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## INTRODUCTION

My arrival to Alicante was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September of 2019. I was on the verge of continuing my education in Architectural Technology and Construction Management in the University of Alicante as an exchange student from the Copenhagen School of Design and Technology. My focus in my education was mainly the in the management field. What the University of Alicante was offering was the studies of The Fundamentals of Architecture, which mainly focuses on the theory, the design, and a more abstract concept of construction. I personally am more interested in the technicalities and the planning.

A lot of people that I had encountered and befriended were on different paths in their education, but as a surprise, there were many exchange students whom were studying Architecture alongside me. In fact, the majority of the exchange program were in Architecture.

The more people I have met, I have also asked what their main intention of coming to Alicante was, and I have received a lot of similar answers; it was either to free themselves from their daily routines that they were used to from their home countries or to search for something more within themselves and to find things that were unknown to them in the first place.

This report will focus on my personal experience within the education, the life, and the pleasure in Alicante.

## SETTLING IN

I arrived to my apartment in Alicante on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September of 2019 at 3 O' Clock in the morning. I found this apartment a month in advance of my arrival whilst I was preparing in Copenhagen for my exchange semester. It was not so difficult to find an apartment; it was in fact quite direct. However, when I woke up the same morning after my arrival, I had realised that this apartment was quite a mess. It took me 6 days to realise that this place was uninhabitable. On my 2<sup>nd</sup> day, I met one of my flatmates out of 4. He was a Turkish young man around the same age as me. He was working within the university's administration, however, after multiple times of explaining it to me, I am still unsure of what he was exactly doing in Alicante. He was planning on moving out to go back home a week later from my arrival. He had warned me that I should move out and that the state of the apartment has been in the same condition it had been, months back when he had moved in. The garbage would never be taken out, the water heater was not operating properly, there were no cutlery provided, and I felt I had to wear a Hazmat suit in order to go into the kitchen because of how filthy it was.

So on the 6<sup>th</sup> day in Alicante, I realised I had to move out. I began the search right after my realization. To my surprise, it took me only 3 hours to find and move into my new apartment in the very same day. I was either extremely lucky with the timing or its simply just easy to find a place in this city. When I first saw my new apartment, I was astonished. It was newly renovated. It had 5 bedrooms, each of which was facilitated with a smart TV, dresser, a double bed, and a study desk. The kitchen was welcoming and spacious to have a cooking session with friends. The living room was

almost like a home theatre, it was the most room that I had spent time in with my flatmates and friends.

I was the first in the apartment to move in. Before me, it was an AirBNB apartment. The owners had taken care of it really well and they were extremely welcoming people. They also seemed to want to provide all the necessities a student may need to live with. They were kind and considerate people. Their names were Alessandro and Nazaret. They were a married couple with a family. Alessandro was a Belgium raised Italian man, and Nazaret was a woman from Venezuela. They were looking to broaden their real estate business in Alicante and ended up living there.

The first horrendous apartment I moved into cost me 280 EU per month. The newer more pristine apartment costed 300-325 EU per month, depending on which room you pick.

## MAKING FRIENDS

On my first day in Alicante, there was a gathering for the exchange students to get to know each other. This is where I met my first friend in Alicante, who would also become to be my flatmate in the later apartment. His name was Jorgen and he was from Norway. We had quickly clicked in our encounter, and after that point we had never been to any more of the ESN programs that had been offered. I mostly knew him for his hobby of being a climber and his extensive and deep knowledge in science, as he was studying molecular biology. The day after, I would meet my second friend through Jorgen. He's a German guy called Adrian. and we he was a medicine student who had a lot of great jokes and stories to tell. He was also soon to be my flatmate later on. The three of us got along really well. Another girl who had known Adrian before coming to Alicante was there as well when I met Adrian, her name was Marina. She was also German, and she was a very compassionate person and was always ready to join on adventures and excitements. The 4 of us became good friends quite fast. Our first couple of weeks (if not the first month) was spent drinking almost every day. We had no classes or assignments in the beginning, so there were literally no obligations other than taking care of our daily needs and to drink very often.

Jorgen and Adrian were both unhappy with their living situations just as I was, and when I had found the new apartment, I quickly informed them both about it. Eventually we all moved in together and lived with 2 other Moroccan girls who were also friends together before moving in. All five of us got along quite well. We called our selves "Los San Carlos Caballeros", after our street name where our apartment was.

