

PRESENTATION OF ASEFUAN CULTURE CAPSULE

What is ASEFUAN ?

Since 1996, member States of the European Union (EU) and countries of the ASEAN+3 process hold regular summits, entitled *Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM)*, to promote dialogue, cooperation and understanding between Asia and Europe. The *Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)*, a permanent secretariat located in Singapore, has been created to implement and further ASEM's aims and decisions.

The *ASEF University* is a two-week selective program for 45 talented and promising university students held twice a year in different places in Asia and Europe. It provides young participants with hindsight on a current topic through lectures given by first-class scholars, diplomats and professionals, while personal opinions and comments are shared in subsequent workshops. Since 1999, 12 ASEF Universities have gathered more than 500 students from ASEAN+3 and EU member States around themes ranging from security issues to the protection of the environment.

Enthusiastic and grateful, participants in ASEF Universities have established a non-profit organization of their own, the *ASEF University Alumni Network (ASEFUAN)*, to promote friendship and understanding among peoples in Asia and Europe through diverse activities and projects. ASEFUAN Culture Capsule is one of them.

What is ASEFUAN Culture Capsule?

Culture capsule is a flagship project of ASEFUAN that involves cultural exchanges between students aged 9-17, from elementary and secondary schools in Asia and Europe. The initiative promotes friendship and better understanding among students by giving them the opportunity to trade local items, cultural symbols, letters and photographic records to their counterparts in the other country. The Culture Capsule initiative hopes to encourage students to gain a broader perspective by seeing other parts of the world through the eyes of a fellow student. Concrete and fun exchanges enable students to compare lifestyles, debunk existing stereotypes and misconceptions and, most importantly, gain appreciation and respect toward different cultures.

Since the establishment of ASEFUAN, three Culture Capsules have been organized by ASEFUAN members and partner schools: between Austria and the Philippines; France and Korea; and Germany and Indonesia. Although former Culture Capsules were cross regional, cultural differences between ASEAN+3 States and EU countries in addition to opportunities offered by ASEFUAN's geographic pervasiveness, lead us to promote the creation of intra regional Cultural Capsules as well. Why not a Spain-Poland Culture Capsule, or one between Japan and Indonesia?

The name of our project stems from the means through which it is carried out. Letters, objects and pictures representative of students' daily life will be put in a parcel, the "culture capsule", and sent abroad to the partner class. Imagine students "ooohing" and "aaahing" as items are brought out of this "culture capsule" coming from a distant country!

Here is a list of what can be included in the parcel. These are just proposals, as students or teachers may come up with original ideas. What has to be kept in mind is the objective of Culture Capsule, i.e. to promote mutual understanding and respect between young people from different countries.

- Each student should find a (nor too big nor too heavy) object that he think best describe his country and environment. This object can be a toy, a CD, a picture, candies, typical food, a t-shirt, a drawing, a book, etc.

- Each student should write a letter to introduce himself, his country and the object he gave. The letter should include the student's photo and home address.

- Teachers in charge of the classes involved in the Culture Capsule could also exchange letters as a way to promote exchanges between education personal in different countries.

- One student from the class shall be selected to record his/her day with a disposable camera. If possible, a digital camera could be used by several students, and their pictures transferred to a CD-Rom that would be put inside the parcel. Among the pictures shall be a group picture of the class, pictures of the school and classroom, and photos related to daily activities, such as family picture, food eaten during breakfast, lunch or supper, the view on the way to school, extracurricular activities like sports and friends, and possibly pictures of the main monuments of the city the school is situated in.

Once parcels have been exchanged between classes, bridges will have been created between the youth of two distant countries. Although the main goal of ASEFUAN's Culture Capsule, giving the opportunity to students in different part of the world to gain a deeper understanding of one's another culture through concrete exchanges, will be fulfilled, we sincerely hope that it will just be the beginning of further exchanges between classes or even students. More parcels could be sent, and students could forge strong friendship with a foreign "pen pal".

Making the best of opportunities, solving potential difficulties

What is the concrete role of ASEFUAN members in organizing Culture Capsule?

ASEFUAN members who get involved in the Culture Capsule project only wish to be rewarded with the smile of young students taking part in a cultural exchange program. They look for an interested class in the country they come from or where they reside, and communicate with fellow ASEFUAN members to find a potential partner class abroad. In this research process, the age of the students as well as the language they study will be considered. Close personal friendships that have been established during ASEF Universities are a great asset in this respect. ASEFUAN members contact schools and teachers, explain what Culture Capsule is about and promote the project.

Once two partner classes will have been found, a local ASEFUAN member shall come to the classroom and present the project and the partner school's country to the students. The local ASEFUAN member should be informed of what students intend to include in the parcel so that he can transmit relevant information to its fellow ASEFUAN member in the partner class's country. He/she will come back to the classroom once the parcel has arrived to be there for its opening and provide explanations on certain items.

In some cases, no ASEFUAN members may live close to the place where the partner class is situated. Yet, representants (friends, relatives) of ASEFUAN members can be sent to help partner classes; also, permanent contact can be established between ASEFUAN members and teachers through emails and letters. Although it would be best to have an ASEFUAN

member come to the classroom and explain Culture Capsule, we hope “logistic” difficulties will not deter some classes to take part in such a rewarding activity. Help from the school staff will not only be greatly appreciated, but is necessary to the success of Culture Capsule.

How to send the parcel and pay for related expenses?

Once letters, objects and pictures to be sent to the counterpart class have been gathered, they shall be put in a parcel and sent directly to the partner class abroad. Local ASEFUAN members can come to pick up the parcel and go the post office to weight it and mail it to the partner class. Or these steps can be taken by the school staff. Such details have to be settled on a case by case basis (for example, do the local ASEFUAN local member has a car and will thus be able to carry a quite heavy parcel to a possibly distant post office?).

Concerning expenses, ASEFUAN is willing to pay for a disposable camera and the cost related to sending the parcel to a foreign country. Yet, it would appreciate any financial help from schools involved in the project or from the families of the students. This question also has to be discussed between people in charge before the activity is carried out.

In what language should students communicate?

Given the age and language abilities of the students, language difficulties may come up. Yet, such difficulties could also be turned into opportunities.

In writing their letters and in reading those of the foreign partner class, students could be assisted by their language teacher, the English teacher for instance. This process could be turned into teaching material by teachers, so that the foreign language abilities of the students would also benefit from their involvement in Culture Capsule. Ideally, German students studying Chinese and Chinese students studying German, for example, could be put in touch through the Culture Capsule project.

In case the language barrier is substantial, objects and pictures only could be included in the parcel and relevant information on each of them given to the local ASEFUAN member, who would transmit it to its fellow ASEFUAN member in the partner class’s country.

ASEFUAN hopes this presentation will induce you to take part in ASEFUAN Culture Capsule. For further information,

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- About ASEFUAN: www.asefuan.net
- About the ASEF University: www.asef.org/asef-uni
- About the Asia-Europe Foundation: www.asef.org