

EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation – Reflective Portfolio

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Delving into the challenging experiences of mine brings me the understanding of my past choices that have reflected on my present self and will guide me in fulfilling my aspirations for the future. Putting myself in a never-ending race I have set a goal for my life but now I am taking a moment to thoroughly take a look back and reflect properly on the international experiences that shaped the way I think, the way I see the world and define my values.

Looking at the profiles of previous recipients of the EUTOPIA internationalism certification made me notice how different not just the experiences of other people are and how diverse the lessons they take from them are but how incredibly unique the way of their self-presentations is. It was the start of my journey of reflecting on the fascinating things that I have done and allowed me to find my individual approach in doing this. Therefore, I am ready to take the ride on a reflection road I have paved for myself and travelled through to discover new insights on the things I have done before.

As long as I remember myself, I have always wondered about how various countries work and what unique cultural traditions and ways of living they were representing. From a perspective of a ten-year-old me, I knew as much information as a child could get about a foreign country from reading colorful magazines and watching rare travel shows on TV. Looking back at it, I can conclude that it laid a solid foundation for all my international activities to come. In this essay I would like to concentrate on my experiences that I have done in the past two years because as Professor Moussa have said to me during the workshop of EUTOPIA – I would have difficulties with trying to put all of them into this paper, that is how numerous they are.

Let me start at last. The wondrous adventure I have had for these two years began when I moved to Italy to obtain my Bachelor's degree in Venice. Studying Philosophy, International and Economic Studies I have entered a new exciting stage of my life. During the first year of my studies, I was chosen as an International Student's Representative, the role to which I have applied so eagerly primarily because of my desire to be able to help other international students with multiple academic, bureaucratic, cultural and other issues that I was managing through myself. Having felt overwhelmed in the first months after my arrival, I realized that it is essential for me to make sure that as few people as possible facing the same difficulties are alone in this. Stepping into this role was a perfect opportunity to contribute to this goal of mine. Almost all international students have reached out to me in one way or another because they need either help, advice or a friend who will be there for them. Being in this role allowed me not only to be the credible person for students on whom they can rely but also be the bridge of communication between the administration and international students of the University of Venice who depend on various authorities to have smooth university years spent abroad. In the second year of my studies, I was offered to become the Representative for all students of my program which I gladly accepted. Looking back at it now, from the perspective of almost starting my third and final year in the university, I realize how both fulfilling and challenging it has been as I had no preparation or at least any idea of what I was about to face but the ability to guide others motivated me to move forward. While managing and setting up my own life in Italy I made sure that others who might be in the same position as me would feel included and supported by meeting up with them to work through administrative problems, by accompanying them from the airports or train stations, by showing the best places to get their new phone number, by warning them about hidden tourist traps. In the end, figuring it out not just for myself but for my friends coming from all over the globe also taught me how to adapt to a completely new environment and how to be able to share this gained knowledge with others as now both students and

professors have the trusted person to whom they can refer to and clear out any misunderstandings. I am in touch with everyone who seeks out help.

During the last summer break, I knew just exactly what I was going to do – the one-in-a-lifetime opportunity provided by my university to be a part of something even bigger and even more international – Ca'Foscari – Harvard Summer School. This unique academic created the opportunity for Italian students to share learning experiences with Harvard students by attending courses given by professors from both Ca'Foscari and Harvard. Participating in this peculiar activity allowed me to gain priceless experience not only in the academic field but also in mine as I could immerse myself into the American way of studying alongside the students coming from the USA while also helping them to adjust to the peculiarities of Italian academia. The intensive studying for over 8 weeks was a great chance for me to reflect on my life as one of the two courses that I took was “The Ethics of Identity”. For the final evaluation, alongside the oral exam, we had to submit an essay where we would try to look at our individuality and discuss it. Writing this paper was one of the most challenging parts of my academic path. I could not read and prepare material for it, there was no right or wrong direction to follow, all the answers had to be found within me. As a solution, I engaged myself in conversations with my mother as she could tell me about patterns of my behaviour before I could remember myself, I consulted my professor to seek guidance throughout my writing process. It was a time of intercultural cooperation for me and my teaching board coming from various background to form a uniform and complete reflective essay. I can never express the importance of this summer school to me, it provided me with insights that were placed so deep in my mind that I could barely find words to put it out for the world but, most importantly, for myself.

