

Career Sheet: Research and Development Project Manager



Gerardo González, R+D Project Manager, BIOAZUL

My name is Gerardo González, I am 36 years old, and I come from Granada (Spain). I have a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Environmental Sciences from the University of Granada (Spain) and a Master of Sciences (MSc) in Urban Environmental Management from Wageningen University (The Netherlands). Since 2017 I have been working as Research and Development (R&D&I) Project Manager at BIOAZUL SL, which is a water engineering and technology consultancy based in Málaga (Spain).



OVERVIEW OF THE JOB

In short, my job as a Project Manager includes activities such as preparation, negotiation and submission of project proposals, identification and setting up of consortia with different partners, and also the management of national or international projects, mainly funded by the European Commission through R&I Programmes like Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe. I am especially involved in projects related to environmental topics such as nature-based solutions, climate change adaptation and mitigation, urban solid waste management, wastewater treatment and reuse, circular economy, etc. So, when managing ongoing projects, I normally undertake technical or research activities but also activities related to dissemination, communication, or training.



WHAT INSPIRED YOU

I have always been passionate about nature. Since I was a child, I used to go to the mountains every weekend. My dad used to teach me about birds and animals in general, but most importantly to respect nature. So, when I grew up, I decided to study something related, like Biology. But at the time I had to make a decision, I was told that Environmental Sciences was a new degree with larger career prospects and that covered a greater number of topics, so I chose this one. Then after moving to The Netherlands and completing my MSc, I collaborated with a research institute for a few months, and I had the opportunity to participate in an ongoing EU-funded project. I think that was the moment when I realized I wanted to learn and get trained to become a project manager, so I could participate in innovative projects at the international level that could bring a major impact on our society and environment.



TYPICAL WORKING DAY

As a project manager, I spend most of my time with specific tasks assigned within the ongoing EU projects I am involved with. This includes undertaking research, technical and dissemination activities but also participation in webinars and meetings, which are regularly organised. So, before the COVID-19, I used to travel abroad quite often to participate in project meetings but also to attend relevant conferences or events for networking, for instance. Besides activities carried out for ongoing projects, I am also involved in the preparation and submission of project proposals, either for third parties or for ourselves, so this is also a time-consuming activity, especially when the deadline for submission gets closer.



STUDY & CAREER PATH

I remember my first decision about my study path came when I was in high school. I decided to take the scientific-technological itinerary, which included specific subjects such as physics, chemistry, maths and technical design. Then, when I got to university, I did a BSc in Environmental Sciences at the University of Granada (Spain). After completing my degree, I moved to England and applied for a Leonardo Da Vinci scholarship which allowed me to work as a trainee for 6 months in an environmental NGO in Southampton. Once I came back to Spain, I applied for another scholarship from my Regional Government, this time to carry out postgraduate studies. After one year of preparing for this scholarship, I was finally granted and got accepted at the University of Wageningen (the Netherlands) to study a 2-year MSc in Urban Environmental Management. This also allowed me to carry out a traineeship in a large environmental engineering and consultancy in The Netherlands for 4 months, and once I finalised my MSc, I collaborated in a research institute in Wageningen (ALTERRA). This was the first time I participated in an EU-funded project. This was the moment I realised the type of career path I wanted to follow and get experience on. After my stay at this research institute, I worked in other organisations such as the International Water Management Institute (Sri Lanka) and the European GNSS Agency (Czech Republic). Finally, I joined BIOAZUL SL four years ago, a water engineering and technology consultancy where I currently work.

I would say the educational experience that had a major impact on me was my postgraduate studies in the Netherlands. That opened my mind in many aspects and gave me a lot of valuable experiences to decide which career path I wanted to follow.

With regards to my colleagues, we are a multidisciplinary team. Most of my colleagues have studied natural science degrees, such as Chemistry, Biology, Environmental Sciences, Chemical Engineering, Marine Sciences, etc. although I have colleagues with a background in Economics, Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations. Some of them have also spent time studying or working abroad, either during their postgraduate studies or working for other companies and research institutes.



KEY SKILLS

ANALYTICAL

- Problem-solving: this is required to overcome some difficulties and obstacles we might encounter in our daily duties, such as negotiation and reaching agreements with partners, or administrative and financial issues with any project, etc.
- Research: it is essential to participate in research and development projects as well as to prepare successful proposals. You need to be up to date with the latest developments or regulations in force and read through scientific and research documents.

