

Summary Essay

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Introduction

Accompanying this summary essay, I have decided to present my activities in a reflective paper. In this reflective paper, I am attempting to present my activities – as my work as EUTOPIA Student Career Ambassador at the University of Gothenburg – by taking the reader along the path of my past on which I reflect which international experiences and decisions have led me to do these activities and formed me as the person I am, both personally but also professionally and academically.

Learning Outcome 1: Reflective

The main activities that are described in my accompanying reflective paper are, on the one hand, my work as a Sending Coordinator for the exchange organization 'American Field Service' and, on the other hand, my work as the EUTOPIA Student Career Ambassador at the University of Gothenburg. While the first activity marks almost the beginning of the mentioned 'path' as being connected to my Highschool year in the US, ten years ago, my work as Career Ambassador can be understood as the (current) end of that path. The way in between showcases not only the build-up of experiences that – almost through a path dependency – has let me to where I am today but also showcased my personal growth on that way through the active decision making to seek international and also challenging experiences. Through decisions like moving to the German-French border (even though more convenient options were available) or, in multiple instances, choosing to live abroad to experience the local culture, langue, and characteristics, different viewpoints are introduced to the path that, again, influence the future decisions and also help within the academic field I have chosen. Through the choice of presenting all of that as a path (dependent) reflective paper, I hope to demonstrate the linkage between all these experiences and activities – both active and passive.

Learning Outcome 2: Intercultural

The choice of stating the mentioned path with my experience as an exchange student in the US and the sequent activity as 'Sending Coordinator' is not only based on my sincere belief and understanding of this event being the 'kick-off' for everything that has happened subsequently (as described in the reflective paper) but also deliberately sets the 'key note' for the importance of (inter-)cultural understanding and the appreciation of different cultures and in all the following 'stations' I am describing along my 'path'. While the culture shock between (then) Germany and the US might not have been as big as it possibly would have been if the exchange year would have spent in a non 'western' society, the general understanding of cultural differences, also expressed through language, were made. I believe that my first activity described (Sending Coordinator) possibly could be understood as a reflective activity in itself as I was given the opportunity to pass on my knowledge and own cultural experiences to others, and thereby giving me the time to reflect on and understand situations that I have experienced during that exchange year. This curiosity for intercultural experiences and the active seeking for such are displayed in the reflective paper, where also developments from a broader intercultural understanding to more 'refined' aspects of interculturalism, such as differences in working cultures (i.e., as a Student Career Ambassador) can be witnessed.

Learning Outcome 3: Intersectoral

Both main activities presented in the reflective paper (Sending Coordinator for the exchange organization AFS and EUTOPIA Student Career Ambassador at the University of Gothenburg) are not immediately connected to the choice of my academic field. However, both my academic field and the activities presented are based on my intercultural and international interests that are inevitably intertwined. I believe that through the stylistic choice of presenting my activities along a 'path' that does not only feature said activities but also other influences through intercultural and international experiences as well as connecting these to my choice of academic field, the transdisciplinary and intersectional character of the reflective paper becomes apparent. While the 'path' presented does lead into one direction (from the distant past to the present), I hope to have – through the analogy of concentric waves that are going into all directions – demonstrated that this path is not a one-way street but that the activities and experiences presented are influencing each other, equally applying to interconnectivity

between the academic field which I have chosen and the 'outside world'. While, through my activities and experiences, I can understand my academic field more comprehensively, I can also take the academic knowledge with me when getting to know other cultures to set situations and experiences into context.

Learning Outcome 4: Challenge-based

Challenges in an international environment are very diverse. These challenges can be pretty personal and based on cultural differences. Still, they can also have a local and global character like youth unemployment, where young people do not see a future in their home region or home country and take a more international approach by living and working in another country, but also challenges stemming from climate change which is affecting people not only locally but globally. On the path described in my reflective paper, all of these challenges are apparent, beginning with the personal (cultural) challenges of moving to several different countries and being faced with the differences on site. Furthermore, living in an internal EU border region made it very clear that challenges do not end at national borders but carry on into another country, making cross-border cooperation necessary to tackle challenges. As a EUTOPIA Student Career Ambassador, I am faced with personal/cultural challenges and local challenges. Students and young professionals seek new opportunities in another country that often greets them with cultural differences, which I am trying to help them with.

Nevertheless, besides personal interest, underlying local challenges such as the lack of wished-for perspectives in their home countries' job markets make individuals look for jobs abroad. Lastly, also global challenges are touched through my academic choice of studying European Studies. Here, my experiences have contributed to my interest in existing challenges not only in or among the member states of the European Union but also outside of the European Union and how the EU is dealing with these challenges.

Conclusion

When personally looking at the here often mentioned 'path', it is almost surprising how international this path is. I am saying this because it is seldom that I am looking at the cumulated internationalism of my last few years. Instead, when referring to an experience, I think of it as

an isolated, singular experience that happens to have an international character. However, seeing this surprising 'whole picture', this – to me – is a symptom of internationalization. Through ongoing internationalization in almost every aspect of life, the world seems to have been shrinking, making it easy to connect and build up infrastructures and networks that both exist in digital form and physical form. Internationalization, therefore, gives the opportunity, on the one hand, to identify international and global challenges but can also serve as a vehicle to deal with these challenges by enabling people to form different countries, cultures, and backgrounds to connect advance. And while this may sound almost like an (e)utopian and romanticized vision, I believe it would be surprising to other people as well to discover how 'internationalized' their lives already are.