

Starting as volunteer in France, ending as professional.

This is the story of how I ended up living in France. In March 2019 I finished my master's degree in "International Studies" at the age of 27. One of my priorities at that point was to learn French and then try to find a job.

Somehow, I found myself looking for new opportunities in Europe and I found out several programs to work abroad. So I said to myself: "I could choose one among those, according to my passions and desire, that could match also with my life's priorities and with my needs to become economically independent". So, I proceeded to apply for some of them but, becoming a volunteer somewhere, I knew it could not be the first option to become independent. But I kept on with these procedures because I thought it could be a starting point. So here I am.

I started in October my European volunteering project, funded by the Erasmus + program for 6 months in France, and after three months I can say that everything is going well.

My project, was coordinated by ADICE in collaboration with Associazione Culturale ArciStrauss Mussomeli, that was my sending organization. That meant that I would be able to take part in a project consists in working in all the activities that the receiving organization was involved in.

My French experience started the day after my arrival; here I have been welcomed by my supervisor Maddy who has never hesitate to help me and to advise me in this new experiences.

She is the european project manager into the Association Community which is a private and non-profit organization located in Arques, Hauts-de-France region. The Association Community, is the cultural center that is hosting me as volunteer and is giving me all the tools and opportunity to improve myself personally and professionally. Moreover, this center offers to all the interested people workshops and activities of any kind, without any discrimination for ages or origins. Once, I understood which were their activities and priorities I started to show my interest in learning more about European project so, I also immediately starting to support my referent in projects already implemented at the local and international level.

Furthermore, it has not been so easy to adapt myself in a new city, in a new work environment and mostly to a really different temperature; something especially hard for a Sicilian girl like me.

Nevertheless, one of my big limits was since the beginning to communicate with people, for this reason I decided to start working with all the other volunteers (younger than me) and children who frequent the Association. This part of the work consists, especially, on the creation of workshops and manual activities having as aim the comprehension of a particular topic. In this sense, I could also have the chance to be creative and to focus on topics that I consider really important such as the climate exchange and the interculturality. This kind of activities helped me in starting learning basic sentences for basic conversations. In fact, the difficulties in terms of expression of our own feelings abroad resulting in one of the main problems. It can be cause of frustrations or no satisfaction, but the secret is to find someone who encourage you in improving and who is patient enough to understand you and your feelings. Here, at work, I found just people available, patient and passionate, able to understand me and to give me the strong inputs to keep going on. That was the main secret to overpass my limits and my period of adaptation.

In these months there have been a lot of things of whom I am proud of. First of all, my capacities to have good personal relationship with everyone around me, second I am really proud for all the things I have learnt so far and I am still in process of. Third, but not for importance I am really proud of myself because thanks to my ambitions, resilience and capacity to well integrate myself into a new context, I have also been able to deal with my fears and present myself for a work interview, obviously in French. I just did it and now I am a new employed at the Association Community and part of this big staff and family.

On a final note I will mention that this experience is, so far, one of the most significant for what concerns my professional growth. It is just my personal experience but I would like, through that, encourage everyone else to do more for their future, leaving the comfort-zone without forget that: the big dreams can become true only if there is passion and efforts in reaching them. I assure, it worth and you will not regret.

With love

Ornella





