



Politecnico di Milano, Italy

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1. INTRODUCTION

I always knew I wanted to go to an exchange semester abroad since I find it so crucial to travel, work and learn from all the global experiences you can gain. Even though I am a student in the international line at KEA, thus I am already a part of the global environment for more than 2 years, it is still different when you go to a different country. You are being put in an environment you are not used to, meet people coming from all around the world, and study subjects you haven't faced in your host university - that is exactly how you grow. On top of that, having the opportunity from KEA to go to such amazing, and world-known partner institutions, it would be crazy not to use it and take that opportunity!

I also always knew I will go to an exchange in the 5th semester of my bachelor's degree. Since I am studying Architectural Technology and Construction Management, both the 3rd and 4th semesters are quite important in my opinion, since it is preparing us for both the 7th semester and overall education. The 5th semester is different since it is a refurbishment semester, which I was never particularly interested in.

If you are considering going in the 5th semester but are afraid because of finding the internship, don't be at all. I knew which company I want to go to for my internship and I prepared my materials in March/April. I had an online interview in April with the company after which I was offered a job position. Also, hands down to Ms Mille who was always ready to answer my questions and give the best advice.

When I knew I wanted to go to an exchange and I knew when I want to go, it came down to – where? I chose Politecnico di Milano because it has the title of being the 5th best university of architecture in Europe and 10th in the world. I found that fact really impressive and I wanted to be a part of such world acknowledged university. Moreover, it was a pure architectural study semester which I missed, or better say, wanted to experience since that is not what we are studying at KEA.

I always heard from other people how Erasmus is an unforgettable experience and, as mentioned, the university has a high ranking in the whole world = My expectations were pretty high.

(Spoiler alert) Going on exchange was one of the best decisions I have ever made. Was Milano the best place to go? I am not sure. But I am beyond grateful and happy to have gone there since I met incredible people and learned things I could have never learned if I wasn't studying architecture for that semester. But also, Politecnico di Milano helped me to realise what I wouldn't like to do in my future career.

One of the many things I learned and realised is how much I am in love with Copenhagen as a city and KEA as an academy.

2. EXPERIENCES AT THE HOST UNIVERSITY

Before I start describing all subjects I attended and the professors I had, I would like to start with the general mark for Politecnico di Milano. As mentioned before, Politecnico is highly acknowledged in the whole world. But is it justified?

It is a huuge university, both in m² and number of students enrolled. Politecnico di Milano has 7 different campuses in and around Milano and around 47 thousand students enrolled in the fields of architecture, engineering and design. KEA has only around 5,5 thousand students enrolled. So the comparison between KEA and Polimi is drastic. I honestly craved being a part of such an environment, being a part of a big university and enjoying all privileges a student has as such.

Students enrolled at Polimi are intelligent, dedicated and hard-working. Having mentioned that, I would definitely *not* recommend you to go to this university if you want to spend your Erasmus semester only travelling and partying. Absolutely choose another university, you have plenty to choose from. If you will be travelling all the time, you won't have time to catch up with the programme, your workgroup will suffer from your absence and it will become stressful for both you and the people depending on you. I took my Erasmus as a study semester, so my intentions were not only to party and travel while I am there so my expectations were right in that direction.

