EUCI Reflective Portfolio

Daniel Angus

17-07-2025

1 Introduction

'*Fernweh*'.

It's a beautiful word in the German language that does not translate easily to English. The main idea, however, is simple. It conveys the opposite of homesickness — a longing to explore that which is unknown. The more elusive element is 'Weh', denoting physical pain. *Fernweh*, then, translates to a deep, emotional longing for exploration, and something that I believe to be intrinsic to the human spirit: *the ache to view what lies beyond the horizon.*[1]

It is to this extent that I find myself gazing out of train windows, or tracing the lines of unfamiliar maps, driven not only by destination, but by desire. Not long after my enrolment into university, I found myself on my own adventure. I travelled through South-east Asia, and much of Europe. What began as my own humble desire to see new things quickly evolved into something deeper: *a true sense of self-discovery.*

There's something almost spiritual about it — this impulse not just to move, but to be moved. I've always been fascinated by the unfamiliar, but it wasn't until I began travelling and immersing myself in other cultures that I realised how deeply formative the unknown could be. To me, *Fernweh* isn't just about new places; it's about what those places reveal within you.

This portfolio explores that idea — not just through my travel experiences, but through the lens of language learning, international collaboration, and my own personal growth. It's a reflection on how crossing borders — both literal and intellectual — has reshaped how I think, work, and connect with others. This is what I believe makes international experiences so important: Meeting people who saw the world differently than I made me question things I'd never even think to question.

---

[1]This term is often compared to 'wanderlust', but carries a deeper emotional weight, describing homesickness and pain for places you've never even been.

2 'Der Weg ist das Ziel'

Inspired by my travels in the German-speaking world, in 2024 I enrolled in the University of Warwick's intensive fast-track German course. The outcome, of course, was to learn German. The destination, so to speak. *Das Ziel.*

But from the very first week, I realised that language learning isn't just another bump on the CV. It's a window into an entire culture. I remember walking through Leamington Spa's Jephson Gardens with Helene Fischer playing through my headphones — a moment that somehow felt oddly cinematic. Her song 'Ich will immer wieder dieses Fieber spür'n' quickly became an emotional anchor for me.[2] I wasn't just learning vocabulary — I was absorbing emotion, rhythm, even values. Singing in German helped me to internalise grammar structures without even realising it. Pronunciation became muscle memory, rather than theory.

As a multi-instrumentalist,[3] the musical route into the language felt organic. It blurred the boundary between study and joy. Some days I found myself singing aloud in the kitchen, surprising even myself with my fluency (Sometimes to the annoyance of my housemates, who clearly weren't ready for such impromptu concerts...). German stopped being 'foreign' — it started to become *native*.

It became clear that language isn't just a method of communication — it's a map of how a culture sees the world. This realisation shifted how I interpret unfamiliar environments — I began approaching cultural differences not as barriers, but as entry points to deeper understanding. It's a mindset I now carry into every intercultural exchange.

The end goal was to learn German. But the journey itself — *Der Weg* — was just as important. I met people from all around the world, and made connections in Hungary, Turkey, Austria, and further afield. I'm planning to go travelling with some of them soon — even being offered a personal tour of Budapest by someone I met on the course.

So apart from learning a new language, which is important in itself, I learned something arguably even more important: That the journey *is* the destination — '*Der Weg ist das Ziel*'. This shift in perspective fundamentally changed how I approach challenges — Not with impatience for the end-goal, but a curiosity and willingness to embrace the process itself — A process which I've come to realise can be just as rewarding, if not even more so.[4]

---

[2]Helene Fischer is one of Germany's best-selling artists. Her song 'Ich will immer wieder dieses Fieber spür'n' literally means 'I want to feel this fever again and again' — a lyric that resonated deeply with my emotional experience of language learning.

[3]I play drums, guitar, piano, and I sing. I've always felt music is itself a language that transcends borders.

[4]A theory I'm now realising I'm embracing even during the writing of this piece.

3 Internationalisation through Collaboration

In my second year of university, I joined TeamWork, an ambitious multi-disciplinary programme that brought together four universities from across Europe: Warwick (United Kingdom), Gisma University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Ljubljana (Slovenia), and CY Cergy Paris (France). Our aim was to investigate upcoming regulations and ethical implications on Artificial Intelligence.

