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1 DESTINATION

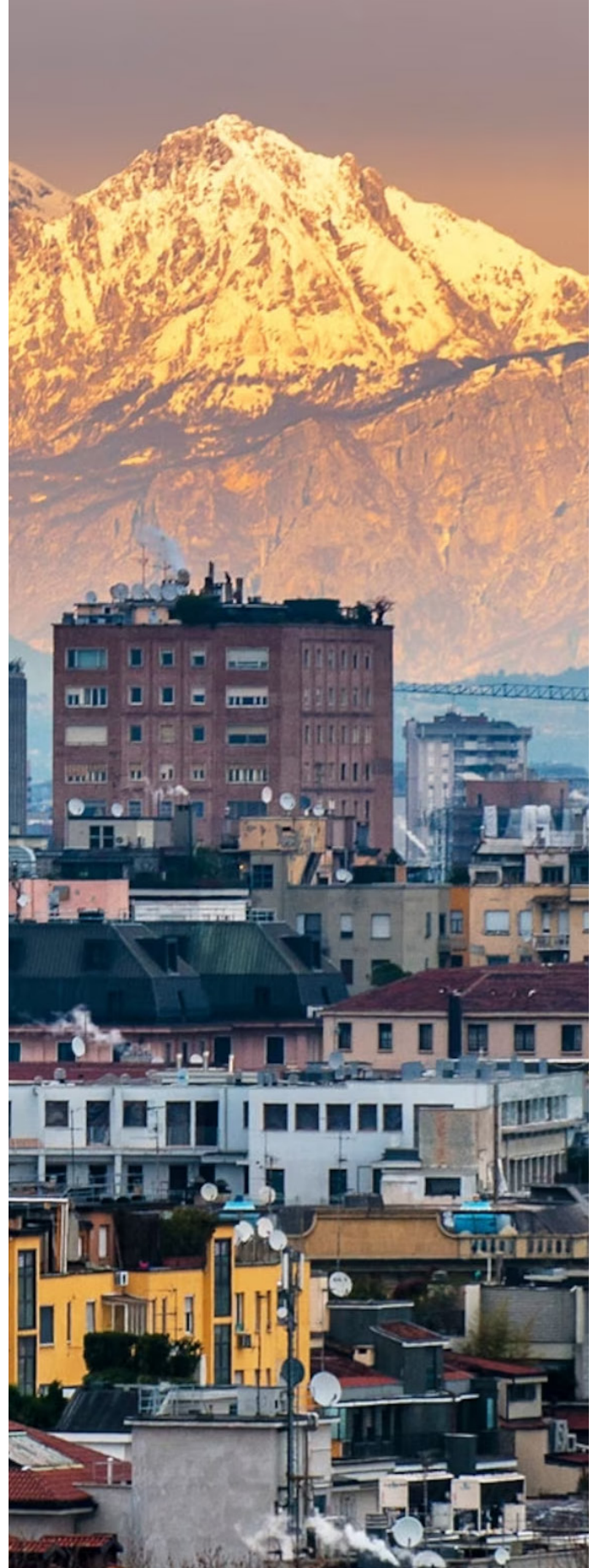
Milan was not my first choice for the exchange destination. I had Spain as my priority but didn't secure a spot. However, Milan was still a great option. I was basically looking to get out of my zone and challenge myself to learn more while experiencing a different culture. The city of Milan has also many advantages and opportunities to learn, such as the variety of architectural styles and the city's vibrant culture.

I thought it would be interesting to learn about the history and context of Milan's architecture. I was also very happy with Milan due to the level of the school. Politecnico di Milano is very well ranked within the schools of architecture so I thought it would be a good opportunity to test my skills acquired at KEA.

2 APPLICATION PROCESS

The application process for the schools was pretty clear and straight forward. We had good guidance from Andreas (our international coordinator). However the choice of courses and the creation of the study plan was slightly chaotic. At politecnico it works on a first come first served basis. I thought I had managed to get all the courses I wanted. This was until I arrived in Milan and realized that one of the course I had chosen was only a second semester course.

The course was 8CFU. It compromised my whole organization, I had to do a few back and forth with the international office at politecnico and Kea to get it sorted out. I also had a course called Mechanics, 8CFU as well. I attended the first few classes and quickly realized it would be very difficult to pass this course (don't take it if you're not into math). In the end I managed to replace all of these credits with other courses where there was still places available. I ended up with 6 courses in total, a studio of interior design and 5 courses of 4 credits, 3 courses were from the master. Looking back it was definitely not the best organization but I'm glad I explored many courses and managed to pass all of them.



