

## The EUI and Florence

I completed a year at the European University Institute, reading for an LLM in European, Comparative and International Law. The EUI is essentially a doctoral and post-doctoral university although the law faculty offers a Masters programme. It is situated in San Domenico, a sleepy hamlet which sits above Florence and below Fiesole, a lovely “hill top” town.

Florence was a wonderful city to live in - vibrant and permanently awake. I felt fortunate every day to live and experience it. I lived alone in an apartment in the city centre on via dei servi (street of the slaves) which lies between the Duomo and the Piazza SS Annunziata. As a street it connects two of Brunelleschi’s architectural wonders: the Dome of the Santa Maria del Fiore church (known as the Duomo) and the Museo degli Innocenti, which used to be an orphanage.



The Badia Fiesolana Cloister, the centre of the EUI, San Domenico, Italy. Bell tower of the 9th century Badia Fiesolana Church in the background

## The Workload



The terrace at the Badia Fiesolana where we had our lunch, Tuscan hills in the background.

Villa Schifanoia, meaning a villa to “avoid boredom”, is home to the EUI law and history students. As an LLM student I took seminars with the PhD students for the first two terms. I had three seminars twice a week as well as my Italian and French language classes (around 16 contact hours per week). The core workload of the LLM is researching and writing a 30,000 word thesis. Centred around the thesis are your readings for each seminar; two oral presentations per term, including one in a non-mother tongue; and two 5,000 word papers.

I took a diverse range of seminars, which I enjoyed immensely, covering international human rights law to cultural diversity, legal philosophy to legal methodology.

The seminars were informally arranged with one or two professors facilitating the debate/discussion around the theme of each class. It was daunting being surrounded by PhD students, other professors and post-doctorates but I felt that my New Zealand perspective could on occasion offer something unique. I am pleased that I tackled a jurisprudence paper as this came in very handy in my thesis. My thesis required detailed consideration of the concepts “competence” and “dignity”. These in turn required much research into the areas of autonomy, choice and theories of rights.

## My Thesis

My thesis was submitted in September of this year and considered the limitation of parental authority to consent to a genetic test on behalf of their child, when the child itself is unable to provide consent. Identifying my research question was the main challenge which took a few months of solid research.

The essential difficulty lay in isolating a topic which would be feasible in 30,000 words. When I look back, two things really assisted me in arriving at a decent research question: access to excellent  
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research facilities and some relevant legal conferences. As to the former, access to the EUI library (with its amazing inter library loan service) and the Oxford University Library (through a membership as a postgrad researcher) gave me more than everything I needed.

As for the conferences, I was fortunate enough to receive funding from the EUI to attend two outside Florence. The first, in Tilburg, The Netherlands, was called *Tilting perspectives on the regulation of technologies*. The conference was great from a regulatory point of view of technologies, theories of autonomy and the relationship between Law and Science. I also attended an *International Workshop in Genetics, Medical Technologies and Health Policies*, hosted by Johns Hopkins University and the Bologna SAIS Center in Bologna, not far from Florence. This conference was particularly helpful and delved into the thorny issues of informed consent and the importance of genetic counselling, both areas which I discussed in my thesis. In addition, the EUI held a conference onsite called *Human Rights and New Technologies: The Challenges of Regulation* which supplied a considerable number of ideas to my thesis.

## Back to Florence



The EUI library and gardens.



The view over Florence during my run.

In my third term I split my research and writing time relatively evenly between my apartment and the university library. I got to know Florence intimately during my 13 months. My days would include a run up in the hills overlooking Florence and around the back of the San Miniato church; thesis-writing and of course a coffee!

I soon realised that my street had everything I needed. For a break (and a rudimentary chat in Italian) I would pop out for a coffee at the “OK Bar” a few doors down. I had a green grocer (in the same family for 4 generations) directly downstairs where I could buy my fruit and veges or I could walk 10 minutes down the road to the wonderful Mercato Sant’Ambrogio which has both an uncovered and covered market. For more general purchases a Conad supermarket lay a one minute walk down the street. For lunch I would usually purchase a freshly made sandwich or salad at I Ritrovino a few doors down (for the small sum of 3 euro). And for shopping temptation I could pop into the leather store across from my apartment and visit Fabrizio and Sylvanna at *I Medici* (sometimes I would just wave hello from my window).

The three things I loved the most about Florence were its climate, its food and its history. It was almost always sunny and warm complemented by that amazing Italian light which made the yellows, oranges and soft beiges of the old buildings glow. Tuscan food is well known. But, for what it’s worth, it was simply outstanding. The tomatoes, oh, the tomatoes. It is true that you have never eaten a real tomato until you have

eaten one in Italy. And they have so many kinds, green tomatoes in winter, small and firm which burst with flavour; enormous bistecca tomatoes with hundreds of little seeds; tiny wee cherry tomatoes circular or elongated; long skinny tomatoes which are nice and mushy for cooking, tomatoes which aren't circular or smooth but wrinkled looking with delicate skins. And what else?! Pecorino cheese with figs and honey; pear and taleggio stuffed pasta; bistecca alla fiorentina; salted spinach and garlic; maiale arrosto; and crispy thin crusted pizza piled high with fresh tomatoes, fragrant basil and buffalo mozzarella.

Living in an open museum was an educational delight. The galleries, the old palazzi (Medici, Pitti, Pazzi to name a few), the churches and chapels and their frescoes (San Miniato, San Frediano and San Lorenzo being in my top three), the monasteries (San Marco was incredible), the museums and the hundreds of Renaissance gems to see; statues, buildings, paintings. It was overwhelming. Five particular experiences stand out in my memory. Watching Macbeth in the Bargello (the old prison, now a museum); attending an outdoor dance concert in the Piazza Annunziata at the end of my street which included ballet, contemporary dance and jazz; seeing Botticelli's Primavera at the Uffizi; gazing at Michelangelo's David in the Accademia around the corner; and wandering through the monks cells in the old monastery of San Marco.



The view at the end of my street; the magnificent Duomo.



Me inside the Badia Cloister, 24th September 2009, the day I submitted my thesis.

My year of postgraduate study at the EUI in Florence was one of the most fulfilling years of my life. It was educationally rewarding, in terms of both legal and general learning; and it was personally fulfilling - I learned another language and met many interesting and generous people, both Florentine locals and fellow students.

The NZFGW fellowship was tremendous in alleviating the financial pressures which inevitably arise from studying in a foreign country. I once again want to sincerely thank the NZFGW for such an amazing opportunity.

Lauren Lindsay (LLM!)  
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