

EUTOPIA CERTIFICATE OF INTERNATIONALISATION PORTFOLIO

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Introduction

To be completely honest with you, dear reader, I applied to this project, not entirely sure what it was supposed to be about. I saw the word internationalization, and that alone felt like a good enough reason to apply. Why? International experiences have become a core part of who I am. The openness I encounter in different projects, conferences, organizations, and travels makes me feel at home. And for me, home is not just a physical place—it's a mental space of acceptance, openness, and inclusion that you co-create with others. Even though I've never lived abroad for more than half a year at a time, I would describe my identity as more European than solely Slovene. I am currently a 25-year-old student with a master's degree in Primary school education with an English module, now pursuing a second master's degree in Family and marital therapy, alongside completing a bachelor's in European and governmental studies.

To make this portfolio more understandable and structured, I have divided my international experiences from the past three years into three key areas:

- Academic internationalization
- Non-formal internationalization
- Active global citizenship

Each of these sections reflects not just where I've been, but how I've grown intellectually, emotionally, and as a future psychotherapist, global citizen, and an individual.

1. Academic Internationalization: Erasmus+ Semester and BIPs

1. Erasmus+ semester in Lisbon

In the academic year 2023/2024, I spent a semester in Lisbon at Universidade de Lisboa as part of the Erasmus+ program. My first plan was to conduct research for my master's thesis on teacher stress, job satisfaction, and work engagement (since Portugal is one of the countries with the highest levels of teacher stress) and compare the findings with Slovenia (which is currently at the EU average).

Even though that was my plan, and I contacted nearly 150 primary schools across Portugal (even on the islands), I only received 4 responses after three months of trying. In Slovenia, you can usually email teachers or the headmaster directly and get full responses within a week. But in Portugal, the process went through school administrations, who had to decide collectively whether to participate. Many said they would — but in the end, nothing happened.

That taught me a very important lesson, that I cannot just expect things to work the same way as they do in my own country. Although I was really frustrated with the situation (especially since I had already written the theoretical part), changing the focus of my research to only Slovenian primary school

teachers taught me flexibility, and eventually, I got my answers in another way. When I had the chance to speak to two Portuguese primary school teachers in person, they told me they were overwhelmed and stressed with all the work they had, especially considering the salary was low while work demands and expectations were very high. I also learned that they are experiencing a shortage of primary school teachers for these reasons. This helped me develop even more empathy, because I could now understand the problem better, and I got to know the people behind the numbers.

This semester taught me a lot. It was extremely difficult for me because I came with certain expectations, because of how many students talk about Erasmus: you meet a lot of people, you travel, you have fun, you learn a new language, and you immerse yourself in a new culture. I was supposed to go with three friends, but due to missed deadlines, illness, or fear, they couldn't come, so I went alone. I thought I would live with other students, but instead, I ended up living with a Portuguese family. This was a challenge since only the two kids spoke English, while the parents only spoke Portuguese. Even though I'm extroverted, I have to admit that at the beginning (for the first two to three months), I stayed in my room on purpose because I was afraid of speaking due to the language barrier. I felt alone a lot, so I started to spiral emotionally. I had to write my master's thesis, attend classes in Portuguese (a language I didn't speak at all), and I had trouble finding a support system or friends who spoke English. I was under a lot of stress, and even though I was physically present in Lisbon, I mostly invested my time in things back home: my theatre group, my university paper, tutoring, and talking to friends. I wasn't mindful, and I wasn't living in the moment. After a few months, I realized this experience would only give me what I was willing to take from it. Friendship and fun wouldn't just come from sitting at home and feeling sorry for myself. So I started to be more active: I made friends with some Portuguese girls from my class, I met two other Erasmus students, I travelled, and I even joined CISV Portugal for activities and minicamps. I realized I didn't have to sacrifice my life at home to build one in Lisbon. I could still keep up with my responsibilities while putting in the effort to step out of my comfort zone. With the host family, I learned that I just had to try. Even if we didn't speak each other's languages, most things can be communicated with body language. I also discovered I wasn't alone in fearing the language barrier, but they felt it too.

The main conclusion I took from this experience was this: speak, even if you don't know how. People will try to understand you, and misunderstandings in language happen daily, even in the same culture. The hardest thing is to begin and step outside your comfort zone, but in every country, you'll find people willing to support you, because we all share the same basic need: to be understood. To conclude, I came home with new courage to speak languages without so much fear of being judged, with a better understanding of a different school system, and with a broader view of European education. I also developed my writing skills by doing academic assignments in English, and translating some material from Portuguese helped me understand basic grammar and deepen my language awareness. And last but not least, I came home with even more appreciation for beauty, for nature, food, different languages, and the uniqueness of people in every culture.