3 CHOICE OF COURSES

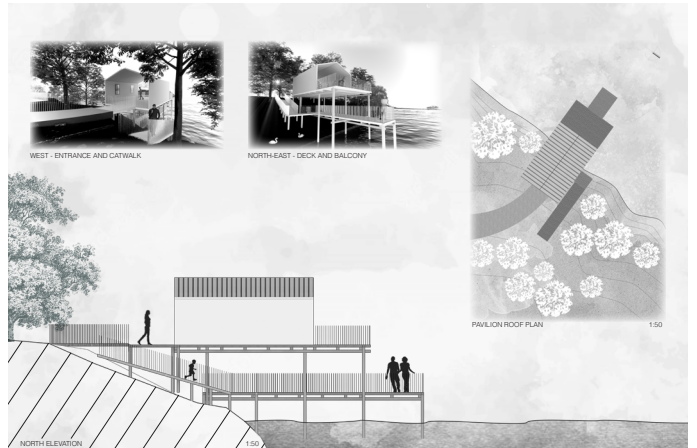
As mentioned above, the choice of courses was pretty chaotic. I knew the courses I wanted to take according to their descriptions on the platform of Politecnico. However, the inscription to the courses is on a first come first served basis. I managed it quite well on the day the website opened and took everything I wanted but some of the courses were very different from what I expected so I had to do a few changes after.



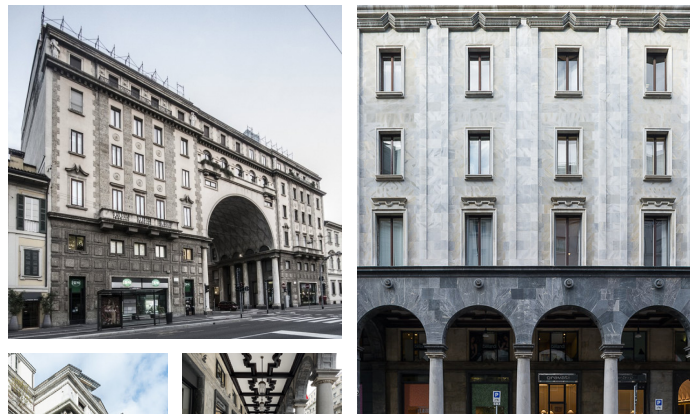
A good thing to know is that you can always try to change some of your study plan once the semester started, you have to go to the international office. I did this, if you have valid arguments they usually accept or at least give you options for other courses where there is still spots. I ended up with the following course. Architecture for human space exploration, interesting but not a very good teacher, however great guest lecturers. Interior design studio, they were 2 teachers for this subject, one of them was very nice and the other terrible.



The content of the course was interesting but I expected more software practice. Urban history, good course but very theoretical, we had 3 books to read and the assignments were long written reports about these books and their authors. I enjoy history so it was fine. Spatial analysis, interesting subject, only the teacher didn't speak very good English and very few people were coming physically to this class which made it slightly boring in terms of interactions. Finally, climate and hydrologie. It was a great subject but I thought it was a bit disconnected from architecture.



They taught us about the water cycles and all the elements involved in global warming. I wrote my final report about urban farming, so it's always possible to connect it to architecture or urbanism if you want to. Some people just wrote about earthquakes or palm oil. Overall I would say that it is really difficult to have a good idea of what the courses will bring you just from their description on the website but take what seems interesting and you can always try to change after the first or second class if you don't feel it.



4 ARRIVING IN MILAN

If you consider Milan as your exchange destination try to get a place to stay ahead of your arrival. I didn't, but I take everything slightly to relax. I started looking for a room on the 15th of August, school started on the 6th of September. Not being in Milan also make it more difficult. I was very lucky to have a friend from KEA doing his exchange in Milan as well. He had a room when I arrived and offered me to sleep at his place.

I managed to find my own room within 10 days but it was a challenge. From what I've seen, most people had found their room through websites such as roomless, housing anywhere, or facebook. Just be aware the market is very competitive so if you have a visit dress up nicely and make your best impression to the tenant. I found my room with one of these papers taped on the wall at the university. I took the phone number, went to visit and got along very well with the tenant. He offered me the room despite 15 other people visiting the same place. In my opinion the budget for a room ranges from 600 up to a 1000 per month.

There is definitely a big luck factor but if you keep searching you'll find a place. The metro works very well, I've met many people living on the other side of town, 30 minutes of commuting and they were at Politecnico.



