

Exchange Report from Universidad de Alicante

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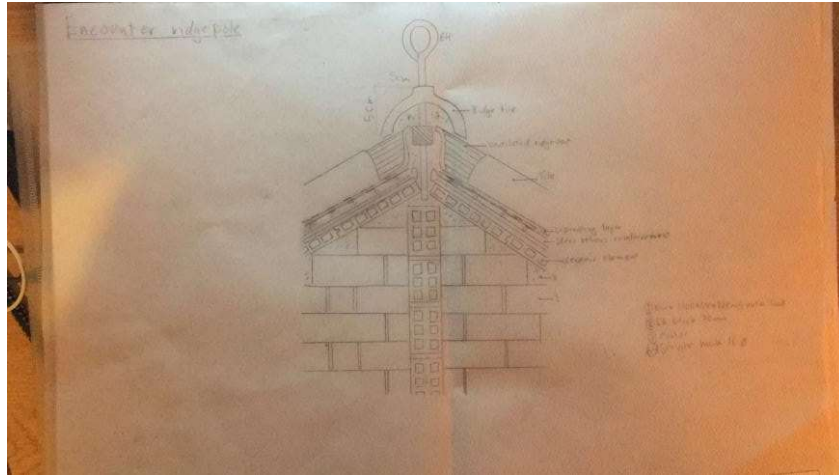
Introduction

When I was about to make the decision of when and where I wanted to go on exchange, there were many things I had to consider first. Originally, I had planned on taking a semester abroad in my 5th semester, but after having several meetings with my exchange counselor at KEA, speaking to multiple friends, and reading exchange reports from students who had finished their exchange, I finally decided on doing it in the 3rd semester. The main reason being, that you as a student is still somewhat "green", and the material being taught to my fellow classmates at home, wouldn't be that serious to miss out on. Another big factor was that there were 5 other students from my class whom I have great relationships to, that would also be going abroad. We had all applied to the same university in Alicante, Spain, Universidad de Alicante.

My expectations to this whole upcoming experience was very good before I left Copenhagen. I had done some research about the school and read reports from students who had been there, and it all seemed like something for me. The courses I would be able to follow would be a lot more architecture focused which I saw as an opportunity to evolve in some different skills than what I do at KEA.

Experiences at the host university

The subjects that I studied when I was in Alicante was slightly different from the ones at KEA. I made sure to go to as many classes that I could at the university before the semester started for real. This way I could change the courses in my learning agreement and make the schedule that I wanted to keep for the rest of my stay. I believe that I found a good mix of courses that I would be able to enjoy, and also something that would have some relevance for my education back at KEA, meaning something that was more technical and similar to what I was used to.



The courses that I chose were as following:

- *Architecture Theory 3 – unit: 35523*
- *Basic Building Systems – unit: 35526*
- *Building Services 1 – unit: 35525*
- *Singular Building System – unit: 35535*
- *Urban Planning 1 – unit: 35514*

Besides these courses I had Spanish at level A1, meaning the lowest possible level, which was perfect for me, since I never have had any Spanish lessons before. It was easy to follow the language course, and is doable for anyone. It was nice just to learn a little bit of Spanish during my stay, just to make it easier while doing groceries and ordering beers etc. I would have Spanish lessons twice a week, for 2 hours at a time. This was all okay in the beginning, but near the end of the semester, it turned out to be a little bit stressful because it was from 16:00-18:00, and before the exams, it seemed a little bit pointless to spent time doing Spanish when I felt my time could be spent more valuable doing preparations for more important exams. Nonetheless a great idea to take the Spanish course anyway.

The one course I had which was very different from my education at KEA was *Architecture Theory*. In this subject we were taught how to really think abstract in the world of architecture. We learned about multiple different architects through time, and what they had all achieved in their career. This was to me a very difficult course and I can't remember how many hours I have spent sitting up till late in the evening trying to get through the assignments. Although it was difficult, I did see the course overall as a challenge for sure. I may not actually need any of the stuff that I learned about, and I will probably never be able

to use it as a reference for my education at KEA, but it did make me think about certain things in architecture, and I have had multiple moments where I stop when I'm walking outside or whatever, and recognize something that I learned in that course. It was an overall good experience.

The rest of my courses were kind of similar to what I do at KEA. We were to solve technical solutions and be able to explain how and why this solution was executed and why it would be best and most efficient for a construction project.

Then I choose *Urban Planning* which caught my attention before I left for Alicante. This seemed really interesting to learn about how to construct, and plan an urban environment. But when I actually begun having this course, I was slightly disappointed. We didn't do as much urban planning of our own, as much as we just had to characterize different cities, and their urban environment. This was also nice to learn about though, because it was something that I could immediately use in the real world, when walking down the street in the different city area of Alicante for instance.

In terms of the teachers and the methods they use while teaching, I didn't feel that big of a difference. Of course, it was different from Denmark where the teacher/student relationship is more relaxed, and you can in many situations have discussions with your teachers. The same applied for most of the teachers in Alicante. I had made some assumptions about how it would be before I came to the university, and was prepared to have teachers whom I couldn't just walk up to and speak my mind, but this wasn't the case. The fact that it was a university that I was going to be studying at, already made me think I would be having these big lectures with hundreds of other students, but I was wrong. We had normal sized classes with approximately 30 students, except for one course, where we were only around 10 students, which was also nice.

In general, I thought the teaching methods used were okay. But one thing I think that they could do much better was the organization. Often, we would find that we wouldn't get any information from the schools' website, and the only way we would get informed about deliverables etc. Would be from the Spanish students, or rumors around the classroom. It happened multiple times that we would not get informed about hand-ins and would get to

school Monday morning and meet a teacher that would question why we didn't do a specific hand in.

