

Trip Report – Sign Link 2024 (March 11th to March 22nd)

Preparations for the Journey

Since the end of the second edition of the EdTech Hackathon in May 2023, the team was committed to taking all six members to Germany. Not only that, our goal was to visit the three cities where the universities organizing the event are located, with the responsibility of representing our universities and the project, SignLink. Throughout 2023, we launched a new visual identity for the product and went through pre-acceleration mentorships to mature what was the idea that won the Hackathon at the Goethe Institut in 2023.

After numerous crowdfunding attempts, contacts with German entities and companies in Brazil, as well as individual entrepreneurial acts by our members (Thiago made winning hackathons his source of income; Caio sold *brigadeiros* at the door of his college for months to raise funds for the trip), the trip became increasingly possible. Along the way, we reached the podium of the Santander X University Awards, further motivating us to make the trip a reality.

One of the main challenges of planning a trip to a country none of the six members had visited was definitely reconciling the budget, logistics, and timing. The three universities were located forming a triangle that covered the German Republic, and finding the optimal visiting order resembled a mathematical optimization problem (fortunately, our team included 3 computer scientists, an economist, and a biomedical informatics specialist). We started in Münster, then went to Munich, and finally to the capital, Berlin. The intercity travels were done by train, which allowed us to cross the country and enjoy the natural beauties that a plane trip would not provide.

The Trip - Challenges, Discoveries, and Connections

During our 10 nights on German soil, we visited three incredible cities and accumulated dozens of hours of activities in over 15 innovation centers, campuses, laboratories, and even the Brazilian Embassy in Berlin. More a business trip than a leisure period, one of the main challenges was managing our time to live up to German punctuality. Despite the time zone difference, arriving in the tranquil city of Münster as our first destination was the right choice: we walked through the spacious streets, dodging bicycles in the city's historic center; visited the beautiful campus of this institution and were warmly received by the team of the Brazil Centre, as well as contacts from innovation centers in this region close to the Netherlands.

After two nights in the northwest of Germany, we took the Deutsche Bahn towards Bavaria: Munich. A huge contrast to Münster, starting with the absence of bicycles and the large commercial buildings, all alongside the significant presence of elements of Bayern culture. The activities in Munich were intense, keeping up with the frenetic pace of Germany's technological capital: we visited the Technical University of Munich and its various facilities, as well as innovation centers focused on the development of cutting-edge technologies.

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Our journey in Germany concludes in Berlin. There, we were surprised to learn that it is the most innovative city in Europe after London in terms of the number of startups. We unanimously agreed that Berlin is a world of its own. A mix between dynamism, youthfulness, and an example of infrastructure and diversity. A moment of great highlight among the activities was undoubtedly the bilateral meeting and presentation at the Brazilian Embassy in Berlin, which opened doors for us to various global funding agencies, as well as to the diplomatic network of Itamaraty around the world.

Berlin was able to please everyone's tastes due to its vast array of events, innovation centers, and historical-cultural activities. With the conclusion of the promotional and networking activities of SignLink, our members were able to relax a bit and enjoy museums, the famous nightlife of Berlin, and other attractions to the east and west of the former Wall.

This trip was a milestone not only for the project that started at the German Brazilian EdTechHackathon but for the professional and personal journey of all team members. Some got their first passport to participate in the trip, others went on a business trip for the first time. Below is a statement from one of our members, Caio Quintana, about the opportunities before, during, and after the trip to Germany.

From Juiz de Fora - Caio Quintana shares his experience of the trip

My first trip to Germany was an experience that exceeded all expectations and left me amazed by the country's cultural richness, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit. Additionally, I witnessed firsthand how the positive impact of projects like Sign Link can transform lives by teaching international sign languages to diverse people. And this was only possible due to the support we had since the German-Brazilian edtech hackathon and from all the representatives of the universities, as well as our mentors who were present at the hackathon and who guided us and met again in Germany.

Throughout my stay in Germany, I had the opportunity to establish valuable contacts with universities, startup centers, and the embassy. These contacts not only enriched my understanding of the German educational and business landscape but also opened doors to collaborations and partnerships aimed at developing and expanding Sign Link in German territory.

The meetings with universities provided insights and mentorship about the latest research and innovations in various fields of knowledge. The startup centers, in turn, were true hubs of creativity and entrepreneurship, where innovative ideas come to life and transform into practical solutions for the world's challenges, leveraging cutting-edge technologies and the engagement of many impressive people.

The visit to the embassy was a moment of bilateral connection and dialogue. Besides discussing aspects related to business and commercial partnerships, we also explored opportunities for personal and cultural development. Diplomacy between countries became

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tangible in each interaction, and the possibility of bilateral agreements and joint projects between Sign Link and Brazilian bodies around the world opened a horizon of exciting possibilities and a huge potential for impact that we wish for.

In summary, my first international trip, being to Germany, was much more than a simple business journey. It was an enriching experience that expanded my horizons, challenged my perceptions, and strengthened my determination to promote positive changes in the world. Sign Link and the contacts established with universities, startup centers, and the embassy represent just the beginning of an exciting journey towards international collaboration and the construction of a more inclusive and interconnected future.

Furthermore, the receptiveness and hospitality of everyone who welcomed and assisted us in making this trip a reality, from the Brazilian centers of the universities to the mentors who met us again in Germany and all the people we connected with during the stay, are undeniable. I hope our experience can contribute in the future to new students, researchers, and individuals interested in going to Germany and developing their ideas in a country that can provide enriching experiences.

A Sincere Thank You

We would like to immensely thank everyone who made this trip a success. To the representatives of each of the universities we visited, both in Brazil and Germany: Laura and Katy at Uni Münster; Sören and Anna at TUM; Christian, Kim, Kamila, and Nora, at FUBerlin. The long journey of planning and mediation between countries was essential to provide us with an incredible schedule. We felt very welcome at every place we visited during the trip, and this feeling was made possible thanks to the tireless effort of each of you.

To the supporters of the EdTech Hackathon, including DWIH São Paulo, Goethe Institut, and ReEdu. Thank you very much for investing in the future of initiatives that have real potential to transform education in Brazil and Germany through technology.

To everyone who contributed to our crowdfunding and believed in our potential, Vielen Dank! (Many thanks).

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Visit to KIEZ, an Innovation and Startup Incubation Center in the Field of AI, in Berlin.



Presentation of the Project at the Brazilian Embassy in Berlin.

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In front of the University of Münster's Rectorate Building



After visiting TUM AI, we went to a food quarter in Munich with David, the acting president of the leading student organization for AI in Europe.

INTER/- NATIONAL NEWS



Presentation of SignLink at REACH Euregio in Münster. A startup acceleration center focused on the North Rhine-Westphalia region.