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: *Academic Year of Exchange*	2020/2021	Nome della Sede in scambio: *Name of the Exchange School*	Nottingham Trent University
Cognome e Nome: *Surname and Name*	Giordani Gaia	Stato: *Country*	Regno Unito
Matricola: *Registration*	914788	Codice Sede: *Exchange code*	UK NOTTINGH 02
Corso di studio: *Study course*	Design della Comunicazione	Tipo di scambio: *Type of exchange*	Erasmus
Anno di corso: *Year of course*	3°, Laurea Triennale	Semestre di scambio: *Exchange semester*	2°
Email: *Email*	ggiordani2012@gmail.com	Docente promotore: *Promoter*	Elena Caratti

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

ERASMUS AND UNIVERSITY
My Erasmus experience has been great, even if the period in the host country has lasted a short period of time, because of Covid (I stayed in the United Kingdom from April 11th to July 3rd 2021). If anybody asked me, I would for sure repeat the overall experience without having any second thoughts.

Even if at Politecnico I'm enrolled in the Communication Design course, and the most obvious thing would have been for me to follow the Graphic Design classes, I asked, and I was given the opportunity to follow the Photography classes in Nottingham, and deepen my knowledge in this field, that has always passionated me.
I started my online classes at Nottingham Trent University in mid-february, from Italy, and moved to the UK when some restrictions were lifted in April. The classes, unfortunately, remained online for some courses, mine was one of this, but some others, like Graphic Design started having blended learning (both online and in person meetings). My hope is that future students won't have to deal with this problem and will be able to live the university at its fullest, on campus and face to face, that is always the best way to meet the other students and experience the host university's learning methods.

Since the beginning, the professors have showed full availability in helping, and very good organization in the course structure, requirements and assessment; the module guides laid out and presented the schedules with classes, lectures, seminars, guest speakers and topics.
Knowing everything since the start of the semester gave us the possibility of planning our work on the final projects right away and work fully on them since the beginning, while also learning and exploring other matters through the parallel lessons. What I found different from what I was used to at Politecnico, is that I was given much more freedom in deciding my assessment topics and themes, and in organizing my work; I was required to discuss and bring ideas each week, in order to receive feedback and advices from the professors, but nobody ever told me it wasn't ok, but rather to keep working on it and find the way that fit better within my process and to the final result I wanted. I found this a little difficult and destabilizing in the beginning, since I couldn't understand if what I was doing was "right" or not, but when I started getting used to this method, and perceiving the research behind it, it became easier and easier.

Even if you are a third year student at Politecnico di Milano, when at Nottingham Trent University, either in the photography course or in the graphic design one, you will be most likely put in the second year of their bachelor degree; they do this so that you can work on different projects and try many things (the students at their third year are just working on their final dissertation). The photography course, specifically, is divided in two modules, *Visual and Professional Practice* and *Cultural and Critical Practice*, one is more practical and the other one theoretical, but they work together in building the students' knowledge and practice. The exams, have then been both theoretical and 'practical', and the final results were an essay and a couple of photographical projects; you get different grades for each one of them, but the final grade is one and general.

The communication with the host university hasn't always been the fastest (sometimes I had to wait a week for receiving an answer), but in the end they were very helpful, and always solved all my doubts. In addition, they helped me get my transcript of records ahead of the scheduled time, and on time for me to send it to Politecnico and graduating in July; I am really grateful to my exchange referent at NTU for this.

Even if the classes remained online throughout the whole semester, the university organizes many events, meetings, seminars, and, in my case's course, in-person workshops. I attended a couple of them for learning analogical printing in the darkroom, and it was amazing. The university's campus and spaces are very cool too, new and well-equipped; I used them many times while preparing my exams, like the library and the Art and Design building.

ACCOMMODATION

I stayed in a private student accommodation, even if in the beginning I wanted to stay on campus (that is 5 minutes walking from the city center), but because of the delayed departure it would have been too expansive compared to the time spent in England. For 12 weeks of rent I then spent 1224£ (102£ a week), a pretty good price considering the good maintenance of the spaces and the en-suite toilette. The flat in the accommodation was shared between Chiara, the other girl from Politecnico that travelled with me, two English guys, and myself; I'll be honest, the domestic partnership hasn't been the best with the two boys, because of their being very messy and not caring at all about the communal spaces, but when comparing our situation to that of other international students, we found out that it could have been even worse, so we were "lucky" I guess. The accommodation was also a little far from the city (30 minutes walking), but it had all that we needed (except for kitchen utensils, we had to buy everything) and it was good for the time we spent there. Obviously, I would recommend other solutions to future students, and I'd suggest to them to always check how far is the accommodation/flat from the city center. Furthermore, if future students are looking for easy ways to meet people, I would tell them to search for bigger flats in accommodations (7-12 people); that's the only thing I would change about my Erasmus if I could go back in time, because it would have made possible for us to meet more people sooner, and especially practice our English more (when living with another Italian, it wasn't spontaneous for us to talk to each other in English).

FREE TIME AND THE CITY

Classes took just a small amount of time each week (6/7 hours a week in the most busy ones, when we also had guest speakers), and this gave me the freedom to organize my time, work on the projects, as well as on my final year thesis at Politecnico. About the thesis, thanks to the online PEL meetings, I was able to be in line with the requirements and always on time with the deadlines, without the need to go back to Italy (like it was in the past years before the Covid pandemic happened).

Having just a little amount of hours dedicated to classes, gave me also some free time to enjoy the city, explore and go on little trips.

