First of all, **the purpose of my stay** in Tel Aviv was not to study abroad for a semester and take courses but to conduct a research project that is related to my Master thesis and should provide some insight for a possible PhD project. My project is about global environmental problems and the specific local responses within different climatic contexts. As one presupposition I considered that the German and the Israeli climate are different from each other and that a comparison between Germany and Israel can provide insights for adaptable and transferable technologies with regards to sustainable development. From a sociological point of view it is also important to highlight the social, political and economical aspects that might influence e.g. the transferability of certain technologies. Therefore, I used different methods to get a broad overview of relevant topics connected to my research. Eventually, the results will be shown in an extra report, some maybe find their way in my Master thesis and the plan is to write an exposé for a possible PhD project.

My **first contact person** was Shira Leon Zchout from the Porter School of Environmental Studies – an academic unit of the Tel Aviv University that is relevant to my research interest. Shira is the coordinator of the international MA program “Environmental Studies” and she recommended some supervisors from which I chose the former head of the School Prof. Dr. Dan Rabinowitz. While waiting for an answer from the DAAD Shira already sent me a
document with the formal criteria to register as a **visiting student**. At the beginning, she thought I wanted to apply for the international MA program, so I had to make clear that I was only there to do a **research project** which is related to my MA thesis. When I received the positive answer in January I needed to reschedule my research plan because the soonest possible date for going to Tel Aviv then was March and not February as originally planned. I sent an email to Prof. Rabinowitz to make sure he can still supervise me but he was no longer associate of the Porter School. As I was quite interested in his academic work I switched to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology which is part of the Faculty of Social Science. Therefore my coordinator at Tel Aviv University also changed to a representative from the Office of Academic Affairs. Once I handed in the necessary **registration documents** - health insurance, certificate of good health, supervisor and head of faculty confirmations - I booked the flight (325€ from Munich to Tel Aviv incl. return). I planned to stay for the whole month of March which was a problem for the Tel Aviv University Administration because if you want a **student ID card**, for example, you have to apply at least two months before your arrival. I decided that I don't need the card as my research project was not highly dependent on **public transportation discounts** (normal bus ticket in Tel Aviv is about 1,50€) or access to the university libraries (unfortunately I haven’t been to any library). So, as soon as all the documents were sent to the Office of Academic Affairs they registered me as a visiting student. During the registration process I was already looking for apartments in some Facebook groups (namely: Tel Aviv Apartment available; Short Term Rent/Sublet Tel Aviv; Tel Aviv – rooms for rent, roommates & short term sublets; Tel Aviv Area apartments, rooms & apartment stuff) where long term rents as well as short term rents and sublets are offered quite regularly. I've had some trouble with getting a sublet as they were either not within the period of my stay or because they were very expensive. In general, the average rent in Tel Aviv – compared to Frankfurt/Main – is very high if you’re looking for a room within the city area (a room in a shared flat was about 700€/month). I decided to make a strategic change which also fit to my research plan and booked a **hostel** for the first two weeks (Florentine Backpackers Hostel: 17€/night in a 6-bed mixed dormitory). For visiting other projects and related sites/places I was planning to travel for about ten days, do some observations, conduct interviews and go then back to Tel Aviv. I contacted hosts via Couchsurfing, booked other hostels and stayed also in a Kibbutz for some days. Eventually, I can say that I had no problems regarding the operability of my research plan. Quite the contrary, every step I took and most of the people I met were somehow contributing to successfully conduct my research. However, let me tell you some important points and particularities regarding my stay in Israel.