In our free time we would meet more and more exchange students, and our group of friends grew larger and larger. We spent most of our time in the centre of Alicante, which was not the that big compared to other larger cities. The location where most bars and 'fiesta' events were present in an area that was known as 'El Barrio' (The neighbourhood). It consisted of bars, restaurants along paths that only pedestrians could go through, the area was constantly busy with foreigners, locals, tourists, and exchange students. The area was centred in the oldest part of Alicante, where building seemed to have been there for centuries. It was a melting pot of diversity. There was a specific bar/club that everyone would go to mingle at. I personally did not enjoy going there, but a lot of interesting encounters and conversations would take place outside of this bar. It was called 'Parabarp'. The bar had a slogan: Low Cost Pub. This was very attracting to students because, indeed, it was low costing. You could buy a Mojito the size of a drum, but it was mainly sugar, but you get what you pay for, and it was 5 euros. It was quite simple to get drunk at this bar. Whenever someone would hear the name of this venue for the first time, their reaction would be of laughter of how that name would roll off

the tongue. Alicante is a small city, so it was very frequent and often that I would bump into familiar faces every day, especially ones that I saw at Parabarap.

At one point, the constant and frequent drinking and partying had to take pause. Responsibilities for our education started to kick in. Assignments were being handed. Tasks had to be done. The first phase of organizing my class schedule was quite complicated for me. Most of my subjects were slightly irrelevant to my studies back in Copenhagen. In Alicante, we were learning more abstract, and theoretical architecture, until I had heard that there were some subjects that were more relevant to planning and technical knowledge in construction, I changed a few of my subjects. However, one of those subjects were taught in Spanish. So I took this subject alongside taking Spanish language courses. This subject was the Management of processes of construction. Although it was taught in Spanish, I thought it was quite interesting. I was learning all the phases of construction from start to finish in their respective sequence and order. My other subjects consisted of: Basic Building Structures, Urban Planning, History of Construction, and Spanish Courses.

## EDUCATION

When the classes began to start, assignments were due, and deadlines were close, I had to become serious. There were a few classes that I could not take seriously as I saw the teachers themselves didn't make it feel as important as it is supposed to be. For example, in 2 of my subjects from the 5, one of them being Urban Planning, all the students felt as though they didn't know what they were doing. When we found out what to do, we never knew why or the reason behind doing it. We were constantly given work to do, never knowing why. I had to create my own reasons to make sense of it. I disliked this confusion, and the teacher had failed to explain her reasons. It took some explaining to understand the 'what' and the 'how' of the task, but never concluded the 'why'.

In another class, Basic Building Systems, I learned a few things here and there, however the teachers understanding of our questions were not being sent across to him in order to get a direct answer to our questions. But the teacher had complications in speaking English, so I could not blame him. He was, in fact, very enthusiastic to explain things when understanding the question, he seemed to really care that the message was being sent through to you, it was only a matter of knowing when there is miscommunication in order to address it. Another problem with this class was the lack of use of technology. In Copenhagen, we immediately learned how to use computer programs, such as Revit, in order to create construction drawings, and detailed sections. But the teacher was insistent on completing the tasks with pencil and paper. This was a large obstacle for me, as I had lacked the skill of drawing.

In History of Construction, we were meant to learn as much as we can about certain eras of architecture and how iconic buildings around the world, especially in Spain, were constructed. I found this to be interesting to learn about, to know how the construction techniques and technologies had advanced through the ages until today. But my expectations were not met. The teacher was definitely not qualified to teach in English. There was so much information and potential for a subject like this. But it seemed as though the teacher himself did not know how to get his message across, so he relied on showing us videos of previous semester presentations made by past exchange students. He depended on the knowledge of students rather than his own intellect. I believe he had extensive knowledge, and he would have been able to spread his knowledge to Spanish students much more easily. So obviously it was not his fault. It seemed as though he was assigned a job to do, and he used the limited skills and tools he had to complete the job inefficiently.

For the class that was taught in Spanish, the management of the construction process. Although it was in a language that I was at the time still learning the basics of, I was warned about taking it, but I insisted on having as many subjects that were relevant to my field of studies in construction. I learnt a lot more than the subjects that were taught, inadequately, in English. I was the only non-Spanish speaking student in the class. I had to use all my brain power to translate from Spanish to English and to focus with the teacher at the same time. My understanding in Spanish had progressed whilst taking this class, so sometimes the teacher seemed surprised when I asked a question in English that was relevant to what she had just explained in Spanish. The teacher herself gave me individual attention, as she knew that I would be troubled within this class regarding the language barrier. This was very considerate of her. She would also take her time to explain, after some points in her lecture, in English to me.

The Spanish classes were the most engaging for me. I have a deep interest in learning many languages, or at least, parts of a language. The classes were very smooth, well structured, and really engaging. This was thanks to the teacher. He made sure every single student participated. Once he would shine the spotlight on one of the students to test their Spanish, it felt more like a hangout session and everyone wanted to take part in the learning. I would say that the Spanish classes were what I looked forward to the most, in regard to, going to classes in general.

Coming from Copenhagen, the methods of teaching were drastically different. The tasks that were assigned were rather bizarre and group work was not really enforced as much as in my studies in Copenhagen. The language barrier was a critical problem, as some information could have been misinformed unless you ask the right questions. However, the teachers in general were more than happy to give individual attention to students who asked for it. There was a more focus to theory than practical works.

