

Beyond **Borders** _____

My Journey

Through Cultures,

Connections, and

Growth

A Reflective Portfolio for the EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation

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A JOURNEY MEANT TO BE SHARED: SEEKING MEANING ACROSS BORDERS

From a young age, I've held the belief that the world was never meant to be lived in alone—or in one place only. I've always felt that our differences—languages, cultures, faiths—are not barriers, but bridges. I believe that Allah created this vast and diverse world so we could explore it, learn from it, and grow through it. This deep motivation has guided me through every step of my international journey.

One verse from the Qur'an has always stayed with me, capturing the essence of this belief:

“O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another.”

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

[سورة الحجرات: ١٣]

(Surah Al-Hujurat – 49:13)

These words, both timeless and universal, remind me that our identities are not meant to divide us but to deepen our understanding of the human experience.

In 2024, I turned this philosophy into action. I left my home in Algeria, where the streets were familiar and life was comfortable, and took the first step toward something unknown. I quit my job and moved to Tarragona, Spain, to pursue a master's degree in International Markets at Rovira i Virgili University (URV). It was my first time living abroad—and although I carried fears and doubts, I also carried faith.

I still remember my silent prayer as I landed: “Ya Allah, help me get through this.”

That prayer became my compass.



New chapter begins—with faith, purpose, and a world waiting to be explored.

What followed was not just an academic experience, but a personal transformation. I didn't just study international markets—I lived them. I didn't just meet people from different cultures—I shared meals with them, celebrated with them, debated with them, laughed with them. I saw the theory of intercultural dialogue come to life in real, often unexpected ways.

This portfolio is a reflection of that journey. It's about what I've seen, what I've felt, and most importantly, what I've learned about myself and the world around me. From Algeria to Spain, and then to France—and now, preparing for another chapter through the EU4EU internship programme—I've discovered that internationalisation is not about ticking countries off a list. It's about growing as a person. Becoming more open, more grounded, and more connected.

And for me, **this is only the beginning.**

FIRE, CHESTNUTS, AND A POOPING LOG: A SEASON OF SURPRISES IN TARRAGONA



CORREFOCS—MY UNFORGETTABLE WELCOME TO CATALAN CULTURE.

Just days after arriving in Spain, I stumbled into Santa Tecla, Tarragona’s most iconic festival. Suddenly, I was standing in the middle of Correfocs, surrounded by “devils” sprinting under fireworks. Sparks rained from the sky, drums echoed through the narrow streets, and I stood there—wide-eyed and amazed. This wasn’t just a festival; it was my first real taste of Catalan culture, and it hit with full force.



CHESTNUTS AND COSTUMES OCTOBER’S DOUBLE CELEBRATION.

Then came October, with its playful blend of Halloween and La Castanyada. I saw children dressed as skeletons and witches collecting candies, while local families roasted chestnuts and shared panellets (sweet almond-based pastries). It was a strange and beautiful duality—global meets local.

In Tarragona, tradition and modernity aren’t opposites; they dance together in the streets.



October Traditions in Tarragona - Halloween & Chestnuts in the Streets

FIRE, CHESTNUTS, AND A POOPING LOG: A SEASON OF SURPRISES IN TARRAGONA

EL CAGA TIÓ—A LOG THAT POOPS GIFTS?

By November, Christmas decorations began to light up the city. Tarragona felt like it was in a constant state of celebration, and each month had its own rhythm. But nothing prepared me for El Caga Tió—a smiling wooden log with a red hat that kids “feed” in December and then beat with sticks while singing a hilarious song asking it to “poop out” presents and sweets.

At first, I thought it was a joke. But the tradition was real, joyful, and absolutely charming.



El Caga Tió—Catalonia’s funniest tradition

Each celebration was a window into the soul of Catalonia. From the fiery energy of Correfocs to the sweetness of Castanyada, and the laughter sparked by El Caga Tió, I discovered that cultural understanding often comes through joy—and that joy, in Catalonia, is abundant and generously shared.



**Christmas Lights on La Rambla Nova - Vibes in
Tarragona's Main Street**

BUILDING CASTELLS AND BREAKING STEREOTYPES



**CASTELLS—TEAMWORK, TRUST,
AND TRADITION. MUCH LIKE
INTERCULTURAL LIFE.**

As I spent more time in Tarragona, I discovered more of the Catalan world: the Sardana circle dances, the fiercely protected language, and above all, the Castells—human towers built with incredible coordination and trust.

In a symbolic way, those towers mirrored my experience. I was also building something new, with every interaction and conversation.

At the university cafeteria, one conversation with a local student stood out. When I told him I was from Algeria, he seemed genuinely surprised. “You look like a local,” he said. That moment led to a historical discussion on Al-Andalus, and I explained how my ancestors were from Granada until 1492. Suddenly, I didn’t feel like a stranger—I felt like a missing piece of a much older story.



