

LEONARDO DA VINCI

MOBILITY AMBASSADORS 2006



Education and Culture

FOREWORD



Ute Haller-Block European Commission leonardo da vinci mobility coordination

Have you thought about going to France for six months on a work placement as a young cook? Or 6 weeks to Germany as an apprentice in the mechanical industry? Or have a 4 month work experience in Poland as a student in architecture? Or to explore as a vocational guidance specialist the approach to guidance applied in Finland? Since the year 2000, the Leonardo da Vinci Programme has helped around 280.000 persons to realise their idea of getting an insight of professional life in another European country.

It is impossible to describe all these various experiences. Particularly as the Leonardo Programme covers very heterogenous target groups, professions and situations. But the few examples described in this brochure give a good picture of what a Leonardo experience can be like and of the effects and impact it can have on your personal development, your job perspectives and your qualifications.

And this is certainly a good start to employment in an increasingly interconnected and international world where job seekers are regularly competing for are "mobility, flexibility and foreign experience" – independent of the form of education or vocational training you have followed. A Leonardo grant offers a unique chance to gain training and work

experience in a foreign country. It not only allows young people to acquire new competences and professional skills, but also to develop specific abilities to adapt to a new linguistic, cultural and professional environment. As teachers, trainers or vocational training specialist you have the possibility to exchange experiences with your counterparts in other European countries.

The positive side-effect of these placements are that they contribute as a whole to the development of a European Labour market. The trans-national partnerships which are the basis of the mobility projects contribute to the mutual understanding of the different education and training systems and to an increased transparency of these systems. They favour the modernisation of training systems in Europe and thus contribute to the overarching strategy of the European Union to become one of the most competitive economies in the world: the Lisbon Agenda.

Ambassadors for Leonardo! This is what the people interviewed in the following pages will be considered as. With their respective personal and professional experiences gained through the Leonardo da Vinci programme, they will stand as role-models for others to follow.



NATIONAL AGENCIES

Austria	http://www.leonardodavinci.at/
Belgium	(Flemish) http://www.vl-leonardo.be (French) http://www.fse.be/leonardo/leonardo.cfm (German) joseph.ganser@dgov.be
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AMBASSADORS



Markus Wasinger Anja Kaivers
Petr Novotny Eegi Saksing Aini
Kaikko Dorianne Saliba Andreia
Alves Pauline Illy Matthias Lex
Ellen Veel Viktoria Balla

2006X21



Jurate Samulionyte Siv Roland
Martina Pečnik Mariusz Zyngier
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“It wasn’t only a good experience to discover Europe and meet new people; it was also an excellent opportunity for his language skills”.

Markus Wasinger



Markus Wasinger austria>spain

Markus Wasinger (25) was in his early twenties when he and his entire class from vocational school traveled to Spain, thanks to the Leonardo Da Vinci project. He liked it there so much, he decided to go abroad again after his final qualifications exams, at the age of 23.

This second time, Marcus set off to Sweden, to work for five months in a carpenter’s shop. He learned to work with solid wood and was also integrated in the whole production process of many projects in the carpentry.

Marcus himself organized most of the projects there. The Swedish host

family was very kind and the company greeted him with open arms, which made his trip worthwhile.

It wasn’t only a good experience to discover Europe and meet new people; it was also an excellent opportunity for his language skills. In high school he was a flop in English. By going abroad to Sweden, where everyone speaks English fluently, he was able to practice the language everyday

From there on, his career only went up-hill. After his placement in Sweden he won a tender to design and build furniture for a new courtroom in Sarajevo and spent two

months there last summer.

At the moment, he’s in a college of interior design and timber technology in Villach. The college will be completed in June and then he will have the academic title of engineer.

Marcus highly recommends leaving your home country to gather more professional luggage. He is convinced that, without the Leonardo project, he’d still be working at a small carpenter’s shop in Burgenland. His experience with the Da Vinci project is a great/ example of the fact that work and education pay off.

Petr Novotny czech Republic > france

“As a young man from a small village in Northern Bohemia I worked in the car repair shop of my father and wasn’t even thinking about going abroad”. Nevertheless Petr went abroad, to France. “I had the support of my father as he wanted our garage to specialize in the repair of Peugeot cars.”

In Concarneau (France) he got the orders of his new boss, “I worked as a car mechanic and electro mechanic. I knew from home how to make all kinds of repairs and soon I was allowed to make the same repairs as other workers. I was the only “universal” worker in the workshop as other employees were specialized.”

Petr also liked the interesting challenges, “The most interesting and complicated challenge for me (due my poor French at the beginning) was to work with diagnostic equipment. To understand how it works I had to look for technical expressions in my technical dictionary that was outdated. Fortunately my colleague tried to describe it in other terms so I could find it in the dictionary afterwards.”

Petr was most surprised by the differences in working habits between the two countries, “There was a difference in the approach of work at the workshop. There also was a difference in the entire atmosphere, in ordinary life. Everybody was always willing to help and advise. Everything was going with a smile and stress less.”

He also found out about some less social habits, “On the other side the staff in the workshop did not keep relations outside work. They did not know where their co-workers life. They did not have each others private phone



“There was a difference in the approach of work at the workshop. There also was a difference in the en- tire atmosphere, in ordinary life”.

