

**1. For those who don't know you, how would you define yourself? Who is Filipa?**

I'm 33 years old and I have a serious background of backpacking and exploring other countries. I would describe myself as empathetic, sympathetic, positive, a bit friendly, and naturally curious about the others. I think my general path has been this awareness of the human being and how they relate to each other.

I always go by the sentence "Everyone smiles in the same language", and this actually portrays my personality. I think the smile is something that speaks to me and allows me to connect with other people.

**2. How did you start your journey?**

I've always travelled with my parents; I was one of those fortunate kids who had a big trip every summer. But then the crisis came, I grew up, and I realized that I liked to discover other countries, and other people, and I was always very curious.

My three favourite things to do on a trip are: going to a bar or staying outside with a coffee observing people, getting lost in the city while walking, sightseeing, and going to the supermarket.

I graduated in Economics and I didn't fell in love with the degree, but I went to work at a bank. So, at 21 years old I was already having the 9 to 5 kind of life, and I said to myself "I'm wasting my life here". This is not what I was meant to do, so I went on to study Economics, but in relation to social sustainability and inclusive projects. It was about creating projects around the communities' needs.

## **Peru**

When I got the chance of doing my first solo trip – a summer school in Peru, in 2011 – I really felt like “Yeah, this is my jam”. What gets me most curious is not the history of places, but connecting with people and observing their behaviours.

I was very sad when I landed in Portugal, because I didn't want to come back. I wanted to stay there, because I fell in love with salsa, with couscous, and this 10-year-old boy, who was very savvy for his age. That little boy was selling art craft. It was late at night, the sun was already down, and my friends and I had already bought all the crafts that we wanted for the day and he smartly asked:

“Where are you from?”

“I am from Portugal.”

“So, your capital is Lisbon, your flag is red, green, with a yellow dot in the centre, and you have the best football player in the world, Cristiano Ronaldo (at that time).”

He was already a marketing strategist, and of course we bought stuff from him! That got me thinking, and I realised that he was probably doing that to support his family. Sometimes, we are really just what we are dealt with, our contexts, the cards we are given.

In 2012, I joined my first NGO, called SAPANA (“dream” in Nepali). I was so excited to be part of that, and we were working on the development of soft skills and personal development. At that time, I was really interested in this NGO because they were planning on going to Peru. But then, I fell in love with its mission, and I started another path of studies, which was Branding and Brand Management, because I was inside the NGO, and I was like “This is so cool. How do we pass the message and explain to other people what we are doing?”, so I pursued that path. Once I finished my studies, the NGO hired me.

After my one-year contract ended, I quit the NGO and that was really hard for me, because I had invested very much in it, and I believed in it – still do –, but it was time for me to get past the computer.

### ***Argentina***

In 2014, I went to Rosário, Argentina, through EVS (currently ESC – European Solidarity Corps), because it was close to Peru, of course. We were two Portuguese and two Italians. To our surprise, we didn't have anything to work on, nothing prepared, and we were supposed to work on community empowerment.

Given the situation, I decided to do something, and went hitchhiking. I posted about that on a Facebook group to see if there were people who wanted to join me. This girl from Uruguay wrote to me, expressing her desire to join me, and little did I know that she was deaf. This was the most enlightening experience for me. Meeting Natalia was a learning opportunity for me, because you never get the time to experience the same experience that you're having from another side. We went on some mountains and valleys and did some hitchhiking, hiking, and mountain hiking, and the noises of the trees that make you look back, she wouldn't have that. Instead, she would be touching the trees, stopping and feeling the wind, and it was so poetic.

In Rosário, I developed my own project; I launched a campaign that was called *Remeras Humanas* (Human T-shirts). It was inspired by the free hug movement, but it was through the T-shirt. I produced ten T-shirts that said "Give me a hug, and I will give you this T-shirt". The idea was to create a hug chain that would next connect to the selling of other T-shirts that would actually be supporting NGOs working with homeless people. The idea was "By the warmth of the hug, provide warm to the homeless". Due to lack of communication and commitment, I only managed to sell around twenty T-shirts, because it was just me working on this. That was me testing the communication and branding part in relation to social change.

I think that social awareness is what makes us change. This doesn't happen only by being told what to do. You have to actually be aware of what's happening and get engaged with a cause. That's why I rely so much on branding and communication. I really believe in the smile, but there's something more, and communication is key. And how we are evolving on the way to consuming communication, information is getting challenging, and that's thrilling for me – I like to live on the edge of the new.

### ***Hawaii***

After Argentina, I started the backpacking trip. I had a friend from France meeting me in New York. We did New York, flew to Las Vegas, then we did a road trip in the canyons and everything. My friend returned to Europe, and I went to Hawaii and stayed there for one month and a half doing woofing (Willing Workers on Organic Farms). There, we had weekly workshops on non-violent communication and it was about sharing our feelings and needs, and accepting “no” for an answer, and it was a true learning experience that I enjoyed very much.

