Placement Report

Internship at Fair Play for All Foundation
Quezon City, Metro Manila
27/06/2018 - 30/08/2018
**Rationale for choosing placement and preparation phase**

Upon applying for Masters courses throughout Europe, a major factor in opting to study at the University of Groningen was its international placement programme. Studying at university teaches you all you all the skills required to enter into the field of IR, however it does so in a fashion that is distant from the real life setting, for my placement I wanted to gain as much experience in the field as possible. The prospect of such a placement has always appealed to me, however I overlooked the difficulty in actually identifying and choosing a placement that met this criteria. Throughout my first semester my main interests shifted from the research of international conflicts, to more of a focus on the human security aspects of IR, the protection of vulnerable persons and groups. I knew I wanted to find a placement where I could have a first hand role in experiencing and working alongside the conditions and situations faced by the most vulnerable of people. Although such options as diplomatic placements in embassies were an appealing and available option, I believe I would be distanced from such experiences, much the same as I was studying in front of a computer in my academic research. Therefore, I began looking for placements at small grass roots organisations working in the field. Of course, attending the voluntary IRIIO placement class helped, however I was still left with a world of options and it was hard to know where to start.

Fortunately, a chance meeting with a fellow student helped me on my way to my current placement. During our conversation, we spoke about our courses and on the subject of me choosing a placement, he made me aware of a non-profit organisation his father and his workplace had helped sponsor in Metro Manila. It operates out of one of the most impoverished areas in the Philippines, providing community development programmes, an alternative learning system for the street kids in the area, as well as nutrition and sports in the community to alleviate the issues of poverty, crime drugs and a lack of opportunities. He put me in touch with the head of the organisation, an Englishman named Roy and from there I began a dialogue to find out more. Initial contact with Roy and the time was encouraging, they were very open to having a masters student on board to help with the research team, studying the link between health, poverty and education at the FairPlay for All Foundation. Upon doing some personal research, I began my application. Although it was slightly removed from most of my study, I believed it presented an opportunity to experience, first-hand, the issues that many throughout the third-world face and the opportunity to live and immerse myself in such an area and line of work was exactly the type of experience I wanted to gain.

The next stage was to update my CV and begin my written application. For my application I had to outline what my main reasons were for wanting to intern at the organisation, what skills I could bring to the organisation and what aspect of the organisation I would like to work with. I explained my goal of gaining experience at a small grass-roots NGO, especially in the Philippines, a country with a massive disparity in wealth, massive levels of corruption and an underclass who have faced systematic abuse by those in power. I wanted to utilise the skills I learned throughout my course, looking at the levels of poverty and crime first-hand and, due to my IR background, tie that to the wider political situation. The process took around a week to complete and soon after I was accepted officially accepted as an intern. The next stage was utilise the Marco Polo funding available, the application was rather straightforward to complete and vital for me to afford the travel, despite leaving it rather late I was accepted and booked my lengthy flights to the Philippines. I remained in constant dialogue with the research team, they gave me articles to read before I arrived, first generally about the situation in the country and secondly a study regarding a test known as ACE. This stands for Adverse Childhood Experience, it identifies such experiences in a persons childhood such as abuse and exploitation and argues a direct link between that in poor health in later life. Although a US based experiment, the organisation was utilising it in the Payatas area where I would be working. It was a great introduction into the work I would be doing. After organising my accommodation and transport I finally arrived on the 27th of June for my two Month long internship.