Petr Novotny



numbers etc. Also the working hours were kept very strictly. At half past five all workers stopped working whereas in

my country working overtime is usual in this type of work.”



“There isn’t such a big difference between the two countries as some people believe”.

Anja Kaivers



Anja Kaivers belgium>ireland

Seventeen year old Anja was selected from a group of students to go to Ireland, where she received the opportunity to work in the tourism industry. Her job included speaking on the telephone, interviewing people and processing their data on the computer.

“When arriving in Ireland, everyone was really surprised that I spoke their language. They were also very impressed that I had the courage to go and work abroad for three weeks.”

Anja didn’t find Ireland to be too different from Belgium. The biggest differences she found, were the hospitality of the Irish and the fact that if you encounter any problem, someone immediately reaches out to help you. “Something I found particularly funny was that the Irish tend to apologize for everything. In Belgium people are a bit more conservative socially.



“I’ve gained valuable experience in every one of these jobs. As a youth worker, I received and shared knowledge about culture, education, language and everyday life in Greece and Estonia”.

Eegi Saksing



Eegi Saksing estonia>greece

For nine weeks, the twenty-five year old Estonian youth worker Eegi Saksing went on a placement in Greece. “I went on a placement abroad with the purpose of broadening my mind and gaining new experiences and skills in working with children and young people within an other culture. I worked in three sectors while I was in Greece. The office of “Kids in Action”, a care-center for people with disabilities and the Center of Creative occupation for kids and adults.”

“I’ve gained valuable experience in every one of these jobs. As a youth worker, I received and shared knowledge about culture, education, language and everyday life in Greece and Estonia. The teachers of “Kids in Action” taught me that a good laugh is the best healer.

After having had the opportunity of working with disabled people in Greece, I was encouraged to start the same thing over here in Estonia. Now, there are several volunteers in my group with whom we visit hospitals, disabled people homes and orphanages, to help them have more fun and

creative activities which should make people laugh.”

“There are many big differences between Greece and my home country. The most important thing is the weather. It reflects on the everyday life like the work mentality, the siesta and the typical eating habits of the Greeks. At noon, when the sun is on its highest position, everything comes to a full stop, the shops close and everyone goes home to have lunch and take a nap. In Estonia the only thing that might stop people from working are heavy snow falls and, of course, national holidays.”

“The main difficulty for me was to understand the meaning of the word time. They told me that an important meeting would start at five o’clock. I ran home, took a shower, ate, changed my outfit and arrived, out of breath, at five o’clock sharp. All the others, including the person who reminded everyone to be on time, peacefully arrived one hour later. It really took time for me to get used to that kind of lifestyle, but after-all, working abroad was a great experience for me.”

Aini Kaikko finland>austria

In the autumn of 2003, Aini Kaikko, together with a fellow student from Tampere Vocational College, headed towards Vienna for a six-week Leonardo placement. The two young cultural ambassadors took Finnish delicacies such as dark rye bread, cloudberry jam to give to their Austrian hosts. On arrival in Vienna their luggage was already less heavy. They had forgotten their presents at the airport, except for a couple of jars of jam.

Aini chose Austria because of Austria's fine reputation in confectionary baking. She went to work for Café Demel in the capital, Vienna. She knew that Café Demel was a well respected and a traditional Viennese café and bakery. Aini was very well received there. In the beginning the tasks were easy, but soon she showed her skills and was given more demanding tasks.

There were a few differences in the Austrian working culture compared to what Aini had got used to in Finland. For example, she had to learn how to address her senior colleagues in the Austrian way. In Finland you can call your superiors by their first name, whereas in Austria that would be unheard of.

“One of the moments Aikka enjoyed the most was the selection for the Eurovision Songcontest Finals. She stayed in a dormitory with other international students. The atmosphere was really great when all of them were cheering for there own country”.

Aini Kaikko



Perhaps the knowledge does not have so much use in a country where the baking tradition is based on products made of rye.

One of the moments Aikka enjoyed the most was the selection for the Eurovision Songcontest Finals. She stayed in a dormitory with other international students.

The atmosphere was really great when all of them were cheering for there own country.

After the Leonardo period, she came back to Finland to graduate in 2003. After her graduation she returned to Austria to apply for a job at Demel. She was hired and stayed another year in Austria.



Pauline Illy france>ireland

My first goal was to improve my English and to meet people with a different way of life. I wanted to have an adventure to discover a new organization. I wanted to see what I could do with the innovative ideas I would bring back.

When I arrived I had no specific mission. After 2 weeks in the operating department I knew the organisation quite well. I also learnt the tools used to organise the transport.

I explained my motivation to my tutor and I asked her to let me work on other topics.

I started to work on the weighing and measurement of big parcels that were not checked before transportation. I created a new program which calculates the revenue up-lifts that were the results from my measurements. I made the company earn so much money that they asked me to organise and train the staff of the 2 other depots in the country.

The first thing you see is the driving on the left of the road but you get used to it quite soon.

Irish people take their time to live. Even though they are late or busy they always take a few minutes to talk to you and share a cup of tea or coffee.

But like us, they complain a lot and enjoy good food. It's not that difficult for French people to feel like home in Ireland.



