Relazione di fine scambio

Scuola del Design

Informazioni generiche

Anno Accademico di Scambio:	2019/2020	Nome della Sede in scambio:	CEU – Universidad Cardenal Herrera
Cognome e Nome:	Mordini Gabriele	Stato:	Spagna
Matricola:	893382	Codice Sede:	E VALENCI08
Corso di Studio:	Design del Prodotto Industriale	Tipo di scambio: (Semplice o Doppia Laurea)	Erasmus (semplice)
Anno di Corso:	3°, Laurea Triennale	Semestre di Scambio:	2°, 02-06/2020
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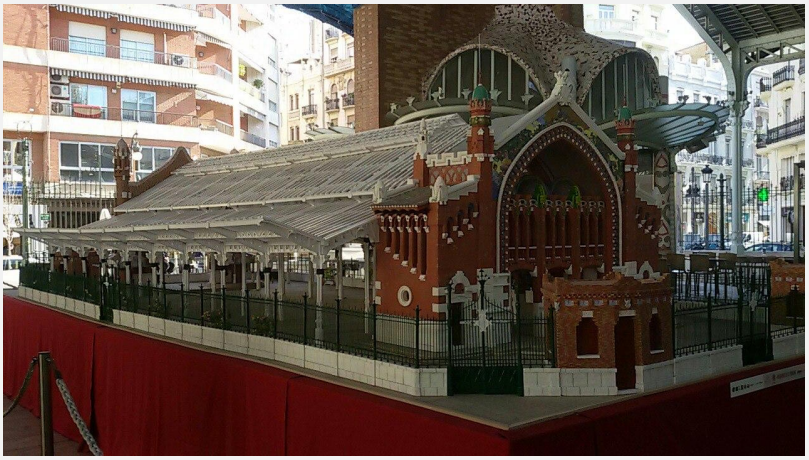
Racconta la tua esperienza di scambio:

I've spent my Erasmus during the second semester of my third year of bachelor degree, from February to June 2020. I went to Valencia, at CEU – Universidad Cardenal Herrera, to study Design.

Spain was my last option, but I was happy to have the opportunity of going abroad. I wanted to experience a different way of life and study than the one in Milan. Politecnico has a very professional approach to its students, focused on excellence and productivity. This makes it a top rank university in Italy and the world. What's so different, then, about other academic institutions? My curiosity was to explore alternative studying methods, believing that less famous countries are still valid places to learn and grow. I put Sweden and Netherlands as my first preferences, but I ended up going instead to an overrated Erasmus country, famous for its night life rather than for its academic qualifications. That's obviously great too, it's a choice of mine and it surely will be a completely different environment than before. So I couldn't wait to go there and enjoy the total change. In hindsight I can confirm it was a total change, although I absolutely didn't expect it *that way*.



Valencia is a beautiful city, rich of interesting sites and traditions. Comparing it to Milan, it seemed to me like a "big town": it's great, full of events and people; public services are widespread and efficient, there are many shops, restaurants and attractions. Many are the possibilities to go out and have fun, alone and with friends, at any time. On the other hand, the city has a quiet daily mood, is very green and surrounded by parks and places to walk. The city centre is well connected and nice to see, with beautiful architectures and large squares. You can both enjoy the *movida española* and relax during the day. Students here usually live and gather around the State University, whose district is full of pubs and well served by transports (but the metro doesn't run late at night except for Friday and Saturday). It's even possible to reach the beach by metro and tram! I lived near the city centre, renting a room through a good company a previous Erasmus student suggested me. From there I had no problems going back and forth, any side of Valencia in easy to reach.

I soon made acquaintance with my three roommates, two of them Erasmus students too from France, and with the partner academy. Universidad Cardenal Herrera has got four campuses. My one is dislocated in the town of Moncada, linked with Valencia by the metro line, and the school of Architecture and Design is once more separated by the main campus, that includes among other the faculties of Engineering, Medicine and Veterinary. The Design building is small but very pretty, decorated by the numerous artworks made by older students. What surprised me the most about it are the prototype laboratories. They have multiple rooms, some of them dedicated to different machines and tools, and all of them are big enough to the amount of students in the campus. Moreover, people can freely use 3D printing machines and a laser cutter. I had no lab courses but I liked having access to it. Every professor was gentle with me and the other foreign students, recognizing my difficulty of learning a new language. Spanish people know English like Italians: I managed to express myself somehow the first two weeks while studying the local language, then I learned how to ask basic questions and had less and less problems understanding other and being understood. It was easier with young people, used to study English. Anyway, even knowing nothing of Spanish before, it was a quick idiom to learn for me because it's really similar to Italian. Don't be afraid of a foreign language.

