

REPORT AL RIENTRO DELL'ESPERIENZA DI SCAMBIO - A.A. 2015/2016

_Cognome	ARGENZIANO
_Nome	Ilaria
_Matricola	834647
_Anno di corso	2.LM
_Corso di studi	INTERIOR DESIGN
_Sezione	I_1
_e-mail	ilaria.argenziano@mail.polimi.it
_Sede di scambio	EESTI KUNSTIAKADEEMIA, TALLINN
_Stato	Estonia
_ID ERASMUS (per sedi in EU)	EE TALLINN01
_Semestre svolto all'estero	2°

Testo:

APPLICATION

The first question I was asked (even before leaving) was "why Estonia?", so I will start this report explaining the reasons why I chose it. I mainly wanted to study for a while in one of the very-north countries of Europe because I find them deeply interesting, especially when it comes to their way of approaching, thinking and developing the project. Estonia is under-discovered in a way since it is a very small country with a complicated past, though it's very active in the field of Art and Design, it has grown up quickly in the last decades in the effort to build its own, strong identity. Now Estonia does have its own identity and peculiarities, which have been built by taking advantage from its own difficult past and its "magical" nature, which has a strong meaning in people's traditions and beliefs. I find it amazing how Estonians love the forest, the wood and the (little) resources the land has to offer. The way they use wood, even in the school labs, shows an old tradition of working with it and an extremely strong relationship with the territory, trying to make the best from it.

ARRIVING

Arriving in Tallinn in January was kind of shocking, because of the weather, of course. The cold and the heaps of snows are the main things you can think about for the first moments. Everything is completely white and frozen, the day is very short and you have darkness in the early afternoon. This aspect affects people's way of living very much, even if you don't notice it immediately. Estonians are known as never-smiling people, talking only when strictly necessary. They like saying this is due to their need to spare energies to survive the cold climate, and it's probably true.

EESTI KUNSTIAKADEEMIA

The Esti Kunstiakadeemia (Estonian Academy of Art) is a quite big university, including many different faculties such as Painting, Sculpture, New media, Urban studies, Architecture, Blacksmithing etc, and interior design of course, even if they call it Interior architecture. Each department is in a specific building, spread all over the city.

At first it is very simple to find everything you need, the arrival of exchange students is very well organized and the university employees and students are really helpful, although they just say the minimum required (as I said, they don't speak too much).

I loved the interior architecture department: an old building situated in the Vana Linn (Old Town), very close to the ex-industrial area of the city where a lot of things are now changing and events happening. Inside the department there are several rooms (it's easy to get lost in such an old group of renovated buildings) that are used every day for different purposes such as public lectures, painting classes, parties, building workplaces, meetings and so on (there was even a boat once). This thing perfectly explains their academic way of working and learning. They have a very practical approach to deal with materials, tools and real projects. There's a big wood workshop which students can use whenever they like, and they spend most of their time there trying to find the best solutions to complete their projects.

Inside there's also a communal kitchen and two beds, and the doors are 24h open (each student has a personal card to access). They built the environment the more comfortable they could since they spend at school many hours, it looks just as comfortable as a house. And this point was the very first difference I found, comparing the Politecnico spaces (of course the difference is also due to the number of students who attend the courses).

In the courtyard, students and teachers built a sauna out of raw and recycled materials. Sauna is a super strong tradition in Estonia with very old roots in its history. People love having sauna, even every day, and they can share this naked awkward moment with other students and professors: second very weird thing about Estonia. But this also shows how easy it is to build stuff in the school and how much they love creating strange habits and events. As a matter of fact, the school now got really popular all over Tallinn and the whole Estonia, known for its events and mad projects, thanks to the current head of department Hannes Praks, who is the crazy mind behind all these interesting projects. Thanks to him, indeed, in the last couple of years the school has changed its image, which was stuck with the previous traditions and maybe not enough behind the times.

In the university, there are several workshops, not only the wood one. The students can attend ceramic, blacksmithing or glazing classes, and all the skills they get are so important for their work. They learn how to use all these nice materials and they get a good dexterity. The results are visible in the beautiful models they do, even just during the developing phases of the ideation/concept of the project.

TALLINN

The city is the capital of Estonia. As a capital, it is full of foreign students and young people.

It is not a huge city and it's easy to explore it all, from side to side, through the different districts and through the old soviet atmosphere it still has.

Mainly Tallinn is developed around the Old Town, which is situated up on a low hill and surrounded by the historical city walls. It stays next to the shore but it's weird how the city doesn't seem to have a real connection with the seaside, perhaps due to the cold wind coming from that direction.

In the north part of the city there's a peninsula where some old factories (whose past is unknown, hidden by the soviets) and abandoned workers houses. The area has a beautiful view on the Baltic sea and lies among tall pine trees. In the last ten years artists and designers have transformed part of the area, which is now cool and lively, crowded with young people and hosting events (parties, concerts, markets, exhibition and some other strange format of events) almost every week.

Outside the city walls, all around the Old Town, there are the amazing old neighbourhoods entirely made of wooden houses that are typical of the Estonian traditional way of building. Some of them are still abandoned and falling apart, but now the city government and the more forward-looking inhabitants found out how precious this architectural treasure is and they are developing new urban plans and renovation projects for the houses. Kalamaja (the previous fishermen's district) is one of the more developed district in this sense, now artists and hipsters want to live there, the wooden houses have new lively colours and the prices of the rent are getting higher and higher.

In the south part there's "downtown", the modern city centre. Actually, this is made only by modern glass buildings hosting massive shopping malls, supermarkets, offices, cinemas and so on. It's surprising how big the shopping malls can be, and how crowded these are everyday.

Going further from the city centre you can find the panel houses districts: this was one of the most shocking things when I got there, especially when I tried to look at them from a different point of view, like to one that Estonians have. Walking among these gray, huge, looking-all-the-same buildings it's easy to get lost and it's normal to start thinking about how people can live there. Knowing about the history of Brutalism, Soviet architecture and social-houses project wasn't really enough for me to understand it in depth. After talking with my classmates and listening to their stories, or better their grandparents' stories, I got it. Now people knows that these concrete monsters are ugly, uncomfortable and in bad conditions, but they still look at them with the same eyes thinking about living the modern dream.

SPRING

At the end of April the trees were still completely grey with no leaves at all. I was hopeless and I thought an Estonian spring couldn't really exist. But, at the beginning of May, in just one week everything changed completely! The muddy soil got less wet, the trees got green and thousands of flowers bloomed everywhere. The day started to get longer and longer till the moment when the night didn't come at all, but just a dark blue sky was visible for two or three hours.

With the environment, the population changed as well. Everywhere people was smiling and talking a lot, walking in the parks, organizing public events and concerts. In Kalamaja a big neighbourhood party took place and all the inhabitants offered food from their windows and in private gardens and courtyards.

It was an amazing transformation that I would have never expected.

Autorizzo al trattamento dei miei dati personali ai sensi del Decreto Legislativo n. 196/03 da parte del Politecnico di Milano.

Firma