I met the drivers that were working for TNT Dublin depot. It was quite difficult for me to understand what they were saying because they were speaking fast and with a strong accent, but somehow I managed to discuss with them. After one month, one driver told me in perfect French that his mother was French and that he spoke French quite good but he didn't say it earlier because he wanted to test my English. After that, we became very good friends.

A placement abroad definitely means something if you go looking for a job, but that's not the most important. When you spend a few times abroad, you develop much more your personality than when you stay at home. Personally, it helped me becoming more patient and tolerant. I made a lot of friends, too.

“Personally, it helped me becoming more patient and tolerant. I made a lot of friends, too”.

Pauline Illy





Matthias Lex germany>austria

Matthias Lex (21) has been doing an initial vocational traineeship with Munich International Airport to becoming a mechatronics specialist. He went for three weeks to the Vienna Airport to gain some experience abroad.

For me it seemed to be very interesting to stay with another European airport company for three weeks, to learn about their working methods, to meet Austrian colleagues, and not to forget to stay in Vienna longer than one would stay for a city trip. Besides this, it should be a lot of fun to go on the placement to experience the Austrian way of life.

My job there was to exchange trainees who are doing an apprenticeship in the technical area. The placement was a combination between work and leisure. It contained an internship with Vienna Airport, following the regular working hours of the Austrian

colleagues, as well as a cultural programme with visits to the most interesting sights of Vienna and its surroundings.

As Vienna Airport is a bit smaller than Munich Airport, the working atmosphere is more familiar. I also met a lot of friendly people in Vienna, who made my stay there so beneficial and comfortable.

Most of the people believe that the Austrian and the Bavarian culture are almost the same. For me it was very interesting to experience all the fine differences, like the different pace of life.

To enjoy the famous Viennese coffee house culture was one of the best cultural experiences. Instead of following the hustle and bustle and taking a quick, but weak coffee to go at an American coffee place, as it is very fashionable among young Germans, it was so relaxing to do as the Austrians do: take time and not

just have some ordinary filter coffee, but have a choice from a great selection of different coffee specialities and then enjoy this with one of the delicious Austrian cakes and reading a newspaper.

One funny incident was, when we went for lunch in the staff canteen at Vienna Airport and ordered a special kind of sausage, which is called "Viennese" in Germany. The lady behind the counter looked a little bit irritated asking us, if we meant "Frankfurter"

Going on a placement abroad does not only mean that you get an insight into another company and into another culture, but it also gives you another perspective concerning working processes in your own company and it might also provide you with a different view on own culture.



Ellen Veel netherlands>austria



"International experience increases my chances for a job significantly".

Ellen Veel

"My field of study, Biomedical Sciences, is very international. There is a lot of communication and collaboration on an international level between individual scientists, laboratories and institutes", says Ellen enthusiastically. Ellen Veel is a Dutch student in Biomedical Sciences who went on a placement in Austria to complete her last year of the bachelor education.

"For scientists it is very common to work abroad for a couple of years, for example to get a PhD. Therefore, I figured it would significantly increase my chances of getting a nice job if I already gained international experience as a student.

During this placement I have learned a lot on both professional and communicational level. At the immunology department where I did my placement many of my colleagues were foreign as well. I've worked with scientists from Colombia, Greece, Indonesia, Romania and of course Austria. It was very interesting to work and interact with people of such a diverse scale of nationalities and scientific backgrounds.

If you have an international career in mind, as I have, it is very important to be able to communicate with people from all over the world.

In order to become a good scientist, it is an advantage to be experienced in the use of many different techniques. At this institute I have had a lot of opportunities to improve my practical skills and to learn new techniques. Most of them are widely applied in the field of lab research.

I was very happy to be offered to participate in lab-courses that are part of the PhD program at the medical university of Innsbruck.

My host country, Austria, was not very different from my home country. Apart from the language and of course the good winter sport facilities, there were only minor differences between the two countries. The only difference that I have experienced in the work environment is that people in Austria are a bit more formal than in the Netherlands. The distance between the employer and employees is smaller in the Netherlands and titles are used less of-

ten. I absolutely did not experience this as something negative, it's just a little difference in mentality.

"I think that in every field of work or study it is a big advantage to have international experience. It shows that you're independent, not afraid to face new challenges. It is an excellent opportunity to do a placement abroad during your studies. You're probably still free and open-minded about your future career and you do not have much to lose.

Moreover, it is also very good for your personal development. It really makes you a stronger person to know that you can do all this on your own in a foreign country. I would encourage anyone who considers a placement abroad to just take the step. It's a very unique experience that I would have never wanted to miss!"

Viktoria Balla

hungary > united kingdom

It was very useful but not easy because I really felt like a stranger there. The youth workers had to do their best to integrate me in the group. But I learnt a lot about the work of local youth clubs and in the end I had both positive and negative moments. And I am sure that the British youngsters now know that Hungary is not the same as somebody that is hungry!

I could experience how much more organized the youth work is in the UK compared to Hungary. Every county has their own budget for youth clubs and they have also paid youth workers. We have a long way to go to reach the level where the British are now. But on the other hand I felt that we Hungarians with our non-profit spirit would have solved problems easier than them because of their many strict rules.

