



UNIVERSIDAD
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MADRID

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I attended the Universidad Complutense de Madrid during my Erasmus, February of 2017. I did not have many expectations of the University or the studies abroad. I only knew that I needed a change and Spain would be it for me. Having grown up in Mexico, I thought that I would not have any problem regarding the cultural association and getting used to the way things worked. Nevertheless, I experienced certain difficulties, which I will be talking about further along the report. One thing is clear to me: I am incredibly fortunate to have had grown up with Spanish as my mother tongue. This being said, I noticed how challenging it was for my former Erasmus classmates, who were not Spanish speakers to understand the lessons, the administration and the system. Enclosed to this introductory paragraph, I will be speaking about **1.** The preparation I took to welcome this semester abroad; **2.** The intercultural experience I had; **3.** and lastly, my reflections on the lessons learned while abroad.

1. Personal preparation and its enforcement

Before going on my Erasmus, I started reading about Spain; about its climate, the culture, the university, the way things worked and how the unemployment rate is extremely high, especially amongst youth. I was expecting it to be very similar to Mexico and was not too worried about the cultural shock. I quickly found a flat close to where some friends lived, and after that, all the pieces started falling into place. Something I did not know, was that the University that I attended had 11 Faculties and all in different parts of the city; My faculty (Social Work faculty) was even outside of Madrid.

Through the International Office in Berlin, I was able to feel more prepared, because all the paperwork was organised; I was sure that there was no need to stress out about the important documents or the like, because it had all been arranged. I did not feel this way while in Spain. When I arrived to Madrid, I didn't receive any sort of email of accompaniment, telling me where my faculty was- for example-, or when my

classes started. When I finally found a number and address of the Faculty, they told me that classes had started a week before and they did not know who I was. They had lost my file and the system in the computer was unable to recognize my documents. I quickly became aware that my anger in the expectations regarding the Faculty's organisation, had no place in Spain. Also, it helped me understand a valuable lesson: Organisation and symmetry are part of the German culture- with its bureaucracy and paperwork- not the Spanish one. This represented a very valuable experience for me; that I need to learn flexibility if I wanted to enjoy my Erasmus in Spain. Turns out, this was the right decision that I could have ever taken during the Semester abroad.

2. Intercultural experience - lessons learned

I was encountered by laughter, sun, friendliness and enjoyment while in Spain. It had been so long since I had experienced a culture like that. It was different than when I go back to Mexico to see parents, because I merely visit, I don't live there. But knowing that I was going to live in such a beautiful city and country, gave me a certain feeling of adventurousness. Madrid is a breathtaking city; with its history, its food, its architecture and its food. I fell in love with the city, and the way people live their lives, really enjoying every moment- even if it's lunch during work, then it's a two-hour lunch during work. In Madrid, people socialise a lot, they go out every night (as the evening meeting with friends starts at 9pm), even if they have to get up early the next. In the summer, people meet really late to try to avoid the heat waves and the way it reflects to you when you are walking down the street.

I think that the thing I loved the most about living in Spain, is the way that the country made you feel upon arrival. It was as if you've always belonged there, and there was no other way to live. I particularly enjoyed how Spain made me a better version of myself. I was constantly in a state of happiness, because it was so contagious to be happy and enjoy life. Spain is also such a relaxed and flexible country, and

everything also works accordingly. As in the already mentioned paragraph above, I was able to develop the ability to be flexible, which is something that I had completely forgotten about while living in Germany. This proved to me that I was a lot more emotionally strong than I had thought- moving to a new country, and leaving your personal 'niche' behind, is no easy task.

Another quality learned during this time is independence. While it is true that I haven't lived with my parents for a very long time, and I learned to be independent at a very young age, during the semester, I learned to be even more than previously thought. This semester proved to be challenging for me. For the first time in many years, I suddenly realised that I did not need to consult with anyone about the decisions I took (not my boyfriend, not my brother, not any friends). Also, I was able to reflect on my ability to make friends and what effect this had when I was in Spain.

I think overall, a semester of Erasmus abroad in Spain, was a positive experience. Surely, it had also some negative aspects (like the being unable to rely on government and official offices, the chaos of the country and the economy), nevertheless, I was so very pleased with the way that the people there made you happy; how there was something always going on in the streets; how Spaniards take any opportunity to party and how social they actually are; how they accept anyone from any background, how you make 20 friends in one night and how the city itself, is dazzlingly beautiful. The only thing that I regret from going abroad is not taken the very short time, seriously enough- I thought I had so much time and was not able to travel as much as I would have loved to. I think I would definitely go back. There's so much to see, so much to eat and so much to experience. But Without the Erasmus+ grant, and the unfailing help of the International Office at the ASH, I wouldn't have made it. So, a special thanks goes to you.