

COIL PROJECT

Intercultural Encounters



Project idea

The primary purpose of the project is to document and analyze the personal experiences of Bulgarian and Romanian students who participated in international mobility programs, such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, or had intercultural encounters in other settings. The project focuses on several key areas:

Intercultural Exchange: Exploring how students interact with diverse nationalities, including peers from Romania, Italy, Poland, Spain, Brazil, and China.

Personal Growth: Highlighting the "transformational" nature of these journeys, which help students develop independence, open-mindedness, and a broader worldview.

Overcoming Challenges: Identifying common communication difficulties and cultural misunderstandings, and how students resolved them through patience and active dialogue.

The information was gathered through a structured survey administered to the participants.

The consistency in the narratives indicates that each student responded to a specific set of questions:

Background Information: Participants provided their name, major, and the specific location of their intercultural encounter.

Reflective Evaluation: Students were asked to describe their experience in a few words, ranging from "great" to "bittersweet" or "transformational".

Social Dynamics: They identified the various nationalities they encountered during their stay.

Problem Solving: The survey investigated whether they faced language barriers or social norm differences and how they handled those situations.

Lessons and Advice: Participants shared the most important lessons learned and offered advice for future exchange students.

Cultural Comparison: Students identified what they would like to bring back to their home country and what they might change about their host country.

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Research process

The survey includes the following questions:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your major?
3. Where did you go on Erasmus+ or another program, and how was your experience?
4. Did you meet people from different nationalities (if yes, which ones)?
5. Did you experience any communication difficulties (e.g., language barriers or cultural differences)?
6. Were there moments of intercultural misunderstanding, and how did you handle them?
7. What important lessons did you learn from this intercultural experience?
8. What advice would you give to someone interacting with a different culture for the first time?
9. If you could bring one thing from your experience back, what would it be?
10. If you could change one thing in the country you visited, what would it be?
11. Would you share photos from your experience?

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Team members Bulgaria



Mariya Stefanova

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Field of study: Media Economy

Hobbys: Upcycling & DIY projects

Interests and work: Creative marketing



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Maria Kicheva

Maria is a student at UNWE majoring in International Economic Relations who participated in an Erasmus+ mobility program in Zagreb, Croatia. She describes her experience as positive and interesting, as it gave her the opportunity to live in a different country and meet many new people. During her stay, she interacted mostly with local students from Croatia but also met people from other countries such as Portugal and Poland. These international friendships helped her experience a diverse and multicultural environment.



Teodora Shishkova

Teodora Shishkova is a student at UNWE majoring in International Economic Relations who participated in an Erasmus+ mobility program in Italy. She describes the experience as great and full of new activities, opportunities, and meeting many new people. During the program, she made friends with people of different nationalities. Her closest friend was from Romania, and she also spent time with students from Poland and Italy, which helped her learn more about different cultures.

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Georgi Karadzhinov

Georgi is a student at UNWE majoring in International Relations who participated in an Erasmus+ mobility program in Croatia. He describes the experience as bittersweet, but overall valuable and meaningful. Despite some challenges, he is glad he had the opportunity because it taught him many important lessons and allowed him to grow personally.



Lili Markova

Lili Markova is a student at UNWE majoring in International Economic Relations who participated in an Erasmus+ mobility program in Alicante, Spain. She describes the experience as both difficult and very useful, as it challenged her but also helped her grow personally and academically.

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Angel Balashev

Angel Balashev is a student at UNWE majoring in Business Informatics and Communications who has had several international mobility experiences. He spent a semester in Vilnius, Lithuania through an Erasmus university exchange, attended three Erasmus+ training courses in Slovenia, and also volunteered as part of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) on a farm in Slovenia. He describes these experiences as impossible to fully explain in words, but if he had to summarize them in one word, it would be “transformational”.

Comparative Analysis

For all six students, studying abroad was more than an academic experience - it was a journey into unfamiliar cultures, habits, and perspectives. Teodora and Yoana faced challenges communicating complex ideas in English, while Maria and Angel experienced minor misunderstandings related to social norms, all of which were resolved through open communication and curiosity. Georgi and Lili adapted to diverse cultural habits and learned to navigate different teaching styles and social interactions.

A common theme across all experiences is openness and adaptability. Each student highlighted how stepping outside their comfort zone led to personal and cultural growth. Friendships with people from different nationalities provided insights into varied worldviews, while overcoming communication and cultural challenges fostered patience, respect, and empathy. Intercultural experiences, though sometimes difficult, proved deeply rewarding, encouraging independence, tolerance, and curiosity. Collectively, these encounters shaped the students into more confident, globally aware individuals capable of engaging with diverse communities.

