

# EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (EUCI)

## REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO

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## COVER LETTER

First of all, I would like to thank the EUCI program for letting students share their international profiles and give them credit for that. During the whole essay I have tried to present all the activities I have participated in and all the experiences I lived that have significance at an international level and that built me to be the person that I am today.

### LEARNING OUTCOME 1: REFLECTIVE

This learning outcome has been accomplished during the whole essay, as it has been written in a reflective way. I have mainly described three different activities that I have participated in, and I tried to show the impact that it made on me and the internal process that I lived during each moment.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is the first activity that I mention, as it was the first approach to an international academic program, which I found very complex due to its structure and content. The three main subjects made me develop analytic and problem-solving skills and a global mindset.

About the Erasmus program and the year living in Belgium I learned a lot not only at an academic level by improving my level of French or my legal knowledge, but also from all the people I met there, national, or international students that accompanied me during this adventure.

In order to get rid of the very common “post-Erasmus depression”, at the beginning of this academic year I joined ESN, where I have been able to meet people from around the world, get to know the city of Barcelona and also develop new organizational and leading skills required to gain responsibilities inside the association.

### LEARNING OUTCOME 2: INTERCULTURAL

Interculturality can be defined as the process that starts when different cultures interact with each other and must find common aspects to adapt to each other. Well, I accomplished by far this outcome when I did my Erasmus in Belgium. I was living with 4 other students from around Europe, and we had to adapt to each other to make the convivence as peaceful as possible.

Established again in Barcelona, I have continuously been keeping in touch with international students thanks to ESN, a space of constant culture mixing and interaction. I have seen people from very different nationalities mix and integrate to the autochthonous culture, people and language.

### LEARNING OUTCOME 3: INTERSECTORAL

It is true that all the activities that I presented (IB, the Erasmus Program and the participation in ESN) are linked to the academic field, as all my life has been focused on studies. However, it is much more than this and it has much more significance.

Let me explain myself: it is true that I went to study abroad with the Erasmus program to continue my law bachelor in a Belgian university, and that later I joined an

international organization linked to university. Nevertheless, through the pages of the essay, I have reflected and demonstrated that each of the activities are not independent from each other; they are part of my process and evolution and without linking them to the academic field I wouldn't have had the opportunity to participate in them.

If I hadn't had a learning agreement with UCL, I would not have had the opportunity to live abroad. And the same happens with ESN, as it is a student organization and has to be linked to a university. Academic institutions have permitted and helped me achieve these goals, but the most enriching part of what I learned it is not linked to my courses or university, but to all the experiences that I collected.

#### LEARNING OUTCOME 4: CHALLENGE-BASED

If you have or want to have an international profile, you will encounter numerous challenges that you will have to overcome or to live with. These may have to do with language-barrier problems, but most of them will be personal challenges.

While studying the IB program, one of the challenges was taking up with this high-quality education program, that focuses on the reflection on the nature of knowledge, independent research, and undertaking a project that involves community service. As I showed in this portfolio, I was allowed to take a closer approach to the big problems that are affecting the whole globe, such as poverty and hunger.

Living and studying in another state was challenging due to the cultural and language barrier, although it was not that shocking as it was a European country, and the differences were not that hard to assimilate. The most obvious one was the language barrier, but as I had studied French in the past, I was looking forward to going to a French-speaking country. Having studied abroad and having studied other languages are aspects that most enterprises and companies value and take into account for their future recruitments.

Other features that help the employability of students is their participation in activities or projects that help them develop skills that they will be able to apply in their future careers. Apart from doing this, ESN also allows me to help the incoming international students deal with the personal and cultural challenges they face when moving to Spain.

#### CONCLUSION

All the activities that I presented in the portfolio and that I tried to summarize in these pages can be explained individually, but they must be understood globally. I undertook a process of internationalization that first became real with the participation in an international baccalaureate program, but that I have continued building and developing.

Through this internationalization process I have been enriching myself through connecting with people and experiences that I'm sure will open a lot of doors for me in the future. Having accomplished local and global challenges makes me a more confident person and more willing to undertake more challenges in the incoming future. This process hasn't end here, so I may end with a "To be continued".

## MY PERSONAL DIARY

When I first decided to enroll myself to EUCI I didn't know what to expect. I had never heard about it before, I just got to know it some time after I had discovered the existence of EUTOPIA. The idea of internationalization always appealed to me, this is why this alliance of European universities, aiming to create a new academic program that promotes mobility and inclusivity, drew my attention.