I found Nottingham great, it's a city, but it's not too big, so you can experience it at its fullest; the city center is beautiful, old and new buildings at the same time, alternative quarters, big parks within small distances, and the canal and river area is good for relaxing times and nice walks. There are places to visit too, like the art gallery (which is free), the castle, just renewed (interesting and well displayed), and a couple of other museums. It's a city with an important story, they say it's "the heart" of England, from which many changes and revolutions throughout history were made; furthermore it's Robin Hood's city, and there are many references to it (streets, statues, experiences in the castle…). With just a 5£ return ticket, you can get to Sherwood Forest in an hour by bus from the bus station; I really recommend it in a nice sunny day, for a relaxing walk and a good picnic.

In the city there are an infinity and variety of cafes, bars, bakeries, restaurants, and pubs, different cuisines, and styles, for different tastes. It's a very energetic, busy and lively city.

There's also a big shopping mall right in the city center, where you can find pretty much all you need (supermarket, a covered market, post office, important shops…). And if you are looking for something different and "alternative", don't miss out on the Lace Market area and Hockley district; between cafes, and typical pubs, there are some nice vintage clothes shops too, where you can find some pretty good deals.

Moving around the city and nearby is easy also thanks to the bus and tram system, that runs very frequently and almost always on time (English people are very precise in this). Furthermore, from the station, you can get easily anywhere around the UK, either by train or bus (if booked in advance, tickets are not too expensive). In less than 3 months I was able to visit Cambridge, Manchester, Leeds, Oxford, Windsor, and Birmingham.

If you are planning on traveling around the country by train, I would suggest to buy the railway card for 30£ that allows you to have discounted tickets (up to 1/3 off on prices) on all your future train trips. The price is basically covered with just the first 2/3 trips taken.

LIFE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Living in the UK is a little expensive, especially when enjoying the time out and going for meals or nights out (and then converting the amount spent in €), but if well-managed it's not too bad (on the contrary, supermarkets are not expensive at all, and with good thinking and organization you can really save some money on the grocery shopping). Don't bring too much cash with you because you won't need it (all shops prefer cashless payments, especially after Covid happened), and you will probably find yourself with 100£ of cash (or more) to spend in the last 5 days before leaving the UK (or at least that's what happened to me).

People are nicer than I expected, in shops and cafes they always greet you with kindness and courtesy, providing a good and (almost always) fast service.

The weather is interesting, I'd say; we had some beautiful, sunny, and very hot spring days in late April, and after some other good days at the beginning of June, we had to take back out our jackets and coats from the wardrobe because it became very cold again. As they told us, it's been one of the coldest springs ever in the last few years, so hopefully future students will be a little more lucky than us. Anyway, my advice is to not take with you too many summer clothes, but the right mid-season ones that can be used in multiple ways.

COVID SITUATION

The pandemic had a relevant impact on my overall experience; since the beginning, when I decided to postpone my departure because of heavy measures that had been taken in England at the beginning of the semester (because of lockdown, you couldn't go out and everything around was closed). Even in March/April, when I started thinking about traveling to Nottingham because of some restrictions' lifting I was unsure wether it was a good decision or not; I was afraid I would have gotten there and spent most of my time at home, because of online classes and not meeting many people (all the events were still online too). In the end, the situation turned out to be way better than I thought: restaurants opened up as soon as we arrived, the obligation to wear masks outside was lifted too, and inside places (like museums) opened later in May, giving us the time to visit

everything we wanted to and live the full experience. When looking at Italy from abroad in the past months, I was sincerely happy I decided to take this opportunity (and “risk”) and go to the UK, even if for such a short period of time. Covid, contrary to what I had thought, didn’t change anything about the experience, and when I started going out and enjoying my exchange, it almost seemed like it wasn’t there (the only thing that reminded us about its presence was having to wear masks indoors).

FRIENDSHIPS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to create many relationships with other students within my course ,because of the online learning, and many people not being in Nottingham, but in their home cities. Anyway, I found a good support within a couple classmates, that were able to help me and solve some doubts about classes and assessments; furthermore, there was a useful group chat on whatsapp with all the course students, where they would communicate important news, and answer questions.

On the other side, I was very lucky in finding a good network of Erasmus and International students that had been created since the beginning of the semester, in February. It was a group of around 20/25 people, and all the students were very hospitable and invited us to join for a dinner as soon as we met them the very first time. Creating friendships was very easy from that point; we organized dinners, parties, trips, breakfasts and brunches, study and coffee sessions, went bowling and on walks together; all these little moments made possible for us to create a good bond, have some really good times, and share beautiful memories with them.

Furthermore, having a good and big group of international people is key in exercising and improving the language, while also spending time away from the computer, and “recharging”.

CONCLUSION

Leaving the UK and finishing my Erasmus experience has been tough, because I enjoyed every moment of it, and I didn’t want to leave when the moment arrived. During my staying abroad I never regretted it, I lived every moment as much as I could, and tried to find the good in the everyday simple things. I just came back, and already miss it very much; I just wish it could have lasted more, it’s been amazing and a real life lesson for me. I was able to deepen my knowledge in one of my passions, photography, while also finishing my thesis and preparing for the next step. I traveled, visited places, and enjoyed the city of Nottingham as much as I could.

One of the most important things for me was, of course, meeting new people, and building many great memories with them; even if the major friendships that were created are with international students, and not with English students, I don’t find it a lack in the overall experience, but rather an added value, that made me meet and know different cultures and lifestyles.

Overall, I can say I was able to live the experience at 360°, “seizing” every moment. My short, but meaningful Erasmus, will always be a beautiful and unforgettable memory. I would really recommend it to everyone; as long as you think positive and face “tests” with determination and desire, it will always turn out good. Nottingham has treated me very well, and I would leave for the UK again tomorrow if given the opportunity.

Firma / Signature: Gaia Giordani

Data / Data: 06/07/2021