where on Sundays you have an extra long, big breakfast, right? Or am I imagining that?

00:47:37: Stephan Hanf: No, you meet some sometimes in the weekend for big breakfast. That's not, yeah. I don't know. Now, I think it used to be breakfast. Now it's like brunch or what? There's something in between again.

00:47:47: Stephan Hanf: I don't know. But. But I remember for birthday, not that long ago, we went to breakfast and it was so completely full that there was a buffet that's also very popular in Germany, I think, Germany, I think everywhere now, and where you have to stand in line for half an hour to get like breakfast.

00:48:02: Dr. Joost Kleuters: I thought it was typical German as well to have a Sunday late breakfast, brunch and buffet or something.

00:48:08: Hariharan Arevalagam: But usually at home

00:48:10: Dr. Joost Kleuters: or outside as well at a restaurant, they would go on until three or four in the afternoon.

00:48:15: Hariharan Arevalagam: Okay. Yeah. Cause uh, one thing that, so I'm not a, like I said, I don't really have breakfast, but back home, like on the weekends, I would have breakfast because we usually go to a, it's called a coffee shop, not like the Dutch ones, of course, but there you can get all kinds of hot meals from many different stalls.

00:48:32: Hariharan Arevalagam: So it's usually like Chinese stuff, a bit of Malay stuff as well. So you would get like a pack of, like they sell these rice packets. So it's rice with fried anchovies, eggs, spicy sauce. In this sambal, I think you know the word sambal because they have it in Edeka as well because it's Indonesians in the Netherlands, uh, wrapped up.

00:48:51: Hariharan Arevalagam: That's like our national dish actually. So you have that for breakfast and then you can have like some toast with butter and then, you

know what's dim sum? It's uh, yeah, it's sort of like it's a Chinese thing. Many different types of like dumplings and they have like different fillings, different types of meats and stuff like that.

00:49:08: Hariharan Arevalagam: You have a few of those and then you have your hot coffee. Like you get super full. And that's something I used to look forward to back home because it was very special. Because you don't make any of that, I wouldn't make any of that at home. So yeah, so the Sunday breakfast, at least for me and my family, is something that is a little different from my usual routine of just skipping breakfast and having a coffee.

00:49:29: Hariharan Arevalagam: Depends on what time I wake up, really.

00:49:33: Stephan Hanf: What I, uh, Oh, and Joost, you still haven't answered like the, the question about German food. Do you remember anything? Jägerschnitzel? But I think that's all.

00:49:40: Dr. Joost Kleuters: No, I think sausage or something like the currywurst or things like this. It's very easy to just cross the border and get one of those.

00:49:47: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah. But Krakauer, those were nice. It's a little similar to what you would have in the Netherlands, but then from the grill. So I like those Krakauer? Yeah, yeah. So the currywurst, you chop it up, right? And then you put the curry sauce on it? Yeah. And then with this one you just take it with mustard or something, yeah.

00:50:07: Hariharan Arevalagam: Currywurst was something I was warned about and I actually quite like it. I really do enjoy currywurst, but I'm yet to try the, the OG currywurst in Berlin. I think that's the, where it's from right?..

00:50:17: Stephan Hanf: Whoa,

00:50:18: Stephan Hanf: that's a big debate in Germany.

00:50:20: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Wasn't that Hamburg? I think it was Hamburg.

00:50:22: Stephan Hanf: No, no, no, it's a Ruhr, not far away from here, the Ruhr area.

00:50:26: Stephan Hanf: So, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm not quite sure. Maybe you have to fact check that. But whoever is listening to that. But I think there was even a law dispute about the founding of the Currywurst. If it was in Berlin or in the Netherlands. Maybe we should ask. As you can hear, people are very getting ready to serve the food, screaming at each other.

00:50:47: Hariharan Arevalagam: They also have a decent currywurst here in the Mensa, but not today, unfortunately.

