POLITECNICO MILANO 1863
SCUOLA DEL DESIGN
DIPARTIMENTO DI DESIGN

RELAZIONE DI FINE SCAMBIO
End-of-exchange report

Istruzioni
Indicare di seguito tutte le informazioni che possano essere utili ad altri studenti che parteciperanno ad uno scambio. Preferibilmente in lingua inglese, lunghezza min. 2500 parole + possibili immagini, file di max. dimensione 2MB in formato PDF. Questo documento sarà pubblicato nel sito web della Scuola.

/ Instructions
Please indicate below any information that may be useful to other students taking part in an exchange. Preferably in English, length min. 2500 words + possible images, files of max. Dimension 2 MB in PDF format. This document will be published on the School's website.

Informazioni generiche / General informations

Anno Accademico di Scambio: 2020/2021
Academic Year of Exchange

Cognome e Nome: Mazzoleni Michela
Surname and Name

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Registration

Corso di studio: Design for the Fashion System
Study course

Anno di corso: 2MA
Year of course

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Nome della Sede in scambio: Vilniaus Dailes Akademija
Name of the Exchange School Vilnius Academy of Arts

Stato: Lithuania
Country

Codice Sede: LT VILNIUS03
Exchange code

Tipo di scambio: Erasmus+
Type of exchange

Semestre di scambio: Second Semester/Spring Semester
Exchange semester

Docente promotore: Vittorio Linfante
Promoter

Racconta la tua esperienza di scambio / Tell us about your exchange experience:

I arrived in Vilnius in January 2021, so we could say that the timing and the situation were not the usual ones of an Erasmus. Despite that, I still decided to do it, thinking it could have been a good experience anyways. Now, six months after, I can definitely say that it is one of the best choices I could have made.

Since the beginning, even before leaving, the International Offices of Politecnico and Vilnius Dailes Akademija were more than helpful for every little thing. Given the circumstances, Lina and Elena (from VDA's office) were available for calls and online meetings in case of need; plus, they organized three days of online meetings for orientation since we couldn't meet in the school. In the beginning, we had a two-week "trial" period, during which we could attend all the optional subjects before choosing the final ones we wanted to carry on during our stay. In this way, we didn't lose many classes, and we also had to change our Learning Agreements just one time.
Being in my second year of my Master's Degree, I had more optional subjects than department ones. This is because, during the spring semester, students are working on their thesis and don't have many other classes to follow. The only department class I had (Fashion Design Project) allowed me to be free and design something I wanted to because I didn't have a strict brief to follow and, as mentioned above, it is the class during which students develop their thesis. I can say that I was pretty free to work autonomously, and I could organize meetings with the teacher that was helping me whenever it was necessary. My project revolved around natural materials and natural dyes, and I actually worked entirely from home. I had the possibility to even book a studio, but my teacher suggested I bring home a sewing machine, so it would have been easier for me to manage my time without having to deal with booking the studio. Concerning the materials I used for this class, I went pretty often to Humana, a second-hand shop I will talk about later, in which I found clothes and fabrics that I needed. For the dying part, I found everything I needed in the supermarkets.
The teacher that was following me suggested I followed another class, which was called Fashion Forward. It was not necessary for me, and it was not included in my Learning Agreement, but she thought it might help me in the research phase of my project. The class was entirely in Lithuanian, but both the teacher and the students were very kind and translated for me the PowerPoint presentations and part of the discussions they were having. I managed to follow it for

