

Beyond

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Beyond Study Abroad

The Shifting Field of International Education

Working in study abroad can be a rewarding and deeply humbling experience; one that keeps you on your toes and far away from the temptation to keep things static just because “this is how it’s always been done.”

I started in the field when I was just 26 years old; back when ISI Florence was still called “The Institute at Palazzo Rucellai.” At that age, advising students on the best and cheapest ways to travel, where to find the greatest restaurants with the most authentic meals, and how to avoid pickpockets felt more like passing on useful information to my peers rather than fulfilling any sort of professional obligation. Of course, student advising in international education includes more complex topics such as culture shock, intercultural communication, and personal development, but I had been so relatively fresh off of my own experience that – for a while – my anecdotes were fodder enough for many of those conversations.

As time went on, this became less true; my own experience also became a little less relevant. Student cohorts would come and go, all remaining the same age while I got older and farther away from my first, life-changing year in Italy. Now, after 15 years in the field, I am no longer relatable when I talk about having to use internet cafes and computer labs during my first experience abroad. When I explain that our apartments didn’t have WiFi, and our phones were not smart, all I receive are slightly bored looks and half smiles or nods in return.

The fresh groups of students who join us every term bring renewed energy, shifting perspectives, and a clear need for adaptation. And, each new generation’s views, expectations, and goals for their study abroad experience dictate what areas of our services will be utilized, stretched, reimaged, and improved. It’s an opportunity to understand not only how the field of International Education is changing, but how the world itself is evolving.

As we are firmly on the “other side” of the pandemic, this has never been clearer. With the boom in post-COVID travel and study abroad participants came overlapping novelties in education such as online learning, AI tools such as ChatGPT, and a more widely accepted and less stigmatized view of mental health challenges and accommodations. As professionals in International Education, we are tasked with creating an integrated experience for students that considers all of these things.

While compiling and editing this edition of *Beyond*, we saw many of these themes of change, evolution, and adaptation present themselves within the articles selected. We hope this year’s collection can provide new perspectives in the field and inspiration to keep up with the ever-changing times!

Katie Mathis



academics

The Impact of Excessive Use of Portable Electronic Devices

Eugenio Bacchini

Abstract

The excessive use of portable electronic devices decreases attention span, a fundamental cognitive resource. The constant use of technology, especially smartphones and social media, has impacted human attention span and increased the sense of social isolation. Smartphones have become a necessity, and are an integral part of people's lives, but they are also creating cognitive impediments and emotional negative effects.

Since 2000, the average person's attention span has dropped from 12 seconds to 8 seconds, and constantly subjecting our brains to processing information as dictated by electronic devices can have unintended consequences on our ability to follow and process complex ideas. Electronic devices are a factor of distraction for children, interfering with concentration and their ability to "get into the mindset of thinking about homework-related activities."

Keywords: Smartphones, Technology, Social Media, Attention Span, Cognitive Impediment, Emotional Negative Effects, Complex Ideas, Distraction, Children

The negative consequences of technology on attention span

According to a study conducted by Microsoft Canada, due to electronic devices, humans have a much shorter attention span than in the past. Smartphones have become a necessity; they have become an integral part of people's lives. We now use our smartphones more for other functions than for making calls: checking email, checking our bank account, buying a train ticket, reading the latest news, and posting updates about our lives on social media are just a few examples.

This progressively leads people towards isolation. Little by little we are moving away from reality, as people present themselves more through

manipulated social media. The sense of isolation is increased as people are more engaged in texting than in actually speaking with each other.

How is it reducing our attention span?

A study from the American Journal of Preventative Medicine reveals that the people who use social media and technology the most feel socially isolated. Another study by Dr. Jean Twenge in 2020¹ suggests that there is an increase in cases of depression, self-harm, and suicide among young American adults due to the increase in technology use. The constant use of social media for short periods of time tends to make people completely dependent, with a sense that they are missing out on important information if they are not connected. Also, they skip from one site or profile to another, thus reducing attention span.

Social media is not the only aspect of technology. Technology allows people to do multiple things at once. This, however, as beneficial as it is, also decreases attention span. During the day, a person is exposed to an overload of information, be it news or work-related information. Constant notification beeps distract people from whatever they are doing, decreasing their concentration. This is such a common phenomenon that some people decide to do a “detox” from social media or technology to increase their concentration. This involves not using any apps or social media for a certain period of time.

The study conducted by Microsoft Canada on how technology has affected attention span found that since 2000, the average person’s attention span has dropped from 12 seconds to 8 seconds². The study was conducted on 2000 young Canadian adults, whose brain activity was studied with the help of electroencephalograms. The year 2000 marks the widespread adoption of mobile phones, a device capable of instantly receiving, sending, and connecting people across oceans.

1. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1176/appi.prcp.20190015>

2. <https://sherpapg.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MAS.pdf>

The advantages of technology

We cannot, however, ignore the progress technology has made in every sector. Due to technology, people can now participate in events in very distant places via video conferencing and remote working. Additionally, technology also offers multitasking capabilities, which can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. On one hand, it allows people to multitask, but on the other hand, it can lead to information overload and decreased concentration due to constant distractions.

In a study that scientists from Pennsylvania State University recently published in *Scientific Reports*, it is noted that constantly subjecting our brains to processing information in the way dictated by electronic devices can have unintended consequences on our ability to follow and process complex ideas³. In their article, the scientists explain that expository texts, like scientific articles, have a particularly complex knowledge structure. This means that they use cross-referenced information that readers find in different parts of the text. To understand such a text, the reader must be able to identify the information they find in these various sections and then connect those ideas.

However, in the study, researchers found that those who constantly used electronic devices had a poorer understanding of scientific texts than those who used them less frequently. Furthermore, people who used electronic devices constantly throughout the day had lower activity in brain areas related to processing complex information and understanding language. Likewise, their attention span was shorter.

While current findings only indicate a correlation between the excessive use of electronic devices and lower activity in these key areas of the brain, researchers warn that relying too much on our smartphones and tablets can change the way our brains process information.

How phones ruin concentration

According to a recent study, the mere presence of a smartphone re-

3. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-47176-7>

duces a person's ability to concentrate. In the study, college students who were asked to leave their phones in another room performed better on cognitive tests than those who were asked to silence their phones and leave them face down on the desk or in a room⁴.

In the experiment, even students who said they didn't consciously think about their phones still experienced a loss of ability, meaning some of this distraction occurs on an unconscious level. This is bad news for those who think they're good at not getting distracted by their phones while working.

"I hear about these technology issues all the time," says Matt Cruger, PhD, director of the Learning and Development Center at the Child Mind Institute⁵. In regard to the children Dr Cruger works with, he says his concern is not about their ability to complete homework, but their "ability to really get into the mindset of thinking about homework-related activities." In other words, they could do their job if they were able to concentrate on it. And while difficulty concentrating on tasks is certainly nothing new for children, captivating new technologies do not make it easier.

Distraction devices

Why are technological devices so distracting? For starters, most apps and web content are designed to be as intuitive and engaging as possible. They send us notifications when we receive a new message or when someone has posted something that might interest us. They are reliable sources of validation that tell us when someone likes something we have posted.

But there are also less obvious reasons why children might be particularly addicted to it. Phones are where young people socialize today, especially as they reach preadolescence and adolescence, when their primary developmental goals are to begin creating an identity separate from

4. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/691462>

5. <https://childmind.org/article/kids-shouldnt-use-phones-during-homework/>

that of their parents and to prioritize forming friendships with their partners and peers, who spend hours on social media.

Compared to adults, children have a less developed ability to control their impulses. If it is sometimes difficult for parents to unplug; imagine how difficult it is for a child who struggles with impulsivity or a teenager with a new best friend to resist constantly checking their phone. Prioritizing getting started on a book report or even studying for tomorrow's test won't be as compelling.

Conclusion

The impact of technology on human attention span and well-being is a topic that deserves further exploration and attention. It is important to find a balance between using technology for its benefits and avoiding its negative consequences. Technology was born to help humanity and instead has become a necessity. Constant notifications, information overload, irrelevance of the data presented, and targeted advertisements all contribute to shortening our attention span.

About the author

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The Virtual Global Classroom: Development, New Tendencies and Applications

Paola Cascinelli

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on our relationship with technology, forcing a transformation that has been underway for some time. This change has also impacted the higher education sector and, within it, the possibilities offered by greater internationalization. This article wants to expand these initial insights, defining ICT-enabled curriculum internationalization and underlining how it connects the classroom to the world's knowledge exchange and production ecosystem, enabling both students and instructors to learn from and contribute to its richness. After a brief excursus of the history of global digital training tools and an account of the definitions offered by the literature, the characteristics of a virtual global classroom will be highlighted, underlining what makes it different from in-person training opportunities. The concepts of virtual third space and community, as well as Post-Gutenberg Learning and Superadditivity, will be used to show the advantages of virtual global classrooms in the field of social science training and how it can be, with the necessary adjustments, more than a poor substitute for in-person learning.

Keywords: Virtual Global Exchange, Virtual Third Space, Remote Learning and Teaching, Global Knowledge Ecosystem.

Introduction: The COVID boost

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on our relationship with technology, forcing a transformation that had been underway for some time but which has developed incrementally during those weeks. This change has also impacted the higher education sector and, within it, the possibilities offered by greater internationalization. The long months

without international travel accelerated the quality and frequency of digital exchanges, both real-time and asynchronous. Even the professors who were most attentive to protecting in-person exchange in institutional places found themselves working from home and collaborating through video conferencing software. Although those attempts were sometimes clumsy and not always excellent regarding the quality of the educational experience offered, each of us now understands the frustrations and the potential of global digital training.

This article intends to expand these initial insights, defining ICT-enabled curriculum internationalization, underlining how it connects the classroom to the world's knowledge exchange and production ecosystem, while enabling both students and instructors to learn from and contribute to its richness.

After a brief excursus of the history of global digital training tools and an account of the definitions offered by related literature, we will highlight the characteristics of a virtual global classroom, underlining what makes it different from in-person training opportunities. We will then focus on the advantages of virtual global classrooms in the field of social science training and how it can be, with the necessary adjustments, more than a poor substitute for in-person learning. This is based on the writer's practical experience, as she coordinates a global virtual internship program and teaches a virtual seminar class. A previous version of this article will go out soon with another publisher.

The landscape of virtual exchanges

Starting after the Second World War, distance education has expanded, along with technology. Initially this happened through the diffusion of television, and then together with the introduction of personal computers, the internet, and – more recently – smartphones, video conferences, and social networking technologies. While at the beginning the educational experience was mainly top-down, new digital tools have made it more interactive, quick, network-based, and characterized by a communal exchange. More and more researchers and students are now able to

connect with one another, exchange ideas, and facilitate live cross-border communication and projects. Expanded synchronous learning opportunities have become available for students across international borders.

Since the '90s, virtual exchanges have started to have more formal recognition, especially when players from different countries are involved. National and international organizations like the EU, United Nations, and the OECD increasingly recognized virtual exchange as a tool for promoting global competence, and a number of reports have been published underlining the benefits of this form of international exchange.¹ As a result, the early 21st century saw more and more universities offering online classes in an effort to leverage their learning management systems and open education technologies,² while others specifically focused their efforts towards the promotion of virtual exchanges.³

At the turn of the century, “in-person” student mobility reached its maximum expansion, with thousands of students crossing the national borders to study in other countries as part of a study abroad program or as part of a student exchange program. The number of international stu-

1. In 2002, the formula Open Educational Resources (OER) was coined at UNESCO's 2002 Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries.

2. The first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) was launched in 2008, to scale access to online courses at low or no cost for students across the world (Glass et al., 2016). TerraDotta, founded in 2001, helped international educators who were managing the growing number of international students and an increasing number of study abroad programs. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), an early proponent of OER, launched MIT OpenCourseWare to provide free, open access to course materials, lectures, and resources to be used by students and educators around the world. The Open Education Consortium, originally founded in 2008 as the OpenCourseWare Consortium, promoted OER and expanded access to educational materials and increased knowledge-sharing (Veletianos, 2016). Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024, p. 6.

3. The establishment of the SUNY COIL Center (Collaborative Online International Learning Center) in 2005, with the support from the American Council on Education (ACE), marked a turning point for the growth of virtual exchange. The center has fostered collaborative projects embedded within courses, connecting students and faculty across the globe. Another outstanding initiative was founded in 2015, The Stevens Initiative, specifically aimed to expand access to virtual exchange for young people in the United States and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In 2018, the European Commission launched the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange program, promoting virtual mobility opportunities for students and young professionals. And again in 2018 the Virtual Exchange Coalition was founded to support high-quality virtual exchange programs and promote integration in the curriculum. Cfr. Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024, p. 6.

dents studying at the higher education level around the world increased from 2m in 1998 (when UNESCO records began) to 6.4m in 2020.⁴

Yet, in this environment, a massive transformation was also happening. The rapid growth of blended learning, flipped classrooms, and experiential learning has become essential to the study abroad experience, pushing towards a more horizontal and integrated educational experience. The digital world was also becoming a daily experience for students, who started to expect an interaction between these technologies and their educational experience. Then, universities increasingly invested in technological infrastructure, virtual technologies, and started offering opportunities for hybrid programming and keeping connections with home universities. Courses would take place at the same time virtually and in person, taking advantage of the exchanges of global knowledge with local experience the students were having abroad. Technological advances through artificial intelligence (AI) products, like ChatGPT, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR), rapidly shift and change the tools and practices, enabling students to engage in more realistic, interactive, and immersive experiences.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s pushed this tendency even further, forcing academic institutions to find new ways of offering international experience without traveling. International educators have seen a final shift in their professional environment towards remote work, connections with communities beyond traditional mobility-based ties, participation in collaborative global virtual teams, and attendance at virtual networking and professional development opportunities. The world discovered how virtual exchanges could expand access to international education to groups that couldn't easily travel by removing barriers like travel expenses, visa restrictions, and affordable housing.

Today, a virtual exchange is defined as an online learning environment that connects groups of learners with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations in extended periods of online inter-

4. British Council, 2024.

cultural interactions and collaboration. It is an integrated part of the student's education programs and happens under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators. It allows learners to interact and collaborate in real time using various digital tools and platforms.⁵

Inside this vast definition, the literature recognizes a variety of formats that can be considered virtual exchanges: online learning, virtual mobility, virtual global internships, hyflex (hybrid-flexible) learning experiences,⁶ virtual exchanges, collaborative online international learning (COIL), telecollaboration, digital enrichment of international education, digital storytelling, global learning, international student mobility, degree-seeking international students, education abroad, hybrid or blended mobility and international research collaborations.

The difference among these tools resides in the level of awareness among instructors, the level of intentionality, the level of engagement of online student services that ensure proper integration of the remote and real worlds, and explicit learning outcomes in the area of intercultural awareness and/or competency.

Indeed, new technologies can offer many opportunities to incorporate international, intercultural, and/or global elements into existing curricula without necessarily advancing internationalization's fundamental purpose of active knowledge exchange with diverse others.

Lecturing about topics with g/local connections, diversifying the authorship of required course readings, developing new modules on diverse cultural practices, and inviting international guest speakers are all forms of internationalization that have been considered as forms of inward look,⁷ ways to connect with others without entering into deep experiences. Indeed, while these methods expose students to diverse ways of

5. O'Dowd (2018).

6. These are learning experiences conducted in a physical space, typically a classroom, equipped with technology that allows two-way interaction with remote learners. They require significant awareness and training for the learning facilitators who need to manage and address the needs of two different audiences. Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024.

7. Leask, 2015.

knowing, they do not necessarily advance it and do not take full advantage of the digital world's potential.

Instead, ICT can favor outward-facing learning curricula, where the instructor intentionally designs environments that “facilitate critical, dialogic encounters amongst students, academics, and wider communities, not confined by national contexts but with g/local perspectives”.⁸ Global Virtual Classrooms can be an interesting tool in this realm; in the next paragraph we will explore how it should be built to reach these goals.

More generally, virtual settings can enable intercultural communication across geographical, temporal, and social boundaries. People can connect and collaborate with others from different countries, time zones, and backgrounds, thus bringing different cultures, languages, and worldviews into the classroom. This can also enhance the creativity and innovation of intercultural communication, as people can exchange and integrate diverse ideas and solutions.

