



Yuri Mamero Exchange Report Alicante Autumn 2022

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Host Institution: Universidad De Alicante

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Intro

Exchanges are a great way of achieving exactly these things. I already study abroad in Denmark, which is an experience of its own and it motivated me to take things one step further and go abroad to a Spanish-speaking country. I had Spanish classes in high school and wanted to expand my knowledge of the language and practice it. Alicante seemed like a great location to me as I didn't want to move to a huge city like Barcelona or Madrid and it is well connected to the rest of Spain and is surrounded by amazing nature. That's why for me, it was an easy choice and I'm glad I did it. It was an exchange packed with new cultural experiences, meeting incredible people, seeing amazing places and expanding my professional horizon.



View from Santa Barbara Castle

Universidad de Alicante – UA

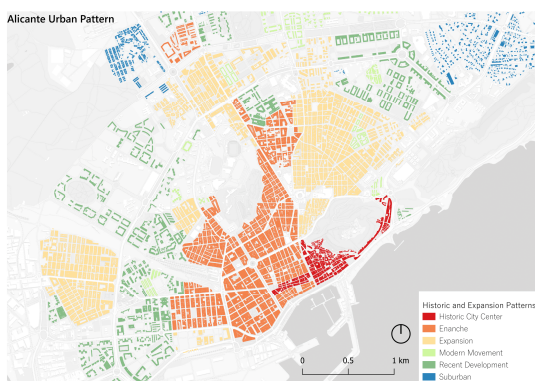
Forget everything that you're used to at KEA! I don't mean that literally of course but Universidad de Alicante is a completely different place. Starting with the campus, it felt like a city of its own when I first arrived and the tour, we had on the first day took about three hours. They showed us around the Sports facilities with a gym, bouldering walls, football and tennis pitches and much more. If you're looking to do a lot of sports, it's well worth taking a 6-month membership for 50€ which gives you access to most of the facilities. The campus also has plenty of green spaces where you can hang out to relax, they even have a park and a lake that's home to a small duck colony. However, except for the language courses all your classes will be in the polytechnical school (Building 39) which makes your life a lot easier. After the Campus tour, you get to choose your subjects and make your own schedule for the semester. This process can be a little bit frustrating as you can expect to have some clashes. My recommendation would be to look at as many courses as possible in the first one or two weeks and then just keep the ones that you enjoy most.



About the teaching style: For us KEA students the teaching style was something completely different. First of all, we were taking courses from an Architecture Degree called fundamentals in Architecture which puts a lot more focus on the creative process and the visualization of your work than what we are used to from the technical education at KEA. As the UA is a university everything is a lot more independent. Every course has its own project and there is no link between the subjects. This also means that there are different groups for every subject which can be quite challenging in terms of time management. Especially during the last weeks of the semester things got very frustrating and stressful as the courses all had different platforms and hand-in times on the same day. However, having different working groups also gives you a great exchange with people from very different backgrounds and that is what the exchange is all about.

