

EXCHANGE REPORT

Politecnico di Milano

Laura Kovacevic
laur108m@stud.kea.dk

Exchange period | September 2019 – January 2020

Contact Person | KEA | Andreas Berger | andb@kea.dk
Contact Person | Politecnico di Milano | Ingrid Paoletti | ingrid.paoletti@polimi.it

List of contents

Introduction

Experiences at the host university

Social and cultural experiences

Practical experiences

Conclusion

Introduction

Decision of studying abroad came quite naturally to me after hearing presentation made by KEA Global in the beginning of my studies at KEA. Furthermore, I was positively impacted by all the students who have experienced exchange before me and had an amazing time themselves. I was a student of Architectural Technology and Construction Management in the international line who went for the semester exchange in the 5th semester. I was debating for a while whether to go to Toronto at George Brown College or Milano at Politecnico di Milano. Eventually, I have decided to do an exchange semester in Milano due to the several reasons. Good reputation, ranking and tradition of Politecnico combined with the cultural and geographical proximity of Milano in Europe made my decision final. Since I felt the lack of knowledge in the fields of history of architecture, art and building construction techniques, urban planning and sociology, I have concluded that Politecnico would offer more compared to George Brown College. I was also encouraged by my previous knowledge of Italian language and Erasmus Grant which was a great financial help in the process of settlement in Milano.

Experiences at the host university

Welcome Week

Beginning of the semester at Politecnico di Milano was quite turbulent. Welcome Week was organized by the university and it left the grand impact on me. Big university, thousands of students buzzing around, huge lines and overall chaos. Information in the Welcome Week were not as useful as I have hoped them to be. Things around the residence registration and health insurance remained unclear and unsorted (until the end of the semester). All exchange students were complaining about the schedules that they ended up having, including myself. University is not providing enough courses taught in English which leads to many non-Italian speaking exchange students having courses taught in Italian. This caused a lot of problems and stress in the beginning. Furthermore, a crucial tip that we were unaware of is selecting the courses for schedule in the very first minute when it opens on the official website. A single day of wait (which was my case) can be costly – all the classes are full, unavailability of courses taught in English, courses that you have no academic interest in, immense waiting (easily up to 8 hours) in the university administration in order to change schedule etc. All in all, do not hope for the help of the international office and get your information from other students and student associations. Eventually, I ended up creating the schedule I was content with. It was combining all the classes and knowledge I was hoping to get, even though half of them were still taught in Italian. My suggestion would be to do a course research in order to be ready as soon as the schedule opens and chose Master courses since they are taught in English and provide far better learning environment and outcomes.

Facilities

Facilities of Politecnico di Milano were generally disappointing. You can hear the complains about the study environment throughout the entire duration of semester. University has more students than the physical space and facilities provided which results in unavailability to find study space in the libraries, long waiting lines, uncomfortably full classrooms etc. It is

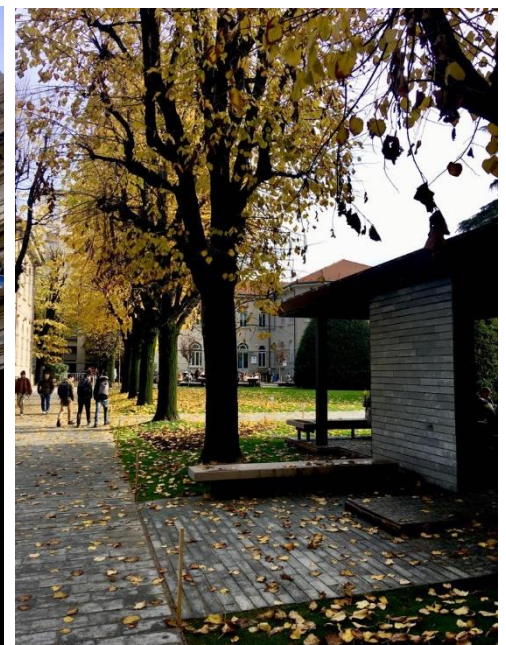
quite hard to do a group meeting since there is no group workspace provided anywhere in or near campus Leonardo. Cafes and restaurants around the campus have limiting laptop usage time or they do not allow them at all. Usually, you are lucky if you find a place to sit and study in study spaces or library of Leonardo campus. Furthermore, WiFi in the study spaces of the university is slow or unavailable and most of the plugs are not working. There are many study spaces in the open air around the campus Leonardo and students are using them during the winter due to the lack of interior space. Classrooms are quite laptop-unfriendly since the plugs are embedded in the walls and there are no extension cables provided. University canteen is completely full during the lunch break which makes the most students bring their own lunch boxes, buy food in the nearby supermarkets or grab something small on the go. We would all usually eat over our working tables in the classrooms or library (which has led to an interesting combination of smells). I have found study environment overall uncomfortable. On the positive note, the renovation of the interior gardens in the campus Leonardo was beautifully done and during the warm times (which in Italy is until the beginning of November) the green spaces around the campus were vibrant and pleasant.



Popular study space *Agora* is often overcrowded
December, 2019.



