

EUCI - Reflective Portfolio by Rad George-Ciprian from Babes-Bolyai University

I. The local cultures

I was born in Romania, in a small village close to the eastern borders of the Maramures county with Ukraine. This village, alongside its neighboring ones as well, has a rich history where multiple cultures co-existed due to different historical reasons. I will name them out while stating my interactions with them and how each helped me enhance my understanding of the importance of interculturalism and intercultural exchange and how it is precisely this exchange that shaped my whole world and who I am today, and will continue to influence my views and future prospects and actions, to advance with respect and active interest for the variegated cultures around me:

1. The Zipsers - a minority of German origin from Slovakia (more specifically from Spiš, which in German is spelled Zips or Zipser Land; hence the name) have come to what they later called ÜberVischau (regionally, Vischau is translated to chisel or "a place looking like a ditch" ergo the name roughly translates to Upper-Chisel in some parts or the Upper Ditch-place in others. This is because of their history, having come here for woodworking, chiefly transportation of logs on the river, they called Vischau from another stream, which they simply called Waser. The names are the same to this day.), a small city continuing straight on from the village I lived in, which they called RunterVischau (Lower-Chisel). They had an amazing influence around the place where I lived and where I studied in high school (i.e., ÜberVischau in Roumanian spelled: Viseu de Sus), in that the names they gave to the rivers and streams still remain to this day and they became the official spellings. I had my first encounter with them due to my Germanteacher at the time, who insisted that I participate as a volunteer at the Zipser Forum to promote and provide a tour for other children around Viseu de Sus. It was a 2-month experience during which I managed to ask questions and learn from more than half of all the Zipser around here. Firstly, it didn't pique my interest to sit with old people and talk about historical facts and being shown images of how the city used to look, but seeing the passions with which they regaled all these facts and very earnestly lay out advice for me, as a message for the whole youth, I began to read into it myself and ask for more historical vestiges from the Zipsers. Something within me deeply changed after that, and I never discard any information as being futile or uninteresting, but I commenced a self-search to see why it is useful and how to get myself to research the roots of it. Even now, I volunteer as a distance member of the Zipser forum, which also offers aid for people in need or a home for kids with abusive parents. It is due to the cause of the forum and because they became so dear to me that I decided to continue helping as much as possible to not let the culture, proverbs, and heritage of the Zipser die out from this place. I daresay that this experience engendered in me a desire for the conservation of the culture of minorities.

2. Ukrainians - being so close to the border with Ukraine, it is only normal that many came to live close by. I only had my interactions with them in high school. Around 70% of the teenagers who enrolled were Ukrainians. Having lived in our country, they were taught our language at school, but at home they spoke their own. I came to know them really well in four years and learned much from their way of being. They have a stronger impetus for the traditional ways and have a deeper bond with the nature surrounding them and the providence it provides. They foster a love for physical work and are usually well-built. These are innate philosophies that I was taught, and I embedded them as a part of me. Their rather bohemian and plain way of living resonated with my soul, which is at home in the fields and meadows, and I found myself in the aphotic depths of their cultures where I began to know their essence through my own. There were many significant interactions along my time with them, but what particularly influenced me the most was a spring outing from a year ago when I sat on a hill next to a lake with one of my Ukrainian friends who is suffering from an incurable illness and he talked to me of how he faced it and changed for the better because of it through prayer, and in spite of the warnings of doctors or family he decided to work out and run and look towards living his life this way. It stayed with me since then, and whenever I catch myself lacking discipline or the necessary mental fortitude to complete a task, I think back and his words echo through my brain and continue to change me and my actions towards being a better man and a stronger person overall. My fondness for nature began to translate into a fondness for Ukrainians because I associated whatever is beautiful about the reflection of the sky in placid water or of the blooming of a flower with the moments and words spoken to them or by them in a similar setting. There are, of course, many differences between us, but there have always been connections between my culture and theirs: for example, in the past, Ukrainian women used to sell at the Friday plaza "Devils" which are books with spells and rituals and the women in Viseu learned how to untangle the spells with songs called "Descantece". It was fascinating as I learned from my friends the urban legends they heard as children and realized that they are similar or sometimes even identical to the ones I was told. All these exchanges and newly formed information embellished my empathetic side and formed a sense of awareness of the similarities and familiarities between cultures that could, from a distance, look totally different. It is through knowledge, experience, and information that one can become genuinely an intercultural individual.