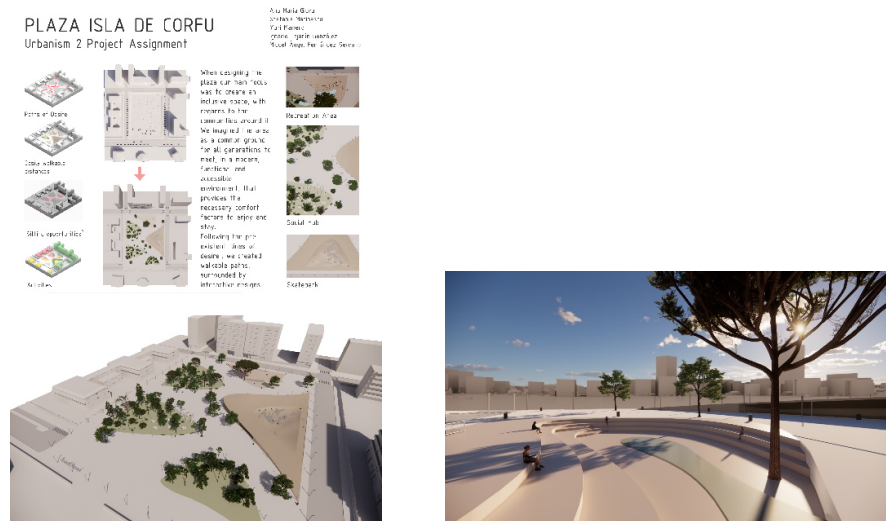
Urban Planning 1 - 35514

In this Subject we analysed the city of Alicante. This was very interesting, especially at the start as we had a lot of input and learned how the city is structured in terms of the urban fabric and how different urban elements are related to each other. We learned a great deal about how cities work on a large scale, and it has definitely changed the way I look at google maps these days. We also got introduced to some new software called QGIS to create different kinds of maps that we used to make most of our analysis. This is one of the maps we made to analyse the urban patterns



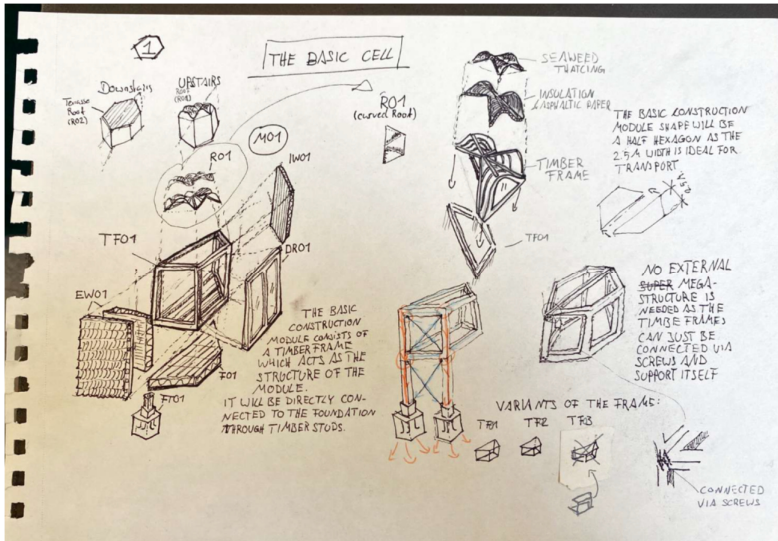
Urban Planning 2 - 35524

Also dealing with Alicante, Urbanism 2 teaches you about the human scale of cities. We investigated how public spaces work, what can make them successful and why some plazas are just empty spaces. At the start of the semester, we had an amazing teacher (Laticia) who had a great passion for public spaces and a very interactive and fun way of teaching the subject. I feel like I learned a lot from her. While the first part of the semester was about analysing, in the second half we designed our own plaza in Alicante. Unfortunately for the second part we had to switch the teachers who didn't seem to care much about the subject. However, this was a fun project where we got to be very free in the design of our plaza.

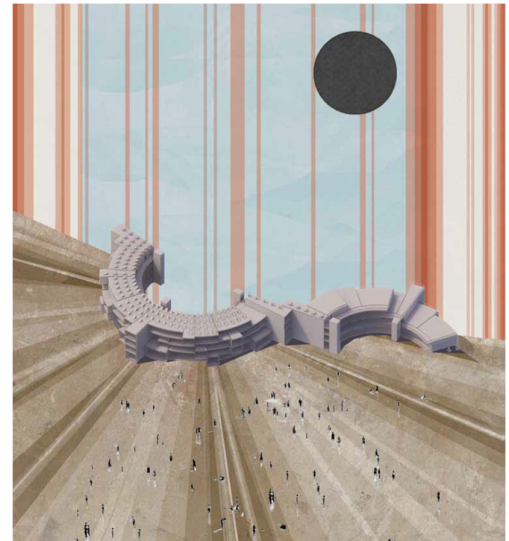


Singular Building Systems - 35535

This was by far the most intense course I took. Right from the start of the semester, we had to hand in our work every week which was sometimes a bit stressful especially when you plan trips throughout the weekends etc. Our teacher was very passionate about this course and provided us with a lot of reading material, he even wrote a few books on the subject which he integrated into his teaching. Although it was quite time-consuming, I also felt like I learnt the most from this subject. Our brief for the subject was to design prefabricated villas for a resort in Croatia that was also the brief for an architectural competition which made the whole course feel a lot more relevant and practical. The project was structured so that we looked at our design very holistically, so from the architectural vision of the project to prefabrication details and transportation we had to think of everything. A great course if you want to push your academic level, but you need to consider if you're happy to invest 8 to 12 hours per week besides the lectures.