Moreover, VGCs can provide access to quality learning opportunities for students who face barriers such as poverty, distance, conflict, or discrimination. As such, they can help close the global education gap by overcoming geographical, economic, and social barriers.⁹ A report from the World Economic Forum highlights some examples of successful digital learning initiatives, such as the Global Learning Network, which connects students from 30 countries to work on real-world challenges, and the Global Digital Library, which provides free access to high-quality reading resources in more than 40 languages.

VGCs can also impact global climate change through a reduction of unnecessary carbon emissions that result from international travel.¹⁰

However, virtual global classrooms also face some challenges. The most discussed and evident is the digital divide, as the proliferation of online learning cannot reach those who have limited and unreliable ac-

8. Wimpenny et al., 2022, p. 291.

9. World Economic Forum, 2021.

10. Helm & Guth, 2022.

cess to modern ICT. Disparities in access to personal computers and high-speed internet connectivity leave behind students in regions lacking technological infrastructure. In addition, a study by McKinsey¹¹ found that teachers in high-poverty schools rated remote learning as less effective than their peers in low-poverty schools and that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to disengage from online learning. For some, virtual global learning serves to perpetuate already-existing power structures and social hierarchies.¹² Moreover, recent evidence that participation in virtual international exchange doubles the likelihood that a student will study abroad draws into question the extent to which virtual programs may actually reduce carbon emissions in the long term.¹³

With the increased competition in global higher education, other concerns are related to the quality and accreditation of online education. As universities worldwide increasingly began offering online courses, criticisms of the marketization and commercialization of internationalization have become more strident, with widespread concerns that it is being dominated more than ever before by revenue generation with a minor focus on the learning experience.

The quality of online instruction would then be at risk. Online teaching and learning require skills and strategies that differ from face-to-face instruction. Teachers need to design and facilitate effective online activities, assessments, and feedback, while students need to develop self-regulation, motivation, and collaboration skills. Measuring and evaluating the learning outcomes of virtual global classrooms can be challenging, especially when they involve intercultural competence and global citizenship.

11. World Economic Forum, 2021.

12. Bali, 2014; Knight, 2023; Schueller & Sahin, 2022; Whatley et al., 2022. For example, “in international and higher education, the often-uncontested privileging of English—or, more specifically, the privileging of white, Anglophone English—is particularly salient, and the field of international virtual exchange (IVE) is no exception... According to the Stevens Initiative (2022), 77.3% of 2,470 reported IVE programs were offered only in English, 20.5% were offered in English and another language, and a mere 2.2% were offered only in a language that was not English.” Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., *Digital*, 2024, p. 144.

13. Lee et al., 2022.

Valid and reliable tools and methods are needed to assess these complex and multidimensional outcomes, and this has not been the rule, especially for the experiences born right after COVID.

Therefore, virtual global classrooms can be a powerful tool to address inequality in education, but they also require careful design, implementation, and evaluation to ensure that they meet the needs and expectations of all learners.

Virtual global classrooms as a new educational environment

The physical movement across borders to experience other cultures and engagement with the local reality have traditionally been viewed as vital components of meaningful cross-cultural dialogue and exchange. In addition, proximity to other students has been seen as an essential element for creating a thriving intellectual and research environment.¹⁴

For this reason, remote, distant, or virtual classes have long been reduced to a secondary role within the field of internationalization, associating it with the negation of place. “It is neither here (at home), nor there (abroad)”.¹⁵ A growing body of literature, though, underlines how the inability to pinpoint one fixed or geographically bounded place can represent a unique opportunity within the field of digital internationalization. An exploration of its potential, therefore, requires reconsidering the meaning of place and recognizing that, under specific circumstances, remote virtual classrooms promote a more diverse, fluid, and multidimensional knowledge creation, where participants become used to dealing with the ambiguity and complexity that prevails in today’s world.

We will discuss three features that distinguish global virtual classrooms from in-person international learning: the digital new space, the possibility to form virtual communities, and to achieve post-Gutenberg learning and superadditivity.

14. Hawawini, 2011.

15. Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024.

Digital place: Here or There?

In order for digital forms of internationalization to begin to hold their rightful place alongside others, educators and leaders should recognize the unique ways that students experience a sense of place online.¹⁶

In a globalized and digital world, the meaning of place is becoming ambiguous. We are used to environments that are largely indistinguishable despite their different geographical locations: non-places like shopping malls, airport shops, and fast-food chains.¹⁷ That is why some authors call for a reconceptualization of place as the environment where interactions happen and are weaved, more than as necessarily rooted in a physical location.¹⁸ For Massey (1994), a globalized sense of place is open and unbounded by national borders; also, it is flexible and linked to outside environments. Virtual global places are unique and ever-changing environments, composed of multiple identities, where the online space is co-created by the interactions among the participants' own physical locations and the objects and people that reside within them, as well as the thoughts, opinions, and ideas that the participants bring with them. The virtual place is, therefore, permeable and hybrid in nature, merging both the physical world and the online platform, neither of which can be separated from the experience.¹⁹ The blending of public and private spaces is a unique feature of the online environment, allowing for the movement of participants within and between places.²⁰

That is also why some authors like to define the virtual space as

16. *Ibidem* p. 104.

17. Augé (2023).

18. Massey (1994).

19. Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., *Digital*, 2024, p. 107.

20. "A student participating in a virtual exchange, for example, is impacted by their own physical space: the lighting of the room, the arrangement of furniture, outside noises they hear through their window as well as the smell of dinner being prepared in their kitchen. At the same time, they are also immersed in an online place, one that is dominated by a screen, but also includes sensory inputs: views of their peers in their own physical places, as well as sounds, both intentional, such as a comment or discussion, and those less intentional sounds, such as a dog barking in the background." *Ibidem*, p. 107.

a Third Space²¹ where the “real material world” (which comprises cultural, social, political, economic, and other contextual factors that influence the local perspectives participants bring to knowledge exchange) is continually reinterpreted by the virtual community. Indeed, thanks to ICT-enabled curriculum internationalization, participants co-create “hybridized cultural norms and practices that facilitate equitable knowledge exchange”,²² socially negotiating new ways of perceiving and representing their shared reality.

The personal space becomes more open as students share their stories, work, and study with someone living on the other side of the world.

Virtual community

Virtual third spaces can then be the place where a real community of shared norms and values, rules, roles, beliefs and ideals can emerge. The digital environment, indeed, offers unique opportunities for participants to construct imagined communities,²³ where there is a manifested “sense of community, group climate, mutual trust, social identity, and group cohesion”.²⁴ Norton and Toohey suggest that “in imagining ourselves allied with others across time and space, we can feel a sense of community with people we have not yet met and with whom we may never have any direct dealings”.²⁵ Hilli et al. note that such places “support hybrid or fluid forms of becoming and being in, with and for the world”.²⁶

When online, participants can also experience new freedom in expressing themselves, their opinions, and their identities or even build a new community with peers in a way that would not be possible for stu-

21. The concept of Third Space was originated by post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha who proposed it as “a new productive space in which the historical dimensions and identities of cultures are challenged when two cultures meet” (Lin, 2014, p. 45).

22. Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024, p. 78.

23. Anderson, 1991.

24. Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 141.

25. Norton and Toohey, 2011, p. 422.

26. Hilli et al. 2019, p. 78.

dents having their in-person study abroad experience.

It is not uncommon for international students, indeed, to find themselves unable to cope with intercultural discomfort in their host communities. They may enter a panic zone, a state of fear that blocks their learning, and “retreat to superficial or stereotypical interpretations, dismiss or demean the ‘other’ as irrelevant or insignificant, or defer to authorities who tell them what to think”.²⁷ Similar difficulties in creating meaningful intellectual and intercultural exchange can also happen with international students who are allowed to live and study within a bubble of familiarity, remaining on the economic and cultural periphery of their host communities and never positioning themselves as “contributing members” of that community.²⁸

These limits of international education could be overcome online as connecting via the Internet blurs the distinction between “domestic” or “international”. Everyone participating in the encounter may consider themselves to be, in some sense, at home. Also, interlocal knowledge exchange repositions all participants as both home and international learners. Digital interactions can be perceived as a new safety zone that transcends national borders or the “real” community’s opinions. When the roles of host and guest are erased, and students maintain a connection to home’s physical security, they may be more likely to experience international dialogue in their learning zone, and a greater sense of belonging can emerge.

It is, for example, possible to discuss opinions and perspectives on topics in ways that would not be normally permitted in one’s own physical space.²⁹ Judgment is suspended as participants cannot completely grasp all the factors that built up an opinion expressed during an online session.

27. Jurasek, 1995, in Ogden, 2007, p. 46.

28. Ibidem.

29. A student stated, “I felt like I’m in a country where it’s free; we have rights to talk, to discuss things, to have an opinion that’s radical in your country.” Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024, p. 112.

Post-Gutenberg Learning and Superadditivity

ICT-enabled global curricula also offer new ways for diverse and geographically dispersed people to depict, categorize, manipulate, and co-create new knowledge.

When used at their full potential, virtual global classrooms take advantage not only of what is available inside the virtual community but also of what each participant can bring into the community from their personal vantage points. Thanks to digital technology, news, scholarship, and cultural productions from around the world can be accessed in an instant via the internet. Guest lectures from scholars and fellow students in other parts of the world can be carried out relatively easily via email, message boards, video conferencing, social media, etc.

However, an additional component makes this environment able to produce new forms of knowledge. Web searches from different locations will show different results, opening new perspectives that instructors have to utilize in class. This means increasing the number and diversity of explanations and representations of topics, which in a VGC can be seen in different contexts or via other points of view.

Digital ICTs broaden students' access to divergent ideas and to the people who possess them. Differences in gender, race, nationality, religion, and other identity-related perspectives might interact with those tools, producing subtly but meaningfully different interpretations that could lead to significantly different combinations of ideas and innovative solutions. Page (2007) dubbed this phenomenon the superadditivity of diversity, and it is one of the main benefits of internationalization.³⁰ Virtual exchanges increase these possibilities exponentially.

Criss-crossing the web on a topic and bringing the results in class

30. "Superadditivity means that the whole of a cognitively diverse group of people, in terms of their ability to analyze and generate solutions to complex problems, is greater than the sum of its individual parts" (Landorf et al., 2018, pp. 54–55). When cognitively diverse teachers and learners apply their different knowledge and skills to shared questions and challenges, they often combine parts of their different ideas to create new ideas." In Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024, p. 74.

permits accessing multiple perspectives and many alternative points of connection, as opposed to only reading a single book on the same topic. Spiro and DeSchryver (2006) recommend taking advantage of the Web's hypertext paradigm to design "Post-Gutenberg learning" that develops the "Post-Gutenberg mind."

Moreover, the results and the materials that come from virtual exchanges will be complex and non-linear. The same is true of the web, which is characterized by a higher level of unpredictability.³¹ Surviving in this environment means that students and teachers have to deal with ill-structured problems, where concepts don't always show up in exactly the same way, where parameters are less manipulable, and there is a level of uncertainty about which concepts, rules, and principles are necessary for the solution or how they are organized and which solution is best.³² Learning in ill-structured domains demands nonlinear thinking, i.e., the ability to expand thinking in multiple directions and discern links between seemingly disconnected ideas and perspectives (Spiro & Jehng, 1990; Spiro et al., 1987).

VGCs in social sciences

Virtual global classes can have an interesting application in social science courses. Students who want to become managers, entrepreneurs, or public officers have a fundamental need to learn how to deal with global reality. This means not only becoming used to collaborating with people from different cultural and national backgrounds but also knowing how to approach complex problems and solutions that are often neither clear nor definitive. Furthermore, given the growth of

31. "The structure of the World Wide Web is nonlinear. It is based on Hypertext Transfer Protocol—the "http" at the beginning of every website address—a nonlinear, nonhierarchical, borderless linking paradigm that fuels the Web's power and potential. Trillions of hyperlinks allow users to crisscross the Web's network of knowledge through nonlinear leaps from one page or object to another. If you have ever spent hours on the Web "going down a rabbit hole," i.e., following link to link in a seemingly random pattern, then you have experienced the Web's power to facilitate nonlinear connection making." Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., *Digital*, 2024, p. 80.

32. Jonassen, 1997, p. 65.

“hybrid” jobs and virtual work groups, getting used to the dynamics of digital communities is essential.

Digital pedagogy is particularly relevant for “a globally networked world in which knowledge is created, shared, and remixed across digital networks.” It also prepares “students to live, work, and take political action in such a world” (MLA, 2020, par. 1).

In VGC, indeed, future leaders in politics, business, and economy have the opportunity to contend with intercultural and cognitive complexity and, at the same time, deal with the ambiguity and complexity inherent in the problems they study.

Looking at the skills that can be developed thanks to global virtual classes, the instructor’s role in this realm seems to be the turning point, as intentionality and guidance in ICT-enabled learning environments are essential.

In the digital age, curriculum internationalization is not just about what students know; it’s also about what students make and do with what they know.

By engaging in dialogue and joint projects on global issues, such as human rights, environment, and peace, students can learn to appreciate diverse perspectives and experiences, thus developing intercultural competence and global citizenship.

Most real-world economic and business domains are a mix of ill-structured and well-structured problems. The human mind likes to think in straight lines, but the economic and political world does not operate in a linear fashion. We are surrounded by nonlinear phenomena that neither develop nor progress in direct or unidirectional ways. Instead, they need to be approached in a multidimensional way.³³

33. “For example, if the problem of predicting and mitigating COVID-19’s spread had been tackled only by microbiologists, we might never have understood the impacts of air travel and indoor air quality on infection rates. What’s more, if information about the problem and experimental solutions had not been shared across national borders, we might still be struggling to develop a vaccine and deal with the pandemic’s impacts on the global economy.” Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., Digital, 2024, p. 80.

For this reason, students of economic disciplines can gain interesting skills if adequately accompanied in a global virtual classroom, which is intrinsically characterized by a higher level of uncertainty. Using the web landscape, learners have to combine and recombine parts of different ideas into a complex whole and present them to various digital global learners. This form of synthetic thinking can be stimulated by divergent keyword searches, serendipitous discovery, and multimedia sharing.³⁴

In today's interconnected world, many economic challenges have a local and global component. As such, they are too complex for any single person, group, discipline, or institution to understand or to solve by themselves. Social Science students engaged in global virtual classrooms can generate synergetic learning and knowledge production outcomes, taking advantage of the many "places" that are part of the virtual community. Thanks to the interactions with other students located in other parts of the world, participants can easily connect with the "world's knowledge and learning 'ecosystem'",³⁵ sharing ideas that are needed in other parts of the system and gaining new insights. The diverse and distant others interacting in a VGC can help students look at things differently, collect new ideas, and collaboratively construct new knowledge across borders.

Practitioners can leverage the unique virtual global classroom to help students bridge their physical and online places through activities that invite students to share objects in their physical environment with the group.³⁶ Rather than seeing the physical distance between students as a barrier, instructors may leverage this geographical separation as an occasion for performance, as a stage for participants to construct an imagined community based on possibility and potential. This can be done through activities where students are asked to move beyond their lived realities

34. Cabrera & Cabrera, 2019.

35. Hawawini, 2011, p. 5.

36. "Yet, it is also important to be mindful of individual preferences and different perceptions toward privacy. Giving students the option to turn on their cameras and share their personal spaces without requiring them to do so will provide them with agency when developing their sense of digital place." Woodman T. C., Whatley M., C. R. Glass C. R., *Digital*, 2024, p. 80 p. 108/109.

to consider an imagined future and their roles within it or through more playful approaches, where students might construct imagined identities through avatars.

An example would be to ask students to share stories they take daily from their context, being immersed in “their place” about local economic and business context, successful business ideas and practices, as well as government policies and then recombine this knowledge in the digital environment. These kinds of activities create open-ended discussions and encourage personalization and storytelling that can help cultivate emerging ideas and provide opportunities for networking now and in the future.

VGCs can foster intercultural competence and global citizenship by learning how to become a global worker and which rules prevail in that setting. Working remotely has its dynamics, values, and practices, and communities have to be developed specifically for that context.

Learning how to interact online with global peers and with authorities is essential: how to conduct a work project with participants spread throughout the world and with different time zones and daily habits; how to rely on English as a working language used in many ways and with different accents, and learn to simplify the vocabulary so to help non-native English speakers in understanding the debate and feeling comfortable to contribute; how to conduct a business meeting online, give feedback, opinions, know when to interrupt, and how to create space for everyone to express their opinion; learn to master the technology and be able to add features cooperating with software developers that can facilitate digital global meetings.

