

How ASEM-DUO paved the way for what I am now - *Inspired to actually learn*

Kornelija Putriūtė

It would be hard for me to say this programme impacted only my career path. I would be hard pressed to state it was life changing. Sure, it might seem a little bit overblown, but knowing what kind of person I was prior to this experience, I wish I could repeat it all over again just this time with all the experience I possess now.

My journey began with applying for an exchange programme in South Korea in my 3rd year of university. Even though my major had little to do with subjects chosen abroad, my professors were understanding and let me go. 'I am going to search for inspiration for what to do next', I told them. I wanted to try something else and preferably in a place where I will be forced to get out of my comfort zone to use the experience of the exchange programme to its fullest. Eventually I was even rewarded with DUO-Korea scholarship. Before I even applied for it, I could not have imagined how important it is going to be. Had I not received this scholarship, I would have had to spend way more time trying to survive first, and only then being able to engage in my search of 'what to do next with my life'. The financial freedom I was gifted with allowed me to essentially forget about money and spend all the free time I had in participating in as many things as my highly introverted, shy self can bear. I admit, it was not many, but the impact it had on me is irreplaceable and invaluable. This whole experience was my steppingstone towards my career in language-related field. Right now, I work as a subtitle translator from English to Lithuanian language. I have wanted to be one long before I managed to come into this position, but also never really thought it will happen simply because my confidence in my own skills was virtually non-existent. Which, I admit was not just me not understanding how good I was. I wasn't. Reading my final report from all those years back, I cringe with every sentence. I can see how far I have come, and how much I have improved with the help of DUO-Korea. Not only was I forced by the environment to talk, put my language skills to practice, but acquired a strong interest in everything around me which is highly valuable in my professional life. I enjoy learning about other cultures, comparing what we could benefit from each other, and as a result started functioning as an adult capable of critical thinking instead of being one that operates on default personal software.

Since quite some time has passed after I had the pleasure of using the perks of DUO-Korea to further my contemplations on my professional future, a lot has happened. After all, it was almost a decade ago. After my return from abroad, I started with a simple job at a grocery store, which as I keep on pestering you about, I would not have been able to do, with my communication skills as they were prior to my journey to South Korea. Its not like the job was that demanding of it, but the whole situation simply meant I will have to deal with people. And as it turned out, I was not that terrified after I got back from abroad. I was not as afraid to talk, in my native language or any other, as I was before. Using that experience, for a short while I worked as a consultant at a music store, selling instruments where I had to communicate with people at an even closer range. However, that was not meant to last, as I was not cut out for a salesman position. There is simply no talent in me to be a good one, therefore I quit. As I ended up searching for a job once again, my friend suggested teaching English at a studio she was familiar with. 'They are always short of people', she said. Even though I have never even dreamed of becoming a teacher, I said to myself 'Why not?' And it did end up happening. I have worked there for about two years before the pandemic struck and I was forced to search for another job once again. Yes, I could have done it remotely after some time, but my interest in teaching had also been depleted by the time the whole lockdown situation came to be. However, the experience in teaching English greatly improved my knowledge. As they say, 'You get better yourself when you teach others'. Never have I taken so much interest in nitpicking grammar. Thinking on how the whole speaking apparatus, called mouth, operates when we pronounce one thing or the other (something that has started with Korean lessons in South Korea, as I have never really had to think about it before). Paying attention to the difference in expression of various languages, i.e., why

the sentence is structured like that, why some particular words work better at conveying the message than others do, how the culture influences language, and what the language itself says about said culture, the society that wields it.

All these things are tremendously important in my present career. And to think of it, none of it would have happened had I not eradicated my self-consciousness to speak English in front of others. Which was a direct result of my experience facilitated by DUO-Korea. e.g., my job at the Global Lounge, my tutoring endeavours and of course being free of financial burden and using that time to converse with people. Had I not participated in that exchange programme, this progress will have taken me much more years to make. Thanks to all that, I became more confident in my skills and was not afraid to apply for a subtitle translator position when the chance had presented itself. It has already been over a year. And even though this job does not require me to communicate with people all that much, it made me realise that my biggest talent (as well as interests) lies in languages, and that I should pursue career opportunities related to them. My whole professional life mentioned above might look like a complete roundabout way of doing things, but it had to happen for me to be able to see myself and my capabilities in a clear light. Of course, I could have studied something translation-related (which I did for a short time) but was apparently not prepared for that to work just yet, as I had no interest in it at that time. I simply thought it would be profitable enough. Now I nitpick everything I read, I am way more sensitive to what is being said - I simply cannot turn it off and therefore go back or change the path. There are plenty of turns to take in the language field, so I do not necessarily have to stick to the main forever, but I cannot step out either.

In fact, one such turn is right up ahead. Unfortunately, I am unable to brag about it yet as the process is still ongoing, but I am participating in a competition for a position related to localization. And it happens to be an opening in one of the world's biggest tech companies. The funny fact is that I did not contact them, they approached me. Therefore, it seems that the skills I have gained thanks to DUO-Korea have already started speaking for themselves. Communication and the ability to feel less self-conscious were those skills that started this whole "chain reaction". Without DUO-Korea, I most likely either would not have been able to go or would have ended up immersed in my subjects only, thinking about how to survive. Not only did I not have to do either of these things, but I even got some of that scholarship left after the trip to invest in my explorations of professional world before settling on the path I am on right now.

The only thing I regret - not being able to pay back enough to the Republic of Korea for this opportunity while I was there. Now that I can stand on my own two feet (figuratively speaking of course) in a more stable manner, I am going to find a way to do it. My gratitude towards the country cannot be measured, and I am reminded of it daily. The experience is simply invaluable. Thank you.