

Personal Journey from Márton Árvay

In this article we demonstrate how the Leonardo da Vinci Lifelong Learning Programmes can impact employment prospects of conservationists via vocational education. Márton Árvay, employee of the Barn Owl Foundation (BOF) from March 2013, successfully applied for a Leonardo Mobility placement coordinated by the BOF. Then he participated the EuroGIS-GPS training course (Leonardo Transfer of Innovation). Acknowledging this, the BOF had an easy choice to make when a vacancy became available and Márton became the selected candidate. Read Márton's personal journey:

During my university years I did not have chance to study one or more semesters abroad as I had to work and also volunteered for various environmental organisations. I knew, however, that experiences gained abroad are vital at successful job applications. A friend of mine drew my attention to the Leonardo Mobility placement advertised by the Barn Owl Foundation in 2011. They were recruiting career starters and unemployed conservationists for a 15 week long training placement in England. This seemed to be the right place for me so I applied and luckily I got accepted.

During the course of the habitat management and monitoring work in the UK I tried to pick up as many new skills and gain as much knowledge as possible. I also took advantage of the great opportunity to work alongside native English speakers. I got more familiar with the UK conservation approaches, the types of valuable habitats and endangered species, and I also indulged in the British culture and language.

One of the best experiences was helping in the completion of the management plan of the Lower Sharpham Sustainable Farm Project, also I volunteered for the RSPB, met the representatives of the Environmental Agency and the Torbay City Council. It all broadened my knowledge.

Having returned to Hungary I was able to apply for more and better positions in the environmental sector. The language experience gained in the UK appeared to be more important than any of my previous formal language certificates. A few weeks later I had a job at an environmental company. I worked on environmental disaster assessment and mitigation projects. I did not lose contact with the BOF and helped them with translation work every now and then. After my job finished at the environmental company I won an apprenticeship to Birmingham, advertised by the Climate KIC Pioneers into Practice. I was responsible for sustainability grant applications during my 3 month long contract, which opened a new window for me in an entirely new field. Returning from the UK again I came across a new advertisement for training placements for a GIS and GPS course. This Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation project recruited 24 Hungarian conservationists who had little experience or access to GIS and/or GPS techniques and whose job was based largely on biodiversity monitoring. I had some experience with GPS units but I had very limited knowledge on GIS software so I applied. What could I lose? I was selected and offered a place. I was one of the participants from the researcher/free lancer sector. The three day long training course gave us a long enough time to get familiar with a project-provided GPS device, and also get to know the most important functions of the QGIS program. This software is an open source GIS program which is widely used in conservation, it is free and available in many languages. The learning content of the training was very carefully put together and by the end of the third day we had some confidence to do geo-referencing, uploading waypoints, handling the GPS, navigating with it and creating and editing different shape files.

This was the second time I worked closely with the BOF. They were seeking a new employee for conservation and project management work and they asked me if I was looking

for a job. 'We know that you improved your language skills in the UK, we got good references from the British host, also you volunteered for us and you have good knowledge on GIS which is required for our job vacancy. So we know what we buy!' they said. As I was looking for a job, and I also knew the BOF well I said yes. My job at the BOF is mainly the dissemination of the EUROGIS-GPS project and the Leonardo Life-long Learning grants. I also work on bird monitoring and other biodiversity monitoring projects, which has been my dream for a while.

There is no doubt that the Leonardo Life-long learning programmes played a multiple role in my career development and I can thank these projects for my present job at the BOF. The practical training combined with the language opportunities means the best mixture of the required competencies can be gained in this field. This is what career starters do really need.

The BOF encourages everybody to grab every vocational training opportunity provided by the Leonardo scheme. For further information visit www.tka.hu (Hungarian National Agency) or the official EU website <http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme>.