**Nature, Structure and objectives of FFA foundation**

Fairplay for all Foundation is a small grass-roots NGO based in the Payatas slum in Metro Manila, it attempts to alleviate the poverty faced by the street kids and general population in the area. It does so by “creating a safe environment for the families we work with, developing holistic and
sustainable projects in education, sports, and nutrition” with a goal to “empower the community by ensuring they are part of the decision-making process and organisation of each project, in order to identify the root cause of the problem and break the cycle of poverty for good.” The organisation seeks to build innovative and long-term solutions to the issues of crime, poor education and child labour. Within Payatas, many young children are forced to scavenge a large dumpsite located next to the neighbourhood or ‘barangay’. Families tend to be extremely large, therefore “financially, they [families] just can’t afford to send their kids to school, as a family of five living on the poverty line would be spending half of their entire household income sending their three kids to school” (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). What happens is families ‘specialise their children’ (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). This means they focus on one child in the family to send to school in hope they in the future they can provide for the whole family. The other children are therefore put to work in the dumpsite, sifting through garbage and selling on their findings. It is these children that the FairPlay for all Foundation attempts to provide for in the areas of education, nutrition and sport. It gains funding through social business projects such as the FairPlay cafe, this provides food for the kids in the area and sells food in the wider community to allow for the running of the organisation. The organisation also relies on sponsorship of the children in order to provide for them the education, nutrition and activities provided for them.

Another issue is in the structure of the Filipino education system itself, a lack of funding has led to classrooms often of around 60-80 students with a curriculum based on information memorisation in place of critical thinking and thought. 50% of students will drop out in grade 1, apart from financial difficulties faced in transport to school, purchase of stationary and books as well as uniform, a major reason why kids are left behind and drop out is the system of teaching itself (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). Philippine schools are guilty of teaching in the form of rote memorisation pedagogy, meaning that students are taught through graded recitations of information, they are not taught to think reflectively or critically, instead to store large amounts of information (Nozaki, Openshaw and Luke, 2005). Combine this with overly crowded classrooms, students are left disengaged and thus fail their classes or simply drop out. FairPlay foundation attempts to remedy this through an Alternative learning system (ALS). According to the foundation ‘the students have a say in how the school is run, in what lessons they take, and in how they shape their future’ the reason being that the rigid and bureaucratic style of teaching has proven difficult to translate in poorer contexts (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). In a bid to prevent this disengagement, the organisation acts on the belief that ‘curiosity should be encouraged and become the corner-stone of the learning process, not shut down for a prescribed curriculum that has little to do with their actual lives’. Therefore students are encouraged to cooperate rather than compete. In this more open learning environment, the teachers encourage the students to dictate their own learning, the theory being that a happy student is more engaged and less likely to be passively memorising lessons. This open learning environment has meant that kids in the area have been able to gain qualifications they otherwise would not have achieved and drop-outs are a rare occurrence.

The organisation also engages in community development projects, one such being the newly constructed Payatas Sports centre, here is the home of Payatas FC, a football project aimed at providing the street kids with an escape from the abject poverty they face. Kids in the area are able to take part in training and competitions, giving them a purpose and encouraging them to stay away from crime, gangs and drug use which is prevalent in the area. ‘Payatas Football Club was established in 2011 as a way to build relationships with the community while having fun. It is a safe space to play and interact with peers, away from gangs, drugs and the underlying causes of such problems’ (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). Since its inception, the club has won over 40 trophies and produced some of the best young players in the country, gaining selection for the Philippines national youth team. Importantly, many kids in the team have earned footballing scholarships to universities throughout Metro Manila. One such success story is a coach I worked with during my time at the organisation. Ronalyn (21), came from a family of 11 siblings, she was sent to school for a period, however she had to drop out in order to work due to her family living on the equivalent of 3 euros per month. Upon joining the football team she progressed through to coaching and from there she has earned a sports scholarship to the Colegio de San Juan de Letran, one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the Philippines. The hope is that more kids can gain entry to university and escape the cycle of poverty. A youth group also takes place twice per week, this consists of older kids who are still a part of the general education system in the Philippines. Here is a group where, again, kids can
escape from the poverty they face and to provide a safe environment away from crime and drugs. The youth club also teaches many things left out of the general curriculum, such as a class on Philippine culture, how to identify fake news (a huge problem on Filipino social media which can be partly blamed for the continued election of corrupt government officials) as well as classes on sexual health and tolerance.