Virtual work implies a new kind of manager, who has to create a virtual community and contrast the feeling of isolation and demotivation that can easily be connected with distance working. New leadership techniques have to be developed, especially when the participants come from different cultural settings. In global virtual classrooms, different interaction styles can be present; how participants conceive and promote power distance, individual expression, assertive behavior, and reaction

to uncertainty can vary deeply. The lack of non-verbal clues and spontaneous interactions complicates the picture in online communication. Small misunderstandings can be amplified and cause barriers to effective intercultural communication. Non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and tone of voice, can help convey emotions, intentions, and feedback. However, these cues may be missing, distorted, or misinterpreted in a virtual setting. For example, a smile can mean different things in different cultures, such as happiness, politeness, or embarrassment. Without seeing the person's face, it may be hard to understand the meaning behind the smile.

Students attending VGCs can observe the instructor's method for creating and maintaining a shared third space, promoting diverse opinions and identity development, creating synergies among diverse perspectives, and seeing what works better in that environment.

Getting used to the complexity and ambiguity of that environment requires students to develop self-confidence and self-knowledge; both qualities are essential for tomorrow's business and political leaders.

Conclusions

As we have seen throughout this text, one of the main benefits of virtual global classrooms is the ability to promote intercultural understanding. A social science student increasingly needs to master this skill, given that it is likely that during their career they will be confronted with cultural diversity, both inside and outside their company or nation.

Yet, in Virtual Global Classrooms, as with any kind of internationalization of curricula, there is the risk of allowing students "to remain comfortably situated on the veranda [as voyeurs]"³⁷ without promoting genuine connection and reciprocity.

This could also fail one of the main advantages of this tool, the promotion of equal participation. The notion of a digital Third Space has indeed been criticized by authors like Potter and McDougall, who un-

37. Ogden 2008, p. 50.

derlined how its supporters ignore “the material circumstances, ... the economic imperatives of screen ownership or the political engagements in the (re)production and (re)-imagining of the world onscreen”.³⁸

We should then always consider that interlocal students may live and learn in different environments where under-resourced, inequitable, unjust, and/or colonialist national and international frameworks can influence their perspectives and access to necessary technology. This can be particularly true in partnerships that involve Global North and Global South, but also in more urban or rural contexts in light of existing power relations or patterns of cultural dependency.

That is why, as we have tried to demonstrate in this paper, VGCs require careful design, implementation, and evaluation to ensure that they meet the needs and expectations of all learners. Facilitators have to be trained to address such issues within the digital environment to provide a safe and supportive place for all participants.

To avoid any form of virtual voyeurism, digital ICTs can open up a Third Space within which teachers can address postcolonial hierarchies and asymmetrical relations of domination that also exist in that environment: for example, selecting discussion topics that are aware of hegemonic structures and the different intellectual, emotional, and socio-cultural positionings of Global South-North students.

Making VGC really inclusive also requires attentive technology work. International institutions will need to partner with tech developers to build platforms tailored to their needs and that promote deeper communication for international exchange. This way, virtual global interaction can be not just a “poor man’s substitute”³⁹ but foster virtual exchange experiences in transformed ways.

38. Potter and McDougall (2017), p. 44.

39. *Ibidem*, p. 140.

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About the author

Paola Cascinelli is the director of the Italian branch of a North American university and teaches organizational behavior in multicultural contexts. Her purpose is to empower the young generation for a global marketplace, creating opportunities to experience the local context and create intercultural connections. To this end, she has been involved in research, planning, and management of training for personal, social, and organizational development. Since the beginning of her career, her belief in the value of the interaction between theoretical debate and professional life has brought Paola to undertake independent research, write articles, and participate in academic conferences. Her work has been published in national and international journals.

Humanities Studies as a Cultural Tourism Accelerator

Spyridon St. Kogkas

Abstract:

Approaching the field of Humanities Studies as an accelerator for the Cultural Tourism means to identify the beyond academy pivotal dissemination of its values in international society and economy through different levels of function.

Keywords: Humanities, Tourism, Social Economy, Education, Cosmopolitanism.

Introduction

Cultural tourism stands as a pivotal bridge connecting people across the globe through the exploration and appreciation of diverse cultures, traditions, and heritage. At its core, cultural tourism offers an immersive experience, allowing travelers to delve into the rich tapestry of human history and creativity. However, what often remains unnoticed is the profound influence of humanities studies in shaping and amplifying this experience.

Encompassing disciplines such as history, literature, art, philosophy, and anthropology, the humanities serve as the cornerstone of cultural understanding and interpretation. It is through the lens of these academic fields that we gain insights into the intricacies of human expression, societal evolution, and collective identity. As such, the integration of humanities studies into cultural tourism not only enriches the visitors' experiences but also fosters a deeper appreciation and respect for the cultural heritage of destinations worldwide.

In this short article, I would like to delve into the symbiotic relationship between humanities studies and cultural tourism, exploring how the former act as a catalyst for the latter's growth and development. Through case studies, analysis, and reflection, one can unravel the manifold ways

in which humanities scholarship fuels the engine of cultural tourism, thus transforming it from a mere excursion into an enriching journey of discovery and understanding.

The interplay between humanities and cultural tourism

The interplay between humanities studies and cultural tourism is multifaceted and profound. Humanities disciplines serve as the intellectual foundation upon which cultural tourism experiences are built, providing essential context, interpretation, and meaning to the destinations and artifacts visited by travelers.

Consider, for instance, a visit to a historical landmark such as the Colosseum in Rome. While its imposing structure may capture the eye, it is the knowledge gleaned from historical studies that imbues the site with meaning and relevance. Understanding the political, social, and cultural contexts of ancient Rome enhances the visitors' appreciation for the Colosseum as more than just a marvel of engineering but as a symbol of power, entertainment, and societal values of its time.

Likewise, humanities studies enrich cultural tourism experiences by offering insights into the literary and artistic traditions of any given destination. A stroll through the streets of Paris becomes a literary pilgrimage as one retraces the steps of Hemingway or follows in the footsteps of Proust. Museums and galleries become windows into the creative souls of civilizations – past and present – inviting visitors to engage with masterpieces of literature, painting, sculpture, and music in meaningful ways.

Moreover, humanities studies foster cross-cultural understanding and dialogue, which are essential components of responsible and sustainable cultural tourism. Through the exploration of diverse narratives, perspectives, and voices, travelers gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of the human experience, while challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy and respect for cultural diversity.

In essence, humanities studies serve as the guiding light that illuminates the path of cultural tourism, turning mere sightseeing into a trans-

formative journey of discovery and enlightenment. As we delve deeper into the nexus of humanities and cultural tourism, we uncover a wealth of opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and enrichment that promise to shape the future of travel and exploration.

Case studies: examples of successful integration

Several destinations and initiatives around the world exemplify the successful integration of humanities studies into cultural tourism; as such, they showcase the transformative power of interdisciplinary collaboration and scholarship.

One compelling example is the Louvre Museum in Paris, often hailed as a pinnacle of art and culture. Beyond its vast collection of masterpieces, the Louvre offers visitors curated experiences that delve into the historical, philosophical, and artistic contexts of its exhibits. Through guided tours, educational programs, and multimedia resources, visitors are invited to explore the stories behind the artworks, gaining insights into the social, political, and cultural landscapes of the times when they were created.

Similarly, the city of Florence stands as a testament to the symbiotic relationship between humanities studies and cultural tourism. Home to iconic landmarks such as the Uffizi Gallery and the Duomo, each year Florence attracts millions of visitors, eager to immerse themselves in the Renaissance heritage of the city. Here, humanities scholarship comes alive as visitors trace the footsteps of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Botticelli, encountering their works not merely as aesthetic marvels but as embodiments of the intellectual and artistic ideals of their era.

Furthermore, initiatives such as literary walking tours, historical reenactments, and heritage preservation projects serve to enrich cultural tourism experiences by integrating humanities expertise into the fabric of destination management. Whether it's exploring the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu with a knowledgeable guide or participating in a traditional tea ceremony in Kyoto, travelers benefit from the depth and authenticity that humanities studies bring to their encounters with cultural heritage.

These case studies underscore the transformative potential of the humanities in elevating cultural tourism from a superficial encounter to a profound exploration of human creativity, ingenuity, and resilience. By embracing interdisciplinary collaboration and investing in educational and interpretive resources, destinations can unlock new dimensions of cultural tourism that inspire, educate, and enrich the lives of travelers around the globe.

Interregional bridging of European cities through humanities studies projects

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the role that humanities studies play in fostering connections and collaboration between European cities, transcending national borders and cultural divides. Through interdisciplinary projects and initiatives, cities across Europe have forged meaningful partnerships centered around the exploration and celebration of their shared cultural heritage.

One notable example is the European Capitals of Culture program, which aims to highlight the cultural diversity and richness of European cities through a year-long series of events, exhibitions, and performances. By showcasing the cultural heritage of different cities and regions, this initiative promotes cross-cultural dialogue and exchange, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among Europeans.

Moreover, collaborative research projects in the humanities have emerged as powerful tools for bridging the gaps between European cities and regions. Through joint research initiatives, scholars from diverse disciplines come together to explore common themes, issues, and historical narratives, shedding light on the interconnectedness of European societies and cultures.

For example, projects focusing on topics such as migration, identity, and memory bring together researchers from multiple European cities to examine how these phenomena have shaped the collective experience of Europeans across time and space. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, these projects not only generate new insights and perspectives

but also strengthen the bonds of cooperation and understanding between European cities.

Furthermore, cultural institutions such as museums, libraries, and archives play a vital role in facilitating interregional bridging through humanities studies projects. By digitizing and sharing their collections online, these institutions make cultural heritage more accessible to people across Europe, fostering a sense of shared ownership and stewardship of Europe's cultural legacy.

In essence, humanities studies projects serve as catalysts for interregional bridging, bringing together European cities and regions in a spirit of collaboration, exchange, and mutual enrichment. By recognizing the interconnectedness of European cultures and histories, these projects contribute to the building of a more cohesive and inclusive Europe, grounded in a shared appreciation of its diverse cultural heritage.

Challenges and opportunities

While the integration of humanities studies into cultural tourism offers immense potential for enriching visitor experiences and fostering cross-cultural understanding, it is not without its challenges.

One of the primary challenges is the preservation of cultural heritage in the face of mass tourism. As destinations become increasingly popular among travelers, the pressure to accommodate large numbers of visitors while safeguarding fragile monuments, sites, and traditions mounts. Balancing the demands of tourism with the imperative of conservation requires careful planning, investment, and collaboration between stakeholders, including local communities, government authorities, and tourism industry players.

Furthermore, the commodification of culture poses ethical dilemmas for cultural tourism. As destinations seek to capitalize on their heritage to attract visitors, there is a risk of reducing cultural artifacts and traditions to mere commodities, devoid of their intrinsic value and significance. This commercialization can lead to the homogenization of cultural experiences, eroding the authenticity and diversity that make

each destination unique.

Accessibility is another challenge facing the integration of humanities studies into cultural tourism. High entry fees, language barriers, and inadequate infrastructure can exclude certain groups of travelers from fully engaging with cultural heritage sites and experiences. Addressing these barriers requires a concerted effort to make cultural tourism more inclusive and accessible to people of all backgrounds and abilities.

Despite these challenges, there are also significant opportunities for furthering the integration of humanities studies into cultural tourism. Advances in technology, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive multimedia, offer innovative ways to enhance visitor engagement and understanding of cultural heritage. By leveraging these tools, destinations can create immersive and educational experiences that appeal to a diverse range of travelers.

Moreover, the growing interest in sustainable and responsible tourism presents an opportunity to rethink the relationship between humanities studies and cultural tourism. By prioritizing authenticity, community engagement, and environmental stewardship, destinations can create tourism experiences that not only enrich the lives of visitors but also contribute to the preservation and celebration of cultural heritage for future generations.

In conclusion, while there are challenges to overcome, the integration of humanities studies into cultural tourism holds great promise for fostering meaningful connections between people and cultures. By addressing issues of preservation, commodification, accessibility, and sustainability, destinations can unlock the full potential of cultural tourism as a force for positive change and mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

About the author

Spyros-Stefanos Kogkas studied Sociology and Economic theories at the University of Bristol.

He is a consultant for European Cultural Heritage and Education.

With the European project Digital Humanitas Learning, in 2013, he designed for the first time in Greece digital educational products at the level of higher education, the first entitled: "The symbolism of the journey to the West, from Homer's Odyssey to Dante's Divine Comedy" and the second one "The City of Rome as a Concept in European Art".

He is the co-founder and director of the non-profit organization Imagine Heritage which is active in Europe in the fields of Culture and Education. He is the founder and director of the Pan-European consortium "Heritage Future", which consists of organizations for Culture and Education from ten European countries, and Representative in Greece of the European Cultural Center based in Venice specializing in Art and Education.

In addition, he is the coordinator at the European level of the World organization for education Edheroes, leader of the newly established Edheroes Greece Hub.

Editor-in-chief and co-editor of the international digital space "Thrausma", a Science, Art and Philosophy project with an emphasis on Artificial Intelligence and Deep learning.

A writer on European Cultural Identity and its institutions, this year he is publishing his work "The European Heritage Contract: Turning our Symbolic Bonds in Republican Institutions".

Awe

Faculty-led Trips Yield a New Body of Work

Rick Love

A word from the editor

As quoted by William Blake in this article, *"I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create"*, we, as editors of Beyond, decided to apply this idea to the following submission by Rick Love by breaking our standard style guides and allowing the article to be published how the author envisioned it. In other words, we also went out of our comfort zone and beyond – that is, beyond the rigid standards of an academic publication as well as beyond the layout grids, fonts, and styles set for each page of this journal.

Personally, I've always had a keen fondness for editorial design. As a graphic designer myself, I treat the blank page as a canvas on which to communicate words and images. In fact, as designers, we establish the grids, baselines, margins, typefaces, and line spacings before we start to fill the page with its content. All this becomes a sort of graphic "enslavement" against which Blake rebelled. This is exactly how art evolves; rules are broken to make room for expression, often leaving the beholder in awe.

With this decision, we hope the reader can visually appreciate the very AWE Rick Love has portrayed, not only with his words, but also through his artistic vision.

Nina Peci, co-editor, Beyond

AWE





CHANGE

ChangelItalia

USD	1.1139
GBP	0.9169
CHF	1.0143
YEN	168.90
AUD	1.7700

VISA

VISA

C



The Temple of Venus and Roma was built by Emperor Hadrian in 135-138 ce. It is one of the largest temples built in Rome, located just steps from the Colosseum. Photo Credit Rick Love. ©RAWWAR, LLC 2023.

The dome of Santa Maria del Fiore has 4 million bricks. Filippo Brunelleschi, the architect of the dome, designed special shapes of bricks that create a herring bone pattern increasing their strength and reducing weight. Photo Credit Rick Love. ©RAWWAR, LLC 2023.





Every year about 1,252,508 people visit the Accademia, in Florence, Italy, to see Michelangelo's 'David'. Photo Credit Rick Love. ©RAWWAR, LLC 2023.

AWE

noun:

a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder.

“Art can never exist without naked beauty displayed.” William Blake

FACULTY-LED TRIPS YIELD A NEW BODY OF WORK.

WHY

I went to Italy to capture awe. Why Italy? Because Italy offers up awe on a platter, over and over again. Why capture awe? Because the joy that exudes from someone's face when they have seen Venice, the Colosseum or the David for the first time is priceless. But it is fleeting! I went to Italy to see if I could capture it!

I first glimpsed this awe on a series of faculty led trips to Italy. I witnessed it year after year, trip after trip; the emotions that bubbled up out of my students' bodies when they experienced Europe for the first time. It was especially apparent in Venice. As first-time visitors, arriving in Venice by train and having Venice thrust in front of them, a first glimpse of joy exudes from their faces, a look that is forever etched in my memory.

I remember my first visit to Venice, exiting Venezia Santa Lucia and seeing Venice before me, as if transported by a time machine back a thousand years. I distinctly remember thinking “Wait! What?”. My brain and body were in shock, and it took a hot minute to get my bearings. I was forced to face the Grand Canal and the myriad of watercraft going in all directions and ‘palazzos’ thrusting up out of the water. I was experiencing the physicality of awe. This cannot be explained in words, it can only be experienced. I immediately understood why artists over the ages were drawn to Venice. I thought of Turner and his Grand Canal painting and Canaletto's voracious output, not to mention Thomas Mann's Death in Venice. I realized Venice is not a cliché, it is Venice and its allure is infectious.

