

CY Cergy Paris University

EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (EUCI)

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Reflective Portfolio
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Reflective Essay:

I discovered the EUTOPIA University Alliance during my first year of a master's degree, through the EUTOPIA Global Connections Cross-University Migration Program 2022. An encounter that would significantly shape my academic and personal growth. Collaborating with students from all over Europe, with diverse backgrounds, we carried out researching solutions to future waves of migration that could occur as a result of climate change. This month of interaction, not only shaped by understanding of global challenges but most of all brought me a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and internationalization. Winning first place was a huge gratification for this journey of learning how to adapt and to reflect with students from different cultures and working methods, and a proof that we can go further in this collaboration. This enriching experience inspired me to learn more about this developing institution and to take part in other events to fuel my thirst for internationalisation and commitment to foster connections without borders.

Ever since I was born, I've been immersed in interculturalism. Indeed, from my childhood to my student life, I've had to live in many different countries and continents to follow my family, achieve my educational goals or simply learn other languages. As I reflect on my own journey through these diverse cultural landscapes, from the childhood memories in South America to the Erasmus year in Italy and my recent internship in Vietnam, I am hit by the profound impact these experiences have had on shaping my identity and keep being a tool for my future. An internationalization journey which I believe, touches all the EUCI Learning Outcomes.

I've been committed to interculturalism from the very beginning of my life. I was born into a French family, but my mother is of Cuban and Spanish descent. This enabled my sister and I to grow up with the ability to communicate in two languages, French and Spanish, and to travel to the wonderful pearl of the Caribbean from the cradle. For me, this has been an opportunity to express multiple intercultural identities and to be accepted in many different cultural identities. However, my international experiences expanded at the age of seven, when my parents moved to French Guiana

in South America. This experience was a captivating journey through a tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions. Indeed, even if French Guiana is part of the French Republic, the culture and the life was totally different from what I experienced in Europe. A unique blend of indigenous, African, European, and Asian heritages from the creole cuisine to the Afro-Caribbean music, I grew up with an innate curiosity and appreciation for difference. Attending a public school, in contrast to the typical experience of French metropolitan children, gave me a unique perspective on my social construction. Within the classroom walls, I witnessed an intersection of backgrounds and origins prompting me a series of introspective reflections on inclusivity. I intuitively engaged in a process leading me to nuance intercultural communication and understand the importance of unspoken behaviours, gestures to build connections. Reflecting on these years, I realize that French Guiana gave me a great lesson about tolerance, and inclusivity. The tapestry of diversity made me learn that even if every single person was from a different culture, sometimes not speaking the same languages, we could build together and share passions. Moreover, sharpened my ability to navigate cultural nuances with sensitivity and empathy. A lesson that continues to shape my perspective to strive for a world where differences are celebrated and that gave me enough confidence to embark on more international journeys in the future, but this time, alone.

After years back in metropolitan France in my hometown and being hit by Covid-19, I was stuck in my house, lonely for one year, and most of all cut off from the outside world. The flame of internationalisation that was lit up in French Guiana was off. Enrolling in international relations studies, I recaptured the sense of exploration and cultural immersion that enriched my education. Thus, I took the opportunity to spend my third year of bachelor studies at the Università l'Orientale di Napoli in Italy with the Erasmus + programme.

Arriving in Italy, I was thrown into a variety of experiences. Living with five Italian flatmates was like diving into an accelerated class of Italian culture. From learning the art of cooking the best pastas to arguing about which country has the best wines, every day was a lesson in cultural exchange. Despite the initial language barrier, we found

common ground through laughter, evening outings, and even traveling together. My time in Italy wasn't only about amusement, it was also a period of academic challenges and personal growth. Studying in Italian pushed me out of my comfort zone, forcing me to follow Italian classes and learn about a totally different way on how to study. One of the biggest challenges was the Italian academic system. Indeed, it is mostly based on oral exams, and everyone should try to reach the maximum grade, a big challenge for a student who used to have hours of essay assignments, something even more complicated due to the language barrier. I decided to take Italian language classes from my arrival to give me all the chances to pass my exams on time. Fortunately, being a native French speaker made the learning of Italian a bit smoother for me. With many similarities between the two Romance languages, also pushed by the need to speak Italian at home if I wanted to interact with my flatmates. However, this linguistic journey was more challenging when I noticed that my once-fluent Spanish began to take a backseat. This shift made me gain a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of languages and the importance of actively maintaining each linguistic skill.

