

EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation 2024
Reflective Portfolio by Nandika Karunakaram
(University of Warwick)

My journey of internationalisation has been long with experience of more than 20 years now. I was born in the populous city of Delhi in India. I was introduced to new cultures at a young age as my family belongs to the South of India and we live in Delhi. I have been accustomed to both sides of my heritage whether it be my place of residence or my roots in Southern India. Delhi is a city where people from all over the country reside, and having people from culturally diverse backgrounds helped me comprehend the value of respecting cultures and traditions. Although, this is not particularly 'internationalisation' I think stepping outside one's comfort zone and the exposure to such a diverse set of people has been very enlightening. I have always wanted to put myself out of my comfort zone, therefore after living in this country for more than 18 years, moving to the United Kingdom was nerve-racking.

As an international student at the University of Warwick, I have learned a lot in the past two years. However, this journey of internationalization started before moving to this country. My school introduced an exchange program. I had worked on this exchange program with a school in Hamburg, Germany. Due to the 2020 pandemic, the program could not take place in person. However, the fact that this took place online was of great help since in 2020 the pandemic caused most people to switch to the online medium and this being the first of its kind was one of the few exchanges that still goes on now in my secondary school. This exchange was very interesting as it helped in developing an international outlook towards things. Bring to light the different policies specifically during the lockdown, the family dynamics, my exchange partner's hobbies, and the activities they were engaging in. We exchanged these thoughts and understood each other and our cultures better. Using this ideology in the EUTOPIA program helped me expand my thought process.

Coming to the University of Warwick allowed me to interact with people from different cultures, countries, and backgrounds. How someone inevitably has to participate in social situations at University is almost impossible elsewhere. In my case, I have been exposed to people in my course through such situations. Especially, being a part of the Global Sustainable Development department has made me think laterally in terms of the issues that many different parts of the world face daily. Moreover, I have understood the social, economic, and environmental issues (the three pillars of sustainable development) that these countries face and how they approach them.

Specifically in a group project, if it is an ethnically diverse group with a lot of perspectives on issues that we discuss. For instance, in one of my first projects at university, I was in a group with people from four very culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds. We were working on the impact of economic and institutional policies in Ghana and Ivory Coast, trying to describe every aspect of the two countries and relating it to current issues and the aspects that we have learned in class to our project. Our project looked at the impact many situations like wars, coups, religion, and certain economic policies can have on the country and the people.

Moreover, we also dwelled on the implications of existing policies, and the degree to which people are receptive to such policies depends on their trust in the government and the policymakers ensuring that the policies do not obstruct any kind of beliefs, or traditions or hurt the sentiment of the population. Moreover, one of my team members had a particular interest in this topic which made it even more interesting and fun for all of us to research. This is a very basic concept I understood then the use of citations and in-text citations. This journey of internationalisation has been extremely engaging and on some level nerve-racking as well. However, I have learned so much in such little time whether it be developing friendships with people from across the world, understanding their culture and traditions, and teaching them my own.

Further, even in terms of researching other countries and the policies used by them, I learned a lot about their culture through policy implementation and the environmental and social problems they face regularly. Employing policies from other countries and optimising them to the requirements of the selected countries. Although not physically there, my international journey was accelerated with the help of such research projects and essays. Whether it be discussing menstrual health policies in the United States of America or understanding the problem of ocean acidification and pollution in China. I have found that reading and understanding the perspectives of the people in that particular country is particularly enriching in terms of understanding the culture, traditions, habits, and daily activities.

Furthermore, over the past two years moving to the country of the United Kingdom and understanding their culture has been extremely enlightening. Comprehending the several lifestyles of places within the country and appreciating the same. This exchange of ideas and traditions has only been possible due to the diverse and vast cohort of the university. This was specifically very insightful when learning of ideas and concepts from different countries and people can contribute.

This journey taught me the value of stepping outside one's comfort zone. I applied for a study abroad program with my department to further my journey and my ambition as an international student. The study abroad program was taking place in Venice, Italy. It is an island in the Northeast of Italy. The city has been afloat on the water of the lagoon, thereby the bridges and the canal are a very important part of its infrastructure. Environmentally, it is like Atlantis and could go underwater any time soon. It is important to note that there are cities that might be suffering from water scarcity by the time Venice's sea level rises to the point it goes underground. The two-week study abroad program on resistance and representation and the liberal arts department. This module was about the history of resistance and representation in the city. Something is the presence of multiple tourist groups, which impacted me, us included. Moreover, I ended up looking at Venice from a completely different perspective due to the content and the hands-on experience I had gained.

