

## Guidelines “Dossier”

### 1. Aims of intercultural studies and the “Dossier”

Your intercultural studies and the subsequent documentation of your experiences in the form of a Dossier should help you to...

- enhance your language proficiency and develop a better understanding of the target language and its communicative practices;
- identify and describe key aspects of social, cultural, and political life in the target culture;
- understand and analyse the significance of the social, cultural, and political life in relation to questions of individual and collective identity in the target culture;
- critically reflect on and systematically evaluate a range of personal experiences with and relations to the target culture and comment on possible changes in your perspective.

### 2. Some guidelines for the critical reflection of your intercultural experiences

- When describing the experiences related to your intercultural studies, please keep in mind that you are expected to give a well-reflected and thus critical account. In other words, you are supposed to not only report on your experiences, but to assess them in an analytical way. This assessment includes a comparison of your own expectations or assumptions with the situations you encounter, a reasoned statement of your opinion as well as conclusions on the different aspects described. In any event, **avoid oversimplified descriptions or conclusions** but instead give an **in-depth and well-argued account** of your experiences.
- Please remember that you are expected to describe your intercultural experiences from a **critical** perspective, i.e., elaborate on both positive and negative aspects related to your experiences within the target culture. You are thus explicitly encouraged to not only highlight positive encounters, but also give an account of difficulties or problems you were confronted with before and during your intercultural studies and how you have dealt with these.
- Make sure to be sensitive to different aspects of culture and document both aspects in which cultural differences are fairly obvious (with respect to e.g. food, literature, language, ...) and less visible aspects connected to underlying attitudes, beliefs and values (with respect to e.g. body language, gender roles, attitudes towards certain groups of people, ...).
- You might find it useful to reflect on what it is like to be a member of the culture you are experiencing. Please note that the concept of ‘national culture’ needs to be problematised since social and cultural life in your target culture will be very diversified. Individuals belong to a number of groups with cultural practices and identifications of their own. This includes ethnic or religious groups as well as social class; but it also includes institutions such as universities or corporations. In other words, what is it like to be a member of a particular community (e.g. a student community at a foreign university, an employee in a corporate culture, a citizen of a village/town/city)? Also

explore different concepts pertaining to the study of culture, e.g. feelings of belonging, expressions of personal, gendered, sexual, religious, or national identity.

### 3. Format

You are required to submit a written report, which may be supported by audio, visual, or audiovisual materials (e.g. interviews, internet video or sound clips, pictures). The report can take any of the following forms (feel free to discuss other ideas with Ms Kopeckova well in advance):

- a blog (including pictures, videos, etc.); you can, for example, work with WordPress
- a video of max. 10 minutes (voice-over commentaries and / or subtitles) and an accompanying script
- a written report to be submitted as a PDF file (which may include pictures, videos, etc.)

Further formats are possible but need to be discussed with Ms Kopeckova well in advance via e-mail.

In any of the above formats, please make sure your language reflects the conventions of the chosen medium as well as a good command of academic English.

Furthermore, all formats have to fulfil the content criteria specified below (see section 4). You are not required to use secondary sources, but if you do, please cite them according to MLA or APA style.

### 4. Content Criteria

***Length: 1,000 words (+-10%)***

The “Dossier” consists of one major part preceded by a very short overview of your stay abroad:

First, give a very short overview of your stay abroad in bullet points (these are not part of the 1,000 word count):

- country:
- place/city:
- name of university/institution/workplace:
- study programme/internship:

Second, describe and reflect on **one important/ personally relevant cultural experience you gained** (see possible content categories below). Finally, evaluate the relevance of this experience for the development of your intercultural awareness. Please keep in mind that you do not have to include a separate introduction and conclusion.

#### Main part

When you describe your experiences, include

- **description** (What did I see? Where and how did I gain the experience? ...)

- **reflection** (What does the experience tell me about the target culture? Was this experience in line with my expectations?)
- **evaluation** (In how far did this experience have an influence on my view of my own and of the target culture? ...)

