EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation

Reflective Portfolio by Miha Robnik Kračun

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0. Introduction

Writing the EUCI Portfolio enables me to put my personal international experience into perspective and to gather the reflections of what does internationalization mean in today´s world. First, I will write about my personal internalization experiences. Second, I will reflect on the four learning outcomes, relevant for the EUCI – reflective, intercultural, interdisciplinary, and challenge-based. And third, I will present an imaginative – to be read both figuratively and conceptually – writing that connects my internationalization experiences with my perspective of the EUCI learning outcomes. We were offered several options on how to form our portfolio. I decided to write a poem because I felt I could express myself most freely, authentically, and clearly this way.

1. Experience

In the course of 2021/22, I attended 5 EUTOPIA events – Warwick Economics Summit, The Open Innovation Challenge Hackathon, BeEUTOPIAn Annual Student-led Conference, the EUTOPIA Innovation Conference, and the Student Career Ambassador Annual Meeting. The experience was transformative. I grew as a person and strengthened my global perspective. I got familiar with the Design Thinking method and the Hackathon problem-solving format. I met a lot of amazing people, and we had a great time together.

A past internationalization experience that was very important for me was taking a two-week English course at the European School of English in Malta in 2016 right after I finished high school. The experience was a mix of lectures and leisure, I enjoyed it fully. Looking back, I now see that it was a transformative event that opened the world to me. It made me realize how safe and boring home can be and that I need something to fight for, something to enjoy, and something to learn, to be satisfied with the way I am living my life.

A key aspect of internationalization is learning languages. Apart from Slovene, I started learning basic English and German words in kindergarten. I picked up French as my third foreign language in high school. I´d been singing in choirs and solo from 2008 to 2021 in many different languages and learned to feel in many different social contexts. Now that I think of it, it had not been that many. The main domain of my feeling acquisition had been the European Catholic musical tradition – I was raised a Catholic more than I realize.

The main areas of internationalization for me from a young age had been via media technology and popular culture, most notably playing computer games and watching sports and cartoons. I started to Americanize my soul around 2003 when as a 6-year-old I started playing video games and watching cartoons. The most formative internationalization products for me were the games NBA Live 2003, F1 2002 and FIFA 2002, and the cartoons Tom and Jerry, Looney Tunes, Bob the Builder, Fireman Sam, and Thomas & Friends (the last three in Slovene dub). A game is a simulation of reality. Each one of these video games has a special soundtrack, visuals, and commands to execute to successfully perform an action. Each cartoon has an idea, a message, directed at educating children. Apart from learning how to feel, move and win from video games, and learning about society through watching cartoons, I became part of global culture through interacting with these products of globalism – I

became international, as is the way of globalization or if we put it in a demonizing way, the way of Anglo-American cultural imperialism.

Each language is a unique plain of feeling. Language arises on the basis of feelings, which are more fundamental than concepts – we develop feelings earlier and they determine our personalities more strongly. The language we are using presents our self-understanding and understanding of the world within that language system, within that feeling database – when we use language, we access sensory data from within that system. And prior to that, when we learn a language we connect concepts with feelings, syntax with situations. The language we are using forms our self-understanding. Using several languages creates an interaction of systems – as Charlemagne is reputed to have said that to speak another language is to possess another soul, so the sense of self in bilinguals is constituted in this interplay of feeling-understanding systems. How does one create then, using several languages? By deploying a creative medium such as thinking or art, where multiple existing systems interact and create new connections that show themselves within the limits of the chosen medium – in the medium of thought this shows as new ideas, for example.

2. Learning outcomes

I. Reflective – inclusivity

Inclusivity is the basic educational form today. We must be inclusive, otherwise we are automatically not. Inclusivity has become the norm of cooperation. Rather than achieving goals, including as many people in the process as possible has become the goal itself. We are bound together by involving each other in a process without a direction. The irony of globalism is that localities shape directions. There is no global sense of direction. Our efforts and desires shape the future together. The intertwinings of our interests and abilities set the stage for others as theirs set the stage for us. We collectivelly enjoy the efforts and rewards of one another. It is the right thing to do to to include as many as possible into this game since we create opportunities for one another and add value to one another. Creating and participating in spaces of sharing perspectives is beneficial for all included.