few weeks then, unfortunately, I had to stop attending it because it was overlapping with one of the classes I was following at Politecnico.
The optional classes were taught in English, also because most of them are followed only - or mostly - by Erasmus students. The teachers are really nice and always available for consultations or clarifications regarding the classes or the personal works. With the school being an Art Academy, it surely has a different approach from Politecnico. The classes are more art-oriented and, because of this, I decided to follow some optional courses that otherwise I wouldn't have the possibility to experiment with here in Milan. I picked three subjects that were more practical and arts-related, Bookbinding, Printmaking, and The Art of Painting on Glass; and then two that were more theoretical, Sustainability and Innovations and Visual Communication Design. Positioning. The Visual Identity. When we started with the classes, everything was still completely online, even the practical ones, so, for this reason, some of the teachers gave us materials so we could start working on our projects at home. Slowly, when things started to open little by little, we had the possibility to use some of the workshops. The Academy has several laboratories and, from what I could see, they are all well equipped. The graphics studio, in which I worked for my Printmaking and Bookbinding classes, it's pretty big. It has a room entirely dedicated to Bookbinding, with all the materials that you may need to bind books: cutting machines, presses, fabrics, and all the tiny tools that are necessary. Our teacher was very kind and always available for meetings. In the beginning, he gave us a list of items we might need for the realization of the books, along with video instructions on how to effectively do them, since he could explain us during the online meetings, but it was easier if we could visualize better the steps and rewatch the videos. As soon as we could, we met with him to finish the more complicated books that needed a press or further explanation from him. Needless to say, it was way easier and faster actually finishing the projects in the workshops so that we could ask for help when needed.
For what concerns the class of Printmaking, as I already mentioned, we started it online. The teacher was explaining and showing us different examples, techniques, and the results we could achieve with each of them. Then, she gave each of us a bag with several tools and materials - including inks and paper - we could use to start our projects, mainly with the linocut technique. As soon as it was possible, we started going to the workshop. The studio is pretty big, consisting of several rooms fully equipped with everything you could need; presses for linocut printing, offset lithography, and a place for screen printing. Also, the school offers its student a lot of materials, such as linoleum for the prints, rolls, spatulas, inks, and even paper, which is a good thing, since at the beginning you don't really know which one you might need. My work mainly consisted of linocut prints, in the beginning, I was doing it at home, but, of course, the result was not as good as when I did it in the studio, where I could use the press and have a more uniform layer of ink. I also started working with offset lithography; I prepared sketches on transparent paper and transferred them on metal plates. Unfortunately, I couldn't finish my prints because of the imminent exams session, during which the studio was almost entirely booked by graphic design students that had to finish their projects and thesis works.
Then I worked a lot in the Glass workshop. The studio is in an old building a little outside the city center, it can be reached by bus, but I found it faster and easier to go there on foot in like 30 minutes. The teacher was always very available for any kind of clarification. In the beginning, we had lots of online calls, during which he explained to us what can be achieved using different techniques of glass painting and compositions. We also had the opportunity to have a meeting with a foreign artist that showed us his works. When we finally started to do practical works, the teacher gave us a list of materials, mainly brushes, that we might need for the painting part, but he also had some that we could borrow in case of need. Needless to say that we didn't have to buy glass, it was provided by the workshop. The first project was focused on discovering the different techniques, pigments, and enamels for painting on glass. To do so, he gave us several images of primitive drawings found in caves so that the subjects of our paintings were not too complicated - since it mainly was a "training" exercise. After the first one, we were a little freer and could go in the direction we wanted. We also had the opportunity of experimenting with different methods of creating glass artworks. After painting, we focused on compositions and layered glass pieces. We discovered that, in order to melt with each other, the glass pieces need to be made of the same type of glass - for instance, you can't melt a transparent window glass with a colored one otherwise it will break during the "cooking" phase. Of course, some types of glass can melt with each other, even if they're different colors and compositions, but that is a very specific and expensive kind of glass, so we did not work a lot with it. The last technique I experimented with was the Tiffany one. It basically allows you to create a composition made of different glass pieces (colored or not) that are then soldered by the technicians with lead, like in the windows of churches.
Regarding the two more theoretical classes I followed, they were both taught by the same teacher, which was really helpful and friendly. The subject of Sustainability and Innovations was structured with frontal lectures in which she gave us a theoretical basis about different sustainability concepts and issues. Towards the end of every lecture, she gave us a small task we needed to work on. To do so, she split us students into smaller rooms on Zoom in which we could work more easily - after that, we had to present our work to her and the other students. I found this really helpful, not only to get to know a little more the other students - this class was also composed of Lithuanian students from Klaipeda, a city where the VAA has another branch - but also to be more involved and active in the class. Then, for the final individual assignment, each of us had to select one of the sustainability topics she gave us, develop a concept and a solution to improve the issues on it. Concerning the "Visual Communication Design, Positioning, The Visual Identity" class, it was pretty much structured in the same way as the Sustainability one since it was held by the same teacher. We had online lectures about visual communication, branding, marketing. Classes were structured with a theoretical introduction on a topic then small group works on the theme of that day, and a final individual assignment. The task consisted of choosing one topic, do a market overview, develop a concept, and some solutions to improve such category.

