

**EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (2021/2022)**

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### **HOW DID I ARRIVE HERE AND WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?**

This EUCI course came to me through the Erasmus association I am part of, the president of the association is currently collaborating with the vice rector of my university Pompeu Fabra which is part of the EUTOPIA alliance and the project. She offered to all the volunteers of the association the chance to be part of this project by participating in this course, so I just had to jump in.

During the seminars given by the EUCI team, several topics have been approached in a very dynamic way, during the sessions I have been part of some debates where all participants were encouraged to express their opinions and thoughts. Now I am going to make a quick revision of all those topics and which learning outcomes I've gotten from them.

One of the most interesting seminars for me was one where we talked about the sustainable goals and about intersectoral activities, and how they are present in most of our daily activities. The participants in the seminar gathered in small groups and we had the opportunity to have an extensive conversation about the topic. During the session I realized how many sectors I have been in touch with and how many goals I have reached unconsciously. For instance, I am currently a volunteer in an educational association where every Saturday I meet with several kids in a school with other volunteers. We prepare activities and games for the kids, all of that with an educational aim and a background topic like gender equity, empathy, teamwork or others. By doing this I add a new sector to my daily activities and experiences. By doing this I integrate the sustainable goals of quality education as the rest of the volunteers and I offer a different, but also valid, way of education apart from traditional learning in schools, teaching values or abilities that usually in traditional schools are not approached that often or that specifically.

Another learning outcome that I considered that I have acquired during this course is the ability - maybe I am not quite there but on the way to do so - to assimilate a reflective way of not only writing but also of thinking. It is very important to leave the descriptive way and starting using a reflective mindset which gives us a much wider context as we take part in the process, we evaluate the actions, we analyse what is good and what's bad, we compare the outcome to our expectations, speculate about the reasons that might have been influential on what finally happened, and finally we think of how can we improve and learn from the situation for the future whether it's been a success or a failure.

About the cultural diversity that exists in our world, this course is a reflection of it. In the seminar sessions many people from so many countries were there, each of us spoke a different language, had had a different education, we probably weren't even interested in the same topics or fields but the connection we had was internationalisation and the desire of learning more about other cultures, of moving around the world. For these reasons, this course itself has been a learning outcome for me.

Moreover, thanks to this course I've acknowledged that internationalisation doesn't have to happen in a foreign country but can also happen in your hometown. You can embrace your culture and show it to others, learning a new language or meeting new people - that is also internationalisation.

### **HOW MY PASSION FOR INTERNATIONALISATION BEGAN**

From the very beginning of my life, I was encouraged to take advantage of as many international and intercultural experiences as possible. On one hand, my mother enrolled me into English classes when I was little which gave me the opportunity to learn a language very easily and I didn't know then, but this ability allowed me to participate and blend in an international environment much more easily than without this capability. Also, this same encouragement that I received, my older sister got as well, and as I grew, I saw how my sister started taking part in these experiences such as exchange programs, and I got inspired by it making me a nerd for international experiences.

One of my first international interactions was during English classes, where one of my classmates was Russian, and we became friends, and she would share with me so many experiences that she had in her home country and other trips she took around the world, and I got fascinated by it. Unfortunately, this friendship didn't last long as she moved a lot and we didn't keep in touch, but it was a very pleasant experience anyways.

But my first real international experience was an exchange I did in high school, it was actually a French exchange and even though I didn't know much of French I decided to enrol anyways, that's how much I craved international connections. I did this exchange with some of my classmates, first a group from a French school came to Barcelona and afterwards we would go to their home school.

When they came to my city, I had to show it to the French students, then is when I first realized how little I knew about my city, and I rediscovered my own home. During those days we brought the French students around the city, and as they were from small villages they were impressed by simple things for me such as big cars or limos, they also were very surprised that we could go out at night by ourselves as we lived in a big city - they thought it was dangerous. I was assigned a French boy who would stay at my place, and I found that very interesting to live, for a short time, with someone with a different cultural background, but this would be much more noticeable when I went to France. During the time they were in Barcelona, I spoke a lot in English, I learned a bit of French, but this experience got better and much more intense once I went there.

Six months later, me and my classmates went to a small French village, Lézat. There is where I experienced a real cultural shock. I went to their school, I lived in their house, I met their friends and family and during a few days I lived in a different way from what I was used to. I saw a different way in which school could be structured, I saw different habits such as using their bike for absolutely everything as they lived in small villages close to each other, or how the food was different than ours. Also, their homes where not the same as mine, their doors were all sliding doors and they had a vegetable garden, I know it sounds weird to say but at the time and having had very few foreign experiences (as every time I travelled, I would stay at a hotel) little things were huge for me. For instance, kids instead of drinking soda they would drink a kind of syrup diluted in water, or their eating habits, the timings and much more. All these differences were exiting for me, being in constant change and seeing how other people live, and seeing what for me is weird but for them is the usual, was something I liked a lot.

Thanks to this experience I noticed how much I loved getting out of my comfort zone and getting to know all the different ways of doing familiar things, as I've always thought that there isn't only one good option and I enjoy a lot discovering new ways of living life. From then on, I started travelling much more and I started looking for more international experiences.