We felt responsibility was the main core running through each part of our project. This wasn't just the responsibility of companies to simply follow the regulations put towards them, but the responsibility of ourselves, governments, and individuals to carefully control this relentlessly-evolving, dangerous technology. Our task was to examine how currently emerging EU legislation — the AI Act, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), and the Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)[5] — will affect businesses and the wider technological landscape.

As one might imagine, this was no small task. With its vast subject matter and complex legislation, It initially appeared to be a mundane regulatory exercise. But as the project unfolded, it became clear that it was something much more ambitious: an exploration of how we, as a society, govern tools that are global in scale but shaped by local values.

Artificial intelligence does not recognise borders. A model trained in California might be deployed in a London hospital, then refined by user data from Germany, and audited by a consultancy in India. It might interact with users from dozens of cultural contexts, carry unseen biases from its developers, and pass through countless hands. In such a world, no single country can — or in fact *should* — define what 'ethical AI' means alone.

This was something we felt within the fabric of our team. Each of us came in with different assumptions about technology and ethics. I was interested in its implications to our civil liberties. To another it felt natural to approach it from the perspective of sustainability. We were incredibly lucky that our French team-mate studied not only French law, but also English law, which allowed us to gain multiple perspectives on certain topics.

We didn't always agree — and perhaps that was the point. Disagreements forced us to clarify our positions, explain our reasoning, and confront the complexity of the topic head-first. If we, a small international team of five, struggled to define an 'ethical AI' with consistency, it made me wonder: *how much more difficult must this be at the level of policy, where decisions impact millions?*

One of the most eye-opening moments came during a group discussion on algorithmic bias. When exploring the ethical implications of AI deployment

---

[5]These are landmark EU legislative frameworks aimed at increasing ethical transparency and corporate responsibility in digital technology and sustainability.

in police work — particularly implementations of facial recognition — a team-mate raised concerns that AI systems may potentially miss-classify people based on ethnicity. Another pointed out that bias in AI is not just a Western issue — in regions with different social histories, bias manifests differently.[6] This conversation made a particularly lasting impression. It reminded me that **AI may be written in code, but it operates in culture**.

In our final report we outlined recommendations for companies to align with these upcoming EU regulatory frameworks — We covered areas such as AI risk management, supply chain transparency, and sustainability best-practices. But more than that: this project showed me how to navigate complexity, work across cultures, and ask better questions. I saw how *global* problems require *international* thinking, and how truly meaningful collaboration is built not on uniformity, but on diversity.

I now approach group work and international thinking with a different lens — not just asking what is the right answer, but instead I ask: *whose voice is missing?* That question alone has improved how I research, how I listen, and how I contribute to complex discussions. I learned that diversity in opinion, in background, and culture wasn't something that held us back. It was the thing that made our work stronger. In the end, the most valuable insight I gained wasn't about regulation, but about people. That in the face of something as fast-moving and far-reaching as artificial intelligence, it is in our capacity to listen, adapt, and connect across difference that will shape the outcomes that matter most.

---

[6]In India, for example, caste can manifest in algorithmic bias just as racial profiling does in Western contexts.

4   Future Horizons

These experiences affirmed something I've felt for a long time: the most important challenges of our time — from climate change to AI — will not be solved in isolation. They demand cooperation, understanding, and most importantly: a willingness to engage across cultures and disciplines. The best solutions to global problems require thinking that transcends borders. Solutions born from diverse perspectives — not limited by local mindsets — are the ones most likely to endure and make meaningful change. This insight has influenced my academic focus and career aspirations — I now seek out international, cross-disciplinary settings *precisely* because I believe that's where the most resilient solutions emerge.

So I'd like to close this portfolio not with a formal conclusion, but with a lyric that means something to me, and encapsulates this feeling of global responsibility.

> *'Es ist nicht deine Schuld, dass die Welt ist, wie sie ist. Es wär nur deine Schuld, wenn sie so bleibt.'*   (Die Ärzte, Deine Schuld)

> *'It's not your fault that the world is the way it is. It would only be your fault if it stayed that way.'*   (Translation)

And if there is one principle I intend to carry forward into my career and life, it is this: '**Whatever path you take, take it with conviction.**' Whether it's learning a new language, tackling an ethical dilemma, or building connections in a foreign land, I want to meet it with full presence and commitment. Because if *Fernweh* taught me to chase what's beyond the horizon, this lesson reminds me how to walk the path once I find it.

Figure 1: *Fernweh* in full force. Myself atop the tallest peak in Germany, the Zugspitze — 9,718 ft above sea-level.