

My Reflective Journal

I hardly know where to begin when reflecting on this program—it has truly been an emotional roller coaster. However, let me start from the very moment I first saw the announcement on Neptun.

My name is Chuma Chiamaka Juliet, and I am an international student from Nigeria studying in Hungary under the Hungarian Government scholarship. The moment I saw the post; I wanted to disregard it because I thought I was not capable of participating. But after much thought, I decided to give it a try and put myself out there—because if I do not step up, how else will I overcome my habit of self-doubt or even know that I can do it? It took me quite a while to decide—so much so that I ended up submitting my application just one day before the deadline.

After submitting, I anxiously waited to hear if I was qualified or not. Every notification ping on my phone felt like a tiny poke to my heart—I'd instantly check, hoping it was about the program, only to find it was something else. Then, the big day arrived: I can still vividly remember it was the 18th of July at 4:16 PM, at my friend's after-graduation party. It felt like a double celebration when I read the email saying I had qualified, but that I still needed to participate in an interview for the final selection. I doubted myself again but gave myself a quiet pep talk—I promised not to back down and to do my best. If it didn't work out, at least I wouldn't have given up without trying. So, during the period before the day of the online interview, it was originally scheduled for the 22nd of August 2025 but, due to a Hungarian national holiday on the 20th of August 2025, it was postponed to the 27th of August 2025. During that time, I travelled to the UK for my summer holiday. It was a wonderful and enjoyable break, yet a small part of me remained uneasy because of the nervousness about the upcoming interview. Every day, I practiced some basic French in preparation and also had practice sessions with my aunt, whom I really appreciate for her patience and encouragement. Her support gave me strength and confidence when I doubted myself.

The big day finally arrived—my interview was scheduled for 11:30 AM. Honestly, I didn't sleep a wink the night before, overwhelmed by preparation. When the moment came, I joined the online call, took a deep breath, and reminded myself to stay confident and do my best. The professors were kind and welcoming, which helped ease my nerves, and the interview went well.

After it ended, I breathed a sigh of relief and personally felt that I had done my best, though I was still anxious awaiting the result. When the results arrived—unexpectedly quickly, the very next day—I was in the kitchen preparing a meal when my phone chimed. Seeing the email notification titled “Interview Results,” my heart pounded and felt really heavy. I closed my eyes and whispered a quick prayer before opening the message. I read the professor’s words and slowly scrolled down to the list of candidates. As I scrolled, doubt crept in, but then I saw it: Number 9. Chuma Chiamaka Juliet, highlighted in green. In that moment, happiness washed over me, and excitement made me lose my appetite completely. I immediately called my parents, and their joy was infectious. Later, when my aunt returned from work, I shared the wonderful news with her. The rest of that holiday felt perfect—it brings a warm smile to my face even now as I write this, remembering how happy and full of hope I felt.

From that day forward, everything went smoothly: the application for the Pannonia scholarship to fund the trip and logistics, the administrative processes and the arrival of two French professors for preparatory visits. We had engaging and fun online tasks as part of our preparation. I was truly excited and eagerly anticipating my first trip to France, plus another chance to meet people from around the world. To be honest, I wasn’t worried about my level of French. I felt confident in my listening skills and trusted that if I encountered difficulties, others would help me. Oh, how wrong I was... But that is a story for another time. Let’s just say my French skills would present challenges I hadn’t fully anticipated. Still, I looked forward eagerly to my first experience in France in such an intercultural setting.

So, I was scheduled to fly to France on the 23rd of November on a 6:05 a.m. flight. We travelled from Győr to Budapest around midnight: Tanya, a senior student responsible for the mobility, and me. She helped with the practical organization and made the journey feel less overwhelming. We waited in the airport until boarding time, but my mood suddenly dropped when my skincare products were confiscated at security because they exceeded the 100 ml limit. I felt really upset, as if things were already going wrong before I had even left Hungary. I called my mom, and she calmed me down with her reassuring words; moms really have a special way of making everything feel lighter. I was also grateful that my friend Alitsala was there, which made me feel less alone in that stressful moment.

We arrived in France, and although I was still a bit down, I slowly started to feel happier. However, another problem came up. We landed at Paris-Orly and had to take a bus to Le Mans, the city where the event would take place. Just as we were about to board the bus and needed to show our tickets, my phone, which held my bus ticket, died on the spot. For a moment, I truly thought the universe did not want me to be in France. I was close to tears when I suddenly remembered that I had already sent my ticket to Tanya so she could forward it to the university for the Pannonia Scholarship administrative process. That realization brought huge relief. We boarded the bus and finally arrived safely in Le Mans.

At the apartment, everything seemed fine until I tried to charge my phone and realized I had brought a three-pin charger, while the socket only accepted two pins. That was the point where I finally broke down emotionally. It felt like one thing after another was going wrong, and I started to think that maybe I wasn't meant to be in France. I had managed to charge my phone a bit on the bus using just my USB cable, but now I felt completely helpless. I stepped out of the apartment and called my mom again. It was a long call, and she listened patiently, comforted me, and reminded me that setbacks do not define the whole experience. I appreciate her so much for that; she made me feel seen and heard. I also felt guilty that I couldn't fully enjoy my first day in France, but I tried to console myself by thinking that everything happens for a reason and that tomorrow could be better.

That evening, we all had dinner together and practiced for the presentation planned for the next day. Being with the rest of the group helped me forget my sadness for a while. I was especially thankful to my friend Alitsala, who let me charge my phone with her power bank using my USB cable directly. Small acts of kindness like that meant a lot to me. In the end, I did not get to present because of the time limit for the groups; so, I stopped practicing after that. Still, the shared preparation created a nice team spirit.