It turns out that there are eight types of awe:

- **moral beauty**
- **collective effervescence**
- **nature**
- **music**



- **visual design, art, architecture**
- **spirituality, mysticism, religion**
- **life and death**
- **epiphany**

When my son was a senior in high school, I brought him on one of these faculty led trips and took the opportunity to try and get a picture of his first moments in Venice. Alas, my reflexes were too slow, my iPhone let me down, and I missed the moment. That was four and half years ago, but the idea stuck with me. I decided to make the pursuit of awe a formal project. I put it on the calendar. I booked the flight. I secured accommodations. I started voraciously practicing photographing fleeting moments.

HOW

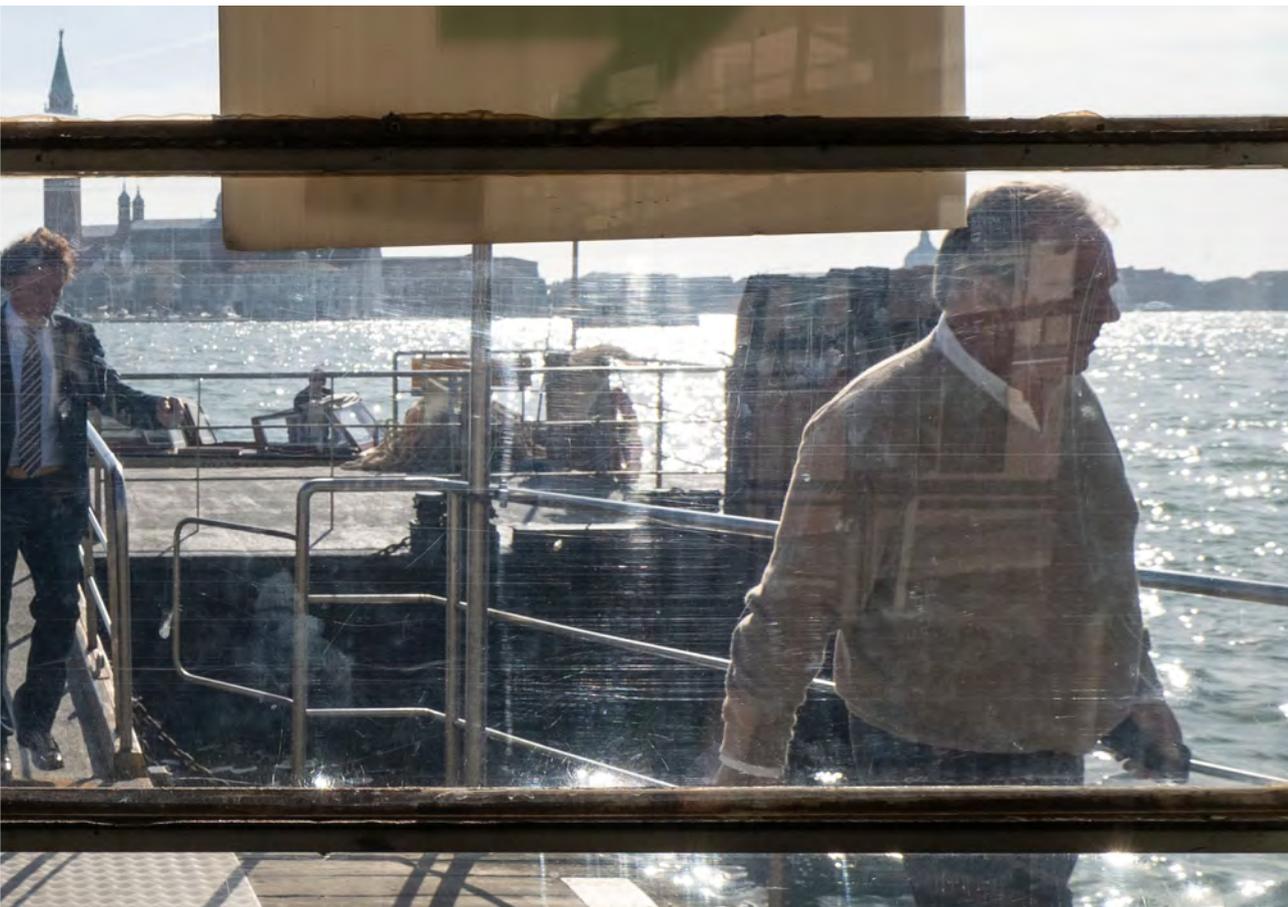
I knew from previous artistic endeavors that I should do two things:

1. Practice, practice, practice! This took the form of me buying lenses and testing them out on daily walks with my wife and dog and the occasional neighbor. I had to acquire a new skill. I needed to nail focus and capture the moment with large telephoto lenses (some of them being manual focus), all without a tripod. I figured if I can do this at home it will translate in Italy.
2. Be open to something happening that I hadn't prepared for. Allow a mystery to show up once I am in Italy. Or as Chris Voss says in his book *Never Split the Difference*, and I am paraphrasing "don't be so sure you know what you want that you wouldn't take something better." This usually comes in a form and time frame you don't see coming. You cannot anticipate or predict this inspiration. It's in the throes of the work that this mystery unfolds. I purposefully allowed some space for this to happen.

I was eager to get to Venezia Santa Lucia and take my first frames. With two camera bodies and six lenses stuffed in my carry on, I landed in Venice. It was late October, rain had unleashed on the Veneto, and I had forgotten my umbrella. I gladly slunk below deck on the water taxi and headed for the Rialto. I dodged gusts of wind and rain, found my monastery, dropped off my gear, grabbed the Olympus and the 50-200mm and headed out to buy an umbrella. It was Ognissanti and it seemed like all of Europe was in Venice for a fall break. The fates were on my side, I knew I wouldn't be lacking in opportunities to photograph AWE.

I turned my last corner, gazed at the dome San Simeone and headed to the Grand Canal. I found a seemingly endless flow of multicolored umbrellas stretching from the Scalzì bridge to the train station. With my new red umbrella perched above my baseball cap (my attempt to hide in plain sight as a tourist), I dove into the pulsing river of people.

VENICE ROME FLORENCE









“I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create.” William Blake

I enacted my plan.

WHAT

In preparing for this project, I was hyper focused on Venice and Rome. I knew from past experiences with my students that Venezia Santa Lucia and the Colosseum Metro would serve up many opportunities. The sheer number of people passing through these locations increased my odds of capturing the moments.

I was prepared to fail. I was prepared to regroup and do it again. I figured I might need different camera gear. I might need a new strategy. What if I missed the moments? What if three weeks wasn't enough time? What if I got rained out? I was prepared to do whatever it took to pull it off. I braced myself for this trip to be just a practice run, a scouting mission of sorts. To my surprise this mild question mark of possible success dissolved after that first session at Venezia Santa Lucia. The pouring rain seemed to add a spark to each newcomer flowing out of the station.

Rome and Florence were next, and the AWE just kept coming. Before I knew it, I had filled a 1TB drive. I settled down in Florence, my last stop on the AWE journey. I had time to reflect on what had just unfolded. I also had some time to try some locations not on the pre-planned shot list. Surrounded by books at my extremely homey Airbnb, I reflected on how almost two decades of faculty-led trips had led to this moment, this project and its almost immediate successes, tied up in 20 years of haunting Italy. I had so many good pics I couldn't quite believe my good fortune. Looking back two decades I saw how gradually the fates were leading me to this moment; this project. I found myself grateful to all the students and colleagues who had signed up for adventure in Europe with me! Without them these pics you see here would not have happened!

HOME

AWE is a big project...now back in my studio I am on the precipice of launching AWE into the world. Frames are being designed and need to be made. Potential books are being laid out. Studio visits need to be lined up. Life size images hang on the walls, calling out to live in the world.

About the Author

Rick Love works as a full-time artist; his studio (RAWWAR, LLC) is in Saint Paul, MN (www.ricklove.com). He is currently the Collaborative Dean of Arts and Humanities at www.campusedu.com. Before that he was an associate professor of Art & Design at the University of Northwestern in Saint Paul, MN, where he served as both a faculty member, chair of the Art & Design department and faculty president.



There are eight different types of AWE:

MORAL BEAUTY

COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE

NATURE

MUSIC

ART, ARCHITECTURE

SPIRITUALITY, MYSTICISM

RELIGION

LIFE AND DEATH

EPIPHANY



CASH WATER CO

Exit stairs are on the left side of the platform, a two minutes walk, go to the subway down to the left down the stairs with the ticket.





Each day 819,421 people use the Rome Metro, many of them exiting at the Colosseo Metro stop. Photo Credit Rick Love. ©RAWWAR, LLC 2023.









administrators

Not Only in Chianti

Verdiana Garau

Introduction

Foreign students attending study abroad programs in Italy for an academic term should also explore the not so obvious destinations. Paradoxically, while the number of international students grows (and Italy stands out as their favorite European country), the number of places they visit tends to decrease. It is becoming increasingly rare for those students to explore new sites on their own and — so to speak — go off the beaten path. In this regard, the routes taken by US students while abroad (especially when traveling with large groups of peers) are becoming overtly commercial and, consequently, predictable. This article tries to highlight some short, simple, and yet not so obvious trips in one of the regions that US undergraduates like best when it comes to studying abroad – Tuscany – as well as the pride the local inhabitants take in preserving its terroir and traditions.

Go to your Google Maps, type “Valdarno”, tap on it then jump in your car and take a drive from Florence along the Strada Setteponti, “Seven Bridges Road”. Stop a little further and from the hills of Cavriglia, Montevarchi or Figline Valdarno look ahead and gaze at the Pratomagno, those magnificent mountains of the Appennino, which divide Tuscany from the Emilia Romagna region. Alternatively, if you are already traveling in Chianti, continue and follow the road along the Chiantigiana route towards North-East. Either way, you might spot a particular and unique physical conformation of the valley standing before you: the Valdarno, literally Valley of the River Arno.

Not everyone may know that, up to a hundred thousand years ago, the Valdarno was a lake. To recount the geological history of this corner of Tuscany, we must go back around 5 million years ago. At the end of



Trekking in Valdambra Rapale.



Cycling in Le Balze.

the Pliocene era, when the humanization process of the Earth began, the Apennine ridge of the Pratomagno and the Chianti mountains had already formed. Between the two mountainous reliefs, a depression was created. Surface runoff water, unable to flow away, formed a large lake.

It was located in the area near the Chianti mountains and extended to where the Arno riverbed is now. During that period, the climate was much warmer and more humid. Dense vegetation grew along its shores, which were inhabited by large mastodons and tapirs. Plant deposits, along with animal carcasses that ended up in the basin and the clay acting as insulation, initiated the formation of fossil coal. After millions of years, it would become Italy's largest lignite deposit. It was the Castelnuovo dei Sabbioni deposit, exploited until the early 1990s.

Later on, the Valdarno territory underwent further lowering, lead-

ing to the formation of a new basin larger and deeper than the previous one. It extended from Laterina to Rignano sull'Arno and from the Chianti Mountains to the Pratomagno. The Valdarno was a lake that measured 40 kilometers in length and 10 in width. The various watercourses descending into the valley (carrying clay, sand, and later coarser materials such as gravel and pebbles) caused the lake to fill, thus leading to the formation of a new large plain. The climate became less warm and more temperate. The new environmental conditions favored the extinction of the previous fauna and the arrival of animals typical of the tropical forest such as elephants, hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses, and monkeys.

Today, at the Paleontological Museum of Montevarchi (a small town located in the Valdarno only 45 km from Florence), a skeleton of a large mammoth – the most important in Italy of its kind – can be seen. Among the various findings are the remains of saber-toothed tigers, masterpiece and symbol of the museum itself, cheetahs, giant hyenas, and many other fascinating finds.

Only about a hundred thousand years ago, the Valdarno lake ceased to exist definitively. There was a rupture of the earth's crust in the area of Incisa Valdarno (from which its name derives, as Incisa literally means "cut") due to seismic activity that caused the outflow of water. Thus, a network of watercourses was created, flowing from the highlands into a large river downstream: the Arno, that beautiful river millions of people today know very well, being the lifeblood stream of Florence.

Billions of tons of mud and clay material were removed from the center of the lake. This led to the formation of small valleys, hills and hills, creating a more varied landscape than before. The new habitat favored the extinction of large tropical mammals that no longer found ideal living conditions. The erosive activity of the waters caused the formation of the Balze del Valdarno in the stratified bottoms of this valley, which is an immensely attractive touristic area today.

It is whispered that Leonardo da Vinci was the first to realize that the Valdarno was a lake. His notes in the Hammer codex testify to this. In those notes, he perfectly describes the area and he was so impressed by

those eroded hills, Le Balze, that he depicted them in the landscape of the Mona Lisa.

The lacustrine origin of the Arno valley has made it one of the most fertile lands in Italy. This was recognized as far back as the time of the great Roman historian Titus Livy and still today great wines and olive oil are there produced.

All this demonstrates that the Valdarno Superiore or Valdarno di Sopra (upper Valdarno) has a very fascinating history that deserves to be known and appreciated more. You have undoubtedly heard of Chianti many times, but quite possibly most of you have never heard of the Valdarno. So, if you visit this area, its hills, its valleys, and especially its cliffs, remember that you are not facing simple solidified clay reliefs but rather a still tangible cross-section of Tuscany's geological history filled with fascinating history.

The Valdarno Superiore has been a crossroads of historical and political turnovers since medieval times. Today it is a very well-known productive area for both technology and fashion industries, like PRADA. Despite this, it has managed to preserve its magnificent nature, along with its traditions and the eno-gastronomic peculiarities associated with this splendid territory.

Many of its cities have been built by the Florentine Republic such as Castelfranco di Sopra, Terranuova Bracciolini and San Giovanni Valdarno. They were all conceived with the same layout: parallel streets, a central square with a main church or cathedral and defensive walls. They have given birth to illustrious masters, like Masaccio (the famous painter), who was born in San Giovanni Valdarno, or Poggio Bracciolini, great humanist and historian, after whom Terranuova was named.

You can drive along the provincial roads up into the hills or take a footpath to discover unique medieval churches or mineral water springs. You can swim in the cool waters of natural waterfalls, or take your bike and follow the circuits of great cyclists and eventually get lost elsewhere among beautiful vineyards and olive groves.

This unique territory, located only 40 kilometers away from Flor-

ence, roughly 30 minutes by train, must thank its industrious and attentive inhabitants who do their best to care for their own land and precious history. Among them, Nicola Benini, current mayor of Bucine, stands out together with Enzo Brogi, former mayor of Cavriglia, and Costantino Cattaneo, young entrepreneur who left Milan to change his lifestyle, but above all, to breathe new life into the Valdarno territory by betting on smart investments.

We managed to entertain ourselves with all of them. Here are some excerpts from these interviews:

Nicola Benini

Nicola Benini was elected mayor of Bucine in 2019. Bucine is a lovely town located in Valdambra, the little valley of the Ambra river which includes a quite widespread area where many other pretty villages are situated. He's the main promoter of the project VisitValdarno.

A few months after his election, COVID broke out. It soon became particularly violent in the municipality of Bucine. During the year and a half of lockdown he began to dream of the future and study a new tourist project in the hopes that sooner or later everything would return to normal and perhaps even better:

“The VisitValdarno project involves eight municipalities in the Valdarno: Bucine, Cavriglia, Castelfranco Piandiscò, Laterina Pergine Valdarno, Loro Ciuffenna, Montevarchi, San Giovanni Valdarno and Terranuova Bracciolini.

We wanted to make ourselves known, without focusing on just tourism. Our goal from the beginning was above all to find the right key to developing within our communities the awareness of those who live here.

The main problem that we became aware of is that the general cultural impoverishment has consequently led the citizens to distance themselves from their own roots. The natives did not know their own history. They did not know about the museums of the Valdar-



Nicola Benini

no, the history of the Balze, the history of the Tower of Galatrona and the Pieve di Gropina, which is a medieval jewel next to Loro Ciuffenna.

So, we started collaborating with tour operators – activities that we are still carrying out – on Enogastronomy and culture, which led to involving all trade associations.

We can now proudly say that, as a result, a network of companies was born, initially made up of ten companies that came together collaborating with the public entity and the tourism sector for the commercialization of the territory.

Last but not least, we created the CLOSE TO HOME program to involve our young people, who are the real protagonists of this whole process. In this regard, by including students from various high schools in the studies program, from scientific to linguistic, to graphic advertising, we have launched this initiative.

The project came out as a surprise. It wasn't just "talking about tourism". Thanks to our collaborators from DEDE (Destination Design, a network of business created to combine functions of destination marketing and management), the students were able to create a real advertising agency by working together and doing teamwork.

