

Career Sheet: Director



Despina Mitropoulou, Director of GFOSS – Open Technologies Alliance)

I received my BSc (Hons) in Digital Media from the University of Portsmouth and my MSc in Child-Computer Interaction from the University of Central Lancashire. I started working for GFOSS – Open Technologies Alliance in 2010 as a project coordinator and am currently the Director of the organization. As the director of GFOSS, I have participated as an invited speaker in multiple events/conference to discuss and promote Open-Source Policies and Initiatives. I have also been responsible for the organization of several workshops/conferences about Open Source, and I actively participate in the design and implementation of GFOSS' initiatives and projects.



OVERVIEW OF THE JOB

Being the director of a non-profit organization, it is always a challenge to balance the management of projects and active participation in creative and innovative initiatives. I am lucky enough to be involved in an organization with a wide range of activities on Open-Source Software, Open Data, Open Educational Resources etc., so a lot of the initiatives and projects we implement involve STEM education. GFOSS is the national contact point for [Scientix](#) in Greece, therefore we organise and participate in many initiatives that promote STEM education. Some of the most recent projects we designed and implement that relate to STEM is the annual [competition](#) of Open Technologies in Education and the [Code+Create](#) project.



WHAT INSPIRED YOU

I cannot say that there has been someone, or something, specific that initially inspired me to start this job. Although, there was a series of (mostly unplanned) events that led me to the position I am in today. Once I started getting involved in Open Source and Openness in general, I was every day inspired by the people of the community, and my colleagues, to actively participate and contribute as much as possible.



TYPICAL WORKING DAY

Apart from the daily communication via emails and teleconferences (which has increased in the Covid era), we have daily and weekly short sprints with my team to check in and plan the tasks of the day/week.

Apart from that, there is no typical working day. And this is the aspect that I love about my current job. Because of the diversity of the projects that we implement and participate in, one day, I might be talking to a conference about Open Education and its principles, and the next day I might be working on a deliverable of a project about Digital Twins! My job also involved a lot of travelling (in the pro-Covid era) that has now been replaced with teleconferences.



STUDY & CAREER PATH

After I finished school, I was not yet sure about my field of studies and the career path I wanted to follow. Therefore, I decided to take a two year course in a Vocational Training Institute in ICT and realised that I liked the field. But I mostly enjoyed the creative aspect rather than the technical aspect. And therefore, I decided to get a degree in Digital Media next. I was always fond of children and educational activities. This is what led me to then do a Masters in Child Computer Interaction and try to combine ICT and education. Although at the time of my studies I did not have a clear career path in mind, now I realize that my studies and skills acquired through them, have prepared me for the career path I followed. If I started all over again, I believe I would make the same choices since I have gained experiences and knowledge in different fields, that when combined have helped me throughout my career.



KEY SKILLS

- **Critical thinking and Problem-solving** are necessary skills, especially when you manage a team and challenges raise daily, which you usually need to resolve in a short amount of time.
- **Research** is necessary for proposals and projects, especially in ICT, where things change constantly.
- **Administrative skills** are very important when you need to manage projects and activities.

- **Collaboration skills:** since you are required to work as part of a team, within the organization, but also with other stakeholders in projects.
- **Presentation and social skills** are needed as I very often have to participate in events and present and advocate for the principles and benefits of Open Technologies.
- **Editing, writing and translation,** are skills needed for creating or reviewing reports, policy papers, studies etc.
- **IT skills** are also essential. Although, for my job I will not be directly involved in the development of technical parts of a project, however, to manage a team of software engineers and developers and monitor tech projects, technology literacy and understanding terminology and design principles are required.
- It goes without saying that **managing skills** are essential for my job and are used every day, within the organization, but also with external stakeholders and collaborators.
- Last but not least, **personal skills such as adaptability, commitment, creativity, motivation, personal responsibility, self-reflection, time management** etc., are needed in order to perform my job successfully.



CAREER PROSPECT

Having acquired multidisciplinary skills both through my studies and my work experience, there are different sectors that I could work and utilise my skills. I could work in the ICT sector. With expertise in Open-Source Software, in Project Management, in Research, in Education, etc. ICT is used horizontally in so many different fields. Therefore, I could also easily move to another sector.



CHALLENGES

So much to do and so little time! The main challenge is usually time management and monitoring of tasks. Since we have a wide range of activities, there is always more that we want to do and accomplish. But usually, we do not have enough resources and time to implement everything! That is why time management, prioritization and delegation are essential skills.



YOUR ADVICE TO STUDENTS

I remember when I was finishing school, there was a lot of pressure for students to figure out early on exactly what they will study and what career path they want to follow. In my case, I had no idea of what I wanted to do, so I decided to experiment and try different things. From my side, I would say that it is ok if you do not always have a clear plan! The world evolves every day. And what we learned from this past year is that circumstances can change, so there might be a career path that you will end up following that has nothing to do with what you initially planned or studied. My advice to students would be to follow their interests and ambitions and try to gain knowledge and skills from every experience and opportunity you get!



YOUR ADVICE TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

I would suggest to teachers and parents to inspire and support children's ambitions as much as possible. Expose them to many diverse opportunities. Let them try different things and experiment until they find their inclination and realize their talents. Respect and accept their differences but do not limit children because of them. Give attention to social and personal skills such as self-confidence, adaptability, curiosity, motivation, and empathy. They are of the same importance as the skills you teach them around specific topics.



LEARN MORE

Explore the GFOSS – Open Technologies Alliance website: <https://gfoss.eu/>

Find out more about Despina Mitropoulou and her work as a director on the Women in GovTech series of the DUET project: <https://www.digitalurbantwins.com/despina-mitropoulou>



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