COMMUNICATION

- Collaboration: most of the projects I participate in are collaborative projects in which a consortium of partners is organised and put together to carry out an agreed work plan, therefore collaboration is essential.
- Presentation: we usually must prepare and give presentations (either online or in-person) to present our projects, our activities, our results, etc.
- Translation: as we participate in projects funded by the European Commission, our main working language is English, and we usually translate reports or communication materials from Spanish to English and vice versa.
- Writing: part of my job consists of writing project proposals, technical reports, communication, and dissemination materials that will be evaluated by experts from the European Commission.

MANAGEMENT

- Negotiation: negotiating with partners and reaching agreements is essential in the preparation of any project proposal, where you need to consider administrative, financial and technical aspects.
- Project management: this is a key skill needed to do my job, which requires considering all administrative, financial, communication and technical aspects of any project to deliver the expected outcomes and results.

MARKETING

- Social media: we use it to disseminate and communicate about our activities and results, usually on LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

- Adaptability: very important to work in different environments, with diverse groups of professionals from different backgrounds and cultures.
- Commitment: my job implies the delivery of agreed outcomes and results with my clients (in most cases the European Commission itself); therefore, commitment and organisation are highly required.

- Motivation: I believe feeling motivated and passionate about your job always contributes to give the best out of you (your 100%).
- Personal responsibility: this is related to commitment and time management, as we are accountable for our own projects and the delivery of the expected outcomes to our clients.
- Public speaking: as part of the internal and external communication and dissemination activities we carry out, we usually participate in discussion panels, give presentations to different audiences, organise workshops and training activities, etc.
- Team spirit: as a multidisciplinary company, we support each other and also benefit from each other, from our different expertise and knowledge as a group, and so we must be able to work in teams (and also individually).
- Time management: as we normally have to meet deadlines to submit our work, it is essential to keep good time management, this will avoid having to work under too much pressure.



CAREER PROSPECT

With these skills, one can work in jobs and industry sectors such as:

- R+D Project management for private or public entities
- Environmental consulting and research, also for private and public sector
- Solid waste and water management
- Education and training.



CHALLENGES

- Meeting tight deadlines (internal and external), which requires high commitment and time management.
- Communication with large groups of partners sometimes from diverse backgrounds and cultures, which can be time-consuming sometimes and requires dedication.
- High workloads and working under pressure at specific times in the year, mainly linked to the preparation and submission of project proposals.
- Working on several projects, under different conditions and specifications, also of different nature and topics, requires a high degree of organisation and coordination to be effective.
- Working in multi-disciplinary teams, especially with partners at institutions from all over Europe, could be challenging if there is no proper communication.



YOUR ADVICE TO STUDENTS

I would encourage students to be open-minded and to explore and try different jobs and working environments, as this will help them to narrow down options throughout their career and choose the path they will feel happy about. They should not worry about spending time doing this, and they should not consider this explorative process as wasting time, because at the end of the day they will gain insights and valuable experiences. My advice is also to work on something that motivates them, and they feel passionate about rather than just thinking in terms of salary or financial conditions – because this is something that will probably come eventually. For me, it was also very important to travel, to live and to work abroad, so I would recommend them to do the same, preferably in an English-speaking country or somewhere where they can practice and improve their language skills, as this is a key tool nowadays and will open a lot of doors.



YOUR ADVICE TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

I would advise teachers to expose students to professionals or graduates so they can learn from their experiences. Perhaps teachers could invite external guests to their class, or organize short visits to companies, universities, etc. in their own region. That would provide students with insights on jobs and working environments they could carry out in the future. On the other hand, I would suggest teachers provide tools to students to develop their critical thinking skills, this is important to confront themselves, to discover what they are now and what they want to become in the future.

My advice to parents is to support and encourage their children to travel abroad, even if it is for short periods, but it is important that they experience different cultures and meet new people when they are young. This will help them develop new skills and capabilities for their future. I believe it is also important that they support their children in whatever career path they choose as long as they have the drive and motivation.



LEARN MORE

Gerardo González LinkedIn profile:

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BIOAZUL SL website:

<https://www.bioazul.com/en/>