



WUR Goes Abroad

1. Student Information

Study programme WUR	Landscape Architecture
Exchange semester (dd/mm/yyyy)	05/09/23 until 17/02/24
Exchange destination: University	Politecnico di Milano
Faculty	Architecture
Country	Italy
City	Milan

2. Motivation for exchange

Why did you choose to go on study exchange?

I thought it would be a great experience, a once in a lifetime event. I wanted to meet other international students, experience life abroad and learn about other cultures and universities.

What is the reason you chose for this country/university?

I wanted to do something in architecture. My exchange coordinator told me that the university in Milan has a lot to offer in this category, and it should be quite easy to get into (in comparison to other universities where places were limited). Plus, Italy is quite close, so it was easy to go home in case of emergencies. Next to that, the weather, culture and food seemed nice to explore.

3. Accessibility to reach destination

Do you have any tips to reach your exchange destination?

I went by plane with RyanAir. They fly to Bergamo, from where you need to take an hour bus ride to Milan. The bus isn't ideal, but flying to Bergamo is extremely cheap (20-50 euro), so that was worth it. Airport Linate is great as well, it's really close to the city centre, there's a direct metroline from Linate to the centre of Milan. It's a nice, small airport; however a bit more pricey.

4. University and studying

Could you provide some general information about the followed courses?

	Course	ECTS	Short description of the contents	Appreciation of course: 1(low) – 5(high)	Remarks
1	Conservation and management of historic gardens & landscapes	8	<p>This course was quite nice! We went on a few excursions to some really beautiful places and gardens in and around Milan. We had to make a masterplan for an existing park, to bring back some historical elements.</p> <p>We got lectures about preservation and management, those weren't the best. Many students come late, the teacher's English was not really understandable.</p> <p>Another part of the course is arboriculture and botany, I really loved that part. The teacher was a kind of gardener that knew everything about trees and plants.</p>	4: I really liked the arboriculture and botany lessons. The preservation lectures weren't great. The group work was nice; but that's really depending on what kind of group you have.	Exam: group work + presentation, oral exam about preservation, written multiple questions exam about arboriculture
2	Construction & sustainability design studio	10	<p>This course was interesting, but quite hard for me, since it was a master's course in architecture. I didn't have any background education in this subject, so some topics were hard to follow (like energy calculations, load bearing beams).</p> <p>You had to form a group to design a student building. I</p>	2: the topics were interesting and I really wanted to learn more. I feel like I didn't get that opportunity since it was a master's course and they expected more base knowledge.	Exam: group work + presentation

			<p>thought it was interesting, but there were many problems with the groups. Many groups split up and I experienced some problems as well. My group members were frustrated that I lacked some information, which is understandable. They kicked two others out of the group. One girl was essentially bullying another one, and the teacher did nothing. So yeah, not the best co-working experience.</p> <p>The teachers didn't speak English very well, so during feedback moments they would speak Italian and afterwards my groupmates had to translate for me. That was not ideal.</p> <p>I passed the course, but it took a lot of energy. I wouldn't recommend following it when you don't have a bachelor in building construction.</p>	Prepare for many, many, many frustrations during group work.	
3	Ecology & agronomic science	8	<p>This was great! I didn't follow all the lectures, since the teacher's don't speak English very well. But they had a lot of text and information in the powerpoints, so I learned a lot when I read those.</p> <p>We went on an excursion in October, and the day before christmas, very last minute, the teacher</p>	4: learned a lot, lectures weren't the best.	Exam: written test + group work document

			told us to write some research about the excursion. We had to hand it in the day after the christmas holiday, so it was a bit weird that we had to make groups with people we didn't know and make a project during the christmas break.		
4	History of contemporary architecture	6	I didn't pass this course. The lectures were boring, there was no interaction at all. The teacher would just sit at his desk and talk for 5 hours without breaks. A student asked him if the lessons were going to change (e.g. discussions, group work, research), but the teacher didn't want to do that. So I wasn't really motivated to study hard for my exam, so unfortunately I failed.	1: could have been interesting, but the lectures were dry, and not really understandable, even when I really concentrated.	
5					
6					

What is it like to study there?

