

MY EXPERIENCE IN “ENGAGING CONFLICT SUMMER SCHOOL” IN TURIN

Written by Su Wai Htet

My name is Su Wai Htet, a Master student specializing in International Relations at University of Yangon, Myanmar. During March 2019, I came across a Summer School program on social media. Enthusiastically, when I looked into the pop-up link, it is about opening application for “Engaging Conflict: Prevention, Management and Resolution” Summer School for the year of 2019. Compelling provided benefits of the program at www.engagingconflict.it, I set out to apply this two-week program organized by T.wai - Torino World Affairs Institute in partnership with Department of Cultures, Politics and Society of the University of Turin, Italy. Between the provided options of self-funded and scholarship, I marked the scholarship option to join it with letter of intent and numerous questions structured in the online application form. Great luck hit me to have a chance to attend the program with special conditions.

This reflective essay aims to the sharing of the activities or collaboration, participation and managing learning in the classroom, my educational, cultural and social experience in Turin.

What is Engaging Conflict Summer School?

The Engaging Conflict Summer School is designed to equip committed students, early-career researchers and professionals with advanced tools to critically understand conflict and tackle it as a dynamic reality. The Summer School provides participants with a critical and multi-disciplinary understanding of contemporary conflict and violence, starting with a broad approach and moving to a specific approach to individual conflict, assessing the complexity of post-conflict scenarios and evaluating the relevance of different policy choices or normative standings from non-intervention to conflict prevention. Every Summer School is hosted at University of Turin, Torino which has a long-standing tradition of conflict-related studies.



Education System and My Academic Time



Education in Italy is highly esteemed with a wide range of excellent institutions throughout the country, welcoming students interested in virtually any subject. Quite similar to Myanmar education system, Italy has a compulsory education from 6 to 16 years of age to complete high school certification. The public education in Italy is observed “not free” and is markedly expensive, compared to Myanmar, although some are found cheaper depending on the university and program of study. The university education is usually merged with language studies and most of the students are obviously found ability to speak two or more languages.

Turin plays an important academic role, providing a wide range of higher education courses. The University of Turin offers a wide choice of study options and boasts a remarkable research tradition. With best of luck, I got a chance to learn the heart of higher education course at University of Turin. It situates in a unique location set in a wonderful scenery. The first thing caught me amazed was a chain of huge glass buildings with beautiful campus and a big bull statute in front of the University. My scholarship provided me half-board accommodation at the student hall of Residenza Olimpia, just 10-minute walk to the University. The student hall is large spaces decorated with huge buildings, small gardens, table tennis room, gym, computer room with internet access and laundry. The whole campus provides Wi-Fi access. There is also a systematically organized reception where we can ask to keep our keys and smart card of electricity circulation. Detached from the student hall, there is a 5-minute-walk canteen, offering a variety of food and drinks. My scholarship also granted me 14 free meal tickets in that canteen.

Every Monday to Friday of the two weeks was taking up with 9 - 4:30 intensive class time with 15-minutes separated break time and almost two hours long lunch time. From the first day of the Summer School, the participants from different countries and I were put together into separated groups of six members with different topics. Then, we started to contact each other with following available methods such as name tag introduction, mobile phone, email, social networking, group meeting either after class or weekends and sometimes, we went together for outing. All the visiting

professors and speakers were talented, giving priceless lectures about conflict and peacebuilding. Honestly, after the induction was proceeded, I obviously found that I was the youngest and less experienced compared to other participants because most of them worked and are working in UN related agencies, embassy and even the military officer and some peers of around my age did many internships and voluntary works. It was observable for me to take pains in managing learning in class and also in group works.