Measuring reflection is difficult, for it shows only through the content revealed. One cannot measure the extent of reflection without interacting with the content that is being reflected on. And since we – EUCI participants writing the portfolio – are reflecting our own ability to reflect – whether it has improved, decreased, or changed in style – we are presented with a unique opportunity to assess our own thoughts in relation to the thoughts of others. One thing is remembering the topics being discussed in the seminars – introducing ourselves and others, sharing our experiences, views and opinions on topics ranging from education, tolerance, globalization, democracy, and so on – and another thing is to take the sharing into one´s own account, to allow the sharing to impact one´s point of view. And finally, to see the change that the joint sharing has created and verbalize it, thus creating a sharing continuum. Joint reflection actually hurts unity the most because it exposes the gap between the self and the other. But it also establishes the bridge between them. This is why inclusivity as one of the central EU ideas is so difficult to judge – on one hand it establishes common ground for all the participants to share regardless of their background, but on the other hand it keeps watering down the initiatives for work since they all need to be inclusive. And spreading inclusivity becomes work itself – this is why there is so much senseless work being done today, work without a clear agenda but to expand the idea that enables more people to get involved in it. Being reflective establishes ground and potentially brings people together but it also leads to the exposure of problems that then need to either be addressed or watered down. There are and always will be more people to be included. Inclusivity will never succeed totally because in expanding itself it keeps

producing new ways to be expanded and creates new not-yet-inclusive ground. By creating new ways to expand itself it also creates obstacles that it then needs to solve in order to continue. Inclusivity becoming the norm of doing things in the EU owes its success to its ultimate failure to ever succeed and its continuous production of infinite possibilities to apply itself in any social domain.

II. Intercultural – theory of culture

Culture is the one thing the humanities can legitimately theorize about. This holds true even for domains of technology or politics for example. Rather than doing technology or politics, the humanities are describing the state of the chosen domain, the way things stand, the way things are being done – the culture of it. The fundamentals of culture are ideas – and creating an idea-exchange environment allows different cultures to understand one another. Humanities/social sciences usually take care of establishing such environments.

Sharing what was happening in the EUCI environment was multi-cultural. We were gathered from all over the world in the same virtual environment, our images and voices being representative of the physical world. I say this non-ironically because images and sounds that were being transmitted via electrical signals were representative of our cultures being shared. However, we can understand "intercultural" in two different ways, in a connective and a differing way. These two ways create four senses/stances of culture that I will describe:

a) Interculturality as a bridging initiative between existing cultures to cohabit peacefully and prosper together. The globalist-liberal stance. Exchanges between cultures are seen as a mutually beneficial means of cooperation and enrichment of the global society. Makes most sense economically in a neoliberal system where individual freedom is measured by the individual´s interaction with the market. Culture as commerce, the way of the West.

b) Interculturality as a difference-creating dynamic to understand the differences more clearly to adapt to other cultures being present in our environment. The pacifist nationalist stance. Cultures are seen as grounded in themselves and interaction between them is optional as far as it does not threaten sovereignty of each culture. Works best in a closed self-sufficient (or super rich) system, where tolerance comes second to the idea of the great nation.

c) Interculturality as a connecting force between various aspects of one global culture. The religious universalist stance. Culture as a god's gift to mankind, interculturality a method to unite people and bring them together. Not really a relevant view outside religious circles. Has great pacifistic emancipatory potential.