Some very interesting aspects are of a more general nature and are not restricted to certain categories. Feel free to reflect on questions such as the following:

- In conversations with representatives of the target culture(s), what are the conventions in terms of body language and facial expressions? Are people eager to engage in small talk? If so, which topics are appropriate for which contexts? Is there a specific code of politeness?
- Try to think of a stereotype about your own or your host country (such as, for example, the Germans' love of punctuality). Keeping in mind the general nature of such cultural clichés, do you find this somehow confirmed or refuted from what you have experienced? In how far has your perspective been expanded and modified?
- Humour is a mode of social interaction which may vary heavily depending on both the cultural and situational context you find yourself in. For example, watch several stand-up comedy routines or sitcom episodes pertaining to local, regional or national notions of identity. What do the jokes – and the ways in which they are scripted and performed – tell you about how people think about themselves and others? How do you experience the use of humour in everyday life? Are there any differences to your own culture? Other examples: awareness of environment and its protection, level of public security, awareness of international news broadcasting, etc..

### **Category “Everyday Culture” - Daily Life & Festivities**

Attend an event or analyse an aspect that belongs to the everyday culture of the community you encountered. Describe this event / aspect and reflect on its relevance to the community and also on the impact it has on you. What does this snapshot of everyday culture say about the larger picture that you have of the target culture? Such everyday cultural events / aspects could be found in the following places / could include the following:

- your university
- community life
- shopping
- food & cuisine
- clothing
- pubs and restaurants
- markets
- birthdays
- family festivities
- sports events
- parades
- seasonal fairs
- extracurricular activities
- ...

### Category “High Culture” - Music, Art, Literature

Attend a cultural event that belongs to the field of “High Culture”. In which way(s) is this cultural event and / or its reception by the community indicative of cultural characteristics? When you talk about the event, include aspects such as its contents, its setting, its relevance within the community, its target audience, audience reactions. Such cultural events could be found in the following places / could include the following:

- a theatre play
- a visit to a museum, an exhibition, or art gallery
- a dance performance or ballet
- a concert
- a festival
- a film event (e.g. a film festival or a visit to a cinema)
- a reading
- ...

### Category History, Geography, Religion

To a large extent, a country’s history, its geography and its religion(s) have a huge impact on the cultural identity of its inhabitants. The following list contains suggestions for places to visit or events to attend, and also questions that can guide your description and evaluation:

- **History:** Visit a historic site, such as a famous building, an artefact or even an entire area of a city. How is this relevant to the history of the area you are staying in and to what extent does it still have an impact on the present cultural climate? Do you know any such sites in Germany that have a similar quality or that are similarly important to your home culture? You could also take part in a (guided) city tour, or go to a museum or an excavation site to experience your target culture’s history.
- **Religion:** Attend a religious service organized by a local worship site. How is it structured and what do you think can be deduced with regard to the local people’s religious beliefs and cultural practices? Which similarities and/or differences do you notice when comparing the local religious service to German worship practices? Did you gain new insights into or perspectives on your own religious background?
- **Geography and nature:** Visit a site of great natural beauty, a geographic landmark (e.g. river, mountain, coastline), or a listed geographic area. What are the specific aspects of the place you visited, and in how far is it important to the people who live there? What kind of relationship does the community have to the area/place you visited? Is the appreciation of nature an inherent part of the community you lived in?

### Category Institutions & Companies

Visit a public or private institution or company, such as:

- publishing houses
- radio stations
- embassies
- hospitals
- factories
- ...

Pay particular attention to processes, devices, situations which are indicative of cultural characteristics. These can include conversations between employees you observe or take part

in, working processes or schedules, projects with other institutions or companies, or the content and implementation of a particular mission statement. In other words, how, for instance, is the communication between participants structured and what may be concluded from conversational routines as regards the participants' and/or institutions' intercultural background? In which way(s) is/are (the) organizational structure(s) (e.g. the hierarchy between different groups of employees or employers and employees) representative of a particular corporate or institutional culture? How does a particular institution or company contribute to the creation or maintenance of an intercultural context?

### **Category Media**

- Follow, in the original English version, a popular TV programme or series which reflects the target community's national consciousness or culture. This may, for example, be a period drama or even a sitcom produced in your target culture. Which topics are touched on and how are they depicted? Do you see similarities to your own cultural background?
- Choose one topic currently under debate in the anglophone media. Would you expect the same kind of media coverage in Germany? Why? Why not? What makes this topic relevant in your opinion?
- Listen to an anglophone radio station. What tastes in popular music seem to predominate? To what extent does this reflect the various influences of cultural diversity within the target culture? How does it compare to your experience of music?
- Collate and describe several examples of advertising in the target community. Explain and analyse what they communicate about aspects such as citizenship, identity, ethnic and racial communities or, more generally, the notion of belonging. How does the country of your choice market itself internationally? Is there a specific image that is communicated to attract tourists? If so, do you find this reflected in your daily experiences?