

Marie Gervier, Communication and Event Manager for the United Nations



Master in Public Policy, policy stream Cultural Policy and Management, promotion 2018. Marie Gervier graduated from the Master in Public Policy at the School of Public Affairs, Cultural Policy and Management policy stream. She is currently working as a Communication and Event Manager for the United Nations Office in Geneva. Testimony.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND?

I come from a small village in Normandy. My high school was not in the top ones and I joined Sciences Po through the “Conventions Éducation Prioritaire” (CEP). Before I got into Sciences Po, I did not even think that it could be for me, but my French teacher told me about the CEP, a different kind of exam, based on press reviews, for students from high schools like mine.

I passed the exam and joined the Sciences Po Poitiers campus, where the core curriculum is the same as in Paris, with a regional specialization on Latin America, Spain and Portugal. I chose this campus because it offered classes in Spanish and Portuguese. As I already spoke French and English, it was a good opportunity to speak four languages by the end of my bachelor's degree.

After two years in Poitiers, it was time for the third year abroad, which is mandatory at Sciences Po. At the time we could either go on exchange, work on a personal project or do an internship. Since one of the reasons I chose to go to Sciences Po was the opportunity to work abroad for one year, when it was time to decide I naturally chose the internship.

At the time I already knew that I wanted to work in communications and event management in the cultural, political or diplomatic sectors. I found a very interesting position as personal assistant to Faouzi Skali, communication counselor of the King of Morocco. I was in charge of his agenda, his communications and Public Relations, and also organized many events for his agency.

I would say that the most educational event I organized for him was a Franco-Moroccan symposium on the “construction of radicalism”. It was a very small project at the beginning, but when we obtained the support of the French President and the

patronage of the King it shifted to a totally different level. Two speakers on Daesh's blacklist confirmed their participation and I had to work closely with the secret services of France and Morocco. I was only 20 years old and I will remember it forever. It was an amazing opportunity to contribute to the political, cultural and diplomatic aspects of an event and it confirmed that it was what I wanted to do. My experience in Morocco was very enriching and launched my career as I was entrusted with high-level missions and started to build my network.

It was in Morocco that I met my current boss, Francesco Pisano, UN Director in charge of the Cultural Diplomacy in Geneva. He was a speaker during one of our events. He came to me and we started to chat. It is only after a few minutes that I realized that his questions sounded like an interview. At the end he told me that UN Geneva organizes dozens of cultural diplomacy events per year in partnership with Member States (concerts, exhibitions etc.). I joined his team as an intern and got promoted to consultant when I was only 23 years old. Sometimes, while rushing through the Palais des Nations to welcome an artist, to set up panels or to meet a diplomat I smile foolishly and I ask myself: is that real?

WHAT WERE THE MAIN STAGES OF BUILDING YOUR CAREER PLAN?

I had one goal – working in communications and event management in the cultural, political and diplomatic sectors, but I never had a career plan to achieve it. I genuinely believe that we need to be aware of the different opportunities that come our way and that there is no unique plan to achieve a goal. At least this is what has worked for me so far. I never told myself that I had to work for a King's counselor, the French Parliament or the UN to be successful, and I believe that this is precisely what has brought me to where I am today. I did not plan it, I seized the opportunities.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A STUDENT WHO WOULD ENGAGE, AS YOU DID, IN THE UN?

First of all, you have to be aware that having a strong academic background is good but not enough. Working for the UN is highly competitive. There are a lot of candidates for internships and only a few of them stay and get a job afterwards. So my first advice would be: be humble and share with us what makes you interesting apart from your diplomas. It does not have to be professional experiences, even if that helps. For an internship in event support, I would be interested by someone sharing with me how he/she contributed to the organization of a wedding, a surprise party or any kind of event. If you volunteered, if you lived far away from home, share with us what you learnt from it. It is also something we value in an international organization like the UN.

Secondly, if you want to work for the UN, you need to ask yourself: to do what? I meet a lot of students who tell me that working for the UN is their dream, but when I ask them what they would like to do they tell me "anything". It is definitely the wrong answer. The UN is so diverse, we have nurses, librarians, experts in chemical weapons and so many other profiles. Find your field of expertise and state a specific interest. This is what will make you competitive.

My last advice applies to any student having a first work experience: be proactive. Many supervisors are busy and don't always take enough time to think about personalized tasks that could be given to their interns. Show them that you can do the general things they assign you and once it's done volunteer to do something else. It is a good opportunity to show your skills, your motivation and your ideas. If you seat in the back, there are few chances that they will keep you afterwards.

What are the main features of your job today?

My job is to organize cultural diplomacy events for the Permanent Missions based in Geneva. These events can be exhibitions, film screenings, concerts or even fashion shows. It is very diverse. All our events occur at UN Geneva in partnership with the Member States. It involves maintaining personalized relationships with Ambassadors, diplomats and UN staff members and working on all aspects of cultural diplomacy events: from politics, diplomacy and protocol to marketing and communications, through administrative, financial and technical tasks.

WHAT WERE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR TRAINING TO THE FUNCTION THAT YOU HOLD TODAY?

Sciences Po is an international school. You have students from everywhere in the world. Being immersed in such a multicultural environment during my studies was very enriching and helpful for my job at the UN. Sciences Po also provides skills to analyze and understand humanity's contemporary challenges and find innovative solutions in the pursuit of the common good, just like UN staff members do.

The classes of the policy stream on “Cultural Policy & Management” of the Master in Public Policy are very helpful for people who would like to work in the cultural sector. The School of Public Affairs gave me the opportunity to study creative industries, property law, cultural and art economics but also fundraising and marketing in the cultural sector. These courses were also very enriching because the School of Public Affairs’ teachers are experts in their field. Jean-Paul Cluzel, former Director of the Opéra de Paris, Aurélie Filippetti, former French Minister of Culture, and so many other professionals of the cultural milieu teach at Sciences Po. Being surrounded by such talented professionals had been very inspiring to build my own career.