This allowed them not only to learn while having fun but also to understand the value of what they study every morning in school, which until the day before might have seemed useless and boring.

Tourism was ultimately the pretext that became an accessory to creating something of real value. This nourished and enhanced the personalities of each student, our citizens of tomorrow, who now finally know their territories inside out.

And we did not stop here. There is a large and very old olive tree in a little district of Bucine's municipality, more precisely in Montebenichi: thanks to our project, it is now listed in the repertoire of autochthonous cultivars. It has been scientifically proven that it is a native plant of Valdambra. Forty genotypes have been studied and reproduced in a nursery, all of which have been planted in the sorting field.

The "Montebenichi Olivone", located just below the town, was officially confirmed through genetic investigations in collaboration with the CNR (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche - National Research Council) of Florence. There are four other cultivars on the list that could have autochthonous characteristics.

We stumbled upon this treasure somewhat by chance. The olive tree had fallen ill; it's over three hundred years old. So, by calling the CNR to come and conduct tests, thanks to the studies and treatments the plant underwent, it was noticed that this olive tree did not have the same leaves and flowering as other olives in that area. Generally, in Tuscany, there are four or five types of cultivars in the various olive-growing areas. However, with each trip the CNR made to the Montebenichi Olivone, researchers began to notice that the olive trees in our area exhibited a huge variety, with up to for-

ty different species. Perhaps this is due to the presence of an ancient abbey whose monks skillfully, over time, through grafting and crosses, contributed to this varied landscape.

At this point, specialists from the CNR decided to delve into the matter. So, we asked all the growers to start reporting if they had any strange or ancient plants in their fields or ones that did not fit exactly into the norms.

From this data collection, a scientific research project was launched. The cultivars were reproduced in a specialized nursery in Pescia and replanted in the sorting field. This also allows us to constantly have updated data on the performances of the various types of olive trees and their resistance to various climatic effects or pathogens.

The Olivone now has also been reproduced and even multiplied, in the hope of producing a monocultivar! Experts say that the blend is the best oil, but the charm of the unique monocultivar in the world exists only in Bucine.

Later, we participated in calls for innovation, with the aim of building an innovative mill to produce our own olive oil. Our mill is already active and has some unique elements. For example, in the phase of separation between the leaves and the olives, all the parts destined for oil can already be used for other sectors, such as cosmetics.

The mill has been entrusted to a network of companies, eight companies specifically, so that the entrepreneurial realities of the territory can collaborate with each other, and the activity is not the prerogative of a single entrepreneur. The mill is open for visitors, tastings and lunches highlighting only local oils.

Every year, companies produce their crushings, keep them separate, and then these are submitted to the expert's opinion, Professor Parenti, who tastes them and selects the best ones. With the best crushings, the blend is produced and sold as *Olio Nostrum*."

Enzo Brogi

Enzo Brogi was born in 1952 in Loro Ciuffenna and is the former mayor of Cavriglia. He began his involvement in cultural and political activities at a very young age, joining Lotta Continua. In 1973, he started working at the ENEL (Ente Nazionale Energia Elettrica) lignite power plant, which used the same lignite deposits we mentioned above. He was elected municipal councilor in Cavriglia and in 1991 he became mayor, a position he held until 2004.

“This is a land of struggle”, he says. “But of many satisfactions also. When we say *struggle* we talk about the reopening of the coal mines, because they had been closed at some point and by occupying them, staying inside the tunnels, miners fought to get their jobs back. Their women contributed too: they organized a presence in San Giovanni Valdarno to which people from all over the Valdarno, but not only, came to bring food and money to the miners so they could continue their strike. Many were volunteers.

In this area, journalists and politicians suddenly began to gather: Pietro Nenni and Enrico Berlinguer, a young leader at the time and secretary of the Communist Youth Federation, arrived along with Giuseppe Di Vittorio, historic secretary of the CGIL labor union and one of the greatest personalities of the country.

Lignite began to surface in the area of Castelnuovo dei Sabbioni and Santa Barbara at the beginning of the last century, and by surfacing that ignited with the air, it created sulfurous emissions, which even Grand Duke Leopold (1797-1870) spoke about, saying that these outflows negatively affected the wine, giving it a bad burnt taste.

That is how the locals began to use this kind of fossil as domestic fuel. Lignite is a relatively young coal, four or five million years old, not like coke coal, which is 15 to 18 million years old.

Only later mines were opened, turning this area in a small Wild West to which people came from everywhere, a kind of Eldorado for seeking coal. The mines were many, and so were the small mining

owners who were born here.

The business was huge and entrepreneurs began to join consortia. This is why MIVA, Mines of Valdarno and the Lignites of Valdarno started, as well as projects that became increasingly larger until the 1920s, when there were about four or five thousand miners at work. From all over the Valdarno, these miners who woke up at dawn

walked to Caviglia to stay there from Monday to Saturday and return home on Sunday. They dug in the tunnels.

Consequently, the first workers' associations were born here. The life of the miner was hard, a life of hardships. All men crowded into these dark galleries to dig coal.

Farmers and shepherds, or small local industries, such as hat makers, certainly fared better.

When the Italian Communist Party was established in 1921, very strong communist cells arose in Caviglia. One particular event is worth mentioning, a bloody event: it marked the beginning of Fascism, and this event indeed caused the scattering of the union aggregation.

It was in Caviglia that the eight-hour workday was obtained for the first time. Struggles and trade union actions in this area were truly powerful.

It is also worth mentioning that back in 1917, a small but important thermoelectric power plant was established, powered by fossil fuels, which operated until the end of Fascism. It was the first power plant that brought electricity to Florence. When the gas lamps were removed from the Lungarno to put light bulbs in, that electricity came from here, from the Santa Barbara plant.



Enzo Brogi

During Fascism, the mines continued to work, and Mussolini came from time to time to visit the miners.

However, the plant was bombed in 1944 and in Castelnuovo dei Sabbioni, especially in Meleto, there was a Nazi roundup comparable to that of Sant'Anna di Stazzema or Marzabotto. In July '44, the Germans killed everyone they saw passing by. It was a massacre. Two hundred people died in just one day.

Right after WWII lignite began to become of little interest. This caused local discontent; work was scarce, protests were on the daily agenda. Plants were shut down. Violent protests arose. One of these worth remembering was the "mortadella strike".

Workers in the area received news from London that the conditions of their colleagues overseas were far better. One night, the miners of the Valdarno decided to strike to get something to put between the slices of bread that cost them 200 Lire a day, when they earned 700 Lire a day only. There were many workers and the managers initially rejected the request. 50 grams of mortadella each multiplied by two thousand five hundred workers made 125 kg of cold cuts a day! A crazy expense, which would have raised the selling price of the product. But the miners didn't give up and they opted for a whole month of strikes.

Suddenly they saw a load of 125 kg of mortadella down in the tunnel, arriving every day.

Despite the victory over mortadella, the sector remained in crisis.

The first cooperatives arose, like the Carpineta mine, which continued to dig. Opinions were divergent: some argued that keeping them open could be profitable, while others held the opposite opinion. These lands, grown all around the mines, seemed to have their destiny marked. At some point, the German Krupp family arrived in Cavriglia, the same family who shortly before was producing the V1s missiles that bombed London.

They converted the industry and started producing excavators instead of weapons.

Two converging ideas were born: to build a new power plant (which would then come into operation at the end of the 1950s) and to dig lignite with the excavators.

Betta 1 and Betta 2 (the two machineries that were named after Krupp's daughter Elizabeth) began to work.

Until that moment, the territory, which had remained mostly intact to the eye as the mines were nothing but underground tunnels, completely changed its appearance. Entire villages were displaced, whole communities relocated to totally new villages, and everything was built and financed by ENEL, the national power company.

Faced with these great changes, it must be said that nobody resisted anyway.

At the time, the idea of living in a new and modern house was certainly more appealing than continuing to live in old rural houses. The excavators appeared as big dinosaurs, and people said that the large reptiles of the Pliocene had returned.

Hills disappeared, valleys appeared, small mountains suddenly popped up elsewhere. It is so that in the late 1970s the project of the park started, the Parco di Cavriglia that no longer exists today. The park covered several hectares. It wasn't exactly a project based on environmental sensitivity, but a more aesthetic-oriented one, given the turmoil caused by decades of excavations. This park was dedicated, in full traditional style of the communist area, to Soviet companion Nicolaj Bujanov, who was killed in Cavriglia by the Nazis back in 1944.

The project started during the years of the Cold War, and the ties of the Italian Communist Party with the USSR were very strong at the time. Incredible donations of animals began to arrive at the park from Russia. Bisons, bears, elk, eagles, horses of very rare breeds. So, we were forced to make cages, and we were quite sorry about it. After a while, we started to worry every time the delegation arrived for a visit. 'Oh no, what will they bring us this time?'. The initial idea for the park would have been to have local cows, some chickens,

horses... but nothing, it looked like a Siberian safari! Unfortunately, when they brought us a Predjamski's horse, an Icelandic and very rare horse, we realized that the poor thing had crossed dozens of borders to get to Cavriglia and of course he was very sad. So, we asked for a female to be delivered to us. We thought it might be a good idea.

In the meantime, we had to regularly report to the embassy on the conditions of the animals. In turn, we received instructions on treatments. Initially they told us to put the mare in a neighboring enclosure, not next to the stag, so they could gradually sniff each other and become familiar.

One morning, however, we found the mare dead. The moose, apparently enraged by the heat of the mare, disemboweled her. We were simply devastated; we didn't know what to do. All we could think of was to lie on the reports to be delivered to the embassy, as we were too ashamed to say that the mare had died... Well, we kept her alive for a few more years, until the Berlin Wall fell and, believe me, that was a great sigh of relief!"

Costantino Cattaneo and the Tenuta San Jacopo

"What prompted me from a busy city like Milan to choose Valdarno instead? Well... City life was no longer for me. I studied design and grew up in the center of Europe's creativity, working for the most prestigious brands. But I also breathed the worst air, stress, and competition. Over 10 years, it all became much less fun and emptier. My family had purchased a XVIII-century estate in Cavriglia in 2003, in semi-abandoned state with the idea of making wine and providing hospitality, enjoying a project of agricultural and real estate redevelopment. They asked me to help with marketing, and from there I discovered this unknown world. I became passionate very quickly, and slowly let this thing take hold of me. The night before coming

home from work at the company, I started going around Milan promoting the wines and the oil, even though I had never dealt with sales before. In 2017, I decided I wanted to delve deeper and give a new direction to the quality of my life. So, I moved to Cavriglia. From there a new phase of my life and the company began.

I knew little about agriculture and winemaking. So, I bought all technical books and started studying hard. I am surrounded and supported by irreplaceable people like Yuri Iacopini, the enologist who joined the team as an in-house winemaker, and, with Maurizio Alongi as a consultant, we created a great working team that soon bore fruit.

Valdarno Superiore emerged as a contested territory between Florence and Siena/Arezzo, just like Chianti. The configuration of the territory, throughout history, has traced a completely different socioeconomic development. While Valdarno developed industry and manufacturing, in Chianti life remained much more rural until the English arrived in the 1980s. This led to the explosion of “Chiantishire”. But the vastly different souls of the two territories are held together by a very important common event: the edict of Cosimo III de’ Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, who in 1716 defined for the first time the boundaries of the most suitable territories in Tuscany for the production of quality wine: Pomino (now Chianti Rufina), Carmignano, Chianti (Classico) and Valdarno di Sopra. Before then, from the diaries of Sante Lancerio, the Pope’s butler in the 1500s, it emerges that among the most appreciated white wines was the Trebbiano from the Valdarno. This ancient tradition is now being enhanced by the Valdarno di Sopra consortium, which includes various wine companies, all of them organic. Fresh news: the new consortium guidelines have just been approved, which provides that the peak of quality, namely wines with the “vigna” (vineyard) designation (the so-called French crus) must be certified organic. This is a unique feature in Italy, which will probably make this small revolution much talked about.



Costantino Cattaneo

My philosophy is to continue making wines of great freshness and drinkability because that's what our terroir wants. We want to carry on the Tuscan tradition of Sangiovese in its most immediate and juicy form with Chianti and its more evolved form with *Vigna Mulino*, where we push ourselves with very long macerations in amphora, or like our Bordeaux blend (Super Tuscan) *Orma del Diavolo*. Yet we also wish to express our creative flair with more unusual wines in Tuscany like our *Caprius* made from 100% Montepulciano grapes. In the end, what truly interests me the most is the development of the territory from a human, social, and economic point of view and being part of this new renaissance in which I feel deeply involved."

From Florence to Lucca and Back

Brian Lindquist

For the students at the International Studies Institute, Florence comes to define Italy—a big city, crammed with art, spectacular buildings, and great nightlife. They will probably go to Rome but many weekends they are off to Barcelona, Paris, Prague or any other hotspots they've heard about. They are less likely to venture nearer towns and cities only a few hours away. When they do, they often feel that they have seen the 'real' Italy.

The nearest of these destinations is Lucca, about an hour's bus ride from Florence. Getting even just a glimpse of this city will intrigue you enough to want to know more about it. If you do dig deeper, you will gain an entirely new perspective on Florence, for Lucca was great while Florence was still a backwater, and it is the one city in Tuscany that Florence never conquered.

Lucca was established as a Roman colony in 180 BC. It had a strategic location, lying at the foot of the shortest pass across the Apennines to the Po valley. It was built in the traditional way, a rectangle of high stone walls oriented to the cardinal points of the compass, the streets within arranged in a strict grid. Most of the streets in the center still lie where the Romans laid them. During Julius Caesar's time, Lucca was a safe enough spot for him to choose for his meeting with Pompey and Crassus to secure their absolute power as a Triumvirate. It is about the time of this meeting that we first hear of Florence as a village for retired soldiers.

Throughout the Roman period, Lucca flourished while Florence languished. An amphitheater was built just outside the walls. In good Lucchese fashion it was never demolished or allowed to decay but was continuously adapted to other purposes. Until well after World War II it served as the central market, a real hubbub, but now is surrounded by leisurely cafés.

In 376 the Goths invaded Italy and soon wrested control of the

peninsula from the Roman emperor, who ruled from Byzantium. In 535 emperor Justinian decided to drive them out and, after fifteen years of failure, sent his seventy-three-year-old eunuch general Narses, who swept victoriously up the peninsula until he came to Lucca where he was brought to a halt. The walls must have been in good shape. Only when Narses agreed to spare the town and its inhabitants did Lucca surrender. Narses appointed the first Duke of Tuscany, who ruled from Lucca, but Byzantine dominance didn't last long. A new horde of Germans, the Lombards, swept south and in 570 captured Lucca. They would rule most of Italy until 774, when Charlemagne arrived. He created the Marquisate of Tuscany and, naturally, made Lucca its capital. The French had little to do with the administration, however; so the Lombard influence remained for centuries. We see it in the local architecture (Lombard churches still dot the city and surrounding hills), the economy (the Lucchesi had a long tradition of trading with northern Europe), and the social characteristics of restraint and resolve.

It was under the Lombards, in 742, that a remarkable wood statue called *Volto Santo* (the holy face of Christ), arrived in Lucca. It would become an object of pilgrimage in the city for centuries, filling the local coffers, and it was Lucca's symbol abroad throughout the Middle Ages—a very famous trademark. If you go, make sure to visit *Volto Santo* in the Cathedral of San Martino.

While Lucca was the capital of Tuscany, the city and its rulers became ever more powerful, so much so that in 877 Duke Adalberto sent four thousand troops to Rome, occupied the city, and imprisoned the Pope. His son, Adalberto II, warranted the epithet 'The Rich.' When the Holy Roman Emperor visited him in 901, he was irritated by the grandeur of Adalberto's court, considering it more appropriate for himself than one of his vassals. When Adalberto died, his redoubtable wife Berta assumed rule of Lucca and Tuscany. Their tomb slabs are still in the cathedral, where you can read of their glories, which are impressive. Adalberto gave "sight to the blind, pity to the widows, feet to the lame, clothing to the naked." He was the terror of foreign peoples and was known to the ends of the

earth. When Berta died in 925 it was written that “All of Europe bemoans their loss. All France is in tears, as is Corsica, Sardinia, Greece, and Italy.”