For what concerns the accommodation, the Academy has a dorm reserved only for its students to which I applied. My decision was driven mainly by two reasons, Covid and the location of the dorm. Because of Covid and the restrictions, I thought that living in the dorm would be easier to get to know other Erasmus and local students of the Academy. It was a very good choice, most of the Erasmus students did the same, and we were living all on the same part of the dorm, so we got to know each other pretty well. The side of the dorm dedicated to us Erasmus students is composed of five blocks, each of which is composed of two rooms that share a bathroom, a shower, a sink, and a fridge. The rooms can be with one, two, or three beds, but in each block (apart from one that can host five) there can be four people maximum. When I

was there, we were not at full capacity (which is twenty-one people), but we were only fourteen students. There is an equipped kitchen with three more shared fridges, a small common area with a coffee table and couches, there is also a laundry room with a washing machine on our floor, but upstairs there are two more washing machines we can use in case the one on the "Erasmus floor" is taken. I have to say that sharing a kitchen with many people might be a little painful and messy, but if you set up ground rules, it can definitely work, or at least it worked for us! The dorm is in a perfect location, five minutes from the Academy buildings, and it is in the Old Town, which is truly an amazing thing. Everything can be reached on foot from the dorm, supermarkets, art supply stores (there is one in front of the Saint Annes's church, which is next to the main building of the Academy, and then there is Meno Muza, a little behind the town hall square), restaurants, bars, clubs, and basically everything else you may need.

The city itself it's really nice, and I truly loved it. It offers lots of entertainment between museums, clubs, parks, and much more. Museums are cheap, all the ones I have been to offer some kind of student discount with a reduced fee, but, being students of the Arts Academy, some of them are even free. The most important thing to do is order your ISIC card as soon as you can. The card states where you are studying and it allows you to have lots of discounts on different areas, even for transportations. Public transportation is already cheap, but with the ISIC you have all the tickets (both for busses and trains) for half the price. You can charge the card with money and use it to buy tickets on the busses, but I found it easier to use Trafi, which is a really helpful app. You can easily book and activate your tickets through it, and it also helps you find the best way to go around. If you don't want to use public transportations, you can always use Bolt, which is like Uber, but definitely less expensive - and it's the perfect solution to go from the airport to the dorm. Bolt also offers two other services, scooter rentals, and food delivery, along with Wolt - another food delivery app. If you want or need to rent a car for some reason, you can use CityBee, it's pretty comfortable and easy to find, but I feel like it's best for small distances in the city. If you need to go to other cities, it probably would be better to find a car rental place, because it will probably be easier but also less expensive.
The traditional food is nice; potatoes are one of the main items that are present in lots of the typical dishes, but I enjoyed them. One of my favorites was the cold beetroot soup, perfect for warm weather, but also the sweets were very very nice. Now the weather. I can say that I experienced the "real Lithuanian winter" or, at least, that is what I have been told by friends and teachers. It was pretty intense, and some days it went down to -25°C degrees - but once you layer very well, and especially cover your hands, you will be fine. But the city during winter is majestic, it snowed a lot when I was there and it was really nice. Some of us went skiing and ice skating, we slide down the hills with cardboards, and, one of the most amazing things, we walked on top of the Green Lakes when frozen. Spring came a little bit later than what we are used to in Italy but it was also amazing, especially because seeing the city in a different light and without snow is something else, and it's probably one of the things that made me fall in love with Vilnius even more. I stayed until the end of June, and the last month and a half were pretty hot (up to 35°C), so bring some less heavy clothes with you. Or you can go shopping at Humana, which is the vintage/second-hand store I quickly mentioned earlier. There are a lot of them around the city, and they offer lots of clothes for very cheap prices, especially right before they refurnish the stores with the "new" collections, they go down to 1€ per item, and you can find some pretty good deals, especially in the vintage ones.

I know I might have said a lot, but I surely might have forgotten something. If you need anything else or want to talk, please do not hesitate to contact me through email (*michela1.mazzoleni@mail.polimi.it or michelamazzoleni2@gmail.com*) or even on Instagram (*@michela_mazzoleni*).

Hope this report helped you clear your mind and maybe choose the Academy of Arts for your Erasmus Experience!

Firma / Signature: Michela Mazzoleni Data / Data: 10/08/2021