Specifically, the history of Venice and the myths fascinated me. I loved understanding the political and economic state of the 'La Serenissima' (The Republic of Venice). Venice has a way of representing itself with the help of St. Mark's Lions.



Figure 1: St. Marks' Lion

Seeing the 'Museo Correr' made me not only understand how Venice is inspired by how it is portrayed. Taking the example of de Babri's map, there are clear reflections in the architecture of Piazza San Marco and the Doge's Palace or the Palazzo Ducale. This has made me understand the architecture and art of Venice that showcases the rich culture, tradition, and religion of the city.



Figure 2: Piazza San Marco at night



Figures 3 & 4: the world map and the Piazza San Marco

Seeing other cities like Milan, Treviso, and Verona, I could see stark and visible differences between the three and Venice. This made me realise how special Venice is. Whether it be the infrastructure or the multiple canals in the city is unlike what I have seen anywhere else. Most of the other cities in the country do not have an infrastructure like this, even if they are close to water bodies like most cities in the Veneto region Venice is one of a kind. One of the few misconceptions of Italy is that the stereotypical cuisine (pizza, pasta, and lasagna) is considered to be the cuisine everywhere in Italy, however, especially in Venice this is not the authentic food. The food in Venice is reflective of its geography; food has an important influence on the cuisine offered in Venice. The outward image of the country and the city to the tourists visiting is based on preconceived notions and the image portrayed by social media.



Figure 5: Canal in Venice



Figures 6,7 & 8: Milan, Treviso, and Verona (central areas in all these cities)

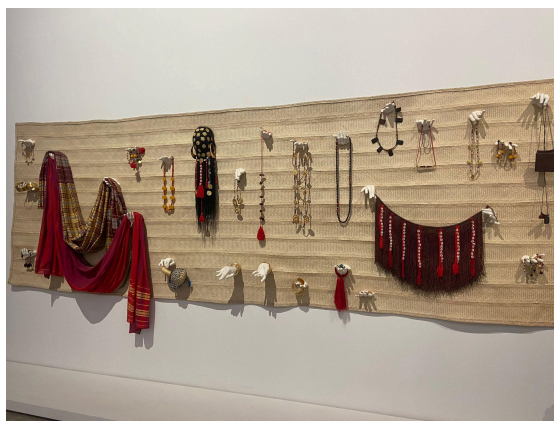
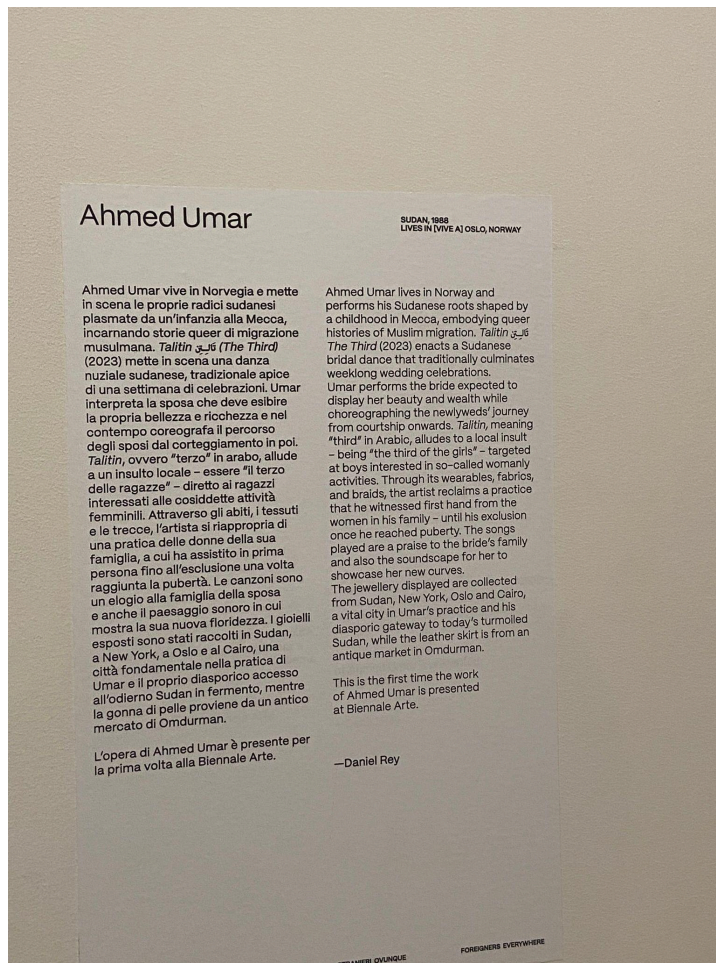
This is evidence of the clear differences between the three cities and Venice. Making the city unique and special for its infrastructure and its location close to the sea. Especially being particularly distinct for the Veneto region.