I appreciate the possibility that this program offers to recognize the internationalization of students. In the next pages I will explain why I consider that I have myself an international profile, explaining chronologically the projects that made me realize that I have and I want to continue having international experiences.

### SEPTEMBER 2015 - JUNE 2020: THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

In 2015 I started my Baccalaureate studies. The year before, at the age of 15 and with no experience, we were supposed to choose the itinerary and type of program we would like to continue. My school was one of the first schools in the region to include an international program called IB (International Baccalaureate).

I first got interested in it for the possibilities and facilities it offered to go to university abroad, as it was a program recognized internationally, except in Spain. As I was not sure what I wanted to do and where I wanted to study, it was the first reason I picked it: to open my doors. The second one, but also an important one, was the methodology used, as it was focused on reflective and analysis work.

It consisted in 3 core subjects: the "monograph" (or final thesis), theory of knowledge (TOK) and CAS (creativity, action and service). In TOK, we questioned the nature of knowledge and how we know what we claim to know. We wrote several essays during the years that helped us answer those questions.

For the CAS subject, we were encouraged to participate in activities related with music, languages (creativity); sports or races (activity) and to take community service actions (service). During the program I didn't understand why we were "obliged" to do this type of extracurricular activity, but seeing it now with perspective I'm glad for that, because it made me challenge myself by enrolling to activities that maybe I would have never done.

I had my first contact with the community service actions, as I had never participated in a solidarity activity. The first time I did it, I discovered the value of it. I remember it was a solidarity campaign that was going on during the Christmas holidays for collecting toys or other types of presents for the children of parents that couldn't afford to buy them. I was very touched for the cause and for seeing the number of people that were also willing to give joy to unknown people.

People acting together for the same cause can have a very deep impact in society, not just locally, but also at a national or international level. It made me realize the actual problems that people that surround me have, such as hunger and poverty, aspects that

I always saw from the distance. It also made me aware of my privileged position, which allows me to actually make a change for the people that are in most need.

The CAS subject also encouraged me to continue my French studies, for the 'C for creativity' part. I had been learning the language for 4 years and I really enjoyed discovering and getting better at it. I liked it that much that I also thought about continuing my university studies in a French-speaking country.

Actually, university and the choice of the future career was something with which I was struggling during the two years of the program. Everybody in my class seemed to have clear ideas about their future career, so that was something that put a lot of pressure on me. I informed myself about a lot of bachelor studies, I checked a lot of universities, even abroad, but none of them were convincing me, so at the last minute I decided to enroll to the Law degree at Pompeu Fabra University.

#### SEPTEMBER 2017-2020: THE FIRST APPROACH TO UNIVERSITY

The decision that I made of studying law in a Spanish university made me deviate from the international education that I wanted to follow, as I chose to study the laws and regulations of Spain. Nonetheless, I still had the idea of going to study abroad for some period.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year we had the Erasmus program meeting, one I had been looking forward to for a long time. I was very clear that I wanted to go to a French-speaking country, as I wanted to re-take my French studies. As a result, my first option was going to Université Catholique de Louvain, in Belgium, but I also had other options in Switzerland. Lucky for me I got selected for my first option, so I would be going for 6 months to Louvain-la-Neuve.

#### SEPTEMBER 2020-JUNE 2021: THE MOST EXPECTED ERASMUS

It was the first time that I was going to live outside my family home, and it was in another country with another language and culture. I felt quite nervous but excited for this new adventure.

The first day I discovered that I would be living with 4 other girls: they were Russian, German, Italian, and Swiss. We had a really good connection: we shared our daily lives there, but also our experiences and routine back in our countries, so we could learn more about each other. Despite the good relationship, we also had some convivence problems, as 5 students living together can be troublesome.



This is a picture of the 5 of in one of our last dinners together

I was also surrounded with a lot of Spanish people, as in that building there were a lot of international students – most of them were Italian and Spanish – so I spent most of my time speaking a mix of English, Spanish and Italian.

At university, all my courses were in French, and as I did not speak the language as much as I would have liked, at least I was learning it through my courses. Listening and having to write in French was also a deep language immersion. It was also challenging, as I was used to study in English, but I never had to study in French.