It's a very amusing way for the British young people (between 11 and 18 years) to learn how democracy works, to make a speech and to make a difference in their local community. We were so lucky that we could study a UKYP election process and even participate in a residential for the elected representatives of UKYP in the South West. It was an outdoor training opportunity/project with team building where the participants received a lot of information about the UKYP and learnt new skills like speech making, representing interests etc

During these 15 weeks lots of funny and strange things happened to me but I have a favorite story. Our accommodation was in front of a social center. The house with two apartments (we shared one in downstairs) was part of the center but was in a separate building. After one and a half months the employees told us that they were going to redecorate the whole centre and before the work could start, some repairmen would check the apartments.

In the next three weekends you can say we got some strange guests. First, a fireman arrived and changed the fire extinguishers. The next weekend we got an electrician that checked the alarm machine next to my bed. He was a bit rude.

The best was the third repairman. He was also an electrician who checked all the electric stuff in the flat and stuck little papers or put metal rings on them. The funny thing was that he put those rings and papers on my hairdryer and laptop as well... I hope he didn't write down my stuff in an inventory because in that case he will be in big trouble this year....

So I can say it's an unforgettable, wonderful, incredibly big adventure and you have to experience this.





“When it comes to childcare, Finland and Ireland are very different. We found the Finnish educational approach different the Irish one as it gives greater autonomy to the learner”.

Kate McAuliffe
Social services / Childcare



Kate McAuliffe ireland>finland

In 2001 Kate McAuliffe exchanged rainy Ireland for snowy Finland for a while. “It was minus 25°C and the landscape was snowbound. The climate was a challenge, but it proved no obstacle to the Finnish who drove in extraordinary conditions.”

When it comes to childcare, Finland and Ireland are very different. “We found the Finnish educational approach different to the Irish one as it gives greater autonomy to the learner. In awe of the greater application of technology in training and education, we were impressed by the integration of other nationals into the Finnish VET system. We believe that a similar approach could be successfully replicated in Ireland. We observed special after-school care/clubs in separate purpose built buildings and saw parks and public amenities made available for young people. We understood the concept that quality childcare should be viewed in the broader spectrum of supporting families.”

Kate went to Finland to visit two partners of the Cork College of Commerce in Turku as a tutor from the childcare section. “The reason for the placement was in the integration of children with special needs.” Especially on the aspect of integration the Finnish were doing a great job according to Kate. “In Espoo we observed teaching, training and student assessment and we visited work placements. The special training course for foreign nationals' pre-vocational training was of particular interest especially when we attended a class and observed the variety of linguistic backgrounds. We were convinced of the necessity of such a training course to assist cultural integration. Also students need the necessary language skills to participate in their adopted country.”

Not only in their educational approach Ireland and Finland are different: “I was not entirely convinced of the favorable conditions in (Ireland). We felt somewhat unsafe as the car we travelled in with staff on our trips to placement, seemed to glide on the surface and I definitely felt safer in the back seat.”

The Latvian girl, Anda Vaice, went to Germany to learn about something rather unknown in Latvia. "I went to learn in practice about Fair Trade, a completely new topic for 99,9% of the Latvian population. I was looking for knowledge and expertise that could not be acquired in Latvia." For Anda it wasn't entirely an unknown matter. "I went to contribute to the work of the Network of European Worldshops (NEWS!) with my (more than) 5 years experience in civic society organisations and with my ideas, knowledge, diligence and enthusiasm."

"My task was to work in the central office of NEWS!. I had to improve communication with the publics that are important for NEWS!. I basically worked on the renewal of the NEWS! website, collected information, communicated with NEWS! members, etc. Together with colleagues from the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and Austria, I participated in brainstorming and planning of a campaign to reduce child labour."

She wasn't the only new face in the office: "As the NEWS! office was recently moved from Brussels to Mainz, everybody was new in the city. Three employees arrived next to work on new projects and two more interns joined us during that summer." Nevertheless they easily got to know each other: "Practical issues like organising



"A great team spirit was developed during my stay. We worked together, but we also travelled together, had lunches and dinners, walked through the city".

Anda Vaice

a cleaning service for the office brought us closer. A great team spirit was developed during my stay. We worked together, but we also travelled together, had lunches and dinners, walked through the city..."

To Anda, Germany wasn't a completely strange country: "I already travelled through Germany and I regularly went to Berlin to meet my colleagues in the Global Education network of young Europeans (GLEN). So I met no surprises. 11 years learning German at school was very helpful."

While staying in Germany, Anda got to know other foreigners: "A few

weeks after my arrival, at the traditional Gutenberg book-fair and festival, I met a Polish guy. We started to chat, and among other things I told him that I missed my bike. He offered to lend me one so I could enjoy lovely rides along the Rhine, surrounded by the smell of maples after a rainstorm. After Roman and I met a few times, he implicitly expressed his wish to date me. I could not return like for like. The air was tight. And I suddenly whispered: will you take the bike away now? He did not, we continued to meet, play ping-pong or visit the botanic garden, and I saw many places in Mainz thanks to that bike."



Anda Vaice
latvia>germany

Jurate Samulionyte

lithuania > czech republic

“Film making is a widely international field. That’s why I wanted to get more international experience”.

Jurate Samulionyte / Producer

“Film making is a widely international field. That’s why I wanted to get more international experience”, says Jurate. Jurate Samulionyte is a 22 year old Lithuanian film student, who went on a placement in the Czech Republic for fourteen weeks.

