

ACTIVITY 1: Expectations, first impressions, being immersed.

You have now been in Italy for at least 6 weeks if not longer. You have probably begun to establish a routine and have worked out how to meet most of your day-to-day needs in your new town. This is a good time to reflect back on your arrival and the first few weeks of your Year Abroad.

1. Below is a reflection from an Irish student arriving in Italy in October. After reading this text, describe your experience of arriving in Italy and travelling to your accommodation for the first time. How did you feel when you first saw the town you would be staying in? How did you feel when you entered your apartment? What did you do or say to display or hide your feelings? Did these feelings and actions match your expectations of your first day?

Well, the first month was pretty much dreadful... As I said to you earlier on, arriving at the airport, when I arrived, it was about 37–38° outside, roasting! I mean it was October! How can you reach those temperatures in October?... Ten minutes in the car, my landlady collected me from the airport, I was sweating... and to see these palm trees which you don't see in Ireland on the sides of the road, and the scorched earth, everything was brown where I'm used to seeing green. And this lady besides me in the car, where the heat didn't seem to bother her, the windows are up and I'm trying to open up every window I can reach and speaking a language which... apart from 'I am' and 'Yes, please', the only words I could understand... My mind just went blank... an accent... the accent was something I had to deal with because the only Italian I'd heard was from my teacher in school and the accent of my teacher – she was Irish... So it was quite a daunting experience... And then arriving in my apartment, hum, was again not very nice as it was an apartment with... there was an *autostrada* literally right below our window... again it seemed so foreign! They had these big steel girders and they close them during the day. So, I remember arriving and the apartment was very dark and dingy and the people I was living with were very, very different... but it was just so alien! And I knew I was the only Irish person there...

Reference: SME: Chapter five, Location 3087

2. Now expand on your description by exploring some related thoughts and experiences from the last six weeks that stand out in your memory. Use the Guiding Questions below as a starting point - but please note, that these are *guides* only - you may choose to address all, or some, or none of them in your personal reflection. Include photos and/or other digital material in your reflection.

Guiding Questions

- What did you find most enjoyable about the experience of arriving in Italy? What was most confronting or difficult for you?
- How have your personal stereotypes of Italians and Italian culture been challenged since you have arrived? Have you encountered stereotypes about ERASMUS students or about people from your cultural background amongst the Italians you have met so far?
- What were your priorities when you first arrived? Were you able to fulfil these easily? What are your daily priorities now?

ACTIVITY 2: Culture shock and transition: being home and away

1. Culture shock : being away

Culture shock might result from a mismatch of expectations and experience, or from continued exposure to an unfamiliar set of values and practices that require an individual to question and adapt their own beliefs, behaviours and assumptions about others. Do you think you have experienced culture shock during your time in Italy?

Here are a selection of words that your peers used in the online survey to describe their perceptions of Italian culture before they left Warwick:

Relaxed; enthusiastic; welcoming; warm; proud; disorganised; fashion conscious; friendly; open; artistic; not always punctual; easy going; family focussed; quite monolingual; flamboyant; sociable; spontaneous; less respectful of women.

Do these descriptions of Italian culture match your experience of living in Italy so far? What cultural characteristics have you observed? Are these characteristics that you enjoy or that you sometimes find difficult to accommodate?

2. Christmas Break: being home

Below are some reflections on the experience of going home for Christmas in the middle of the study abroad period.

However, going home operates in two ways. It means relaxation and shelter after a difficult period. But, returning home also produces uneasiness because the stream of experience is interrupted and discontinued.

This is why returning home for Christmas is laden with ambivalence. John remembers 'dying to go back home at Christmas in the comfort of the house' and at the same time feeling at odds with those who had stayed behind. Amin and Hugo felt like strangers at home where nothing had changed, while things had changed for them. Régine said that 'one felt like a tourist at home'. Sylvie found that 'you feel that you have missed a lot at home, the trip is short-lived, and as you cannot see everybody, you feel torn between opposites'. As Elena summed up, the traveller must re-adapt to life back home. Nevertheless, Christmas is a physical and psychological break necessary for recharging one's batteries in the warmth of the past before going back refreshed into the world of adventure. Maria explained the process.

