

eUTOPIA

Alliance of 10 European Universities

PORTFOLIO

EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (EUCI)

When one world opens many: the journey beyond the visible

DIANA DEL MORAL SORS

UPF 2025

The beginning of a journey

With this portfolio, I hope to convey the same feelings and reflections that I have experienced during and after each of the international experiences I have been lucky enough to live. For me, an international experience is not just traveling to another country; it is facing the unknown, questioning your own certainties, and discovering parts of yourself through others. I tell you in advance that these experiences have changed me deeply; I would not be the person I am today without having shared with so many different cultures and having adapted, again and again, until I found myself anew. This process has made me question what I once took for granted: my way of communicating, my perception of time, or even understanding what it means to be "normal."

I can only be grateful for these experiences and encourage everyone who has not yet lived anything similar to step out of their bubble and experience life with all its intensity. I have always thought that people who only know one way of living are not completely free because if you do not know other realities, you cannot truly choose how you want to live. Understanding other ways of living has shown me that there is not a single "correct" way to do things, and what one culture considers appropriate may seem strange or wrong to another. This has helped me to relativize my own values and open myself to different perspectives.

We grow up in an environment where everything is familiar: the same people, the same traditions, the same rules... But, what happens when you break this pattern? When you discover that what is "normal" to you is completely different for someone else? It is right here that my journey begins, and now I share it with you.

My first journey (2018)

I remember that day perfectly, as if it were today. It was January 2018, I was only 13 years old, and at school they announced that I had been selected to do an exchange in Sweden. I couldn't have been happier: it was the first time I traveled alone and was going to live for a week with a Swedish family completely unknown to me.

Despite the initial nerves, once I arrived in Sweden I felt very welcomed and was surprised by how different everything was: the neighborhoods, the landscape, and especially the way they lived. During that week, I realized that their daily life was totally different from mine. For example, I was very surprised by the meal schedule: we had dinner at five in the afternoon! And this, for a Spanish girl it's very unusual. Also, at school, we took subjects like cooking, sewing, or creating songs, which seemed much more practical and creative compared to the more theoretical education we received in Spain.

I was also struck by how they hardly used social media or cars; they almost always got around by bicycle. This made relationships more authentic and natural, and with the bicycles, we explored many places and I felt a great freedom.



Playing cards with my host family in Sweden

This first international experience made me realize that I felt very comfortable with that way of living. I began to wonder why at home we did things a certain way and that, even though I felt happy in my usual environment, I could be even happier in a context that suited me better. That week opened a new perspective for me: I understood that there are many equally valid ways to live, and that all of them make sense within their own cultural context.

Discovering also what doesn't fit (2019)

The following year, I was chosen to participate in two more exchanges: one in the Netherlands and another in France, both lasting one week. After the very positive experience I had had in Sweden, I went there very excited and with high expectations, but these exchanges were different: I didn't really manage to connect much either with the families who hosted me, nor with the daily routine, nor with the way the local people related to each other. Even aspects like the food or the schedules were difficult for me to assimilate.

At first, I felt disappointed, as I expected to relive that sense of belonging I had experienced in Sweden, but instead, I felt disoriented and a bit disconnected. But over time, I understood that these "more difficult" experiences also have great value; they helped me see more clearly what I value in my usual environment and which things don't quite fit me.

I also began to understand that intercultural competence is not only about admiring what we like about another culture, but also being able to live with what is hard for us, without judging it. This experience made me mature because I started to better understand who I am and what I need to feel well. In the end, knowing different realities, whether they fit us or not, helps us build our own way of living with more awareness.



My school in the Netherlands



All exchange students in the Netherlands



All the exchange students in Nîmes, France

Connection beyond countries (2022)

In the summer of 2022, I had the opportunity to travel alone to Ireland and live during one month with a local family I didn't know. At the summer school, I met students from countries as diverse as Italy, China, France, and Austria. Although we were very different, we connected immediately, and I realized that you don't need to share hobbies or origins to create deep bonds: in fact, they brought out a version of me I hadn't known until then.

