

**EUTOPIA Certificate of
Internationalisation (EUCI)
REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO**



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Cover letter

We are in a society that gives us the opportunity and possibility to expand ourselves internationally. It is becoming easier to get to know other cultures, other political systems, other languages, other traditions, and more. All this is thanks to globalisation, which allows and encourages people to make use of their fundamental right of free movement through different countries, in addition to the great advances in technology that have allowed us to be in another part of the world, in a few hours. However, although globalisation has good points, it also has disadvantages, such as the loss of a country's identity or even the decline of some minority languages.

Throughout my life and through all my international experiences, I have learned many things, including that people are different and the same at the same time. On the one hand, we are moved by similar motivations in life; an example would be that "love moves the world". This is quite a true fact since we are social beings and the fact of feeling affection for those around us and that they feel for us is a wonderful thing. On the other hand, in each country there are different customs and traditions that also differentiate us from each other, such as the food of each country or even the way in which we relate to each other. According to the stereotypes that we have about the different countries and cultures, the further south, like Spain, people tend to be more affectionate and, as for the Nordic countries, the more distance is usually kept, although the feeling of affection is the same. However, although this may sometimes coincide with reality, they are mere stereotypes. Whether or not the above is true, it could be said that, through different means, all human beings have common goals: to be happy, to love, to be surrounded by family and friends, among others.

Although I grew up in Barcelona and have lived here most of my life, I have travelled to many places, especially in Europe. When I was 16, I went to Ireland to study for a whole high school year by myself, without even having the level of English required to defend myself. This wonderful year could be considered the beginning of my interest and passion for living international experiences. I couldn't put this passion aside, so, in addition to keeping my friends from the different countries I met during that year, as soon as I finished high school and started at University Pompeu Fabra (UPF), I joined the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) to continue meeting students from all over the world, getting to know their cultures and learning from their experiences, as well as helping them in their integration process in Barcelona.

However, the academic year ends, but my desire to continue "expanding myself" internationally does not, so during the summers, for example, last summer (and this summer), I went to work abroad, on an island in Greece, Rhodes. All this has allowed me to meet many people and cultures from all over the world and also teach my own traditions. I don't want to leave this international life. I love having friends all over the world. That's why even my future projections are in the same line: do as much Erasmus or other international mobility as I can, work in different countries, etc.

An example of that would be that next year I am going to do my first Erasmus in Belgium, where I will have the opportunity to learn one of the most widely spoken languages as well as to get to know another culture. However, there are other experiences that call my attention, such as, for example, the internship that I have done this year in an anti-racist association (SOS Racisme), which has allowed me not only to meet people from other countries but also to defend the human rights of these and train myself in a more institutional and formal field, in terms of migration and foreigners.

It should be noted that, except for the latter, most of my international experiences are more related to the intercultural level, although there are aspects that can be related to the other learning outcomes, as will be seen later.

I have lived each experience with the maximum intensity that I could, trying to make good friends and enjoy it to the fullest, without forgetting all the knowledge that this type of experience has given me, which has only enriched me culturally. However, although my life is very focused on the international area, I am also close to my lifelong friends and my friends from university. They will always be there, no matter how long I travel or how long we don't see each other. They will always be my friends. All of them have brought me many things in my life; the friends of a lifetime, with whom I have grown up; they have given me love, advice, experience and much more. My friends from university have given me many different ways of seeing life. In the end, each one has their own story and the fact of sharing it allows us all to learn from the points of view of others and allows us to be able to respect the different opinions without affecting our friendship.

I would be happy to mention that the 5 EUCI seminars have helped me understand how my international experiences have influenced my intercultural skills and my life in general; that is, the ability to reflect on different cultures and languages; intersectoral skills; the ability to demonstrate transdisciplinary knowledge and experience from an international context; the skills to understand how to face challenges, both local and global, and find solutions from an international perspective; as well as the ability to reflect on all the aforementioned aspects. Through the following portfolio, I will describe some activities that are related to the topics discussed in the seminars.

I have always heard the term "internationalisation" in the context of companies when talking about their ability to market their products or establish new locations in another country in the world. I consider that the definition that applies to people is also very similar, since I understand that they can adapt a solution to global and local characteristics, closing the gap between them. By this, I mean that every time people have more and more facilities to expand internationally, whether for work, family or even leisure, this allows us to get to know different cultures and to be able to choose the one that is most suitable for us, even if it is not the one in which we were born.

Reflective Essay

INTRODUCTION

I still remember my 16-year-old self, a girl who had never dared to speak English or other languages other than her mother tongue, whose entire circle of friends was from the same country of origin, and who had travelled just enough as a tourist to take some photos and say that she had been there. I didn't know anything at that time. I thought that having visited a city meant I already knew it. Poor me...

