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**Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do (ISCAP)**  
**Centre for Intercultural Studies (CEI)**



**Erasmus Placement Mobility**  
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# **In Porto Veritas**

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# In Porto Veritas!

## A brief summary on an intercultural experience

From a simple intention to an unforgettable experience is just a short distance, which I will quantify by using a measure as unconventional as it is international:  - ERASMUS - and the tool for measuring it, I will call it "Erasmometer".

In this article, I do not want to reveal the ERASMUS experience as something universal, like a pattern, but I want to present it simple, just as it happened to me and I am doing that because I hope to help the future *Homo Erasmus* to imagine how their world would look like for a few months.

Before starting, I have to confess that as much as I tried not to make comparisons throughout this internship in Portugal, I did not succeed.

► The first thing that caught my attention in Portugal, was when getting off the plane, it was a moment that felt like working in a mill. I came from 24 degrees in Romania and got off in Oporto where there were 37 degrees and it was only the 28th of June! I was wondering what temperatures it would be in July and August, If it was already so hot at this time of year? To my surprise, I found that Oporto has a very mild climate. Actually, it was my first summer that I have not suffered because of the heat. Winters and summers are mild, as emphasized by the statements of several people I've met in Oporto, saying that the last snow seen in Oporto was exactly 30 years ago! I suddenly remembered two winters ago when, in Romania there were places where snow measured even 3 meters. Therefore, in terms of climate and according to my unit measure, on a scale from 1 to 5, I will rate Oporto's weather at 5      ERASMUS.

► Next thing that caught my attention was the urban architecture, which combines the old architectural styles with the new ones in a unique way, different of what I had seen until then, by using a lot of granite stone. Lots of city streets and the historical area are paved with this type of rock. Moreover, this architectural landscape probably would not have had this charm without that scent of an important port, where you can imagine the sailors and the people, centuries ago downloading the precious products coming from the colonies or uploading the legendary port wine on the sailing vessels. The most frequented area of Oporto is "Ribeira" - a great place! What would this place be without the narrow streets, with cramped buildings, built in terraces, cheerfully colored, without boats and restaurants overlooking the Douro River and without the fuss made by seagulls until late at night? – Rating: 5  ERASMUS



*View from Ponte Dom Luis*

► **Museums** - I spent two weeks during this internship, just to visit museums and the main attractions of Oporto and surroundings. It was like a museums' marathon, which I can honestly say that enriched me both culturally and spiritually. It was an opportunity to learn much more about the

country, to find out historical, social and cultural features that I can compare to those from my homeland. Rating: 5  ERASMUS



*Palácio da Bolsa*



► **People** - Kindness is the word that defines the Portuguese people when it comes to foreigners. At first, I thought it was fictitiousness. No! They are very courteous, friendly people that you can talk to and have fun with. By chance, I met a Portuguese man who played the touristic guide role

for a couple of days. We built a beautiful friendship and he invited me to visit the famous Douro River Valley. There, he has an amazing mansion built in 1757, where we stayed for two days. My host introduced me to the community which, by the way, it was in the middle of the election campaign, without realizing it. I was also invited for lunch by one of the political parties. It's been a pleasure to be among so many people and to learn about so many aspects of the political life, both from ordinary people and from people connected to the politics. This way it came to my knowledge that, when it comes to politics, Romania is no different from Portugal. Funny thing was that I got to that region precisely during grape harvesting and I did not hesitate helping local people. My grandfather is also a viticulturist; therefore I have good knowledge of this industry. That is why I wanted to find out new things and to discover differences in growing grapes and wine making, between Portugal and my country, Romania. I found out that the viticulture is the same, the only different things are the amazing terraced vineyards, made by stonewalls and the grapevine pillars made by shale, an evidence of the amazing adaptations to local environmental conditions and to local resources. It was hilarious when, the second day, the people in that village already knew that a stranger had appeared in the region. You know, gossip spreads fast. A local man came and asked me if I am the oenologist expert who came to do a study on vineyards. After that, we visited a winery, where, according to tradition, "virgins" were crushing grapes with their feet.

Rating: 5  ERASMUS



*"The sirens" of Douro squeezing the grapes*

► **Student Life** - Oporto is like a hive for students. There are many universities with many types of bachelor degrees. At ISCAP I was impressed by the edifice and all the facilities in there, modern labs, modern classrooms,



organization, resources for students and professors, the library, the virtual library which contains valuable articles and scientific studies useful for anyone who needs information about bachelor, master or PhD degrees. I have met many people and I can state that they were supportive when asking them for information, for help. In addition, here, I found out the importance of intercultural projects and I saw the passion of teachers and students, when organizing cultural exchanges.

A peculiar image often appears in almost every corner of the city, from morning

until late night: young people, dressed elegantly in black, wearing also a black cloak - an image that takes you to *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry* from the Harry Potter novels. It is a student organization/brotherhood/sorority with deep roots in history, dating back to the fourteenth century. Student membership in this organization gives them their environment where they get to know each other better, have fun, socialize and participate in several educational and social projects.

Rating: 5  ERASMUS

Another interesting experience in these three months was helping some friends who own a restaurant in Oporto, a place where I met many characters, where I learned to cook a traditional recipe – francesinha – and other gastronomic delights. Rating: 5  ERASMUS



*Francesinha*

To sum up, I think this Erasmus internship is not necessarily learning about your area of study, but is mainly about learning a new culture, a new language. It is about learning something different that you would not have learnt staying in your own country. Something that will make you understand that you are a part of something bigger, an entity which develops and lives like any other organism and all the parts of this entity are somehow interconnected. It shows you that no matter what you do in some part of the world, it can affect someone situated somewhere else, no matter where you are. It makes you feel important if you see that doing a good thing here can help someone else on this planet.

I finally discovered a new definition for interculturality after this happening: Me, a Romanian student, going into a Portuguese restaurant, eating a Portuguese dish cooked by a Latvian chef and served by a French waiter while listening to an Irish singer.

Obviously, this is the best definition for interculturality and ERASMUS experience.

**Mihai Dumitrescu**