Erasmus+ and similar international programs cultivate both academic and personal development. The students' experiences demonstrate that overcoming challenges abroad enhances intercultural skills, broadens perspectives, and prepares individuals for global engagement in both professional and social contexts.

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Team members Romania



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Moisin Ioana Denisa
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- Field Of study: Law
- Hobbies: traveling, reading, dancing, cooking, hiking
- Interests: Interest in developing knowledge in the chosen field.

Single new creative idea



**Anamaria
Matei**
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Hobbies: gym, dance, travel
Field of study: law
Interests: music, explore, progressing



Graur Alesia
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Field of study: Law
Interests: progressing and exploring



TAMARA FISCUTEAN
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Powerful cases in Romania



Moga Alexia Denisa

Moga Alexia, a student at UMFST “George Emil Palade” Târgu Mureș, Faculty of Law, had her first intercultural experience during a 10-day vacation in Montenegro. She visited coastal cities such as Budva and Kotor, where she interacted with locals as well as tourists from different countries. At the beginning, she felt excited but also slightly uncertain about communicating in a new cultural environment. She was pleasantly surprised by the friendly attitude of the people and the relaxed lifestyle. One of the main challenges she faced was related to language barriers, as not everyone spoke English fluently.



MOISIN IOANA DENISA

Moisin Ioana, a student at UMFST “George Emil Palade” Târgu Mureș, Faculty of Law, had her first intercultural experiences in Italy when she was younger, in vacation. She spent multiple days exploring different cities, where she had the opportunity to meet local people and observe their daily lifestyle. At first, she felt curious and excited, but also a bit shy when interacting in a different cultural environment. She was impressed by the warm and expressive nature of the Italian people, as well as their strong sense of community and appreciation for food and social gatherings.

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Powerful cases in Romania



Anamaria Matei

Anamaria is a first-year law student at UMFST University in Târgu Mureș. She participated in a summer camp in Croatia together with friends from her hometown, as well as groups from Croatia and Hungary. She spoke fondly about her experience, even though at the beginning she felt nervous about what was to come. Everything went wonderfully in Croatia—the young people were friendly and eager to learn new things about one another.

Comparative Analysis

All three students - Alexia, Ioana, and Anamaria - shared meaningful intercultural experiences abroad, each in a different country: Montenegro, Italy, and Croatia. Despite the different destinations, their experiences revealed several common patterns.

At the beginning, all three felt a mix of excitement and nervousness when entering a new cultural environment. None of them had a completely smooth start, yet all three adapted quickly and grew more confident as time went on. A shared challenge was the language barrier - not everyone they met spoke English fluently, which required patience, creativity, and flexibility in communication. This difficulty, however, turned into a valuable lesson for each of them.

In terms of common lessons, all three students became more open-minded and adaptable as a result of their experiences. They learned to appreciate cultural differences rather than fear them, and they discovered the importance of listening, patience, and respect when interacting with people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, all three emphasized the positive attitude of the local people they encountered - whether it was the relaxed friendliness in Montenegro, the warm expressiveness of Italians, or the eagerness of young people in Croatia to connect and share.

In conclusion, while each experience was unique, the common thread was personal growth through cultural openness.

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Comparative Analysis: Romania and Bulgaria

Based on the experiences presented in the mini cases, students from both Romania and Bulgaria share many similarities in their intercultural encounters. In both groups, students participated in Erasmus+ programs or international trips, where they interacted with people from different countries. A common aspect is that most of them initially felt excited but also slightly uncertain when facing a new cultural environment.

Another similarity is related to communication. Many students mentioned language barriers or small misunderstandings, especially when not everyone spoke English fluently. However, both Romanian and Bulgarian students managed these situations by being patient, open-minded, and willing to communicate. They all emphasized the importance of understanding and respecting different cultures.

Social life and interactions also show similarities. Students from both countries appreciated meeting new people, making international friends, and experiencing different lifestyles. They described people from other countries as friendly and welcoming, which helped them adapt more easily.

However, there are also some differences. Romanian students seem to highlight emotional experiences and personal growth more, focusing on how the experience made them more open-minded and confident. Bulgarian students, on the other hand, often mention practical aspects, such as communication difficulties or observations about organization and daily life.

Another difference is in specific observations: for example, some Bulgarian students noted details like public transport punctuality or cultural habits, while Romanian students focused more on social connections and cultural diversity.

Overall, despite small differences in perspective, both Romanian and Bulgarian students had positive intercultural experiences that helped them grow personally and better understand cultural diversity.

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