Walking Through Castells Culture - Castells on the Wall, Culture on the Street

TWENTY NATIONS, ONE CIRCLE: BELONGING ACROSS BORDERS

Walking into our classroom at Rovira i Virgili University was like stepping into a living world map. With students from over 20 countries, it felt less like a class and more like an intercultural laboratory. Palestinian, Italian, Chinese, Moroccan, Polish, German, Pakistani, Thai, Korean, Turkish... the list goes on. We came from all corners of the globe, each carrying our own stories, customs, and languages.

But despite all that diversity, one of our professors often reminded us:

“This is not a normal class. You are a special group. What’s happening here goes beyond academics.”

And I felt that deeply—especially because I didn’t just witness that diversity from the sidelines.

I lived it. Unlike the usual dynamic where students stick to familiar groups, I made it my mission to connect with everyone. I didn’t just sit with one crowd. One day, I was sharing food stories with Italian and Thai friends. The next, discussing religion and cultural taboos with Pakistani and Palestinian peers, and history and politics with Germans. I moved around the classroom, from the left to the right, from the back row to the front—curious, open, eager to learn from every voice.

That openness created unforgettable moments. In one class on Leadership and Decision-Making, our professor asked us to physically split into two groups: introverts on one side, extroverts on the other. As soon as the activity started, both groups turned to me—each expecting me to join them. I stood there in the middle, genuinely confused. That moment made something click in my mind: they both saw me as part of them. Eventually, I went with the extroverts (mostly because I was sitting on their side that day), but afterwards, my introvert friends jokingly told me I “betrayed” them. It was all in good humor, but it meant something bigger to me—I had somehow found a way to belong to both worlds.

That experience gave me a new kind of confidence: the realization that I can adapt, connect, and build bridges between people from totally different backgrounds. It’s a skill I didn’t know I had, but one that I now carry proudly into every space I enter.

More than anything, this part of my international experience taught me that true learning doesn’t just happen in lectures—it happens in everyday moments, in hallway chats, in shared meals, in respectful disagreements, and in the trust we build when we truly listen to one another.



Our global classroom—where most of the 20 nationalities came together in one frame. Around this photo, I will add the flags of all the countries represented in our class, to honor each voice and culture that shaped this unforgettable journey.

FROM CALM SHORES TO CROWDED STREETS: MY PARISIEN CONTRAST



The Charm and Crowd of Paris

After settling into the peaceful rhythm of life in Tarragona, another door opened: I was selected for an Erasmus+ exchange at CY Cergy Paris Université. Saying yes wasn't easy—I had just started to feel at home, made friends, and adapted to my new life in Spain. But deep down, I knew this was another chance to grow.

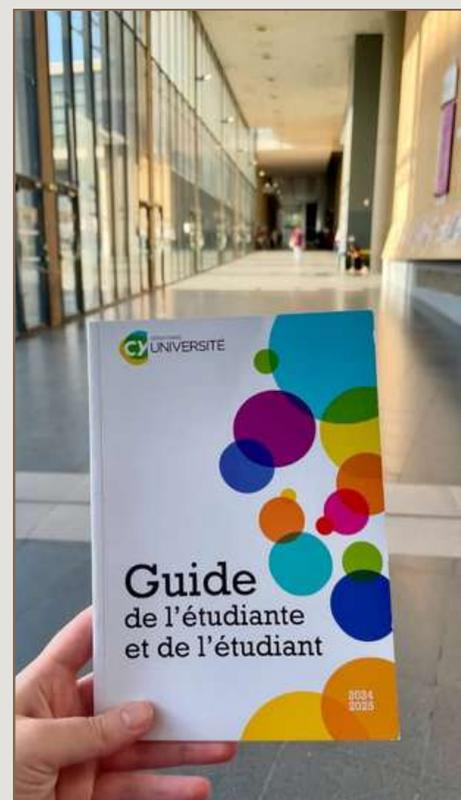
So I packed again and landed in Paris—a city that couldn't be more different from Tarragona. Everything moved at lightning speed. The metro, the people, even the conversations. It was overwhelming at first. I missed the quiet, the sea breeze, and the slower mornings of Spain. But I reminded myself: **growth doesn't always come from comfort.**



Erasmus+

At CY Cergy, I met a new group of international students. I also reconnected with old friends living in France—people I hadn't seen in years. It felt like life was stitching together all the chapters I had lived before. One thing became clear: every city teaches something different. Tarragona taught me connection. Paris taught me resilience.

Luckily, my ability to speak French made things easier. I could navigate conversations, find my way around, and connect with people. The university atmosphere was welcoming, and even though I was in one of Europe's busiest cities, I was able to carve out moments of reflection and calm.



