

CRE8 Europe – through the eyes of the 5 Romanian students

Following 3 wonderful years of activity, involvement, challenge, friendship, traveling, discoveries, deadlines and success within CRE8 Europe, here we are, at the end of the project: older, wiser and with an infinite desire for more challenges. Overall, CRE8 Europe was an excellent opportunity for the students in Romania and this was proved from the first months by the high number of applicants. Unfortunately only five students – Alexandra, Bianca, Daria, Maria and Mihai got the chance to walk the full path of CRE8 Europe and now, we would like to present their thoughts regarding the project.

First of all, we wanted to know **what were the initial expectations of each participant and how were they met.**

Alexandra, a master student in informatics, said that she started with no expectations but got excited about the project as soon as she was accepted as part of the team. At the beginning of the project she was hoping to meet new people and learn about multiculturalism, accomplish new challenges and become a better version of herself. Her expectations were exceeded, as she also became more organized, how to write a speech, use her imagination to solve real-life problems and how to work better in a team in order to deliver something with a stretch deadline.

Bianca studies biology and had similar expectations like Alexandra; she is now amazed what the project actually did for her: she made a lot of networking, visited very interesting things, and got herself some very cool people to spend time outside the project.

Compared to her colleagues, Daria, who is a business master student, says she had high expectations and that, surprisingly, CRE8 managed to exceed her expectations: she met new cultures, learned more about their lifestyle and she had the opportunity to come up with unique ideas and solutions to companies' tasks; given the chance, she would definitely apply again for a similar project.

Maria, also business master student, applied to be part of CRE8 in order to learn how to work and communicate successfully with people from different cultures and learn how to handle unexpected challenges. She is pleased to have learned how to come fast with creative solutions, how to cross-work with new people, quickly analyze business cases and much more.

Mihai, a dentistry student and business graduate, thought initially that the challenges would be easy, that everyone could answer the questions coming from the companies and come up with a clever solution. As it turned out, the challenges were very difficult, and the timeframe given to solve different problems was just at the limit. Given the importance of cultural and local traditions, the challenges were particularly difficult for the foreign students. All in all, the entire CRE8 project has exceeded his expectations!

The second question we asked the students was **about the impact CRE8 Europe had on them.**

Alexandra thinks that the most precious ability that she developed was to divide a problem into smaller pieces in order to find more suitable solutions to it; the ability to work in a team and to listen to other people's opinion was also a big plus. For Bianca, The main impact of CRE8 Europe was that it helped her

with public speaking, teamwork, and testing her English abilities. Daria says that CRE8 impacted her in many ways but that the biggest influence was on her creativity. Through CRE8 she learned to think out. For Maria, the biggest impact was on her communication methods, attention and analytical skills. She is proud to have used these new capabilities within the new internship she had. Mihai says that he made new friends from different countries, that his language skills have improved and the experience which he lived together with the others is priceless!

In terms of employability, we wanted to know **if CRE8 Europe left any marks on the students' relationship with the labor market.**

Alexandra is sure that the new set of skills she acquired will be a valuable plus for her when looking for a job. She does not refer to technical, but to social and cooperation skills, such as team work and pitching an idea with your team mates (which she found to be a challenge)

Bianca would like to activate in a medical field, therefore the soft skills that she achieved through CRE8 are the ones that count for her future employability – teamwork, creativity and being able to respect deadlines.

Daria is sure that she developed her soft skills - Communication, problem solving, teamwork and creativity being the main four – and this will surely improve her chances of finding a job that suits her and where she will be appreciated. Daria thinks that these competences are hard to achieve in school, through formal education and encourages all students to take part in extracurricular projects such as CRE8 in order to develop themselves.

Maria was already involved in an internship for a Tech Consulting Company and she considers that CRE8 improved her competences, so that she is now fully employed with the company. She learned how to pitch in front of clients, how to analyze situations and come up with creative solutions in a short period of time. Not to mention that now we have a global, multicultural, open and global market, where you need to work with different people, of different mindsets and nationality, everything which this project also offered and taught the students how to work in the given situations.

Mihai has now more confidence when talking in English with a foreign person. Also, he considers himself to be more open-minded which helps a lot at job interviews, where adaptability is a main skill which employers search for, especially in dynamic fields where communication with customer matters the most.

What was the most appreciated aspect of CRE8 Europe? Our students told us:

For Alexandra, it was the diversity of the challenges, that got them the chance to learn a wide set of information, as well as the activities and people that taught her about multiculturalism. What Bianca appreciates most about the CRE8 project is the independence it gave to participants and the fact that it happened in almost every home country. Daria appreciated most the balanced approach of the project: she thinks that every working week had enough. Maria liked how the students were mixed every time in order to have a new working group and also appreciated how each activity allowed her to discover the host university, the culture and way of living from each partner country. Mihai really liked the diversity of

culture, experience and habits of the students, considering each student studies in a different field than its colleagues. This way, everyone can share their personal knowledge without being influenced by other colleagues which study at the same faculty

What were the cultural implications of CRE8 Europe?

Alexandra considers that CRE8 offered her a better understanding of multicultural experiences, knowledge about other people's traditions and other people's lives. Having more cultural experiences will teach person loads of things about the world and people.

Bianca said that each country brought something new: Sweden was the time management and the Fika breaks, which she liked a lot and in Spain everything was like a paella, diverse and warm, but nothing too different from the Romanian culture.

Daria learnt how to accept the others and that we live in a diverse world. She says it is awesome to be in the same room, working for the same project, but to have different ideas, different perceptions based on our experiences in life. On the other side, it was interesting to adapt to the culture of the country where CRE8 was taking place: in Sweden it was FIKA and drinking gallons of coffee, while in Spain it was Dulce de Leche and Paella. Different culture everywhere, but it enabled the team to develop one important soft skill – adaptability.

Maria learned how to empathize with different cultures, how to bring people together to work on the same goal, regardless of the different types of personalities that she encountered and different points of view.

Mihai says that, given the cultural differences between the countries (Romania, Sweden, Norway and Spain), everyone has gathered important knowledge about the other's culture. The CRE8 Experience changed the perspectives about how each student sees these countries, depending on their country of origin. He thinks that a lot of opinions have been changed in a positive way after the CRE8 experience.

In the end, seeking to improve future editions of CRE8, we asked our students **what they would like to change about the concept of CRE8 in order to improve it.**

Alexandra would add more cultural activities for students coming from other countries, activities that would be extra activities, available but not compulsory. Bianca thinks that the CRE8 concept is flawless. Daria would not change, but expand CRE8 Europe' her desire is to involve as many countries as possible in future editions.

In terms of chances, Maria thinks that the evaluation of the pitches should be done by the task owners alone, following a clear and transparent evaluation pattern, as they are the ones knowing the best what would suit the company.

In the improvement section, Mihai suggests that participants should be grouped by age, so the ideas framework to be similar, thus leading to a more homogeneous solution to the task-owner problem.