By Christmas, I was definitely well integrated, I mean, 'well integrated' came after Christmas, but feeling very secure with my friends and then just wait for it to become better [...] I was anxious to get back and to see how everyone was and what they were doing and tell them all about how my first half of the year had been. So Christmas was kind of like a necessary break for round 1. I called it 'recharging my batteries' and I went back, I found my batteries had been completely recharged and I was dying to get into the second term... I was looking forward to the going back with a new... I knew where I was going, I had friends, I was bringing them back little things from Ireland, you know, Christmas pudding, this kind of stuff, Irish sausages, Irish tea, I mean the fact that I even had people to bring things back to, I was really happy about that you know [...]. So I was more comfortable then the second time.

Feelings of uneasiness and ambivalence can often arise for people when moving between cultural contexts – in one location, or in both. Do any of the reflections above reflect your experience? Did you expect to have any difficulty re-adapting to your home environment after your time in Italy?

Guiding questions:

- Describe some of the major differences that you have observed between ways of living and studying in Italy and at Warwick and/or in your home town. Would you describe any of these as ‘cultural’ differences?
- Are teaching and learning practices and expectations in Italy very different to your experience in the UK? Do you have any clear preferences for one way of doing things over the other? If so, why?
- Being exposed to the ways that other people do things can sometimes make us more conscious of our own habits and taken-for-granted values. Have you noticed anything new about your own strengths, vulnerabilities and personal values during your first 2-3 months in Italy?
- What were you most looking forward to and what are you most enjoying about your visit home? Have you found it easy or difficult to fit back in?
- Have you noticed anything different about your home town and how you interact with people in your community after your time in Italy? Do you feel as though you have developed a ‘new lens’?
- What are you looking forward to, or not looking forward to, about your return to Italy?
- Are you planning to continue working on your Italian language skills while you are at home (e.g. reading) or do you feel that you need a complete break from Italian Studies?

Activity 3: At home in Italy?

1. Making a home in Italy : Erasmus culture vs 'local culture'?

How do you create a sense of 'home' for yourself in your town or city? How does your Erasmus network contribute to your efforts to feel at home? What elements of local culture do you draw on in your efforts to feel at home? And what do you bring with you from your home country as you try to create a new home in Italy?

Optional exercise

Is Erasmus culture the same everywhere? Find four ERASMUS videos on You Tube – one from Italy and three from other countries. Comment on your observations. Then find a video that captures something about your experience of local Italian culture. Are there any similarities or points of connection (or any clear contradictions) in the values expressed in the Erasmus videos and the Italian video? (include the You Tube links in your submission)

2. 'Cultural Informants'

Thomas is a German student studying in France. He explains below how different people helped him to understand different aspects of French culture. Use this text as a starting point to reflect on how you gather local knowledge. Do you have 'cultural informants'? Do they provide information that helps you feel 'at home'? How do you use that information?

Thomas contrasted three cultural informants who made him see different aspects of their culture. One introduced him to French culture, politics and history and enabled him to advance deeper in his cultural understanding: 'he... brought me more into French culture, took me more into French culture, like *politique de la 5ème République*, in the language class and he was very into politics like... de Gaulle and Giscard d'Estaing'. They talked a lot about French society and 'as he was a professor, he could tell me a lot of what was going on in France, you know... it was just a view of the whole nation'. His other informant during his stay in Aix was the teacher whose house he was sharing. She urged him to 'understand' the culture by reading Sartre and Vian.

She knew the French literature, she said: '*Now, you are in France, what you have to do is read French books, watch French TV, go to friends around, you have to understand...*'. She said: '*your aim is to be like this*' and that impressed me, to understand... Because she saw also the whole culture and the whole nation as a whole, and she said '*to understand, you have to read Sartre and Boris Vian and this and this and this...*'. So, '*I give you a TV and you have to see TV*'. I took this as good advice. So, I took out French books and it was really hard to read French books when you don't speak the language, but I just said '*OK, you have to learn, and if everybody talks about Sartre, you have to know who is Sartre*'.

This supposedly 'very French' concern for understanding through the medium of a certain kind of culture, even when it enables students to comprehend contemporary realities in a larger historical context ('the whole culture and the whole nation as a whole'), is nevertheless based on selective judgement. Thomas's other informant was his flatmate during his Parisian sojourn.

