



# **EUTOPIA CERTIFICATE OF INTERNATIONALISATION (EUCI)**

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I can perfectly remember the first time that the concept of international awareness came into my life. I was four years old, and I listened to my mum and my aunt talking in English – just because they didn't want me to understand what they were talking about. It was this moment when I realized that there was something else than what I have knew, that there were other languages that I could learn, and it was also that moment when I thought, "I'm going to learn English and then I will be able to understand everyone". Poor me, I didn't know that English was just one of almost 7,000 languages spoken in the world.

### **THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AS SOMETHING INHERENT IN ME**

It is now that I'm aware of the international presence in my life. My family moved from a little town in the rural part of Spain to a big city in California, when taking a plane was more of a vital adventure than a simple means of transportation for your personal leisure. They came back to Spain and moved to Barcelona, but they have always been people with different concerns, and that is part of my education and my way of seeing life. For this reason, when I had the opportunity to take decisions – on my initial path of higher education – I've always looked at the international vision. When I had to choose a degree to study, one of my big concerns was to enroll in a university with the same perspective that I have, an open view and opportunities to grow in an international environment and meet different cultures while learning something related to the degree I chose. That is why I chose UPF: it has a big focus on these themes as an institution and it offers a wide range of degrees and agreements to offer the opportunity to do an international mobility during your degree.

### **WHAT I DIDN'T EXPECT WAS WHAT MADE ME FALL IN LOVE WITH MY UNIVERSITY STAGE**

Like a stroke of luck – although at the time I didn't know it was – I received a message on the WhatsApp group of my university class. With just some lines of text I was moved to join a Buddy Program, fostered by an association of the UPF called ESN (Erasmus Student Network), the aim of which was connecting local students with international ones to help them with their first steps in what was to be their new home, Barcelona. Without any expectations and with the only plan to get to know international students and help them integrate in the local culture, I started joining some of the activities that ESN was doing in January 2019. It was after that month when I realized that I wanted to be one of the people organizing activities and I joined ESN in February.

Becoming part of this association meant starting my path to truly understand how it is to spend time and concerns with people that have such different backgrounds, cultures and traditions. I had the opportunity to build relationships with people from all around the world, listen to their situations and understand how differently we live depending on where we are born, and how lucky I was to learn from that. As a volunteer in ESN, I had the inputs of hundreds of international students on the topics we were discussing: from how to improve the bureaucratic process in the UPF to how to move around a city, going through how to understand others in a natural way or how to learn new languages to better communicate with everyone. And after a period in ESN, I could really live the internationalization at home.



Part of the ESN Barcelona UPF team with some awards we won for our work

Besides all that, being part of one of the biggest young associations in Europe gave me the chance to work with other volunteers from all over the world with just one thing in common: the willingness to improve the world through international students. I participated in local, national, and international events that gave me the chance to work hand in hand with people from other countries that were kind of doing the same work as me, but with very different perspectives. This made me a strong lover of multicultural teams because I realized that it is the difference between my local perspectives and the ones that people from all over the world have, that make the real difference in a project. Those events and the component of struggle for the improvement of European higher education that ESN has, helped me to know the real meaning of European sentiment. The citizenship that is created around the idea of Europe was far from me until I immersed myself in this ESN adventure. Now, after knowing the European perspective from my local point of view, I firmly believe in the European project and in the possibilities that open up as part of it. When I think of the European Union, what come to my mind are opportunities, growth, and personal development. That is what made me take the leap to the next stage of my life.

## THE OPPORTUNITY THAT LEAVES A MARK ON YOU FOREVER: THE ERASMUS EXPERIENCE

Even before starting my degree, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to live in a different country for some time. After living in a sort of Erasmus, surrounded by international people as a volunteer in ESN, I had no other thought than doing an international mobility.

