

REPORT AL RIENTRO DELL'ESPERIENZA DI SCAMBIO - A.A.
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Testo

As Eleanor Roosevelt claimed: "You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. [...] You must do the thing you think you cannot do". The University of New South Wales is ranked among the top 60 universities in the world and Australia is universally acknowledged as one of the most enjoyable places to live. However, the idea to abandon the comforting familiarity of one's culture, language, circle of relationships and University System can still stop some students from undertaking the experience of an International Exchange Program at UNSW. This report will pinpoint the many advantages deriving from the choice of starting a study experience abroad, extremely nourishing from a both personal and professional perspective. In particular, it will focus on the academic/professional, cultural and identity implications of the Exchange.

To begin with, the academic environment at UNSW equips its students with all the tools they may need in order to have a positive learning experience. There are services such as 'The Learning Centre', whom students may refer to whether encountering doubts or difficulties in their studies; or associations, arranged according to students' personal interests, promoting social activities within the university, aiming to enhance the development of well-rounded individuals and socially active people.

The infrastructures are impressively good, deriving from the much higher fees that local students are required to pay to the university, and the level of the course's offering is satisfactory. Moreover, being an Exchange Student, there is often a greater freedom on the timetable's building, that is an interesting opportunity in order to tailor one's learning experience to one's deepest interests. Indeed, the selection of the classes is a crucial aspect for the Exchange experience to be successful. Accordingly, I had the good luck to deepen at UNSW my knowledge of subjects that are not strictly part of a Design Study Plan, but that are useful tools for the development of a T-shaped expertise. Even though I had to compare myself with students having a more specific background for courses like social-works or cinema and media, I found the academic experience of these subjects rewarding, wherein I was deepening my knowledge in these disciplines at a very high speed, also bringing a slightly different, peculiar angle, informed by my design thinking training. Furthermore, UNSW provides many chances for its students to develop their professional expertise, offering Internships in a selection of working places. Particularly, this is a very good

opportunity for Exchange Students to experience the working environment in a foreign country and develop their level of professionalism, under the guidance of a supervisor from the workplace. For instance, I worked at AFS, a non-for-profit organization aiming to exchange students throughout the world in order to promote intercultural dialogue and to embrace otherness. As an Intern, the offered position was analogous to that of an External Marketing Consultant, with the objective to develop a 'Marketing Strategic Plan', responding to the company's need of rising the brand awareness in an increasingly competitive market. Therefore, a Marketing Interns Team was built by the Business Development Manager of the company, our direct supervisor. This team included two Interns with a background in Linguistics and International Relations and me, engaging in an extremely interesting collaboration in an interdisciplinary team. Effectively, my team-mates proved to be very opened to learn and apply methods of Design for services (Service Design Tools 2009) and graphic languages, as I was very grateful to them for upgrading the project with their extraordinary analytical skills, particularly at the level of the interaction between different stakeholders. Moreover, all the three of us, experiencing Australia from the perspective of International Students, were regarded by our supervisor as an interesting opportunity to bring to the organization an angle very close to those of its actual target. Accordingly, the working environment was positive and empowering. We did our best to develop a Marketing Strategic Plan as thorough as possible within the Internship's time frame. At the end of our Internship we delivered a final document along with a presentation followed by a Q&A session, to the presence of the members of the organization, that showed genuine interest towards our work. This was my first presentation in a working meeting of a real company, proving to be a both challenging and rewarding experience.

Moreover, as guests in another land, International Exchange Students are called to explore the cultural heritage and influences of their host nation, affecting people's lifestyle and mindset. Indeed, attending classes and doing exams is just a small part of the value embodied in this type of opportunity. Particularly, in Sydney the widespread western culture, deriving from the British colonisation occurred at the end of the 18th century, merges with the Aboriginal heritage and Multicultural influences in a very peculiar way. Sydney is a vibrant reality, where many skilled international students and workers are welcomed, increasing the value of the city while having the opportunity to experience a very high lifestyle's standard.

One of the facilitators of the multicultural interaction is undoubtedly the language. Indeed, English is nowadays one of the most universal languages and having a good proficiency of it is a basic requirement in the most innovative contemporary working environments. As Italian, having learnt English at school and having practiced it during my Master in PSSD at Politecnico but rarely interacted with native-English speakers, I found the experience in Sydney as an extremely good training, offering room for a satisfying improvement of my language and communication skills.

Within this framework, a good way to increase the chances of interaction can be the choice to live on campus. Particularly, I was given the possibility to live in a college at UNSW. Here, I had the opportunity to talk with Australian and international students, coming from all over the world. We shared beautiful moments, each of us bringing over his/her own culture and respect for diversity and curiosity to learn about it. There was no time to be homesick, since the college environment was extremely welcoming, creating a network of people ready to help each other whenever in need and keen to grow up and build experiences together. I will always be grateful to every person I shared something with, since everything was so nourishing and inspiring.

Also, the characteristic location of Australia within the world map and in comparison with Italy should not be ignored or underestimated. Indeed, to be in Australia means to be extremely close to South-East Asia and reaching and witnessing this country can be a life-changing experience and

a good ending for one's time as Exchange Student. Accordingly, after my exams I took my time to start this travel. I can clearly identify how extensively it challenged my perception of how life can be lived and my understanding of how poverty, richness and social/technological development can affect people's lifestyles and opportunities. Particularly, as a Service Designer, this journey offered me many clues on the way I would like to lead my future profession towards social innovation and multiculturalism. Indeed, the awareness derived from the realities I was immersed into leads me to reconsider the range of the things I believe possible and gives me a great incentive to travel and learn more, hopefully finding a way to give voice to people in needs and to develop projects of real use.

Finally, at the end of an International Exchange experience it is easy to realize the implications it has exercised on students' lives, taking roots into their renewed identities. Particularly, going far from their own natural surroundings, students have the great opportunity to feel themselves unique, peculiar. This enhances them to build a deeper understanding of their own skills and strenghts. Particularly, after a few years of studying at Politecnico, because of the similarity in beckgrounds and educational paths with most of my colleagues, I started experiencing the frustration of feeling like an average student, reaching average results and being given little credits for the undertaken accademic efforts. On the contrary, at UNSW most of the expertise I was trained to use daily at Politecnico was considered innovative and outstanding and, in this encouraging framework, I was inspired to use my potential at its best. I dislike mediocrity, and interacting with people highlighting my skills helped me to finally understand my value and to detect the areas I could work on to improve. This experience was of great help in order to develop my self-confidence, showing positive outcomes even in social interactions.

In conclusion, out of the limits of the things and the people we are familar and safe with, in that area where we are not even sure if we will succeed or fail, there is a big room for us to learn and grow. I believe that an International Exchange experience, in whatever location it is, falls neatly within this area. All we need to do is give ourselves the opportunity, and be ready to put all the strength of our will and all of our committment in being the best that we can be and doing the best that we can do.

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

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