E.g. study forms, academic level, examination, workload, lesson material.

The system is very different from the one in Wageningen. At the Politecnico you have one course a day for the whole semester. So Monday is one course, Tuesday is another, etc. This is quite an adjustment, since some courses are a bit complicated with group work and homework, and then the following day you will have a different course.

The teachers and the students are always late. Many lessons start an hour later than planned.

The teaching style is very different. The teachers will make a powerpoint with a lot of text. They will sit at their desk and just read the powerpoint from their laptops. So many students don't pay attention and do other stuff (some even wear headphones). There is a little interaction, in general. You get maybe one break during a 5 hour lecture, so sometimes you will sit for hours.

I was really scared that the courses were too hard and that I needed to study a lot. In the end, I got good grades, so I didn't need to worry.

What is the culture of the university?

E.g. How approachable are the lecturers, engagement with local students? What are the differences with the WUR?

ESN does a lot. That's really nice, they offer a lot of activities for international students. The university is quite big and has buildings all over the campus/city. The buildings are very beautiful and historic. Felt very cool, like I was playing in an American university movie or something.

Contact with local Italian students can be hard, since they are quite driven and study hard. They have high expectations, which can cause problems in group work. But there are a lot of international students, so that community is big and beautiful!

What does the university offer students additionally?

E.g. catering, sports facilities, laundry facilities?

There's one restaurant, where you can get lunch, which consists of pasta, a second course and a small dessert. There's also some food trucks.

One of the main problems however is that there's little to no seating. In summer, that's fine: everyone sits outside. In winter, you'll be looking for a place to eat or study for ages, and end up in a classroom where other lectures are taking place. You just sit quietly in the back, but it's not ideal.

There's sport facilities available, complete with courses in yoga and other stuff.

5.Housing-travelling-living

What are the possibilities for housing?

E.g. Availability to sign up for a room on campus, private rooms, rent rates?

Rooms on campus are likely not available. There are just a few, and they are almost always reserved. Next to that, they closed one of the buildings last minute without warning, so those students didn't have any place to stay.

Rent is high. 700-800 euros a month. You can get cheaper rooms at the outer rim of the city or in shared rooms. But I would recommend living closer to the centre. I actually have had two rooms in Milan, the first one took almost an hour to reach from the centre. The neighbourhood was shady and a bit scary, so I didn't feel safe. Many international activities take place in the evening, so I couldn't attend them, because the last bus would leave at like 9pm.

So I cancelled my contract (had to pay a fine for that) and moved to another room closer to the university. That one was amazing! Very close to everything, nice flatmates, nice neighbourhood, felt safe. Only downside was the price, but it was worth it.

What is the culture of the country like?

E.g. Differences with home, local cuisine, habits, manners?

Of course, the food is kind of different, but most people like Italian food. There's many supermarkets in Milan, and the big ones offer almost everything. It can be hard to find

international groceries for Asian dishes for example, but in that case you should visit Chinatown. Very cheap and diverse food.

The people really like their "aperitivo". At around 5 or 6pm, they will all go out and have a aperol spritz with some additional snacks. They will sit everywhere, from big restaurants to small café's. It's really nice to be a part of that experience! It's a fun and really nice way to just relax and meet other international people.

Could you give some information about public transport infrastructure?

E.g. Cost public transport card, taxi prices, how to travel to the university?)

If you have a tax code (which is basically mandatory, so make sure to get one), you can buy a travel pass. You can buy a subscription to travel unlimited for a full month for 22 euros in Milan (so in the city itself you can travel unlimited with train, bus, metro and tram). This is really great!