**How I started.** Departing from Munich Airport to Israel is different. There is a special check-in hall (Hall F) for passengers flying to Israel and the hall itself is again divided for flights with El Al (Israeli airline) and flights with Lufthansa (German airline). In a way, you already get a hint that security regulations are not the same as we might know them from flights within Europe. When I arrived at the **Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv-Yafo**, I only needed to step outside the airplane, decided to take the stairs instead of the elevator (everyone else used the elevator) and two men, waiting at the top of the stairs, watched my lonely stair-climbing action that seemed to be reason enough to take me aside and start asking some questions about my visit in Israel (it took about 10 minutes). After that, I went to the pass-control counter and they asked almost the same questions again but that time I had the answers already prepared. They gave me a blue paper saying “B2 Stay Permit until 28.05.2017. Not
Permitted to Work” which I had to keep in my passport until I leave the country. This is the policy in Israel: You will not get a stamp but a stay permit paper, and some say that it might be a problem if you have stamps from Arab countries and Iran in your passport (except stamps from Egypt and Jordan). You can look up the homepage of the Federal Foreign Office to inform yourself about the current immigration laws to/from Israel.

During my stay in Tel Aviv at the Florentine Backpackers Hostel I got to know travelers and locals alike. The area around the hostel – called Florentine – is said to be the liberal students’ place where you can find nice cafés, bars, shops, 24/7 stores (called am:pm), everything you need for your basic living standards. It is close to the beach and to Jaffa, the oldest port city of the so called “Holy Land”. Public transportation from this place is also quite convenient: There are different bus lines stopping nearby (bus line 25 is the one you need to go to Tel Aviv University which is in the northern part of the city); and a 20mins walk away you find the central bus station as well as the train station “HaHagana” where you can leave the city to many other places of the country. Another 10-15 mins walk away from the hostel/Florentine you will find the Rothschild Boulevard which is one of the most central streets in Tel Aviv. If you want to go to a club, take a walk through the city, go to the theater, opera, museum, etc. you’ll probably pass this street and see many people walking along the Boulevard with their dogs or riding e-bikes. That’s another particularity of Tel Aviv: a lot of people own dogs and use e-bikes. You can also rent an e-bike at a docking station pretty easily. I highly recommend a visit at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art (about 10/11€ for students) where I found coincidentally an exhibition related to my research project.

What I have done. Most of the time, I was not using any public transportation because I wanted to discover the city walking around. It was a method I used to describe my own impressions of Tel Aviv and the social and environmental particularities. The method of walking/strolling was also applied to other places I visited, namely Haifa, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Kibbutz Lotan and Beer-Sheva. It was interesting to see that the country – even though it is pretty small – has a wide variety of climatic and natural environments. In the north, in Haifa, I was surprised by a heavy rainfall and could not continue my walk; in Tel Aviv I got accidently sun burnt because I did not feel how intense the sunbeams were as there was always a cool wind blowing the heat away; in the south, in the desert region called Arava, I visited a Kibbutz were there was almost no humidity and you always have to carry water with you and put on sun protection. What I want to say is that wherever you go in Israel you should be prepared for a different weather condition – depending on what time of the year you are there.

Because I had my own research project, I hardly visited the Tel Aviv University for studying reasons. I was there to see the building of the Porter School of Environmental Studies, which won the Platinum award of the “Leadership of Energy and Environmental Design” (short: LEED) from the U.S. Green Building Council. I visited the University for an interview with Prof. Dr. Ronen Shamir (which will be published around October 2017) and for a meeting with my supervisor Prof. Dr. Dan Rabinowitz. The interview as well as the meeting cleared up many uncertainties about possible research sites. Prof. Shamir connected me with a student who writes about an environmental park near Tel Aviv (Ariel Sharon Park) and Prof. Rabinowitz encouraged me to visit a Kibbutz/eco-community in the Arava valley. In general, I would suggest visiting the Tel Aviv University because it has an interesting and huge campus with very different architectures and you can see the skyline of the city pretty well.

To get easier in contact with locals and projects I bought a SIM card from Golan Telecom for 6,50€/month. I had an old cellphone with me which I used for this SIM card and was then
able to call the Kibbutz, other professors with whom I did an interview, the recommended contact from Prof. Shamir, and different eco-projects. For any other communication that is internet-based I used my smartphone with a German provider. Given that there is free WiFi almost everywhere I didn’t have to use Data Roaming. The hostel had a computer as well and if you ask people for any information they are ready to help you.