“I was working at “North American Pictures” where I got the chance to be involved in every aspect of moviemaking. At first I found myself analyzing earlier scripts and budgets in order to get familiar with the various budgets and costs in the Czech Republic. I watched films produced by the company and directed by my mentor Lloyd Simandl.”

“Lloyd Simandl offered me the opportunity to assist him in producing his new film “Hunt for the Devil”. Under his supervision I created a budget for the production of the featured film. In the meanwhile, I learned working with different high-tech programs to make film- and shooting schedules.”

“During my time at North American Pictures I tried to get to know as much as I could about the film business which worked out well and they offered me work in various jobs during those 14 weeks. It gave me the opportunity to taste every aspect of moviemaking. I started out as an assistant director, script supervisor and ended up as assistant production coordinator. By doing these different jobs, I gained knowledge of all the functions and responsibilities of each crew member. However the most valuable piece of advice I got, was from my mentor who taught me all about the “plan B”- theory. Always prepare an alternative solution for every situation!”

“In the end the whole placement turned out as a big success for me and it was a great chance to test my theoretical knowledge in practice. Sometimes there were some difficulties because of the language, but isn’t that normal? What impressed me the most was the kindness of my co-workers, there was a very friendly and informal working atmosphere, where I could always expect a helping hand during the day, a nice lift afterwards, a relaxing chat or even a dinner at the weekend.”





Dorianne Saliba

malta>united kingdom

I didn't expect anything in particular. I was just hoping that no matter what, it would be great which in fact it was. We worked hard and produced a good amount of work and had fun at the same time. There was no pressure on us.

We attended Park Lane College in Leeds, where we followed a photography training focusing mostly on black and white films. We also experimented with mark making techniques.

It was awesome. I thought of myself as a private investigator preparing photographic evidence. Working in the dark room was unusual and exciting. The fact that we don't have photography equipment in our institute in Malta made this even more interesting.

First and foremost I learnt it's not easy to live 24 hours a day with

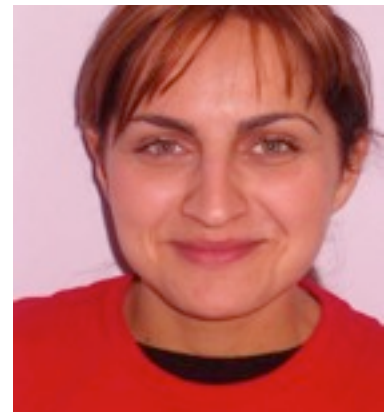
somebody. I lived in the same house with my best friend. In Malta we pass every single minute with each other. But when you live under the same roof

you have to learn to accept each others disadvantages. Apart from my friend I had to live in the home of strangers, with the host family and I had to work with students from different cultures. I learnt that I have to be more reasonable, more humble, more supportive and more independent.

There were six of us, two 'young men', and four beautiful ladies, basically of the same age. The reactions were different. The ones that missed the family and the family food, the ones that missed their lover and the ones who just wanted to enjoy it! They were all thankful that it happened. Even today at school, after four months, I still hear students that

have participated in the placement telling certain funny anecdotes. The least you can tell is that it was indeed an experience.

If I had to describe this experience in three words I would say Bibidi, Bobidi, Boo. In English: educational, unforgettable and fun.





Siv Roland norway>italy



“International experience increases my chances for a job significantly”.

Ellen Veel

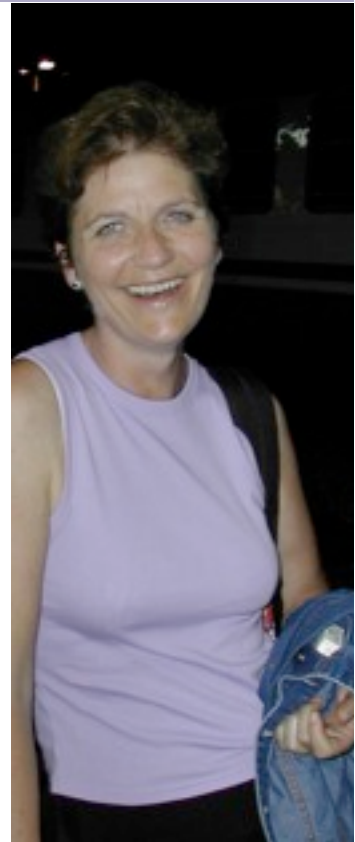
We heard about the Leonardo Da Vinci program by coincidence and attended an information meeting in the autumn of 2004. At first, we wished to send students, but that was impossible. Then we noticed the possibility for instructors and advisors to go on INST exchanges. Educating professional musicians, Italian language and culture are elements of great importance, especially in the fields of musical history, opera and the early renaissance music.

The exchange lasted for two weeks, and we attended 4 hours of language classes every day. Besides, we went on a lot of musical and cultural excursions, such as operas and concerts. We learnt Italian on a beginner's level. Actually, when we got back to Oslo, we started an Italian phonetics class for our students, and myself and several others have attended regular Italian classes here in Norway since the exchange.