The last aspect of the organisation is in its social business projects, the biggest of which being the Fairplay cafe. ‘The Fairplay Café is our main social enterprise, empowering local mothers to run a kitchen in Payatas, providing healthy, affordable meals in the community’ (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). In running the cafe, the organisation is able to earn money to allow for its projects and by involving the wider community it gives many within the area a purpose. By ‘empowering the community to solve the root cause of the problem, rather than the most visible symptom. We believe when we identify the root cause of a problem and target that, it is more efficient and sustainable and leads to a longer-lasting impact’ (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). Those in the Payatas area suffer from a lack of proper nutrition. Indeed, the kids in the area are highly stunted in terms of growth and most are underweight. The issue itself is not a financial one per se. According to the organisation; ‘There is a great deal of hunger, but the problem is not the lack of food, it is the socioeconomic problems leading to a situation where the family cannot support their own basic needs, even when working 12 hours a day. If a family is struggling on or below the poverty line, they cannot afford to invest in a refrigerator and the electricity bill it comes with, and healthier food becomes much more expensive as a result’ (Fairplay for All Foundation, 2016). The cafe prepares cheap vegetarian food to combat this, the members of the school and kids also eat for free in order to combat the health issues that plague those living in the area.

The organisation is split into departments, the administrative team deals with sponsorships, maintaining the flow of money and donations that come in as well as keeping track of the students and staff and their tasks. The school department consists of the teachers and the education team who oversee the implementation of the ALS. The department that I work in is the community development and research team. Here, the work carried out identifies the main issues in the area and with the school and does research on the kids health and education levels. The reports are sent to the school and to the sponsors in order to track progress and come up with ideas to implement in order to tackle the issues faced in the community.

**Expectations prior to the placement**

During my correspondence I was made aware that not only would I be working in Payatas, I would also be living in the neighbourhood itself. Coming from a comfortable life in a western country to live in one of the worst slums in the Philippines was a daunting prospect, however it was one I wished to experience given the line of work I hope to one day enter. I grew up in Glasgow, a city with its own fair-share of poverty, crime and social issues. Having an understanding of the living conditions of the poorest in Glasgow I could only imagine what Payatas would be like. Through my research I learned about the way many people live in Metro Manila. I viewed images of those living in makeshift houses made from corrugated metal and tarpaulin and I read articles about how the poorest experience widespread crime, substance abuse and poverty on a daily basis. I knew it would be a totally different experience from what us Westerners understand as poverty. I was not put off however, through my research and correspondence with the organisation, I also learned about the massive community spirit and hospitality of Filipinos, I was excited to experience this. Leaving my comfort zone was exactly what I wanted from my placement. I was aware that all the reading and research in the world would not prepare me, I had to experience it first-hand, so I went into the placement with an open mind and was prepared to leave behind the comforts of Europe and immerse myself in the experience in hope that it would give me a different perspective on the world.

In terms of the internship itself, I gained much of my expectation from the correspondence with the organisation itself. I expected to work closely with the research team and continue with the research they were carrying out. However, they also wished me to come up with my own ideas and research, from what they told me, I expected to work with a certain degree of independence. I expected for the first week or so to simply get acquainted with the area and organisation and chose which direction my research should go from there. Again, I didn’t want to have a set idea of what to the internship would be like, I wanted to simply get there and assess the situation and
organisation and take it from there. My goal was to gain an understanding of how NGO's at a 
grass-roots level work and indeed how they can impact a community. In future I wish to enter into 
a larger NGO and I wanted to use the experience I gained at Fair-play to illustrate firsthand how 
programmes can be introduced and affect people. With the idea that in future this would aid me in 
introducing more widespread programmes at a larger NGO in future.

