RELAZIONE DI FINE SCAMBIO / END OF EXCHANGE REPORT

INFORMAZIONI GENERICHE / GENERAL INFORMATIONS

Anno Accademico di Scambio / Academic Year of Exchange: 2021/2021
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Nome della Sede di Scambio / Name of the Exchange School: Nottingham Trent University
Stato / Country: United Kingdom (England)
Codice sede / Exchange code: UK NOTTING02
Tipo di scambio / Type of exchange: Erasmus (short)
Semestre di scambio / Exchange semester: Spring semester
Docente promotore / Promoter: Elena Caratti

RACCONTA LA TUA ESPERIENZA DI SCAMBIO / TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

COVID

I'll start off by saying that I had my Erasmus experience during Covid (February-June 2021), herefore many aspects of this experience have been affected by the whole Covid situation. First of all, I was never 100% sure I would actually leave: i was afraid to be forced to stay inside due to a possible lockdown or restrictive measures or to have to attend lessons online from Italy, which was something I really didn't want to do. The UK went into lockdown during February, making my decision even harder. However, I decided to start taking the courses online, without neglecting the ones I would have had to follow if I hadn't had my Erasmus. This allowed me not to be left behind in either university, while giving myself more time to make a decision. I'm happy with what I decided, since I was finally able to leave in April. To be honest, going to England didn't actually have such a big impact on my academic experience: after the 10 days quarantine, i only had three in lessons on campus. However, I had a chance to use the spaces inside the campus and meet new people.
The university managed the whole Covid situation quite well. Some courses could go back on campus and we were able to use the labs and spaces available on campus, such as the library and common rooms. We also had access to free Covid self-test (antigen), which they suggested to do at least once a week. We could either go on campus and do a self-test there or bring some of them home.
Regarding the Covid management in England, it was very different from Italy. When I got there, the situation was already better and the government was able to progressively lift the restrictions.

WEATHER

have to say, I'm usually a fan of the British weather, but this time it caught me off guard. I can't say much in terms of advice, since the only thing I learnt about it is that it's absolutely unpredictable. I arrived there in April, therefore already Spring time, but in Nottingham it was still winter. The weather was pretty cold until the beginning of May, then it started resembling an actual Spring season. We had some warmer days in June, when it actually seemed it was summer. After that started raining and being freezing cold again. The only thing I can say is to bring a wide range of clothes, not to trust the weather forecasts too much (since they're often wrong) and to bring an umbrella even if the sun is out. Most of the time it's sunny in the morning, but then it starts raining all of a sudden.

THE CITY

For some reason, I expected the city to be smaller than what it actually was. However, it's a nice city. Everything is pretty much condensed in the city centre. The university campus for Design students is in the city centre as well. I didn't visit Nottingham much though. I went frequently to the city centre, but mostly to go shopping or to study in the campus. I know that there's a Modern Art Gallery in the city, which unfortunately I didn't get to visit. Of course, there's the Nottingham Castle, which was closed during the first period of my stay, but it opened up later. One of my university professors mentioned a guided tour I could take around the city.

One thing I did do was going to the Sherwood Forest. It's around 40 minutes away from Nottingham by bus. It's a relaxing way to spend the day, since the walks you can do on site are quick and not too difficult.

THE UNIVERSITY

I found the Nottingham Trent University very different from Politecnico, both in terms of student/professor relationship and courses. I took the Graphic Design course, which is basically the equivalent to Communication Design at Politecnico. I didn't have to choose the specific modules to substitute the courses at Politecnico. In the Learning Agreement I just put Graphic Design (which lasts the whole year) and the courses I had to do at my home institution. Then the professors there assigned me to this other course, called Exploring the Professional Context and Personal Direction. It's a big module, similar to the studios (laboratories) at Politecnico. Erasmus students are usually asked to do only that module (since it's a big one and worth 30 credits for just one semester).

During the Spring Semester we had to do two different projects. The students there are given much more freedom: unlike Politecnico, we got to choose between different options.

For the first project we had different Competition Briefs we could choose from. There were briefs in a lot of different fields (branding, typographic design, illustration…) and we could take part in competitions or assessments with our projects.

The second projects had different Live Briefs: various design studios held lectures with us, where they explained the brief and what they wanted us to do. We could choose one of those briefs and we worked in collaboration with the studio that launched the brief. The project wasn't reviewed just by our professors, but by the design studio as well. Some of them also offered placements to the students who produced the best outcome. I was offered one, even though I was an Erasmus student.

This collaboration with the design world, both with competitions and actual design studios, is something I really appreciated. Especially because it's something that I think it's missing from the Politecnico experience. At Politecnico you're given the chance to collaborate with design studios or other partners, but it's mostly for extracurricular activities like workshops.

One thing I found difficult about these projects was the amount of time we were given to complete them: we had around five weeks. I found it challenging to adapt to this schedule, since at Politecnico we usually have more time. This different approach to projects forces you to allocate less time to research, since you have to save enough time to actually produce your final outcome. The choices you make have to be thought through, but the professors tend to question them less.