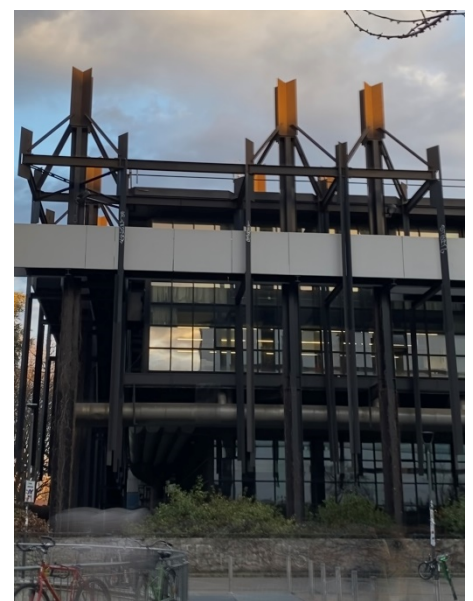
Politecnico has an enormous problem regarding its facilities. I can't even tell you the number of times I came to university and could not find a single spot to sit and study. That is crazy. Some students are literally studying on the staircase (and the staircase is not as nicely designed as some in Copenhagen). Sockets ... I don't even want to start with them. One of the biggest pieces of advice I can give you is to take an extension cord with you!! Because even if you will be so lucky to find a socket, it will probably be 2 or more meters away from you. On top of that, already at the start of spring, it started to be either too hot or too cold inside the campus. It became more and more clear how the whole service department was poorly managed in both air conditioning and ventilating rooms, thus studying at the campus during late spring and summer was quite uncomfortable. Furthermore, almost nobody among the employees (excluding professors from the international line) speaks English. I know it seems like little things, but from a university which is ranked as 5th best in Europe, I expected a bit more.



Most of the classrooms at Leonardo Campus. Big auditoriums with not a lot of space for the individuals.
(Practical studio classes were not held in such auditoriums.)



One of many beautiful parts of the campus consisting of inside gardens and astonishing architecture.



Building 11, famous for being open 24/7. Designed by Vittoriano Viganò starting 1970s.

I started on a bad note but definitely, not everything is bad. The library is equipped with the best of the best books and magazines. The archive in that library is amazing, I loved it. I also loved studying in the library but I could do so only if I would come at 8 in the morning while there was still one seat available. The lunch options were also great. I loved the salad selection in Cafe, only 5,50 euros for a salad filled with proteins and vegetables which keeps you full the whole day or around 7 euros for a 3-course meal at the canteen. One of many advantages you have at a university of such size is all custom stores and facilities such as gym, Poli print (where you can print but also buy all necessities such as pens, pencils, notebooks..), store with Polimi clothes etc. Lastly, something I will be talking about more in the paragraph below, the green areas and seats for lunch, absolutely amazing and exactly what you need for recharging before going back to class.

Regarding the overall work with Polimi students, one thing really lacking was communication and collaboration between students. It was hard. I find it a bit appalling since, especially in our career, without good communication and collaboration, you won't go far. My good friends who were also on Erasmus from Malta, Brazil, Denmark and similar, thought the same. Politecnico, at least I can say so for the field of architecture, is focused so much on theory and having so many studios and subjects per semester. But when it comes to collaborating with others and developing that knowledge, it becomes quite frustrating since they are not thought how to work as a team.

2.1 STUDY PLAN AND CHOOSING SUBJECTS

I was intimidated at the beginning by the fact that I have to be super fast with choosing English subjects I would like to enroll in since they are gone in seconds. Therefore, I was ready in a millisecond since registering subjects opened. Luckily, I got all subjects I wanted and all were in English. I was so lucky to have friends at Polimi who directed me to the right information and explained how the system works before the day for registering comes. Their advice was **to go through all subjects offered for the semester before registering** comes and see what you would like to choose as well as **see if your wish subjects are overlapping!** Later when I was already at Politecnico, I heard so many stories of people who couldn't choose subjects because they were overlapping or they didn't know the whole spectrum of subjects they could attend so they ended up unhappy. It can become a mess quite fast.

The marvel of the story is to be super fast with registering and be ready before the date for registering comes. Be 100% sure what you want and have plans A, B, and C in case some of your wish subjects are taken.

Another thing that was different at Politecnico when compared with KEA, is that some subjects are mandatory to attend while for others you can be a non-attending student and only appear at the exam. In my case, only studio had a disclaimer of mandatory attendance. I was an attending student for all subjects I chose.

