

By Selma Joana Moreno Rivera



Embarking on a pre-doctoral program at the Technische Universität Berlin—as part of the Global Center for Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability—was a deeply enriching experience, both intellectually and culturally. Coming from Mexico City, a place where urban dynamics also pulse with vibrance, sometimes in a chaotic manner, my expectations were high in terms of understanding how a leading European institution approaches the intertwined challenges of cities, sustainability, and spatial analysis.

One of the things that impacted me the most is the diverse and unique character of academic approaches of the research projects presented by the PhD candidates, researchers and practitioners that shared their experiences. As well as the holistic attitude towards complementary professional and personal aspects that entail the completion of a doctoral project. As an urban designer, I found the lectures on “Diagramming as an ethnographic method” very stimulating and transformative in terms of the implications to the perspectives of scientifically production of knowledge.

From a more general perspective, and perhaps the most formative experience that I had, was the pleasure to build my daily routines around the solid fabric of educational infrastructures. I had the opportunity to build the addictive habit to spend too many hours at the Stabi and TU Libraries. Despite the apparent solitary journey that academic endeavours seem to unfold in these places, I profoundly enjoyed not only the privilege of literature accessibility, but the collective feel in these precincts of knowledge production. Six months could only show me a glimpse of the vast amount of natural and cultural heritage places that enable academic collaborative navigation. From institutional seminars, international workshops and local innovative exhibitions; to daily practices, ephemeral appropriations and intellectually stimulating events , drew the intense pulse of this training program.

The SMUS program introduced us to institutions that converge as collaborative nodes, allowing research to transcend disciplinary silos and encouraging different disciplines to engage with spatial data, historical narratives, and design methodologies all at once. Berlin’s urban collection of forests, lakes, gardens, museums and music clubs became

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extensions of the program inviting us, as multidisciplinary scholars, to consider urbanity not just as an abstract goal but as a situated perspective.

My time at TU Berlin has been a vivid reminder that academic disciplines thrive in ecosystems where knowledge is shared openly, and where institutions cultivate an atmosphere of curiosity rather than competition. It's a model that I hope to bring back to my own practice and research in Mexico—one where professional and educational networks feed each other to rewrite better cities.