Such glory would, of course, be challenged. With the turn of the millennium, one great rival arose—Pisa. It was only ten miles away for a crow but, separated by a ridge of mountains, the two cities were worlds apart. To defend against this new threat, the Lucchesi built a new ring of walls, which incorporated the suburbs that had grown around it, almost doubling the area of the city. At the same time the street level within the walls was raised eight feet so that the Serchio river would no longer flood the city. This was a massive undertaking, building a new city on top of the Roman foundations. There is an archaeological site under the Baptistery which offers glimpses into the Roman city, and the centuries of development between then and the modern age. Seeing this, you will understand why some ancient church doorways seem absurdly short and why you step down, not up, to go through them. These are the Lombard churches.

As Pisa became a maritime power, Lucca became ever wealthier in the terrestrial economy, through a surprising means—silk. Lucca’s merchants had brought home the secrets of silk production from the Orient and soon were providing the finest garments and vestments to kings and popes. As they traveled to sell their goods, the merchants of Lucca became the best known and the most trusted throughout western Europe. There is still a plaque on the façade of the cathedral, dated 1111, that proclaims the probity of all money changers and dealers in spices, who carried out their business in the piazza in front of San Martino. They have sworn an oath so that “all men can exchange, sell, and buy with confidence. There are officials who see to it that if any wrong has been committed, it will be rectified.” This perfectly captures the mercantile ethos of Lucca still today and is why private bankers find it a congenial place to set up shop.

The wealth of Lucca attracted many a covetous eye. In 1300 a soldier of fortune arrived—Castruccio Castracani. The name probably rings no bells, but he was once very famous. Mary Shelley’s second book, after *Frankenstein*, was the romanticized story of Castruccio’s life. Castruccio had been hired by the Pisans to seize Lucca, which he did, but then decid-

ed to keep it for himself. Within the walls he built a large fortress to secure his impregnability and then set out to conquer Tuscany.

By this time the dukes of Tuscany had transferred their capital to Florence, which was now the greatest rival of Lucca. Castruccio decided to put an end to this threat and in 1325 he defeated the army of Florence. He staged three triumphal marches around its city walls, the last one by the camp prostitutes. Three years later, Castruccio died, and the fortune of Lucca reversed. New mercenaries conquered, bought, and sold it and then, in the ultimate indignity, Pisa ruled it for twenty years. By the time Lucca bought its freedom in 1370, Florence had surpassed it as the dominant city in Tuscany. Lucca dug in and, more fiercely than ever, defended its independence. Although it lived in the cultural penumbra of Florence, Lucca never lost control of the areas surrounding it, the *Lucchesia*, which extended from the Mediterranean to the plains towards Florence and, crucially, up the Apennines along the best pass to Europe. The inhabitants of this region owed allegiance to Lucca and every year they were required to come to the city where they would parade with their local banners. Still today, from all over the world, the Lucchesi come to honor their homeland, though now their banners read Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco, New York, or Auckland. The procession is led by the statue of the *Volto Santo*. All electric lights are turned off and the city is lit with thousands of candles. If you want to know how special the Lucchesi feel about their heritage, you should attend the festival, but be sure to book early.

In 1406 Florence finally took control of Pisa but it never seriously tried to conquer Lucca. The city felt secure until a new threat arose when King Charles VIII of France invaded Italy in 1494, bringing with him a new invention—light and maneuverable bronze cannons which could easily dispatch medieval stone walls. Lucca, being a very diplomatic city, with close ties to France, was never seriously threatened but the lesson of siege artillery for the future was clear.

By 1525 plans for a new set of walls were being made. As with the raising of the city four hundred years earlier, it was a daunting project. The new walls would be one hundred feet wide, filled with earth, imper-

vious to an eternity of cannon shots. They would be encased in brick, with bastions large enough for a host of troops and artillery. Most dramatically, everything outside the wall was to be leveled—every house, church, and tree—for several hundred yards, the length of a cannon shot. This *tagliata* (cut-down zone) sloped away from the walls so that approaching infantry would have to advance upwards through raking fire. Just outside the walls was a second band of earthen fortifications for snipers and pickets. A few of these remain and we can imagine the rest. Lucca was impregnable.

Construction of the walls began in 1550 and would take one hundred years to complete. Every citizen of the Republic of Lucca was compelled to contribute, which often meant using a shovel for a few weeks each year. The walls of Lucca truly belonged to every citizen.

When, in his turn, Napoleon invaded Italy, Lucca had a fortunate introduction to the new Emperor. At five o'clock one morning in 1796 his wife Josephine arrived unannounced at the gates. Her husband was fighting a touch-and-go campaign in the Po valley so, for her safety, she fled across the Apennines to the first sheltered place, Lucca. The town fathers roused themselves and quickly devised a suitable welcome for such a notable visitor. Considering that Napoleon's future eminence was still uncertain, it was the traditional Lucchese custom of cultivating all possible alliances that accounted for Josephine's warm welcome. Her own past, certainly, fell well short of Lucca's standards of propriety. By such a chance event the patricians of Lucca forged a personal relationship with Napoleon, which would serve them well when he became Emperor in 1804. The next year he made his sister, Elisa, ruler of this independent realm, the Principate of Lucca.

Elisa ruled a glittering court, entertaining in the grandest fashion. Niccolò Paganini served as her concert master, writing some of his most compelling pieces in Lucca. When in 1809 Napoleon elevated Elisa from Princess of Lucca to Grand Duchess of Tuscany she moved to Florence, which she didn't like nearly as much as Lucca.

It would not be until 1847 that Lucca was absorbed into the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. For the first time in well over a thousand years, Lucca

was no longer independent.

But old differences die hard. To take the hour-long bus ride from Florence to Lucca is to move between different worlds. After years in Florence I still struggle, listening to casual conversation in a Florentine café, to understand what people are saying, but as soon as I get on a bus to Lucca, filled with Lucchesi going home, their speech becomes clear. This, for me, is proper Italian.

Such subtleties of the Italian experience are too often missed by students. I understand why. There is so much to absorb, so many distractions, not to mention classwork and, if I remember being twenty-years old correctly, never enough time to party. Lucca is not a party town. It is one of those places that Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio called "cities of silence." Silence is the most under-rated pleasure, and often the most rewarding. I encourage every student at the International Studies Institute to avail themselves of the opportunity to visit such places as Lucca, Siena, Orvieto, Volterra (real silence), or a host of others. Not to get to know the 'real' Italy—Florence is certainly real—but to know *Italy*.

For students and non-students, I warn you. A day will not be enough. So, for your first visit just wander around and absorb what you see. You will need to eat, and for this I recommend the restaurant Da Guido. It is large, informal, with classic Lucchese cuisine; the menu hasn't changed in decades. Horse tartar is one of the items and "farro," the ancient local grain, can be had in various ways.

While you are walking, do not be afraid of getting lost. You will get lost, but you will soon find your way; the Roman grid makes it easy to get yourself back on track. You'll quickly realize that at the center of this grid lies the piazza and the church of San Michele, a site you will never forget. The façade can keep you occupied for hours, deciphering the stories it tells. It was built in the 1100s according to an aesthetic un-found in Florence. The façade of the Cathedral of San Martino, which was built about the same time, is equally surprising and stunning. But I won't go on about churches because there are too many. Lucca was long known as the city of one hundred churches, and about forty remain,

almost all pre-Renaissance.

What else to do on your first day? A walk along the walls is absolutely necessary. The entire circuit takes about an hour, but even a few minutes looking down on the city or out onto the snow-capped Apennines will give you insight into Lucca.

Did I mention art? Well, that's for another day. For now, return to Florence. You will have a new perspective on it.

About the author

Brian Lindquist was Associate Director for Student Life at the Institute at Palazzo Rucellai, the predecessor to the International Studies Institute. He is the author of *The Wanderer's Guide to Lucca*, a comprehensive guide to the history, art, and architecture of Lucca. He is also the cartographer of *The Wanderer's Map of Lucca*. When not in Italy, he lives in Connecticut. He is currently completing a book on the *Ventotene Manifesto*.

Studying Abroad in Italy – Applying Theory to Practice

Why students' negative experiences abroad can actually signal growth, and how to promote student success through involvement

Katie Mathis

After seeing a drastic drop in numbers due to the pandemic, study abroad in Italy has rebounded in a remarkable way. According to the Institute of International Education's Open Door Report (2023), there were over 30,000 US study abroad students in Italy during the 2021/2022 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2023), making it the most popular destination for US students abroad. This makes up a significant proportion of all US students who had international experiences that academic year. While there are a number of extremely positive outcomes to educational opportunities abroad, they also come with their own set of developmental issues and challenges that are not always clear to students pre-departure. This ambiguity can be due to a number of reasons, including the desire of Higher Educational Institutions to boost enrollment and participation in Study Abroad during the recruitment and pre-departure phase, which in turn means dedicating more time focusing on the benefits of international experiences (which are many) rather than stressing the ways it can be difficult. Ultimately, however, the challenges students face contribute to increased student success and self actualization in the long run. In order to better understand and unfold the details of the student experience, I will be applying Baxter Magolda's (2001) Theory of Self-Authorship and Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement to some common adjustment issues students face when studying abroad. Finally, I will be providing my own conclusions on how these challenges and theoretical applications may impact the practice of student affairs and advising.

Theoretical models and definitions

This essay focuses on two important themes: student identity de-

velopment and student involvement and success through the lens of two theoretical models.

First, *self-authorship*, as defined by Baxter Magolda (2001), is “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity and social relations” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 183). According to this model, individuals, and in particular students, go through four phases of self-authorship, including: following formulas, crossroads, becoming the author of one’s life, and internal foundation. The phases progressively move from an individual’s actions and beliefs being influenced by external forces and norms (following formulas), to grappling with the conflicts that arise between external forces and one’s own internal beliefs, needs and interests (crossroads), to being able to rely solely on one’s own beliefs and values and stand up for themselves in the face of adversity (self-authorship). The final phase involves solidifying one’s internal foundation, and using personal convictions as a compass for life’s choices (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Astin’s (1984) *Theory of Student Involvement* states that the level of a student’s involvement, or physical and psychological energy, they invest in any given object or activity during their experience at a higher education institution is directly proportional to the amount of their learning and personal development (Astin, 1984). In other words, the more students feels connected to their educational community by engaging in co-curricular and extracurricular activities, the more they will thrive in an international setting.

Transition to life abroad

Inevitably, students who travel, study, and intern abroad will at some point face challenges that relate to the transition from their home country to life abroad. Goodman et al. (2006) defines a transition as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 215). As a result of the dramatic event of moving from their home country to Italy, US and international study abroad students typically encounter psychological, academic, and sociocultural issues relating to this challenge (Harper et al., 2009).

In the case of most study abroad programs in Florence, Italy, the first

layer of this transition comes when students encounter their new roommates. While some students request friends as their roommates in advance, the majority will be living with at least 1-2 individuals they have never met before. This could bring conflicting and sometimes dramatic lifestyle changes which make the transitional period even more challenging.

This discomfort is often clearly evidenced in program evaluations where students cite roommate situations to be among some of the biggest adjustments they've made during their time here. If we follow Baxter Magolda's (2001) model of identity development, it is easy to understand how students may come into their study abroad experience with a whole host of preconceived values and ideas that they have initially learned from "external forces" such as family, friends, and their home institutions but have started to internalize and claim as their own. When these internalized aspects are then confronted with new roommates who are bringing with them their own perspectives and values, students then enter phase two of grappling with how the new external norms (their new roommates and living situation) differ from their own internal beliefs, needs, and interests. This crossroads phase of Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship, is the 2nd of four, clearly demonstrating progress on the path to self-actualization, and can only be achieved when confronted with conflicting values and norms from one's own.

Another part of this transition and growth during study abroad involves coming face to face with the new culture as it relates to the expectations and norms of each student, starting from their own upbringing, cultural realities, and day-to-day habits in addition to how well they understand their host country and the expectations they bring into their experiences. "Winkelman (1994) defines culture shock as 'a multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture,'" (Harper et al., 2012, p. 21-22).

In the field of study abroad, culture shock is often defined and represented by the W-Curve Model, initially introduced by Gullahorn and Gullahorn in 1963. In this model, students come into the experience in an almost euphoric state often dubbed "The Honeymoon Stage," followed

by a progressively more negative experience until they crash into the depths of culture shock before beginning to adjust to the experience (The Exchange Student, 2015).

In a recent *Insider* article that sent shockwaves through the field of study abroad, Stacia Datskovska outlined her negative experiences during her time in Florence, Italy. In the excerpt below, we can clearly see specific sociocultural challenges, such as culture shock, exemplified in the way Datskovska perceived the locals' attitudes towards her. While speaking about her experience, Datskovska writes:

I'm not quite sure whom I resented more during my stay in Italy: my American classmates or the locals. The latter is often described as soulful, charming, and overflowing with hospitality, but I could provide concrete examples of them being hostile, inconsiderate, and preposterous. For example, one time, two women were talking about me on the bus, looking at me up and down and scoffing. There were a couple of incidents of verbal confrontations (Datskovska, 2023).

What makes Datskovska's piece interesting is that she wrote it at the end of her experience in Italy. This would either suggest that her experience did not align with traditional understandings of culture shock or that she had not completely cycled through the full W-curve model which ends in acceptance and integration (The Exchange Student, 2015).

This clearly represents an example of why student advising and support in all of the phases of a study abroad is so critical. Maintaining solid support for students during application, pre-departure, post-departure, and re-entry phases can help students continue on their path to development, even if their experiences and timelines differ from pre-existing models.

I also found Datskovska's response to this perceived discrimination very interesting:

I started to protest by presenting myself to the public in a way I knew they'd hate. I started wearing American-brand athleisure,

Nike Air Max 97s, and oversize hoodies. The Italians rolled their eyes as I passed them on the street (Datskovska, 2023).

Instead of exclusively taking steps to integrate into local norms, expectations, and habits, Datskovska chose here to exaggerate and put on full display what made her American. In reality, it is not all that uncommon of a reaction and, in my opinion, not one to be immediately disregarded or admonished.

In Baxter Magolda's (2001) *Theory of Self-Authorship*, this type of behavior can actually provide evidence of her moving through the stages to self-authorship and integration. This behavior of reinforcing her Americanness can represent Datskovska's shift from being guided solely by external expectations (in particular, those of Italian locals), and coming to a crossroads while battling conflicting external attitudes and behaviors with her own internal identities and beliefs (her identity as an American). Each student will move through these phases at their own pace, and ultimately learn more about themselves in the process. What can help promote success and self-authorship also includes deeper involvement in students' surroundings which help them navigate conflicting perspectives on their path to self realization (Baxter and Magolda, 2001).

As study abroad administrators and international educators, we can take this example to help integrate more targeted teaching and learning towards the intricacies of Italian cultural norms and the expectation of public decorum for our students. Fundamentally, we want our students to move through their experience while respecting local cultures and norms as they navigate their own development. In this way, they may be able to begin internalizing aspects of their identity which do and don't align with local customs. Discrimination may be a part of this process, but it is not always what it seems.

For example, Julie Ficarra has studied the impact of Study Abroad on host cultures, focusing in part on Florence, Italy. In her research, she found that while there was some dissonance between the host culture and visiting American students, there was also the perception from local hosts

that the city of Florence is underutilizing the presence of US students in town to engage in cross-cultural learning and engagement. Specifically, while many local residents can feel burned out by the ever-growing international presence of students and tourists, some do believe that better infrastructure and intentional integration could help residents and visiting students maximize their relationship with one another (Ficarra, 2019). If we put this into practice, study abroad institutions would be wise to offer as many intentional opportunities for both structured and informal engagement in the community to help soften the feelings of discrimination and “otherness.”

Helping students understand these perspectives, and maintaining positive relationships with local vendors, community members, and organizations can help close this gap between our student populations and Florentine residents. As student affairs professionals, we must also exhibit continued patience with our students who can understandably struggle with the transition from life in the US to life abroad. Negative reactions to their host country can be a normal part of this process which students must simply move through to the benefit of their overall growth and development. This growth and development will continue long after students return home, which is another key point to keep in mind.

Student involvement and success

Existing literature would suggest that the more a student is involved and engaged in out-of-class activities, the more successful the transition and the more capable study abroad students are of working through their psychological, academic, and sociocultural issues (Harper et al., 2012). For example, Astin’s (1984) Theory of Student Involvement can be applied to any study abroad student’s experience in order to unfold how they cope with transitioning to life abroad. In other words, the increased level of student involvement in any given object or activity during their experience at a higher education institution is directly proportional to the amount of their learning and personal development (Astin, 1984). Therefore, challenges with psychological and sociocultural issues appear to be softened

by involvement in various groups within the educational community.