For anyone wanting this kind of experience, but not knowing how to really get started, my advice is “Figure it out there”. When we start putting the ifs is when we try to fit a pattern.

### ***Costa Rica***

The next experience, which I call “surf”, involved me working at a surf camp for 3 weeks in Costa Rica. I was already 26 years old by that time, and I thought to myself “I'm too old for this!”, because I was there with younger people than me. Actually, it was even nicer, because I saw that those people had a different take on the world and the way they would put themselves in society. They had other expectations and this also brings the reflection of how important is to experience other cultures and lifestyles to enrich and find yourself. I learned the duality of really being yourself, because you don't give a flying duck about what other people think, but on the other hand, you cannot develop more profound relations.

### ***São Tomé e Príncipe***

In the meantime, I travelled to Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, then, in 2016, I returned to Portugal, but this time I had a plan. I had bought a flight ticket to Africa. I was supposed to help build a sustainability project in Portugal and implement it in São Tomé e Príncipe for one month and a half.

The idea of that project was to empower communities that weren't economically efficient. We call these countries under-developed, but it's such a false concept, because we do this by applying our own concept of development. There were days when they didn't commit to the project, and I struggled to accept that, because that was something you somehow do for yourself, to empower yourself, and gain financial sustainability. But they already have the fish, the crops, a roof over their head. They live from day to day, and they're not like us, who need to have a savings account for a rainy day, and a rainy day here is actually meant to pay the car that you need to go to work. You work to pay the car that you need to go to work with. It's this vicious circle and we call it development. And people there are like "If I want to go to work today, I go. If not, I'm not going".

### ***Thailand***

It was a two-week experience. One week of traveling and one week of volunteering. This was the returning to SAPANA as part of the communication team. It also helped me find myself, besides the experience with branding and communication. I really stand for being a buddy. BFH – Buddy for hire – is my brand, because I feel that being a buddy is my calling. I'll be the one cheering you up, I'm there to help you and be a little bit more.

Sometimes, you see this kind of quotes – "If you're not working on your dream, you're working on someone else's", but doing this is actually part of my dream.

What people don't see – and I think this is a deep belief of mine – is that our actions don't have real change or impact on our generation; it will probably have in two generations after us. That's where sustainability is going to count. Sometimes, it's not about what you're doing, but about how it will affect the future. I stand for the long-term effect and change.

In self-development work, there's always this element of sharing in a group, a safe space, and where you can get others' feedback. Sometimes, you're so plunged into your own sufferings, that you can't see other paths. When you enter this sharing mode, someone else might see things in a different way, which can help you unblock.

### **3. Why Branding and Communication?**

My values are based on saving time so that everyone can dedicate their time to what they love. I work mainly with coaches, who don't necessarily have the time to pursue social media and do brand communication. Hence, the professional that I help doesn't have to worry or spend his energy and time on communication. It's a very personal relationship.

### **4. One of the ways in which this love for communication and people took form is SPEAK FARO. How do you see this project growing?**

Patricia – the co-founder of SPEAK UTRECHT – spoke to me and she told me “This project is you, and if you want to commit to being in one place, this would be ideal for you”. Then, in the context of the pandemic, I decided to do it.

SPEAK is everything that I stand up for, which is working on social inclusion, but taking the advantage of something that is common – the language. It's also about sharing culture, and getting across the feeling of belonging, because what we would like to do is to welcome the people and invite

them to share; they're not coming here just to learn, but they can always share and there's validity in that.

**5. What do you like most about Faro?**

Although I've been born and raised in Faro, I never thought that I would end up here. But from all these hippie experiences that I had, and living in cities, I always thought that I would live in a Lisbon-like city, more cosmopolitan, and busy. When I lived in Lisbon, I could count on my hands how many times I went to the beach. I realised that the busy lifestyle was not for me. The other city that could fit these criteria of having events, cultural life, and people, was Faro and since it has started having low-cost flights, it made a huge comeback of development.

**6. What is the place in Faro you are most connected to? Why?**

Probably O Castelo, and the Old Town, because I like its vibe, and I think that the bar is the perfect place to be in touch with the old and the future, which is the Ria Formosa, where you can actually see the horizon.

**7. What is the first thing on your mind when you think about Faro?**

I think what stands out most about Faro is balance. I really believe that Faro brings the right balance to a life where you can feel yourself, and choose from different activities, cultural events. Also, you are close enough to the airport, the beach, the countryside, so it fulfils you in the right way.

**8. What would be the soundtrack of your life story?**

It would be a mix of kizomba, salsa, bachata, and tango.

