

General description of the activity of the student during his / her mobility in the academic year 2008 / 09

Just like the other 1.999 999 students, I decided to go abroad to give another dimension to my studies. Beside the fact that I would be able to learn a foreign language, meet new people from all over the world and deal with new and different assignments, the culture and possibilities for the future also made part of my decision to go abroad.

Like a real Belgian girl longing for sun, new cultures and independency, I decided to go to Spain. I wanted to experience the real Spanish culture in all its aspects. Beach and tourists were the last things on my mind when I chose my favourite Erasmus city Valladolid. This city is the capital city of Castile and León and it is known for its castles, fountains and impressive plazas. Furthermore the people speak the clearest and most beautiful Spanish of the whole of Spain. As if that wasn't enough to convince me to choose this city, they told me that I wouldn't need an umbrella to go to Valladolid because it almost never rains over there. What does a Belgian girl want more?

At the end of August 2008, I arrived in Valladolid ready to throw myself in this big Erasmus adventure. After a difficult and long search for a good apartment, I started with my intensive course of Spanish during which I met a lot of new people from all over the world, from Scandinavia to southern Europe and from central Europe to Canada. The basic grammar and new vocabulary, but also the culture and nonverbal communication were explained in this course. During this first month I had plenty of time to get used to the Spanish rhythm of life with the well-known siestas, tapas and fiestas, because I only had two hours of Spanish class a day. You can say that I transformed from tourist into a real citizen of Valladolid.

After the final exam of this Spanish course, I thought I was ready for the real management studies. Well, after my first class at the university of Valladolid, I knew I still had a lot to learn. I didn't understand a thing of what the professor was saying. I felt reassured when I saw the faces of my friends. None of us was sure whether our professors were speaking Spanish or Chinese. We were lucky that we were such a good team. The combination of all our notes made a good course. In February we all passed our exams successfully.

During this time of studying, I also took the time to enjoy my stay in Spain. At least once a week, there was a party at a friend's place, with typical food of his or her home country. Of course, the Spanish alcoholic drinks were also present at these parties, a fact that clearly helped us to speak Spanish and English fluently.

While studying and partying, I was looking for an internship in Valladolid. I had the opportunity to do an internship in Barcelona, but I preferred to stay in Valladolid. I loved this city and I had such good friends that I didn't want to say goodbye after 6 months. That's why I decided to do my internship in Valladolid.

I took a brave start, but goodwill wasn't enough. The global economic crisis, which hit Spain hard, wasn't simplifying my search for a placement. I did the best I could, rented a bike and rode around the whole city to hand in my application letter at different companies. When I realized that all these methods weren't effective, I knew I had to look for organisations who are happy to have a free worker. I contacted ten NGO's all with different purposes, but with a lot of volunteers. When I received a e-mail from Fundación Triángulo, I was the luckiest girl in Valladolid. After a first job interview I knew this was the place to be. They were pleased that I really wanted to work for them as a volunteer.

In November, I still remember this moment as if it were yesterday, I had to hand in my

proposal for my internship. Although I had found an appropriate workplace, I was confronted with the Spanish let's-do-everything-tomorrow culture. In other words, I didn't have a signed contract before the deadline imposed by my university in Leuven. Luckily my tutors in Belgium understood my situation and gave me a couple of weeks more to get a contract in Spain. In the beginning of December, I could finally hand in my contract.

Fundación Triángulo is an NGO that strives for social and legal equality of the LGBT society in Spain. LGBT is the abbreviation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual, at that moment a new word for me. This organisation has five different offices spread over Spain. To sensitize the people, every office organizes its own film festival. I had the opportunity to help with the organization of the film festival "CinHomo La Muestra Internacional de Cine GLBT" in Valladolid.

During my first weeks at Fundación Triángulo, I realized that the Erasmus language is a slang version of the 'normal' language; so that I had to make an effort to improve my Spanish. The organization of the film festival CinHomo was hectic and a lot of people were already in charge of the main tasks. I took the opportunity to find some new sponsors for the festival and wrote a sponsor dossier to professionalise their procedure. I did a mailing to invite all the visitors of the previous editions of the festival and tried to help the best I could. During the festival I collected survey data to evaluate the satisfaction of the festival visitors. In the period after the festival, I wrote an evaluation of the festival based on these data. Moreover, I wrote a memorandum of the festival and the integrated project "Ciclo de Derechos Humanos" about the Human Rights.

My life during the first semester was the complete opposite of my life in Belgium. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were a couple of hours later than at home. People were communicating in a very different way. Although winter does exist in Valladolid, the sun was shining all the time. The style of teaching and examining was quite different too. Studying as an Erasmus student is more than theories: it's about experiences and self-development.

When I started my internship at Fundación Triángulo in Valladolid, I made another U-turn. Beside the fact I had to learn "everyday" Spanish, I became aware of the existing sexual discrimination in the world. I have learned that it isn't wrong to discuss subjects like adoption by parents of the same sex, transsexualism and gender swapping. It's all about respect and the acceptance of differences between people.

After a goodbye party at the end of May, I returned to Belgium. At home I had to adapt once again. But my mind is still boiling and assimilating all the experiences of my Erasmus stay in Valladolid. My life has changed in an irreversible way.