With them, I learned words, songs, ways of living and celebrating that were very diverse. I especially remember the fascination I felt when, each speaking their own language, we discovered that many Catalan words surprisingly resembled Italian or French, and we could manage to understand each other by each speaking their own language. Communication became a game and a constant discovery. That summer taught me that diversity is not only to be tolerated, but it can profoundly enrich our way of living and understanding each other. Even today, we keep in touch and try to meet up from time to time; that experience made me feel fully connected to the world.

When I returned from that intense summer, I started university far from home, in a city where I didn't know anyone. Although I was still in my own country, I perceived important differences: the pace of life, social relationships, and even the way of living everyday life felt strange to me. Although the first years were positive, I felt something was missing, I felt disconnected from myself, as if I didn't quite fit into that new stage.

It was then, following a very deep intuition, that I decided to go alone to do international volunteering in Portugal for 20 days. I needed to look at myself from the outside, from another environment, and I wasn't wrong: that trip was the beginning of another awakening. I realized how powerful it is to leave your context when you feel lost. Adapting again to another culture, living with strangers, and contributing my grain of sand to a social project helped me recover, reorient myself, and above all, to find myself again.



With my Irish host family, as well as some Italian and French friends who were living there too



With my international friends from the summer school

When giving gives you more (2024)

When I decided to go to Portugal, I almost backed out: there had been a big fire in the area and I was afraid of the whole situation, but I felt inside me that I had to go. I understood that if I let fear stop me, I would never move forward.

Once there, I shared the experience with twenty young people from all over the world: Ukraine, Mexico, Turkey, Serbia, Denmark, France... The volunteer work consisted of helping families and small producers in a charming village, all sleeping together in a hostel. Every morning we helped with different tasks, and honestly, it moved me to see how many good people there are in the world. I felt part of every family that welcomed us.

I especially remember a day during the grape harvest: after picking the grapes, we did the “vindímia” the old way, stomping the grapes all together, laughing, dancing, and listening to traditional Portuguese music. I stopped for a moment, looked around... and my eyes filled with tears. I felt at home, surrounded by people from all over the world I had met just a few days before.



Some of the participants, the local family, and I during the grape harvest



Our typical afternoon

In the afternoons, we did cultural activities: each person shared something about their country, some cooked, others taught dances or games. The diversity was experienced like a celebration, but also as a space for learning and connection. Every night we opened a box of anonymous reflections: it was like reading the emotions floating in the air. That space made me feel understood, connected, part of something bigger.

One of the moments that marked me the most was talking with a girl from Ukraine. I asked her how she was living through the war, and with teary eyes and a sincere smile she told me: *“You know? Almost no one asks me that. And I thank you from the bottom of my heart because I needed to talk to someone and give voice to something that is happening.”* That conversation united us. She shared her story: the losses, the escape, the anger of seeing how many people pretended nothing was happening... we cried together, and that healed us.



Some of the letters I received

On the last day, I didn't want to leave; those people had become my family. I had never connected so deeply with strangers in so little time. They made me rediscover who I am when I slow down, and I returned changed, with the certainty that for me happiness is not having more, but living with peace, meaning, and real bonds. I still keep all the letters they gave me for when I have hard moments; I read them and the words of each one heal my soul.

Here is a short video summary of the volunteering experience, created by Danilo:

<https://youtu.be/AxSFzV15ZMc?si=0-5frf6JiMqkUzkQ>

Reflection and Intercultural Learning

Looking back on all these experiences, I realise that intercultural learning is not just about noticing differences between countries, but about deeply questioning who you are in the face of those differences. Through every encounter, every moment of discomfort, and every connection I built across languages and cultures, I have developed not only an awareness of how diverse the world is, but also of how flexible and resilient I can be within that diversity.

These experiences have allowed me to understand cultural norms not as fixed truths, but as perspectives shaped by context. I have learned to embrace multiple points of view, to suspend judgment, and to truly listen. This has transformed not just how I see others, but how I see myself. Reflecting on these journeys has taught me that identity is fluid, and growth often happens in the spaces where we feel least at home, until we make them home.

In this sense, my development has been both intercultural and deeply reflective. I do not return from these experiences simply knowing more about the world, I return changed, more open, more grounded, and more capable of navigating complexity with empathy and curiosity.

The journey doesn't end here...

So, if someone asks me what living an international experience means to me, I couldn't answer with just one word, because for me it has been a before and after. It has changed the way I see the world, but above all, it has changed me.

