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WHY THIS NEWSLETTER

“Come and go” is the International Relations and Study-abroad newsletter which aims at keeping our readers up-to-date on the latest news and events related to our activities. It is published 4 times per year and reaches approx. 4'000 readers, in particular USI students, faculty and staff, incoming students and staff from our many partner universities and other collaborators. We do hope you will enjoy reading it!

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID CARRASCO, SEMP MOBILITY FOR TRAINEESHIPS GRANT HOLDER AT THE ACADEMY OF ARCHITECTURE

The last testimonial of the year describes the experience of David Carrasco, PhD candidate at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura (ETSAM), Madrid. David has received a SEMP Mobility for Traineeships grant that allowed him to spend three months at the Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio and to work closely with Prof. Arch. Valerio Olgiati.

Hi David, thank you for accepting our invitation for this interview. Please tell us something about yourself.

“Hello, thank you very much for this opportunity to share my enriching experience in the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio. My name is David Carrasco, I am an architect from the ETSAM - Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, obtaining both specialization certificates: in Building and in Structures. Now, I’m developing my PhD thesis in the Design Department (DPA) of the same school, where since 2012 I am also Assistant Professor in the Teaching Unit of Prof. Alberto Campo Baeza. He, with Prof. José Antonio Ramos Abengózar, are my doctorate directors.”

What does your research activity focus on? Why did you choose to come to the Mendrisio Academy of Architecture as a visiting researcher?

“My PhD thesis is titled “The primitive capabilities of reinforced concrete”. It studies how this new and old material allows the architects to think again about the origin of Architecture. Each material has its own rules and logic. Their possibilities are not often completely explored, mostly due to cultural reasons. Concrete is not an exception, but because of its specific properties it can translate directly a concept into reality. It is possible to give a unitarian and continuous solution to all architectural requirements with one single material.

On the other hand, Ernst H. Gombrich in his book “The preference for the primitive” works with the definition of this term, through the history of western taste and art, far from some prejudices to avoid misunderstandings. He concludes that the primitive manner is not the reflection of a lack of technique, that it can be used as an intention of the artist to express in a direct and crude way, full of strength.

Despite the fact that this research is complemented with the analysis of some buildings in which experimentation with reinforced concrete as the



David Carrasco in front of the Library of the Academy of Architecture.

most important aspect of the project, it is not an historic investigation. Even the today's worldwide accepted architectonic stylistic classification is not relevant for this study. They do not belong to a specific time or culture, even when they were built in a specific period. The most important aspect is to find and study the diverse tools of this way of working, which can be used in the architectonic project design. I have known of the Accademia in Mendrisio for a long time before visiting, and I was really interested in making this stay here, as my PhD will be candidate for mention in the International Excellence Campus. However, there are two main reasons for choosing to Mendrisio. The first one is very practical, because several of my case study buildings are here in Switzerland, so this allows me to visit them. The second reason is very clear, this stay in the Accademia offers me the opportunity to meet Prof. Valerio Olgiati, whose work is very strongly connected to these "primitive concrete", perhaps not in the exactly same direction but in a close one. For this investigation, his experience and personal approach is full of value at different levels."

"I had the chance to interact not only with the big names but also with the students, which I find very important in order to understand the reality and the result of this whole system."

You are also here as part of the SEMP/Erasmus placement scholarship programme. What is your internship about? Please describe a typical day at the office.

"The ideal week is divided in two parts that are related between them: Theory and Teaching. In the first half of the week, I spend a lot of time in the library. It is a nice building, with this huge drawing of Apollo/Medusa by Le Corbusier on the vertical wood stripes of its curved façade. Inside it, there is a great collection of books on the catalogue, and it also has very interesting documents in the archive. The people who work there and the facilities are of great help for my daily tasks.

During the second part of the week I try to go to the critiques of different ateliers as an observer, I am very interested on learning how to teach architecture, and in Mendrisio you can find very good collection of examples. Of course, I go to every class of Prof. Olgiati to know his method in detail, also with the help of his three assistants. Then, we usually meet once per week. We talk about many aspects in relation with my PhD, but also about the teaching experience and architecture in general. The dialogues are really exciting and motivating, he shows a lot of interest for my research and also for different aspects of the Architecture School of Madrid. He is a generous and accessible person, I appreciate each of his words.

I keep learning in the weekends, organizing travels to know better the magnificent Swiss architecture, not only to the concrete buildings I am studying for my PhD. The USI also programmes very interesting activities for the exchange students."

How is the working environment? Have you had the chance to interact with some of the big names of the Ticinese School of architecture?

"Naturally, I don't have such a strict routine as described before, sometimes I also attend to theoretical classes and lectures that are usually announced in posters. This gives me a superficial global vision that makes me understand better the context of what is happening in the Accademia. Even though it is still a young school (architecture usually takes long times), I think that it was very well conceived at multiple levels and it is finding its place in the international architectonic panorama. It is really well organized, probably because it is not too big, and somehow it is possible to see an idea of architecture that wants to be taught here. Prove of it are all the high-quality events, exhibitions and publications. They are really well coordinated over some strong parameters, but at the same time, giving total freedom to each Atelier. I had the chance to interact not only with the big names but also with the students, which I find very important in order to understand the reality and the result of this whole system."