Luckily, all this has changed, and it will be in this portfolio where I will explain in detail each one of the activities that have most marked my international experience, as well as what each of them has given me in relation to the Learning Outcomes (LO) worked on in the EUCI Seminars. They are the following: Firstly, we have LO1, which deals with reflection, that is, reflecting on those international experiences while considering personal development, which will be present throughout the portfolio and will not need to be specified. Secondly, LO2 deals with the interculturality of the experiences, that is, being aware of the relationships that have existed in each of them between different national cultures and languages. Thirdly, LO3 has to do with the intersectoral field, which is to demonstrate transdisciplinary knowledge in international experiences. Lastly, LO4 deals with how these international experiences are challenge-based to show commitment and awareness of local or global challenges from an international perspective.

EXCHANGE YEAR IN COBH (IRELAND)

At the age of 16, with the support of my family, I decided to embark on a new path. I needed a change of scenery in order to evolve, to get to know myself and, of course, to learn English in order to continue with my studies without having problems in this area. The first few days were not easy. In addition to having difficulties communicating, the Cork accent was very characteristic. I loved it, but at the same time, it made it very difficult for me to understand when I had conversations. After each class, I went home and practised English exercises on my own, and in this way, every day I understood more to the point of dreaming in English. That was the moment when I saw the fruit of my efforts. I remember that before I went to Ireland, my English teacher did not encourage me to do it, he said that it was crazy with my level of English and that I was going to lose a year and I would have to repeat it. Now I would love for him to see who I have become, what I have done since living in Ireland for a year, the friends I have made and what I have learned.

Not only did I learn the language, but there were other things like the Irish culture that also surprised me a lot, and that I was able to discover by living with a host family. One of them is the use of potatoes. In all the meals there were always potatoes cooked in all the different ways that you can imagine, and I evolved from not eating vegetables to a diet where they took on a fundamental role, to the point of becoming vegetarian. Yes, since my experience in Ireland I gave up eating meat, which, in my opinion, has also been a personal development.

As well as studying the full academic year at a Cobh high school, I was also volunteering at a nursing home and also as a member of a club that was dedicated to promoting the dignity and uniqueness of all young people by supporting, defending, and helping to safeguard their right to enjoy life, feel respected, and grow without relying on drugs and alcohol. All this made me see life from another perspective, with a special promotion of objective 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that deals with health and well-being. This means seeking to guarantee good living conditions so that the population can grow with the maximum possible well-being, such as giving support to the elderly so that they feel accompanied, and preventing young people from spending their free time and linking leisure with narcotic substances. For this reason, from the local actions that would be the ones mentioned, the aim is to improve society to the point of achieving the objective globally.

FIGURE 1. This is a photo in the Cobh high school where you can see the prizes they give at the end of each year to the best students



FIGURE 2. This photo was taken of me when I was volunteering at the nursing home. One of the activities we did was Bingo.



FIGURE 3: This photo was taken the day that the members of the No Name's club participated in a dance competition.



ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK

Since I was 18 years old, I have been a collaborator (and currently an official member) of the Erasmus Student Network. It is an interdisciplinary association in Europe for the support and development of student exchange. Our motto is "Students helping students". Other values of this association that stand out are: "Unity in diversity, diversity in unity" and "Cooperation in integration".

The causes of the association are closely related to the SDGs mentioned above, such as education and youth; sustainability in a broad sense; health and wellness; employability; and culture and social inclusion.

Personally, in this organisation, I started as a collaborator who worked within the committees that organise activities. Specifically, I was in the sports committee, the equality committee, and the Buddy Program. In relation to the latter, I am now responsible for the committee, which basically tries to promote the integration of Erasmus students (or other types of international mobility) with the help of local students who will act as mentors.

My experience, which is still going on, at ESN has taught me many things. I came from a town where perhaps the ideals are more conservative and, when I met the organisation, they helped me to open my mind a lot, to normalise many types of situations and not to normalise other toxic ones. In addition, all the colleagues have always behaved like family to me; they are people you can always count on and that also affects the coordination of activities and the ease of working with someone you trust.

Thanks to ESN, every year I meet many people from different countries, to whom we teach our culture so that they learn from our traditions, always allowing them to explain their own traditions and experiences as well.

As I mentioned before, I am assuming more and more responsibilities, now being an official member with voting rights, in addition to being responsible for one of the committees that have a more direct link and relationship with the university. For this reason, we also have to have good harmony with UPF to facilitate all the procedures to guarantee the best integration of the international students who trust us.