d) The fourth sense of interculturality is that there is no culture at all and that interculturality is the network dynamic that establishes culture as such – the sense that cultures exist only through the interaction of differences and similarities between them. More specifically, cultures exist only insofar as they are connected to one another. Think of so-called "barbarism" or so-called "primitive peoples" for example. Imagine an undiscovered island in Polynesia with a "wild" tribe of native inhabitants with an unknown culture. The West discovers it and finds the inhabitants to act hostile towards the Western explorers. The link between cultures is established, and the West denotes the sign +/- to the discovered culture – the indigenous people as "wild beasts" or merely "humanity a couple of steps backwards". More concretely, if the indigenous people were to act friendly – "aha, similarities, they are merely primitive people, a couple of steps in evolution behind our great Western civilization". And if they were to be hostile – "aha, they are more animals than men, no culture found here". I am using this 18th c. caricature example of the interaction between culture and non-culture to

demonstrate that interculturality as the form of contact between cultures is the very form that establishes culture, that gives the concept of "culture" its meaning. The theory of the signifier stance.

III. Intersectoral – use of knowledge in society

Intersectorality leads us to the problem of knowledge within the domain of public education. Intersectorality has been established for academia to be able to create new interests, very much like the way the market operates in the manner of creating needs for consumers. Intersectorality is a way of establishing new interesting connections and cooperative projects that transcend traditional divisions between disciplines. Intersectorality is a symbol of neoliberalism in academia. It is an attempt to boost research and discovery, an attempt led by creativity and innovation in an entrepreneurial sense. Creating the conditions for knowledge to be created in a wider array of future applicability.

This learning outcome leads us to the field of education and brings us to the question of creating and using knowledge. The concept of "knowledge" has changed drastically through the lens of info-tech theory and systems thinking. Creating environments where different stances meet has become the norm for creating new connections that lead to new business ideas and new research projects. There is a principle at work that is using knowledge to create work, this principle being best present in the contemporary meaning of the concept of "innovation". Innovation rather than breaking ground as in creating something new, today means constant polishing, adjusting, optimizing, tweaking – innovation has become the form of exploration of the modes of adaptation. That is because change and novelty are operating on a different time function than before, which is due to rapid technological progress since the industrial revolution and especially since the emergence of the internet. Today "new" does not even get to last because it is so rapidly consumed and incorporated into the existing scheme of doing things. Of course, "real change" still happens from time to time, like the Covid pandemic outbreak or the war between Russia and Ukraine – I say that it happens still, because the event slows time down, our perception of it. Such an event shifts the current, established flow of information in the process of decision-making inside a particular knowledge domain, practice field and social circle, and creates uncertainty. It creates a new trajectory for predicting future events which guide our present actions. If innovation used to mean ground-breaking scientific discovery, and revolution a history-changing event, innovation today means optimization of the present, and revolution a future-altering scenario. It is like the new keeps getting old and is never quite there. What does that mean for intersectorality inside and outside the context of university?

In the context of university, connecting various more and less scientific fields, in which innovation is the key drive both to thrive and survive, offers young people great opportunities to create their own future work rather than merely receive education and thus get prepared for the existing work to be done. Intersectoral or interdisciplinary environments also mix up the social organization of knowledge, where hierarchical systems that clearly differentiate between those who know and those who do not – for example professors and students – are replaced by a more dynamic, fluid form of knowledge creation and transfer, where holders of knowledge are active or at least have an opportunity to be active in the process of knowledge exchange regardless of their formal position. Outside of university, intersectorality shows itself in the ruling principle of ˝if you´ve got a good idea, test it, work it, sell it and you´re good˝. Formal knowledge has become less of a requirement for success, and teams across domains of work ranging from sports, business, scientific research to engineering, etc. are more frequently employing workers with backgrounds not necessarily related to the ˝task at hand˝. Intersectorality favours knowledge as a skill over knowledge as a form.

IV. Challenge-based – globalism

Being challenge-based today means using knowledge to solve problems, creating value in the process. However, the biggest challenge in the EUCI environment for me was to open up. To share without restraint. Only by sharing our thoughts can the problems even emerge. By thinking, we come to questions. Questions give rise to problems. Problems can be solved or at least we can go about solving them. Thus sharing is a key component of the social stance of being challenge-based.