3. The Romani people, as they are more commonly known by the exonym "Gypsies" live in many parts of my country, with predominance in the South. I had many personal experiences with them, since I had gypsy classmates. They have lived here for so long that our traditional ways have interlocked and formed somewhat of a unity in places. For example, the cuisine, wedding songs, and dances are very similar since we borrowed a lot from each other. I came to realize how rare and beautiful the sound of a traditional gypsy song is and how heart-thrilling their dances, yells, and slaps are. I felt, when I was first taught their dance, that this is how the body innately wants to move alongside the music and the rhythm, and it gives you the pumps and flushed skin always desired at a party or

gathering. They live in rather squalid, almost slum-like places, even here, but it is more than anything a choice. Having had a classmate in high school who came from a gipsy family, I learned why they chose this lifestyle, and this is also the encounter that left a mark on me the most; it became a bridge to connect the missing gaps for a good life. It happened during a pastime, when we chattered on a throng of logs stacked on top of each other, and it was on that day that he decided to open up and speak from his own experiences being a Romani and living with Romani. He must have observed that I have an issue with taking words and opinions to the heart and letting myself be affected by what other people think and the way they behave. He decided to speak from the heart of his people and asked me how many times it is that I think about a shameful thing that someone else did, and how many times it is that I think about mine, and how often it is that I think about the life of someone else, and how often about mine. All these inquiries were meant to give myself the answer that everyone else does the same thing that I am currently doing, scantily worrying for others and chiefly concerned to prove their own shamelessness and blamelessness. He decided to place a lot of emphasis on the fact that one should not care much for what others might think, or else they lose their own life, and this is how the Romani live as well, unconcerned with the statements or assertions of others. My subsequent days were filled only with his words echoing in my sleep and my waking hours, and they deeply changed my future actions in which I once again decided to open up to people and allow myself to be vulnerable in front of others without the fear of whatever they might opine. They still ring to this day and push me towards more social interactions on a daily basis. Later on I decided to re-give this lesson to him in the form of an old saying, when he was in duly distress caused by the approaching exams and the death of his father from which he got the idea that all his family depends on his success: "The greatest tragedy in the world is not to be unknown by strangers but unloved by your companions". I described their way of being as being a cross between Eastern and Western philosophy, and it got me raving to get to know more of their proverbs, language, songs, and dances, which are fascinating.

4. The Japanese - there aren't any Japanese people living in Viseu de Jos; however, I wanted to introduce here a brief encounter my family had with a Japanese couple, which inspired the creation of a pair of wooden geta I carved (see pictures below). My grandparents used to paint wool as a business. Back then, communism was still ongoing, and a couple from Japan came to visit Romania and asked if they could take pictures of my grandparents painting the wool, after which they were served a bowl of fresh-made cabbage "sarmale" by them. They ended up taking pictures with my grandparents, mother, and uncles, and years later sent the pictures alongside a letter of gratitude. It only arrived so late because during communism, a lot of the letters were banned from being sent or were opened before being sent. This story became a catalyst for multiple woodworking projects, like an unfinished pair of Okobo and a Shogi board (see pictures below).



a pair of Geta shoes



an unfinished pair of Okobo shoes



Shogi pieces

II. An international activity that I participated in

Three years ago, I got the chance to participate in a fortnight exchange in Germany alongside my classmates grace to an Erasmus program. Since I was at a mathematics and computer science profile, the exchange took place at BBZ Mitte, a learning institution that provided all the necessary facilities for the scheduled activities, amongst which robotics and animation were included. I was nervous at first since my German was not the best at the time, but the teachers were prepared to explain everything to us in English, lest students like me were in the group. This activity served to give an entire and comprehensible explanation of how the system of education works in Germany, which, especially for higher education, is very different from my country's. I've observed a deep desire for practicality in the German education system, which surely sounded intriguing: at the time, I was fully considering a career path in Germany for myself. In that span of 2 weeks, I learned what it feels like to live with 3 other students in the same room and to study in a foreign country for a short time, which still fosters within me a desire to repeat this again and participate in an Erasmus

