

Universitat d'Alacant
Universidad de Alicante

Exchange report

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Introduction

My name is David Palacka and I'm a student of the International line of the Architectural Technology and Construction Management (BYG) program at the KEA - Københavns Erhvervsakademi in Copenhagen, Denmark.

The reason why I decided to go on an exchange was mainly out of a desire for an adventure. I moved to Denmark for the same purpose, but since the opportunity occurred to see some more, I just went for it! In my belief, it's a one time opportunity to experience new environment, new culture, new lifestyle and meet like-minded people of similar academic interests (while getting payed for it, lol). And I never did regret it once! It really exceeded all my expectations, whether academic, cultural or social.

The only thing I wouldn't recommend from the student position on the international line is to take the risk of going for the 5th semester, in case that you are considering to take the internship back in Denmark! You are expected to be around, take active part in the application process and participate on the internship interviews in person, which from 3000 km away is a little bit difficult to do. So the result i.e. for me is, that I'm taking my upcoming internship semester in Spain again.

Experiences at the host university

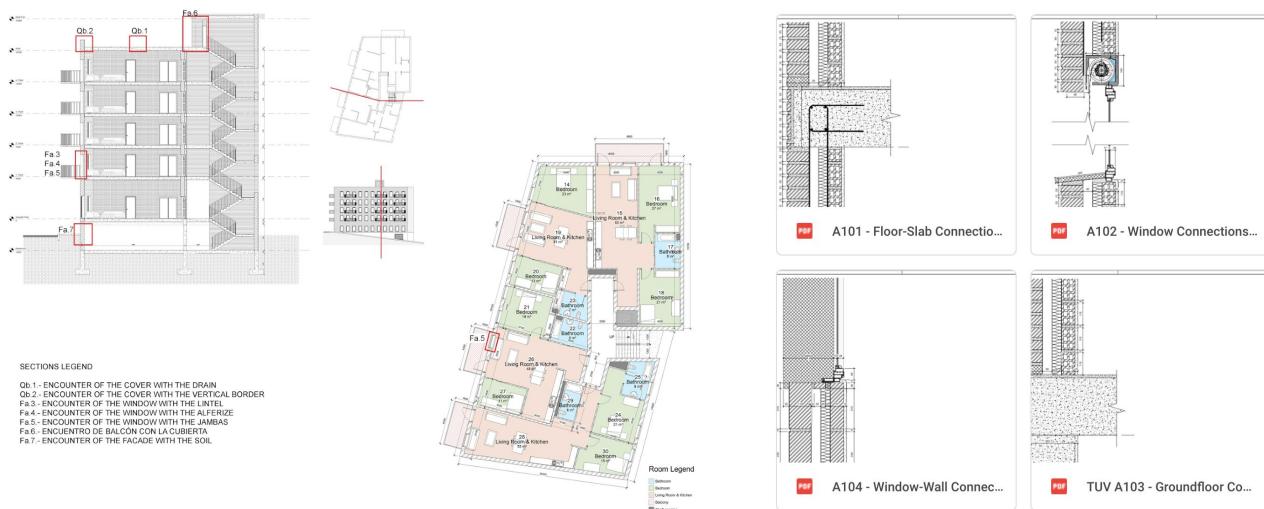
The study system in Spain is much different than the one in KEA. Back home, all your subjects revolve around one project you are developing from the ground up to the great detail in one group. The thing that makes it different in Spain is that you are doing group projects too, but one per subject (with some subjects even 2 or 3 projects) separately during the semester. It's quite challenging to coordinate the group meetings with 5 different groups of 5 different subjects (which is the minimum you have to take, in addition to have 30 ECTS), but everything is a challenge! So sometimes it can happen that you find yourself going to school on Sunday, but if you're disciplined enough and can motivate yourself to do your work in time, it shouldn't be a problem.

The subjects I took were:

- Basic Building Systems
- Urban Planing 1
- Urban Planing 2
- Urban Planing 4
- Spanish Language Course lvl. A1 (optional)

Basic Building Systems

BBS is a subject very similar to the course we are taking at KEA. Its main focus goes towards learning the technical key-junction connections and form of structures in a Spanish building culture. Goes all the way from the structure of the walls, floors, to the types of roofs and the drainage systems. (Doesn't really cover the any MEP or ventilation systems, nor any documentation). For me it was fairly easy because KEA provided me with a good informational background.

