

Big changes begin with a small step

Lao Tzu once said, "The journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step." as I did my first step in biology engineering field, when I decided to apply for completely another master study, from my previously education in the area where I didn't have background or experience, but just wish and huge interest to learn something new. So after I passed my first year, the international office announce open call for all students that would like to go and spend some time abroad on Iceland or Norway. I was interested for it since I heard it, but there was so many doubt in my head about it, like; will they accept my application?, will I be chosen?, how I will be manage to work in environment, I have no clue about?, having "small talk" is really frustrating,.. So with all this questions in my head I send application on the last available day, and when I was chosen I have one month to arrange everything and I was already on the airplane to Iceland, where I spend 5 months in biotechnology lab.

Location of my internship was at University Akureyri, on the north of Iceland, and I was working under supervision of professor Orlygsson and his assistant in the area of biofuel production from thermo-anaerobic bacteria and biomass. I know I didn't leave good first impression, especially when they ask me what are my lab experiences, and my answer was zero. But during all those months I prove them that you don't need it if you have passion and interest in work and if you are willing to be as sponge and absorb all the knowledge, which can give you in short period. During my stay, there was also some other international students, but we didn't have a lot of connection, while all of as was there with different reason and perspective. For the time, I was there I also joined the artic microbiology summer school, where I have chance to learn for me new method to work with and tools for analysing results, and all this was and still is very useful for me. After I returned to my country, I wrote my master thesis from experiments and work I did on my exchange, and I also managed to publish one article.

So FNM grant give me huge opportunity to start working in a fascinating word of biotechnology engineering, and from 2015 since I took that opportunity, I only continuing with it. First as zero grant intern at food mycology lab at Institute polytechnic in Braganca, Portugal, where I was chosen to work on project "Survey of fungi and mycotoxins in traditional Portuguese meat products". For this position, I was chosen because of my previously lab experience, which I obtained with FNM grant and recommendation letters from them. This project is already showing some promising results in my career, with first price for poster presentation at IV Encontro de Jovens Investigadores, Braganca, Portugal, and by published article (*Aspergillus westerdijkiae* as a major ochratoxin A risk in dry-cured ham based-media) in International Journal of Food Microbiology. I have also received FTC-NORTE2020 PhD grant at University Minho where I am currently working at Centre of Biological Engineering on my PhD project.

So many thanks for opportunity that has been given to me with this grant; for opportunity to work under great supervisor abroad, where only my interest and enthusiasm count, while without it I wouldn't be where I am today, and even if it's not easy, it was and still is worth the entire struggle. My small step begin with sending application for FNM grant, and since then I am only using all opportunity to grow and develop my skills and career.

Ziva Vipotnik