Historic buildings of campus Leonardo
are still in function
November, 2019.



Il Giardino di Leonardo in campus
Leonardo
November, 2019.

Group Work

I feel like this section deserves a mention since it was consistently present during the semester. University is trying to enhance the group work in most of the courses without providing any proper support or education needed for collaborative process. To start with, it was impossible to keep track and manage group meetings since each student had min. 4 different groups from different courses. In reality, we would always end up distributing individual tasks and combining them before the deliveries without quality assurance. I have also experienced that the most of my teammates didn't act professionally in the group - not sharing files, personally attacking after receiving project-related criticism, submitting work without the approval of all teammates etc. I feel like the university should invest more time

and effort into teaching about the rules, etiquette and advantages of the group work in order to make it enjoyable and meaningful.

Courses

I had 5 courses which contained 30 credits all together. Three of them were taught in Italian and two of them were Master courses. All of them were taking place at campus Leonardo.

History of Architecture and Building Technologies

This course was a BA level course, taught in Italian and it was awarded with 6 credits. It was tracking the history of (predominantly) Italian architecture from the 15th century until the present times. It was a 4-hour lecture on Wednesdays which lasted until the late afternoon. The course started with explaining the building technologies dating from the Renaissance. We have seen many examples of Italian churches, villas and buildings followed by the details of construction. In the later months, we were introduced to the international architectural pieces in the period of neoclassical, modern, functional, Bauhaus and contemporary style. I have learned about historic materials, building constructions and architectural design. Informative presentations with various pictures and examples made it enjoyable course to study. Knowledge that I have accumulated at KEA was a great help in order to grasp the subject. The final delivery was in a form of a group report, PP presentation and image folder. Each group (up to 3 people) was given a classical or neoclassical building in Milano which they had to analyse and describe by tracking the history, architect, architectural style, construction, use and context.

History of Art

This course was a BA level course, taught in Italian and it was awarded with 4 credits. Unfortunately, this course was overlapping with my other course (History of Architecture and Building Technologies) which made it impossible to attend. Professor Cordera was helpful with giving us the reading material in English in order to get ready for the exam in January. I have never attended the lectures from this course, but I have followed with the readings during the semester. My personal interest and previous knowledge about the subject made it enjoyable subject to study. It has deepened my knowledge about the major art movements, periods and artists. I would have loved to attend the lectures because I have heard that professor Cordera makes them informative and interactive.

Foundations of Aesthetics

This course was BA level course, taught in Italian and it was awarded with 4 credits. I have attended this course just couple of times and decided that I want to be a non-attending student. The course was analysing form, aesthetics, concept of art and ideas from the philosophy point of view. Professor Chiodo didn't use PP presentations with images while lecturing which made my understanding of Italian low - terminology used was quite specific and complicated. We were given a book in English that we had to read in order to prepare for the final exam. The subject is exploring the philosophical history of concepts of architecture, art, aesthetics etc. I found it to be quite thought-provoking and eye-opening and I have enjoyed learning about it. I am sure that class attendance would be optimal for in-depth understanding, but my Italian knowledge was not sufficient in order to do that. The knowledge gained from this subject cannot be practically used, but it can serve as a base for understanding the history and development of the artistic concept.

Contemporary City: Social Changes and Policies

This course was MSc level course, taught in English and it was awarded with 8 credits. This was my favourite course of the semester. It belonged to the field of Urban Planning and Sociology and it tracked the urbanization process of cities from the late 19th century until the present times. Professor Ranci was easy to follow and respectful towards our interests and needs. This course analysed many factors and outcomes of urbanization, such as gentrification, segregation, social inequalities etc. I found myself really engaged with the lectures which had often resulted in the extracurricular research and readings. I believe that this course provided essential skills of understanding the urban processes and behaviours needed for the field of architecture and planning. We had to do two written exams based on the given readings and a group report (3 people) about the chosen city. Even though the course contained a lot of challenging academic readings, I had no problems with fulfilling my tasks.