The whole course pretty much revolved around the projects we were doing. On Monday we had one-to-one meetings with different professors: we could choose the time slot we wanted with a specific professor, based on what we needed. Some of them were able to help us with specific problems. On Thursday we had group meetings. Even though everyone was working alone on their projects, we still had group meetings where each member could show theirs work and progress in order to receive feedback both from the professor and groupmates. Friday was kind of a jolly day: during the first part of the semester, we used to have lectures with different guests (like people from various design studios, who talked about their experience); going forward the end of the semester, we mostly had business meetings on Fridays. During

business meetings, professors mostly did a recap of the week and told us what was ahead of us (reminding us of deadlines, giving advice, etc).
Therefore, the approach was mostly practical, I didn't take any theorical courses.
Another thing I really appreciated was the relationships between students and professors. The teachers are really there to help you. They don't make you feel like you're inferior, but they treat you with kindness and are truly friendly. Many times, they've offered me help with things that didn't even relate to university.
One of my professors, Rob, mentioned a guided tour I could take around the city. They really wanted me to have a good time in Nottingham, aside of the university experience.
One thing I missed though was the clarity in the feedback I was given. The professors there really want you to find your way, so sometimes they don't specifically tell you that what you're doing is wrong. Sometimes I kind of missed the clear no I used to receive at Politecnico.

GRADING SYSTEM
The grading system there is completely different from the one we are used to in Italy. It comes with different levels: First Excellent, Upper Second Very Good, Lower Second Good, Third Sufficient, Fail Insufficient, Zero. Each one of them is divided in three sub levels. The professors evaluate your work looking at different aspects, like the research behind your project, time management, final outcome, experimentations in terms of materials and techniques…
The students are also asked to do a self-assessment. Fortunately, we were given a sheet with grading descriptors, which helped us to grade our work.

LABORATORIES
The campus was great, even though I didn't get to use it much due to the whole Covid situations. First of all, there were a lot of spaces where to go to study or work, like common rooms or the library.
The laboratory I know of is the Photography one. There were different rooms where to do photoshoots (like the Lab Immagine at Politecnico). There was also a dark room where to develop analogue films.
There was also an Art shop inside the university, where to buy materials. During this time however, students needed to book a time slot to go there.

ACCOMMODATIONS
There are many different accommodations, which vary one from the other based on the price range and the things they offer. At first, when I was planning to leave in February, I rented a room in the Sandby Hall (which was one of the cheapest, while still having an en suite bathroom). However, I was forced to cancel due to my delayed departure. The thing with the university accommodation is that you have to rent a room for an extended period of time (a whole semester for example), you can't book one for a couple months. If you go there for the whole semester, it's not a problem and the university accommodations are the best solution, since they're usually close to the city centre and to the university campus and you can find one that suits best your needs (in terms of facility or price range).
If your stay is shorter like mine, you might want to look for a private accommodation. It shouldn't be too big of a problem, since Nottingham is full of them. I stayed at a private accommodation called Cotton Mills. It was cheaper than the university ones, even thought it was quite far from the city centre (30 minutes by foot). Anyway, you shouldn't have problems to find a place where to stay.
A common thing across all accommodation is that you'll have to bring sheets and pillows for your bed and utensils for the kitchen, since the accommodations rarely provide them.
If you rent a room in a university accommodation, you'll probably be given a bedroom and kitchen kit (they come with pillows, duvet cover, sheets, pot and pans…) for free. However, if you find a different solution, you'll still be able to buy those kits from the website, even if you're not staying in a uni accommodation, and have them delivered at your place.

UNI LIFE

Nottingham is a city full of students. I have to say, I didn't get to bond much with my classmates, since most of my lessons were online. I met a few of them in person, but I didn't really hang out with them. Most of the friends I made were other Erasmus students I met thanks to a WhatsApp group.

The university does its part trying to organize meet ups for international students. This year it wasn't entirely possible due to the Covid situation.

I was hoping I could get to meet new people inside the accommodation, which is one of the reasons I chose to stay in a student accommodation. However, it entirely depends on luck and the people you find in your shared flat.

COST OF LIVING

The cost of living is certainly higher than in Italy. I didn't notice much of a difference in terms of groceries. The biggest difference stands out when you go out at night. The thing is that in Italy I'm used to going out for aperitivo most of the times, so I get to pay for my drink and eat something as well. In England they obviously don't have, so if you want to go out to eat, while also having something to drink, you're probably going to spend some money. There are some places where drinks and food are cheaper, even though the quality might be a little bit worse.

There are some places where it's possible to find student discounts.

TRANSPORTATION

During my stay, I rarely used public transport. Most of the times I preferred walking. However, it's possible to download an app that allows you to obtains students discounts on tickets (you have to login into the app and have your profile approved, in order to be able to get them).

The city is also full of scooters. I personally don't like them, but they're fast and useful. Also, the first 10 minutes of the trip are free, so if you use them for less than that you can basically go around for free.

TRIPS

Personally, I didn't travel as much as I wanted but I was able to explore a little bit. The trips are not too easy to organize, mostly because you need to arrange everything in advance, otherwise you'll probably have to pay a lot for train/bus tickets.

I went to Leeds (the train ticket is around 16 pounds to go and come back) and Birmingham (the bus tickets is about 20 pounds) for the day and I did a longer trip to Oxford and Windsor (I stayed in Oxford overnight). Regarding the trips, it really comes to how much you're willing to spend. Some friends of mine went to London (which is about three hours away) and some others went to Edinburgh.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it's an experience I definitely recommend. I really enjoyed the time I spent in Nottingham, even though my Erasmus experience was shorter than expected. I got to meet new people, see new places and test myself in a different university environment. You might be scared at the beginning and it's perfectly understandable. However, the fear of being far from home and what you're used to will quicky go away, thanks to the amazing experience you'll get to live.

If you have any question or doubt, please do not hesitate to contact me, both by email or on social media. I'll be happy to help.

Chiara