

EXCHANGE REPORT

HOST INSTITUTION: POLITECNICO DI MILANO

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Introduction

As a part of my education at KEA's BA in Architectural Technology and Construction Management program, I have decided to take my fourth semester abroad, and for that, I have chosen KEA's Italian partner university – Politecnico di Milano.

I have stayed in Milan from September '21 and returned to Copenhagen at the very end of January '22.

In the following paragraphs, I will be addressing some objective, practical everyday information as well as subjective thoughts about the experience itself.

Comparing KEA and PoliMi

To begin with, I will focus on the differences between KEA and PoliMi that are, in my opinion, useful to know beforehand and are important for the overall decision-making process.

The core difference that opens the window for the other, big and small ones is definitely - the capacity of the two schools. As of February 2022, Politecnico di Milano has 47,170 enrolled students, of which 7,231 architects & 4,294 designers. On the other side, 5,475 students enrolled in KEA (all departments combined), signalizes quite a contrast in the study environment.

Unlike at KEA, where we are studying in smaller classes and groups (at BATCM, where you are a member of one group throughout the whole semester and you are developing a project together with your colleagues while listening to subjects that are meant to be synchronized and related to one another; Politecnico offers a different setup, especially for Erasmus students)

Study Plan Submission

Why did I say „especially for Erasmus students“? It brings me to my first point: Study Plan Submission

As an International Exchange student, you are meant to have a look at the study offer of the University, make your selection and enroll in the desired courses through the Online Platform of the University (which, you will get access to). The tricky part might be the fact that you and +11 000 other students might want the same course. I am saying 11 000 because you are allowed to choose courses from all five years, both BSc and MSc. And keep in mind that full-time students have reserved spots for them. Therefore, it is truly a „competition“ to get the spot in the desired class.

Having said that, it's crucial to be ready at the exact time when the Online Platform for the SP Submission opens. Talking from experience, in summer 2021, when I was submitting mine, it opened at 14:00:00, but just a few seconds after – some of my priority courses to listen to were already booked. Therefore – prepare plans A, B, C, D, ... Many thanks to our coordinator

at KEA – Andreas Berger, for emphasizing the importance of this, as well as potential risks of a situation as such, because many students end up listening to courses held in Italian because the English ones are a minority and get booked sooner than the Italian ones. Knowing and hearing that from him has put the caution in the back of my mind, and I was ready with many different alternatives and ended up not having the language issue many have unfortunately faced.

The offered courses, as well as their scheduled hours, teachers, descriptions, etc. can be found on:

<https://www4.ceda.polimi.it/manifesti/manifesti/controller/ManifestoPublic.do>

It is useful to pay close attention to this (condense) webpage because it answers all the questions one might have about courses. (Also, pay attention to the semester number, when checking out the offer. Make sure it will be held in the semester you are about to attend).

As you can see on the webpage, the schedule is also mentioned, however it may not be updated for the upcoming semester at the time you are expected to submit your Study Plan, but there is no need to stress about it, because in case of overlapping classes, which you cannot know before the actual semester starts, you will have a chance to make changes to it once again in the first few weeks of the semester.

From personal experience, I ended up listening to courses I was interested in, but with big overlaps, which resulted in being a so-called „nonattending “ student at PoliMi.

Being a nonattending student is, in simple words, coming to the exam – only. You are not required to attend the classes if you inform and confirm it with the professor. In three out of six subjects, I was a NA student.

Courses

I have listened to six courses which in total gave me 32 ECTS points. I was attending three of them, and in the other three, I was a nonattending student who participated in the examination process only.

Historic building preservation studio

3rd year of BSc | ECTS points: 12

Professors:

Alessandra Kluzer & Sara Goidanich

This class was organized into three main deliveries, all carried out in the form of group work.

The first workshop was called „Historic building preservation in your country“ where students from two different countries compared building preservation approaches from different perspectives, mainly legal ones. This workshop lasted around 2/3 weeks and ended up with a presentation of the discoveries in a comparative way.

The second workshop was the analysis of a building in Milan city center – Ca' Granda. In the past, it served as a hospital, and today it is part of the University of Milan's main campus. The analysis started with getting familiar with the historical value, historical impact, and historical importance of the hospital itself, and slowly progressed to gaining knowledge of building features with different analysis tools: photographic surveying, measuring, hand drawing, and recreating the assigned facades in Auto CAD which has undergone multiple evaluations and perfecting our group's deliverables, in order to prepare for the next stage.

The next stage belongs to professor Goidanich's subject, and it was focused on planning the conservation intervention, analyzing the building materials, their interaction with the outdoor environment, and as a product of this analysis - mapping decays according to the *ICOMOS-ISCS Illustrated glossary on stone deterioration patterns*.