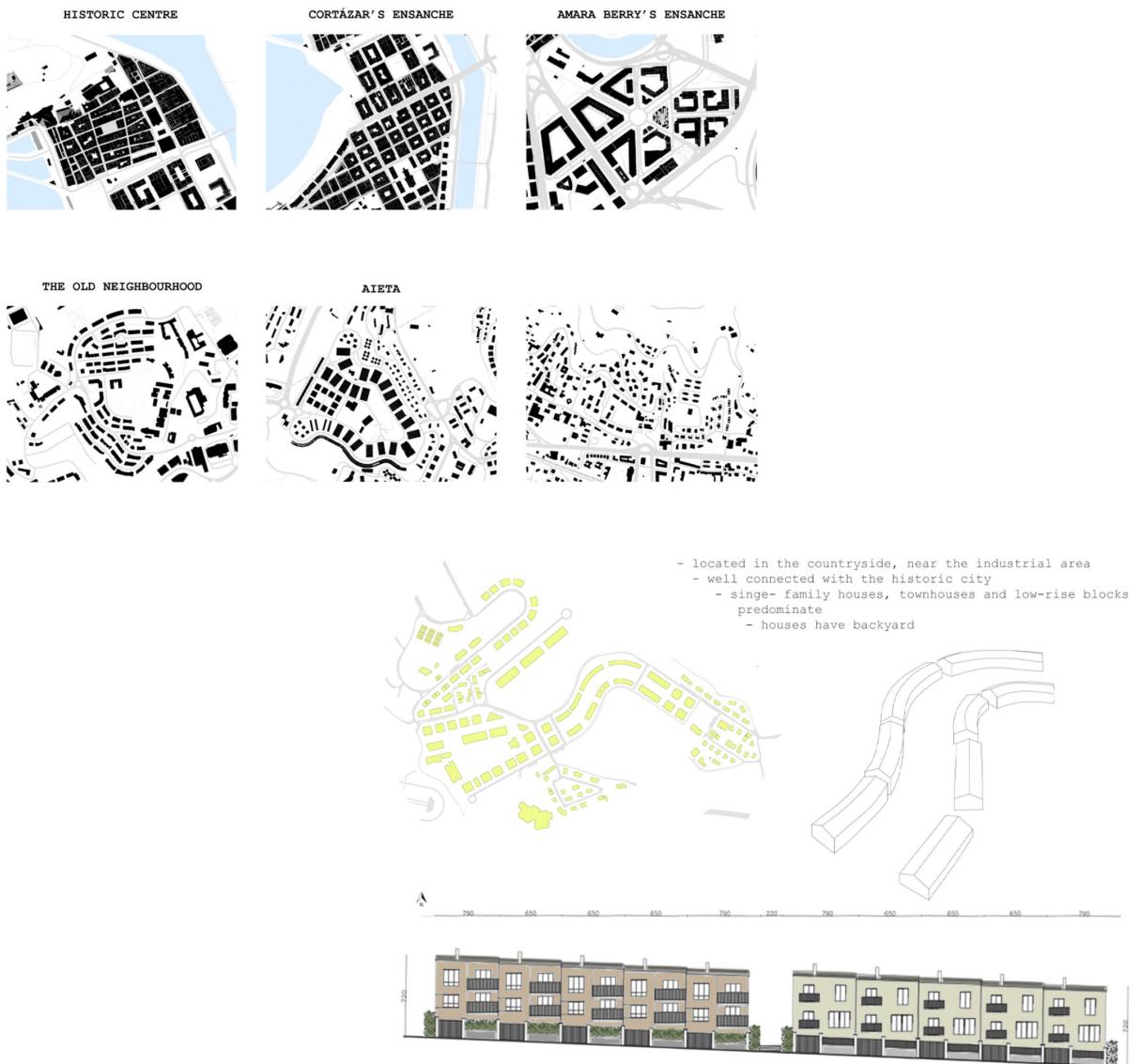


Urban Planing 1, 2 and 4

Also known as “Urbanismo” was a subject focused on a landscape development. They all have the same standard approach, therefore I’m putting them in one category. The only thing they differ in is the ratio of the landscape-study.