The next day marked the official beginning of the programme, held at Le Mans University. It was exciting to go to the university together. The event started with the introductory group presentations, followed by an overview of the programme for the week. Afterwards, we went to the cafeteria for lunch, and later we had a city tour. At the meeting point, we were divided into groups and played a treasure-hunt game, a bit like "Clue." We had to follow written clues to move around the city and find a hidden "pearl." It was at this moment that I realized I should have been

more worried about my level of French. The entire game and its instructions were in French, and everyone around me seemed to be fluent. I felt quietly embarrassed. However, my treasure-hunt group, especially the Italian girls, never made me feel left out. They kindly explained the words and clues whenever I didn't understand. I felt really grateful for their patience and kindness. We also took lots of pictures to capture those moments. The day ended on a positive note, and we all went back home tired but happy.

On Tuesday, we had a tour of Le Mans University. The campus was very large and beautiful. Around noon, we had lunch at the university restaurant, where the food was surprisingly tasty and comforting. After lunch, we attended a sort of book conference, where people at the front table discussed several books—about four in total. It felt like a literary roundtable, and even if I couldn't catch everything in French, I appreciated being exposed to different perspectives on literature. We finished earlier that day because we had to wake up early the next morning for a trip to another city.

On Wednesday, we travelled by coach to Angers with all the participants in the programme. In the morning, we stopped at a small bookshop before starting the main activity. We were divided into groups and asked to write a poem or short story using our different languages. It was a very creative and fun exercise, mixing cultures and words from various mother tongues. Later, we presented our texts to the others and then went on a city tour of Angers. That day, I felt a lot of joy, fun and excitement. We also took pictures and short videos of our group work and presentations, which helped me remember how creative and lively the atmosphere was. In the evening, we returned to Le Mans, but those of us from Hungary decided to go out again for dinner and a bit of extra fun, which made the day feel even more special.

The following day started a bit later because the coordinators realized we needed rest, and they were absolutely right. That day turned out to be my favourite of the whole event. It was full of creative activities and games, and we had to act out the story we had written the previous day. That was the moment I realized that acting is definitely not my calling, and I like to joke about it. Still, I laughed a lot and enjoyed myself because, in the end, the goal was not perfection but participation and joy. I was thrilled because we got to perform on a real stage, with lights and an audience, which gave me that “performer” feeling. We stayed until around 7 p.m. for a small banquet. Writing about it now brings a big smile to my face; I truly loved every moment of that

day. Of course, we took many photos that evening—on stage, with the lights and the audience in front of us. Looking back at them now, they bring back the excitement and pride I felt in that moment.

The last day of the event felt bittersweet. Sadly, I did not attend the final official session in the morning because I was ill and was advised to stay in the apartment and rest. I left around noon to try to catch up with the group, but by the time I arrived, most people had already left, and only a few participants were waiting for the tram to go sightseeing at the Abbaye de l'Épau. I felt quite emotional because I had developed small but meaningful bonds with some of the participants, and it was hard to accept that everything was ending so soon. I even felt a little tearful, wishing the experience could have lasted longer, but I reminded myself that, like all beautiful things, it had to come to an end. A small group of us went to visit the abbey despite the rain, which slightly spoiled the mood, but the outing was still pleasant in its own quiet way.

After the sightseeing, I said goodbye to several people I might never meet again. A few of us went to buy souvenirs—small items to take home as memories of this French adventure. Later, a final dinner was planned, but I could not attend because I wanted to make time to try an African meal at an African restaurant before leaving. Tasting that food made me genuinely happy; it felt like a warm connection to home in a foreign country. The next day, it was time to leave France. We tried to experience a little bit of Paris before heading to the airport, but we did not have much time as we needed to be punctual for our flight back to Hungary. As I boarded the plane, a wave of sadness came over me. I felt that something beautiful had ended, but I also knew that life had to go on and that this experience would stay with me for a long time.

After returning to Hungary, I felt genuinely happy and grateful that I had been able to take part in such an enriching activity. I made new friends, had fun, discovered new places, and learned new things, but above all, I finally experienced France for the first time in my life. I felt both honoured and thankful to have been chosen for this opportunity. I also noticed a small but meaningful improvement in my French, especially in listening and simple interactions. More importantly, I gained confidence in myself. Performing on stage was a big step outside my comfort zone, and even my professor was surprised to see me speak out loud so clearly. It became a kind of inside joke: she told me she would remember that performance as proof that I can actually speak

up in class if I ever try to speak too softly again. That moment made me realize that I am capable of more than I usually think.

This experience is something I will remember for the rest of my life. It connects directly to my professional goals, because I study International Relations, and this kind of intercultural environment is exactly the world I want to work in. Meeting people from different countries, collaborating in multiple languages and adapting to new situations all helped me develop skills that are important for my future career, such as communication, cultural sensitivity and resilience.

For any student interested in this scholarship or a similar mobility programme, my biggest advice is: do not let self-doubt stop you from applying. Even if you think your language level, background or confidence are not “perfect”, take the chance and submit your application, because opportunities like this can change you more than you expect. Prepare seriously for the interview, practice the language of the host country as much as you can, and do not be afraid to ask for help—from family, friends, teachers or former participants. Finally, remember that things will not always go perfectly during the journey, but every challenge on the way can become part of your growth and your story.

To end this reflection, I just feel deeply grateful—to my family, friends, professors, the Pannonia scholarship administrative team, Széchenyi István University and everyone who made this experience possible and supported me through the difficult and beautiful moments. Their encouragement, patience and kindness helped transform what could have been just a trip into a meaningful step in my personal, academic and professional journey.