

Reflective Learning Diary - Rita Di Cancia. Università degli Studi di Padova

My year abroad has shown me that studying in another country is about much more than taking the same classes in a different place. Although mathematics is universal, every university has its own academic culture, teaching style, and approach to learning. Experiencing these differences at the University of Padova encouraged me to become more independent, more adaptable and more confident, both as a student and as an individual. Looking back, I realise that the most valuable lessons I learned this year extended far beyond mathematics.

Although the University of Padova also uses Moodle, there is a much stronger emphasis on independent learning than I have experienced at Warwick. Rather than relying heavily on lecture notes, professors recommended several textbooks for each course, leaving students to decide how best to study the material. Initially, I found this approach quite daunting because there was much less guidance about exactly what to learn. However, as the semester progressed, I came to appreciate the freedom it offered. Reading multiple explanations of the same concept encouraged me to think more critically and develop my own understanding instead of simply memorising notes. Even though it sometimes felt like I was "on my own", it ultimately helped me become a more independent learner.

The atmosphere in lectures also surprised me. Classes typically consisted of around thirty students and took place in rooms that felt more like classrooms than lecture theatres. Each lecture lasted two hours, usually with a fifteen-minute break halfway through before finishing fifteen minutes early. The pace was generally slower than at Warwick, with lecturers taking care to ensure that everyone understood each topic before moving on. Rather than feeling pressured to keep up, I felt encouraged to learn at a comfortable pace. My favourite daily tradition was the coffee break, when students and lecturers alike would gather around the coffee machine before returning to class. These small moments contributed to a strong sense of community that I had not expected.

Outside my studies, the first semester was largely about adjusting to everyday life in Italy. Alongside learning how the university worked, I was also learning practical skills such as navigating public transport, finding the best places to shop and becoming comfortable living independently in another country. Joining the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) played a huge role in helping me settle in. Through city tours and social events I met students from Spain, Germany, Hungary, Russia and many other countries. It was fascinating to hear about different cultures and university systems, and it reminded me how valuable international experiences can be.

One of my favourite ways to spend my free time has been exploring the Veneto region. Rather than only visiting well-known cities, I enjoyed discovering smaller towns around Padova and finding places that many tourists overlook. A particularly memorable day was hiking in the Euganean Hills with one of my flatmates. Experiences like these reminded me that studying abroad is also about immersing yourself in a new place and learning from everyday life.

This year has given me a clearer sense of direction for the future. Living abroad has pushed me well beyond my comfort zone, but in doing so it has made me more adaptable, more

resilient and more confident in my own abilities. While I arrived in Italy expecting to learn mathematics, I left having learned just as much about myself. It has been an experience that I will carry with me long after my year abroad has ended.