Outside the city it really depends on where you want to go. I would recommend visiting the lakes of Como and Lecco; prices for the train are around 8 – 10 euros. If you want to go somewhere further and more expensive, you should check the prices on trenitalia and book you train early. The prices get higher when you buy it last minute, so early booking can make a difference from like 20 to 60 euros.

6. Expenses

Can you give an indication of your expenses for/during your exchange?

E.g. you can also indicate price differences (higher/lower/equal) in comparison to the Netherlands.

Ticket there: 20-70 euros if you fly cheap with RyanAir to Bergamo. Malpensa & Linate is around 100.

Visa if applicable: not necessary for Dutch passport holders. You do need a tax code, which is free. Most of the times you need to apply for it yourself via the embassy, sometimes your university organizes it for you.

Vaccinations if applicable: not necessary.

Insurances (extra, if applicable): travelling insurance for about 7-10 euros a month.

Highly recommended, because I know several people that had some stuff stolen (including myself)

Housing costs per month & type of housing/accommodation: 700-800 for a private room in a shared apartment in Milan.

Groceries: depends on the supermarket, but the prices are generally the same as in the Netherlands.

Public transport: 22 euros for a monthly unlimited travel pass in Milan, 5-20 euros for traintickets to visit other cities.

Restaurant/going out for dinner: local small restaurants have pastas for around 10 euros. Aperol spritz is 4 – 15 euros, depending on how fancy the place is and if you get some additional snacks.

Daytrips/sight-seeing: most of the time I took a train for around 15 euros + eating out + maybe some souvenirs or activities.

Additional remarks regarding expenses?

Gyms are quite expensive, since most gyms require a year long subscription. If you want a flexible subscription, prices start at around 50 euros a month. Normal monthly price for a year subscription is around 30 euros.

The Politecnico has its own gym, but you don't get a discount as a student. Prices are quite the same as in other gyms, however they do offer more flexible subscription options.

7. Free time

What are must-sees in the area?

E.g. nearby destinations, how do you prefer to travel, when to plan?

Go to the lakes at Como, Varenna (absolutely love the place), Venice, Verona, Turin, Bologna.

What does not appear in a travel guide, but is definitely worth a visit?

Do you have general tips and tricks about leisure time?

E.g. recommendations for restaurants, going out?

Navigli neighborhood is great to visit for an aperitivo or eating out. It's a cute place with many people. On Sundays there's sometimes a flea and antique market, which is really cool.

Porta Venezia is really nice to have a drink during the weekends, the bars are crowded with young students.

There's no clubs and café's combined like we have in the Netherlands. If you want to go to a club, you need to purchase a ticket. Clubs are far away from each other, so you won't go hopping from one place to another. So I would go to a club if you want to dance. And if you want to have fun and drinks, go to a bar in Porta Venezia or Navigli.

8. Challenges & best moment abroad

What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

School was quite hard, since the education system is completely different from the Netherlands. It can be hard to adjust. Be aware that your courses can change or they're very different than you expected. Group work, lessons and lectures are very different from the Netherlands.

Organize a room & tax code. These two things are quite important. I had many problems with my first room (from shady neighborhood to the agency forgetting to give me a key to my front door).

What is your best memory of your time abroad?

In the beginning I found it hard to be there. But in the end I made some nice friends and my flatmates were great. I really loved going out for drinks and a bite. The freedom of a big city is amazing; many times I would just hop on the train and find a cozy spot to drink a coffee and read a book.

During the week, you get adjusted to going to uni, just like at home. But in the weekends you can visit nice cities and sceneries or go hiking, and those moments feel like you're instantly on a holiday. That's amazing for sure!

And it's really cool to meet so many people from different countries. I learned some Italian and it was such a nice experience to go to my local bakery and being able to order in Italian.

9. Contact details (optional)

Is the reader allowed to contact the writer?	yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no <input type="checkbox"/>
Name/e-mail	Miriam.wassink@wur.nl	