The third workshop was a class presentation based on the assigned topic, in my group's case, was „Built Heritage and Seism“ where students from different countries introduced a meaningful intervention through an oral presentation and compared the countries' different or similar approaches through the prism of building conservation.

History of building construction

1st year of MSc | ECTS points: 4

Professor: Mariacristina Loi

I was a non-attending student. The exam was carried out orally, based on the given literature. I found it very interesting, I learned about the main phases in the development of building techniques in the Western world. There was plenty of examples, seminars (some of which I attended), discussions, and although I was not attending the class, I got the impression students were quite engaged in it. I enjoyed preparing for this exam because it enriched my knowledge about the mentioned topics I feel like I was missing out on.

Heritage preservation fundamentals

2nd year of BSc | ECTS points: 4

Professor: Anna Anzani

I was a non-attending student. The exam was carried out in the form of multiple-choice questions. The final grade was a combination of the exam result and different deliveries that all students had to submit, despite their status (attending or not). Literature was an interesting mix of articles, books, and videos regarding different topics. It was great to engage with topics such as monumental architecture, its' structural and morphological aspects, cultural heritage, ... Although I was not attending the classes when engaging with the provided materials, I believe I gained awareness of how a restoration project should be respectful of cultural values, as well as contemporary needs.

Planning legislation

2nd year of MSc | ECTS points: 4

Professor: Maria Cristina Colombo

Personally, this was my favorite class to attend. Professor Colombo gave me a great insight into European and Italian legislation in such an engaging and easygoing way, that it should be mentioned in this report. If you are interested in this side of our industry, I can truly recommend this class. The professor is very realistic with her expectations of the learning outcome, and she focused on students understanding the points, rules, and regulations, rather than reading hundreds and hundreds of pages of different laws. We've had a guest lecturer, Michele Rizzo, who focused on the combination of sustainability and European/Italian laws regarding this matter. The exam was carried out orally in the form of 3 open-end questions.

Project appraisal

2nd year of MSc | ECTS points: 4

Professor: Federico Dell'Anna

I liked this course quite a lot, it provided us with different methods of evaluating the project in its' early stages by organizing us into groups of four to five students who dealt with different case studies throughout the semester, assessing them using, for instance, SWOT, Stakeholder analysis, cost analysis & estimation, multicriteria analysis, etc. The process was very engaging and dynamic and professor Dell'Anna did a great job at connecting the topics with our industry and bringing it closer to us, students. The examination was a written multiple-choice question, and finally enough the closing grade was a combination of grades received in previous submissions & the final test.

Management for architecture

2nd year of MSc | ECTS points: 4

Professor: Deborah Agostino

I was a nonattending student. The ones who were attending the class were in groups of 4-5 students and analyzed a case study project through the business model canvas, SWOT, PEST, Porter's Value chain, and other managerial and budgeting tools. Since I haven't participated in the class, my examination was based on the theoretical knowledge on the mentioned topics, orally.

Conclusion

Social & Practical, Practical & Social

Living in Milan was fantastic! The city is as cultural and eventful as it is beautiful. I am sure that everyone can find the right spot for them according to their interests, any time of the day. Speaking of Erasmus's life, it is very easy to meet people, especially as a Politecnico student. Friday evenings at Piazza Leo are the easiest way to start networking, you can also join different Facebook/WhatsApp groups made specifically for Erasmus students, or simply follow and register to ESN events (and there is PLENTY of those).

When it comes to the accommodation, I've found mine through an agency called Roomie Milano and I can warmly recommend it. My experience was one hundred percent positive, they are reliable, trustworthy and are willing to help and were open for compromise (f.ex., the usual minimum stay is six months, but my exchange period lasted only five months – a simple question and explanation was enough for them to say „Alright, we can make an exception“).

As far as the costs of life go, Milan is not a city to go to if you are relying only on the Erasmus Grant. In comparison to Copenhagen, it is more affordable in terms of, for instance, dining out, however – rent, or even groceries, are not SO much cheaper. It all depends on your spending habits, but, as mentioned – the grant itself will not be sufficient, personal input is a must.

All in all, as this report is coming to an end, I see I could easily continue and write pages and pages about numerous anecdotes, friendships, and bonds formed during my stay, but - if you are dwelling and thinking „Should I go? Should I not go?“ – all I can say is: please, go.

The university is demanding, sometimes challenging, things may even seem chaotic, but it is nothing you won't be able to manage. Italy, on the other hand, is an absolute gem, and living in Milan opens many opportunities for exploring, be it Lago Maggiore, Lago di Como, some of the other Italian cities, or even Switzerland. All of this is reachable within 1hr by train. More importantly, the atmosphere of the city and the people who I promise you will meet will stay in your memory for a very long time, if not even forever. All I can say is everything was worth it.

Wishing you all the best of luck with your upcoming exchange semester and in case of any questions, feel free to send me an e-mail, I will be more than happy to answer it.