Tasks undertaken

For the first week of my placement I was tasked with simply getting familiar with the organisation, 
its staff and the children. During this week I gained experience working with all aspects of the 
organisation, spending a day in each. Firstly, I worked with the teachers, helping them teach the 
maths class to the older children. I found this highly rewarding, also with my lack of Tagalog, it 
was one of the few classes I could help teach. Secondly, I joined the football team and helped 
coach a training session, having played football throughout my life I settled in quickly and it 
helped to create a relationship with the kids. The next day I joined in on the trip to the Manila pride 
march, this was part of the class on tolerance and was vital again in forming a bond with the kids 
that were part of the organisation. Through my research I would have to deal with the children a 
lot, so getting to know them was a must. Next I joined in the social business aspect at the 
FairPlay cafe, here I worked with the mothers of several of the children and got aquatinted with 
the people in the neighbourhood. Again, it was necessary that I made myself known in the area as 
someone working at FairPlay. It helped me settle in to the community and it was far safer for 
myself that I was known to work at the organisation when venturing around the area. Lastly, I had 
my first taste of the research team I would be working with, they gave me several readings to get 
acquainted with the research they do, and soon after I was put to work.

My first task was a midline reassessment of the football teams mental and physical health. In order to do this we utilised three tests, with the goal to determine the levels of change from the 
baseline assessment carried out at the start of the year. First was the task to go around the area 
and locate the kids, most were at the sports centre the others we brought there. Here we 
measured and weighed the kids in order to determine their BMI's, right away I noticed the kids, 
generally around 14 years old appeared to be far younger than they were. It was clear that their 
heights were on average heavily stunted and they were rather underweight. Following that the 
children were given a test known as the ‘Mindset Tool’. The mindset tool is a short questionnaire 
taken from renowned Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, she identifies what is known as a ‘fixed 
mindset’ as a belief that talents, intelligence and abilities are predispositions that are inherent and 
set in stone (Dweck, C. 2007). Those with this mindset believe they are born with a set of skills 
that cannot be changed, preventing them from attempting and therefore achieving growth. The 
test is composed of a number of statements that the students rank in agreement from strongly 
agree, somewhat agree, disagree, strongly disagree. The last test we gave to the students was 
the Childhood Depression test, taken from the Centre of Epidemiological Studies. The test is a ‘20 
item self-report depression inventory with possible scores ranging from 0-60. Each response to an 
item is scored: 0 - Not at all, 1 - A little, 2 - Some, 3 - A lot.’ These scores are reversed for some 
of the questions. The higher the score, the higher the level of depression the child has 
(Brightfutures.org, 2012). After tabulating the scores we gathered our findings. On average, the 
BMI’s of the children showed some growth, a positive sign. However, in the mindset tool, the 
children on remained at the same level as the baseline report. They were found to have a ‘growth 
mindset with some fixed ideas’, a positive result, however no improvement. The depression test 
however was worrying, the children went from, on average, a ‘slightly depressed’ score, to ‘highly 
depressed’. This was identified to be the cause of a recent drug raid by police, they had arrested 
several of the children’s parents. This was a regular occurrence in Payatas, police officers often 
rabled and arrested residents under the pretence of illicit drug use and sale, often doing so in 
plain clothes and without a warrant. President Duterte’s ‘War on Drugs’ affects the most 
impoverished in the Philippines, having spoke to residents, coworkers and from my own research, 
the war on drugs seems to be more akin to a war on the poor. The mental health and depression 
levels of the children in the area therefore fluctuate greatly depending on such circumstances and 
events. The children who’s parents were arrested were therefore given the support necessary by 
the teachers and staff.

My next task was, alongside another intern, to create a child protection policy for the 
organisation. The aim here was to create a policy that would allow the children to understand
what constitutes child abuse, in so that if they can identify whether they are victims of abuse. The reason that we had to make this clear is due to the fact a lot of the abuse that occurs to the children is so normalised in their lives that they are not aware of it being abuse. Such incidents of physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as child labour are issues that many children have grown up experiencing, therefore we had to make it clear in a simplified form what constitutes abuse and what should be the steps if they had experienced it themselves or in others. We done so by creating a child friendly flow chart, we simplified the terms and translated it into Tagalog. The next step was to create a more comprehensive paper for the staff in order for them to identify it in the children and to know which route to take to solve the issue through the organisation. We adapted the national child protection policy of the Philippines and altered it to suit the environment we work in and also made it clear the route that would be taken should they report incidents through the organisation. This was done in correspondence with Aileen the social worker who works with FairPlay. The finished document was presented to the staff in a meeting.