00:50:52: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah, that's why I was looking. I'm getting hungry during this conversation.

00:50:57: Hariharan Arevalagam: What do you think of the Mensa food, Joost, since you've eaten here many more times than either of us?

00:51:02: Dr. Joost Kleuters: I never go here because in the Netherlands you never have a warm meal in the afternoon.

00:51:08: Dr. Joost Kleuters: And even though I've lived here since, more than 15 years, but it's something that I'll never get used to because I can't imagine going to the Mensa, having a hot meal at 12 in the afternoon and not just fall asleep immediately, right?

00:51:23: Hariharan Arevalagam: So that's a good point because lunch, after lunch is when my productivity always dips.

00:51:27: Dr. Joost Kleuters: One of the few times I came here for lunch, they have something which also from a language perspective I thought was very interesting. It's called a Sättigungsbeilage. And that must be a low point, both in German cuisine and language, right? Because it means, you know, stuff just to get full, right? Yes. Just a Sättigungsbeilage.

00:51:45: Stephan Hanf: Oh, that's very German.

00:51:46: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah.

00:51:47: Hariharan Arevalagam: Sättigungsbeilage. Is it related to the word satt?

00:51:49: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah.

00:51:49: Stephan Hanf: Yes.

00:51:50: Hariharan Arevalagam: Ah, so to fill you up. Just a side dish to fill you up.

00:51:52: Dr. Joost Kleuters: So, no matter what it is, apparently, no matter what it tastes like. Something you just stuff yourself with. I think Sättigungsbeilage. Yeah, yeah.

00:52:00: Stephan Hanf: But I think...

00:52:03: Stephan Hanf: It's actually, they write it down, Sättigungsbeilage?

00:52:04: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah.

00:52:05: Stephan Hanf: Really?

00:52:05: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah.

00:52:05: Stephan Hanf: Wow. Not just Beilage.

00:52:07: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Sättigungsbeilage.

00:52:09: Stephan Hanf: Oh, that's really...

00:52:09: Dr. Joost Kleuters: That was a new word to me. I'll never forget it. I'll, I'll go for my cheese sandwich and glass of milk. Okay. Instead of the Sättigungsbeilage.

00:52:17: Hariharan Arevalagam: From a certain perspective, some certain perspectives, that itself might be a Sättigungsbeilage.

00:52:23: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Maybe.

00:52:24: Stephan Hanf: Yeah, I don't know.

00:52:25: Dr. Joost Kleuters: Yeah, Germans will complain about the bread in the Netherlands. They don't have proper bread. It's just white bread. Not as bad as in the US, but it's... Yeah. Different.

00:52:32: Hariharan Arevalagam: White bread is good.

00:52:34: Stephan Hanf: No, it isn't.

00:52:34: Hariharan Arevalagam: It's awesome. I don't know.

00:52:36: Stephan Hanf: There's a lot of sugar in it. I think that's like the argument against it.

00:52:39: Dr. Joost Kleuters: So after this conversation, I'm pretty hungry. I don't know about you guys.

00:52:42: Hariharan Arevalagam: I've been hungry since we started the conversation, so.

00:52:45: Stephan Hanf: I think that it's getting louder and louder. Let's grab some lunch, guys.

00:52:48: Stephan Hanf: We learned the word Sättigungsbeilage, so maybe we should try and find out what it is. Yeah. There you go. You think so? Sounds like a Sättigungsbeilage. I think, I think potatoes probably.

00:53:00: Hariharan Arevalagam: Let's go get "satted".

00:53:03: Stephan Hanf: Oh no, it's opening. Okay, we go get some food now.

00:53:07: Hariharan Arevalagam: Good.

00:53:48: Stephan Hanf: Thank

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00:54:34: Stephan Hanf: Thank you very much for joining us today. I'm Stephan Hanf. This is the How to Hochschule podcast. We are looking forward to hear you next time. Tschüss.