

MY MOBILITY STORY



“Why not?” was the first thing that came to mind when I was offered the possibility and the necessary resources to enjoy a **3-month experience in Pésaro, Italy**, where I could put in practice the skills acquired during a year of training and also learn new ways to apply them. **I had everything to gain and nothing to lose.**

ÁNGELES MARTÍNEZ

After more than 15 years of experience as an **administrative accountant** in the private sector, I decided to give myself a break to become a mother, because I think it is a license that society has to allow us, since by nature it is up to us women to bring new lives into the world, ensuring future generations to maintain and advance our society.

The role of caregiver is one that can be adopted indistinctly by any component of the family structure, but in my case I decided to take advantage of the crisis in the construction industry and its subsequent years, as I was working in this sector as an administrative and it coincided with the birth of my daughter in 2008.

This break to be a mother and the family caregiver, together with my age, left me in a weak position to re-enter the working world. I had reached the dreaded 45-year-old barrier, so I decided to take back the reins of my professional life, relying on the public resources that the Spanish state and Europe provided me with. I went to the offices of LABORA (Valencian Employment and Training Service) and the Guidance Department advised me to do some training, recycle and professionally bring myself up to date before returning to the working world: we live in an ever-changing society and the needs and skills to be covered are constantly changing –something I am very aware of, because I belong to the analogue generation and, throughout all my life, I have had to continually readapt to technology.

The result of the interview with LABORA's Guidance Department did not take long to materialise and I was selected for an employment workshop co-funded by LABORA and the Alzira City Council through its local development department, **IDEA**, the agency that manages employment, training, entrepreneurship, commerce and European projects. At the end of 2019, I started a Certificate of Professionalism (CP) Level 2 and then a Level 3 one, which I finished in December 2020. For one year, I had a training contract that allowed me to train and provide the minimum income necessary to support my family by ensuring a decent quality of life for my daughter.

During the first CP, **"Telehealth Call Management"**, I learned how to manage, deal with and understand the needs of the users of a telehealth service. I also got to know another resource at our disposal to improve the quality of life of our elderly and dependent people.

In the second CP, **"Community Mediation"**, I was able to acquire the knowledge and

skills necessary to attend to users at risk of social exclusion and, thanks to mediation, help them to coexist and integrate into the community.

At the end of the CPs, IDEA offered me the possibility of opening up new horizons and learning how social policies were developed in Europe, putting at my disposal all the logistical and economic means that allowed me to spend three months

"Why not?"

immersing myself culturally, socially and professionally in another country. This experience helped me to understand that **Spain is not a part of Europe: it is Europe**, and its purpose is to break down social barriers by unifying social and health policies and services, guaranteeing the security and well-being of its citizens. I comprehend this when, 45 days into my stay in Italy, I had a fall and suffered a sprain, for which I had to go to the emergency room of the hospital in the city where I lived. Just by showing my European health card, the protocols of care and professional treatment were no different from those in Spain and, in a difficult situation and alone as I was, as I didn't share this experience with any of my colleagues, I was made to feel at home. In addition to this situation, we were in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, so access to public services was subject to strict security, hygiene and personal distance measures, which I had no problem with because they were virtually the same as in Spain.

I had definitely achieved one of the main objectives of the mobility – **to feel like a full-fledged European citizen**.

WHAT WAS THE MOBILITY ABOUT?

Before starting my story, I would like to emphasise that, out of 30 students from different 2020 employment workshops, only I participated a mobility. They all feared the uncertainty of the pandemic, but I thought «Whatever happens to me here may as well happen to me over there». Besides, I had travel insurance and a European health insurance card, I had been learning Italian for an intense month and I was ready to be understood and to understand them.

For three months, **I lived in the city of Pésaro**, in the region of “Le Marche”. I lived in a residence called “Villa Borromeo”, where I had a room, a bathroom, a television and a study table. I shared the kitchen with other residents in shifts since, because of the pandemic, we couldn’t meet in the dining room of the kitchen, and we would only go there to cook, heat something or use the fridge.

My workplace was an NGO called “Onlus Gulliver”, whose work was the reintegration of socially excluded people both at work and socially. They had a warehouse where people from the city and the surrounding area brought second-hand goods fit for use: furniture, kitchenware, computers, baby and childcare items, books, clothes, shoes, accessories, home decoration, lamps and any other object that could have a second life. They had an orderly and controlled work structure, from the reception of the merchandise, selection, cleaning and disinfection to the conditioning, storage and display in the shop, as well as cleaning and maintenance. All these objects were displayed in sections in a large warehouse with a symbolic price that people paid, but, when referred by Social Services, they were given without payment whatever they proved to need. All the proceeds from the sale of the available inventory went to the maintenance and cleaning of the warehouse.