### **THE ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK AND EUTOPIA**

January 2021 was the first time I considered enrolling in this university association called ESN (Erasmus Student Network), which my sister was part of. At that time, Covid-19 restrictions were harsh and leisure activities were very limited, me and a friend of mine started looking at ESN's social media and we saw that they would do simple activities such as beach volley which for us was an exciting plan considering the situation. That was when we decided to send an email expressing our desire to get into the association. Unfortunately, we had to wait until the beginning of the next course year.

In September 2021 I started participating in ESN activities as a Newbie and those first two weeks, where we would have daily activities with the Erasmus students coming to my hometown, were the most exciting days that I had in a very long time. What I liked the most was the diversity that I would find myself in, people from all over the world were there, I met so many people with different backgrounds. I remember one afternoon in an activity called "Speed friend" where the goal was to make friends, I realized how many different cultures there are, I talked with German people, Danish, Dutch, American, French, Italian and many more nationalities, all of them told me so many different traditions and customs they would have in their countries, things that they do as their ordinary routine but that for us is surprising. At some point I tried to explain to a boy what I did in the Erasmus Student Network, and he would not understand what it was; meanwhile for me and the other Spanish students it was such a normal thing that everyone knew about, but for the Erasmus students it was something they didn't quite understand. They would also point out Spanish customs that as a Spanish person I assume are normal, but for others they are not, such as blinds in the windows, physical interaction, or dinner time.

Now it's been almost a year since I joined ESN and I can say I have learned a lot about other cultures, and I have found my passion for it. I love not only meeting new people but also getting to know other ways of doing things, other cultures, other beliefs, and I love showing my culture to others as well. During this time, I have been able to learn about foreign people and foreign countries, but I also have learned a lot about my own country, not only by doing tours around Barcelona and finding out lots of curiosities that I did not know before, but also I have met people from other parts of Spain that have differences too.

Another program I joined with ESN is the buddy program which consists of connecting international students with locals in order to help them in their process of adaptation in the city and the university. I have participated in this program during this course, for three quarters, where in each of them I had assigned between three and five Erasmus students. I had the chance to meet them in person, show them the city, and help them with issues they had with the university. That last point made me realize how different each university is and how difficult it is for an exchange student to adapt to the university without any help, for example how we structure the class schedule, we have the theory lessons with all the students in the course and the seminars where all the students separate into groups. I found myself explaining this system to lots of students as they didn't have this same structure in their home university, and they didn't know that the seminar sessions were mandatory or that they were assigned to one seminar group so they didn't have to attend all the sessions. That's one of the main reasons why I decided to enrol in this course, the project that EUTOPIA is trying to develop is beyond useful and interesting for me and everyone interested in having an international experience during their college time. Unifying higher education around Europe would be outstanding and I couldn't resist contributing a little bit to carry out this amazing project.

ESN has given me a huge opportunity to be more open minded by getting to know all these ways of doing things. Also, it has given me the opportunity to help others and learn from it. For example, I wouldn't be doing this course if it wasn't for ESN, during the course I have had the chance to look back and think about all the knowledge and lessons I had thanks to the several international experiences done during my life and during this past year the most.

### **AND NOW WHAT?**

As you could have seen, I am a nerd of international stuff: I take every chance I have to go abroad, be in an international environment, learn from other cultures, other people or basically anything related to international diversity. People like me, once we are hooped into this adventure, we cannot get enough of it, and we want more and more. That is why I have created a space in my life destined to it.

First of all, I want to start travelling more, I want to explore the world and see with my own eyes all the things I've been hearing about. Also, I intend to get in touch with the locals from the cities I visit so I can completely soak in and have the full experience.

In the near future, I am planning to do my Erasmus exchange from February 2023 until July in Italy, more precisely in Modena, a small town. I decided to choose a small town so I could be able to connect more with the city and taking into account that I live in a big city like Barcelona I wanted to experience the small town life and make this change even more accentuated.

Regarding my long-term future I wish to incorporate internationalisation in my work. As I said I enjoy a lot being in touch with different cultures and people, so I would be more than pleased to work in an international company with subsidiary offices around the world, so it allows me to travel and also to talk and see how the rest of the branch offices work.

This last point I realized I wanted during the internship I just finished in IESE, a Business School that is located in Barcelona, Madrid, New York, Munich and more. There, some of the other workers would tell me stories and anecdotes they had during their trips to the other offices, how they would become friends with the rest of the employees from the other cities and I just thought that I wanted that for my own future career. As the time goes, the world becomes more unified and more homogeneous, for me that's very sad as I think as the more cultures there are in the world the better and richer is our society, that's why I would like to experience how other people work around the world so I can adapt my way of working depending on the country I am in, and I don't have to impose the way I am used to. Also having a wide vision on the diversity of getting things done will make me more suitable for any kind of job I wish to fulfil.

To conclude, I wanted to add that this course has made me realize so many things, has given me the space to talk and think about the experiences and opportunities I have had during my life, and gave me the push to decide what I want to take part in and how I want to include all of it in my life.