There were difficult times, as I was planning to move to Belgium in the middle of what it was supposed to be the recovery from the pandemic. It was January 2021, and I was packing my stuff to start the trip of my life, my Erasmus experience. I wasn't afraid to have a different way to enjoy an Erasmus, not focused on going out all day but a more reflexive and self-aware period. And I wasn't wrong. I started my experience with a quarantine, PCR tests and security distances, but I was excited to walk around and literally not understand anything as people were talking in French, or to go to a supermarket and have the chance to try food that was completely the opposite of what I used to eat in my home country. Even as I had this weird start, I wasn't alone, and I got the

chance to know other students that were facing the same situation. I guess this is the fact that made these friendships last and empower our personal ties: people with the same concerns facing the same issues.

After a time there, I started feeling that I really belonged to something bigger than my home city or the one that was hosting me there, I felt that I belonged to Europe. Feeling that I can move freely around the Schengen space, that bureaucracy was easy to manage because of where I have been born and the opportunities that all of this gave me – like having the possibility to join the Erasmus+ program – opened my eyes to a new vision.

Thanks to building an international family, having friends from all around the world with whom I could have conversations that I would never have had if it weren't for that: about how we felt regarding the European concept – I had friends from Turkey or the US – about the religious basis that our countries have, about how languages separate us and make us unified, etc. Constructing a home far from home, learning new languages and living with people with interests, traditions, and ideologies so different from mine, but loving them as if they were my family, is something that I would never have imagined. All this made me grow as a person, understand the world better, and see that there are challenges that exist and that they must be fought from a plural, multicultural and intersectional perspective.



My Erasmus friends in a trip around Germany and Denmark

## COMING BACK HOME WITH A BACKPACK FULL OF KNOWLEDGE

I came back to Barcelona being a different person. More open, more reflexive, more tolerant, with big capacities to adapt, to understand and to face challenges and difficulties. Also, with a bigger passion for what makes me feel that way: the Erasmus+ program. It was in this moment when I became the president of ESN in my local association, in the UPF. By doing it, I immersed myself into the institutional world and the politics side of education with a local perspective, and by discussing these topics with the university and their vice rectors, with young people, with institutions such as the European Commission and the European Parliament and other Europeanist associations, now I value in a different way the importance of diversity, of culture and the integration and inclusion of everyone in every project we are running.

As a president, I got the opportunity to lead a team of more than 40 people, try to motivate them to engage with our mission, work with them to be able to achieve all the goals we wanted to and be the reference for them in ESN, facing challenges every day.



In Porto, in the Erasmus Generation Meeting of ESN with people from all around the world

## I NEVER SAID NO TO ANY PROPOSAL

In this process was where I started working with the vice rector of internationalization of the UPF and we understood that ESN has tons of things to say in the establishment of a European Alliance in our university. That's why I started meeting him and the EUTOPIA team of the UPF and trying to find ways to help each other. Through this connection, I managed to know more about the project and find people in the association also interested in it, and that is what led us to EUCL.

It also was through the contacts I had in ESN that I found out about the World Higher Education Conference that was held in Barcelona by UNESCO this year. The president of ESN International sent me an email with an invitation to participate on a Creathon inside the WHEC. This was a space where you had to meet other people from all around the world and create a project about inclusivity in a field you chose in the framework of the SDGs. I decided to say yes to the proposal and extend the invitation to other volunteers and international students from ESN – we finally were 13 people – and we started working. I was with two people from Spain and two people from Mexico, and we developed a project in the field of inclusivity of international education, to solve a worldwide challenge. We did it with the methodology of Design Thinking, through which they led us during the days it lasted.

I developed intercultural communication abilities, faced with having dialogues with very different points of view but taking advantage of all this to get the personal experiences of each one, enriching our collaboration, and that finally made us winners of that Creathon. Now, we are working online, across the Mexico-Spain time-zones, to develop the project in an incubator, and we will present it at the Mobile World Congress next year.



During the WHEC Barcelona 2022  
after presenting our project in the  
Auditorium

Although all this is part of my path, I have understood that internationalization is no longer something I choose, but a way of understanding the world and living my life. This essay collects the key points that have made me develop this vision and tries to reflect the background of this thought.

