

Università della Svizzera italiana

My Exchange Experience in Accademia di Architettura

KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm
faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment
exchange at spring term, 2021-2022

Yu Lin
yul5@kth.se
Architecture

Introduction

In this report, I will demonstrate my five-month exchange experience in Mendrisio, a small town in the Italian part of Switzerland, where the famous Academia di Architettura is located in. Generally speaking, I enjoy the study in Mendrisio a lot. Hereby I will explain why.

Why Mendrisio?

I study in KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. My home university adopts a more conservative attitude in architecture pedagogy, concentrating on space, construction, material and context. It is well reckoned that Academia di Architettura is the pioneering academic institute on traditional and orthodox architecture education. Academia di Architettura is the academy that I admire and adore, and I have no hesitation to put it in the first choice as an exchange destination.

At the end, Mendrisio and Academia di Architettura do not disappoint me. Although being a small town on the border of Switzerland and Italy, Mendrisio is very picturesque and convenient. From Casa dell'Academia I could see the mountain with a frozen tip. The extensive train network in Switzerland compensate for its short coming of locating at the border. It is one hour trip from Mendrisio to Milan, and half an hour trip from Mendrisio to Lugano. Mendrisio itself, because of its remoteness and quietness, becomes a perfect place for architecture study. In the town are several buildings by Mario Botta. Strolling in the small town gets people of feeling of relateness to good architecture and master architect.



How I travelled to Mendrisio

I set off on early September from Stockholm, arrived in Milan via aeroplane and took a train turning on a hourly basis from Milan Malpensa Aeropoto to Mendrisio. From Mendrisio train platom to Casa dell'Academia is just 10 minuntes of walk.

The Mendrisio Campus

All curriculum of architecture take place in Mendrisio campus, which consists of Palazzo Canavée and the Teatro dell'architettura Mendrisio. Most lectures are in Palazzo Canavée, as well as all the studios and the modeling workshop. Teatro dell'architettura Mendrisio has a three-storey gallery above ground and a theatre underground. East to Teatro dell'architettura Mendrisio is Palazzo Turconi, where the school library is located at. The three buildings are adjacent to each other. It takes 15 mins to walk from Casa dell'Academia, the student dormitory to Palazzo Canavée. There are one major modeling material shop in Mendrisio, Brico, which is 30 mins walk from Palazzo Canavée. The three major supermarkets, Migros, Coop and Denner, are within walking distance from Casa dell'Academia. Generally speaking, it is quite convenient to study in Mendrisio.

Palazzo Canavée provides a 24/7 premises for studying, accessing the Internet and the printing materials. Every student access Palazzo Canavée with a student card.



Education

There are two main categories of courses in Accademia di Architettura, studio and theoretical courses. The theoretical courses could be subdivided into technical and humane courses.

The matriculation of studio starts in early September every spring semester, called 'pre-selection'. The students submit their portfolio and pre-selection choice onto Segreteria Virtuale, the course selection system. There are a limited amount of seats in each Studio. The assistants who run each studio will pick up the students according to their academic performance demonstrated in their portfolio. In mid September, the students who are not pick up during the pre-selection round could rank their choice on Segreteria Virtuale. The system will then distribute the seats to the students, prioritizing senior students.

Each studio is hosted by two assistants, with one professor being the reviewer every week. The professors invited by Accademia usually enjoy an international reputation among Europe or the world. That is also one reason why Accademia would become a definite destination for all architecture students in the world. The studio review happens on Thursday and Friday everyweek in Palazzo Canavée. Along the whole semester, there is one mid-term review and one final review, when the guest reviewers will be invited to the event. It is common that the studios in Accademia has a high demand on physical models. While laser cut is not available in Palazzo Canavée, there are several shops in Mendrisio available for laser cut, including Brico and Photoshop. If driving to Italy, there are some cheaper choices also. Studio takes up 15 ECTS in each semester.

There are mainly two genres of studios: architecture design and landscape design. Of total amount of 12 studios, there are roughly 6 studios related to architecture design. I got into a landscape design studio, which is 'Silence in the age of noise' by Prof. Carrilho da Graca. The output of the studio is a landscape planning for a coastal shore of 2.5 km. During the studio, I made several iterations of handmade physical models.

The selection of theoretical courses happen in the mid September, after the selection of studio. The selection of theoretical courses is run in a 'first come first serve' principle. It would be beneficial if one use the computer in top floor Palazzo Canavée, as it has a higher internet speed than Casa. After selection, the students have a two week trial period, during which they can cancel their choice. The minimum credits for theoretical course in each semester is 15 ECTS. Each course worths 2.5 ECTS or 5 ECTS, conducted in Italian or English.

I finished four theoretical courses: Leadership in Architecture (English), New and existing structure (Italian), Preservation for 21 century architecture heritage (English), and Integrated digital fabrication (English). I gain a lot of knowledge from the four courses, among which I inherited some design tools for my further architecture study.

In addition to those, there are free language courses available at the beginning of the semester and during the semester. The language courses provide free language training for Italian, German, French and English up to C2 level. Exchange students can gain 2 ECTS for the intensive language course at the beginning of the semester, and 1 ECTS for the language course during the semester. At the end of the course there will be a level test.