My first month of Erasmus was an explorative one. I don't usually go out often neither I'm extroverted or easy-going, but finding myself in a whole new city I walked around several times. I liked the places I went to and Spanish food and landscapes. I also participated to some trips and parties organized by the many Erasmus associations. Morella and Peñiscula are little touristic sites, both with ancient castle, the latter famous for its crystal clear sea. I joined other foreign students to visit them one day. Another time I went volunteering for the environment, following a group of older people from the Valencian Botanic Garden. That trip led to the little town of Aras de los Olmos, near an old abandoned field where we planted some native trees. These two were my only experiences out of Valencia and I did both by myself aggregating with strangers. One of my few concerns about the Erasmus was specifically ending up alone, knowing that I need my time to make friendship and in just a semester I feared to bend only with classmates and people like me.

The short period of journeys, together with classes and nights out with other Erasmus people, stopped in mid-March due to the Covid-19 pandemic. After the Italian outbreak of the virus in February, Spain went on as usual while some people (especially foreigners) started to worry about it, until a few cases arose in Madrid. From that moment on, fearing the exponential increase of cases all over Spain, CEU university closed for a week, recommending us all to stay home, then started moving the courses online. The same happened to all the schools and the public activities of Valencia. Since I'm a Design student attending no laboratorial courses, I was able to attend all my lessons from home. Valencia lived that sudden quarantine with dismay, because it happened right in the middle of *Las Fallas*, an historical and spectacular tradition where people from all over Spain and the world came to see fireworks, exhibitions and giant carnival floats put on fire at the end on the feast. It has never stopped since Spanish Civil War. It's another missed occasion of this Erasmus, but I'm glad that authorities prevented the worse in time.

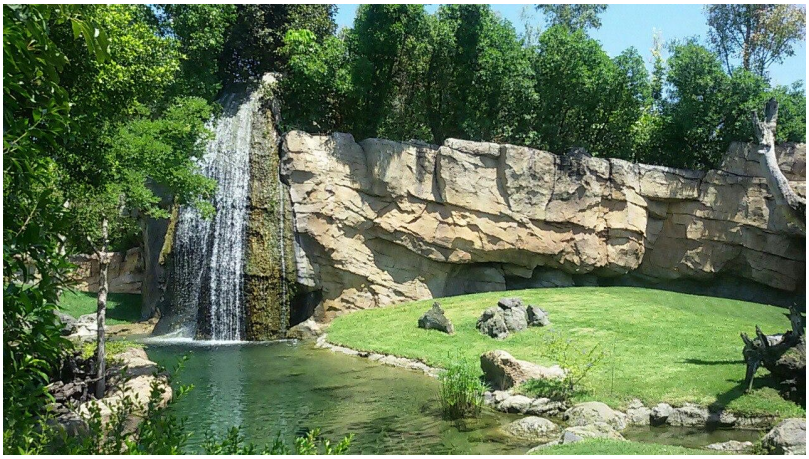
My roommates, a third one from Alicante other than the two French, all went back home in a week after the start of quarantine. Politecnico gave me the possibility of cancelling the study experience and turn back to the normal 2° semester planned in September, as well as going on with the Erasmus both in Valencia or at home. I decided to stay there continuing the Erasmus: although gathering every possible information about coming in Italy, I didn't feel safe to travel and didn't want to put my family at risk. Many hurried to go out of Northern Italy that days and while media pointed it out as a risk of spreading coronavirus all over Italy, I wouldn't do the same. At the start of the pandemic outbreak people used to go out on their balconies and windows to clap their hands all together, thanking Spanish health workers for their brave effort against Covid-19. It's a habit Europe learnt from Italy, I listened to many friends of mine talking about it and I was happy to see it in Valencia. I always participated, feeling a sense of community towards all my unknown neighbours, and this habit went on until the end of the so called "phase 1" of public restrictions, while in Italy it lasted a week or two. Universidad Cardenal Herrera had the very heart-warming idea of contacting all of us foreign students still in Valencia: it organized a video call saying we're not alone and it will be by our side during this time, then kept us in contact creating a Whatsapp group with our phone numbers. I must admit that we didn't use it often, on the contrary it has been abandoned a few weeks later. It's a pity, because

I found this initiative an encouraging message from the university and have never expected an expression of closeness like it. We student were never left alone by our institution.