## CAMPUS LIFE

The campus of the university was rather astonishing. So many facilities were provided. There were tennis courts, swimming pools, gyms, multiple cafeterias spread around, basketball courts, a football field, a whole building dedicated to sports, many clubs to join from chess clubs to music clubs and sports clubs. The university campus had so much to offer on the side of education. The spaces and the gardens spread about the entire campus made you feel as though you are taking a walk in a park when you are going from one class to another. It was really satisfying. The university not only encouraged to find their careers, but to find their hobbies and interests. This is something that I wish was implemented in the same way in KEA. There were also ATMs and bookstores, and banks. There were discounts offered in various forms. If you were an architecture student, you can get a discount on tools dedicated to your studies from the bookstore. If you were a sports student, then you get a discount on all the facilities in the sports hall. If you were just a student, you can get a discount to your gym membership. The campus offered a great environment for students and was pleasant to be in.

## ADVENTURES

This was my favourite part of my experience in Spain. There are various activities and adventures to take part in Alicante and around it. The south of Spain offers a lot of beautiful landscapes and nature. There are a lot of great mountains to hike and see amazing views from the peaks. The sun is

mostly present all year round, which makes it satisfactory to go on such adventures. There are small towns and cities nearby to explore, and if planned correctly you can manage to go to beautiful cities such as Granada, which is a 3-5 hr drive with a car. I went on cycling tours to mountains, and then parked my bicycle to hike these mountains.

One of my most memorable adventures was when I took a spontaneous trip to Granada with my friend, Adrian. Our group of friends had planned it long ago. However, Adrian and I were not sure to go with them. I had quite a bit of studying to do, so I was in the library. Meanwhile, Adrian took his girlfriend to the airport after she had come to visit him. While this was happening, the rest of our friends were on their way to Granada. After Adrian said his goodbye to his girlfriend, he contacted me to tell me he is standing right outside a car rental agency at the airport. When he had said that, I knew what he was hinting at. I told him to rent a car, and I started packing my things from the library and cycled home as fast as possible to pack my things for the next 3 day. A couple of hours later, he picked me up and we drove to Granada extremely excited after this spontaneous decision. As we were on our way in the middle of the night, we were also searching for accommodations through AIRBNB.

The trip cost us both a lot more than it should, compared to what the rest of our friends had payed, but we had an amazing time. I would recommend planning ahead of time, then to make the decision on the spot, it is 5 times more cheaper that way. If you stay in Alicante for the whole duration of your stay, you will get bored. There's only so much a person can do in Alicante until they get bored. The more adventurous fun lies outside of it.

## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation within the city is relatively simple. There are trams that can take you from the city centre all the way to the University of Alicante. There are many bus lines as well. I personally do not like public transportation and I have stuck to my roots to cycle everywhere I go.

Cycling in Alicante, however, is not as easy as it sounds coming from Copenhagen. There are bike paths, that are tucked in between buildings and quite hard to find, that then lead to main roads and direct you to important landmarks of the city. These bike paths are very narrow, and one path is made for both directions for cyclists, so its not that ideal. The people of the city are not very accustomed to cyclists within the city yet. It is not a norm in Alicante to have people cycling as a mode of daily transportation.

Drivers are quite unpredictable and could startle the cyclist from their sudden brake or be started by the cyclist from not looking around to check if there are cyclists passing by. This is especially tricky since there are many one-way roads. But I cycled every single day that I needed to be somewhere in the city or in the university. It took some getting used to, and I always tried to avoid car traffic dense roads and stayed on bicycle paths as much as I could.

## THE LOCALS

It is very difficult and rare to find locals of Alicante that speak English. It hard to get by in the city if the basics of the Spanish language is unknown. This can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on how you view it yourself. This can be an opportunity to force yourself to learn the language. However, if you do not see it that way, there will a lot of miscommunication with the locals. The

locals themselves find it charming when you attempt to speak Spanish, and have no judgement of how incorrect you are in the language, but in fact, they will try to assist you in understanding or helping them understand the information you are trying to get across to them.

The Spanish people are very welcoming people, and very hospitable and compassionate. They do not stick to rules as much as compared to other nationalities but go more with moral and gut instincts and values. They are also very traditional people, in regards to architecture and also cultural traditions.

## MY CONCLUSION

Alicante has been a great experience overall. I have enjoyed every bit of it within the city, as well as what lies outside of it. I have been on many adventures on this journey and I regret not even one. I have met great people and have heard their great stories and their adventures before Alicante. I have been inspired by many of those people and have left some inspiration for them. I have found out things about myself, such as my personal capabilities, and personal insights along this journey. I have also found how different learning experiences can be from country to country, also being able to tell the similarities. Most importantly, Alicante is a great place to make some reflections on various things within your personal life, education, and your goals. There is time for that in Alicante.