3. Italy: Letting go of control



The third BIP took place in Reggio Emilia, Italy. As a disclaimer: I am deeply fond of board games and sociology, so I was really excited. There's one important thing to know about me: I'm quite restless, constantly active, and very hard on myself. So, as usual, I arrived with high expectations, especially in terms of academic content. What this BIP challenged me to do was to let go of control, accept the environment as it is, and understand that people have different expectations and forms of learning.

Most participants came with the goal of having fun and experiencing Italian culture. The facilitators created space for that, since we had 4–5 hours of sessions per day, and the rest of the time was free or informal. Most of the learning was experiential: we played board games. At first, I was frustrated. I felt the BIP wasn't "academic enough." But thanks to the friends I made there, I started to reflect on those thoughts and recognize my tendency to be overly rigid. It wasn't perfect, but in many moments, people helped me stay mindful, enjoy myself, and just be. The goal wasn't always to win, but to be present and connect through play. In the end, this experience helped me embrace balance, and the people I met even invited me to another BIP, which allowed me to build a small international network of friends with shared interests.

4. Prague: Embracing entrepreneurship and digital tools

The final BIP I attended, not even a month ago, took place in Prague. I've always been interested in entrepreneurship, but never had the courage to take real risks, especially ones involving money or uncertainty. I must say: the program was very well-designed. Content-wise, I learned the most here. At first, I felt like an impostor-like I didn't belong, but I quickly realized that many of the other participants felt the same way. We were students from different backgrounds, with different levels of knowledge, but similar aspirations. Each of us had a vision or mission we wanted to develop, and we worked in diverse teams to design real entrepreneurial projects. This was the BIP where I learned the most about teamwork, creative problem-solving, and AI (which we used and discussed critically). It also helped me understand how to develop digital skills intentionally. We live in a time where digitalization is progressing rapidly, and I believe we shouldn't fear it, but learn to use it critically and wisely. I think education is key: both for ourselves and for others.



Conclusion of BIPs

Each of these programs helped me grow in different ways: emotionally, intellectually, and culturally. They pushed me to be more open, more present, more accepting of difference. They strengthened skills like intercultural teamwork, creativity, critical thinking, and participatory learning. For me, BIPs represent meaningful and powerful experiences of internationalization at home. They've broadened

my understanding of how European universities collaborate to build students who are not only educated but also empathetic, thoughtful, and globally aware.

The last two projects I would place under academic internationalization, though they also touch on civic engagement, are the T4EU (Transform4Europe) week at my previous university and the EUTOPIA Student Innovation Challenge in Cergy, France.

1. T4EU Week in Trieste: Finding my career path

I participated in this program during my gap semester, right after returning home from Lisbon. It was the first year our university formally joined the T4EU alliance, and I was curious to see what this new initiative would bring. This was my very first international short-term academic mobility, and I'm extremely grateful I took part, because it directly influenced what I study today. The program offered several academic tracks, and I chose one titled "Suicides without borders." It was my first academic experience in psychology, and even more than the content (which was quite emotionally heavy), it was the first time I felt like I truly belonged in an academic group.

Don't get me wrong, I've always loved teaching and working with young people, but I've also always been deeply curious about the human mind: why we are the way we are, how people become who they are, and how we can better understand each other. That kind of introspective and analytical approach wasn't necessarily the emphasis in my previous program. During the T4EU week, I found myself surrounded by students from all over Europe, many of whom were studying psychology. What amazed me was that my way of thinking, asking a lot of questions, going deep into analysis wasn't seen as "too much" or annoying, but as something valuable. It felt like a revelation to realize that others shared the same intellectual curiosity and need to understand deeply.

This week also gave me a broader, multicultural perspective on psychological issues. It was eye-opening to see how suicide prevention is approached differently depending on the country, because it is shaped by culture, stigma, healthcare systems, and social attitudes. I felt truly engaged in a European dialogue on prevention, and for the first time, it felt like I was part of something meaningful: not just learning for myself, but learning to make a difference.

2. EUTOPIA Student Innovation Challenge in Cergy: From theory to practice

This project gave me one clear takeaway: it bridged the gap between theory and practice. During the challenge, I learned how to design innovative solutions and had the opportunity to meet real start-up entrepreneurs. That experience not only sparked my interest in entrepreneurship, but it also helped me understand the kind of responsible risk-taking mindset that entrepreneurship demands. Meeting founders, seeing their journeys, and listening to their challenges made entrepreneurship more real to me, not just an abstract idea, but something human, uncertain, and rewarding. This sparked further curiosity in the field, and I later joined additional workshops and programs on the topic.

I believe university education often leans heavily on theory, and while theory is crucial, it's only half of the learning puzzle. Without practical experience, you can't fully internalize what you're learning. Even though I'm naturally more of a theoretical person, this experience taught me how much you can grow by learning through doing, failing, and getting constructive feedback. It pushed me to improve my ideas, rethink my planning processes, and develop better collaboration skills, especially in an interdisciplinary and international environment.