We noticed some cultural differences in the conception of time. On one hand, everything is much more hectic and stressful; on the other hand, everyone always seems to have an ocean

of time. The Italian eating traditions are very different from the ones we were familiar with, whereas we eat all ingredients together in one dish; they split everything into smaller units and serve them separately. Of course, we noticed a strong difference in the performances we visited. Italian opera is directed very differently, much more pompous and also more rigid than the Norwegian tradition. For us as artists, the blend of very old and very modern cultural aspects was a great inspiration.

It was worth going on this placement because of the experience and the professional and cultural skills one can acquire. It was like a reward for several years of hard work to have the chance to attend these classes. We all use our new knowledge at work and in private, and we are already planning to do a follow-up course to learn even more!



Mariusz Zyngier

poland>holland

Mariusz Zyngier left his students, family and friends in Poland, to go on a vocational training in Holland for two weeks.

“International cooperation in the field of vocational education and training has always been a passion of mine.” In 2004 Mariusz organised, with Leonardo Da Vinci agency, a 4 week internship project in electronic companies for 4 students from the Electronic Technical Secondary School. They also discussed the concept of the project for teachers. “I was aware that only active participation on getting to know the best practices could ensure optimum methods of accumulating knowledge.”

“The main objective of the project was the development of the individual skills of beneficiaries with regard to teaching and examining electronic technicians. This was at the level of secondary education, verification of their own skills in relation to Dutch teachers and examiners.”

Being in Holland, Mariusz got to know the Dutch vocational education and training system, including life-long learning as well as training people after accidents and returning them to the labour market. He also observed new methods used in Dutch schools, collected learning materials and documents related to his work. “I improved my knowledge of technical professional vocabulary and terms used in the teaching of electronic subjects.”

“The reaction of my colleagues, who were the beneficiaries of the programme, was very positive. They participated actively in the preparation, implementation, accounting of expenses and dissemination of results.”

According to Mariusz, the Netherlands are a country with an established position of vocational education and training. “The introduction of graduates from



“The project under the Leonardo Da Vinci programme has become the most important element of my professional career path. It has also become a very significant part of my life “.

Petr Novotny



vocational schools to the labour market is prepared excellently, it is almost natural.” He was particularly impressed by the cooperation between electronic companies and schools. Mariusz claims that everyone should go on a vocational training placement abroad. “The project under the Leonardo Da Vinci programme has become the most important element of my professional career

path. It has also become a very significant part of my life! It simply drags you in.” Each new idea brings him sleepless nights and the characteristic choking feeling in your throat before the competition.

You simply get addicted to Leonardo Da Vinci, and there is no possible way to cure yourself.”

Martina Pečnik

slovenia > austria

When you enter Martina Pecnik's small wooden house on a hill at the foot of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, it's clear you have entered the living and working space of someone who is in love with mountains and nature. On her wall hangs a diploma stating she conquered Großglockner, the highest peak of Austria. She also has a lot of little souvenirs of her mountain expeditions and other kinds of expeditions everywhere.

After graduating from geography at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, this enthusiastic mountaineer went to search for a job connected to the protection of nature and working in the protected areas. But it seemed as if there was no such job available for her anywhere in the country. Martina refused to give up on her dreams, and started looking abroad.

Shortly afterwards she found out about the Leonardo da Vinci program. The program immediately got her attention. Martina decided this could be it, and she started preparing her project.

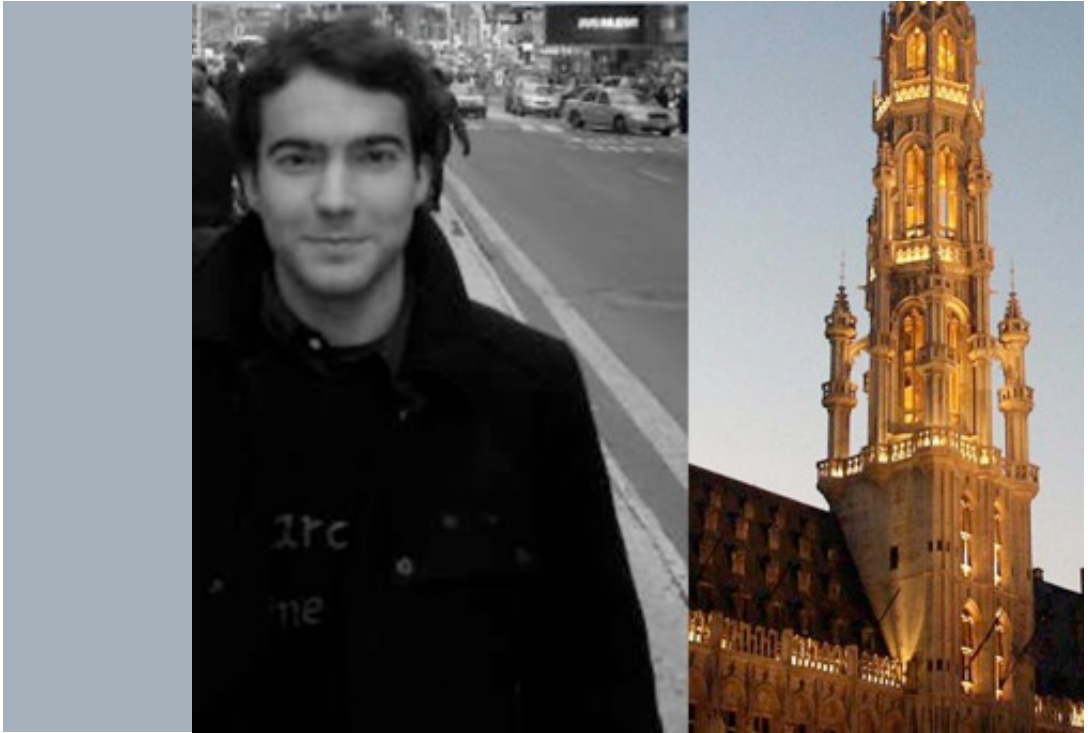
Four months later, Martina's well-rounded internship program on protection of nature and management in the Alps was ready. Getting the actual job on the other hand was a different story.