My next task was undertaken with the Youth Group. Here I done a midline analysis, I constructed a short quiz in order to compare my own findings to the baseline findings. I asked questions such as what skills they had gained from the youth group, whether it had met their expectations and what could be done in order to improve the skills and experiences they gained. This basic test was meant to be the first step in my own research. However, a conversation with the staff member running the youth group changed the direction that I took my research. He had recently done a workshop on modern Filipino history, in particular the impact of Ferdinand Marcos, the dictator overthrown in 1986. Ferdinand Marcos was famous for his extravagance, corruption and human rights abuses, ruling under Martial Law from 1972 until 1981. During this time, he was estimated to have taken between $5 to $10 billion dollars from the Philippines for himself and his powerful dynastic family (Celoza, 1998). During the workshop, the kids were asked their opinion on both martial law and on Marcos, overwhelmingly the kids seemed to hold him in high regard, when asked they explained their parents felt the same way. Puzzled by this, I done some research on Filipino’s and their political views and found that knowledge levels in regards to their own country and its state of affairs were worrying low. The 2017 Ipsos survey on the Perils of Perception supports this. It tested over 20,000 people from 38 countries on their perception of their own country, asking question in regards to crime, health, corruption and technology. The Philippines was found to be the 3rd most ignorant of the issues in their country, yet in terms of confidence in their own answers Filipinos were ranked 1st. Furthermore, Filipinos were found to be highly susceptible to fake news and were unable to identify satire (Perils of Perception, 2017). Moreover, voting behaviours were based, not on a politicians actual policies, but on their personality, their ‘celebrity’ status in the country, and indeed on paying off the poor to vote on their behalf. The result of which meaning that corrupt politicians were continuously voted into positions of power, maintaining the massive gulf between the rich and poor (Quimpo, 2007). An example being former President Gloria Arayo, who had been convicted on several accounts of election fraud and embezzlement, was excused for her crimes by President Duterte and given the position of Senator in the government (RG Cruz, 2017). Such blatant and visible corruption has seen little protest or demonstration by the Filipino people.

I wanted to find the link between the children's puzzling beliefs and the political situation in the country. Throughout my Masters degree at the University of Groningen, we were taught that employing critical thinking was the key to fully understanding and reflecting on an issue. Within the Philippines I theorised that critical thinking skills were severely lacking, this in my mind could explain the unjust political system that is in place. I began my research and found that within the school system, rote memorisation pedology was the main form of teaching, meaning that memorisation tasks were taught in place of critical thinking and reflection. The result of which meaning that students fail to be able to reflect and question the society they live in, a major flaw that may be the reason why the system of corruption in place for the last two generations has been maintained. I wanted to test this on the kids. From speaking to the teachers at FairPlay, they told me that they try to employ critical thinking in their lessons, Therefore I wanted to compare the kids at Youth Group -who all attend mainstream school- to the older or ‘mastery’ level kids at the fair-play foundation to measure critical thinking levels. In order to do so, I adapted the ‘Fairmindedness’ critical thinking test by Richard Paul (Paul and Elder, 2012). Students were given a set of opposite or contradictory beliefs and asked to identify which one they agree with the most, or find the most correct. Then, the students are presented with the opportunity to identify one of five reasons for accepting their belief and then for the opposite. The theory behind the quiz
being that fair-minded critical thinkers should be able to identify the most logical and best reason for the belief. The first task here was to adapt the quiz to suit the age group by simplifying it to a degree and asking my colleagues to translate it to Tagalog. Also, due to it being a westernised test, I had to adapt it to a test that young Filipino’s would understand. To do so the questions and beliefs I used were contemporary and well known issues in the country, such as martial law, free speech and trustworthiness of politicians. An example of the quiz:

Part I
1) Politicians are trustworthy all of the time.
2) Politicians should not be trusted all of the time.