In a piece that ISI Florence student Elizabeth Mueller wrote for *The Florentine*, she offers a point-by-point response to Datskovksy's article in which she describes her experiences as vastly more positive (Mueller, 2023). What we know about Mueller's experience during her semester abroad is that she was well-integrated in the ISI Florence community. Her involvement in the Global Leadership Program, which includes a series of professional and personal development opportunities, allowed her to bring her own skills and abilities into this new reality while continuing to learn about her new surroundings.

Her willingness to engage in active exploration evidently contributed to her ability to cope with the transitions associated with living and studying in a foreign country. Mueller deliberately engaged in activities that pushed the limits of her personal comfort zone. These attempts at widening her horizons of understanding the world through different lenses are in line with Baxter Magolda's (2001) *Theory of Self-Authorship*.

From the institutional perspective, continuing to provide high quality, thoughtful, and engaging co-curricular opportunities is critical when it comes to student success. These programs can take the form of cultural activities, internship or volunteer opportunities, and extracurricular programming which allows for a deeper connection to the local community.

Implications for practice

Given the dramatic transition of moving to a foreign country to pursue part or all of a postsecondary education experience, international and study abroad students are at risk of suffering from serious issues, including but not limited to depression, isolation, homesickness, academic and linguistic challenges, culture shock, and discrimination (Harper, 2012). With nearly 190,000 U.S. students who studied abroad in 2021/2022, it is imperative that student affairs professionals be prepared to provide support to these students in order to help them cope with their issues and foster healthy personal development and growth during their time abroad. More importantly, it would be wise to remind students that it is only in

the face of challenge and being confronted with difference, that we can grow secure in ourselves and our own unique identity.

Astin's (1984) Theory of Student Involvement and Baxter Magolda's (2001) Theory of Self-Authorship, Gullahorn and Gullahorn's W-curve model (1923), along with other relevant student development theories, can be applied to students' experiences in order to shed light on how to strategically give each individual the tools they need to conquer the challenges they may encounter. Mueller's experience would suggest that involvement in out-of-class initiatives and active, deliberate exploration beyond pre-determined formulas can be beneficial to study abroad students seeking to overcome typical issues that generally affect this student population. To this end student affairs professionals should keep in mind that providing students with support and encouragement to become involved in institutional organizations and activities is key to helping them adjust to this transition. In addition, challenging them to push their limits in order to break out of the mold can help bring them to that next level in their development and growth. Of course, not all students are the same or will respond in the same way to these opportunities. This is why it is important that student affairs professionals utilize theory as a starting point and ensure that it guides and informs their work.

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Unveiling Emanuele Amodei's Vision

Preserving Cultural Heritage and Shaping the Future of Restoration

Karen Nuñez

Born in Siena on 28 August 1972, Emanuele Amodei graduated in Economics and Commerce in Florence with a specialization in Cultural Heritage Management.

Chief Executive Officer of the Palazzo Spinelli Group, President of the Institute for Art and Restoration of Florence, General Manager of the International Art and Restoration Exhibition in Florence, President of HeriFairs Network, today he covers an important role in the field of conservation, restoration, and enhancement of cultural heritage and the context of cultural planning.

Prof. Amodei is Cultural Ambassador of the city of Florence and the Calabria Region, Board member and former Executive member of ELIA (European League of Institutes of Arts) in Amsterdam, Vice-President of Assopatrimonio Italia, National Councilor of Assocastelli, Member of Icomos Italia, expert of learning evaluation and consultant of the Saudi Commission of Tourism and Heritage, and a member of the Plart Foundation.

As a Professor in Project Management, he has lectured at the Faculty of Economics and Tourism Policy in Florence, the University of Dubrovnik, Heritage Malta Institute, Pera Institute in Istanbul, Anahuac del Sur in Mexico City, and Lenoir Rhyne University, NC, USA.

He has been the promoter of over 20 European and transnational projects such as Argos, Artis, Plaster, ECPL, Argomed, Sismile, Meditares, TimeCase and HeritUs.

He has carried out project design and development activities in over 35 countries, including Albania, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Brazil, China, Croatia, Cuba, Egypt, Japan, Libya, Malta, Mexico, Poland, Spain, United States, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay, and Vietnam.

He is the author of several publications, including "Artis, A European Project for Culture 2000" and "Cultural Heritage and Community

Funding (46 projects for Calabria)”).

Below are his current roles:

Ambassador of the City of Florence, Ambassador of the Calabria Region, ICOMOS Member

Institute for Art and Restoration of Florence – CEO <https://www.palazzospinelli.org/ita/default.asp>

Palazzo Spinelli Group – President - www.palazzospinelli.org

Florence Art and Restoration Exhibition (Salone del Restauro di Firenze) - General Manager - www.salonerestaurofirenze.org

Herifairs European Network of Heritage Fairs – President - www.herifairs.eu

Rotary Club Florence Lorenzo il Magnifico – President - <https://www.rotaryclublorenzoilmagnifico.it/>

ELIA (European League of Institutes of Arts, Amsterdam) – Former Board Member and Regional Ambassador - www.elia-artschools.org

States General of Italian Heritage – Permanent Member - <https://www.statigeneralipatrimonio.it>

We interviewed Emanuele Amodei, who shared his thoughts on cultural heritage preservation and restoration. In this summary, we'll outline his exceptional career and forward-thinking perspectives.

Could you kindly highlight the main features of the Institute for Restoration?

The Institute for Art and Restoration was founded on September 26, 1976. It is a training, specialization, and professional development institute accredited by the Tuscany Region in the field of conservation and restoration, enhancement, and fruition of the world cultural heritage; it operates nationally and internationally as a consultancy and restoration center on behalf of public and private entities.

Our mission is “To contribute, through direct action and through the training of professionals, to the education and conscious fruition of the artistic and cultural heritage of Humanity, developing, together with all operators, governance models aimed at increasing the sense of belonging, interest, respect, and awareness of one’s own and others’ culture.”

The experience accumulated over more than 40 years of activity, with over 4,900 courses activated, over 9,000 students graduated, and 18,000 interventions carried out, defines the Institute for Art and Restoration as a center of excellence in the sector, nationally and internationally, capable of offering, within a university-type system, a highly practical professional training, attentive to the needs of the job market, and constantly updated on modern technologies and new intervention philosophies.

From 1978 to today, students from all over the world have been trained in the classrooms, laboratories, and workshops of the various institutional locations, and just as many have attended short introductory courses or refresher courses. This intense activity has contributed to consolidating the strong image of Florence as the “world capital of art and restoration” in every corner of the planet.

Today, it offers professional training courses for Restoration Technicians, Masters in Cultural Heritage Management, specialization courses, short and online courses, and foundation courses.

Moreover, the Institute operates globally for the defense of the world cultural heritage, both through the promotion and management of initiatives aimed at studying, conserving, restoring, and enhancing historical and artistic assets, and through projects carried out in collaboration with public and private entities, with the European Commission, Unesco, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; in the latter case we operate within the framework of Scientific, Technological, and Cultural Cooperation agreements signed with over 60 governments worldwide.

Thanks to this international activity and constant participation in projects financed by the European Commission, the Institute has established a vast network of collaboration relationships, which includes over 500 partners in 100 countries.

Regarding your courses, would it be possible to discuss the most recent trends among students in choosing their educational path?

In recent years, we have noticed an increase in the demand for restoration courses, especially frescoes and paintings, paper and prints, and stonework, due to a greater awareness of the need to recover and enhance the world cultural heritage.

At the same time, our master's degrees in cultural events management, museum management, and cultural heritage management have shown significant growth, as there is a lack of professionals with such skills on the Italian scene, and beyond. Indeed, the impact on the job market is very high for our students, who, thanks also to internships in companies, acquire important transversal skills.

What innovative developments do you foresee for the future in this sector?

Undoubtedly, new technologies, as they have always been in the past, are a resource for operating in the knowledge and awareness of the importance of the conservation of cultural heritage. I am certain that the future will offer us many development opportunities: from artificial intelligence to intervention techniques, from management and control systems to material technologies.

But the intervention philosophy does not change. Our work is like that of a hospital whose purpose is to cure and save lives. We deal with works of art; their survival depends on our ability to understand and interpret them.

Another topic of particular interest concerns any significant changes observed in students before and after the epidemic.

There is a greater awareness of the time spent on study and work.

In particular, preferring what one loves most and focusing one's energies and resources on one's passions.

Our students are dedicated to the care of works of art and feel the need to immerse themselves deeply in this environment, operating with attention and concentration and learning the value of the work through its knowledge. This attitude, in my opinion, is also derived from the period of the pandemic, which made us understand the importance of time and ourselves.

We would be grateful if you could also share your personal experience in this professional field.

I have always lived in the world of art and restoration, since I was a child, when my father, who founded the Institute, took me to the workshops and I made myself available to do some work. Later, I chose to continue in this field but more from a managerial point of view (I have a degree in economics and marketing with a specialization in cultural heritage) dedicating myself to the development of new opportunities in the sector, both through investments in skills and technologies and through the design of new thought paradigms related to the world of restoration.



alumni.

Studying Abroad: A Transformative Experience

Carla Galfano

This year marks twenty since I studied abroad at ISI Florence when I was an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut. I would say that it feels like only yesterday, but in the intervening years I finished my BA, earned a certificate in painting restoration from l'Istituto per l'Arte e il Restauro, completed two master's degrees, and lived in two countries and three states where I held six positions at four institutions. I also got married and had three sons – two of whom, completely accidentally or at least only subconsciously, share names with Medici brothers. I was recently appointed Manager, House Collection at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, a role that is both the culmination of years of education and experience and the fortuitous outcome of being in the right place at the right time. It is my strongly held belief that anyone who does not acknowledge the part played by dumb luck in their success is being dishonest. Yet, among the decisions I did make, studying abroad in Florence was one of the best. My semester learning and living in Italy had a profound impact on my personal and professional life, a fact that I wrote about in the inaugural issue of *Beyond* in 2018.

From Palazzo Rucellai to Dumbarton Oaks

In the six years since then, I have had the privilege of finding myself in a series of other extraordinary places. Although my morning commute to Palazzo Rucellai through the historic heart of Florence remains unmatched, I currently work in a historic house built in 1801 and renovated in the 1920s with glowing Koa wood floors and wrought iron bannisters alive with sculptured foliage and woodland creatures. Sixteen acres of formal gardens designed by Beatrix Farrand erupt in a riot of color each year starting in early spring with a pathway of purple plums followed by a hillside of yellow forsythia and a glen of pale pink cherry trees be-

fore culminating in a profusion of multi-colored roses. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection is the Harvard University center for Byzantine, Pre-Columbian, and Garden and Landscape Studies located in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, DC. That eclectic mix of disciplines is in every way reflective of the interests of the founders, Mildred Barnes and Robert Woods Bliss, who donated their estate and all its contents to Harvard in 1940 as a home for the humanities. The timing, too, was no accident, hastened as it was by the looming global conflict now known as World War II. When I interviewed for the job, I asked the committee what they liked best about working at Dumbarton Oaks. The Director of Security answered first by gesturing around him. We were sitting in the Oval Salon, which is fully painted in trompe l'oeil decoration created by the French designer Armand Albert Rateau, where an antique mirror glistened above a marble fireplace and the verdant South Lawn was visible beyond the shimmering silk drapes. I later learned that the proportions of the room, which is an oval as the name implies, were based on a fantastic Savonnerie rug from the 18th century purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Bliss in 1926 still in the collection. It is one of my favorite rooms in a place full of favorite rooms. But this was not the first remarkable conference room in which I found myself in Washington DC. That distinction goes to the top floor of one of the towers in I. M. Pei's iconic East Building at the National Gallery of Art (NGA).

The Corcoran Legacy Collection: a career milestone

When I moved to Washington DC in 2018 to take a position at American University (AU) as Museum Registrar, I knew that I would be responsible for the collection and the robust exhibition schedule. I was also given the vague outlines of a much larger project, which I subsequently learned was the transfer of thousands of paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, photographs, decorative objects, and site-specific installation components from the Corcoran Gallery of Art to the AU Museum. When the Corcoran closed in 2014, the NGA took custody of its collection, eventually accessioning about half the works and managing the distribution of the others

to DC institutions. Most of the participating museums made small selections, judiciously choosing objects based on precise collecting goals, but AU took a different approach. With whatever was still unclaimed, AU created the Corcoran Legacy Collection, more than doubling its overall collection and providing an unmatched resource for scholars and students. It was to finalize the details of the gift agreement and to make a plan for the physical transfer that I found myself in that first mythic conference room. As it would turn out, the Corcoran collection would take me to many amazing locations – a gallery converted to print storage, an off-site warehouse where a forklift hoisted art dozens of feet in the air, the Cabinet Room of the White House, and the residence of the United States Ambassador to Finland in Helsinki. One of my favorite memories, though, is of a December visit to the NGA days before Christmas to discuss shipping logistics for a group of objects still downtown. As I emerged from behind one staff-only door or another, I stood mesmerized beneath the massive dome of the West Building which was illuminated in purple with the silhouettes of flying reindeer soaring towards the central oculus through a smattering of stars.

Professional growth at Dumbarton Oaks

I started my tenure at Dumbarton Oaks as the Registrar and Collections Manager, a job that put me in charge of the care and documentation of all the objects in the museum collection. That interview in that fantastic Oval Salon was on Monday, March 2, 2020. By the time I received the call offering me the job, I was working from home and the world had shut down in what was supposed to be a temporary closure intended to halt a global pandemic. As we now know, the lockdown persisted in one way or another for years, and it had the effect of delaying my start date until June 1, 2020. For the first year or so in the position, I was not going much of anywhere. My office was my kitchen table which was also my oldest son's classroom. I shudder to remember onboarding video calls with my new colleagues conducted with Zoom physical education class in the background, balled up socks flying through the air into an empty laundry bin.

Once we started traveling again, it was my pleasure to retrieve a pair of exquisite silver objects from the Getty Villa in Malibu, California, where they had been on view in an exhibition on ancient Persia. The registrar apologized profusely for the schedule, which involved deinstalling one object on a Friday and the other on the following Monday, keeping me in beautiful, sunny California over the weekend in a Santa Monica hotel only steps from the beach. Needless to say, I did not see this as a hardship. I used the free days to wander the Villa, sink my toes in the sand, and meet a dear friend in Los Angeles where we visited the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and The Broad.

Closer to home, my oversight duties had me accompanying art across town to the Smithsonian Museum Conservation Institute (MCI) in Suitland, Maryland. The MCI imaging and materials scientists were collaborating with us and conservators from Greece on the analysis of two micro-mosaic panels, so called because the tesserae that compose the images are so small as to be nearly microscopic. Over the course of two weeks, I watched over 3D scanning, x-radiography, and scanning electron microscopy enjoying the opportunity to chat with the experts as they did their fascinating work. Publications in various international journals are forthcoming, but this research already had its first public presentation at an interdisciplinary symposium, entitled “Piece by Piece: Mosaic Artifacts in Byzantium and the Ancient Americas,” that brought together art historians, archeologists, anthropologists, curators, conservators, and scientists studying the mosaic artform. In addition to the colloquium lectures, the symposium included object study sessions for working group members and speakers. It was my duty and privilege to don a pair of nitrile gloves and handle the objects for the participants delicately cradling them and turning them to reveal features of interest. Being a part of this project was one of the highlights of my professional career.

In my new role as Manager, House Collection, I have curatorial oversight of a diverse group of objects in assorted media from various cultures. The collection ranges from a painting by El Greco of the Visitation to a Degas preparatory sketch for the Bellelli Family Portrait. It includes Ital-

ian Renaissance furniture once owned by the Italian diplomat Giuseppe Brambilla and Flemish tapestries from the 15th and 16th centuries. Even the historic structures themselves are considered museum objects with records of their own in the collections management system, a relational database that I manage. The jewel in the collection is perhaps the Music Room, constructed from 1926 to 1928 with repurposed architectural elements and reproduction features including an elaborately painted wooden truss ceiling with faux cracks and wood checks among the arabesque curves and classical figures. Designed as a venue for concerts, which are still held there, the room also hosted the “Washington Conversations on International Organization, Dumbarton Oaks,” otherwise known as the Dumbarton Oaks Conversations in 1944. This series of meetings brought together American, Chinese, British, and Soviet delegations towards the end of World War II in discussions that eventually led to the founding of the United Nations. It is a most exceptional place. Indeed, I think I have the Music Room to thank for my new position. It was among the first things that I adopted, advocating for new draperies, regular conservation examinations of its marvelous tapestries, and UV-screening film for the windows. In between managing loans and collection access requests, essential duties of the registrar and collections manager, I started to research the ownership and conservation history of the objects. Through those investigations, I found the courage to suggest that perhaps I was the best one to steward this collection. This self-assurance, coupled with a supportive chief curator, led me to where I am today.