5 WELCOME WEEK

The welcome week was a great start for the semester. It's a good idea to attend it if you want to meet a bunch of erasmus students and meet people from politecnico and other schools in Milan. There is a pep talk from the international office at the beginning as well as a quick tour of the campus. There is also many parties in the clubs of Milan with discounts for the erasmus students. It is very nice, you meet people from many countries and everyone is here to socialize. There is a majority of German and French students in erasmus but also a lot of people from all over the world. On the first week I met people with whom I hanged out all semester and that I now consider as good friends. I believe it is the people arround you that makes a place feel like home. Consider the welcome week as the moment to make friends, at this point no one cares about school, it's the time to go out.



6 SEMESTER, COURSES AND FACILITY

The semester was very enjoyable. The amount of courses is reasonable even though sometimes they all give assignments at the same time. But overall the rhythm is not overwhelming. I didn't enjoy the format of the classes very much, it is quite different from Kea. They usually do 3 hour classes with mostly, and sometimes only the teacher talking and there is a single break of 10-15 minutes in the middle. It's difficult to stay focus for such a long time, especially when there are just few interactions between teachers and students. Yet, this is different for each course and teacher.

Group work is also way less prominent at Politecnico. Studios are always in group, as well as a few other classes. The issue is that the teachers don't even address this part of the assignment. I felt like they take group work for something easy. Of course you can go to them if you have any issue collaborating with your groupmates but it is not encouraged in any way. I was pretty lucky with my groups but one of them was really bad. We were 6 and only 3 of us were working. We talked to the teacher who didn't seem to really bother. One of the groupmate did not even attend a single class.

Nor did he showed up at the final exam and still received the same grade as us. It was basically a free pass for him. I mostly blame the organization of the classes. There is really not a single module about communication, mediation or group management.

The facilities of Politecnico are quite nice overall. It lacks of modernity but there is most things you would need. The library is good and the classrooms are often open when there is no classes. However, the architecture building (n°11) is not the prettiest. There is also a nice gym and running track, the subscription is about 160euro for 6 months



7 CHILLING

I had a good time in Italy. Making friends out there was the best part and there is plenty of great stuff to do in Milan.

If you have 3-4 hours of free time you can check out any museum, there is already 3 very nice one in the center, museo del Novecento, Palazzo Real, and museo del Duomo. Of course there is also Duomo di Milano, the cathedral which you can't miss. I recommend having a few appetitivo while in Italy. If you find a good address you'll have many Italian specialities for a fair price. Do not neglect the aperol and campari spritz. Be careful for the addiction, it's just around the corner. If you have a weekend I advocate for a quick day trip to the lago di Como.



Como village is beautiful but a bit further you'll find Varenna and Bellagio. Very touristic but there is a good reason for it. These villages are the climax of Italian folklor. Finally you can take a quick flight from Milan and be anywhere in Italy within 2hours. I went in Palermo with a few friends for a weekend. We had a blast. Italy is great because pretty much every city is beautiful and loaded in culture, food and traditions. In Sicily I tried the arancini and the cannoli. Insane.

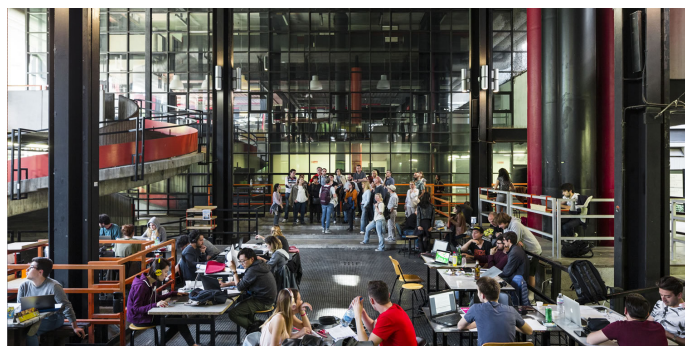


8 EXAMS

And of course exams. I honestly expected way harder exams. All my classmates kept telling me how hard it is to pass and that some of them had to retry the same subject a few times before passing. It is true but it widely varies on the subjects you chose. For instance, in mechanics 60 people attended the exams and only 15 passed on the first attempt. But most of my exams consisted in presentations.



Usually the presentations were about a final project or report. In these cases it wasn't that difficult, as long as you work a minimum during the semester you will manage. Know your script and package the presentation nicely and it'll go very smooth. I still have one exam left when I'm writing this report but I passed all the other ones on the first attempt. For the written tests you should definitely take a few days to learn the lessons (usually by heart). I felt like written tests were too much based on pure memory from the course's content not enough logic or critical thinking. Learn well and you will pass. Don't trust what the Italian students tell you, they want to get the best grade that's why they look at the exams with a lot of apprehensions.



It's not as difficult as it looks, especially when you see how hard people work at school you will start doing the same when the exam period comes around and it will work out nicely.