"After I got the data of the contact person in the Hohe Tauern, I called him. He told me to submit an application and write what the project was about. I sent in the application and a month later they still hadn't notified me. Since I was at a geography camp in Austria at the time, I decided to go visit them personally. The next morning, I was standing in front of his office, unannounced, asking if he could see me and explain what was going on. He was completely surprised, but instantly went to talk to his superior who decided there and then to take me in."

"Thinking more European-like, is the most important thing I learned during my ten months abroad. I learned that new knowledge means partnership and not competition. That's something a lot of people in Slovenia still haven't realized. They look at the rookies as their competitors instead of looking at them as their partners," she expresses her disappointment.

If it were up to Martina, a work placement abroad is a must for everyone. She's convinced that to be on top of things it is vital to continuously gather new knowledge, because we live in a time when new things are happening really fast. According to her the only way to do this is to go abroad and meet partners, people you then keep in contact with and learn from, also through work. Or as she puts it: "Learning to connect is what it's all about."





Javier Sánchez García

spain>belgium

Javier Sánchez García went abroad because he needed to have an experience working abroad before he finished his degree. "I was working in Madrid for a while and I was quite well known in my area (journalism), but still there was something missing. I felt limited in my work and I wanted to improve my situation culturally, my experience and my languages too."

He participated in an original project and he still does, "I've developed the idea behind a fashion line, based on a project for a good cause, Designers Against Aids (www.designersagainstaids.com). This means I've been working as creative partner on the promotion of the brand and mainly getting support from different designers to contribute in DAA. Basically I used to work in a press promotion for fashion environments and then place the initial idea and the results on international level."

"I really appreciate the high cultural level within Belgium", Javier explains the cultural differences between the two countries, "Specially in Flanders, every single village is very aware about its tourist attractions but also their inhabitants have a high sense of culture which makes them very sophisticated compared with the way it would be in the same kind of rural zones in Spain."

He thinks it is relatively easy to get support when you want to convert an idea into work in Belgium: "There are more chances to expose your work (when is about arts or business), because there is more interest for it as well. There is a feeling of multicultural metropolis in cities like Antwerp or Brussels and people normally are respectful with each other concerning religion, nationality, sexual options and sexual gender."

He feels lucky: "I worked at a very high position within the project from the start, which gave me a lot of responsibility but a lot of quick experience as well." That's not the only professional success Javier had, "I've travelled quite a lot around (for work I swear) and while working as freelancer I suddenly got hired in the same company where I was doing the stage!!"

"Which was great", says Javier, "because I kind of started my life in Belgium since then. And on top of it I fell in love here. It has been already half a year, we moved together and it will last forever... Can it be better?"

Christian Ardelean went from Sweden to Germany to learn and work in the German maintenance technology. Why would someone from a progressive Scandinavian country want to go to a strict country such as Germany? "I wanted to get a wider perspective and learn more about the European world. I was also interested in similarities and differences between the Swedish and German culture."

Although he couldn't deny that the German discipline was a new thing for him, he didn't see it as something negative. "The discipline is stricter here and it seems that an organization here is more hierarchic(al) than in Sweden, but I think this could have both positive and negative sides in a learning situation."

"I have learnt to see similarities and differences in organizations. I also learnt to think businesslike. The people there have showed us how the machines work in two different factories." It was this talent for organization and business that Christian was looking for in Germany. "Germans are very good at maintenance technology. One of the things we aimed for was to increase our skills in that area during that period. We wanted also to exchange information, about how things work in Sweden and Germany, with the German co-workers. The condition of the placement was that it should be a learning experience, not a working experience." This aspect of his stay was considered to be a very important matter. "Everyone from



"something new happens every day....it's a good variation from your every day life to experience a different society and a different culture."

Christian Ardelean

Sweden had got a personal supervisor there, which was very good."

He also got to know a less attractive side of the German culture. "On the second day after our arrival, I went into town to get something to eat with a couple of Swedish friends. We had promised to bring some soup back home to a friend who was ill. None of us spoke German very well, and unfortunately the guy in the soup stand wasn't that good at English. But with the use of body language we understood that our option was lentil soup or... cow stomach soup. After a few

minutes consideration we decided to go for the lentil soup.

We didn't want our friend to get worse." Nevertheless he really enjoyed his stay abroad. "We have had an excellent reception there. I even got the home telephone number of the factory manager in case I had any questions." Why would somebody want to go abroad for such a long time? "Because it's so much fun! Because something new happens every day and because it's a good variation from your every day life to experience a different society and a different culture."



Christian Ardelean
sweden>germany



“I strongly believe that everyone should have the opportunity to travel and experience life in other cultures and countries. It has opened up doors for me and has given me unique opportunities that I could get anywhere else”.

