

## My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

### Tennis balls and chopsticks

Marco Piscitelli

LM Relazioni Internazionali Comparete

Destination: Hanoi University, Vietnam

Marco Piscitelli tries to pick up chopsticks and catch a tennis ball at the same time.

At the third month of my exchange period in Vietnam, I was almost getting used to most of the different things that I was experiencing over there. Going from a place to another by motorbike, maybe while having my sugarcane drink inside a plastic bag instead of a tin can, zigzagging between chickens and exotic fruits with bright colors that I had never seen in my life, making my way to one of the many bars next to the West Lake of Hanoi became my weekly routine. The curiosity about trying new food shaded, as drinking egg coffee or eating noodle soup in the morning was not as strange as it used to be before. I did even stop taking pictures of all the fancy or absurd things Vietnamese people managed to carry on their tiny vehicles, and driving alongside them turned out to be my reality. Thanks to my host brother Son, I was able to make some local friends, with who I ended up playing Chinese chess or Neapolitan card games, always present in my backpack. Life was pretty nice, people still stopped me in the middle of the streets to ask me to teach English to their children, or just to have a picture with me, but neither one of these things bothered me anymore. Nevertheless, there is one main episode that really made me fell in love with Vietnam and its citizens. It was Saturday when me and Thuy, a classmate of mine, ended up in Hoan Kiem, walking alongside the lake, observing the pagoda that was towering in the middle of the water. During the weekend, the roads around that area were closed to traffic, so that the great flow of motorbikes could leave a spot for the Hanoians, who could spend a nice time with their beloved ones over there. Because of that, Thuy showed me some games that we could play just by sitting on the asphalt, by using a tennis ball and some chopsticks. Seeing an Italian guy playing some local games with a local girl, as we were communicating to each other in Japanese, was something uncommon in that place, so other people started to become curious about our match. Other two Vietnamese boys decided to join us, and so did a kid that was staring at me, or at my beard should I say, so curious. I wasn't able to communicate with any of

them, but body language, and maybe Italian gestures as well, helped us to have fun together. However, it was when an old lady, dressed in a pink suit and wearing the traditional Vietnamese hat, sat next to us and threw the tennis ball in the air, while catching all the chopsticks on the ground in one turn (that was the point of the game), beating all of us, that I realized how unique that thing was to me. Six people, or I should say six complete strangers, were playing such a childish game all together in the streets of the second biggest city of Vietnam, regardless of age, gender or nationality. And they were even unable to speak properly to each other. After that, we all left to go back to our lives, as what did just happen minutes before was just something so normal and common to do.

During my stay in Hanoi I experienced many times the kindness and friendliness of Vietnamese people, but that episode ended up being one particular sweet memory among the others. Vietnam was a totally unknown country to me, and discovering its scenery, food and traditions made me more curious and interested in it, but not as much as its people did. I think every student that has been on an exchange program has cried at least once when coming back home or when some random memories of their experience came into their mind, and I have to admit that I am not an exception to this. I came back realizing that I changed so much in such a small amount of time, and that my so-called 'bag of experience' was now full of stories that I wanted to share with the others, trying to give them at least some sprouts of how amazing that journey has been for me. I do not know if my stories may be effective, but I know that I enjoyed one of the best, if not the best, experiences in my life. Oh, and I also taught my siblings how to play that chopsticks game together. It is a silly but really funny game after all.