Ciao! Waking up every day in the mountain range, I witnessed the gradual seasonal changes from the dorm room’s window – I truly believe that I cannot be more blessed than seeing Monte Bondone changing from fluffy green, to balding brown, then putting on a white snowy cap through half a year’s time. While one might imagine life in Italy may be quite relaxing, I actually lived a busy yet fruitful life, as I could usually only afford to greet with a brief “Buongiorno” to the cleaning lady who always wears a sweet smile at my block, while I grabbed my sandwich and ran for the bus in the morning. Yes, Trento is small, but the possibilities here can be various as one drops by and starts to explore: knowledge, nature, smiley faces, and the list can go on and on.

THE GIFT OF NATURAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

A day in the small city usually began in the morning with a core course related to local development, the major theme of my study programme. The course “Local Sustainable Development” reminded us the precious value of the natural environment, which is often considered as a resource to be exploited in a conventional economic model, but a perspective of local sustainability would see otherwise. In more details, significant coverage of the course stresses that general participation of the local community in making economic and political decisions can enhance local competitiveness, which turns out to be the reason economic development and environmental care can go hand in hand. An example here would be developing eco-tourism with local small entrepreneurs. If the natural scenery serves as the source of wealth, then taking care of the environment should always be a question within local development. Certainly, circumstances should depend on the specific profile of the community, in which different business models, social rules and hence independent path of development should exist.

To understand how the local community can contribute to effective development, a toolkit of “Economic and Social Analysis of Institutions” will be helpful. In particular, we discussed the interrelations between economic and social institutions in the case of family business and innovation, mechanisms of which reveal how social interactions, small like those in a family, or big like those between the government, universities and companies, can contribute to the advancement of local and even regional economy by promoting systemic growth. These changes
would be measured and communicated with the right measurements, such as indices and proxies that concern the demography, human resources and business climate of the local community. Putting things together, the notion of local development includes not only the economic aspect, but there is also a range of social and communal domains to be aware of.

The above ideas, still, could not be successfully put into practice without reliable formal institutions, and hence the topic of “Legal Analysis of Local Development” becomes important. To allow resources and services to be aptly delivered to the local community, codified rules are necessary. Laws play a central role here to ensure autonomy through, for example, local self-governance and fiscal power delegation. Even though the legal terms may sound like ideal types, different countries possess different models in handling issues of local government, all depending on the specificity of history. Thus, decent work of local development requires careful understanding down to the level of local governmental system, as circumstances vary a lot. Upon a stable institutional structure, production units, especially the smaller ones, can pursue their economic goals at ease. A stable system can guarantee the protection of local community, including both producers and consumers, through legal tools such as standards, certification and intellectual rights. After all, for sound local development to be achieved, the need for formal and informal institutions to function properly becomes inevitable.

Comprising of the primary part of study, these core activities set a bright, glittering colour tone. The class activities, furthermore, were never bound to the traditional classroom setting. With a number of guest lectures and a field trip to a local wine factory, I have gained wide exposure on the topics relevant to the profession of local development. All in all, these privileges pathed an essential part of my career development as a development professional.

**WORLD OF IMMENSITY, HISTORY OF DEPTH**

The elective courses have definitely added spice to my academic life. The tricky part of local development, as many scholars would claim, is how it is situated in the international context. The course “International Cooperation, Development and Security” successfully pinpointed this with the insights of world history, international relations and the dynamics of international civil societies, and reminded the students how modern history, often full of tragic stories of colonization, revolution and war, shaped the way we look at development nowadays, and hence the way different political bodies implement development plans. This helped me take an alternative perspective in looking at the formulation of the current knowledge of development. What captured my attention even more is the notion of “development-security nexus”, which attempts to suggest the interrelations between development and security issues. I even hope to further this idea in my master thesis and try to apply it to the current circumstances in China.
Another elective course “Democratizing Security: Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law in the Age of Uncertainty” dug into depth the changing conceptualization of security through classic scholarly work of some political philosophers and discussion on a collection of security topics. This furthered my insights on relating some nuances of development to security issues with the conceptual tools present in the academia. In more specific terms, the poststructuralist understanding of racism and governmentality, as well as the realist understanding of the alliance and division of the population upon polemics in historical process brought me to a brand-new comprehension of development, especially on the aspects that one must be very careful with, as chances could be systemic marginalization of some minority groups in a population. Putting simply, the course provided me inspirations that I would never anticipate before, and again the aspiration towards discovering the impact of development to local community in my master thesis.

Altogether, the elective courses not only contributed to an extra learning experience to the core ones, but also to facilitating some in-depth reflection on development issues with the appreciation of the knowledge of politics and international relations, especially on topics that might easily be forgotten. Where the glows exist, they have to be contrasted by darkness.

VIVID COLOURS ADDED TO LEISURE LIFE

“Work hard, play hard.” I brought with myself the same motto dated back to my bachelor days, and it worked equally well in Trento. While the academic life has been a rewarding one with the hard work paid off in class and study time, the same pertains to my life experience when I spent leisure time with teachers and students. My classmates and I will never forget the enjoyable time we spent with Prof. and Mrs. Trevisan for our chestnut walk in the country side and their hospitality with the homemade sweet pies. I believe they had great time with us for the international dinner gathering too. Daily life has been just as meaningful with the friendly exchange with local and international students in the dorm or in the class about any topics that we could touch on, be it casual one or intellectual.

Trentino and, to be exact, Italy also checked a few items on my bucket list. The overnight trekking trip in mid-October’s Brenta mountain range was the pure appreciation of the landscape of the Italian Alps backed by sunrise, sunset and starry night, from the grassy foot to the icy tip of the mountains. After winter arrived, my classmates and I also seized a day in February to take our baby steps skiing in Vason for the very first time in our life. Moreover, weekend trips travelling East to Venice, and those
heading down South to Florence, Rome and Naples painted my semester in Italy with a few more colourful strokes, as I dove in and felt the vibe in different parts of the country.

If the broad brushes sketched the contours of the mountains, the rich colours embellish the minutiae. Learning, at the end of the day, represents a process of exploring possibilities, adapting to novelty, integrating it to oneself and so on. Such course of actions relies not only an educational setting, but also a surrounding that allows authentic interactions between individuals and that with the environment, which I believe my life in Trento Italy has embraced with. In between the light and shades, I found a bunch of colours filling the remaining spaces of the canvas.

**SOME MINOR REMARKS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The experience of mobility in Trento is no doubt very wonderful, and it will be even perfect if some minor suggestions could be taken into consideration, which I put as the remarks that follow. I was quite surprised that the course materials, assessment methods, marking criteria and score weightings were fully announced not until the middle of the semester (around mid-October to late November) for some of the courses, which was pretty different from my previous academic engagements in Hong Kong, Hungary and Germany. Such arrangement would rather lead to a disruption on students’ plans, as coming into the third semester of our study programme we would need strict time management for arranging our master thesis and internship. Therefore, an early reveal of the course content in its entirety should help a lot. As well, some of the courses demanded long hours of lectures (even longer than that written in the course description), some objectives of which could possibly be fulfilled with other means like home reading or self-preparation, which should instead allow better flexibility. Still, these issues, while some may merely see as a form of cultural difference, should not shadow the excellent time I had if all things are considered. By now, I look forward to continuing my journey of life, knowledge and being. Ciao!