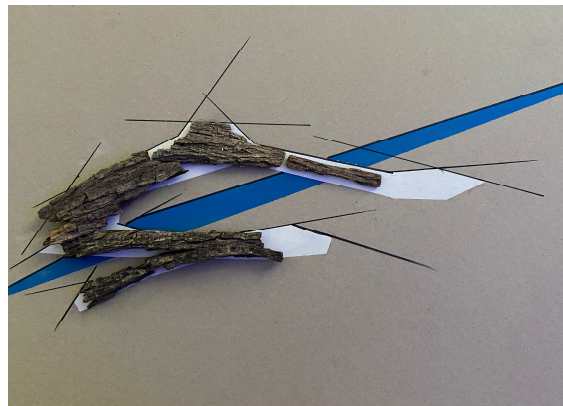
Individual work, only hand drawings



Group work made in Revit

Graphic Analysis and Design 2 - 35512

Because I came to Spain to learn more Spanish, I challenged myself to take a course in the language. It is a course about form-giving and is very artistic and creative, something I haven't done before. Mostly we were dealing with making conceptual models in different techniques of manipulating forms and making abstractions in form of paintings. Although it was sometimes a bit confusing due to the language barrier, I learned a lot about the creative process of giving form to a building.



Models, Abstractions, and more models

Spanish Course

I recommend everybody to take the Spanish lessons. They are fun, you learn a lot of Spanish and they are also credited with 6 ECTS by KEA. We had a very sweet teacher who was quite relaxed when we couldn't make it to class in time and her priority was to make us enjoy Spanish. So, we had a lot of interactive exercises, talked a lot in class and got lots of recommendations about good places to go for food, cultural events, and other places to visit in Spain.

Social and cultural experiences

Rule number one: You won't have any free time if you don't take it. There will always be enough university work to keep you working but you need to remember that Erasmus is not only about academics. There is a lot to do in and around Alicante and it is up to you how much you take advantage of it.

When arriving in Alicante and you don't know anyone just yet go and join some of the trips and events organized by ESN (Erasmus Student Network https://www.instagram.com/esn_alicante/). You will meet a lot of interesting people to build your network. Especially at the start of the semester, they have something going on almost every day. Some of the trips I enjoyed most were to Guadelest and Les fonts de l'Algar, Cala del Moraig and Tabarca, an island in the bay of Alicante (amazing for snorkelling).



Later on, I found it a lot more fun to organize trips together with a few friends I met. It's a lot more flexible and you can do what you really want. For instance, we visited Granada and Valencia by renting an Air BnB and staying there for a long weekend. Both cities are absolutely worth a visit!



The Alhambra was one of the most impressive buildings I visited (Quick Tip: book your tickets well in advance)

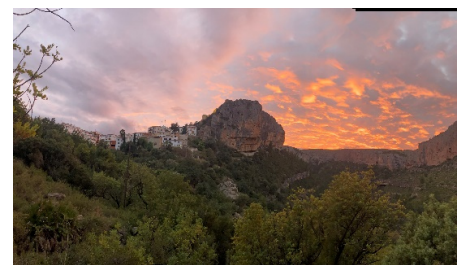


Valencia has a beautiful food market that overwhelms you with good food...



Also spending a night in Muralla Roja was an incredible experience (It's a building designed by Riccardo Bofil in Calpe) I recommend booking an Airbnb with a few people here to see the building also from the inside and to get access to the roof top pool.

Apart from the city trips I also enjoyed outdoor sports a lot in Alicante. At San Juan beach for example it's a lot of fun to play volleyball or spike ball and when the conditions are right it's also a good spot to have some surf or wing foil lessons. As Alicante is surrounded by mountains we had some great hikes for example on the Bernia mountain chain. If you're looking for more action I recommend going rock climbing in Chulilla which is a small village full of climbers in a beautiful valley close to Valencia. That was one of my personal highlights as I haven't been climbing on real rock before.



