

SMUS Trainee Experience Report

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Having visited Wittenberg on 26th July 2025 through the SMUS PhD Training Programme, I was struck by the pragmatic yet forward-thinking approach to development. Every project I learned during this excursion was centered on making growth work for people rather than simply happening to them. As an urban planner, I was fascinated by the idea that Wittenberg has positioned itself as a commuter city for Berlin and Leipzig workers who are looking for affordable housing. The city is designed around the train station (Lutherstadt), enhancing smooth transport connection for commuters. In addition, buildings are situated close to transport hubs to strengthen the city center and avoid urban sprawl.

Another highlight was the implementation of smart and sustainable growth incorporating the design of high-rise buildings, solar panels on new developments, and geothermal energy in the city's energy mix. Moreover, green infrastructure is incorporated to promote environmental quality and resilience. As someone who is passionate about sustainable cities, I am intrigued about the combination of these elements which reflect sustainability in Wittenberg's regulatory framework. A particularly inspiring project was the Garden Exhibition which transformed a slaughterhouse into a large public park. Financed by the government, this ongoing project demonstrates a dual role of greenspaces: they provide environmental benefits while also acting as socio-cultural anchors for urban life. This project demonstrates how underutilized historical sites can be repurposed.

Perhaps one of the most valuable lessons of this excursion was the municipal approach to planning. The architectural team made a presentation on building infrastructure while also ensuring support for community needs and ensuring public participation processes through co-creation and co-production principles. Participatory planning is imperative for not only the success of projects but for also ensuring the relevance thereof. What sparked my interest about Wittenberg was the balance of pragmatism and vision. Ultimately, Wittenberg is strategically growing in a manner that values affordability, sustainability, and genuine community participation.