In both cases, I didn't just gain knowledge, I gained clarity about who I am as a learner, where I want to go, and how international spaces allow us to become more honest versions of ourselves.

2. Active citizenship engagement internationalization

I wanted to highlight this one, since I strongly believe it is one of the most important ones. I know change starts on a personal level-that is also the reason I fell in love with volunteering. Even though I started local I quickly realized the more you engage with others also on a global level, the bigger your world gets, the wider your knowledge gets, and more you are able to discuss and understand the problems in depth and think about them critically. In this part, I will focus on international organizations and experiences that I did in the past few years that formed me as the person I am now and greatly impacted me (even though I don't have the space to talk about all of them, so I will highlight the most important ones). They include:

- EYE Brežice
- Summer camp in Taizé with a Catholic youth organization
- CISV (Children's International Summer Villages)
- Rotary (camp for children with special needs)
- Medusa summer school: Online gender-based violence
- EU careers student ambassador (plus the Luxembourg conference)



1. CISV

- **Leader (2022 Linz, 2025 Milano)**
- **Camp director (2024 Vipava)**
- **National trainer (TTT in The Netherlands)**
- **NJR-national junior representative (2022,2023)**
- **NAR-national representative (2025-)**
- **Board member (2022-)**

I will start with the most important one for me in the whole portfolio. As a fun fact I can tell you I am writing this part of the portfolio on a 3-week Step-up camp in Milano that I am part of right now. To understand why it means that much to me, I have to take you back to how this all started: It was April or march in 2022 and my mother came home one day, saying they are searching for a "leader" in an organization called CISV. I had no idea what this organization is about, but at the time I was doing my bachelor's in teaching and the purpose of a leader was to (in my mother's words), take 4 children to an international summer program abroad. Since this part is only about my beloved CISV, I think you deserve to know more about it. CISV is a global, non-profit, non-political organization that educates

and inspires young people to build a more just and peaceful world through intercultural exchange and experiential learning. Its four main pillars are Diversity, Conflict and Resolution, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development.

My first experience (which I am repeating now again, just in a different program) was the leader experience. Both of the times were extremely different: as a Village leader, you are the person, who off course takes care of the kids, but you are also in charge of planning the activities and facilitating them. In step-up, the participants have to step up and they plan their own activities and facilitate them, but you are there to guide and help them. CISV people are the most inclusive people you will ever meet. The organization stands for everything I value, and I found so many like-minded people there. More importantly, the biggest gift you can receive from it is that you see participants (no matter if they are 11 or 16) grow in their knowledge, values, mindset, and as a person, and this is something that makes this experience worth it every time. You also see yourself grow as a person a lot. You learn how much prejudice you have. How much you actually don't know about the others. How this diverse environment can challenge your beliefs, emotions and values. It takes flexibility. It takes openness. And most importantly, it takes empathy. Ever since I joined this organization I have a global family.



I am very involved in this organization in Slovenia and outside, which you can see at the beginning of the section, where I described the roles. Last year I was a camp director, which means I organized a summer camp in Slovenia for participants hosting 10 different delegations from all over the world. This experience challenged my organizational skills, since it required adjusting the food, campsite, religious space, and privacy for a lot of different people. As I improved my skills, I also became more aware of diversity and how to act responsibly based on individual needs. All that I have participated in with CISV, help us achieve exactly what the point of this internationalization certificate and our organization is-being and making other people active global citizens, and I am extremely proud of that.

2. Rotary Ankaran (a week-long annual camp for children with special needs)

One of the most profound international experiences I've had, though it didn't take place abroad, was at the Rotary Ankaran camp, a week-long annual camp for children with special needs. I joined for the first time without any prior experience in working with this population, simply drawn by the opportunity to help with caregiving and assist in sessions of music therapy. Although the camp was held in Slovenia, it had a distinctly international character. Most of the children and their guardians were Slovene or Croatian, but we also had Croatian staff and an Italian music therapist. While I understand quite a bit of Italian (due to living near the border), I don't speak it fluently. That summer, I unexpectedly found myself acting as the



translator between the Italian therapist, the volunteers, and the children, which was a role I wasn't prepared for. Even though I could translate quite accurately, the inability to respond fully or express myself fluently in Italian created a lot of internal stress. I was constantly mediating meaning without being able to fully participate in the conversation, which became a metaphor for the work itself. Music therapy doesn't rely on words. It bypasses language entirely and gives space to emotions and expressions that don't need translation. The instruments we used were all broken or DIY, like a cardboard box filled with stones, sticks, or bottles. Yet, those tools showed a great impact on the participants. Children who were often non-verbal, withdrawn, frustrated, or overstimulated showed entirely new sides of themselves in the music sessions. Through noise, rhythm, chaos, and shared creation, we entered their worlds. There were no diagnoses in that room. No therapy labels. Just presence, sound, and emotion. That week fundamentally changed how I think about therapy. Before that, I was skeptical of alternative or non-verbal forms of therapy, but seeing the children express frustration, joy, or even anger and sadness made me realize just how important it is to adapt our approach based on the person, not the method. It was the first time I saw therapy work right in front of me.