We talked for hours..., well not about culture or about history, more about daily parties, she was my age, or about cooking... you know, saying '*oh, what are you doing? it's disgusting! I would never eat cheese in the morning, I would never...*'... and so, I got to know the French taste, what do they eat, how do they work, the French things of what you should not do and what you should do, like what people think: '*this is not really ... or this is not good what you do*'. You have to take all this... and she had a sister who was studying at the Sorbonne and that was the cultural part, like she studied history and she explained to me '*you know, the French and the English, they did this and they did that*'... and... she took me in Paris showing me around: '*this is that and this is that...*'. So I had more history with the two girls.

ACTIVITY FOUR: Regional Italy, Global Italy

1) Regional Italy [regional cultural literacy; Intercultural communication and competence]

The following segment of text explores the idea that language is a way into culture.

Live contact with the country, language and people is necessary to contextualise communication. Then, the language experience expands into a taste for living and experiencing foreignness. Jürgen specifies: 'language is an experience' which 'comes with living on the spot' to become 'the basis for other events'. For example, Thomas describes how it can lead to a 'transformation' in the way one thinks about cultures, because if 'there was no word in French, so perhaps they don't feel this way'.

...for me it would be interesting also going to Spain, Italy and to do all this transformation, like to talk the language because when you talk the language, then you have to think in a different language. Like in France, I understood that there are some things you cannot say in French, because there are no words for... like, eh..., I can give you an example in German '.....', 'it's comfortable'... I couldn't, I always wanted to say: 'ya, it's very cosy here!'. It didn't work because there was no word in French, so perhaps they don't feel this way... So I said, for me the result was to see that the culture could be completely different...

Reference: SME: Chapter Eight, Location 4380

You have now had quite some time to become more familiar with the idiomatic use of Italian in your place of residence. Do you feel as though you learned anything new about what it means to be Italian in Pisa or Forli or Siena or Pavia? Can you identify particular ways of speaking or behaving that are especially typical of town where you are living? Have you heard people talking about the characteristics that they believe make them unique in their region?

2) Italy in Europe: (global cultural literacy; Intercultural communication and competence)

Have your perceptions of Italian politics and national identity shifted over the last few months as a result of reading and listening to Italian media? Have your perceptions of politics and national identity in your home country shifted as a result of being exposed to Italian perspectives? What do you think it might mean to be a 'European citizen'? How might this be different or similar to being a citizen of your home country or a citizen of your host country/ies.

Contemporary employment crisis for young people in Europe? How might ERASMUS experience relate to this situation?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/28/europes-lost-generation-young-eu>

3. Italian perceptions of foreigners

ACTIVITY FIVE : TAKING STOCK

1) Career Development

This task asks you to apply or 'translate' some of the insights and reflections and experiences you have recorded in your previous journal entries (and practicum activities) into a practical context:

Imagine that you are applying for your ideal job – the job you most fantasise about.

Find an advertisement online for a similar job (make sure you submit the advertisement with your journal activity so we can see what you are applying for – it can be a graduate job or the director of an international organisation – whatever appeals to you. If the advertisement is not in English please translate it roughly to capture your understanding of it).

Now attempt to address the non-technical selection criteria (i.e. the general ones about personal values and qualities) by focusing on your experiences during your Year Abroad. For example, what interpersonal skills have you developed? How would you demonstrate in your application that you are a confident intercultural communicator? Can you present evidence of your ability to work as part of a team and to work independently? How might you describe your levels of 'cultural literacy'?

Have a look on the Warwick careers centre webpage for information about how to address selection criteria. You should also look for information specific to the industry or job you are applying to. Include your research with your submission.

2) Achievements and Ongoing Goals

After completing the exercise above, make a list of your achievements and of the goals you are now working towards as you come towards the end of your Year Abroad. You may find it helpful to look back at your earlier journal entries as you do this. Use the following headings to structure your list of dot points.

Achievements:

- Personal / Cultural/ Social
- Academic/ Linguistic /Professional

Goals:

1. Personal

- Short term
- Mid term
- Long term

2. Professional

- Short term
- Mid term
- Long term

ACTIVITY SIX

Activity 6 will ask you to submit a multimedia presentation (e.g powerpoint slides or something similar) including photos, perhaps some sound recordings or whatever other resources you have available to you. We will ask you to provide the following - using words and images:

- a summary of your Year Abroad experience focussing on key moments, locations, people, activities (positive and negative)...
- Reflections on your feelings about leaving Italy, your plans for marking the end of the experience and any ideas you have for building your Italian experience into your future plans...
- Your thoughts about returning to Warwick and how your experience abroad might modify your perceptions of Warwick campus, with its international dimension...