Here we would ask the student to identify which statement they support the most to find out their viewpoint. In part 2 we would provide a statement for each of the beliefs and ask the student to imagine they were in front of an audience having to give the best and most logical answer to the statement.

Part II
1) Politicians should not always be trusted because…
   a) They are inherently trustworthy people.
   b) I don’t think they care about other people, only themselves.
   c) They must be untrustworthy to have got to the position they are in today.
   d) Some have a reputation for being liars.
   e) Some of them may be motivated for their own personal gain rather than to help people.

2) Politicians should always be trusted because…
   a) They are inherently trustworthy people.
   b) They realise the truth will come out in the long run.
   c) They have taken oaths to uphold the law and constitution.
   d) They have no reason to lie.
   e) They wouldn’t be elected if they were liars.

For question 1), answer (e) is the credited response, meaning this is the most logical and effective argument for the statement. In question 2), (b) is the credited response. If the student in Part I is of the belief that politicians are trustworthy all the time and answers correctly in Part II - question 1), they would gain 2 points as this is the converse of their belief and thus shows fair-minded and critical reasoning. They would also get 1 point for the credited response in question 2, as they were able to think critically about the view they themselves hold. The opposite would be true if they believed that politicians should not be trusted all of the time.

Overall, for the mainstream students the average score was 6.4 out of 15. With students ranging from 2/15 to 10/15. Overall, critical thinking skills were shown to be rather basic. In terms of the kids at FairPlay, despite being a smaller sample, they scored 6.6 out of 15, with scores ranging from 4/15 to 12/15. Although these scores are close, it is necessary to remember that the kids at FairPlay had dropped out of school early and many had simply fell behind and were generally at the lower levels of mainstream school. This illustrated that the critical thinking style teaching at FairPlay was beginning to have an effect. Having gathered my findings I began writing my report for the organisation. Here, using existing research by Filipino scholars, I argued my theory as to the wider issues that comes with an education system that forgoes critical thinking in place of rote memorisation. I laid out my findings and outlined the need for FairPlay to increase the number critical thinking lessons in the curriculum. I argued too that critical thinking can be emancipatory in that it gives students the ability to reflect on the society they live in and to understand the undemocratic, corrupt and oppressive system that is in place. Through this understanding the hope is that they try to improve their situation within the society they live. On a wider scale I argued that critical thinking, if put in place in mainstream schools, would increase societal awareness and help to provide a fairer and just political system where the people would hold politicians accountable for their actions. In my last week of study I presented my paper to the organisation in hope that it would be beneficial.
Personal learning process, working attitude and placement supervision

Upon arriving at Fairplay and learning the aims and processes of the organisation, I felt some pressure to prove myself in an area that I was not entirely familiar with. My Masters degree was, for the most part highly theoretical in nature, we learned next to nothing of how organisations actually worked and impacted people. Furthermore, most of my research at FairPlay would be an educational perspective on human security, an area I again was not wholly knowledgable on. I didn’t want to burden my already very busy coworkers, therefore I began some personal research alongside the readings that were provided for me. Being shown around every aspect of the organisation, I made sure I was extremely observant in understanding the workings that go on within FairPlay. Despite my worry that I would be a burden to the staff, they proved to be very happy to take time out to familiarise myself with the work I was expected to carry out and set about giving me basic tasks such as tabulating research results and testing the kids out in the field to get me started. During my second week however, I felt as though the work I was given to do was not challenging enough, it was simple office research on existing work that had been completed the month before I arrived. At the weekly sta meeting I brought the issue up, I was only interning for two months and wanted to make as much of a difference as I could in this short time period. Following my discussion I began to be trusted with more hands on research. The following weeks I was trusted to carry out the KPI’s of the children, takings their BMI’s, applying the mindset tool and depression test and presenting my research, as well as completing the child protection policy which is today used by the organisation. As I proved capable of completing such tasks my confidence in my ability as a researcher grew, as did my knowledge on the issues I was researching, I began to put forward my own ideas and plans. During the weekly meetings I was given strict deadlines for my work and began to feel like a member of the team.