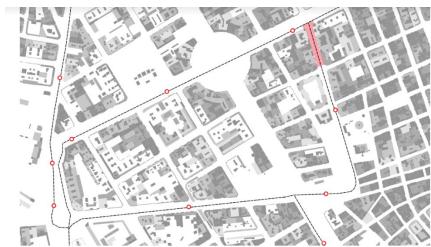
Urban Planing 1 focuses of a development of the city as a whole and analyzes the development of the neighbourhoods based on their function (municipal, residential) and differences in their building patterns (natural, organic, grid). The final project was about analysis of a randomly selected spanish city. (i.e. we did San Sebastian)

NEIGHBOURHOOD PATTERNS



Urban Planing 2 (for me the most interesting) was focusing on a structure and development of the plazas. How different shapes and elements affect behavior of the citizens and overall likability of the square.

The final project was structured as follows: Every group was assigned one spanish city, which they had to analyse using various social-networking tools demonstrating, which plaza/square was the most liked by the citizens. Afterwards the group created a study of the chosen plaza, where they broke down it's core structure, function, services, infrastructure and image. And the last step was to create a statistical study of all the collected information and design a new, advanced model of the area, that could lift up the plaza's potential even more.

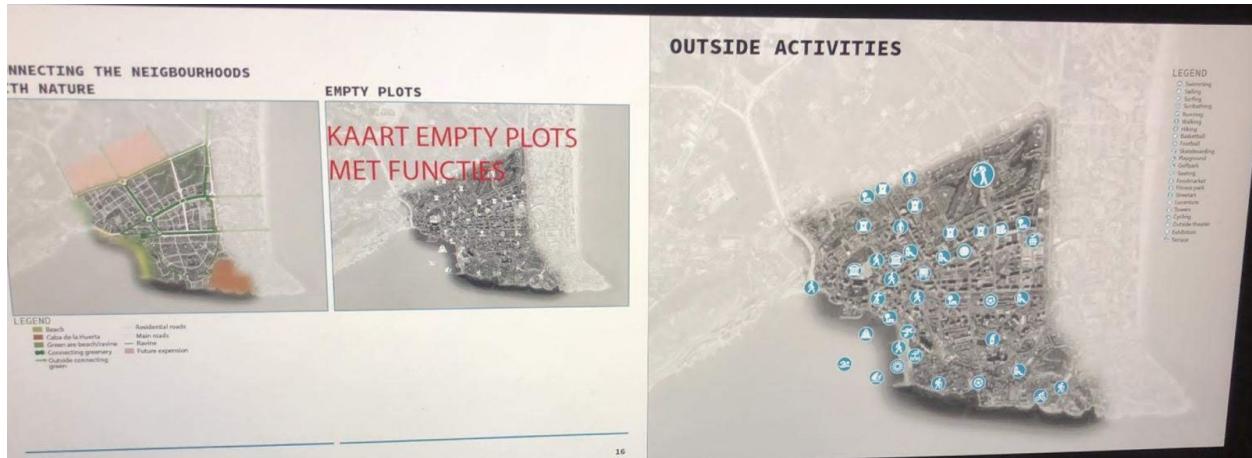


To solve the problems with the public transport the bus lines are changed from roads. Also, there are placed some new bus stops on those roads. There are places two bus stops before and after the square so compensate the removed stops on the square.

The red marked road on the new bus line is the only profile with possible problems in space with the bus. There is enough space to make the road a little wider.



Urban Planing 4 (for me the least interesting) was focused on understanding the development of the large landscape areas, that were civilised and urbanized by the people. The creation of the city basically. The final project was to select a random area/town of the Alicante (i.e. we chose San Juan area), analyse infrastructural development, inhabitant structure, residential-commercial and overall development, creating SWOT analysis, and develop a proposal for a new area design advancement.



07. 3D SECTIONS



All of the Urban Planning courses were based on a big group project that was presented in front of the class on the end of the semester. The presentations were considered as the subject's "final exam", which made them very easy to pass.

Spanish Language Course

As I mentioned earlier, we had some issues with creating a functional schedule, therefore we ended up with 4 subjects of 6 credits & a Spanish course of 6 credits, instead of 5 proper academic subjects (in normal scenario, the Spanish course credits wouldn't count, but giving these complicated circumstances, we've been given an exception).

But regardless of it's academic relevance to our studies, I believe that for us as an international students, it was an awesome and useful experience which very probably might come as an advantage in our future!