The people who worked in this organisation were all **volunteers** except for 4 workers, the ones that managed the offices and tutored the workers that received benefits from Social Services, the City Council or the state. These workers collaborated as well with the maintenance of the organisation in different positions at the warehouse. The people who worked there as volunteers were immigrants

with residence permits, people who had a debt with the justice system and had been sentenced to community service, people with addictions in the process of rehabilitation... All of them had never worked before, they did not know the company hierarchy and it was difficult for them to keep timetables and discipline, but, little by little and patiently, the people from the organisation guided and modelled them during the year that the programme lasted, and some of them managed **to improve their lives**. My job was to be with these people, listen to them, guide them and make them understand that a job did not tie them down, but freed them and gave them opportunities to change. In the office, I learned how to manage grants, bureaucracy with public institutions, volunteers’ and users’ timesheets, and also to know the full organisation chart of the work structure.

At the end of my working day, I loved to take a walk to the port or the promenade. Pésaro is a welcoming city, open to the Adriatic Sea and with mountains, which I enjoyed every day, as the residence was located in a residential mountain area. The region where Pésaro was located was **“Le Marche”**, and there I discovered why it was the only region in Italy with the name in plural: in Italy they have a brand identity for each area, and this region is called **“la piccola Italia in Italia”**, ‘the little Italy within Italy’. Gastronomy, architecture and culture were all represented in the cities of the region. I was able to visit Urbino, the cradle of the Renaissance; Gradara, a medieval town; Fanno, a town with many Roman remains; and, above all, Pesaro, which I fell in love with, because it had everything: sea, mountains, culture, architecture, music, painting... although I could only enjoy its architecture, its promenade and its mountains. I did,

however, make friends with whom I still keep in touch.

I was able to demystify the belief that all they eat is pasta and pizza, just as here in Spain we don't only eat paella. The gastronomic richness and the vine variety of the region is excellent –I ate fish, meat,

vegetables, cold cuts, different varieties of bread, typical sweets and, of course, ice cream.

I would need much more space to describe everything about my experience and my feelings, about this ERASMUS+ mobility that has meant so much to me.

WHAT NEW KNOWLEDGE AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS HAVE I ACQUIRED DURING THE MOBILITY?

Behaviour and attitude directly affect the level of reintegration and employability. I could verify this in the volunteers I worked with and the desire and enthusiasm that some of them put in just for sweeping or sorting clothes or dusting.

Being aware of my vulnerability. When I had the sprain, I spent a few days morally very low. Later, I realised that I needed patience and resilience.

Intergenerational coexistence, cultural and social diversity in the workplace. In the organisation, everyone (volunteers, workers) was under 35 years old, with the exception of the president of the NGO, the one in charge of the warehouse operation. Among all of them, the four workers on the payroll and the users who came to work, there was quite a diversity of ages and social and cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, the group was quite cohesive and respectful with each other and shared their ideas and their points of view. The young were

always enthusiastic, with good ideas, and the not-so-young confronted those ideas with good sense and self-criticism.

Learning to help without expecting anything in return, simply for the sake of helping, to put myself in the user's shoes and to understand and know what needs or wants they might have. I listened to the volunteers' stories with respect: there were scary stories, but I knew that listening to them was very important. They didn't need advice: they needed active listening and empathy.

Understanding that the current work model has nothing to do with the traditional one. Nowadays, the work model is measured by objectives and projects: the era of signing contracts is over. All organisations working with public funds organise their work and demand workers for the time strictly necessary for the project. I learned how to manage public funds and the bureaucracy required to receive and justify them.

Erasmus+

has changed

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WHAT PERSONAL SKILLS HAVE I DEVELOPED THANKS TO THE MOBILITY?

Language skills. I have acquired a B1 level of Italian and English completely from scratch, which allowed me to communicate with people from these countries in their own language.

Physical activity. Being active helps me to feel fulfilled, useful, socially connected and with my mind and body at peak performance.

Self-confidence. Thanks to the situations I have experienced in Pesaro, outside my comfort zone, I have gained a lot of self-confidence.

Resilience and patience. The day of the departure to Italy was more than 12 hours between planes and airports, with no fixed timetable. After about 40 days in Italy, I slipped getting off the bus and twisted my ankle: I sprained it and cried with rage and helplessness, but I said to myself "This too shall pass". And after 15 days on crutches, it did.

Uncertainty and creativity. Uncertainty is the best ally: learning to live with it forces you to be alert, awake, learning and doing things... You perceive many more

external stimuli. I arrived in the middle of the pandemic wave: hotels and shops were closed, only those offering basic necessities were open; and every fortnight, the health protocols and, therefore, mobility were changed in a more or less restricted way. Until 20 days after being in Italy, I could not leave the city where I lived, Pésaro, so every week, on Friday, after knowing what the protocols would be like, I could schedule my days off for the weekend. I never stayed at home without going out: within the possibilities, I always had a good plan.