Class participation and responsive question-and-answer section after every lecture orchestrated the Summer School alive. We also did drawing a map of our local life, a brief warm-up activity in the pursuit of collaboration spirit and role-play game. I have also learned their teaching techniques of “tight transitions”, i.e. teachers establish transition routines and students execute quickly without much directions from teachers, and “props”, i.e. the act of publicly praising students who raised good questions and some for coming up with great answers to the questions that other students raised. I always kept me active in class, watched on every step of other participants such as discussion with them or following the good strategy of study methods and maintained the relationship with them. On our last day of Summer School, I was quite assured that every single group did their best in presentation of assigned topics and my group members and I also knocked ourselves out in a way of teamwork spirit on the topic of “Somalia.”

My Days in Turin and Social Experience

My biggest difficulties in Turin were technological problem, language barrier and cultural shock. As my flight time to land Milan Airport was almost midnight and it took two hours to go to Turin from Milan, I had to take SADEM bus to Torino Porta Susa Station and from there, I took taxi to reach the student hall. The problem started with hiring taxi. Unlike in Myanmar, we can't hire taxi randomly with raising hand signal and instead, we have to find taxi stand or dial the code of taxi rank. Taxi fare is not much cheaper like in Asian countries. Turin offers a variety of transports such as buses, trams and Metro and many young people use bicycles and roller boots. All the lanes are differently and systematically constructed so that the problem of traffic-jam and accidents are apparently lesser. Bicycles are found everywhere on the corner of pavement and we can take the bicycle using online application that unlocks the bicycle by showing the code on it to the sensor of that application.

As mentioned above that Turin is a place of University City, it was not that much difficult in communicating students within the campus. But, most of the people outside the campus rarely speak English. As I am fond of exploring popular spots of the place, I went around many tourist attractions and thus palpably came about language barriers with local people and also some distortions on google map made me troublesome. Anyhow, I found out that the sign language worked out for me and I studied mostly useful Italian words from my friends. I saw many Bangladeshi working in restaurants and convenience stores. Fortunately, I was able to befriend with one owner of store and he was of much help and showed willing for me by touring the city and teaching how to use machines to buy bus tickets as well as food and drinks. As the standard

Italy time is 5 hours ahead of Myanmar, I had problem sleeping because of time difference and surprisingly, Turin enjoys long daytime so that activity hours can be stretched out.

In culture, most of the local Italians are Christians and there are few Muslim people in Turin. Italy provides freedom on religious practices and hence, although being a cosmopolitan city with many Bangladeshi migrants, Chinese, Koreans and many international students studying in, Turin is technically a peaceful and safe city. As usual, European culture never fails to make Asians shock. Asian culture is normally based on religious beliefs and conservative traditions. For me, I get used to live under curfew of my parents and under ethically prohibited alcohol drinks and smoking. But, I learned that Italians make themselves live up and enjoy freedom and social gatherings all night long at restaurants and bars. I found myself keeping love to Italian food and I did have great time with my teachers and classmates in all the gatherings of “Welcome Aperitif”, “Alumni night” and farewell dinner.



Future Work

It was only 2 weeks in staying Turin but I felt like so hard to say Goodbye to my friends and also the University of Turin that I love the most in Turin. I flew for 19 hours to Yangon but the long hours return on board did not bother me to reminisce my days in Turin. The two-week intensive Summer School granted me to learn voluminous new things for my academics, for more reliable and confident me, being independent and responsible for my own choices, coming up solutions to my small and big problems and building a cycle of intelligent youths and professionals over different countries. The lectures also gave me priceless knowledge and insights about conflicts with theories and micro-level peacebuilding process. From those experience, I plan to share my academic knowledge, social experience and problem-solving process to my friends, juniors and my class which I am assigned to take responsible as a part-time tutor. Not only that I have multiple links with all of the teachers, participants of Summer School and some local people I befriended in Turin on social media. I am also seeking an opportunity to study in Italy for Master degree or post-graduate studies and to plan a trip to Europe. The “2019 Engaging Conflict Summer School” in Turin is a diamond opportunity for me to learn more details about conflicts and peace studies with amicable solutions. Participation in that Summer School remarks one of the honors in my lifetime.

References

Engaging Conflict (EC Summer School) Official Website

Engaging Conflict: Prevention, Management and Resolution Facebook page