

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name**

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**Year and semester for exchange**

2024 VT

**Exchange university**

UPV Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain

**Degree programme**

Media Technology, master's in computer science.

## A Journey from Cold Climate to Sunnier Horizons.

### Before departure

I applied for exchange studies experience a new culture, develop as a person, and meet new international friends! Although, it took me a while to make the actual application due to hesitation and concerns about leaving family and friends behind. I ended up having to make a late application, but fortunately, it all worked out. There was plenty of amazing destinations to choose from, but I knew I wanted to go somewhere in Europe so that my family and friends could visit without having to spend a fortune. Europe was also a clear choice because I did not want to have to worry about the time difference. In the end, I ended up choosing Valencia, Spain. The main reason behind my decision was that I knew some Spanish from before, and I wanted warmer and sunnier weather.

### Upon arrival

I took an intensive course in Spanish before my studies at UPV began. The course took place in UPV Gandía where we lived with other Erasmus student's that also took that course. This course had its up's and down, but the intensive course also acted like a reception for Erasmus students. Each night there was a party or activity arranged by Erasmus where you got to know other students.

### Financials

I did not receive any scholarships from KTH, but when traveling within Europe, you can apply for an Erasmus grant. This helped with paying some expenses related to accommodation and airplane tickets, as well more "fun" expenses such as train tickets to explore different regions within Spain. In my experience, Valencia to be cheaper than Stockholm. Food, alcohol, some Spanish clothing brands such as Zara and accommodation differed quite a lot. My biggest tip to experience Valencia without having to empty your bank account, is to join the "Erasmus Life Valencia". They arrange trips and activities for Erasmus students for a cheap price. Another great way to save money is to visit the flea markets that is set up every day in different parts of the city. Some flea markets have a rule that nothing can cost more than 1€. I found so much nice things for a cheap price. Although, watch out so that you don't get overweight on your bags when returning home!

### Accommodation

UPV Valencia does not provide any help with finding accommodation. This is the student's own responsibility. I would say that it is good to start early, but perhaps not crucial. I found an apartment together with 2 other girls from KTH at a website called Idealista.com. The apartment was super nice and very clean. The price per person was around 550€ which was quite high in comparison to other student's housing. Most people payed around 300€, where you got a room in a shared apartment. The reason we chose the more expensive apartment, was that it was more modern, had a dishwasher, three AC's and we knew that we were the only three that was going to live there. The apartment was a 10-20 minute walk from campus, depending on which building you were located in (it's a huge campus).

## **University and studies**

UPV is a very big university divided into 14 faculties and 3 campuses located in different parts of Spain. My university was called UPV Vera which was in Valencia, but there's also UPV Alcoy (in the mountains) and UPV Gandía (1,5 hour south of Valencia). UPV mostly offer technical subject similarly to KTH such as Computer Science, Media Technology, Industrial Economy, Machine Technology etc. Although, I would say that the studies varied a lot from KTH. All the exams but one was true/false or multiple-choice questions and to pass, you would have to get a 5/10 on the entire course. To collect 5 points, it's a kind of treasure hunt where you collect points in various activities. For examples, a lab would give maximum 3.5 points, an exam would give perhaps 4 points, "good behaviour and attendance to lectures" would give 1 point and so on. My regular day of studies would be to study at home and go to campus when mandatory. The reason behind this was that even though all my classes was in English, most of the professors was terrible at English. They would often switch to Spanish and take all discussions in Spanish. Some professors could actually speak good English, so I would attend those lectures.

## **Courses**

My courses included Concurrency and Distributed systems (Csd), Animation for videogames (Adv), Human Computer Interaction (Ipc), Fundamentals of Business Management (Foe), and 3D modelling (Dm3d). I choose these mainly because they were in English. I had trouble finding courses that I could transfer to KTH. I changed master's so that I could count the Csd course to a track course in order to get it to work out. In the end, I had to change my study plan to become an "individual track". I found most of my courses interesting. Csd focused on threads and how to avoid deadlocks and race conditions in softwares which was very interesting and in line with my master. Adv was a course based on Unity and how to compose animations. Foe was similar to the base course of Industrial economy at KTH but without the focus on engineering. Here we got to learn more about Spanish economy which was super interesting. Ipc was a course in human computer interaction. I had already taken a course during my bachelor similar to the content in this course, but here I got to learn how work JavaFX. JavaFX is a UI tool where you program the functionalities, but the interface is drag and drop. Lastly, Dm3D was a course focusing on visualising 3D objects in space using different methods. This is more like a project (did not an have exam) where the final project is to build some 3D model using your own preferred tools. I did a share using python!

## **City and country**

I both loved and disliked the Spanish culture for different reasons, but I think there are good and bad things about every culture especially if you're not used to it. The best parts of the culture were the food, the surroundings, the weather, and the nightlife. If you go, you should really try Paella and the tapas that the city offers. There are a lot of good restaurants to try. Valencia is also a very beautiful city. It's a mix of city and nature with great shopping, ancient buildings, architecture, and a lovely beach that spans throughout Valencia. If you like to party, this is also a city for you. There are plenty of nice nightclubs and bars to visit but be prepared for a lot of reggaeton. The worst part of Spanish culture was that everything is very unstructured. They have a certain mindset that everything will be fine and that there's no stress. I am a very stressed person and I like to have control of what's happening. This was difficult to maintain. Another thing that was challenging was the language barrier. Most people don't speak English, so you have to speak Spanish, although this made me improve my Spanish skills. I also found it both fun and challenging with all the festivities going on. During the spring, there's a lot going on in Valencia which was super fun. There's a festival called Fallas which you must experience to understand. I loved the first week of it, but it continuous for 19 days. All the streets are cut and there's fireworks called "Mascletas" every day at 2PM. If you love fireworks, this is for you.

## **Leisure and social activities**

In my spare time I visited the beach, looked at "touristy" things, partied and hung out with the friends I made. I did not make any Spanish friends unfortunately and I am guessing that is because my

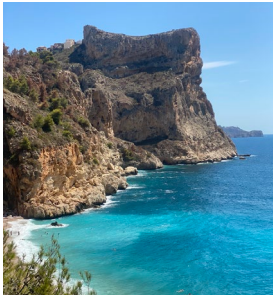
Spanish is limited. However I am very grateful for the friends I did make and I still see all the people from Sweden and KTH that I got to know. Regarding activities offered by UPV, there's a lot to mention. They have a lot of sports that are free for students. They had volleyball courts, paddle courts, tennis courts, a soccer field, a gym with classes, a rugby field and much more.

### **Sustainability**

There are ways of being sustainable in Valencia. I took the flight there, but you could also travel by train. There are also many cheap trains to catch in Spain in order to visit different regions. UPV also offers a "second hand" market where you can take things for free that student's from previous years dropped off. As previously mentioned, there's also plenty of flea markets to shop from and you can buy food locally grown from food markets.

### **Other recommendations and observations**

I would like to take the opportunity to mention some good spots to visit outside Valencia. First of all, you should rent a car (costs about 40€) and drive to Cala de Moraig which was a gorgeous stone beach surrounded by cliffs and caves.



Another recommendation is to take the train to Madrid and Barcelona. I would really recommend Madrid, but go early spring before all other tourists. If you get time, you should also take the opportunity to visit Mallorca. The airplane ticket's cost 14€ and took about 50 minutes. Although the hotel was a bit more expensive.

I documented my exchange on my TikTok @josephineekuo if you want to know more! Also don't hesitate to contact me if there's any questions.

Safe travels!