program for my master's degree. The most significant experience during that time was, even if it may sound surprising, a spontaneous guitar concert I held for German kindergarten children, my teachers, and other colleagues. To give context: at the boarding house where we were lodged, a group of kindergarten children alongside their schoolmarm also decided to dwell for a few days. On that day, I saw the schoolteacher carry a guitar on her back and, heedlessly, one of my friends jumped the gun to ask her if he could borrow her guitar so I could play for them. One of my colleagues was sobbing in their room at the time and my teacher tried to calm her down and the children were all playing and gamboling around the house; in short there was a lot of commotion happening all at the same time, but soon as I started playing a deep silence lay and I couldn't even hear their breathes and my classmate stopped crying. Everyone gathered quickly and quietly around, and when I raised my head and opened my eyes to see everyone staring as if in a daydream at me, I was shocked, and a strong sentiment came over me at the realization that this was the first time someone ever listened to me so earnestly. There were prickles all over my body, and my arms and legs were quaking uncontrollably, but I continued playing. Marrow morning, while doing some stretches outside, all the children came to me to teach them how to stretch, and I spoke to them in simple hand signs due to my lank German. The outcome I realized only later, that I had formed unity even though I could not even communicate, but only through the sound of some metal strings. The human desire for connection transcends the means of language or culture; it is but a childish joy, a juvenile innocence to be together in one spirit and one wish. The kids never had any kind of differences to put aside, they never even cared for language or background, but only to be present and listen to the music or to do exercises. For a little while, I managed to transform the grown-ups into little children again, such that they might create this oneness. It changed me, and I made a vow to myself to never quit guitar so I can create moments like this again and soothe for a while this aching hankering for togetherness. (below is the link for the short guitar video)

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/1110035261>

III. How the EUCI sculpted my understanding of interculturalism and intercultural exchanges

Partaking in the EUCI was a great way to reflect upon my past and see through it from a different shard: that of interculturalism. Having taken direct guidance from the tutors and getting to speak with people from so many different backgrounds awakened the dormant craze for knowledge of the history of the people in this world. During the seminars, I learned of the iceberg of culture, which served as a good diagram for the reflection writing. I no longer associate ethnic groups with the stereotypical movie-like depiction of them, but with the way they communicate using body language, their attitudes towards religion, nature, elderly people, relationships, marriage, family, animals, and other people. Looking back, I came to know that even the very concepts of time may differ, which always seemed like a constant idea throughout the whole world. The theory became like a tour I took to see the values and taught patterns that slipped past me when interacting with others. I took a

deep dive instead of simply dabbling or dousing myself a little in the iceberg of culture. As a direct and real consequence of the seminars I decided to read poets from the cultures I had encountered in my attempts to see through the eyes of a lover of country and of his people who is not afraid to speak the truth and how he feels exactly what stirs up the hearts of the people from this ethnic group, what is the essence of their ethos. To name a few: Taras Shevchenko is a poet from Ukraine that I enjoyed reading, and Ingrid Jonker is a South African poet whose poems I even came to study in Afrikaans because I was intrigued by the language. Another very useful exercise was the comparison between a descriptive and a reflective text, together with a list of contents that makes a text reflective, and what questions one should ask oneself when writing such a text. It also served as a boon in my writings.

IV. Other activities during school that pertain to the promotion of respect and awareness in the social milieu

During my time in high school, I attended an English essay contest with the theme: "Tolerance Through My Eyes" as part of a larger Erasmus+ program called: "Empathy for Understanding and Tolerance for Others' Mistakes". All the essays were made public and published in multiple schools for reading and promoting values absolutely necessary for any individual. The essays became a part of the exhibition of the "Festival of Tolerance and Mutual Understanding," which took place in Italy, Slovenia, North Macedonia, and Romania. I made quite a technical and philosophical essay that conveyed all my personal beliefs and solutions to the intolerance of individuals. I prayed that it may change the view of at least one person for the better, because that is how I would know it was a success. I went by the motto: "Foster Before it Festers". To foster respect before the wounds of the disregarded fester, or to foster unity before the indignations of the segregated and ostracized fester, etc.

