

My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

A journey to the centre of myself

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Destination: European Union Experts, Brussels, Belgium

Finding herself by chance at the scene of a terrorist attack which had taken place the previous year, Valentina Zago decides she has to engage more completely with her surroundings to make her mobility a success.

‘Practice without theory is blind, as blind is theory without practice.’

This has been claimed more than twenty centuries ago by the ancient Greek rhetorician and philosopher Protagoras, considered the father of sophistry. And what's more true than this? I have always been convinced that theory and practice are two complementary elements in any field. Especially in personal and professional training, I believe that the theory learned in books, notions, formulas, concepts cannot benefit 100% if not accompanied by practice, by the concrete application of these rules, concepts and notions. It was precisely for this reason that, at the dawn of the third academic year, I decided to start a traineeship with the Erasmus+ international mobility program, which I believed to be not be just an educational opportunity (both from an academic and personal point of view), but a necessary step in my life path. I had the opportunity to visit Brussels during the months preceding my internship and to deepen my knowledge about the European Union's history, and it was this interest that led me to seek a traineeship that was connected with the huge institutional world of international communication that is present in that city, which I believe will be the fulcrum and the starting point of the macro-economic events that will take place in the future. So I left on September 15th, alone and with a city of about a million and a half inhabitants ready to welcome me, ready to face new adventures and clash with a city that I knew as a tourist, to learn millions of new things and to start an internship that would have put me in contact with new people ready to teach me something new every day. But it was when I landed in Belgium that I realized how much I had underestimated the difficulties that I would have encountered during my trip: although I had been looking for accommodation for months, when I arrived in Brussels, I did not have a roof under which I could sleep and, above all, no known face that could have helped me. Unfortunately, this

last detail turned out to be the most difficult thought to live with. After two days spent looking for accommodation and sightseeing around the city, I managed to find a temporary accommodation: two weeks in co-housing with three Belgian girls. I thought things were settling down, but it was when I moved in the apartment that I realized how lonely you can feel even if you are sharing a house. The girls came home only late at night and stayed closed in their rooms without saying a word, while I was waiting them with dinner prepared by me (despite not being an amazing cook) to be shared, excited to have a conversation about who they were, what interesting things they had done during their life or even just about how they had spent their day. I found myself sharing the evenings and weekends with only myself, and that days seemed to last forever, marking every centimetre of the 852 km that separated me from my parents and all the people I love. This was also due to the fact that at work I had only one colleague, who lived on the opposite side of the city and that in the evenings was said to be too busy to spend some time together. All this, however, changed on a Saturday afternoon when, while I was going to visit the Atomium, I realized I could not do it by foot, so I decided to take the metro. I went to the first available stop and went down the stairs. I found myself in a rather strange place: the walls were dirty, falling and chipped, but it was not a simple little 'shabby stop; it was cold, full of sadness, gloomy. It was the following seconds that I realized where I was: Maelbeek station, where one of the bombings carried out by ISIS terrorists took place a year before. I remembered all the images that the whole world had seen on the news, like those of the attack at Zaventem airport, where I had landed two weeks ago. I realized how certain images seem distant and do not affect us so closely until we find them in front of us: men, women and children fleeing, covering their faces with blood or trying to trudge among the turnstiles, holding a leg or an arm. Those images were true, they had happened here. 57 people died and 340 were injured there. I thought about how important life is and how (unfortunately) the possibilities to shine during our lives can be cancelled without warning and without remorse. So I decided to put my legs on my shoulders, to be able to make my stay in Brussels and all my life a challenge to myself, a constant attempt to seek new opportunities and new hopes. So I started to participate in dozens of events organized by the European institutions and so I managed to get a pass for the Parliament. In the meantime I found a much nicer and cosy apartment shared by four amazing guys and I met new girls with whom I am still in contact. In addition to this, I also had the opportunity to work on issues such as tax evasion, which led me to choose this theme for the thesis that I am working on at the moment.

You always feel disoriented when you are thrown out of your reassuring corner, but you always have to see the positive side of each

experience, always feeling up and pushing yourself to your limits and feeling electrified to overcome them. I decided to challenge life, to do my utmost to ensure that every possibility is grasped. To know that I have the possibility to shape my life at will is a luxury for me, a continuous stimulus. That's the way things are from my point of view. Simply, I have to live.