Not mentioning the amount of fun we had during the classes. The teacher we had was real fun, making the subject a pro-active interactive game. Ironically, it was a subject I like the most, informationally took from the most and will be missing the most. I would do it again, even if won't count the credits anyway! :)



Social and cultural experiences

Spain is a country of social lifestyle. Everything revolves around parties, events, gatherings, trips and life happening in general. One thing is for sure, you will never be bored, because even if you'll get tired of one thing, there is another 5 waiting for you!

As an erasmus participant, you are offered a wide variety of events and trips organized by the school's non-profit Erasmus Social Network group (ESN), which is run by the local, in most cases, former erasmus students. There are programs (parties, sport events, meetings) usually in the weekday evenings, and long trips to the other cities and national landmarks on the weekends. They have program literally for every day. Socializing has never been easier.

When it comes to nightlife on the weekends, the city wakes up around 10pm and goes not-stop until the Monday. Bars are extremely cheap! The most popular club in the very heart of Alicantes old town called "Parabarap" serves shots for €0.50 and a bottle of Heineken for 1€!!!! (I know, right?!!.. an alcoholic heaven!) But lower prices also attract youth, so don't be surprised when you find yourself dancing between a bunch of 16 year olds.



Practical Experiences

You might find it hard to acquire accommodation from back home. It is possible, but most of the Spanish people will prefer to meet in person, before signing up for a rental deal with you. But don't be nervous! When you don't find anything, once you're there it's rather easy. And therefore it's a good idea to go there 1-2 weeks prior to the beginning of the semester (and also to enjoy the sun).

I've booked AirBnB for the first week of my stay. And started looking for long-term place the day after. The webpage that came the most clear and user friendly to me was "idealista.com". I've contacted about 20 places, got 12-14 replies out of which 4-5 were available for seeing that very day.

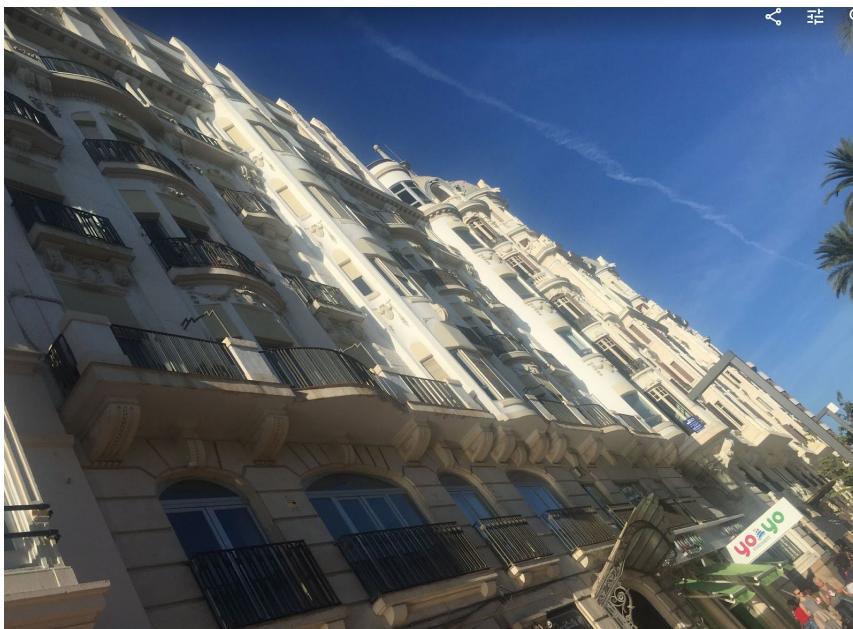
You also might find it a bit frustrating that english isn't a very popular language to be used around there. Yet the people are mostly nice and patient enough to talk with you using the google translator. After my AirBnB I booked one long-term place, at which I stayed throughout the rest of the semester.

Once coming from super cold Denmark to this sunshine paradise, I decided to treat myself right and I went for a bit more expensive option of a private bedroom in a 4 bedroom apartment 20 metres from the Esplanada promenade and 5 minutes walking from the Postiguet beach.

The place had an Air-con (which is not so usual in Spain as you might think), 2 bathrooms, and a cleaning lady coming to fix the common areas up once a week. But as fancy as might that sound, we still experienced occasional welcome from an unwanted guests every once in a while. But in Spain it's a common thing, so get used to it.