Bienvenue à Cergy - Finding My Way at CY Cergy

ECHOES OF HEROINES AND VOICES OF JUSTICE



Two Heroines, One Spirit of Resistance.

One weekend, I took a trip from Paris to Orléans to visit friends. It was supposed to be a calm weekend getaway, but instead, I stumbled into something unexpected and unforgettable: Les Fêtes de Jeanne d'Arc—an annual celebration of the city's most iconic historical figure.

As I stood in the crowd, I saw a young woman on horseback, dressed in shining armor, waving to the people. That image struck me. Not just because it was beautiful, but because it awakened a memory of someone from my own history—Fatma N'Soumer, a legendary Algerian woman who, like Jeanne d'Arc, led her people in resistance against foreign occupation.

While Jeanne fought the English in 15th-century, Fatma N'Soumer stood up against French colonial forces in 19th-century. She was a spiritual leader from the Kabyle region, known not only for her wisdom and bravery, but for uniting tribes and inspiring fighters during the early stages of resistance. Captured in 1857, she died in captivity—but her name continues to live on as a symbol of courage and dignity in Algerian memory.



Locals dressed in medieval costumes brought the past to life during Les Fêtes de Jeanne d'Arc in Orléans.

That same weekend, I joined a peaceful march in support of Palestine that passed through the streets of Orléans. As I raised the Palestinian flag, I felt deeply connected not only to my roots, but also to a global community demanding justice. The crowd was diverse—students, families, elders, people of many backgrounds—all walking together in solidarity.

It was a powerful moment. Being far from home didn't make my voice smaller—instead, it made it stronger. I realized that part of being intercultural isn't just appreciating others' cultures; it's also about sharing your truth, your story, and your values.

That weekend in Orléans was a perfect reflection of that: I was an Algerian student studying in France, attending a Catholic-inspired French celebration, remembering a Muslim heroine, and marching for a just cause. All of these pieces fit into one identity—mine. And I'm proud of that.



Marching for Justice - Joining the crowd in Orléans to raise the Palestinian flag—standing in peaceful solidarity for freedom and human rights.

IS THIS THE END? NO—IT'S JUST THE BEGINNING

BECAUSE ONCE YOU BEGIN LIVING INTERNATIONALLY, IT'S HARD TO STOP

As I write this, I'm preparing for what may become my third international experience—this time through the EU4EU internship program. I've received an offer from a Swedish company, and several other options are still on the table. The destination is still uncertain, but what is certain is how I feel about it: I'm excited, not afraid.

There was a time when the idea of packing my life into a

suitcase and landing in a place where I knew no one was terrifying. Now? It feels natural. Almost necessary.

Living internationally has changed how I see the world—and how I see myself in it. I no longer feel tied to one place, one way of thinking, one cultural lens. I've become a kind of bridge: between languages, between people, between perspectives.

In Spain, I learned the rhythm of life—how to slow down, connect, and celebrate moments.

In France, I discovered the power of dialogue, diversity, and standing up for values I care about.

And now, wherever I go next—Sweden or elsewhere—I'm ready to keep growing.

Because international experience isn't just about visiting a country. It's about learning how to live, think, and feel beyond borders. It's about letting go of certainty, embracing discomfort, and being changed by it.

And honestly? I don't think I'll ever want to stop.



Another destination is coming. I don't know where yet—but I know I'll be ready.

FINAL REFLECTIONS: FROM CURIOSITY TO CONFIDENCE

Looking back at this journey, what began as a leap of faith has become a continuous process of becoming—more open, more thoughtful, and more resilient.

Each place I've lived—Tarragona, Paris, Orléans—offered me more than academic knowledge. It offered me people, stories, traditions, and challenges that reshaped how I see the world and how I see myself in it. From celebrating Castells and Santa Tecla in Catalonia, to raising the Palestinian flag in a French march for justice, to standing face-to-face with living history at the Jeanne d'Arc parade, I've found connection and meaning in moments big and small.

Throughout it all, one thread has remained: my belief that intercultural understanding is essential—not optional—for our shared future. It's not just about adapting to others; it's about growing through them. It's about seeing beauty in differences, and strength in collaboration.

I've learned that true internationalisation doesn't start with a visa or a flight—it starts with mindset. It starts with a willingness to listen, to make mistakes, to be uncomfortable, and still keep learning. It starts when we look at someone from a completely different background and say: Tell me your story.

This portfolio doesn't mark the end of my international journey. If anything, it shows me how much more there is to learn, to experience, to give. Whether my next chapter takes me to Sweden, another country, or eventually back home, I know I'll carry these lessons with me.

Because the world, as I've come to know it, is not just made of borders and flags. It's made of humans reaching out to understand one another.

