

My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

Where are you from?

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Beatrice Sarto reflects on how having a strong foreign accent can actually be a plus point in international interaction.

The word 'Erasmus' means a lot to me: whenever I hear it, a brainstorm happens in my head. It evokes all kinds of bittersweet memories I have been collecting in the past years: a collage made of adventures, funny 'culture shock' anecdotes, linguistic misunderstandings, hours of study in the library, faces of strangers who eventually became lifetime friends, good and bad moments. In these days I have spent a long time recollecting memories from my past experiences abroad - first in Spain, then in Mexico - and the phrase resounding in my mind over and over again is: 'Once Erasmus, always Erasmus'. I learned this motto from the beginning of my very first exchange adventure, when I studied at the University of Girona during my bachelor. Now that a few years have passed I realize that those words mean something very specific to me: once you are ready to jump out of your comfort zone, and you actually find the courage to do it, you will never be the same person anymore and at the same time you cannot go back to who you used to be. I would describe this as the best and the worst thing that could happen to young students, like me, who are still looking for their own place in the world while they are building their future. At least, this was the way I felt when for the first time I said goodbye to my family at the airport and all alone I passed through the security checkpoint. A few months later, seated in an airplane and looking at Barcelona's city lights, I remember I thought: 'this is the most thrilling and scaring feeling I have ever had so far!'. It was in that very moment that I understood that everything I was doing was worth it. At the same time though, moving abroad means facing a lot of challenges, first of all the challenge of expressing yourself in another language. I have been studying foreign languages for many years of my life since high school and I believed I had numerous opportunities to learn how to overcome the fear of making mistakes or the embarrassment of mispronouncing a word... I can assure you that sometimes it is still hard not to feel weird, when eve-

rybody is staring at you while you are talking or reading out loud. This is something that always happens to me - and I mean literally every time I am talking to someone in another language (usually English or Spanish, which are the two languages I use the most). As soon as I finish my first sentence, comes the fateful question: 'where did you say you come from?'. The usually thing evolves with me rolling my eyes and answering 'Italy', then waiting for the mafia, pizza and hand gestures jokes to begin. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that all Italian people abroad sooner or later face these situations, probably because of our strong accent. Initially, I felt quite uncomfortable in such circumstances, but over time I realized that my easily recognizable accent could be a plus. As a friend of mine once said: accents tell stories, they tell people where you come from, where you have been and where you are going. Your accent is the reflection of who you are, of how hard you worked to be where you are and there is no shame in that, not at all. In the end, what I have learnt from my mobility experiences is that certainly each and every one of us is scared of losing the so-called 'Linus' blanket'. At the same time, it is essential to embrace this phase of transition, because change itself is the only constant element that allows our lives to develop and to move forward. Without novelty and diversity there is no growth and without growth there is no freedom. Thanks to the Erasmus project, thanks to all the people I met during my journey, thanks to the linguistic difficulties I had to overcome and thanks to the many super special moments I lived, I can proudly say I have grown a lot since my first university year. Not only I refined my linguistic skills as I always wanted to do, but I also developed various personal, professional and academic skills and I do not regret any hour I spent abroad.