Moreover, another reason why the city was different from cities like Treviso and Verona was due to overtourism. Cities like Milan and Venice have been the victim of over-tourism in recent times. Moreover, infrastructurally it is one of the only cities that has multiple canals and the city is built over it. Venice has had reforms such as the 5 euro entry fee over particular days to reduce the entry of tourists and day trippers. An aspect due to which Venice stands out (in a negative light) is that there are about 48000 residents in the lagoon of Venice. Due to the high cost of living most people from the lagoon have moved to the mainland area of Mestre and Marghera. For the entire duration of the course I was living in the industrial area of Mestre and I could see visible differences between the people and the infrastructure from the lagoon and the mainland. Whether it be the ethnicity of the people or just the buildings in this area, they are very different from that of the lagoon.

Another distinct aspect of the two areas is the socioeconomic status of the people residing on the mainland in comparison to those in the lagoon. Moreover, as discussed before the lagoon mostly is filled with tourists, the real lack of culture and the misconceptions of tourists are promoted by the Venetians in the lagoon. For example, the promotion of fake Murano (glasswork authentic to Italy and the island of Murano in Venice) which has not been made in the real area of Murano. It is difficult to distinguish for people who are not professionals in the field of glassware as certain intricacies cannot be understood by people who just want to purchase a piece of art authentic to the area.

One of the most interesting museums we went to as a group was the Biennale. It is an annual exhibition of art from around the world that takes place in Venice. Every year the theme changes and this year it was 'Foreigners Everywhere'. At first sight, my peers and I thought this was reflective of Venice's plight in terms of over-tourism, however, as we went about exploring the exhibition we realised it was a celebration of the multiple cultures and celebrating the uniqueness of Venice and Italy. A section of the Biennale I found particularly interesting was where there were maps on different video screens and people were talking about their journeys from their home countries to where they had illegally immigrated. Another section I found very intriguing was that of the movies and the artists. The movies from around the world from a diverse group of artists showcase the socioeconomic conditions of people around the world during distinct periods of time. I was mesmerised by the interpretive dancing of a Sudanese dancer based on a dance form. Furthermore, the presence of indigenous art pieces from around the world expanded my perspective. Moving to the country exhibits was engrossing as it helped in understanding the different mindsets and the thinking of countries when sending these pieces for the museum for this theme. The Ukraine exhibit was unique in terms of how it introduced the notion of war which was unlike any other exhibit. I spent the most amount of time there although it was particularly disturbing to see the kind of atrocities committed against the civilian population in that country. A peculiar aspect of the Biennale was how less of Venice and Italy was showcased through art. This can be seen in Venice as well, how it has lost its own culture

to cater to the masses (tourists). The Biennale even at its start had an international appeal and continues with that even after the city of Venice has had problems in seeing how it represents itself to itself.



Figures 9 & 10: Sudanese dance film (the description of the artist and their attire) submission



Figure 11: Indigenous art form from a country at the Biennale

A problem with Venice is that it has been going through a long identity crisis, which is what most of us have undergone at least once in our lifetime. Every aspect of Venice has been commercialised and no change can be brought along unless the city is willing to develop its political and economic structures. This also led me to a journey of self-discovery with the help of psycho-geography. We were taught psycho-geography to understand how all of our senses are impacted by the structures of Venice. A few important ones that put me in deep thought were the ones based on the migration theme of the Biennale and the visible and audible diversity in Venice. I especially liked how almost every street in Venice had the presence of at least three to four languages. Additionally, the presence of old stone, the feel, and the texture of the same is uncommon to any other city in the surrounding areas. This is a clear sign of diversity and even of over-tourism in the city. Venice is a clear sign of how sometimes we lose ourselves just to get to the bigger picture, however, with the help of self-awareness (like the protests against over-tourism in Venice) it becomes a lot easier to represent yourself accurately to the world or the people around you.