V. How the EUCI influenced my future prospects in regard to my international activity and implications

After the pleasant seminars at the EUCI, I've looked into student organizations in Romania so that I can enroll as a sophomore. I will further look into the scope and cause of each organization such that I can find the one that suits me best and serve for the betterment of the world while getting to know it. To name a few candidates on the list: AISEC, UN Youth, or LCOY. They all resonate with my intents and prospects, and through these organizations, I am sure I can have more of what I've got from the EUCI and even more. I wish to provide them with technical and artistic contributions for the causes and volunteer to make myself useful to the people and the planet in need. As being part of the youth, I need to take action for a future I want to live in and towards a time and place in which posterity will live. What piqued my interest the most is AISEC and its volunteering programs in different countries. Getting to know the locals, eating their food, seeing their eyes and how they move for two or three weeks while providing support for sustainability sounds like something that shouldn't be missed.

VI. Portfolio conclusion

Having been a part of EUCI has garnished my instinct for unity with new nuances to the awareness of other ethnic groups and insights into interculturalism. Throughout the journey, I learned of my role as a youth in the development of acceptance and respect for all people. I will use all the learned knowledge in my future personal research and apply the newly found techniques, like reading the poets, to apprehend the history, ways of being, philosophies, traditions, and customs of all the people that make up my world and not only. I aim to continue on this path and contribute as a youth to the transformative changes of the social milieu, all tending to an interculturally aware society.

EUCI – Miscellaneous Poem Collection
By Rad George-Ciprian

Embers of a winter fire

In flames of winter and silent forests
Lies the epicenter of midsummer.
Mown weeds and greens of blue,
Are but shades of a diaphanous white.

In hunts of winter and throbbing feet
Lies the heliocentrism of summer.
Cordate leaves decay into sunlight,
And revive in the icicles on branches.

In falling snow and soon falling eaves
Lies the pouring rains of scorching afternoon.
Fractal snowflakes are the wings without bodies
Of the archangels of fire and seething blood.

In a snake's nest and an undersoil burrow
Lies the chirrup of haunting birds of the sun.

Throbbing dive

Who am I to lose myself?

Like falling snow, you cried a silent storm.
To dive into oneself is to bubble at the surface.
The vicious thrusts of waves unravel a mournful smile.

A feminine muse should be solitary,
Like silhouettes in a jet-black night.

The ardent pneuma does not work through a tired soma,
Ergo, even the energy of the feminine frame cannot light it.
But it shall not be done until autophagy turns to coma.
A cordial throbbing is combing the heartstrings, when all you do is sit.

Who am I to destroy myself?
Like nightfall, you hid an avid woe.
To dive into oneself is to arise in another's ocean.
The calming flow of waves unveils a disheartened moan.

How shall I find acknowledgment of strangers,
If I do not content with the love of my companions?
Muscles are withering on my bones.
Blood vessels are thinning out on themselves.

Who am I to love universally?
Like the sun you are, with or without sin.
To dive into you was worth the hellscape inside this somatic body.
The reluctant vibrations reach the shore for one last downcast sight.

Black chains and footers grow on me, to crown me with roses.

Haunting birds peck at the open wounds on my wrists.

Man is not born with his heart, but must grow it, and...

Every time I looked in your direction, it grew more and more!

Who am I to know you?

What hast thee talk to me?

Like willow whispers, you left me numb, cathartic.

To dive into you is only a desire that I desire for as long as it is a desire.

The throbbing waves clash into each other with the power of fate.

Sandpaper airplanes

My thoughts blind my eyes.

Diana steals the show, but forgets,

that in her light mountains dwell.

My tears climb up to reach my tail brain.

Apollo steals the show but forgets,

that in his light maidens comb harps.

My childish eyes wonder at yours.

Argus steals the show but forgets,

that the lamb has five eyes...

What use to shine with all thy body?

What use is to see with all thy body?

When the three eyes of the lamb turn red again-

Glimpse again your tears at me...