

JOURNEY TO DISCOVER THE WORLD

"Stop waiting for things to happen, go out and make them happen."

Vendula Vankova (2014)

In some point of life, people can realize their life is not exactly how they would like it to be. But to make a decision to change it is not easy. I was always a dreamer living a boring life by daylight and spectacular life full of adventure by night. But I could not find *the* power to do something with *it*. Finally, my life has changed by a coincidence. A friend of mine was asking on his Facebook wall if there was someone to hitchhike around France with him. And I replied "It sounds nice." without anticipating the consequences. Few days later he bought flight tickets to Paris. I was shocked but there was no way back. Our journey around France was amazing and I have realized one very important thing. If you want things to happen, you have to make them happen.

Travelling is very enriching, but even more valuable is to find a job or an internship abroad. Why is it so important? First of all we all know there is a problem with high unemployment rate and the process of looking for a job has become very difficult - but there is always a possibility that in some other country they are looking for an employee like you. By working in a foreign company you can discover new trends in your professional field, different approach and work procedure.

But this kind of experience is not just about professional skills. We shouldn't forget about the soft skills. I see the fact that every experience gained in a foreign country influences your personality as very important. You become more open, self-confident, proactive and responsible, you get to know work habits of other nations, you gain the ability to work with people coming from a different cultural environment and you become more sensitive and perceptive regarding their needs, requirements and the way of behaviour. These are the skills which count. Especially in the case when you want to work for an international company or a company doing business abroad.

I haven't mentioned languages so far. The ability to speak foreign languages is a huge benefit coming from the foreign experience. For example in the Czech Republic, the country of my origin, people still do not see the importance of having rich language skills. It changes with time, but there is still many young people without the ability to say even a word in English. In comparison, if you visit Belgium or Luxembourg, you can see small kids speaking two or three languages fluently. By that time you realize that to learn ONE foreign language is just the beginning.

After I graduated from high school, I decided to go abroad alone for the first time. As I had two months of spare time I went to the Great Britain and I was looking for a job there. I was not very well prepared from my school regarding the language skills and I could not talk and express myself properly. So you can imagine I was not very successful there. Finally I have found a part time job as a housekeeper but obviously I did not earn too much money and I also could not learn English properly while cleaning the rooms in a hotel. But it helped me to realize one thing which you maybe do not realize during your studies at high school. English is not one of the boring subjects you have to attend during your studies – it is a key opening many doors for you.

I kept this thought in my mind and two years ago I went to Ireland for an ***Erasmus internship***. At the beginning it was quite adventurous, because during the first three weeks I did not understand my

boss. But with time it was getting better and by the end of my three and half month long internship I was able to express myself in English, moreover I gained important professional experience.

The possibility to go for an internship abroad is one of the amazing opportunities which young people have. Erasmus+ is one of the programmes which can help you with self-realization. I do not know the exact situation in Italy, but in the Czech Republic people know mainly about the possibility to study abroad and are not very well informed about the option to go for an internship. Personally, I find this option much better. Why? You gain a great working experience and it gives you all the benefits I have described earlier. Moreover it gives you an opportunity to transfer your knowledge into practice under a tutor who supervises you. Thanks to that you can learn a lot within a short period of time.

And there is also one fact which I find quite important for students or absolvents – it is much easier to find an internship than a job. The truth is that employers are open to the possibility to accept an intern because the internships are mostly unpaid and interns cover their living costs by scholarship received from the European Union.

You can choose a company which you like or an organization which cooperates with Erasmus interns. There are also databases containing reports of previous interns. It is a useful tool which gives you an image of usual activities carried out by interns in a specific company. I would advise you to make the expectations of your future clear as well as imagine where you see yourself in few years. The reason is simple. I believe that the best is to contact a company for which you would like to work in the future because there is always the possibility that they will be satisfied with your work and they will offer you a contract.

Regarding the Erasmus programme, there was a big change by the beginning of this year. It was transformed into the new period as an Erasmus+ programme. Regarding the internships you can find many new things reaching the needs of students. Since January, they have more opportunities to gain work experience abroad, because for every period of their studies (both Bachelor and Master) they have an opportunity to ask for a scholarship covering 12 months of an internship. What does it mean? Basically you can go for an internship during you Bachelor studies, then again during your Master degree and then again as an absolvent (in the previous period the programme for absolvents was called Leonardo da Vinci).

For example, the first internship I attended during my Master degree was in an Irish Au Pair and work & travel agency. Currently I am attending a second internship in the office of EURES Puglia and I plan to go for a third one as an absolvent. As I have already written, I was not able to speak English at the beginning of my previous internship. And I am in a very similar situation again - I can't speak Italian – yet. It is just all about finding the courage to change something in your life, pack your stuff and go. The low level of your language skills should not be the limitation. And where could you learn faster than with the people speaking the language you desire to learn?

But there are also other opportunities. I consider the **European Voluntary Service** being one of the best. The only limitation is the age. You can participate if you are between 17 and 30 years old. What is the European Voluntary Service? It is a programme which allows you to volunteer for a non-profit organization in Europe. As a volunteer you can work in a wide range of fields.

How does it work? You can look for organizations in EVS database (http://europa.eu/youth/evs_database). There you can find organizations involved in European

Voluntary Service. You should contact the host organizations for which you would like to volunteer for and send them your CV and a covering letter. The hiring process is very similar to the common job application process. Competitive. If you are successful, you can volunteer for the organization from 2 weeks to 12 months. Organizations often require the volunteer stays at least 6 months, but mostly one year. Your accommodation, travel costs and food will be paid from the European Union budget and you will receive some pocket money. You won't receive any salary, but! – you will have a great opportunity to work abroad with life expenses covered. You will gain amazing experience, professional skills and also language skills. And a great thing is that the host organizations usually do not require a high level of language skills and there is a possibility they will offer you to attend a language course for free.

"A bad attitude is like a flat tire. You can't go anywhere till you change it."

When I was talking about the current difficult situation, I was not talking just about European countries in general. For example the attitude of Czech people to their lives is very negative and they are still talking about economic crisis there. But if you check for example the unemployment rate in the Czech Republic, you find out it is not that bad. On the contrary. It has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the European Union. I have the impression it is more about how people perceive the world around them and about their attitude. If they wait for someone to offer them an opportunity, they could easily wait forever. It is necessary to be creative and open.

But I can see the situation is changing. There are so many people enthusiastic about their personal projects and so many start-ups. That indicates one thing. The times and the way of thinking are changing. People are becoming more creative and if there are no opportunities on the labour market for them – they create one. And that is important for all of us. When there are no opportunities, we should create them, we should go towards new challenges. It can be difficult and hard, but with the right attitude we can change the story of our lives.

"In the end, we only regret the chances we didn't take."