

Exchange Report

Politecnico di Milano

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1. Introduction

After careful consideration and a lot of research I have chosen to my 5th semester at Politecnico di Milano. One of the reasons was that at that time I was already in Denmark for two years and I needed to change my surroundings. I have actually realised here how much I love Copenhagen and how much I appreciate the Danish educational system, but I will write more about that in the sections below. I wanted to check through my own experience how it is to study in a more “traditional” way and how is pure architecture comparing to Architectural Technology and Construction Management. I wanted to experience the creative design process and the feeling of a big, international university. I also wanted to challenge myself as I imagined that it will be a very busy time full of studying.

2. Experiences at the Host University

Facilities

The very first thing I have experienced at Politecnico is the chaos connected with every school-related procedure or activity. During summer, before my exchange, we were asked to choose the subjects that we want to study during the exchange. When I logged into the platform (later the same day), there were no more courses available in English that I wanted to take, so I chose the Italian ones, because I was told the readings and exams are in English and that when we start school it will be possible to change them again. In the whole rush of a welcome week, me and my friends managed to find a place where we could sit, connect to the internet and charge our laptops (all at once! And right now, I know that it was quite an accomplishment). We managed to change some of the subjects that day and we had until the end of next week we had to close and submit the final plans – that meant that we had a full week to see whether we will like the plan we had. The first couple of days I have changed my plan 3-4 times a day, hoping I will get more classes in English. I ended up with 3 classes in English and 2 in Italian and a completely different plan that what I had at the beginning.



Fig. 1. One of the queues, Polimi Winter Gala

The Leonardo Campus is really big and first couple of days I have had problems finding my way around. I have got a very useful tip to download the Polimi app that shows, where your classes are, which helped me a lot at the beginning. The classrooms at school that I have had classes at were mostly too small (especially at the beginning when most of the people were still attending the classes) and they have not had good air quality. I have felt very sleepy there, especially that each class lasts at least 3 hours. Politecnico is not only big regarding the size of the campuses, but also the number of students. I have experience quite a few problems with finding the place to do groupwork. At school there are a few open spaces, where you can sit, but they are mostly taken and busy all the time (also during weekends). There are some structures outside the buildings (fig. x), but they become useless, when it is cold. There is a library, always busy, you cannot talk there and the tables in there are not connected to the plugs, so you can only use your laptop on the benches that are very uncomfortable. There is one café close to school, called *Upcycle*, where you can work, but between 12 and 15 you cannot use laptops as well as after 18 (and that is a thing for most of the cafes). I have found a nice place in Lambrate, called Formidabile Lambrate and I can strongly recommend it as they do not have that policy.



Fig. 2. The outside structures for students

Classes

The classes that I took were: Historical Buildings Preservation Studio (3rd year Bachelor of Architectural Design), Sociology of Contemporary Cities: Change and Policies (1st year of master's in urban planning), Urban History and two courses in Italian (I was a non-attending student) – Foundations of Aesthetics and History of Art (both Bachelor of Architectural Design). I really feel like I have learnt a lot from the classes that were carried out in English, especially the Sociology of Contemporary Cities and I think that I can strongly recommend taking the master classes if you want to learn more. In the English classes we were always following given timeline – of course there were changes from time to time – and they were very well-structured. For the classes that I am not attending I had an agreement with the teachers that I have books in English to read and the exam is in English. I was very excited for the History of Art, but it is a 1st year of Bachelor course, which means that they have a lot of students (around 80 in each and there are around 6 classes) and the teacher that I chose (of course I could not know which one is the best) – Paola Cordera was not prepared for the English-speaking students and in the end we got 4 books to read and it is 4ECTs subject. For me the amount of reading to the value of the subject is not proportional.

Teachers

I can strongly recommend the teacher from my Urban History class – Pilar Guerreri – who also teaches History of Contemporary Architecture in the Lecco Campus. I have a friend attending this class and she was also really happy about it. Pilar Guerreri is one of those professors that makes you interested in the subject even if it was the most boring thing on earth. She is working on the case studies and everything we have learnt was based on cities around the globe. I really enjoyed her class, even though it is not that useful for my profession.