2.2 SUBJECTS I CHOSE:

1. BUILDING TECHNOLOGY STUDIO – 12 ECTS CREDITS

Prof Andrea Tartaglia and Giovanni Castaldo

Studio class at Polimi is a subject that carries the most ECTS credits and consequently is one of the most important subjects of the semester.



This particular studio is really similar to what we do in one semester at KEA. The studio project was to build an Olympic village for the Olympic winter games in 2026 which will be held in Milano. We were divided into groups or better way to put it – we were told to find our groupmates. Every group develops the task with different ideas and different building technologies. The studio consists of both practical and theoretical classes.

I overall enjoyed the task we were given and the seminars we had. The seminars were held almost weekly by the biggest names in Italian architecture (another advantage of attending the world-known university), but, of course, it all comes down to who you are in a group with. Also, I felt my classmates, who were regular Polimi students, were quite confused in this studio. They as architects haven't thought a lot about the actual buildability of their creations, therefore, it was hard for them to put the theory into practice in this studio.

We had a lot of deliverables within the semester, there was always something to work on. Lastly, the exam is oral although, it was not like at KEA. They believe drawings should speak for themselves so what we had to do was print all of our final drawings on A1/A0 sheets, spread them on tables in front of them and the whole commission of professors went through them. Professors had some questions about the project and overall semester theory to every group member and we all had to show our individual analysis of a building in Milan.

2. ENERGY LAW AND SUSTAINABILITY – 6 ECTS CREDITS

Prof Piccaluga Federico

This was one of the subjects I took from the 3rd year/masters programme. I was attending lectures which were sometimes online sometimes in class, or rather hybrid so you could choose.

This subject is so useful for our industry and future career since sustainability is something which shouldn't be a 'wow' thing anymore, it should be the base of every project. The only problem I had with this subject was the law part. I have to say, professors put a lot of effort into finding all the external experts with PhD degrees and a lot of industry experience who would come and lecture in interesting seminars on a weekly basis, but it was a lot of text and a lot of talking which required just to sit down and learn it by heart. So no criticism of the subject itself, it all comes down to what you want and how you like to study. Thankfully I studied with my roommate for this exam and we both got the highest grade. The exam was oral, going through the whole semester's topics with the professor one-on-one.

3. HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE 2 – 8 ECTS CREDITS

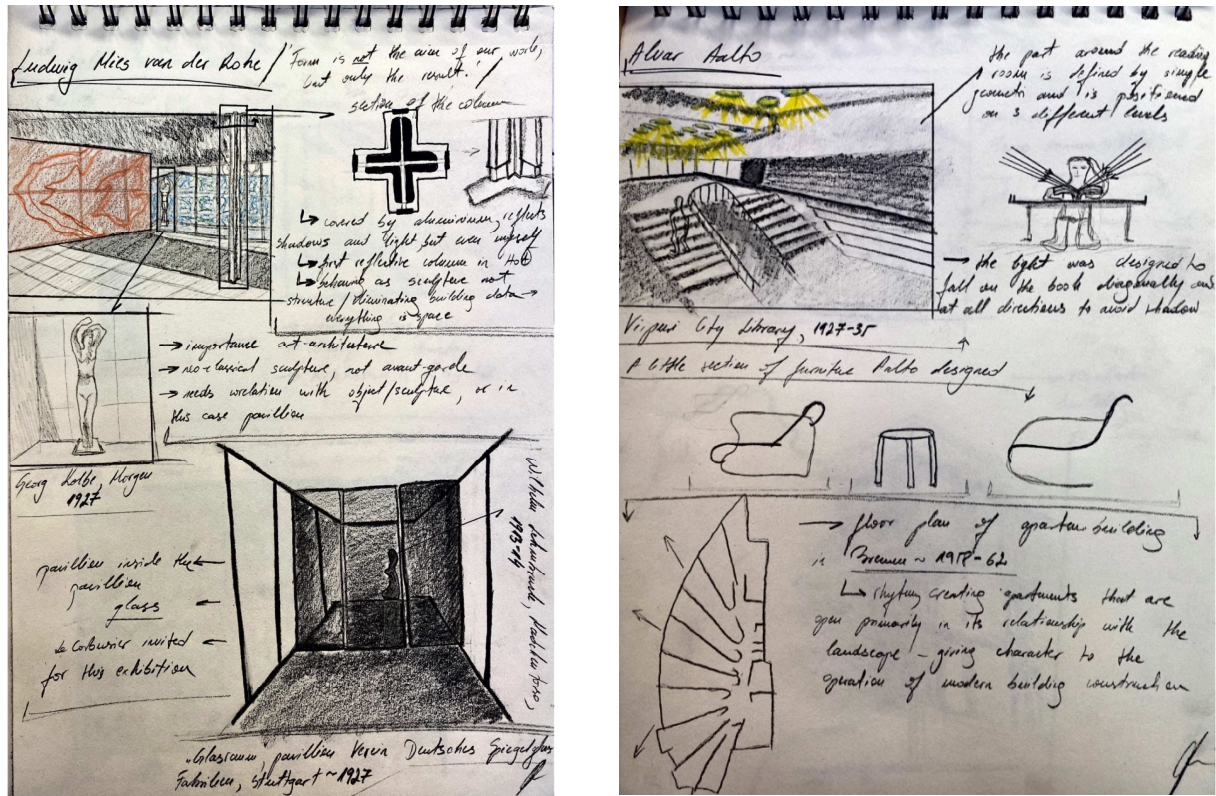
Prof Luka Skansi

BIG RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HoA2!

This subject was one of my biggest wishes and reasons for going on the exchange to Politecnico for me. I missed the history of architecture and art at KEA so much. This subject beat all other subjects for me. It fulfilled all my expectations and went beyond. Prof Luka Skansi is also one of the best professors I have ever had in my life. I learned so much from him and from this subject. What I really liked about him was how passionate he is about the subject and job he is doing and the way he was lecturing.



One of the mandatory documents that had to be produced for the exam was the sketchbook. It was hard for me at the beginning since we don't analytically develop and sketch architecture at KEA, but in the end, I enjoyed working on it so much. I have spent months developing it but it was so worth it. The subject also consisted of weekly excursions around Milan where the Professor gave us lectures in front of the buildings. The exam consisted of presenting your sketchbook as well as talking and discussing with the professor the topics covered in the semester.



Two pages of my sketchbook. Analytical research and studying through sketches that had to be developed after every lecture and every field trip.

4. TIMBER, GLASS, MEMBRANE – 4ECTS CREDITS

Prof Roberto Fidele

Very theoretical class, even though we had some experiments, but also valuable knowledge gained. I attended the lectures and would recommend you to do so as well. We received PowerPoint presentations always at the end which were great to go through, but I felt lectures gave more than the PowerPoint itself. This is one of the master's degree subjects also so the exam was writing a scientific report about a topic connected to the subject. The undertaken research, as well as the paper written, was conducted in groups of 4. It was an oral presentation and the professor asked a lot of questions during the presentation both for the scientific paper and the semester itself. Professor Fidele is also amazing. The way he was lecturing, made me even more interested in the class than I was in the beginning.

3. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Networking in Milan was super easy. As an Erasmus student, you will be offered infinite ways to network such as joining Facebook groups and events, attending a lot of parties organised by the university, having lunches together, exploring good gelato in town, ...

I enjoyed lunch breaks so much. In the beginning, I was wondering why we have almost an hour and a half for a lunch break, but later I realised, when you basically live at university from morning to evening, it is nice to have that hour and a half to enjoy the sun and recharge. The lunch spots were something to live for. There is a big meadow just in front of the campus at Piazza Leo where almost everybody eats together. I met people I will remember for my lifetime. Amazing people from all over the world and you will hardly ever feel alone.



Parties in clubs organised by student community.



Lunch spot at Piazza Leo.