It also changed my idea of what internationalization means. It's not always about travel or formal education. When I first applied, I thought it would be a one-time experience. Still, four years later, I keep returning. These children have taught me more than I could ever express, without saying a word. But I don't want to romanticize the experience. It wasn't all healing moments and connection. These children also triggered in me anger, sadness, frustration, and powerlessness, emotions I didn't expect or know how to regulate at first. Since you can't just walk away or express those feelings like you might in everyday situations, I was forced to confront my own emotional limits. And through that, I learned new forms of emotional regulation, new strategies for presence, and a deeper understanding of group dynamics under pressure.

3. Non-formal education internationalization

That under the Erasmus+ program umbrella includes;

Youth exchange Neumarkt in der Steiermark (Austria): Building resilience in challenging times

- Youth exchange Varna (Bulgaria): Promoting Europe through Entrepreneurship
- Youth exchange Neumarkt in der Steiermark (Austria): Being young in the climate crisis
- Training course Sardinia (Italy): Visual tools for learning
- Training course Zadar (Croatia): Belong to yourself

Instead of evaluating each program individually, I would like to critically reflect on these experiences through two lenses: interpersonal internationalization and professional internationalization.

1. Youth Exchanges: Learning through people

What I took from the youth exchanges was less about the academic content and more about what it means to live, work, and grow with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. These projects placed me in unfamiliar social environments where I had to learn how to open up, communicate across cultures, and build trust from scratch. Connecting with others in these settings was not always easy, especially in moments of vulnerability or discomfort, but it taught me that internationalization is not just about learning about other cultures. It's about allowing yourself to be shaped by them. I developed a deeper awareness of group dynamics, emotional intelligence, and how values like empathy, patience, and openness are not universal by default, but they are practiced as skills. These experiences also reminded me that meaningful connection often happens in informal spaces, and that inclusion is a daily, active process. This has made me more culturally sensitive, both as a future therapist and as a human being.



2. Training Courses: Learning when to stop

In contrast to the more social nature of youth exchanges, the training courses helped me grow as a professional, especially in the field of non-formal education. What I would say about the TT in Zadar (Belong to Yourself, which focused on mindfulness and non-violent communication), is that it brought me one of the most important learnings so far: I realized it's okay to take a break. Before that, I felt like I had to say yes to every opportunity (in slang, this is classified as FOMO) because I feared that time would run out. Both society and I had placed heavy expectations on me: when I should have my life together, when I should start a family, get married, have a good career that gives me a nice house, a good car, and a lot of money. This mindset made



me try to do everything. I took every opportunity, and at one point, I was doing it just so it would look good on my CV. When I came to Zadar, I was completely burned out. I was unable to truly socialize with people or be present in the content. The group there was amazing, and they tried to include me, but I was the one excluding myself, overwhelmed by the constant pressure and the never-ending race I felt I was in. That was the moment I promised myself that, from now on, I would only attend a project or a workshop if I truly felt that I could stay present, and if I was doing it for myself, not just because it would look good on paper. Through the content of the TT, we also talked about this kind of pressure. I realized how many people experience the same, this internalized timeline, the feeling of being late for life, and I began to understand how much it's actually about prioritization. There are so many opportunities, and you can never take them all. You have to choose, and you have to choose consciously. You have to think critically about what adds value to your growth. Sometimes, even when you're already somewhere (like I was in Zadar), you may realize that you've outgrown a certain type of activity or module, and that's okay, too. You grow. You change. You move on to new things. That, in the end, for me, is the clearest sign of growth.

Conclusion

I know this portfolio is too long, and I apologise for that, but honestly, I wrote it for myself. Going through all these experiences made me nostalgic, and for the first time in a while, I actually took the time to reflect on them. I saw how much they changed me in unexpected ways, and how growth is definitely not a linear process. At the time, many of these projects just felt like "another experience for my CV" or something that was nice, but not life-changing. Writing this gave me the space to stop, sit with myself, and look at my memories and emotions with more clarity and honesty. If I had to define what internationalisation means to me, I'd say this: it's the process of finding your purpose and your space in a global context, through people, stories, values, and shared challenges. Whether it's sustainability, human rights, education, or mental health, I don't see my career or my personal life without international elements. I want to keep being involved in these themes, not just as a professional, but as a human being who's aware that we're all more connected than we realise.