The way of the world today is setting goals and achieving them – since the WWII shake-up and the post-war recovery, the world has been progressing steadily and rapidly. Success has become the measure of happiness and problem-solving has replaced morality as the key component of social progress. The United Nations´ Sustainable Development Goals for example have become a key model of measuring the success of nations and the main framework for educational institutions, modelling mindsets of present and future generations as well as reshaping our conception of the efforts of past generations. SDG#13 is titled Climate Action. World economies tend to cooperate when along with reaching a realistic goal there is a significant potential profit at hand, like fighting against the degradation of the Ozone layer at the end of the previous century. Problem-solving is a business, clearly. However, in the case of Carbon Dioxide and humanity being so heavily energy reliant, there is a different story playing out. The cost-benefit ratio of dropping coal burning still swings way too much in the cost direction for the main polluters – China, USA, India – to significantly decrease CO_2 emissions. And then we get graphs like this.

On a social change note that the West promotes, fighting climate change means constant management between continuation and adaptation – between satisfying basic human needs like love, money, freedom, doing things like working, raising families, driving around with cars, flying airplanes, reading books, doing sports, etc. and changing our lifestyles in order to achieve set goals. Within the Western interpretation of the idea of sustainable development the timeframe of reducing CO_2 emissions depends on the degree of sustained change we are willing to make in our consciousness about the way we view nature and the way we want to live our lives. What I find beautiful is how central tenets of Christianity are present in this idea. Firstly, there is in the threat of climate catastrophe the doomsday scenario of Judgement Day that appeals to us to do our best before it´s too late. Secondly, there is the social change push, that we ought to be – not good Christians anymore but conscious citizens of the world. Not pious but woke, not fearing God and praying, but fearing global warming and recycling. Then we´ve got naturalism that praises nature in all its glory and our link to it – what else if not the image of the Virgin Mary and the green transition. Finally, there is technological progress that virtualizes the saviour with the digital transition – the holy spirit being the expansion of technology and brotherhood of man consisting of engineers and programmers. To take this religious hyperbole to its climax, being a good person today – good as in contributing to society – means being a good techie and moving away from fossil fuels, or at least possessing valuable knowledge to contribute to the green and digital transition.

The main challenges of today are fighting climate change and establishing global cooperation. Both challenges require certain changes in the way things are done. Does change really mean something different? When we change something, it is important to notice that the change, along with bringing with itself a difference, remains similar in a way to the previous iteration of doing things. Knowing this, setting more specific goals rather than pushing for more change becomes a more sensible course of action from the executive point of view. Here we can clearly see a difference between the social and economic dimension of change where one is altering consciousness via promoting certain

ideals and the other is allocating resources in a certain way. With China and India accounting for 35-40% of the global CO2 emissions (BRICS countries account for around 45-50%), and with their emerging middle class massively buying highly polluting products like cars and refrigerators, the CO2-emission reduction efforts of the West seem like a watered-down power move of Western imperialism – how the West and especially the EU can remain a step ahead of the rest by greening up and digitalizing. And it is crucial that the West is doing this because it is setting trends for future generations that will presumably want to live on this planet. And when by around 2030 China and India say ˝Ok, we´ve burned enough coal, let's burn less now˝ and by around 2050 they along with USA reach the net-zero target, we might not experience too many catastrophes that the mission ˝keep the planet habitable˝ will still be achievable and there will still be battles to be fought.

What may be most challenging for the youth today is how to approach global problems. It takes some time for an individual to get familiar with the concepts, then to break through the ˝idealizing the good guys, antagonizing the bad guys˝ phase, and to finally form a social stance that the individual represents. So that one is not merely a tool of the past or a dreamer of the future but a change-maker in the present. And if the challenge is to preserve a habitable world for the next generations it is not the question of how to do it – because we are already doing it. It is instead a question of how to do it better.

3. A Poem for the Day

Gloating gold, the goat no more. Man sacrifices lamb and insists on buying new BBQ materials. Slow roast, not a kill is the way to burn if we are Satan´s children, scorching the Earth.

Residual waste. No plans to attack the villain at night. The Earth is cooling down when we´re sleeping. We need to stop being awake to cool the Earth down even more.

