

## *The “culo inquieto”: an on-going path of discovery and growth.*

With one of the many perks of being raised in Southern Spain by Colombian immigrant parents comes a potpourri of cultures, accents and food but also a continuous sense of not belonging, of not being Colombian enough or Spanish enough. Apparently if you combine a lack of locational attachment and a need to discover and experience as much as possible, you get someone that my family would deem as a “culo inquieto” or “restless butt”. And as professional culo inquieto I would like to take the opportunity presented by Eutophia to reflect on some of my most cherished experiences.

### ***All girls schools, cows and Google translate:***

After reading the whole collection of Harry Potter I became obsessed with the idea of studying abroad, preferably in Ireland. After looking for programs I realised that not only were they too expensive but I was also fairly young (I was only 12 at the time). To this day I am not quite sure how but I came in contact with a Costa Rican family living in Ireland, friends of one of my uncles that after a brief visit during new years were somehow charmed by me into offering to pay for a year of my education in Ireland. That’s how my first international learning experience came along. After celebrating my 13 birthday in Irish soil and receiving my new uniform and first ever phone as gifts from my new “family” I was ready to take on the challenge of completing my second year of secondary school in a language in which I could barely introduce myself and repeat my memorized morning routine.

Looking back, I feel a sense of proudness that I have rarely experienced since then. Despite the nervousness of the first days and the fact that I was the only foreign looking girl in my small all-girls school I was warmly welcomed by my classmates, I can say without a doubt that it was thanks to their constant attention to not leave alone at any moment and include me in all activities that I was able to adapt to a new culture and learn.

While the main objective of my studies in Ireland was to learn English, I was taught so much more, I learned to be more self-reliant, responsible and grateful. It was my sense of gratitude to the Molina’s family that took care of me as I was their own that I felt that I owed to them to be my best, to experience everything to the fullest. I was always first to volunteer for anything and everything, I got to jump into the cold waters of the Irish sea from small cliffs, befriended the milkman into letting me expend my Saturday mornings petting and caring for cows and got to try hundreds of different potato based meals. However, at the same time that I was immensely happy I felt that I could not show the moments where I felt homesick, the frustration that overcame after expending hours using Google translate to finish a simple exercise or the embarrassment that I felt when people didn’t understand me. In a way I felt so blessed that any negative feeling had no place within me after all. How could I complain when I was so incredibly lucky to have my dream come true? How many people would do anything to be in my place?

From my time on the emerald island I brought back a rather thick Irish accent, a newly discovered love for rainy days and a rooted incapacity to vocalize negative emotions that to this day I still struggle to correct.

### ***Perpetual sleepovers, bikes and border breaking promises:***

After my first international adventure I was left longing for the opportunity to continue practicing my English skills and the lovely yet frightening feeling of discovering a new place. Once I finished my high school education in my hometown being completely burnt out both academically and emotionally I decided to take a break, a sabbatical year –which was quite frowned upon by my close circles- and after expending summer and autumn doing nothing remarkable I applied to study for 6 months in a folk high school in Denmark. With one big dream of experiencing the unknown, 2 flights and 3 full cases of winter clothes I arrived in Helsingor ready to begin from zero.

After the first awkward introductions to a Dutch, a Mexican and a Danish girl -that were to become my roommates- and a warm meal I knew that it was going to be okay. I was extremely lucky to get sorted with the girls that I did, our mutual nervousness and eagerness to learn made us extremely close and by the end of the first week we had already made plans to spend the summer together after our term was over. If Ireland was a mostly academic experience and a first glance of my future, Denmark was all about learning how to navigate human relations and rediscovering me.

During my stay at IPC (international peoples college) I spent six months surrounded by more than 75 different nationalities, 125 different personalities and the common goal of learning in a different environment. The shared values that everyone uplifted in the school helped to create an environment where I felt comfortable being the truest that I had ever been to myself, I got to make true connections and to explore who I was and what life path I wanted to pursue without the pressure for success that had been haunting me back home since I had come back from Ireland. Having the freedom to choose the subjects that truly interested me without the worry of analysing their future relevance on my academic career helped me reconnect with the immense joy of learning and part take in activities that otherwise I would have dimmed irrelevant or STUPID. I fell in love with learning again and got to try new things without feeling guilty of “misusing” my free time.

Once the Danish weather started to slowly become more amicable, I once again had the opportunity to connect with the people from the community and thanks to my new friends I had the opportunity to achieve another dream of mine: how to ride a bike. And it was through lectures of political philosophy next to a lake, Friday nights drinking Carlsberg with my roommates until 3 in the morning and exploring the city on bike that I realised that I wanted to study international relations in another country and continue my search for ... more. And that's how in that small Danish town thousands of kilometres from my house surrounded by so many different people, I found myself and the woman that I knew I could become.

### ***Crappy weather, Swedish personal space and fika:***

It was during my early days in Denmark that I decided to apply to various programs in Sweden, particularly in Gothenburg and by April of the past year I was admitted into Gothenburg University to study International Relations. Ready for a new challenge I spend a brief summer preparing to say goodbye to my family and friends for the next 3 years.

In Spain we have a saying “Don't become Swedish” . We use it to remind people not to become distant and uninterested and thought at the time I didn't pay it too much mind but after arriving in the Nordic country I saw where the saying came from. While preparing for my time in Sweden I was made aware of the harsh winters but I was not aware of how much cultural difference there was. After spending 6 months being always surrounded by people, the shift to living alone and not being able to form friendships as fast as I wished added to the rather depressive weather. My first months in the city were rather hard. However, going through this period of time I learned to enjoy time on my own, I was able to fully focus on my newly discovered hobby of baking and explore the city.

Whereas I learned to enjoy the calm and steadiness that being alone brought, I decided that I still wanted to try my best and make friends so I started approaching people for the only reasonable Swedish activity that might require getting to know someone: fika. And it worked, after many coffees and even more kanelbullars I managed to establish an amazing friend group that has allowed me to get the full university experience and better understand the “Swedish way”. Once again it was through the connection with other people that I was able to make a new space into my home.

### ***A very much needed pause and reflection:***

If there's a common take away from these very different experiences is the need to pause and reflect before taking the next step. It is during these periods of time where a more thorough analysis and reflection can be done, where one can thoughtfully review and profoundly cherish the different realities that one experienced. Even though I'm still nineteen I like to think that I have gone through a lengthy process of self-discovery and development that is constantly moving according to the world that surrounds me. The different people, the new food, the tumultuous weather and many adventures - the good ones and the not so good ones- have shaped me into who I am today and hopefully will continue to do so in the future.