Figure 4: Picture with some of the members of ESN.



PINK WAVE

Pink Wave is an Italian company dedicated to hotel entertainment. I learnt about them a few years ago because I used to go to resorts with my family and since animation (i.e. entertainment) was a fundamental requirement, my family and I were passionate about it. A few years ago, you would not have believed that now I am the one dedicated to entertaining the other tourists. Last summer, 2021, for the first time, I worked for 3 months with them, and this year I will also go to work as an animator in the same place, an island in Greece called Rhodes.

My main focus was to organise activities for the teenagers, especially the Germans, from all over the world. With them I learned many things. Even if they are younger, you can always learn from other people, since their culture is different from yours. I was very surprised by how easy it was for them to speak English and how much I would have liked it at their age to speak it as normally as they did.

To work in this world, you need to have some essential skills, such as a good level of English and ease in communicating with people; dedicate yourself to a sector such as childcare, fitness, or sports, among others; skills to interpret and act for night shows; and a strong persuasion ability. Dealing with the public is not always easy, even more so when they are people with different cultures, different ideologies, and even different moods.

This experience also taught me a lot about how to deal with people from different countries, how to respect distances between different groups of people and how to persuade them to join the activities, which is not always easy. It can also be a challenge to work with people from other countries, even when our cultures are similar, and good coordination must be attempted to ensure the guests' enjoyment.

Figure 5. Picture with my Pink Wave team in Rhodes.



SOS RACISME

SOS Racisme is a non-profit association that works for the defence of human rights through anti-racism to eradicate racist discrimination in all areas of society and achieve real equality of opportunity in the global arena. This year, I have had the pleasure of doing my curricular internship in this organisation, which has taught me many things, including raising my awareness of a wide range of racist attitudes that society carries out unconsciously.

At the beginning of the practice, the expectations were to materialise as much as possible the theoretical knowledge acquired during the Degree in Criminology and Public Prevention Policies into real tasks within the association. What I did not know is that the knowledge acquired from the law degree was also going to be useful to me. In this way, I have been able to learn many things that have favoured the putting into practise of the knowledge already acquired, in addition to having expanded training in the fields of racism and the Spanish judicial system.

I have worked on many new concepts related to racist discrimination and their application in real life to procedures carried out, especially through administrative or criminal channels. In addition, I have been able to investigate some crimes that specifically affect people who are being discriminated against, such as those referring to fundamental rights. This is where my knowledge acquired in law school comes into play, since, in a certain way, I was an assistant to the lawyers who were in the organisation, among other things.

This association brings together many disciplines since it tries to make the population aware of racist attitudes and how they are present in society through campaigns and training. In addition, when a person wants to report a racist act, they can come to us and we will advise them and, whenever possible, we can even represent them in legal proceedings. Additionally, to learn about these cases, we also have a psychology department, which is the one that conducts the interviews to structure the case, and, from there, the team decides whether the act is considered racism and, if so, what actions can be taken to address the issue. From my personal experience, within the association I carried out many activities, such as those already mentioned, advising lawyers, and creating a database with all the judicial procedures carried out in the association since 2015 to study trends. I also participated in the assistance, by telephone, of people who are victims of some discrimination or racist act, helping to conduct in-depth interviews to understand why people do not report these cases, that is, explain the reason for the underreporting.

I must admit that the profiles of people with whom we worked in the organisation are not like the ones I am used to dealing with, according to my other experiences. In the other international experiences mentioned, I have always related in an environment of leisure, vacations, studies, etc. In this case, the environment is more legal, more personal and psychological. By that I mean that I was dealing with victims of racism who needed our help and, on many occasions, we were the only ones who offered to give them support. All of this made me see that the life that people from other countries lead, who are always exposed to prejudice and abuse by the native population, is not easy

For all of this, my idea, whenever possible, is to stay as a volunteer for the association and for it not to be just a mandatory procedure for the university to get credits, but for a time to come when I can work on it since I am passionate about it.

CONCLUSION

After reflecting on the international experiences that have most shaped my life, I realise that the learning outcome of interculturality appears to be the most important, or, at the very least, the most obvious. However, in the joint experiences, you can see that they have given me a lot of things, especially in personal development.

I have plans to continue carrying out more international experiences, as many as I can, to start next year. I am going on Erasmus to Belgium and my idea is to do two international engagements as well as one day of practice in diplomacy, to be able to really act in international relations representing my country.

It should be noted that all these experiences that I and millions of other young people have had have taken us to the point of not having so many problems when it comes to communicating and seeing each other, as well as having more facilities to cooperate to achieve common goals such as the SDGs.