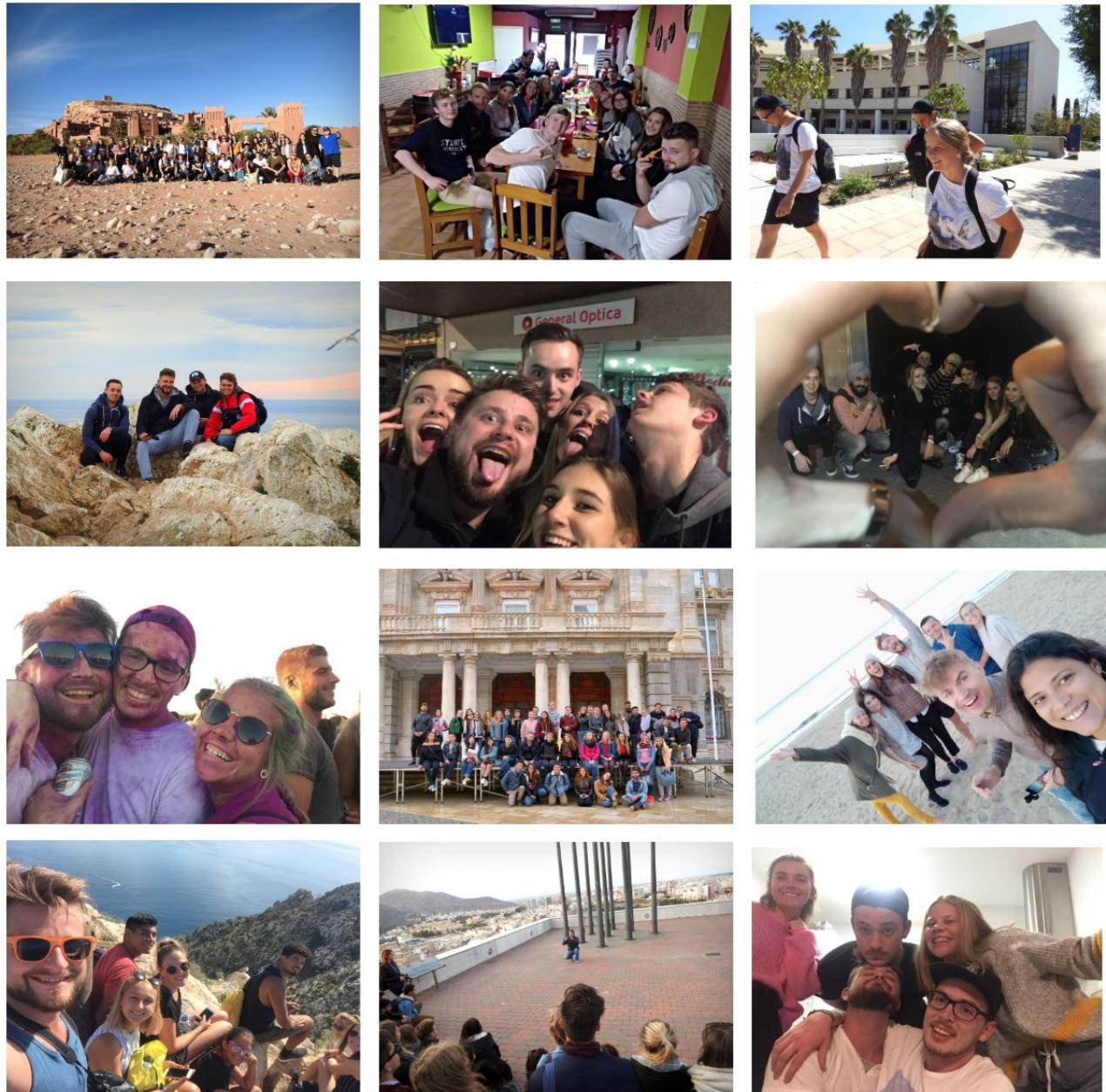
Public transport is rather cheap as well. They will convince you to get a student green-card (which registration costs about 20€), but in my opinion with the blue-card you'll be well-off (If most of the days you'll use it twice a day, for transportation to school and back), because a 1 way transportation with the blue card costs maybe only 0.05-0.10€ more. So do the math yourself.



Conclusion

This experience was worth a much more than the words can cover. The thing I'm grateful the most is the cultural experience, social adaptation, and building the social skills. The people I made friends with over there were one of the nicest people I've ever met! And with a few of them I've created such strong bonds that will last for years to come! :)

So my advice is just one: If you have a chance, stop hesitating and GO FOR IT! :) I can promise you...



!!!YOU WON'T REGRET!!!