Conservation project: a return to Florence

My current project, which brings me back to Florence in the most wonderful way, is a scientific analysis in preparation for a conservation treatment on a portable altarpiece by the Florentine *trecento* painter Bernardo Daddi (c. 1280 – 1348). The central panel – the location of the wings is unknown – depicts the Madonna enthroned with Christ in her lap surrounded by saints and angels. The tenderness between mother and child is eloquently expressed in the way she gently cups his little foot as he

reaches his arm around her neck. Until recently and for quite some time, our panel sat on its own little easel in the corner of the Music Room.

When we had an unplanned interruption in climate control, an event particularly dangerous for tempera on wood, I removed the painting to storage where the conditions were more suitable. It seemed as good an excuse as any to call a conservator for an assessment. Here again I was aided by some incredible luck. The American Institute for Conservation “find a conservator” online tool led me to one of the few people with direct experience working on these types of objects, and during his visit he casually remarked how useful it would be to have some specialized imaging before undertaking conservation treatment. Fresh from our recent success collaborating with MCI on the micro-mosaics, one of our curators contacted a colleague at the NGA who invited us to submit a proposal which was readily accepted. The panel spent several weeks undergoing analytical imaging including infra-red and near infra-red photography to help reveal any underdrawings and identify the pigments. If the conference room at the top of the East Building at the NGA is special, the conservation studio flooded with natural light and filled with treasures in various stages of treatment is even more so. I was fortunate enough to visit twice for this project, and both times I was awed by the generosity of the conservation scientists with their time and expertise. I am excited to see where this investigation leads. For now, the Daddi is with the conservator who is planning on removing what is at least a century of grime with the hope of restoring some of the painting’s original vibrancy.

Career reflections: embracing opportunities

Since I work in an educational institution where we host recent graduates as fellows, I often find myself talking about my career path. The fact is that although I always wanted to work in a museum, I accidentally became a registrar. I had just finished my MA in art history at UCONN, the current registrar was leaving, and the museum director called me. Right place, right time. When I accepted the job, the only registrar I knew was the one who signed my university transcript. At a certain point, I

decided to ride the horse in the direction it was going (sage advice given to me long ago by an old friend). I joined professional organizations, located a few mentors, asked questions on Listservs, and read books. I took a small job in a big institution then a big job in a small institution, and finally, like Goldilocks, I found the right fit. If studying abroad played a role in any of this, and I think it certainly did, it was to force me to be more flexible, to adapt. There is an Italian expression that I love: *tutto fa brodo*. Literally translated, the phrase means “everything makes broth,” and the closest English equivalent is generally understood to be “every little bit helps.” I prefer a more philosophical reading, taking the saying to mean that we are all the product of our life experiences. Something may seem inconsequential on its own, but you toss it in the pot with everything else and the soup you get is you.

Work Study Grant Experience in DEI Abroad

Marola Anes

Introduction

Each semester, ISI Abroad offers students the chance to apply for a Work Study Grant. These grants provide funding for qualifying students in exchange for a small project that can be easily performed by students while abroad. These projects not only enhance the study abroad experience and afford students extra funding, but also provide a valuable service for the Institute and help improve the program for future participants.

One of the more popular work study projects available focuses on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as it relates to the education abroad experience. In Spring 2024, ISI Florence awarded a grant to Marola Anes, a first-generation student from Penn State University. Having limited resources, Marola felt very privileged to have the opportunity to study abroad and was interested in learning how her own ability of adapting to new cultures would be helpful in navigating her 4-month semester abroad. Her projects focused on her own personal growth as a first-generation student abroad as well as exploring Italy on a budget.

Nina Peci, DEI Work Study Advisor, ISI Florence

Studying abroad was always a dream of mine but I never thought it was achievable as a first-generation STEM student. I am endlessly grateful for all of the support I received in fulfilling this dream. I'm an immigrant from Egypt and a second-year biology student at Penn State with the awesome privilege of studying abroad in Florence this past semester. As a first-generation immigrant student, studying abroad in Italy had both its advantages and challenges.

First, let's take a look at the advantages of studying abroad as an

immigrant student! I didn't experience the initial culture shock that most people go through when they first arrive in Italy. Since Italy is so close to the Middle East, I think it shares many cultural similarities and traditions. Examples of some similarities include the way people greet each other, value of family, food, and the warm hospitality. I found this especially true in Southern Italy; it was so awesome going down there because it felt so nostalgic.

Another advantage was that I already spoke another language, Arabic. I didn't know much Italian and not everyone spoke English, so I was able to rely on Arabic several times to communicate. Being bilingual was a skill I never thought would be useful when studying abroad in an entirely different country but I'm glad I was able to use it. Being bilingual also was convenient when learning Italian because some words are similar to the Arabic word.

One of the biggest challenges was navigating everything pre-departure like all the different applications and paperwork. It was really stressful gathering the right things and dealing with all the legal stuff with no one to really guide me through it, since no one close to me had done this before. It was also time-consuming and challenging to find and apply for scholarships to help fund my trip.

Another challenge in my semester abroad was experiencing racism but unfortunately, racism can be found anywhere and isn't exclusive to Italy or studying abroad. Taking on college as a first-generation student is an already daunting experience and then embarking on a study abroad journey makes it even scarier. I took on this adventure with a unique blend of excitement and fear, unsure of what to expect but ready to take on the obstacles, create lasting memories, and go through so much personal growth.

As I reflect on my journey, I am filled with so much gratitude for this amazing experience and all of the support I received from my family, Penn State, and everyone else. This was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I am so glad I took this risk and decided to see the world! It has to be one of the best decisions of my life and I will be eternally grateful



Marola Anes

for all of the things I have learned and gained in these past four months. To those who may be deciding on doing a semester abroad, I couldn't recommend it enough.

Discovering Italy on a Budget

Embarking on a study abroad adventure is exciting, but it often comes with a hefty price tag. From airfare to meals and daily expenses, the costs can quickly add up. As I prepared to explore both the delights of my host city, Florence, and the wonders scattered throughout Italy, I was determined to do so in a way that wouldn't break my bank account. For me, it was crucial to truly immerse myself in the culture of my host country rather than traveling to a new country every weekend. This approach not only aligns with my goals to truly experience Italy, but it's a lot less expensive and better for the environment. After all, what's the point of studying abroad if you don't immerse yourself in the local culture? I'm about two months into my program and I have compiled some of my favorite inexpensive and easy-to-get-to spots in Italy and a few travel tips I have discovered.

Starting off at the home base: Florence!

The museums and churches here are absolute must-sees, and many of them offer free entry or substantial discounts for students. Among my favorites are the iconic Uffizi Gallery and the beautiful Santa Maria Novella Church and pharmacy. Plus, mark your calendar for every first Sunday of the month because all museums offer free entry.

Wandering through the bustling streets and seeing the street performers, exploring the lively markets, and witnessing breathtaking sunsets at Piazzale Michelangelo have also become some of my favorite things to do, and they're all free!

The charm of Italy extends far beyond the walls of Florence, though. With an efficient and inexpensive train network, embarking on weekend or day trips outside of Florence is an easy task.

Pisa

You have to go witness the gravity-defying Leaning Tower of Pisa in person; and don't forget to snap the iconic photo of you holding up the tower! While you're there, be sure to explore the nearby Baptistery and Duomo, which are both impressive attractions all conveniently located in the same area. Pisa itself is a picturesque, small town that can easily be explored in a half-day. I went in the off-season so most shops were closed but I'm sure it's much livelier later in the season!

Lucca

Lucca, the city of 100 churches, exceeded all expectations. From its delicious food to its budget-friendly prices and stunning architecture and buildings, Lucca was genuinely impressive. It was also filled with vintage markets, and great shopping spots amidst its historic streets.

Viareggio

I had never heard of Viareggio, but I'm so glad I stumbled upon this hidden gem. Viareggio is an adorable coastal town within Lucca and is home to one of the biggest *Carnevale* celebrations in Europe. We visited during the first weekend of *Carnevale* and it was truly exhilarating; the energy was infectious and unmatched. I highly recommend visiting Viareggio during *Carnevale* season for an unforgettable, once-in-a-lifetime experience. The warm hospitality of the locals was the perfect finishing touch to our experience. My only regret from this trip is that we only stayed for a day instead of the entire weekend.

Venice

Venice is truly one of my favorite destinations! There's an undeniable appeal about the city that captures your heart from the moment you arrive. Plus, you should go visit the one-of-a-kind town before it sinks. Easily accessible by a 2-hour train ride, Venice is perfect for a day trip or an entire weekend. While there, be sure to marvel at the jaw-dropping Saint Mark's Basilica, which may be my favorite building ever. Venice

radiates energy at anytime of the year. Also, be sure to visit the bright islands of Burano and Murano and don't miss the beautiful glass-blowing masterpieces.

Milan

Milan is a captivating world of its own, brimming with endless adventures. One of my favorite experiences in this beautiful city, was ascending to the Duomo terraces, where you get a 360° view of Milan's landscape. Enjoy Milan's renowned fashion shops and historic landmarks as well as its vibrant cultural scene and delectable cuisine. Window-shopping and admiring the beautiful architecture of San Babila's luxury shops was also a highlight of my trip to Milan. Don't forget to enjoy all of the markets and street food here and spending an evening in Piazza Duomo is a must as it is full of energy, music, and dancing.

If you are in Milan for the weekend, I recommend spending a relaxing, picturesque day at Lake Como. It's less than an hour away at less than €6.

Verona

Verona was so charming, colorful, and energetic! Walk through the stunning house that inspired Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and marvel at the beautiful architecture and artwork. Verona is also filled with lots of intricate churches so be sure to stop in and be amazed. A highlight of my day trip was climbing up to San Pietro's Castle for an amazing view of Verona where there is an incredible restaurant once you get to the top. The Arena was also so amazing to see and go inside. Verona truly had me in awe at every turn and I think it has been my favorite spot so far. I highly recommend making the short trip there.

Orvieto

Orvieto is so lovely and not a place many people know about. It's a small hilltop town in Umbria filled with the friendliest people, the most

beautiful views, and so much history. So many cats too! It was very inexpensive and we got to do a lot of once-in-a-lifetime activities like touring Etruscan caves, having dinner in a cave, and going down into the famous St. Patrick's Well. Orvieto is very high on my favorites list and I was so pleased to have discovered this hidden gem.

Some travel tips I have gathered:

- **Book trains as soon as you can!** The longer you wait to book your train, the more expensive it will get (it can get up to €70-80). I found this especially true with Milan. Keep in mind this doesn't apply to regional trains because those are all the same price at all times.
- **Student discounts!** So many places offer an awesome student discount. You can get into museums, churches, etc. for just a few euros. Many restaurants and *gelatarie* also offer a student discount; so, be sure to ask. Airfare and trains also offer reduced prices for students so always look it up before paying full price.
- **Use public transportation!** Italy has an awesome public transportation system, so take advantage of it. Tickets are cheap and they last up to two hours each. This is especially helpful in bigger cities like Rome and Milan.

My journey so far has been nothing short of amazing and life-changing. I can't wait to see what the rest of this adventure brings and to create lasting memories. I hope you were inspired to discover new places and that this showed you that you can still travel around on a budget.



reviews

DiversItaly – Elementary Italian with Inclusive Language & Gender Equality

reviewed by Catia Santi

The book *DiversItaly – Elementary Italian with Inclusive Language & Gender Equality* is a textbook for learning Italian language and culture aimed at beginner-level students. It was published in 2022 by Kendall Hunt Publishers in Dubuque, Iowa.

The authors, Francesca Calamita and Chiara De Santi, are researchers, teachers, and educators. As professionals experienced in language teaching, they aim, above all, at promoting Italy through its language and culture.

The book's title, *DiversItaly*, already highlights its attention to contemporary reality, while the structure of the text is articulated and heterogeneous. The six extensive chapters contain the following parts:

- Chapter and themes
- By the end of this chapter, students will be able
- Grammar structures
- Appendice: more on ...
- Culture
- Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Upon observing the table of contents, it immediately becomes evident that the text pays special attention to gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, dedicating a very extensive section to this theme in each chapter.

DiversItaly is divided into six chapters, which are extensively developed and accompanied by exercises and activities. As the authors explain, “each chapter starts with a dialogue, while the grammar structures are explained in detail through a variety of examples and at times inductively.”

The dialogues are realistic, and the themes of the chapters are engaging because they draw a connection between traditional Italian cul-

ture and contemporary Italy.

The chapter themes are as follows:

- Iniziamo (a short introduction chapter)
- Il mondo dell'istruzione e del lavoro (education and employment)
- Le famiglie italiane e le loro diversità (Italian families and their diversities)
- La cucina italiana (Italian cuisine)
- Viaggio nelle arti italiane (exploring Italian arts)
- Ciak si gira: l'Italia e il cinema (Action! Italy and cinema)

The exercises in each chapter are organized into four different types: *Esercitiamoci!*, *Scriviamo!*, *Lavoriamo con altre studentesse o altri studenti*, *Parliamo!*.

Esercitiamoci! are exercises to practice Italian grammar structures, while with *Scriviamo!* students improve their writing skills, and *Parliamo!* help students to focus on listening and comprehension skills.

Lavoriamo con altre studentesse o altri studenti is designed for peer-review work, an important activity that helps students engage with each other, by sharing their knowledge.

Another rich part is *Le note culturali* and *Le pagine culturali*. As professors Calamita and De Santi write, those pages “at the end of each chapter play a leading role in this textbook, and are designed to teach students about Italian culture and society in the 21st century.” The chapters end with a comprehensive *Glossario* and an *Appendice* that provides grammatical and/or lexical insights.

The instructions and cultural explanations are in English. The images are both modern and explanatory of the text or the exercise at hand. The choice of vocabulary is certainly up-to-date, while the grammar follows a more traditional path, linked to the structure of the Italian language.

From the very beginning, the authors of this text highlight some-

thing that permeates all the pages of the book:

- Top of Form
- Bottom of Form

“learning a new language can have a predominant role in shaping globally-oriented generations who desire to improve the current social scenario and pursue gender equality, inclusion, and diversity at all levels; [...] Italian language classes can give educators the opportunity to use words to explore present-day issues with their students in a frequently international and diverse setting, thus helping them to become global and active citizens of this evolving world.”

In particular, the section *Le parole contano* examines words and how they are linked to masculine/feminine structures. They also present new elements (e.g., the schwa), and outline possible modern paths for a more inclusive language. “Each chapter also has a number of boxes titled *Le parole contano* where we focus on issues of gender, equality, diversity and inclusion through language.”

In Chapter Two, *Le parole* examines the two pronouns LUI/LEI and adjectives with the masculine form ending in -O and the feminine form ending in -A. This section also discusses the words PERSONA and GENTE, which, despite being feminine in gender, identify a human being, “and there are no references to biological sex.” In Chapter Two, they analyze the vocabulary related to professions and provide examples and advice on the words to use. In Chapter Three, again in the *Le parole contano* section, the authors underline how “the use of maschile universale is currently under discussion by sociolinguistics working on gender and language as well as public opinion in an attempt to find a more inclusive solution.” In Chapter Three, they tackle the issue of so-called “femminicidio,” outlining a precise but concise picture of it. In the *Le parole contano* section of Chapter Five, the schwa is addressed once again, thus closing a circle that began in the preface to the book. In these pages a famous Ital-

ian writer is quoted: Michela Murgia. In recent years, she became an icon of an anthropology centered on the freedom of each human as the sole arbiter of oneself.

The authors start with Michela Murgia's words, "Language is a cultural infrastructure that produces power relations," to emphasize their goal and message: "As educators, we believe that it is part of our job to help our students to think critically about the world, and a language class – far from being reduced only to technical skills – offers a valuable opportunity to do it."

In conclusion, we can say that Francesca Calamita and Chiara De Santi strongly believe in their work as educators and promoters. Through *DiversItaly*, they aim to present a more modern Italian world free from stereotypes. As they write: "The time has come to rethink the canon and the teaching of the Italian language, including more diverse perspectives which in turn might be more representative of the current world."