During my time at university, presenting in front of an audience was a major weakness of mine, I simply didn’t feel confident speaking in front of large groups. During presentations I suffered from a mild case of stage fright, my mind often went blank mid-speech and I found difficulty in translating my thoughts in the form of a presentation -I felt far more capable in my writing ability. I have identified one of the reasons for this; my accent. I have a rather thick Glaswegian accent and -especially amongst non-native speakers- I admit that I am rather hard to understand. Trying to slow down my speech and pronounce my words clearer was always in the back of my mind during presentations and I believe this had resulted in my rather less than effective public speaking skills. This lack of confidence made it hard to translate my thoughts without an exact script in front of me. Four days into my internship was the end of month meeting for June, here each department spoke of the achievements of the previous month and the plans for the following. Unexpectedly, I was asked to stand up and give a speech, a nightmare of mine, I stumbled my way through the short speech and felt a great relief when it was over. Yet, this proved to be a taste of things to come. Throughout my internship I have had to consistently provide a presentation on my work and findings, once and sometimes twice per week. Being subjected to presentation after presentation has somewhat quelled my fears, it has become far more normalised and due to this I have began to feel far more comfortable speaking in front of an audience. Furthermore, being with mainly Filipino's, I learned to speak more understandably in general conversation and now doing so in a presentation comes more naturally. By the last few weeks I had no issues or nerves at all while speaking in front of the group. A skill that will be vital in future. My research and report writing skills have also improved greatly and my ability to look and results and find a pattern has been highly beneficial to myself. Being given more of a free role allowed me to work more independently, I have constructed my own test for the children -which will be used in future by the organisation- and through this created a report on my findings for use of FairPlay. I successfully utilised the skills I learned as an IR student to those learned at FairPlay to link the issues at the educational level to the wider political situation in the Philippines.

I was supervised by the head of the research department, a woman named Francis Aguda, she has been at FairPlay for the last two years and is a very experienced and effective researcher. I found Francis to be very kind and patient, during my time working with her, she taught me how to be an effective researcher as well as teaching me basic skills such as how to tabulate results into a computer, something that was necessary as my IT abilities were not the best. In terms of supervision, she was always there to help and guide me in my work, we work in the same small office so it was easy to get her opinion or advice. I was not given a strict set of tasks to complete for her, I was mostly encouraged -after the first couple of weeks- to do my own work and put my
own ideas into the research carried out. At the end of the week I reported to her to show her my work and then this was presented to the head of the organisation at our weekly meeting. Roy, the organisation director would evaluate our work further and provide us with a direction for the next week, as well as giving us reading which we would discuss in another meeting. I enjoyed the independence and trust to carry out tasks during my placement, I never felt as though I was an intern, instead I was made to feel like a trusted member of the team.

Problems, unfulfilled and fulfilled expectations

As mentioned previously, my first issue came with the work I was tasked with. I started out doing simple work on research that had already been carried out, I feared I would not gain the experience I sought during my placement. This issue was solved when I brought it up during the weekly meeting, Roy and Francis assured me that I was simply being eased into the research department. Perhaps on my own part I was being rather hasty. Shortly after I began doing more thorough research. Another expectation I had was that certain community development projects had been put on hold due to financial reasons, therefore they were not in place for my arrival despite being told they would have been operational. One such being the plastic moulding project. The organisation had invested in a plastic smelter as well as a large 3D plastic printing machine, being located next to a dumpsite and with plastic waste filling the streets. The plan is to utilise this waste by melting it down and printing products for the community to sell. Another project being the urban farming initiative to grow vegetables in spare ground for the residents. I would have benefitted from both projects being operational when I arrived, this would have widened my experience greatly, due to this most of my work was based solely on education and health.