Sabrina Gill



Sabrina Gill

united kingdom > poland

Sabrina Gill went to Poland to participate in two projects. “I worked at a medieval village helping to create authentic rooms on the site for a week. I also worked at a centre for children with severe cerebral palsy as a carer.”

Due to her placements she learned some new skills. “I learnt sensory massage for babies with cerebral palsy, and how to make an authentic medieval bed from straw and wood. Also my time-keeping has dramatically improved as well as my money management.”

Sabrina was happy to experience another culture. “Although Poland has most of the things that we have. It is a traditional country. Food was

probably the biggest difference. We tried lots of new things like perogi (Perogi are square- or crescent-shaped dumplings of unleavened dough, stuffed with sauerkraut, cheese, mashed potatoes, cabbage, onion, meat, hard-boiled eggs, or any combination thereof, or with a fruit filling. They are typically fried or boiled until they float, and then covered with butter or oil, which I loved”.

She also kept a good contact with the local Polish people. “The people out there were friendly and couldn’t do enough for us – not like here in the UK! I did have some language difficulties though as only a few of them spoke English.”

Sabrina enjoyed a good laugh from time to time. “One of the funni-

est moments had to be when we first arrived and were having a language lesson. Someone asked the support worker what the Polish word was for ‘Coca Cola’. The look on the support workers face was priceless! Of course it’s the same all around the world!”

She would recommend everybody to take an opportunity like this. “I strongly believe that everyone should have the opportunity to travel and experience life in other cultures and countries. It has opened up doors for me and has given me unique opportunities that I could not get anywhere else. It is true what they say “travel broadens the mind”. It certainly did it for me.”



Karel Lemmens

belgium>france

I was a guide for the Dutch- and English-speaking tourists in a prestigious Champagne-house in Eperney. I also helped organising receptions and accompanied VIP's. I enjoyed my job so much that eight months passed very quickly.

One of my teachers encouraged me to do training abroad. However there was a problem with financial support, one of the reasons that I turned to the Leonardo Da Vinci agency. Thanks to their financial help I was able to take this unique opportunity. I have no regrets looking back at that decision.

My family supported my decision, although they were going to miss me, especially my mother and my grandmother. Afterwards, they were really happy that I took this chance. I

never got homesick during my stay. I received a lot of visits from my family.

I've lived in the city all my life. There are so many people in cities that you can't know everybody. This often results in little interaction which makes it difficult to have close relationships. When you live in a small community like I did in France it's so much easier. You really get to know everybody!

I'm more assertive than I was before and I gained a lot of self-confidence. My English and French have improved during my stay. But the most important thing is that I learned what it's like to be independent. I lived on my own, so I had to cook for myself, needed to arrange all my transport and had to pay rent with the money I made as a guide. I must say my employers

were very positive about me. About half of the visitors are Flemish. I was able to welcome and give tours to these visitors in my own language.

I was happy to return home, but now that I've been back here for some time, I already want to go back to France, this time to stay. I'm aiming for a job with higher responsibilities at a different Champagne-house.



Andreia Alves

portugal > united kingdom

During my studies, I was told about the possibility of going on a placement abroad in order to develop my skills on a practical basis. I always wanted to have an experience in a foreign country, get in contact with new cultures new people and different behaviors, and thought this was a good opportunity to make my wish come true. As a student of social work in the “Associação Percursos” I was very curious about the practical aspects of what I wanted my work to be – a social worker. Many people had told me how rich a work experience could be in the social field in London, and so I decided to take this opportunity.

I did my traineeship at the Irish Centre Housing (ICH). It is a hostel for young women that provides 133 beds for homeless women between the ages of 16 and 25. The girls in the hostel come from ethnic minority groups, and have low to medium support to their needs. The main aim of the Centre is to provide the girls with tools that favor both social and professional integration through many types of empowerment activities.

I took part in the implementation of integration practices and methods working closely to my supervisor Clare O’Shea, assisting in life skills sessions like football, Kickboxing, drama, dance, coffee morning, pre-tenancy and yoga. I helped putting together resident support to help them gaining and increasing their skills in time keeping, team work, motivation, empowerment, assertiveness, confidence, self-esteem, communication, interpersonal skills and health and fitness. Moreover, it was part of my tasks to contact potential sponsors in order to support the Centre.

I also gave administrative support to the organization of a life skills course.

Although the basic culture is the same, there are differences such as, the language, the weather, its much cold and dark in London, the food, driving on the left, and the cultural diversity; London is a city where one can find people from everywhere in the world.

I didn’t know how to cook at all. Me and some of my colleagues took some pans and other cooking utensils to practice, and locked them in a locker. Days later we were robbed and all our cooking stuff had been taken away.

This placement was a life changing experience for me as it gave me the opportunity to experience a completely different human reality and to grow up as a person. Theoretically, I had learnt what social work should be, but being in contact with real people with real serious integration problems, is a completely different story. Through this experience, I was able to bring lots of new knowledge to my present job.

On these grounds, I strongly recommend any student who wishes to develop his or her skills and knowledge on the social field to go on a placement like I did. And if he or she goes with an open heart, I believe that this can be a journey of a lifetime, leading to personal expansion, and awareness of new human values.

