

Sebastian Ribecky Arroyo
sebastian.ribecky@tu-ilmenau.de
TU Ilmenau
6. March 2020

Erasmus Experience Report

A study semester at Politécnico di Milano, Italy

1. Preparations

Ever since I started my studies at TU Ilmenau, I thought about doing an Erasmus semester by the time I would be finishing. I had heard before, from past Erasmus students, what a great experience it is and how it is totally worth it. I was interested in going to Italy, since I had been studying the language for a couple of semesters, and I thought an exchange semester would be a great opportunity to practice it. I also had special interest in going to Politécnico di Milano, since they had recently opened the Master of science study course “Music and Acoustics Enigeering”, which aligned very well with my study-specialisation goals. So, around May of last year, being on my second of three semesters of my Masters “Media Technology” at TU Ilmenau, I decided to go for it, and apply for the winter semester 2019/20.

I was actually a bit late on the registration process, since the registration deadline for Erasmus on winter semester was around mid-June. Luckily, the people from the International Office in TU Ilmenau were really helpful in quickly assisting me with the registration process. First, as my study course did not had an Erasmus partnership with Politécnico di Milano, the International Office quickly contacted them, to ask if I could participate in the exchange program. Two days before the Erasmus registrations closed, they replied positively. I quickly filled out all the paperwork, sent it, and in matter of weeks I was accepted as an exchange student. I also received per mail from the international office in Milan a very complete guide directed to exchange students, about how everything will work during the exchange semester, from how to do different procedures in the university, to how life in Italy will be.

2. Accommodation

Finding accommodation in Milan was the first real problem I had to face, and I would dare to say, that it was the first (and really the only) stressful part of the exchange semester, which I did not enjoy. I first tried to get one of the rooms in one of the university dorm buildings. Unfortunately, due to the high demand they have each semester it was not possible for me to get one of these rooms. So I had to find accommodation on my own. At this point, the ESN (Erasmus Student Network) organisation of the Politécnico was very helpful. They offer online a guide for finding accommodation in Milan with links to the different agencies (for some they even explained how to get discounts), tips on how to detect scams, and other recommendations. They even offer a program for Erasmus students to stay in other students dorms, if you still don't have accommodation by the time you arrive. However, like it is in every big city I suppose, all rental procedures are very dynamic, and it proved to be very difficult to find accommodation from abroad. So I decided to go a little earlier to Milan and find something there. This proved to be most effective. Within a couple of days I was able to get a room in a shared flat. However the rental price was much more than the university dorms, much more than I was originally expecting to pay, and even much more than what I received per month from the Erasmus scholarship. In any case, I was happy that I could find something, and that I could start enjoying/preparing for the start of the semester.

3. Study Life at Politécnico

The first week at the university was the so called "Welcome Week" (sort of like the "Erstwoche" here in Ilmenau, at a much bigger scale). During this week a lot of orientation was given to exchange students on how to move around the university and outside of it, how things worked; most of it which I found very useful. This event was also a great way to meet other Erasmus, and exchange student from other mobility programs. In my case, I was very fortunate to be able these days to bond and make a lot of friends from all around Europe and the world, with which later during the semester I shared travel experiences with, and now, after the exchange semester, still maintain regular contact with.

I found the lessons I attended in Politécnico very interesting, and they mostly fulfilled my expectations on what I wanted to get from this exchange, in an academic point of view. The quality of the lessons and the professors was very good. The facilities of the university are in general good, although they suffer from overpopulation due to the high number of students. The only thing that can be reproached from the university, but which I was also expecting,

was sometimes the poor (or lack of) administrative organisation. I think part of this comes inherently with the “italian way” of doing things. Having classes cancelled or delayed were things not at all uncommon. Even some classes were not very well organised, with the professors not giving clear objectives for some works, or clear dates for deadlines. Two counterpoints are worth noticing here though. First, that I came from a small German university, which is a synonym for a very well organised institution, so the bar was already very high; and second, that the study course I was enrolled for had only existed for around a year (with one other Erasmus student, we were actually the first exchange students ever for the study course), and they were still experimenting/struggling in some organisation aspects.

4. Everyday Life and Leisure Time

I really enjoyed my time in Milan, I feel so lucky I was able to do my Erasmus there. The city has so much to offer, from buildings, museums, historical places, parks; to an amazing nightlife with a wide selection of restaurants, bars, clubs, etc. When I didn't had to study or do work for the university, I really enjoyed exploring the city, taking part of city events (there is always something), or meeting with friends at sundown for the typical “Aperitivo”, only later to end up going to a bar, or even a club. The ESN of Politécnico also organised a lot of events specially orientated for Erasmus students, which I really enjoyed; like excursions to different historical points and museums of the city, tandem nights, cultural workshops, parties, trips to other cities, and much more.

Apart from all those things, I also enjoyed exploring some other italian cities, by organising the occasional weekend trip with, mainly, other Politécnico Erasmus students from all over Europe. I feel that during these trips, and the experiences lived within them, strong bonds were formed, creating a lot of friendships.

5. Summary

Overall, I am very happy with my Erasmus experience. I feel I have grown during the mobility period, not only at an academical level, but also at a personal one. I was able to meet, and share experiences with people from all over Europe and the world, so it was a great way of expanding my network of contacts. I think this program is a great way to break the shell for people coming from different cultural backgrounds, and succeeds in creating a sense of Europe as a whole. I definitely have now a different view of the European Union.