

First out of the many new employees at Treteknisk, is Ana Maria Santos Bouzada (31) from Brazil. She started at Treteknisk at the end of January, and has already started to find her place, working with sustainability and environment.

Long way away

Ana Maria grew up in Belo Horizonte, the sixth largest city in Brazil, which is also the capital of the state Minas Gerais in the southeastern part of Brazil, one of the largest states in the country. Minas Gerais is known for its many mines as well as the production of milk and coffee.

Ana Maria did her bachelor's degree in Environmental Engineering at the university Centro Federal de Educacao Tecnologica de Minas Gerais (CEFET-MG) in Belo Horizonte, which is for Brazil what NTNU is in Norway.

In the Brazilian education system, a bachelor's degree is five years and much more work-intensive than Norway with 60 credits each semester (as opposed to the normal 30 credits per semester in Norway) and also includes a mandatory internship.

Ana Maria did her internship at a construction company and found the connection between sustainability and construction interesting.

Enter Norway

As a part of her education, Ana Maria did an exchange program to the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) in Ås, where she studied for a major in Environmental Sciences.

She was able to choose the location herself and chose Ås sort of blindly without reading up on the country or the city before leaving Brazil.

– I did not want to prepare that much, as it would be “new” pretty much wherever I decided to go. So that was all I needed to know.

Still shocked

Despite being prepared to take on whatever challenges she faced, coming from a large city in a large country and moving to Ås, Norway was quite a shock.

– I did not necessarily feel at home in Ås, it was too small and not much happening. The cities here feel quite small and intimate, but I liked the country overall with its laid-back style and people.

Ana Maria had never experienced snow before coming to Norway, but after several years she can happily report that she likes the winter and have learned how to ski.

Norway is it

After the study exchange, she knew she wanted to spend more time in this beautiful country of ours, so she finished her studies and came back to Norway, this time to Oslo.

Now a master's degree in Hydrology at the University of Oslo (UiO) was on the menu. This study was directed towards future work with floods, and although coming from a country where one of the main natural risks is floods, Ana Maria realized this would narrow her area for work in the future.

So, after one year she decided to pursue a master's degree in Environmental and Natural Resources, again at NMBU in Ås, although continuing to live in Oslo. This gave her the option of following the academic passion in environmental management while still enjoying the “big” city.

Here she specialized in sanitation and water. Her master thesis was an LCA of a sustainable wastewater treatment system, part of the SiEUGreen project. This was also when the pandemic hit

Norway, so her master's thesis was done from home and the first time she physically met her supervisors all together was at the thesis defense.

The best parts

– Studying in Norway gave me more professional opportunities than I would have in Brazil. I know people from my bachelor that changed career path or are now hired as analysts, which is less paid than if hired as engineers.

Other aspects making Norway preferred over her home country, is the relationship between qualifications and job opportunities, which do not always add up in Brazil . Oftentimes, knowing the right people will give a high-paid and influential job without having the necessary training or experience.

– In addition to the professional opportunities, the values of the Norwegian people and the safety I feel when walking on the streets of Oslo, contributed heavily to my wish to stay.

Environmental Brazilian

With an inherent interest in the environment and sustainability, Ana Maria did the certification for BREEAM and worked remotely for a Brazilian architecture company with their sustainability assessment.

– I saw this as an interesting tool, and I suppose this is where my direction towards the wood industry started, I saw the impact of wood in buildings. Where the construction industry is more focused on economic aspects, my experience is that architects are more interested in sustainability.

She also knew the principles of life-cycle assessments (LCA) before coming to Norway and knew she would be interested in working with that.

Ana Maria likes the complicated over what's easy, and her theory is that this is why she likes LCA.

– In theory, LCA accounts for economic and social aspects as well, not only environmental impacts. So, you can change the focus of the LCA according to the intended application of results, i.e. the choice of a more environmental friendly process or materials, a cheaper product or a socially just process. The latter is yet a challenge, not easy to incorporate in all LCAs.

Theory and practice

EPDs and LCAs are not mandatory in Brazil yet, and theory, practice and regulations differ. Ana Maria believes this must be made mandatory for more sustainable treatments of the trees and wood industry in her home country.

– But Brazil is still in the problem-solving stage whereas Norway has reached a level of optimizing production and working with sustainability.

Personal reasons

While waiting for the studies in Hydrology to commence, Ana Maria found herself with free time in Oslo, so she visited the Brazilian Embassy in Oslo asking if she could volunteer at the cultural section.

Through mutual friends made at the Embassy, she met her future husband, fittingly enough a hydrologist! They have now been married for five years, and he is a big fan of her home country.

– He loves Brazil and although there is a language barrier, he gets along very well with my family. Our overlapping interest in the environment makes our dinner talks interesting.

Having a Norwegian husband helps in the practice of the Norwegian language, and they speak Norwegian at home, although the learning process is going slowly for an impatient Brazilian.

“Wood technician” (“Tretekniker”)

Ana Maria’s first impression of Treteknisk was that the institute was super organized with structured data of good quality, making the work a lot easier.

– Right now, I am working on LCA for Nordic Door, and I am leaning towards working more with doors and windows in the future.

She is also working with experienced researcher Roja Modaresi on her projects, and Ana Maria can definitely see herself doing her own research work in the future.

– The most important thing is that I am optimistic regarding the future of wood!