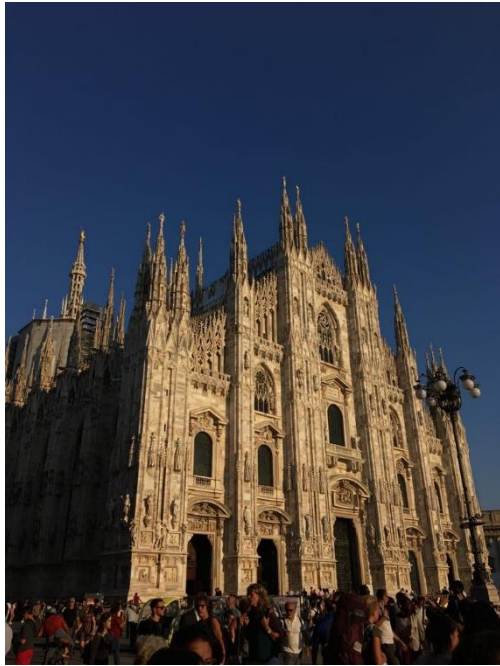
Architectural Preservation Studio

This course was MSc level course taught in English and it was awarded with 10 credits. Studios are the only practical courses in Politecnico where, the same concept like in KEA, students are developing group-based project during the semester. I chose the preservation studio because I was missing the refurbishment themed semester at KEA which made me think that I will still have a chance to learn about it. Also, the preservation studio was the only one that included the software usage which I found important. The studio was dealing with analysis, preservation and design proposal for Monza Park (located in the north of Milan). We have been on a three site visits during the semester in order to get familiar with the park and its landmarks. This course was quite disappointing for many reasons. Firstly, we haven't progressively used any software apart from Adobe Illustrator and AutoCAD. The course description has mentioned the use of QGIS which we have just touched upon in the beginning and quickly switched to Adobe Illustrator. Secondly, the quality of lectures was quite low - professors being late, repeated information, constant changes of requirements and expectations, endless hours of consultancy which haven't really helped in the process, poor organization and the lack of motivation. Finally, the group work was badly managed since we had different groups in each individual course and there was never time in the schedule to meet. The project was progressing incredibly slow due to the lack of proper organization and communication between group members. We could spend the entire day in the classroom discussing ideas with the professors without actually writing notes and implementing suggestions in the project. It was really time consuming and slow. The final delivery consisted of the couple of A1 posters showing the masterplan of the park, historic Monza Park map, materials and decay analysis of the selected building in the park. It was an easy subject to pass, but I wouldn't recommend taking it.

Social and Cultural Experiences

Milano was a truly great city to live in. Its location in the Central Europe offers many possibilities for traveling, weekend trips and mountain getaways. My favourites include numerous trips to the Lake Como which is beautiful all year around and a weekend trip to Tuscany. Milano provides rich cultural, gastronomic and leisure program all year around. It is possible to eat dinner until 2 am at the cosy restaurants and hit the nightlife in the bustling streets every day of the week. I have particularly appreciated art and cultural events that were organized and promoted weekly in different Facebook groups, street posters and zero.it website. There was always something to do and a new area to explore. When it

comes to the Italian culture and people it was also a great fun. Knowing the language can open you many doors in Italy as well as assuring free limoncellos after the dinners at the restaurants. The quick way to win the hearts of Italians was complimenting the beauty of their country and the food (which is indeed amazing). I am thankful for deepening my Italian language knowledge and meeting great people - both Italian and international.



Il Duomo
September, 2019.



Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II
September, 2019.



Bosco Verticale as the greatest example
of the contemporary architecture in Milan
September, 2019.



Aperitivo in Brera
September, 2019.



Italian cuisine
November, 2019.



Fondazione Prada for cultural events and
art exhibitions
November, 2019.



Varenna
October, 2019.



Views on Lake Como
October, 2019.



Florence
November, 2019.

Practical Experiences

To begin with, finding an apartment in Milano can be tricky. We have, unfortunately, been through the basic beginner story everyone was warning us about. I have agreed with two of my classmates from KEA, who have also applied for an exchange semester at Politecnico, to be flatmates in Milano. We have found a student apartment in August 2019 on Housing Anywhere website which was promoted by Politecnico as a trustworthy source. Little did we know, Homes Rentals SRL (<https://homesrentals.eu/>) agency advertising the apartment scammed us by giving out dirty and unacceptable apartment once we have arrived in Milano. We have stayed there for two days and decided to cancel the contract and live in Airbnb until we find something suitable. We have been leading battle with Homes Rentals SRL in order to get our deposit back (which we did after 3 weeks) and moving around the city throughout September. We have eventually moved in the apartment behind Corso Sempione which belonged to one of our Airbnb hosts that agreed to rent it long-term to us for 1600 EUR per month. My advice would be to rent Airbnb and search for the place once you arrive in Milano since there are many agencies who are scamming students over internet. Other than that, make sure that the place you are living in is suitable for studying since you will be spending a lot of your time doing that. We were lucky to have that because, as I have previously described, university is not facilitating comfortable study space for individual and group work. When it comes to the public transportation, I was moving around the city primarily by metro. Monthly student transportation ticket costs 22 EUR which is a great deal for the unlimited rides. Grocery prices are pretty much like the ones in Copenhagen, while the restaurant prices are significantly lower. On the most nights out, I would pay around 20-30 EUR for a nice dinner. A drink at the bar can cost you up to 10 EUR and entrance to the nightclub around 10-20 EUR including a drink. Great thing about Milano are various and active student associations who organize free on budget-friendly events, night outs, walking

tours and trips. I have participated in couple of them and it was a fun opportunity to get to know international people. Since I was living *dolce vita*, I am not familiar with the gym membership prices even though I was told that they can be quite expensive. All in all, I have managed to cover all my expenses with the savings I have made during my studies in Copenhagen.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have genuinely enjoyed most of the experiences offered by exchange semester in Milano. I had a great time getting to know people, exploring the Italian culture and learning about my environment. On the other hand, I am slightly disappointed in Politecnico di Milano and provided study environment. I am thankful for the gained theoretical knowledge which will dictate my future academic and professional career, but lecturing methods, facilities and organization could be improved.