

## BAHRAIN 2018 – EXPEDITION FUND

14/06 - 28/07

Bahrain, which in Arabic means “the reign between the two seas”, is a very small island in the Persian Gulf, connected through a highway to Saudi Arabia.

I had the opportunity to spend there over six weeks working on a project called “Unleash Bahrain 2030: Women Empowerment”, organised by the international youth organisation AIESEC in collaboration with BYLA (the Bahrain Young Ladies Association), the first women organisation of the Gulf since 1955. The project had the objective of working towards the achievement of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations.

The first weeks of the project focused on getting an insight into the current situation of gender equality and women empowerment in the country. In order to learn more about the topic, we prepared a questionnaire that we carried out in Bahrain’s biggest mall, City Centre. The questions we wrote for the survey focused on how Bahraini people perceived the role of women in society, in particular targeting the areas of education and employability. From the responses we gathered, we drew the conclusion, that conversely to what the general view in the West might be, young generations in particular, claim that a disparity among genders is present but that it operates at deeper levels not visible on the surface.

For the remaining weeks we collaborated more closely with BYLA. The NGO wanted the group to help them attract a young audience by organising events and rejuvenating their social media contents and accounts. With my team we managed to organise at the AMA International University of Bahrain an Open lecture. The Open lecture had speakers from both our team and the NGO and covered topics regarding gender equality in Bahrain and the Gulf countries and the Sustainable Development Goals in general. During the lecture we made sure that the audience, which comprised of over 50 students from both genders, actively engaged in the discussion, which ultimately turned out to be very successful, as everyone seemed to be interested in the topic and many contrasting views emerged in the debate. The goal was to start a conversation among young people and raise awareness on why organisations, such as BYLA, are operating in Bahrain and what they hope to achieve by 2030.



In our free time we had the chance to explore the historical and cultural sights of the country. The members of the local Committee of AIESEC Bahrain brought us along to cultural activities, taught us the basics of the Arabic language and introduced us to the local food, such as Swayarma, Malghoom and to the traditional way of eating, which consists in sitting on the ground and eating with our hands. We stayed in the capital Manama, where, despite the fact that during summer temperatures can reach up to 45-48 degrees, we visited for example the Bahrain National Museum, the Bahrain fort - part of UNESCO -, which was built by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and the Tree of Life, a big tree located in the middle of the desert.



Overall, it was an incredible experience, I met very interesting people from all around the world, getting the opportunity to experience cultural exchanges between the Gulf but also India, Ghana and Europe and I also got the chance to get to know closely a country that otherwise is easy to miss on the map and that few people talk about.