I lived the rest of my exchange alone at home, so. I was lucky to live with roommates, since they left to me a big house to live in, but as I said before I had nobody in Valencia. People met during trips and meetings never reappeared and my colleagues formed such a close group I struggled to stick together with. My third year of Italian Bachelor Degree became the fourth in Spain and the students of my courses seemed to be grown up together during the past three years and found little curiosity about outsiders. I was able to know only other Erasmus people, in my same conditions, but then we talked only because of workgroups. My company were my family and my computer (and my friends but not always). I did a video call to celebrate Easter and my birthday with mom, dad and my brother. The city lived a situation similar to Italy, imposing the same personal limitations like face masks, gloves and social distancing. I went out once or twice a month for groceries and nothing else until June, where public activities restarted to open up progressively and with caution.

Online lessons were something new, but I liked them. I had better time management, eliminating the necessity of going out and taking the metro to reach my class, and I could start cooking lunch right at the end of the lesson. Furthermore I was able to regulate the volume of teachers' voice, helping me a lot in understanding everything even in a new language. One of my courses was Web Design and of course working and studying it directly from my own pc was even easier than before. That course, so, went on brilliantly, and also a theorical one of Design Management in which the teacher learned quickly how to use the informatic platform to teach online. That tool was always used by the university to share contents and exercises, similarly to the Beep platform of Politecnico. It has been empowered with a system to do video conferences, share our screens and collect any information about the courses. My third and last course, nonetheless, was organized on Google Drive, where every lesson was a recorded PowerPoint presentation with the professor explanation in background. That method wasn't envolving at all, but all the professors demonstrated to be professional and helpful toward us. We worked both individually and in workgroups and had mid-course assignments to prepare regularly. Two of the courses based their final result just from the votes of the previous assignments, while Design Management (*Gestión del Diseño*) was concluded by a final online exam. It was done entering the exam link from Respondus browser and accomplishing the requested identification procedure to confirm that we're the actual students of the university and we're not close to any external information or distraction.

At the end of June I finished my courses and my quarantine. Valencia's life has slowly come back to the usual. By the end of my exam session I finally went out of home for more than buying groceries, but I had just a few days to make up for the rest of the Erasmus. The other foreign students I knew had already come home in the previous months, some deciding to attend the Spanish courses from home and some others interrupting the exchange. I visited the City of Science and the Bioparc. The first one was willing to reopen and gave special sales to attract visitors; it was a unique opportunity to see a scientific museum with a €4 ticket but sadly half of it was inaccessible for health reasons. The Bioparc, a zoo built recreating natural environments for the many animals in there, was instead fully reopened and enjoyable. Other than museums I urged to visit restaurants and try again typical Spanish food, completing the taste experience started in February. In Valencia, rice is common as much as pasta in Italy and *paella* is usually served with many ingredients and recipes. Other typical specialities are *tapas*, appetizers of every kind, from ham to cheese to vegetables, complemented by beer or *sangria*.



I've seen very little of Spain, but I enjoyed it anyway. If you're considering going there during your Erasmus, do it. What I visited was beautiful and inspiring, it showed me the possibility of a peaceful great city, where work, success and efficiency can coexist with nature, selfcare and entertainment of any kind. Everyone thinks about Spain as a vacation destination: they're right, because there are plenty of opportunities to grasp and enjoy. But looking deeper, I saw a place worth living in, not only visiting, and perfect for students from abroad. The first day of lesson the campus hosted a welcome ceremony where I met young people from all over the world, from Macedonia to Texas, and way too much Italians. My Erasmus period was unlucky and unpredictable, but I'm sure you will appreciate this country more than I did. Mobility programs expand your worlds by putting you into new situations. You can have guesses and expectations but you can't predict or program your experiences and every event to deal with is a moment of growth. Different language, different culture, different people, different professors are going to shape your life for the better. Despite all the problems and the emotions I suffered being locked at home, I chose to continue my Erasmus and to fully live it. It has become a deep reflection on me, my perspective about relationships, my future study choices. I'm grateful for having spent my exchange in a way that cannot be considered wasted. And I wish you a great experience of life, in Valencia as everywhere.

Live your Erasmus

Firma: Gabriele Modini

Data: 13/07/2020