Erasmus + Project – Münster

If someone told my 14-year-old self ''Marija, you will travel someday'' I would have not believed them. I have dreamt of travelling since I was twelve and the dream finally came true.

Everything started with my application for the Erasmus + project. I had to send five of my best works, and so I did. At first, the idea of actually being chosen seemed funny to me because there are so many great artists in this school that the thought of being in the top 10 felt weird and narcissistic. ‘’Do not expect anything and you will not get disappointed’’ I told myself. After a period of time, I got the mail and in the middle of laughing and crying told my mom on the verge of screaming: ‘’Mom, I’m going to Germany!’’ She was just as proud of me as I was proud of myself.

Ten of us had to wait for weeks and gather all the required documents to be able to embark on an adventure which was, in the beginning, excruciatingly boring, and at some point I wanted to give up because it was so stressful. Luckily, my parents were there to help. When the day finally came, all fears and negative thoughts disappeared like they had never been there in the back of my mind.

As soon as we got on the bus, I saw everyone talking to each other, so I sat alone and minded my business. We were riding for at least fifteen hours, and I hope you will never have to suffer the way my bladder did. When we finally arrived at the hostel at half past eleven, we got our cards and went to get our much needed sleep. For the first two days, everyone was tiptoeing around each other, but there was a moment when we had to meet our mentors and everyone was sitting in a circle. The place we were at was once a factory property and it looked a lot like the Medika squat in Zagreb, but about thirty times bigger, with lots of night clubs, galleries and artist studios. As we were sitting there, I had to break the ice and introduce myself. When I did my not-so-funny introduction speech, it felt like the weight had been lifted off my shoulders. It was then that I met Mihaela Toth, who became my dear friend.

So, what happened next? They paired us up and Matija Popovčić and I had to work together. Our mentor Lisa is a performance artist and we were hoping to work on a joint project. The idea was to experience everyday life of an artist. Sadly, her father died of cancer in the first three days of our stay in Germany and she took a week for herself. Then we met Lena, a fashion design major who in her free time does bookbinding and makes her own sketchbooks! Both Matija and I were excited to do bookbinding because it’s a pretty unusual form of art and craft where you truly have to be focused on what you’re doing. Things like that calm me down so I enjoyed every second of it. We also worked with Marwin, a painter. We were free to work on our own ideas so to get most of my time, I practised. A lot. Just drawing with pencils and quick sketches was enough at first, but I had some money and bought quality art supplies like alcohol markers and linocut paint to work with. It was lots of fun, and that experience reminded me of why I was going to art school in the first place and why I had started my journey in Zagreb as someone from a small village. It gave me time to think about myself while exploring the possibilities and ideas that had accumulated in my head.

Every evening we would go to a different restaurant to eat and, to be honest, German food is great. We tried Italian, German, Asian and Arab cuisine. And I loved every second of it, especially trying Arab manakeesh for the first time. After dinner, or sometimes before if we had enough free time, all of us would come together and go to the old town centre. Münster is well known for its medieval architecture and history. It was built in the 7th or 8th century and was heavily bombarded in World War II. After that, it was rebuilt and restored. One of the most beautiful, breathtaking buildings in Münster is definitely the St. Lamberti church. It’s a masterpiece of Gothic architecture and it got me mesmerised. I had never seen such an old Gothic church up close besides the Zagreb Cathedral, which was built in neo-Gothic style and does not have as many details as original Gothic churches and cathedrals. I also went to the Pablo Picasso Museum of Poster Art, which I absolutely loved.

I was genuinely surprised with German lifestyle. There is the Asee lake in the centre of the town and lots of people go jogging, running, they go for a walk or just spend time in parks with their children or friends. This seemed otherworldly to me because I don’t see that many people exercising or spending time in nature in Croatia. And it is also an eco-friendly town. Everywhere you want to go, you can just hop on a bike to get there. The town is full of bikes and pedestrians. There were times when I was daydreaming of living there because it felt like home. I share the values of those people and that’s the lifestyle I want for myself. The town, and Germany in general, is clean and you can’t see cigarette butts on the floor. And most importantly, the people are nice and seem forward-thinking.

As the journey came to its end, I was full of emotions and wished it lasted a little bit longer. First of all, I had met some amazing people who let me into their lives and taught me invaluable things about life. Lisa was kind to me when we talked about our fathers and growing up, and the pains of losing important people in your life. Marwin gave me a new perspective on life and death and Lena taught me patience. And the ten of us just felt extremely close, maybe because of the beer we would drink at 10 pm after a long day of work. We were exhausted after all that bike riding, but moments of bliss like listening to music and drinking beer together made us feel close as we would talk about every possible topic there was. I think the most important lesson was not drawing, or painting, or bookbinding but just finding out who I am, once again because I had forgotten that as some point. And I also forgot what got me interested in art and design in the first place, which I had to find out as I had been feeling increasingly lost.

In the end, I would like to say that what I took from this experience was not so much the beauty of the city and the art we saw, nor the nature and the Zoo we visited, but the experience of something new that made us all rich and the connections that we made. That’s why people travel; not to see, but to feel and connect.

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