

1. Introduction

My name is Eliana Santiago Postigo, a Spanish designer who came to Germany to study Integrated Design at KISD during the winter semester 17/18 at the Th Köln.

Next, I will write a report about my experiences during my semester abroad in Köln, which ended up becoming my home for another three more years.

2. Preparation (planning, organization, application to the host university)

Since I started my bachelor studies I always knew that I wanted to make a semester abroad. In my opinion, a semester abroad is one of the easiest and most beautiful ways to get to know another culture and gain new perspectives.

Fortunately, after completing the registration process, I was accepted by TH Köln and that is how my exchange began. For all future Spanish or international students who want to study at TH Köln, I would like to offer the following tips that I have collected over time:

- . If you come as an Erasmus or exchange student, join the ESN. You will find many events, discounts and it will be also very easier for you to meet new people who are living the same experience as you with the same doubts.
- . Look for groups on Facebook about accommodation in cologne and expats groups from your home country. It is usually very useful for bureaucratic issues or to solve your doubts.
- . Get in touch with former students from your university who have been through the same experience. Also try to get a *Budy* before your arrival in Cologne, she/he or even they will help you with any questions you may have.

2.1 Arrival and accommodation

To find an apartment in Cologne is not easy peasy lemon squeezy and even more for international students who come for a short period of time.

I was searching and applying for places for around 3-4 months until I got three positive responses. To get a room it is necessary to be persistent. You will need to check daily all the groups you (may) have already joined, also webs like wg-gesucht.de, and never stop posting on your social media or the web of the university. Especially, to subscribe and send mails to kstw.de/wohnen/wohnheime (studentenwohnheim in Köln). And, do not despair over rejections.

Kstw has in its platform plenty of options regarding their dormitories, which are classified depending on the area and their prices. Besides, Kstw (public dormitory in Cologne) there are more options if you decide to go for a dorm.

Anyways, if you have the chance to be in Cologne, I would totally recommend to go personally to the Kstw offices in Weißhausstraße, introduce yourself and ask for a room. This last one might be one of the easiest ways for an international to find an accommodation.

2.2 Study in Köln

Since I arrived in Cologne in September 2017, I have experienced and learn not only the language (I came with zero knowledge of German), but also about the culture, social background and the viewpoint of Germany within design. It is unbelievable how changing your home from 2236 kilometres opens your mind and changes your future so much.

First, I started my BA Graphic design in Granada (Spain) and even back then, I knew that I wanted to have an exchange experience that gave me the opportunity to see how design was seen and experienced outside of Spain. In KISD I learned and discover about food design, product design, service design, interaction design, conceptual design, fashion, analogic photography, audiovisuals, silkscreen, and about how to perform and lead presentations. Joining KISD was the greatest experience that I could ever had not only as a designer, but as an individual; shaping and defining my career.

It made me wonder "*which kind of designer do I want to be?*" a simple question with a harder and more extent answer. But also, helped me by unravelling new fields of design to me.

It is also funny how even outside of the university you are still called a "kisdie". So, being part of KISD is more than just design, we create a community.

After completing my semester abroad and finishing in Spain, I decided to start a new chapter of my life studying design in KISD as a regular (international) student. I studied two semester as an exchange student and five as a regular student at KISD. Starting my Bachelor Thesis during my 4th semester.

3. Thesis & the End-of-Study Scholarship

Ironically, I start my proposals researching about the importance of touching and haptic stimuli (this was a few months before Corona hit). According to Finnish neurophysiologist Matti Bergström, "Less Haptic Stimuli, less experience".

Have you ever wonder why some memories are stronger than others? About, how you can remember some days from past years really clear and being unable to remember what did you eat last week? According to psychology, we need to feel engage or to relate a moment with a feeling or emotion in order to create a deep or powerful memory.

Also, some studies found that tactile experimentation helps us to perceive situations more intensely and meaningful. Lifeworld is based on everyday embodied experience, and based on that, we could appreciate that touch is a big part of our human heritage. This theory suggest that our brain can remember old memories and get new ones through touch stimuli, namely, haptic memory. For that, embodied actions are essential to our nature and to the ways in which we accept and find the world. In the middle of this unusual moment that we are currently living, I wondered "how can I send a message and interact through touching?"

“Which kind of language should I use?”

For my bachelor thesis, I researched and tried to establish a new way of communication using body language through dance. Creating an immersive haptic experience combined with my culture background.

In Spain, and in other Latin countries, we do not only communicate verbally but also make use of our whole body. Especially, we integrate our hands and some other rhythmic movements of the upper part of the body. Like touching, the combination of verbal and non-verbal communication is intrinsic in our nature.

I created an illustration catalogue of movements and its meanings related to the most common feelings: happiness, sadness, angry, disgust, fear and surprise. So, each move and part of the body is connected to a feeling or emotion. To elaborate it I made a survey, experimental movement workshop and several interviews. After recollecting all that information, I realized that people felt more engaged to the person they were interacting with. And, that it was easier to understand the real intention of them because that was their honest reactions. And the reason behind is, because you need to really pay attention to the person you are talking with to understand and be part of the conversation – to focus on your task. The thesis is divided in two parts: the catalogue and the human interaction of it. The future of my research was to integrate both and to prepare and installation using human AI-interaction; a camera track the movements of the participants and associates them with one of the emotions and feelings mentioned above. Giving to their movements a whole description of the situation, translating them as an easier conversation to the rest of viewers.

Due to the current situation, it was unable for every student to exhibit our work in Cologne. So, I decided to record a performance as a graphic and visual representation of my work.

The End-of-study scholarship was crucial to develop the workshop and to rent the equipment, studio and to work with the dancers that helped me to perform in the clip.

4. Summary

I have lived in three cities, two countries, and two continents. If you have the opportunity to enrich your life by discovering new places, culture, languages, people, food, do it. Time really flies. Sometimes we need to challenge ourselves answering to “so, what is next?” Getting outside of our comfort zone, never stop learning and enjoying the journey.