

September ended and so my job contract. Barcelona was still hot, and after relaxing a couple of weeks, everything started over again. I didn't have a job, I was not studying anything, I was feeling the pressure. Unemployment in Spain is high and the youth is not motivated either. Precisely. the same day I finished my contract, a friend came back from Croatia and visited me for some days. He did an EVS for a month in Murter island. He was very happy about it. EVS? I had another friend finishing his EVS in Croatia too. I got in touch with him, and everything went fast.. In February I was sitting in the Žmergo office in Opatija.



My tasks heavily involved video making, which is related to my university studies. The job was 6 hours a day, free weekends, flexible schedule, possibility to travel, learn new languages... It was the best choice I could take, no doubt. The change from a big noisy city to a quiet town was needed, plus I had been interested in visiting the Balkans for quite some time.

There was not a cultural shock when I arrived. Everything seemed so natural, so familiar, just following the flow of things. The On-Arrival Training was a great start; meeting other volunteers is the best part of the experience. In the office there was a relaxed workflow, I was becoming more aware about environmental issues and the mentor was very friendly and welcoming since the beginning.



Of course I didn't spend 12 full months in Opatija. I explored as much as I could. Istria, Dalmatia, Zagreb, Slavonia.. and all the surrounding countries too: Slovenia, Bosnia i Hercegovina, Serbia, Crna Gora, Kosovo, Makedonia, Albania, Italy, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary. I even travelled for two weeks alone by myself for the first time in my life, after the magnificent Mid-Term training in Split, where we had a ton of fun.



However, not everything was joyful, I had my lows too. My main problem of EVS has been the loneliness. Basically I didn't get along with my two flatmates and in a small town such as Opatija, having the right company is fundamental. I love to socialize, but I spent countless evenings alone in my room because the lack of plans. After a while, this affected my mood quite often to a point I don't wish upon nobody. I think the most delicate thing in an EVS project is when you put total strangers to share their whole lives during long periods of time. It can have a fantastic result or it can be a disaster. Fortunately, after 9 months two new volunteers came as replacement and the relationship with them was so much better.

But well, during a whole year, no matter where, it is normal to have high and lows, isn't it? That's part of having a life experience. After some time, only the good memories will remain. The nice friends I met, the amazing trips I did, all the videos I shot for the NGO and the language I somewhat learnt, Croatian! I am very proud of how much I learnt, given the difficulty of it. It has been very cool to be able to speak with locals from around the Balkans.

So yeah, I will keep recommending the EVS programme to all my friends. I think it is a unique experience, and we are so lucky to be able to apply for it. I surely have grown as a person, it helped me to develop certain working skills, to make new friends, to get to know about different cultures and world history and come back to my home city refreshed and ready to take a next step!