

REPORT_Erasmus experience

I am attending the Product Service System Design Master of Science, here at Politecnico di Milano. Even though I am an international student at Politecnico, when I first heard about the great opportunity of undertaking an international placement as part of the Erasmus programme, especially the one from ELISAVA Barcelona, I knew it was for me, because I have always wanted to study and live for a while in Barcelona and take up the chance of a life time.

After applying for the international placement, getting a confirmed place to go and then booking the tickets for Barcelona, that is when the nerves kicked in as I realized that this is one of the biggest things I've ever had the chance to do. I wasn't so scared, because I already had other international experiences, but instead I was excited that again, I would be studying in a foreign country for 6 weeks.

The biggest problem I encountered was that the second semester in Barcelona started on the 7th of January and my first semester in Milan ended at the end of January. I tried to explain to the professors of the Final Synthesis course the fact that I had to leave earlier, but they told me I couldn't go, because the course was very important and I needed to have full attendance. So I decided to book four go and come back tickets in order to attend the courses in Milan and some courses at ELISAVA.

I arrived in Barcelona, in Spain on the

5th of January 2014, on the Prat Airport. The beauty of this city and its surroundings amazed me, just by admiring the landscape from my cabin window. I came a bit earlier in order to find accommodation, which was not an easy task. For my first week I stayed at the Sagrada Familia Hotel in order to find a permanent place to live.

Meanwhile, I also had to go on the 7th of January to ELISAVA to attend the Erasmus welcome reunion, to have my confirmation letter signed up by the host university and to come back to Milan on the 8th of January to attend the Final Synthesis course.

I was very pleased and surprised at the same time to find out the University of ELISAVA is situated right at the end of La Rambla, a very famous and beautiful street of Barcelona, very close to Port Vel, at Drasanés metro station. Being so close to the touristic area and to the seaside, I was able to discover much easier this town.

I was very warmly welcomed at the Erasmus student meeting. At the beginning we had a presentation held by the dean of ELISAVA and Paolo Sustersic, the international student responsible, explaining how the university works, how we are graded and many other useful information. After this, all incoming students received a paper file with the ELISAVA logo and some nice drawings on the cover and an envelop with the student card, the id and password.

Then we had the tour of the university and at the end we had a nice bufe with drinks and sweets in order to socialize. I met students from all over the world like United States, Australia, Austria, Colombia, Mexico, Sweden, Holland, Germany and many more.

After all this experience, I had to come back to Milan, as I said before, on the 8th of January, for only one day. On the next day I had the exciting pleasure to attend my first course at ELISAVA, which was called Exhibition project development. This course started at 8 o'clock sharp, as all the others. The first time I entered the classroom I was a bit shocked to see that there were few students, approximate 15. At first I thought that the others were running late, then I learned this is a normal number of attendances at this university. For me was a bit strange, because at Politecnico I am used to have at least 45 classmates at a course. The other thing that I found unexpected was that the professor was speaking in Catalan instead of speaking in Spanish. For me was a bit hard to understand what he was saying so I had to ask him if he could talk in Spanish, because us, Erasmus students, were not able to understand what he was talking about. He seemed a bit irritated, but he changed to Spanish. I liked the approach he had in that class in teaching us how an exhibition should be, in a very interactive way. At first he arranged us in different ways in the classroom, then he asked a girl to be the designer of the exhibition and basically she had to put some post-its on us of what she thought we were in the exhibition. After all this he taught us the basic elements of an exhibition and he gave us our first task.

When my first class ended, I received very good news; I finally had a permanent place to stay, after I struggled a lot to find it, seeing "millions" of apartments. This place was situated in a very nice neighborhood of Barcelona called Eixample somewhere between L'Hospital Clinic and Entença metro station. For me this neighborhood is very interesting, because all its streets are displayed perpendicular to each other, which makes it very hard to get lost. I was lucky to have Catalan flat mates, 2 boys and a girl, because in this way I was able to learn a lot about Catalan culture and to integrate faster. A thing that I learned from them and for me was a bit strange at the beginning was a peck on both cheeks, which was the normal way to be greeted in Spain, which I soon got used to.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to enjoy very much my first month in Barcelona, because each week I had to travel to Milan and because of it I was very tired. Also the second month I was a bit tiring, because I had to recover all the tasks that I had to do in the first month. I was lucky that the professors understood my situation and let me deliver everything later.

After this one and a half month things started to get in place and I finally started to enjoy my time there. I started to socialize more with my classmates, with my flat mates and to finally be able to go and discover the beautiful city of Barcelona.

In order to find more Erasmus students and to be able to travel with them, I started to search different ESN student associations from different universities, because ELISAVA, being so small,

doesn't have an Erasmus association.

One of the reasons I wanted to take up the opportunity of an international placement was to compare the design teaching approach in Spain to that of Italy. As a design student I wanted to observe the similarities and differences in approach in both countries in order to be able to learn and adapt to different ways. A few weeks of spending time in practice and reflecting on this, it became quite clear that things were done a bit differently. This was really interesting to see and developed my professional knowledge. It also gave me the confidence to ask questions and this in turn increased my confidence on a personal level too. I was able to do everyday tasks like shopping and travelling using the public transport very independently even though there was a language barrier. This is one of the main things I have taken from this Erasmus experience, that I have the confidence to do things independently. This is something I was able to do living in Italy, but doing it in another country and in a different language was a real achievement for me.

At the same time of practicing the Spanish language and starting to understand Catalan language, which is similar to Italian, French, Romanian and of course Spanish, I became really involved and aware of the Spanish and Catalan culture as well. Living in the beautiful city of Barcelona, which is rich in culture, meant I was surrounded by the history and diversity of Spain. It was incredible to get involved in the way the Spanish lived their lives, coming home from a day's work and staying in for the siesta hours like everyone else was great and made me feel part of the

their routine.

I enjoyed trying and experimenting with foods I never thought I would eat (raw fish!), but I wanted to fully embrace the culture and do anything to get the most out of this one in a life time opportunity I was experiencing. Only then was I able to get the true feeling of what I would be like to live like the Spanish.

The six months I spent in Barcelona really were the best and has given me an invaluable experience that I will never forget. I have learnt so much about myself and developed in so many ways. It is by far one of the best things I have been a part of and I feel proud privileged to have done it. It's been a memorable experience and I feel glad to have grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

It has been some time since I've been back from Barcelona, and I still talk about it with my family and friends every day, even though they are sick of hearing the stories but I still cannot get enough. I still relate my day-to-day life to when I was in Spain.

I would urge students on any course to do the same; it really is an extraordinary opportunity to learn about yourself and about a different culture. For students who wish to build their confidence and become more independent the Erasmus programme is perfect! It gives you so many learning opportunities and fantastic memories.

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