

## My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

# The most beautiful word of the worst language

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Elisabetta Gobbo tries to explain the true meaning of the Dutch word 'gezellig'.

When I applied for the Erasmus+ program I had no idea that my life would have changed substantially within a few months. Many people told me that I was going to fall in love with Rotterdam, such a mesmerizing city. I only realized it when the doors of the central station opened in front of me as soon as I arrived. Freezing wind and hail on my face, a huge piece of luggage in front of me, homeless. But still, it was love at first sight.

Everyone that has been on exchange can tell you how amazing it is to live such a thrilling experience. During those seven months in the Netherlands I had the chance to meet some of the best people I will ever have the honour to meet in my life. I had the craziest nights, got lost biking in the city multiple times, went to have coffee in pyjama at the supermarket just because it was free... To sum it up, I could tell you so many amazing things about my experience that I had to re-write this paper more than twice to stop crying. It is heart-warming to think about all the good memories that I keep as a golden treasure in my heart.

Nonetheless, this emotional peak is not melancholic. I am who I am now, only thanks to all the people that I met and to the adventures that I went through. I am proud of all that I achieved during my exchange. Particularly, the ability to overcome difficulties on my own, but especially with others. As a matter of fact, it was thanks to the atmosphere that my friends and I were able to create together that we could sustain each-other during rough times. And therefore, I want to talk about the most beautiful word of one of the worst languages in the world (Dutch): 'gezellig'.

Moving alone to another country was not easy, mainly because I had no place to move in. The day before I left, the housing agency from Rotterdam called me to tell me that there were major damages to the hydraulic system in the apartment that I booked. The consequence was that I had to spend the first week in a hostel. I repeated to myself that all the hustle was part of the experience, I had no intention to give up, but misfortunes seemed to be haunting me. Life at the hostel was miserable, I was hugging

my bags while sleeping since I feared robberies, and there always was a drunk man on my bunkbed.

When I was on the edge of a nervous breakdown I finally found hospitality at a friend's place, she was the first one who made me discover the true meaning of 'gezellig'. I moved all my things to her place, in the extreme south of Rotterdam. We were sharing a very small bedroom and both her and her housemates made me feel comfortable and tried to help me in all the ways they could. From that moment on, I profoundly appreciated the altruistic and helpful heart of the Dutch. I am always amazed by how much effort people in Rotterdam put in helping the others. I sincerely hope that I will be able to continue to follow this positive model and to make it spread even more.

My exchange continued, I found another apartment to move in, where I finally felt that I had my own 'gezellige' surrounding in the big city I was slowly discovering. As time went on, I started realizing that I had no need for a safety-net at my place, because I could find a cozy, convivial atmosphere wherever I was thanks to the people that I had around me. I found myself in 'gezellige' situations at house parties having life-changing discussions in front of a beer. Surprisingly, even at university we were able to turn the worst pre-exam intense study-sessions in pleasant moments. I could always feel at ease and full of positive energy thanks to the bonds created with the people I met. The Erasmus programme is a fantastic opportunity to meet life-long friends, who will go through the same indescribable experience as you. Letting yourselves be who you are, you will create a unique connection with those friends, a bond that cannot be easily broken.

'Gezellig' has no definite translation, and if you ask to a Dutch what it means he/she will probably just smile at you and giggle trying to explain it. The closest meaning that I can give to this special word, is a warm feeling of relaxation, something that makes you feel at home and in the mood for socialization. The reason why I decided to talk about this term is that thanks to it I learnt something that I will cherish as a long-lasting life-lesson. There will always be tough moments in our lives, or obstacles to overcome, and the best way to cope with them is to surround ourselves with people who are willing to put an effort in making our day a better one, included ourselves. A straightforward way to do it, is to create a 'gezellige' atmosphere!

In the end, I was lucky. Not only the worst beginning brought the best throughout all the experience, but also, I learnt how to take the best out of the worst. In addition, I have the chance to continue to live the city that I fell in love with, with the person who I fell in love with during my exchange. We have been beating the statistics about long-distance relationships for more than one year now!

In conclusion, to all of you who are about to leave for a similar experience, I wish you to find a 'gezellige' environment, and to meet the adventure-squad that will sustain you throughout all the ups and downs.