It was complicated for me to keep studying as much as I had done in Spain, as I was much more distracted. Whenever I tried to study or read my notes I couldn't concentrate enough, and that ended up negatively affecting my grades: I ended up failing my first subject in all the years of university. I had expected this result, as it was an oral exam, and in French, which added a huge disadvantage for me. Moreover, in my home university I had never done an oral exam, as all our exams are written, so I had no previous structure on how I should answer.

Just before this bad news I decided to extend the Erasmus Program for the second semester too. I had to move out from the place where I lived in the first semester, and I was assigned a flat with two Belgian roommates. This time it was a real immersion in the language, as they didn't speak English, so I had to speak French. At the beginning I struggled in having long conversations with them, but I can say that after 6 more months living there I really improved my oral skills, even they told me so!

In this new phase, apart from all the subjects I had there, I had to deal with the final thesis of the bachelor that I had to present back in Barcelona. As I was living in another country, I proposed to my tutor a little change: instead of just analyzing Spanish law, I wanted to compare Spanish, Catalan and Belgian law regarding access to artificial reproduction techniques for gay couples.

While struggling with the project, I was also struggling with the preoccupation of what to do after finishing the bachelor, as I was supposed to finish it in June 2021. Talking with an Italian friend of mine, she gave me the idea of extending the bachelor 1 year to give me time to reflect about my future. I was not sure about it because I had always followed the established path of studies, and this would be a change of those plans. It was a difficult decision for me, but that is what I ended up doing and I don't regret it at all. I think that I wouldn't have had the courage to take this decision if I had not lived one year abroad, as I saw different mindsets and ways of doing.

#### SEPTEMBER 2021-JUNE 2022: ERASMUS IN BARCELONA

During the summer after the Erasmus, I received a mail from my university stating that ESN Barcelona UPF was searching for volunteers. I already heard about the organization when I was abroad, but I hadn't got to know more about it. It turned out to be an international organization composed by local volunteers that wanted to promote the internationalization of studies and the integration of international students to the local society.

During the month of September I participated as a volunteer in all the activities they had prepared for the incoming students, and at the end of the recruitment process, I got in. I discovered the new and huge world of ESN, as it was a much bigger organization than I had imagined.

The first challenge I had was entering a group of people and friends that was already formed and adapting to their routines and dynamics. Now that I think of it, I had never found myself in a situation like this, as all the groups of friends that I have were formed from scratch.



The group of volunteers in ESN Barcelona UPF: one of them is me!

I wanted to be useful and help in everything I could, so I got in the Cultural committee to help organize and plan the activities. I have discovered parts and stories of the city of Barcelona that I didn't know of, and this has made me closer to and more appreciative of this beautiful city.

I can tell that I have improved my leadership and problem-solving skills, due to taking on the responsibilities of these activities. Nonetheless, I still get stressed as I'm not used to arranging projects that affect a big quantity of people, and sometimes I don't know how to act because of my lack of experience.

Thankfully, the volunteers of ESN also organize formative sessions that allow us to know more and more about the organization, but also to develop and improve our personal skills involving storytelling, problem-solving, etc. I feel that I'm learning and interiorizing these skills little by little, while I'm also my oral English skills, as I'm starting to use it in my daily life.

What has encouraged me to keep participating and defending the values of the association is in part thanks to an internal group called Projects. This group is focused on the community service part, the aim is to encourage the international students to take part in the solidarity activities that have local impact. It reminds me of when I was first involved in these kind of activities, with the difference that this time local and international students will be involved to act for the same cause.

One of the activities that I feel proud of and that I helped organize, was the one called "The Erasmus Chat". We wanted to create a safe space for the international students in

Barcelona to express their feelings and preoccupations. As a person that has also lived the experience, I know it can be hard to adapt to the new city, the new culture, the new language and the new people.

After almost 1 year in the association, I feel more capable and with more knowledge to get responsibilities. The end of the academic course was approaching and in ESN that meant renovating the people in charge of the board and the groups of work. With this opportunity, me and another girl presented our candidature to become co-leaders of the Cultural Committee that both of us are part of. I'm both excited and a little bit nervous for this new adventure, but I'm sure that we will make a great team.

#### THE END

In conclusion, after all these international experiences, I reaffirm my willingness to continue working and constructing my international profile. Seeing with perspective what I have been through to arrive here, I am sure that I am not the same person that first enrolled on the IB program, not the same person that went to study for one year in Belgium, and not the same person that is now part of an international organization. I have gone through a long journey, but the path hasn't ended here.