As I already mentioned, it is easy to travel in Israel during the weekdays (Sunday-Thursday) but also on Shabbat (Friday evening till Saturday evening) there are options to get around with “Sheruts” (shared taxis). If you want to go to Eilat, the city in the south at the Red Sea, there are even more options with buses from the “Egged” company, the biggest bus company in Israel. I definitely recommend a visit in Jerusalem, its old city with the many sacred buildings and the nearby Palestinian territories which can be reached from the bus station on the Palestinian part of Jerusalem. You also can easily reach the Dead Sea, the natural reserve “Ein Gedi” and the old Jewish fortress “Masada”.

I’ve heard from many people visiting Jerusalem that at this place you can actually “feel” the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and I would almost agree with it. However, it depends how much time you spend there and which places you want to visit. For example, going to the “Dome of the Rock” can be tricky because it’s not really advertised and as a non-Muslim tourist you can only enter from one high-security entrance near the “Western Wall” at specific times of the day. Anyway, in one of the former reports from the “Strategische Partnerschaften” programme which was written by Maximilian Stoll (WS 15/16 – 2) he mentioned that one should be aware of the political circumstances of this country and its neighbouring countries which I absolutely agree with. I guess one of the most lucrative practices to engage with this topic is to talk to people and listen to what they have to say about the political situation and you will probably hear many different versions and opinions on both sides (i.e.: Israeli and Palestinian). Also in Tel Aviv, to which some Israelis still refer to as being a “bubble”, you can talk about politics even if the lifestyle appears and is said to be as a very different one.

Another interesting visit was at the Kibbutz Lotan, an eco-community in the south of the country near Eilat. Kibbutzim (plural of Kibbutz) are communities/collective settlements which have their roots in the communist idea of living together without private property. However, this original idea has changed over the years and now you can find many different types of these communities all over Israel. In the one I did my research the kibbutz has developed a focus on ecology and nature protection. Interesting enough was the fact that it was built in the middle of the Arava valley which is a basically only desert. The kibbutz also offers a variety of educational programmes such as the “Green Apprenticeship”, a design course about sustainable development and permaculture (see: http://kibbutzlotan.com/green-apprenticeship/?lang=en). The kibbutz is cooperating with other institutions such as The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies with researchers from the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. For me, it was interesting to see that (1) the kibbutz is attracting so much attention from academics and (2) that they managed to create an oasis-like community in the middle of the desert which celebrated its 34th year of existence at the time of my stay. For further research about eco-communities I will definitely take into account this experience at Kibbutz Lotan. In general, it is not difficult to visit kibbutzim and even live there for some months. Many of them offer internships or volunteer programmes which are coordinated by the Kibbutz Program Center in Tel Aviv (see: http://www.kibbutz.org.il/eng/welcome.htm). However, it is not free of charge as most of them provide you with accommodation and food.
*How my stay ended.* My last six days I spent in Tel Aviv. I had two important appointments for an interview and an urban gardening tour from which other interesting paths could have developed. Unfortunately there was no time and I realized that after one month I gathered many data but it was not enough to work on it more thorough. Nevertheless, I feel like having gained a good overview of different ways to engage with environmental issues in Israel. And this was definitely not the end of the story; my supervisor at Tel Aviv University wants me to write an extra report about the sites I’ve visited and the data I collected. After handing in this report he will confirm to the Office of Academic Affairs that I actually did research and the Office, in return, will confirm to the Goethe-University my activities at the Tel Aviv University. It is a bit of paper-work to do after such a research visit but it can be also a good opportunity to work on your data and experience and make an interesting story out of it. In my case, I plan to use it as a small part of my Master thesis and as an initial project of a PhD proposal.