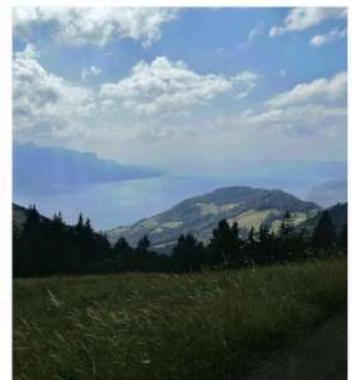




EUTOPIA
CERTIFICATE
OF
INTERNATIONALISATION
GALAIS Alycia's Portfolio



Introduction

Growing up in the peripheral suburbs of Île-de-France, my environment has always been defined by interculturalism. I have always lived in diverse communities in France, where many Sub-Saharan African, North African and Central European people live together, blending languages, food, music, dances, and religions. In my household, there was always a mix of French and Ivorian culture, from the food to the music to the language. This upbringing taught me adaptability and openness. It also made it difficult for me to support certain French ways of thinking, especially the rising xenophobia.

One of the hardest things about being in a mix of cultures is knowing when a culture can not be exported. One of the most obvious examples is the French way of expressing dissatisfaction or being very frank. This behaviour is seen as very disrespectful in Ivorian culture. I have found myself in situations where I spoke my mind around my family and was reprimanded for being rude. Now that I'm older, I try to adapt and understand that I have to code-switch when I am around my Ivorian family in certain situations to avoid conflict. Another example is the European way of treating social interactions with strangers. Those are seen as abnormal in Europe, but in Ivory Coast they are normal and encouraged as they enhance the feeling of community. Over time, I have come to resent being "cold" and try to engage more in conversations with strangers.

I believe that being born into a diverse culture teaches you how to be open-minded and to code-switch. It taught me that when you face situations where two cultural norms cannot coexist, as an aware person I have to present the best version of myself for one given situation.

An Academic Path Bridging French and English Educational Systems

From a young age, I have been a fan of American culture. This motivated me to incorporate English into my studies in the hope of moving there one day. In high school, I took an extra English history class to graduate with a European mention. During my postgraduate studies, I decided to pursue a law degree in French as well as a diploma in common law.

Paradoxically, the more I learned about the American system and culture, the less it aligned with the idealised version I had as a child which was based on art and media (music, films, fashion). Learning English and the common law enabled me to understand the politics, history, socio-economic situations and inequalities in the United States. I learned that their legal system, in some parts, was clearly an advantage for the richest and sometimes unfair. However, this does not mean I will stop learning about common law, as it remains an important legal system. I have now taken a new approach to my learning of English and common law. For me, it is no longer a way to pursue my American dream and use my diploma to live there, but more a way to become a competent future lawyer on the job market in a globalised world, where English and American businesses are dominant.

Involvement in Diverse International Extracurricular Programs

On top of my double degree, I decided to participate in the international activities that my university offered, as it was a way to take all this theoretical learning and put it to use. I participated in the EUTOPIA teamwork online project, where we had to develop strategies to help businesses comply with the latest European Union regulations regarding Artificial Intelligence. I worked with students from the United Kingdom and Sweden. What struck me the most was that there wasn't a huge cultural difference. It must be because of the standardized ways of learning and subjects at school, but we had similar knowledge and ways of thinking. Also, even though for some of us English was not our first language, we all spoke it. This made me reflect on how English being the main language spoken in professional contexts and our standardised education definitely made us lose part of our cultural identity in favour of easier exchanges among different countries. I think this feeling was also enhanced because we were studying European Union law, which is creating a cultural homogeneity among European countries.

Some small cultural differences made me reflect on how our habits are influenced by culture. I remember the Swedish student mentioning how difficult it was for him to deal with others being late, as punctuality is a strong cultural value in Sweden, when to me being ten minutes late was not that dramatic. Knowing that it bothered him, I felt bad because I didn't want us to impose our cultural norms on another person on the pretext that it's not a big deal, especially when it is seen as disrespectful. This experience made me understand that interculturality is not always expressed through direct opposition but can be contrasted by small cultural differences that are not always visible in a professional context.

I also participated in the "Dis-Moi 10 mots" activity, and working with non-native French speakers made me realize that I under-appreciated my french fluency as it is a very difficult

language. It taught me to be patient, and forced me to slow down and adapt to non-native French speakers. Looking back, this experience was a great start point for my internship in Turkey, as I was on the opposite side this time. I was the person that was non-native and was trying to adapt to a new language. Being on both sides made me more humble and made me grow as a person.

First Steps in an International Professional Environment: Internship in Turkey

Thanks to the European Law Students' Association, I had the chance to do a two-week internship in a law firm in Antalya. I discovered a new culture, a new language and a new country. People were more open and generous. Other than that, it was not as different as I expected, with the same lifestyle and similar socio-economic issues as France. For example, the issue of the increasing number of lawyers when there's not as much demand.

At the law firm, I discovered the basics of Turkish law and I could compare it with French law and common law. The team at the office mostly spoke Turkish, so I was very clueless. It was the first time I was so lost in an environment where I did not speak the language. I found it very hard at first because it felt very isolating. For example, someone would speak to me and I would be completely silent because I didn't understand a single word. But I tried to adapt by learning some Turkish words and using Google Translate, and with time I felt more comfortable. I started to use technologies and learn words so I could integrate myself and stop suffering from the language barrier. I spoke English with some, sometimes French with my tutor who was learning it. I was also with other interns, so it was easier to share the experience with people my age. It surprised me that even with a language barrier, nothing can stop young adults from bonding and laughing if they want to make their office time more fun. I think that despite the language barrier. I was able to integrate myself anyway because

they were very welcoming and patient with me, and I could show my personality and my gratitude with my actions as culture is not only expressed verbally.

Another thing that surprised me was the lunch break. In France, we take at least one hour and it's a real break in the day. In Turkey, lunch is still a moment shared with colleagues, but it's much shorter, and people go back to work right after eating. It's a small detail, but it shows how work culture can change depending on the country.

Going to a new country alone, living there and working at the same time made me more confident in myself and in my ability to adapt to new situations. This experience gave me the motivation to do another internship abroad.

Conclusion

Because of my upbringing, "cultural differences" was just the background of everything. The only time I truly felt disoriented was through language in Turkey, when I couldn't rely on French or English. That moment made me realise how important languages are. It also made me realise that I took my cultural fluency for granted, as I saw clearly from my experience in Turkey that it helped me a lot.

To further my international journey, I now want to study and work abroad, but I have realised that language barriers can be a limitation. Instead of seeing this as embarrassing, which was my initial reaction, I now view it as an opportunity to learn new things and use new technologies. It is also a chance to connect through other means: actions, food, and music. I am aware that I cannot learn all the languages of the world, but I believe it is important for me to move beyond the mindset that English is enough. One of my goals to further my international journey is to learn more languages.

As Edward de Waal said, "*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*"