

REPORT AL RIENTRO DELL'ESPERIENZA DI SCAMBIO - A.A.
2017/2018

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Testo

1) Introduction

My exchange program has been a unique experience that allowed me to grow both as a person and as a professional. Southafrican culture, landscape and society played a crucial role in this growth, together with Cape Peninsula University of Technology and its staff. In the following lines, I will go through all the steps of this experience, aiming to give a detailed overview that could be useful to other students and administration.

2) Preparation

After the acceptance from CPUT, some difficulties occurred. From October 2017 on, the university started facing student protests and unrests, that generated a suspension of academic activities. As an exchange student, this made me uncertain about leaving: it would have been pointless to spend a semester abroad without attending courses properly. Even without guarantees, I decided to leave anyway.

Moving to South Africa to study is not easy at all. The study visa requires much time and many different documents. Due to my hesitations for the unrests I was in a rush but I finally managed to submit my request in time. I would suggest everyone to take action at least three months before the departure. This could be also highlighted in advance both by Politecnico and CPUT tutors.

3) Accomodation

Even if a southafrican address is needed to get the visa, it worths to wait until the arrival to look for a permanent accomodation. I booked an AirBnb for the first week, spending time to walk around and talking with different people about Cape Town suburbs and accomodation options: in this way I was able to meet landlords or estate agents directly, avoiding any kind of misunderstanding. From this point of view CPUT usually suggests some options in advance, that are safe and trusty. I personally chose for a single room at Ruskin House (managed by Twisted Lemon Accomodations and suggested by CPUT), a big residential building in Roeland Street, close to the Parliament. It is a safe suburb, at walking distance from the campus, the city centre, the station and all the basic daily services. Every floor has fifteen rooms, with shared kitchen and toilets. Cutlery and cooking tools are not provided. Even if it was a "spartan" solution, it allowed me to enjoy the real vibe of the Mother City: movement, work, multiculturality. Since Ruskin

House doesn't allow visitors, I moved to a single room in a private apartment for two months, coming back in May for personal frictions with the new landlord.

In conclusion, accomodation is quite crucial to live a positive experience. It is possible to find cheaper places, but this means spending a lot of money in public transport, being a bit "out" from Cape Town heart and probably with less safety. From my personal experience, the City Bowl is the safest area: suburbs like Gardens, City Centre/BoKaap and Zonnebloem are probably the best; Tamboerskloof, Oranjezicht, Vredehoek are beautiful but mainly residential and not multicultural (almost only victorian high class family houses); Woodstock is growing a lot and is really active *during the day but still not safe at night*. Out of the City Bowl, also the ocean side (Green Point, Sea Point) is safe and nice but a bit far from the campus. exchange students are usually settled around Zonnebloem and Gardens.

3) Welcoming and registration

At CPUT, design students in exchange are managed together with IT ones, sharing a single tutor. Our first welcoming was basically a meeting that involved some students and the tutor regarding some general informations about bureaucratic procedures and academic choices. "Welcoming events" are not provided to design students, but we were included in a one-day tour within the welcome week organized for Business and Management exchange students.

Registration procedures at CPUT are not easy to undertake; luckily it is almost fully managed by the exchange tutor. However, students are fully responsible to go through academic choices, since the tutor is not a professor. It is up to the student to talk with different professors, to understand how credit points work and if subjects are suitable for the exchange program. I would suggest to spend enough time and energies in understanding deeply every subject level and its contents. Moreover, the exchange office is related with several IT projects that could be joined also by designers. At the same time, I would suggest them to students that have to do their internship or workshops, since these projects are not part of CPUT courses but developed by IT research teams. When it comes to design subjects, the best thing is to meet the design faculty coordinator, the highest expert of the academic offer.

4) Courses and activities

I attended the BTech program in Graphic Design, that is divided in two modules that interact to each other: Communication Design and Theory of Graphic Design - Academic Report, respectively the practical and the theoretical side of the BTech. They are both annual and thesis-based: students have a main project to develop and to support with a consistent academic research. The schedule includes additional short projects, exercises, professional workshops and multidisciplinary initiatives. Even if the design program is not well communicated on CPUT channels, it is intense and valuable. I was positively surprised by lecturers professionalism and teaching approach. They are highly prepared and inspiring, both from a practical and theoretical point of view. Due to the small number of students, lecturers manage to build a deep relationship with them, understanding their personality and managing to help them better.

At the same time, CPUT offers short courses and workshops. I am personally interested in System Design for Sustainability and I managed to take part in the LeNS Pilot course, that was happening during the first term break. It consisted of an intensive two-weeks project in collaboration with a southafrican volunteering association, in order to give a design response to their internal challenges. It was a really valuable experience that allowed me to work in a multidisciplinary environment. One more time, applying for these initiatives is up to the student, since they are not really well communicated by CPUT.

5) Life in Cape Town

Cape Town is a vibrant city that offers many different ways to live the local cultural landscape, from art to nature to innovation as well. I enjoyed my experience from all these points of view and learnt a lot. I would suggest not to be over-anxious about safety when it comes to walk. Walking in Cape Town during the day is safe and is one of the best way to enjoy the city (there are also free walking tours with tour guides about CT history).

As regards design, February and March are really active months with the Design Indaba, the CoCreate Design Festival and many others smaller events. Another amazing experience is the One Club Creative Bootcamp, happening in the end of June: a week of intense design for a big client from the industry. A good chance to work with inspiring mentors and other professionals. African art is really inspiring and unique, I found great contemporary examples at Zeitz Mocaa, followed by an amazing collection at the National Gallery and supported by many independent exhibitions and galleries.

Cape Town has a huge food offer. Due to the incredible number of cultures that live in the Cape, there are many different things to taste. Markets like Oranjezicht Farmers Market, Old Biscuit Mill, Bay Harbour Market and V&A Waterfront are perfect examples.

My personal experience was also characterized by the Water Crisis. Cape Town is experiencing the worst draught in a century and water restrictions in the city were really strict for everyone. Our consumptions were reduced to 50 litres per day and this affected a lot my daily life. I lived it positively, since for the first time in my life I understood what it means to face climate change and global warming effects.

6) Exams and departure

The southafrican mark system is similar to the british one, based on percentages from 0 to 100. However, the "good mark" perception starts from 70% on, differently from what expected doing a simple proportion with italian grades. Lecturers are always available to let students improve their results and they care a lot about exchange requirements when it comes to adapt annual subjects to our six months experience.

The real difficulties at the end of the semester happened by middle June, since CPUT started the winter break. Communications are slow and the staff is not easily reliable. Furthermore, academic results in my case were coming from different faculties (design for the BTech and IT for the LeNS Course) and this made it even more difficult. What I could suggest is to ask for academic transcripts way in advance (May), in order to avoid problems. CPUT administrative procedures are not working very well, but they offer great human support in case students need.

In conclusion of the report, I can state that Southafrica is really stereotyped when described from outside but the reality is that it offers a great landscape for a designer to experience a different cultural context. I would recommend this destination to everyone that is curious and not afraid of finding himself (or herself) out of the comfort zone.

Autorizzo al trattamento dei miei dati personali ai sensi del Decreto Legislativo n. 196/03 da parte del Politecnico di Milano.

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