Later in the evening, Piazza Leo becomes a nr 1 go to spot for events.

3.1. MILAN AS A CITY

To be honest, It felt to me that in Milan there is a constant state of chaos. Furthermore, it is not the cleanest city and also as a girl, I didn't feel safe going home in the middle of the night on foot alone. That is also one of the reasons I liked having a bike (More about it in chapter 4).

But, of course, there are a lot of great features Milan has to offer. Milan is filled with amazing food and aperitivos. People in Milan are friendly and charming, I could feel there is a soul to the city which I liked. Milan often felt like a centre of Europe because there were always big events happening – Design weeks, concerts, influencer conventions, .. I loved the sense of dynamics.

That being said, there are a lot of great train and flight connections to other Italian cities as well as to all over Europe. That is probably the best thing about Milan – you can fly or go by train for a little amount of money to wherever in Europe. My advice is, to take a train to anywhere in Italy and see what Italy has to offer you. Or even a plane for 8euros to Napoli to get the best pizza and come back.

Another amazing thing about Milan is – the weather. I am going through all of these photos I am trying to squeeze into this report, and one thing you can see in almost all of them is the blue sky and shining sun.



Weekend trip to VitraDesign Museum, enjoying a day filled with Frank Gehry's, Zaha Hadid's and many more iconic masterpieces.



Best gelato – Artico!
(Close to Leonardo Campus)



Getting lost somewhere off road in the olive gardens of Lago di Garda.

4. PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

Finding accommodation in Milan was not a nice experience. I teamed up with another student from KEA who was also going on an exchange in Milan so it was easier to find an apartment for the 2 of us. We lastly found an apartment through an agency Housing anywhere. It was quite expensive but when you look at it this way: it was only 8 mins by bike to university, it was a brand new furnished apartment which we didn't share with anyone, it had a balcony and we didn't have any problems whatsoever with the apartment or owners - I guess it was worth it.

I mentioned that it was only 8mins by bike to the university – you guessed it, I was living with a Dane. Since he bought a bike, I decided to do the same. Was it a good idea? Neither yes nor no. Traffic in Milan is one of the most hectic ones I have ever experienced. And honestly, it is not safe to ride a bike there. Italy is a country where everybody owns a car and it has yet not adapted to bicycle traffic. But once you get united with the chaos, it was fast to get anywhere and I didn't have to use public transport so I was happy. If I am not mistaken, the monthly ticket for the metro, and the bus is around 20 euros which is a really okay price – if you like to take public transportation in Italy.



You can move a Dane from Denmark, but you can't remove Denmark from a Dane



Milan as a city is not too cheap. Compared with Copenhagen, everything is a bit cheaper, yes, but you still need to save quite some amount of money if you want to live carelessly.

Since Politecnico di Milano is a huge university, it also has its own gym. It is a great gym and would recommend you to have a membership there. But as with anything in Italy, you have to pass the bureaucratic process before you are allowed to go. It was worth it in the end, if you ask me. You also have a running track you can use (almost) for free.



Arco della Pace – 'not a Duomo photo' of Milanese monument :)



Enjoying field trip at Fondazione Prada

5. CONCLUSION

My expectations were met to the fullest and even beyond, some in good and some in a bad manner. Going to exchange in Milan was one of the best decisions of my life because I learned how to communicate with architects, I learned so much from the history and other subjects, I experienced living in yet another country, met incredible people and so much more.

Summa summarum, it has been quite an exhausting but delicious experience. First, you have to accommodate their standards and way of working and then actually do the work, but in the end, all great things come from hard work and going out of your comfort zone. I would definitely go on further exchanges in some other countries if given a chance in my future education. I think it is an opportunity of a lifetime!



Andiamo ragazzi, In bocca al lupo!

Feel free to reach out to me on my email: paul6153@stud.kea.dk or LinkedIn/Facebook/Instagram: Paula Sklepik for any further questions you might have :)