A student’s academic journey is not always as smooth as one wishes. It can be quite stressful at times and a lot of important decisions will have to be made along the way which can have an effect on the student’s future. When you’re in the final year of your undergraduate course, one of the decisions which has to made is what the next step of your career is going to be. I was in this same situation when I was finishing off my Bachelors degree in Biology and Chemistry. I started thinking of what I wanted to do after an intensive four year course and I asked myself a number of searching questions. Was I ready to find a job, to do something different, which might not be related to my studies, or else to continue studying and broadening my knowledge even further?

I always had a passion for research, and after completing my undergraduate dissertation, which dealt with the community composition of plants in a number of sites around the Maltese islands, I wanted to continue enhancing my expertise in field botany. However, it is not always easy to continue studying full-time without any income, and I was quite hesitant about what path I was going to follow.

Luckily, the first call for the Endeavour Scholarship Scheme (Malta), which is part-financed by the European Union, the ‘European Social Fund’ (ESF), was launched while I was still debating on what to do. Apart from helping out financially by funding my research, the scheme made me think critically about the significance of my research and its relevance to Malta’s strategic priorities and also to the development of the island. Thus, with the help of the Endeavour scholarship scheme, I decided to continue my studies on the diversity of plants by reading for a Master’s degree in Biology.

The MSc degree was solely based on research and included a written dissertation, a Seminar presentation and was examined through a Viva Voce examination. The title of my thesis was ‘Multiscale analysis of the species diversity of Maltese shrubland’. It involved carrying out fieldwork in six sites around the Maltese islands, identifying plants and collecting environmental data. The data gathered was then analysed in order to answer my initial research questions about how diversity varies with spatial scale and about the role of certain shrubs in regulating diversity. My results are useful in understanding trends in the assembly of plant communities, which is important for the conservation of biodiversity in Malta and also in providing effective replicable methods of measurement of diversity. These will add to existing knowledge regarding the occurrence and distribution of plants in the Maltese Islands.

In summary the main benefits of the scholarship were that it funded my research and that it made me think about the broader relevance of my research even at the proposal stage.

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