MY LIFE IN BELFAST AS AN ERASMUS STUDENT

Reflection by Elena Lavin, Madrid

I would like to start my reflective journal being honest and saying that coming here, to Belfast, as an Erasmus student was not in my mind was not one of my choices and I had never thought about it actually. When they told me about the possibility of coming here I had my doubts, I was not sure if I should come here because I knew from the news that this could be a dangerous city, and I did not want to find myself in that kind of situation. It took me a long time to make up my decision but finally I realized that I was living in Madrid and just a few months before almost two hundred people had been killed without any reason when they were going working. They did not do anything bad or wrong; they were just normal persons that had the bad luck of taking the wrong train in the wrong moment one regular morning. This thought and the friendly mails I got from Briege helped me to make up my mind. I took the risk, I came here and I will not change anything at all except for the weather, just joking.

Being an Erasmus student in Belfast and in St. Mary’s university college had been a great experience so far, I will not say that everything is wonderful and perfect but at least you can feel the warmth and the amiability of the people everywhere and these are very important things for me.

I will start talking about the university, this incredible building that makes me feel like if I were Harry Potter in Hogwarts the first day of class. I must say that the building is completely different from my university at home, it is smaller and nicer and probably the resources are much better here than in Spain. Everybody seems to know everyone and the relationships between the teachers and the students are completely different here, the teachers recognize almost every student by the name, and it is easier to talk with them. What I find strange here is the way the students behave themselves in the class, they are so quiet and too shy, they rarely talk or say anything, and when they do normally it is so soft that it is impossible to know what they are talking about. It is also curious that they never or almost never ask questions or doubts and I have never seen a student saying something different from what the teacher is saying, maybe the are thinking about it but they do not say. I really miss that because I think that sharing ideas, even if you are wrong, is very important in a group of students and it makes the class more pleasant. In my class in Spain we always do that and it is fantastic because you can always get new ideas and new thoughts to think about. I have to say that the system here is completely different, you have many choices and options, and you do not need to learn so many things by heart but on the other hand you have to read a lot and do a lot of work. As I said before the system is just different.

Of course if I want this work to reflect my experience here, I have to talk about the city, about Belfast, a city full of contrasts, full of discrepancy, full of disagreements. I love to go for a walk around the city but I cannot help the feeling that someone is watching over me, there are so many T.V cameras all over the city that you truly feel like if somebody will be spying on you. This feeling goes with me everywhere.

I have many things that I like here, in Belfast, but probably the murals are one of my favourites. The murals, those brilliant paintings, you can find all over Belfast attracted my attention from the first moment, I think it is an imaginative way to tell a story because every person can understand it, even if you do not know English. They are full of history, full of colour, full of meaning and the most important thing full of feelings.
Of course, I have to talk about the black taxis, I love them because they are old and big and you have to share them with people you do not know. It was really strange for me, but then somebody told me the history of the creation of the black taxis, that they were a kind of social service because most of the people were afraid to get the bus because of the bombs and I found it really interesting and a good way to solve the problem, of course it is easier to go with other five persons only than a whole bus.

As you can see I love your city, but there are a couple of things that I do not like very much apart from the weather, (sorry), sometimes I feel a little bit trapped, I need more space more places to go, but I think it is normal when you are used to live in a big city like Madrid with more than five million people walking around. Well it is not that bad, you just get used to it. The second and most important thing is the time you go out at night, I have to return just when I would be going out in Spain, so that means that I have to go out before nine and of course I do not have time to have dinner so every time I go out it is a mess. I will never in my life will get use to it; it is a crazy timetable for me and probably for most of the Spanish people.

This work will not be completed without talking about Bostock house, probably the nicer place in the whole city, yes, I mean it, for me right know it is one of my favourite places in Belfast, I do not care about the bathrooms anymore, I like the kitchen and my room looks great. I feel like if I were home and it is mostly because of the people I live with, they all are wonderful, probably one of the best things about coming here is to share your life and your experiences with them. In someway we are just becoming a big family with all the good things and the bad things but when you come back you feel the warmth of a family around you. I know it may sound estrange because probably I have been one of the persons that most hated Bostock house since the very beginning but little by little, day by day it has turn out like one of my favourites places.

I do not like giving advices or guidelines for future students because I think that the real important thing about the Erasmus experience is to find your way of taking and doing things, your way to get to know you better and also the way you enjoy yourself in a different city, a different country, a different culture after all. That is why I will just give them one advice, enjoy yourself and get as much as you can from everything.

As a final conclusion I will say that even I had a few health problems at the beginning of my little adventure I had enjoy myself a lot, it had been a marvellous time and I have met very nice people, that I hope I will keep with me for the rest of my life. I can see that my English is a little bit better, which was one of my main targets when I came here, and if I have to be honest I will not change anything at all, is perfect the way it is.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity, thank you for being so nice and kind and thank you very much for trying so hard to make everything easier for us, all the Erasmus students.

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