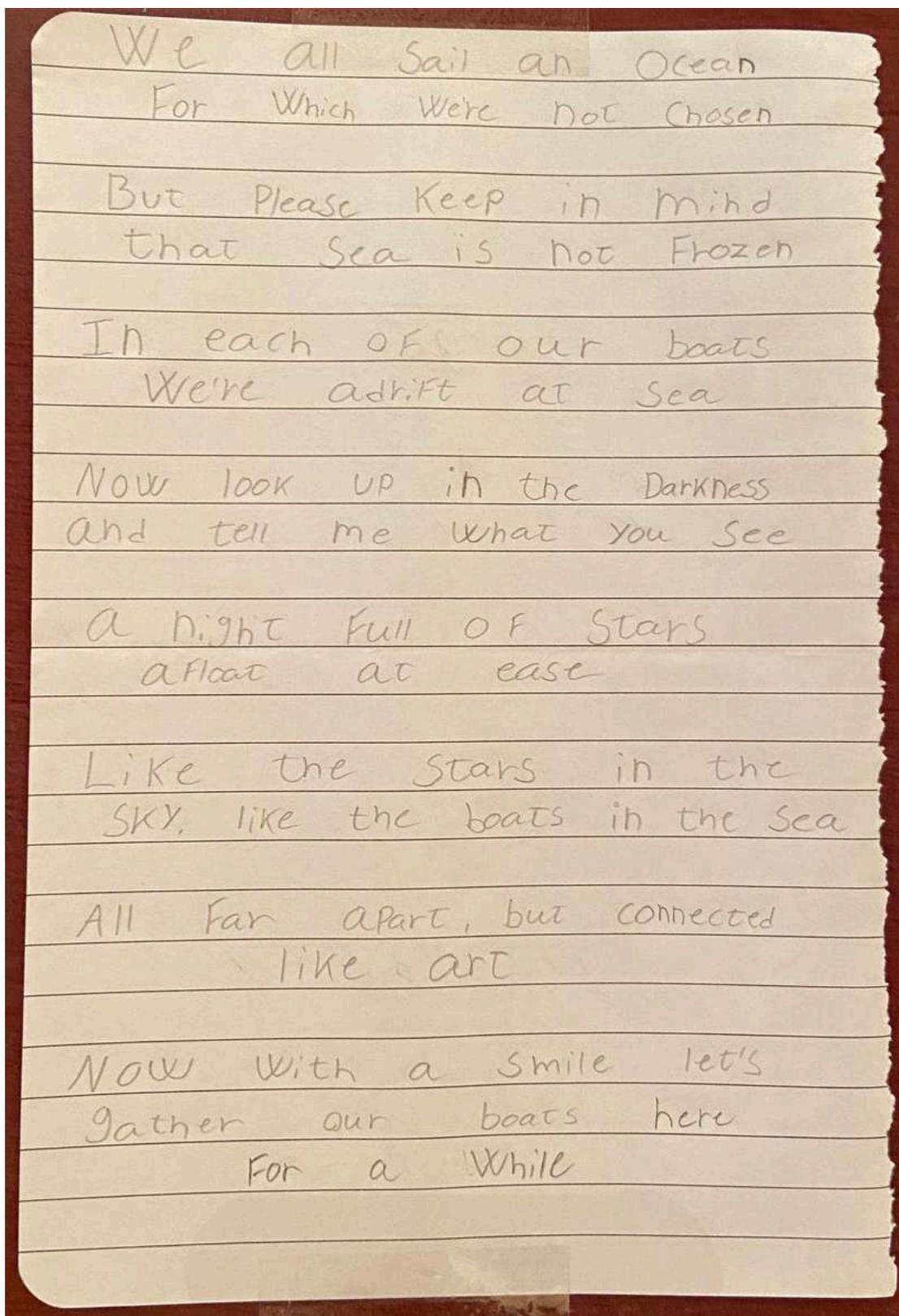
There are trips that open your eyes, others that open your heart, some that make you feel at home in a place you've never been, and others that make you feel lost, but precisely because of that, you find yourself. Sometimes you come back with friendships that will last a lifetime, and other times you return with silences that make you think for days and days. But you never come back the same.