In terms of my work, things ran smoothly for the most part. However, many kids left the programme for a strange reason, this meant the research I carried out relied on less data than it should have. The route to the sports centre had been bricked up by the barangay subdivision meaning children had to walk along a major road to reach the centre. For some reason the parents of several children blamed the organisation for blocking the route, even though there was no truth to that rumour at all. Because of this, around 30 children left the organisation, a complete disaster in terms of the research department and in the progress they were making with the kids. Despite visiting the children houses to explain its falseness, the rumour for some reason persisted. Another issue I faced was not in terms of work but in terms of the cafe. As part of my internship, I was given access to breakfast, lunch and dinner every day during the week at the cafe. The food that was offered was of poor quality and the same dishes were served every day, not only did this mean that I had to spend a large sum of my money on purchase of my own food but the food on offer I believe was not nutritious enough to successfully improve the BMI’s of the children. The last problem I faced was in terms of my accommodation, the room I rented as part of the organisation was relatively damp, I often found myself with a sore throat and my clothes would become damp in the room leaving me to store my items in the school instead. Overall however, the issues and unfulfilled expectations were rather minor.

Reflection on future career prospects

My time at FairPlay, on the most part, fulfilled my expectations of the experience I would gain from working at a grass roots NGO. Within the area of Payatas the organisation had a massive impact on many peoples lives and gave them opportunities to bring themselves out of the dire situation they faced. However, the scale of the operation was very small, in future I would intend to work for an organisation that carries out development on a much larger scale. Despite very much enjoying myself at FairPlay I was aware that I never intended to have a career at the organisation. This does not take away from the work they do at all, however I wanted to gain experience on a much smaller scale and witness the impact it can have with the thought in mind that it would benefit me in the future, hopefully working for a larger scale NGO. For this, I wanted to immerse myself fully in one of the poorest areas in the third world and use this to gain a greater understanding of what life if like for those subject to abject poverty.
Housing cost of living and social surrounding

Compared to Europe the cost of living in the Philippines -and especially Payatas- was extremely low, the cost of a meal from a local street food seller was around 40 PHP, less than 1 euro. Outside of Payatas, prices were higher but still much lower than anywhere in Western Europe. I came to the Philippines on a rather low budget and had no issues with money whatsoever. Such low prices however mean that the quality of food and other necessities was not on the same level as in Europe, I struggled a lot with the food as it was not the best quality and consisted mainly of plain rice with an accompaniment. Housing was equally as cheap, for the months of July and August, my rent combined with water and electricity came to around 80 euros. The room I rented was not an idea place to live, it was very damp and close to infested with insects such as cockroaches. This was to be expected as I was essentially living in a slum so it did not affect my experience too much, the only issue was, as I mentioned, the dampness. My clothes were damp and did not smell great should I leave them in my room, it caused me some throat problems also. This in my eyes was simply part and parcel of the experience, I wanted to immerse myself in the area and that was exactly what I done. I found the residents in Payatas to be extremely friendly and welcoming, at no point did I feel unsafe walking around the area. I had a good relationship with the kids and their parents. Often as I walked down the street I would be invited into homes to have food and drinks. Despite their situation, I have rarely met a more kind and generous people. I attempted to learn some Tagalog before I came and continued to work on it while I was interning, this helped somewhat but it was often hard to communicate with a lot of people due to the fact english levels -out with the kids- were not very high combined with my extremely basic Tagalog. In my first week I became rather unwell, this was perhaps just my body becoming acclimatised to the weather and in the living conditions. Travelling around Metro Manila was rather easy, utilising Jeepneys -converted WW2 American jeeps used as the main form of public transport. Knowing the routes is essential however as it is very easy to become stranded in unfamiliar places, a rather dangerous prospect in Metro Manila.

Tips

I would advise future interns to learn some Tagalog phrases before they arrive, as it proves very useful in terms of communicating with the kids. Furthermore, doing research on Filipino culture and on the living conditions in Payatas is a must to prepare themselves for the shock they may encounter in living there. Lastly, be prepared for the insects as they are everywhere, especially mosquitos who carry Dengue, therefore a large supply of repellant is advised.
Bibliography