Dynamism. I was always willing to make plans with the people living in the residence –each from a different region of Italy or even from other countries– to integrate and immerse myself in their way of life and their way of spending their free time, in their gastronomy.

Empathy. I enjoyed understanding the problems of other countries and experiencing them, like the ones I encountered every day in the company where I did my internship. The users I worked with were people who either had a third degree in prison or some kind of addiction or mental illness.

Speed, risk-taking, and mental agility. The day I left Spain, at the time my flight was due to leave Madrid for Bologna, I was still in Valencia. When I arrived in Madrid,

"This Erasmus+ mobility has meant so much to me"

coinciding with the heavy snowfall, the airport was collapsed with snow and not many flights were taking off. Luckily, my flight to Bologna had also been delayed, so I arrived on time, but I didn't really know my departure and arrival times. However, it was clear that I wasn't going to make it to my final destination, Pésaro, that day, so I decided to book a hotel in Bologna online, from my phone, and tell them that I would arrive later than 10:30 or 11 pm. I took the risk of booking a hotel because of the uncertainty, but I couldn't arrive in Bologna and leave the airport either, because there was a curfew and half a metre of snow on the streets. When I arrived in Bologna, the bus didn't come, so I got a taxi to take me to the hotel. Finally, at 10:45 pm, I was at the hotel, happy because, thanks to the delay, I was going to be able to visit Bologna, since, during my stay, I would probably not be able to leave the region where I was going to live to visit this city, and so it was.

Quick adaptation to change. The Italian working hours and mealtimes are different from those in Spain. Even the natural light is different: at 4:30 in the morning it was daytime, and at 5 pm at night, so the day was short and the night was long, but after three days, my physiology had caught up with the new routine.

HOW HAVE MY JOB PROSPECTS IMPROVED?

I have retrained and acquired new skills that strengthened my employability, because they make me think, do and work better. I am able to solve faster and take risks in changing environments. I can easily adapt to working and living in a difficult and changing environment with safety measures, personal distance and high hygiene. I have improved my patience and I am able to take risks.

AFTER THE MOBILITY, HOW HAS MY PROFESSIONAL SITUATION CHANGED?

I keep training through "Aula Mentor", an online training platform of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. I am also continuing my language training by attending Italian, English and Valencian classes. In addition, I participated in a one-week European mobility thanks to Erasmus+ with the project "Mobility of Youth workers. Something in Common. Qualcosa in comune" organised by the InCo Association of Molfetta (Italy) in 2020.

Currently, I am working as an administrative assistant in an IDEA's project: "El teu itinerari vital", a project of labour reinsertion for people at risk of social exclusion from different cultural and social backgrounds. Thanks to my administrative knowledge and experience, added to my knowledge and skills acquired throughout the Certificates of Professionalism and, later, in the internship in Italy, I have a better understanding of the process of reception of users and customer service, as well as the bureaucracy for the management of public funds.

WHY DO I RECOMMEND PEOPLE TO DO A MOBILITY IN ANOTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRY?

No doubt, the path may be uncomfortable, but the experience is very positive. Fear is the greatest ally of wasting time, so this experience is **the best stimulus** to redo our internal baggage. It's a transitional period to think about how and in what way can we restart or begin a professional career, work on our new professional identity and plan a route that allows us to seek employment opportunities according to our skills and abilities, while acquiring new ones. It's **a time to rediscover oneself** outside the comfort zone; it's a process of transformation for the better, discovering skills that you didn't know you had, basically because you had no need to use them; it's a powerful period necessary to think about who you are, what you want, what you want your life to be like and with whom you want to spend it in the professional context; and it's also an important period because our professional future and its quality is our own responsibility and we have to take care of it.

Facing these changes towards a new working horizon is not easy, but the Erasmus+ mobility not only gives you the logistical and financial means, but there's also a host organisation in the country where you are going for your mobility that will accompany you and help you whenever you need it.

The future will be for robots and artificial intelligence, but it will need people able to work with them, people able to adapt to the constant changes that are coming, and what better training than an Erasmus+ mobility in which you will have to improvise every day, be alert to your surroundings and assert yourself with all your skills and create new ones.

Our careers are a professional adventure. The time of stability is over and we have to prepare ourselves for continuous change, **always learning and always evolving.**

To see more about her experience, visit:

<https://youtu.be/8rNqYFfRPiA>

“Erasmus+ has changed my life. I can now talk about my Erasmus+ mobility as a life-changing experience, because it has been the turning point on the road to my employability, and because life is about trying.”