Pride and accomplishment – diminished through sheer force of will, will we ever be sedated enough to claim what is ours, freedom, and democracy? How is reaching the potential ever going to be enough when we are constantly on the brink of destruction? Raised in the world of impending doom of the Nuclear War, the world could not afford to catch a break and hurried on to the next possible catastrophe, even more material than the last one.

Dark alleys, strobing lights. Humanity finds itself in dark corners

Knowing things are going to be alright is not enough. Piercing through the shadow requires massive action. Massive action creates massive shadows. We are not shadowless Gods but mere mortals whose shadows paint the picture of our actions.

Sandwiches, bandages and bandwidth – the world manages to sustainably produce all three.

We are fighters, told not to fight. Taught not to fight. Fighting to not need to fight. Losing all the time. Winning gives us solace. Winning gives us a break from losing all the time. Seeing that winning is better than losing, we want to win even more. Sayonara suckers, and the world is gone. Blip. Zero.

Loving like a rockstar. Passionately telling the world to shut up and listen. We cannot save the world and the world cannot save us. The world exists to live, to be lived.

Spraying paint – USA America is US´s greatest product. We are performing a service, dutifully obliging in promoting its values. Comfort comes at a cost. Freedom costs democracy. We are free merely in seeking freedom. As we are saving the world only by actually saving it, not by talking about it. What are we saving? A part of the world? A concept? Material gains, achievements? The atmosphere? Saving it for what, for when – for later? Do we know the next generations who we are supposedly saving the world for? Why are we not saving the world for our neighbour? Because he is a point in our lives and not a real person.

Idealising an economical model – such as SDGs – is a huge mistake. Great models are built to be overcome.

Receiving an education means becoming equipped with the tools to reshape the world. The direction of the shaping is set in the process itself.

Being less wrong – as we learn and do, we are less wrong than before.

Salt and heat and rose coloured dust creeping over the rooms of the houses of our forefathers. Because building new houses is too expensive for most of the population.

Will we ever be set free? Why do we need freedom? We do not want to need it, we yearn for it. Inner condition of man. Challenges of the time present the conditions for salvation. Conquering inner demons results in material expansion of ego.

Civilization, mankind, humanity. People, society. All different starting points of thought. What unites us? Thought?

The ways of the word reveal itself as the word progresses. We script our own destiny. No need to play games. Life already is a game. Characters beginning their story arbitrarily, in given conditions. Initiating actions inside an environment that shapes them. The difference is the number of scripted actions. A video game is a simulation with a complete code, however complex. The game does not create itself anew as it is being played, unlike life. But how is the difference showing? Generating new possible actions is the obvious parallel. As we progress we achieve more and new stories are being opened to us. We retain a base character structure, adapt to the environment, change it to a degree, interact with other characters. The video game has a fixed main line, generally. A main theme, central quest that the protagonist is to complete. Life lacks such a central quest – in this sense a video game is more complete. Life´s central quest is exactly to continuously create that quest – building a vision is very much like enclosing oneself in a character that one chooses to play out. To play out and see what the script was. Or rather what the possibilities of the script are.

As we progress, our understanding of the script changes. We use more simple and more complex words to describe what is going on around us, who we are, what others are like, etc. Our understanding of our past interpretations – every character has multiple interpretations of itself. Every person is going through phases of development, where it is identifying with itself in a different way. Every person has a history of self-interpretation. Self-interpretation is a historical proccess. We are constantly interacting with the past iterations of ourselves and creating future versions. The way we are playing these options out in the present time shapes which options remain and which fall off. The self is thus a dynamic process of dying of possibilites and creating the field for further modifications. The self is a point wherein life flows. Through which life flows.

The passing of yesterday means creating the tomorrow. What is the feeling of death? Is there a warning? A precursor? Death is a tragical metaphysical concept. Cessation of the body, material decay is natural, does not feel bad at all. But death as the haunting shadow, the end, the no beyond. This death is scary. This death is not linked to the body. This death – the death of the mind – is linked to the absence of further creation.