Teaching Methods

As mentioned above, there is a lot more theory in Politecnico that I have had at KEA and a lot less practical work. We do have groupwork, but we have a different group for each class. There is no group coordination and from my experience - from KEA, but especially from Politecnico - it is necessary to have it. The teachers are also not interested in what is the division of work in group and I have experience quite a few problems with that. That is also quite challenging when each of you have two or more groups to coordinate and apart from that some people are also working – it really makes a difference. I could recommend trying to create “mixed” groups, so that no two people speak the same language. I have found it more difficult if people were from the same countries as they already know each other from the studies, it is easier for them to exclude you from the groupwork and harder to explain something to you.

3. Social and Cultural Experiences

Networking

I consider myself to be a quite open and extroverted person and I have found some friends at this, although I would say it was not that easy for me as it was in Copenhagen. I think I definitely missed

working and connections you can get through that. I have met most of the people at school, especially through groups. I have also met people at Erasmus events, I have not been at too many of those, just one or two at the beginning, but people are very friendly there and usually want to meet friends as well. I would recommend going out with those people after the events. I have also met really fun people at my Italian classes, that I got through Polimi and I really recommend those courses, but more for the networking part of it.

Going out

Going to restaurants is quite a thing in Milan, at least that is what I have experienced. Italian people love to go out and eat, especially during the weekend, so the city seems like it never sleeps. The more Italian places would have big tables, be very cosy and home-like, with very good food and wine and maybe an after-dinner karaoke or live music. I love going out and dance, unfortunately I have not found my favourite place in this city. I have still a plan to go to a club called *Plastic*, but it is a little bit outside the city and far from my home. I am a big fan of nice, cosy cafes and that I have found here. A very nice one is called *Otto* – it is in Chinatown, you can get lunch there, but I much more prefer to go there in the afternoon and have a coffee with a cake. Another cafe is called *Pause*, it is a 15-minute walk from school, and it is a super small place, but with a nice small boutique in the back. A place that I have visited with my friends and I really liked is called *Pavé*, I have been there a couple of times and I really liked it or a café, restaurant and bookshop in *Corso Como*. I also recommend going to *Fondazione di Prada* and checking out the café that is there, it was designed by Wes Anderson and it is amazing! About galleries I would strongly recommend going to *Gallerie d'Italia*. It is really big, and they have an amazing collection of contemporary art.

4. Practical Experiences

Airports

I have travelled to and from Milan from both airports and I would much more recommend the Malpensa airport, but it is quite pricey to get there, it is 13 euros for a fast train, one way, which is more or less the price of two tickets to Bergamo. Bergamo is much smaller, and it is further out the city, but it is also cheaper.

Accommodation

I have had some problems regarding accommodation at the beginning. Me and my friends from Copenhagen, we have rented out a place through an online agency – *Housing Anywhere* (recommended by Polimi) and we have got an apartment with bed bugs. The online agency was fair to us, we got all our money back, but we have had some problems with the landlord – which was another, smaller agency, they were really taking their time to give us the money back and we had to go ourselves to the office and demand the money immediately after a couple of days. All in all, a very unpleasant experience. Later, we have spent some time in airbnbs, which are very expensive in Milan and I would not recommend them either. We have found our present apartment through a lady that was helping her friend and was letting us in to one of the airbnbs. We have a place at the end of Corso Sempione, we have a two-bedroom flat in a very friendly neighbourhood and we share

it, the three of us. The rent we pay is 1600 euros and apparently it is quite common to pay that. The only thing is that we have a 35-minute ride to school, but it is by subway, so it is not that annoying.

Cost of living

As I mentioned, the rent we pay is quite high and what we have got from Erasmus (285 euros a month) is not close covering it, so I really recommend having your finances figured out before you go. Milan is expensive, almost as expensive as Copenhagen, so we are spending a lot of money on food. If you are planning to go out during the weekends and/or do some trips outside of Milan, it is safe for me to say that it is around 500 euros a month. I am a vegetarian, so I do not eat meat and I also do not eat cow products and I still spend that much money monthly.

5. Conclusion

To conclude I want to say that I am very glad that I went on an exchange. I really wanted to see Italy, which I did over those couple of months. I know it seems, like everything was quite problematic and/or chaotic, but you can manage. People are very helpful here and if you try, you can learn the language, at least to an extent that helps you in the daily life. I am very content that I got to see how bigger school function and I am very grateful right now that I study in Denmark. I think it was a worthy experience different teaching method, big lecture halls and the anonymity of a one-of-many student. The school has a very good reputation and I think it means a lot even if you just did a couple-of-months-long exchange for your future development.