Social and cultural experience

Alicante is a very nice city to visit, both as a student and as a tourist. I arrived in Alicante about a week before the semester actually started in order to get settled and get to learn the city a little bit. At that time there was a lot of 'Erasmus student life' events going on in and around the city, and at several clubs. So, meeting new people and getting friends wasn't a problem, the streets would be packed with other students like yourself every night.

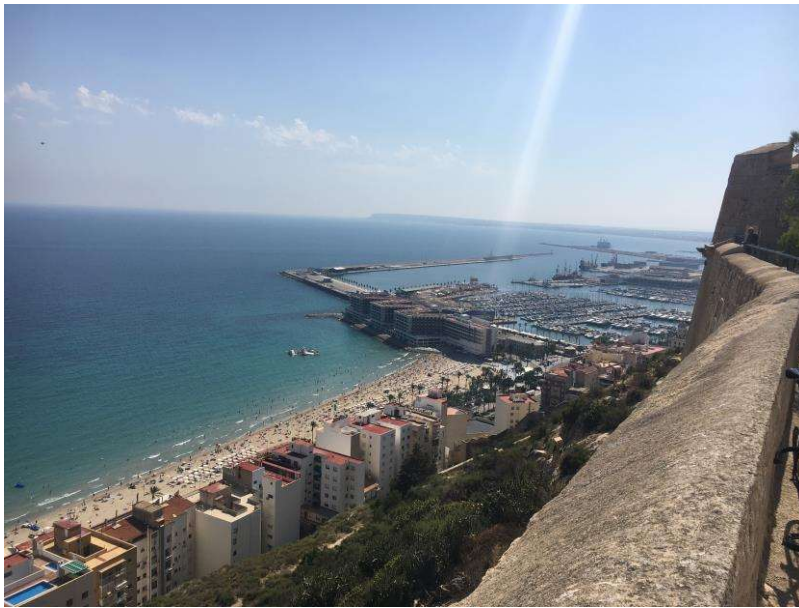
With the Erasmus student groups there would also be activities to do almost every weekend, at least in the beginning. It would in the beginning usually be trips around the city or maybe some of the areas close by Alicante. They would also arrange trips to other and bigger cities such as Madrid or Valencia. I never personally went on any of these trips, due to the fact that they seemed very "touristy", compared to what you could do on your own with a few friends and a rental car. This was what me and my friends would usually do because we found that it was much easier, and in some cases, a lot cheaper. With the car company 'Sixt' we could rent a car for a day for around 70-80 euro, and with gas it another 10-20 euro. So, split that by 4 and you have yourself a somewhat cheap daytrip to a destination of your own choice.



Of activities to do in Alicante, there was also multiple things to do. The castle in the middle of the city was a fun and nice thing to do if you want to see the city from above. It was a somewhat easy climb up the mountain and the view was amazing. On one side you could see the ocean and nearby cities, and on the other side the mountains. During my stay in Alicante I must have climbed the mountain around 5-6 times, due to the visits I got from back home.

The beach was also very nice, although there was quite a lot of tourist during September. But by taking the bus 9 to San Joan, which was just 20 minutes away you would find two

other very good beaches, with slightly fewer tourists.



Practical Experiences

Living in Alicante and perhaps in Spain in general is very cheap compared to Copenhagen. The rent I had where I lived was approximately 65 Euro per. month. And my budget for food was never really strict. I would do groceries with my roommate for one or two days and that would be around 30 Euros. But money was never really an issue due to the fact that I had my SU with me, together with the Erasmus scholarship. Eating out was also something I did at least ones or twice a week.

Finding a place to stay was somewhat easy. There is a lot of students living in the city of Alicante, and this is also what I would recommend you to do. Living at the campus may be nice in order to not spent time in the bus or the tram in the mornings and evenings, but the rooms you're staying in are not that nice compared to what you will end up paying. I met several persons who lived at the campus and although they would get cleaning in their rooms every 14 days, the price was a lot higher than what I ended up paying for my rent. With the help of the university's webpage I found a webpage with apartments I could send texts or emails to get in touch with the landlords of the different places. Do this in good time before you leave, try to make a deal with the landlord, and if possible, you should

travel there a few weeks before you actually, start school. This way you can explore the apartment scene a bit more and find a good place to live.

There are plenty of good places to eat in Alicante. They have a lot of local good restaurants around the city with different good menus. Tapas being an important part of course. This is of course a must if you're going to Spain. "La Terreta" was one of the restaurants I went to multiple times. They have a very good service and the food there is amazing. A meal for one person would approximately cost around 50 Euros, with wine and dessert. Another great place was "Vino y Mas" which I also found to be a fair place to go and get dinner. They had a good selection of tapas and the wine there was also excellent. Of course, any place in Spain will have a good selection of wine, both local and from elsewhere in Spain. A meal here would then cost around 30 Euro, so it was a bit cheaper. But the best of exploring the Spanish kitchen must be to just walk around in the smaller streets and find all the hidden gems.



Conclusion

To conclude my Erasmus exchange stay in Alicante, I will overall say that it has been an amazing experience to learn how to go to school at a Spanish university, and also learn

about their culture. It is an experience I will always remember and I am sure I will be able to use it in my future career in the construction industry, especially if I end up working either in Spain or on projects that are to be built in Spain.

My impression of the school ended up not being the best due to the workload that we got by the end of the semester. The amount of homework combined with how many hours spent at school doing lectures, was huge and nothing compared to how much I was used to at KEA. But in overall I would say that I did learn a lot during my stay at Universidad de Alicante. I improved in a lot of skills I wouldn't have otherwise improved if I had stayed at KEA in my 3rd semester.