ESN also organizes plenty of parties but watch out here: the Spanish as well as the average Erasmus student are a bit mad when it comes to partying. It usually starts as late as midnight, it's

99% reggaeton and doesn't stop until it's time for breakfast, even (or especially) when it's a Wednesday night. That's when ESN organizes a beer pong Tournament in a club called Parabarap, the low-cost pub where you pay 4€ for a 1.5l Mojito. Other clubs in the city are Marmarella (an outdoor club at the harbour), Upikum and if you're looking for something more related to techno and D&B then Skool will probably be your best bet. Besides clubs, there are also a lot of nice live music bars such as Refugio or cantina el Colectivo.

Culinarily, Alicante also has a lot to offer and the food here is CHEAP (you rarely spend more than 15€ on a whole dinner with drinks etc) so take advantage of it. Right in the first week, we found some nice tapas bars like Vino y mas and D'Tablas. Sale e Pepe has by far the best Pizza in Alicante and right next to it, there is an incredible ice cream shop called Livanti. The list of good places in Alicante is long so I gathered the memorable ones on google maps: <https://goo.gl/maps/duyDdrHSHWHVBZwDF8>

Practical Experiences

First question: When should I go on exchange? Most teachers and older students I asked recommended going in 5th semester. It has the simple reason that the technical level of the course is the highest in 4th semester, so I didn't want to miss anything that happened before. What you should take into consideration though when choosing to go abroad in 5th semester is that you need to secure a spot for your internship in 6th. I recommend you start with your portfolio already in the time before your exchange starts because you don't want to invest lots of time working on it while you're away.

In terms of where to find a place to live, especially when you're used to what finding a place to stay in Copenhagen is like, renting a room in Alicante is easy. Most of the landlords communicate through an app called idealista and that's also where I found my place. My landlord John was very sweet and took good care of the flat that I shared with 4 other people. It was quite a cool experience to live with only Spanish speakers because they had plenty of stories to tell which improved my Spanish skills a lot! If you want to contact him you can easily reach him on WhatsApp at +34665492710. One thing that shocked me about living in Spain though was the cold apartments. It feels strange when you can still run around in a t-shirt outside and inside it's an Ice age. Spanish houses don't have great insulation and radiators aren't a big thing either so make sure to also pack some warmer clothes... I ended up paying 250€ plus 50€ bills which I thought was fair given the central location. There is also an option to live near the campus in San Vincente but I don't recommend living there as it is far away from the city and there is no bus or tram connection. Most students will also live quite centrally around the area of Mercado Central and Plaza de Torros so I recommend finding something in that area. To get to University you can either take the Tram or the bus line 24 which costs you about 1,45€ per journey and

takes about 30 mins to get there. I would recommend getting a bus pass which you can buy in the Tram office near Mercado Central. It's also possible to get a discounted pass if you have a youth card (Carnet Joven). However, the process of getting it took me ages so I wouldn't waste too much time on that. What I would recommend though is getting the ESN card which gives you discounts for their events and they also have some good deals with other brands like Ryanair for example. They give you a discount on flights that you take within the year of your exchange and you get some free luggage as well.

Conclusion

When deciding whether to go on exchange or not we were told that from a purely academic perspective it probably won't be as useful to our studies as a regular semester at Kea but we will learn things that we didn't even think you could need before going. In my opinion that is quite accurate. Being thrown into an Architectural Degree was a totally new experience for me and I learned a lot that would never appear in our curriculum at Kea. What was frustrating however was the amount of work I had to put in to wrap my head around the different ways that teachers were using to communicate with us and especially towards the end having so many different groups was quite challenging.

But University life was only one part of the exchange and that is always important to remember. It was a great opportunity to experience the Spanish way of life and learn about their culture. To finish on a high, I did enjoy my time here a lot because it pushed me out of my comfort zone, I met plenty of amazing people that I can call my friends now and I saw a lot of incredible places that I didn't even know existed.