“This exchanges are good for both the guest and the host, who are enriched simultaneously.”

In which way has this period abroad enriched you, both professionally and personally, so far?

“Everything is new and, at the same time, everything is known. Through my description above it is possible to notice how excited I am with this experience that I will strongly recommend. Honestly, I am not sure if this knowledge will have a practical application or not. However, it is not the main point. This exchanges are good for both the guest and the host, who are enriched simultaneously. The important thing is that the mix is done, now we should wait to see what really remains. Going abroad also gives you a certain distance from your quotidian environment, and it helps you to take some perspective.”

What would you say to other students wishing to benefit from this kind of grants?

“It is a great opportunity to know what happens beyond the limits of your home university, probably the best moment is when you already have a clear idea of one institution. I find that the most interesting thing is not only the approach of each school by itself, but the synergic dialogue between them. The people of the administration are really kind, they will help you a lot to make the best of this experience. Here in Mendrisio it is possible to focus in your study without any distractions.”

Please describe your experience in 3 keywords.

“There are three words that Alberto Campo Baeza told me before coming, the three starts with “ES” in Spanish: EStudia, ESCucha, ESCRIBE (Study, Listen and Write). These three words have been always very present in my mind during these months.”



A double room at USIhome.

A PLACE TO CALL USIHOME

In 2009, USI started its Accommodation service with the aim of managing accommodation for students and professors and also help them navigate the rent market in both Lugano and Mendrisio giving information on what's available.

In Lugano, the Service is managed by Ms. Patrizia Bianchi (Office 202, Main Building), and it directly runs a building of 34 apartments in Via Monte Carmen 4 catering to the needs of PhD students, professors (regular and visiting), and staff, and a student accommodation site called USIhome, servicing mobility and international students. USIhome is a 3-storey building conveniently located in Lugano Centre, Via Lambertenghi 1, namely less than 5 minutes from the main campus site, with 24 double and 12 single rooms for a total of 60 beds. Each floor is equipped with two kitchens and two laundry rooms. USIhome makes for an excellent communal living opportunity, perfectly located to make the most of what both USI and Lugano have to offer to students from all over the world.

Additionally, the Service in Lugano keeps a database with regularly updated vacancies ads in Lugano and its surroundings, which can be used by students who cannot take advantage of the limited places available in university managed accommodation. To this effect, the Service also helps students, professors, and staff with language and legal difficulties that may arise while navigating foreign real-estate markets, tenancy laws, procedures, and renting agreements.



The Casa dell'Accademia in Mendrisio.

In Mendrisio, the Accommodation Service manages the Casa dell'Accademia, conveniently located just 10 minutes from the Campus in Via Agostino Maspoli. The stylish building can house up to 72 students, with priority given to exchange students, and it was recently voted number 3rd out of 15 [coolest student residences in the world by uniplaces](#). Apartments come with

complete furniture with the exception of linen, cutlery and crockery, pots and pans. The lower floors provide in-house laundry facilities and parking spaces. Rooms and flats are rented out annually on the 30th of June.

For more information, please visit alloggi.usi.ch and the Facebook page facebook.com/usialloggi, or get in touch at alloggi@usi.ch for Lugano, and alloggi.arch@usi.ch for Mendrisio.

DAYTRIP TO SIGIRINO AND AIROLO

On a cold but sunny November Saturday morning, the International Relations and Study-Abroad Office organized its second day trip activity of the academic year. 22 international students currently studying in Lugano and Mendrisio had the chance to spend the day visiting AlpTransit and eat fondue surrounded by the Alps.



The group with helmets, boots and oxygen masks visiting the tunnel.

The daytrip started at pick-up spots in Mendrisio and Lugano fairly early for a Saturday morning (8.00am), when the students boarded one of the newest Autpostal busses with panoramic windows. The group, accompanied by Arianna and Francesco from the Office, travelled to Sigirino (a village on Mount Ceneri, the pass separating upper from lower Ticino) where the southern section of AlpTransit's excavations are taking place. After a detailed presentation about the ambitious railway tunnel project through the Alps, the groups headed below ground to explore the actual tunnels still under construction. Their impressions were of general amazement at the engineering feats performed by the workers, who excavate huge spaces underground where most of the construction processes (like concrete production) are started and finished. These huge caves, once the actual tunnel is completed, get filled with detritus and sealed off forever.



The Caseificio del Gottardo.