One of the biggest lessons I learned from this linguistic journey was the importance of knowing many languages. Mastering many languages allows you to understand deeply who your flatmates, teachers and any contacts really are, and allows you to build connections that you never thought of before. With these Italian classes I could become friends with Russians, Spaniards, Moldavians and many other nationalities with whom I wouldn't have been able to develop a friendship if I hadn't made the effort to learn a language that brought us together. Finally, this Erasmus experience comforted my passion for learning languages, a necessity that has empowered me to travel and reside in various countries while effectively communicating in French, English, Italian, and Spanish. This multilingual ability has become a parallel of my experiences, allowing me to navigate diverse cultural landscapes and create connections wherever I go.

As I conclude my reflections on my international journey, I understand that it goes beyond learning new languages or and going overseas to study. One of its most captivating aspects lies in the intercultural immersion within the professional sphere.

Seeking discomfort led me to Vietnam for my end of studies internship. This decision, while challenging, provided invaluable insights into intercultural dynamics and global cooperation from a land far and totally different from where I'm from.

Navigating Vietnamese workplace culture and collaborating with colleagues from diverse Southeastern countries enriched my adaptability, communication, and tolerance. This experience was an eye-opening experience, revealing stark contrasts to the norms I was accustomed to in Europe, particularly in France. One notable difference was the approach to working hours. In Vietnam, staying beyond scheduled working hours is the norm, also as showing a strong commitment to dedication. This new change required me to reconsider my own perceptions of productivity and work-life balance, making me reflect deeper on cultural attitudes towards work. Furthermore, even the methods of collaboration and communication are different from France. In my country, I was very accustomed to open discussions and debates while here in Vietnam, contesting the hierarchy is not something common. But this shift challenged me to adapt my communication style through different cultural nuances and renew my sensitivity and respect. Another notable difference that strikes me in my every day's life is the approach to lunchtime. In France, I was accustomed to heading to cafés and restaurants to have lunch, whereas in Vietnam, lunch breaks were most of the time brief and taken on the workstation's desk. This difference highlighted a significant cultural difference on social interactions making me reconsider my own habits. However, by building connections with my colleagues I made them leave the office and come with me to have lunch at some of the local restaurants outside and on the contrary I also started to order food and eat on my workstation. An intercultural exchange that changed our ways to apprehend lunch social interactions between both my Vietnamese colleagues and me. This was a win-win experience.

Another of my experiences of being confronted to an intercultural divergence was the approach to environmental challenges in the workplace. Growing up, I was taught to have a deep sensitivity towards energy waste, sustainability, and climate change. This translated into conscious or indirect actions. It was interesting how I was the only one having a reusable steel water bottle instead of plastic. Arriving in Vietnam, I encountered a different reality. In the office, I noticed that the mindset did not prioritize

environmental respect and that people seemed out of all the issues that we are facing today as we are in Europe. For instance, as I said, my colleagues were ordering a lot of food while relying on single-use plastic. Moreover, lights remained on unnecessarily, and my coworkers preferred using motorbikes over walking even for short distances. These differences made me realize that in Vietnam, the political and economic contexts overshadowed environmental concerns and behaviors. It became evident to me that these behaviors were not a result of indifference but a factor of cultural norms and priorities. Consequently, I adapted by acknowledging and respecting these differences while trying to advocate for some sustainable practices. This experience made me have a different point of view on my understanding of environmental and societal issues and on how to approach intercultural differences with tolerance and understanding. It also served as a reminder of the importance of understanding cultural diversities and having diverse perspectives in order to initiate and foster collaboration effectively in order to build trust and work together for common goals in an international workspace.

To conclude, this international journey filled me with a profound sense of transformation. Each of these chapters, from my childhood bathed in diverse cultural landscapes to my international academic and professional pursuits across continents, has left a deep impact on my identity and understanding of the world. These experiences have not only broadened my perspectives but also shaped my relationship with cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and tolerance in fostering meaningful connections. Whether immersed in my collaborative Italian classes and hanging in the vibrant streets of Naples with my flatmates, or embracing the challenges of interning in Vietnam, I have continuously strived to embrace diversity and interculturalism. As I embark on the next chapter of my journey, I am grateful for every lesson I have learned and feel confident and well equipped for my next intercultural opportunities.

These differences in culture and manners showed that while being tolerant and comprehensive we can learn so many new ways to build our lives and to cooperate with citizens from the world from diverse perspectives. By embracing the positive aspects of each culture and remaining open to new methods, we can shape what will be our best approach to life and collaboration. This means acknowledging and

accepting cultural differences while also recognizing the value in exploring alternative ways of working and living. After all, how can we know what is the most effective method if we limit ourselves to what we already know?