Similar to the way how I found out about Harvard Summer School, I discovered the next international opportunity I knew I was so looking forward to completing; I had my next dot planned on the map – the Blended Intensive Program in Romania. For a little over a week, I had the exciting opportunity to take part in the short-time Erasmus program "Conflict Resolution" in Cluj-Napoca where over a hundred students gathered from all around Europe to participate in it. This time contributed greatly to my multicultural immersion as I was taking this course with people of so many nations while myself being in a completely new setting - Eastern Europe. The best attitude that I learned to apply there was going there as a blank paper being ready to absorb all the lessons from the people surrounding me. The intercultural approach I gained there was to be willing to learn from others by being open to new ideas and showing respect. Being there so short I was, in a way, forced to combine the cultural discovery with the focus on the academic track which I was so tempted with originally. The opportunity to apply my learnings was very soon provided. However, this multicultural experience will also be incredibly valuable when I apply for my Master's degree in the upcoming year.

Shortly after Romania, I had another big project to complete - Venice Universities' Model European Union 2024 (VeuMeu). I have performed the role of the Commissioner of the EU in this student's simulation of law-making. Being a non-European student myself, I greatly value this experience. I had the pleasure to be a part of this, at the beginning of May, as I was tasked with creating a proposal for the Regulation on Migration in the EU (I find this topic of particular interest of mine). Witnessing approximately a hundred students, all coming from different backgrounds, and actively contributing to the simulation, helped me to learn a lot about the legal procedures of the EU, get in touch with so many people to advise them or simply talk to them, and follow guest speaker's lectures from the European Research Center. Thinking now about VeuMeu I can say with confidence that this event was an insightful ride full of hard work, joy and new memories that I keep cherishing up to this day. I had quite a stressful time as I wanted to show the best of my abilities by completing the tasks for the students' simulation; I think this was the best proof of my dedication and will to contribute the most to the success of VeuMeu as

well as help my colleagues to run everything smoothly for participating students to enjoy it to their most. In the personal sense, I learned that people had different approaches to their work depending on their cultural background, therefore, applying lessons I received from my multicultural experience in Romania, I knew that I should avoid potential conflicts of views in my speech and I should not lack in adaptability as each student had their vision of the work they wanted to do. In those cases, I was sure to put the emphasis on cultural collaboration so together we looked for common ground from which we could start completing the task.

Just at the beginning of this July, I have also taken up yet another Summer School. This time the topic was “New Geographies of Global Risk”, where I had the pleasure of studying on the campus of the Venetian Naval College which was a big dream of mine since my arrival to this city. There, after a series of lectures from one of the best professors in Europe, I was challenged with a new task – create and present a poster of the potential risk of a country or region of our choice with one of the course mates of mine. Once I formed a small team of two with an American girl, we had to choose the subject we were going to focus and after a small joke from our professors about the unity of two countries we come from (the United States of America and Russia) we immediately found the perfect topic – the Arctic region which is being heavily exploited nowadays for the economic gain. Working on this poster with my teammate helped me to explore the format of a presentation I had never done before in a friendly and committed environment and helped me to gain confidence in public speaking which I have always struggled with.

All of the above-mentioned international experiences found some sort of culmination in October 2023 when I was accepted to the internship in Vivaticket. It was my time to shine and put all the theoretical knowledge into practice and prove myself of my worth. I have completed a 6-month internship at the headquarters of the company in Bologna, being the first international person to work at the office. Working in this international company with offices all around the globe helped me not just to learn how to complete the tasks from the coursebook only but also accustomed me with interacting with people coming from different cultural backgrounds as I had to communicate with the companies' offices from the Middle East to Australia and the USA, which contributed to my understanding of working cultures in these places. Having my first real working experience in a country foreign to me made me think of the long path with some obstacles on the way that I have completed in order to end up in that place.

I have learned from others indeed, all the incredible stories of mine that I have mentioned here would not be possible without many people from all around the world working together to provide others with new experiences. The EUTOPIA certificate of internationalism is my grand final example of it – inspired students from different parts of the world with inspiring professors and coordinators working together to help us understand ourselves better. Applying to it was a great journey of mine and it became possible with some extent of luck and me being open to all fascinating experiences by keeping in mind the advice my closest person always tells me: “Luck is where opportunity meets preparation”. And it is time to buckle up – I am ready.