After the instructive visit to AlpTransit, which lasted 2 ½ hours, the group boarded the Autpostal again and made their way to Airolo in Upper Leventina, just in front of the St. Gotthard Pass, for a very tasty lunch at the Caseificio del Gottardo (a demonstrative dairy and restaurant). The menu on the table was fondue, a typically Swiss convivial meal that most of them had never tasted before, and the view from the restaurant was breathtaking: the Alps' summits had received the first seasonal brush of snow. Fat and happy with their lunch, the group took a guided tour of the dairy, discovering how cheese is made by farmers in their alpine huts and how it is made in more industrial processes.

Before heading back to Lugano and Mendrisio, the group took advantage of a well-furnished gourmet shop stocking artisanal cheeses and other delicacies. The trip home to the South of Ticino was particularly relaxing, with the sun setting over the mountains in the horizon with spectacular colours.

DISCOVER TICINO: ALPTRANSIT

With the first part of the [AlpTransit project](#) quickly coming to a conclusion, time is running out for people who wish to visit the construction sites in Ticino. The Gotthard basis tunnel in Bodio-Pollegio was closed to visitors in September, but fortunately the Ceneri basis tunnel and its Infocentre are still open until the end of June 2016.



Ceneri basis tunnel under construction.

People interested in visiting the massive engineering project can therefore still travel to Sigirino. There, they can enjoy a detailed, up-to-date, presentation of the AlpTransit project before venturing below Mount Ceneri with special gear for an instructive tour, showing how a tunnel is built from underground.

After the visit, people can take advantage of several [pre-arranged tourist packages](#), which allow them to visit other sites in Ticino, ranging from local gastronomic experiences to cultural and nature excursions.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Interim Solution for Erasmus+ extended

The indirect participation of Switzerland in Erasmus+ and therefore the Interim solution supported by Swiss funding is ensured until 2017. The Swiss National Agency, ch Foundation published the grants for mobility for the academic year 2016/2017. The amounts can be found at: [grants for mobility](#).

British Embassy visit

On November 5, USI President Prof. Dr. Piero Martinoli welcomed the British Ambassador to Switzerland, Mr. David Moran, accompanied by Mr. Richard Ridout, Deputy Head of Mission. The guests had the chance to better know USI and its development strategy for the coming years thanks to several presentations given by professors and researchers of the four faculties. The President and the USI academic and administrative staff were very delighted to meet with the representatives of the British Embassy Berne.

International Students' Fair

On November 9, 2015 the International Relations Office organized the International Students' Fair, where a number of partner universities were represented by host students spending a semester at USI in the framework of an exchange programme, or just through information material. The event took place in the foyer of the Aula Magna. It has been the right occasion for asking specific questions and for picking up information materials, in order to find out more about a desired destination for mobility. Representatives of the US Embassy in Bern have participated. We would also like to take the chance to warmly thank the student ambassadors for their support and active role. We remind that the internal application form including all required enclosures must be received by Monday, 22nd of February 2016. The new edition of the Study-abroad guide describing mobility programmes, partner universities, registration procedures and admission requirements, presented in occasion of the general information session that took place on October 22, is available both in print at our office and digitally at: <http://www.relint.usi.ch/en/study-abroad-guide-149016.pdf>.

IRUS Meeting in Neuchâtel

On November 20, 2015, the International Relations Office teams of the Swiss Universities met at the University of Neuchâtel for the usual bi-annual meeting. Marie-France Farine, Head of the Mobility Office at UNINE, officially welcomed about twenty representatives of the International Relations offices of the different Swiss universities. During the day, themes very dear to the IR offices have been discussed. Specific attention has been addressed to the new ways of cooperation with Swiss universities, as well as to best practices for grade conversions and internal application procedures. The meeting also served the purpose of sharing ideas, problems and concerns related to the mobility activity within the Swiss Universities. The next IRUS meeting will take place on April 15, 2016 in St. Gallen.

Erasmus Day 2015

The Erasmus Day 2015, was organized by the National Agency in Solothurn on November 25, and was designed for staff of the International Offices and coordinators of Swiss universities and other educational institutions. The day was split into two parts: in the morning the focus was on the content of the Transitory Solution of Erasmus+, with a look at the new features of the Call 2016. In the afternoon, the participants had the possibility to choose among three workshops: one on how mobility activities can be included in the Diploma Supplement, another on strategic partnerships (key action 2 of Erasmus+) and the last one on SEMP programme basic information. At



USI President Piero Martinoli welcoming Mr. David Moran, British Ambassador to Switzerland.



usual, this day proved to be a very useful platform for the field's experts.

swissinfo.ch

swissinfo.ch, is an online service fulfilling the federal government's mandate to distribute information about Switzerland internationally, supplementing the online offerings of the radio and television stations of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation. It is directed above all at an international audience interested in Switzerland, as well as at Swiss citizens living abroad. The site's coverage focuses on politics, business, culture, society and research and could be a useful platform for international students to keep informed and better understand Switzerland.



CHRISTMAS WISHES

The International Relations and Study-abroad office will be closed for the Christmas holidays from 22.12.2015 to 6.01.2016. It is always possible to contact us by email to relint@usi.ch.



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