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I'm Laura García, and I've ended my degree in Business Science and Management in the university Pompeu Fabra. My trip with EUTOPIA began in September 2021, as I started being the president of ESN Barcelona UPF, the local association of the largest youth association in Europe: Erasmus Student Network. Even after experiencing internationalization at home, I did my own international experience being part of the Erasmus+ program and moving to study in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, for six months.

### **LEARNING OUTCOME 1: REFLECTIVE**

My experience as the main coordinator of a team of volunteers, and some activities and projects - as I have been the president of the local ESN association in the UPF - has built me as a wider-view observer. It has also let me develop my personal skills to deeply understand every problem we had and try to consider and listen to all points of view to always find the fairest and best solution. This is a useful career skill as, at the same time that I have more opportunities to develop myself in the association, I have more chances to work in bigger projects that involve more and different people.

It is also my participation in the Erasmus+ program that has made me understand the true importance of every point of view. The insights afforded by these experiences have been a breaking point to destroy many barriers I had, and lead me to a more inclusive and open mindset.

### **LEARNING OUTCOME 2: INTERCULTURAL**

During all these years surrounded by people from all around the world it is impossible to not adopt an intercultural view of everything, starting because my family grew up outside the country where they were born and ending with my international career. Thanks to being part of an association, whose main objective is the integration of international students in local society, I have been able to work day by day and promote the need to include everyone, wherever they are from, in decision-making.

It is vital to be part of this association, to have a general perspective, to consider that the differences unite us and allow us to grow beyond a linear vision, but with a broader, more international, more cultural, more open, and more global perspective.

Internalizing this perspective is not natural in our daily environment, but once you understand that we are not alone in the world, it is impossible to get rid of the idea of always going a little further, thinking of our partners in the world and valuing inclusive perspectives for all.



## **LEARNING OUTCOME 3: INTERSECTORAL**

As a volunteer for an association that not only fights for the integration of international students, but also advocates for the importance of global causes - Culture, Education and Youth, Health and Well-being, Social Inclusion, Employability and Skills and Sustainability – I am driven to learn from a transdisciplinary and international perspective.

Everything we do in the association always has in mind to comply with our values and our way of being and defend them, whether we are running a small activity with international students or a huge event. For example, an icebreaker activity in a park promotes culture (since we are making the city known), soft skills (since we learn to develop in a group), inclusion (since it is a free activity for everyone), etc.

Also, after my international experience as an Erasmus student in Belgium, I learned to work on topics that I already dealt with at my university but from a completely different perspective. Integrating the vision of a Belgian faculty with my knowledge of the university in Barcelona was enriching and full of challenges. Above all, the way in which the students understood each part of the lessons was a challenge, which, when we studied together or did group work, meant understanding things twice, from your perspective and from that of the rest of the group.

## **LEARNING OUTCOME 4: CHALLENGE-BASED**

As president of ESN I have led round tables on education and youth with vice-rectors of universities and local associations, and with leaders of international institutions such as the European Commission or the European Parliament. All this has allowed me to put on the table current problems in education, youth and employment that make up a pothole in local society but is replicated at a global level. Thanks to my willingness to try to discuss this and improve it, I managed to get more than 20 people to come together to discuss it and draw conclusions for the future.

In addition, I have had the opportunity to participate in the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference, which took place in Barcelona in 2022. I participated, along with other ESN volunteers and international students who are now in Barcelona, in a program called Creathon. In this one, we had to develop, in teams of people we didn't know from around the world, a project that would solve a global problem. It was based on the SDGs and social inclusion. My team chose to spend our time at that Creathon creating a project that would solve inclusion in international education around the world. After working for three days on the project with a Design Thinking methodology, we managed to shape it and present the idea in front of all the Conference participants. After that moment, a specialized jury deliberated and told us that our project had won. Now, we are working with an ideas incubator in Barcelona to carry it out and we will present it to investors at the Mobile World Congress.

### CONCLUSION

With this cover letter, I have summarized my portfolio presentation with reference to the learning objectives of EUCI's requirements that were: Reflective, Intercultural, Intersectoral and Challenge-based. With it, I have shown how my personal and soft skills are a reflection of my learning during all the stages of my life, in the academic and non-academic sense.

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