I have learned to live with people who think differently, to adapt to schedules and customs that unsettled me, to communicate without speaking the same language, and to see the value in things I once took for granted. I have learned to look at the world with new eyes, but also to look at myself with more understanding, with more depth.

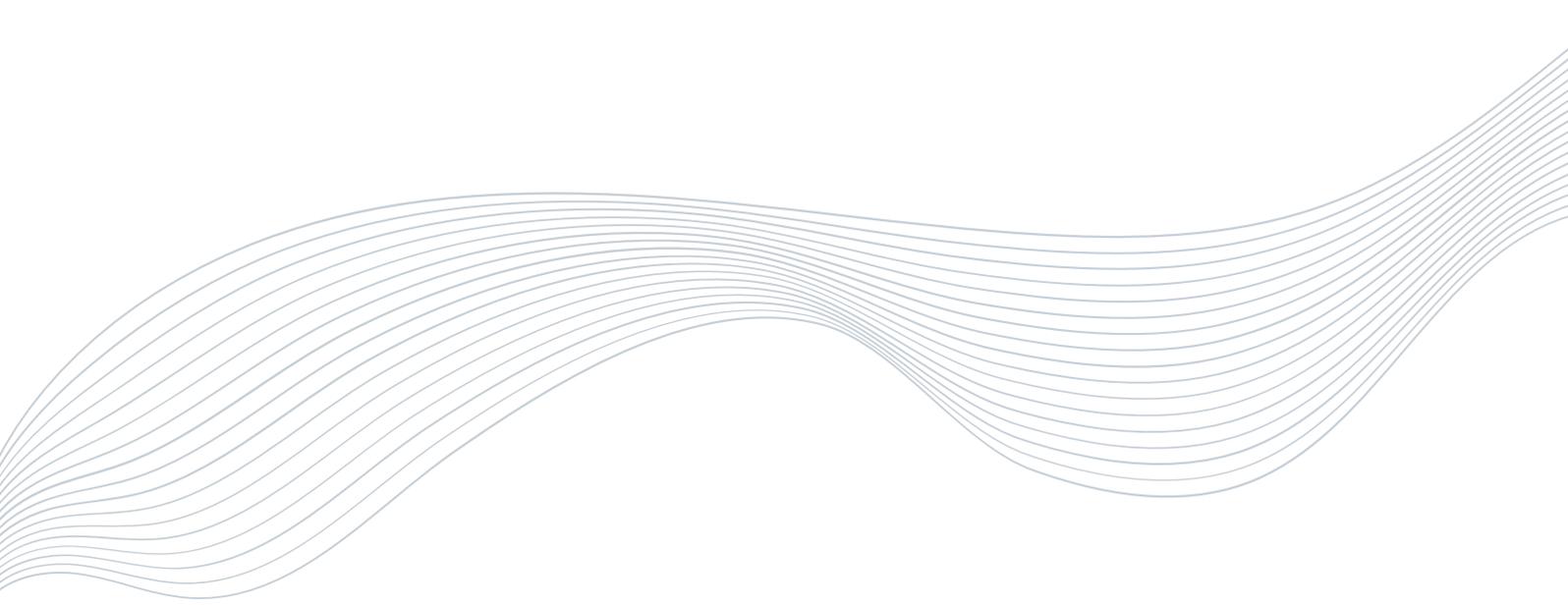
Because in the end, traveling is not just moving around the world, it's having a heart open enough to let the world enter you and teach you who you are. It's realizing that there is no single way to live, and that your truth can transform with every step, and that is wonderful.

If I hadn't left my bubble, maybe I would have lived peacefully in a familiar environment, but I wouldn't have lived so awake, so aware, nor with such eagerness to observe the world. And living awake, for me, is the true meaning of life.

I would like to end this portfolio with this beautiful poem written by one of the participants of the volunteering project in Portugal, as it captures the essence of life:



We all sail an Ocean
For which we're not chosen
But please keep in mind
that sea is not frozen
In each of our boats
We're adrift at sea
Now look up in the darkness
and tell me what you see
A night full of stars
afloat at ease
Like the stars in the
sky, like the boats in the sea
All far apart, but connected
like art
Now with a smile let's
gather our boats here
for a while



eUTOPIA
Alliance of 10 European Universities



**Universitat
Pompeu Fabra**
Barcelona

