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FINAL REPORT OF MY ERASMUS INTERNSHIP IN GIACCHE VERDI BRONTE



Bronte and Etna

WHY GIACCHE VERDI?

I arrived in Bronte at the beginning of January, after my graduation from Master Studies in Environmental Management at the University of Warsaw. I found the offer on the website ErasmusIntern.org, while looking for some interesting opportunities abroad for the first months after my graduation.

The offer seemed very interesting to me – it was closely related to my educational background, it gave me an opportunity to spend a lot of time outside (unlike most of the offers that consist mainly of office work), to do some physical work, to interact with children and to learn about the Sicilian nature. I sent my application and soon after – I got accepted. The Giacche Verdi team was very responsive, answered all my questions and the whole initial procedure with the Learning Agreement and travel arrangements went very smoothly.

This experience was an Erasmus internship for me – a chance to put into practice the knowledge and skills acquired during my university studies but also to improve my language skills, spend some time in a new place, visit interesting spots (Sicily is very rich in beautiful nature, historical sites and monuments) and make new international friends. Since I had

participated in many exchanges abroad before, including Erasmus placements, and I had read final reports of the previous Giacche Verdi interns and volunteers, I knew more or less what to expect and I was looking forward to this upcoming experience. Now, at the end of my traineeship in this organization, I can admit that my expectations were met and that I enjoyed the past three months a lot.

WORK IN GIACCHE VERDI

The work activities in the organization were diversified. Depending on the arrangements and weather conditions, we worked in the office or outside – e.g. in schools or the Children’s Forest. Usually, when we arrived to the office in the morning, we knew (at least more or less) the plans for that day. But sometimes, depending on the needs, new tasks were assigned and we would leave the office to work outside or we would stay in the office even though a school visit had been planned – for example in case of rain. That is why it was always important to be flexible and ready to do whatever was needed at the moment.

We all received Giacche Verdi outfits that were suitable for outdoor work as well as looked well in the schools and in the office so there was no problem with adjusting our outfits to the activities performed.

At the beginning, after I arrived, some of the projects were on hold or did not start yet so I had a “soft landing” – I had some time to stay in the office, learn about Giacche Verdi and its projects from the other volunteers, read about the activities of the organization on its webpage, study some Italian and prepare myself for the awaiting tasks.



The Giacche Verdi team at the beginning of my internship and our dog Bengi in the garden by our office

Bosco Brignolo

In the first weeks of my internship we worked a lot in Bosco Brignolo - Children's Forest, located in the upper part of Bronte. We planted many trees, cut down *Ferula cummunis* (a plant that is poisonous to many animals), removed some rocks and controlled the state of the trees planted in the previous seasons. I enjoyed going to Bosco Brignolo a lot - it was physical work in the open air, with a beautiful view on the volcano. I liked it especially at the beginning, when Etna was still covered with snow. Every time when the air was transparent enough and there were no low clouds, we could see it and it looked simply magical.



Etna seen from Bosco Brignolo

Bufo bufo

The class with the small guides in the Bufo bufo path in Santa Domenica was my first experience with working with children during my traineeship. Before that meeting I was stressed because my Italian was very poor (it was mostly Spanish with some Italian words in between). The German volunteers Pheline and Selina who had already been working in Giacche Verdi for a few months and knew Italian well, conducted the class. The topic was: animals in the winter (mostly the ones that hibernate) and the most interesting part of it was montage of a house for a hedgehog together with the children. My task was to make a group energizer – a game before the class. Even though I was quite nervous before, it occurred to be a very easy and enjoyable activity. The children are used to the foreign volunteers, it is not a problem for them when we make mistakes in Italian and they are very supportive. It was a nice experience for me and an introduction to all the activities with children that were about to come.



Activities in Santa Domenica conducted with Pheline and Selina

Frutti per la Biosfera

Frutti per la Biosfera – Fruit for Biosphere, was the biggest project during my stay in Giacche Verdi Bronte. I had a pleasure to take part in three different phases of this project: I visited a few schools to help with making presentations, I prepared little fields for the school gardens and I participated in making outdoor activities for children.

I visited elementary and middle schools in Bronte, Adrano, Biancavilla, Piedimonte Etneo, Fiumefreddo di Sicilia and Linguaglossa. Along with the other volunteers that talked about their countries and cities, I made presentations about Poland, our typical fruit and vegetables and traditional meals. It was always the introduction to the main presentation about sustainable consumption and production of food products made by Marco and Anna that work with Giacche Verdi. Just like with the class in the Bufo bufo path, I was stressed before (the whole presentation was in Italian), but it ended up being a great experience. The children were very interested in my homeland and our food, wanted to learn some Polish words and there were even a few pupils that had been to Poland before and were happy to share their insights.



On our way to one of the schools – with Natalie and Iris, and presentation making with Fabiane, Anna, Paula and Tobia

Preparation of the little fields for the school gardens was probably my favorite part of the Frutti per la Biosfera project because I enjoy outside activities. Usually we spent a few hours picking the trash, weeding, pruning and ploughing. It was a lot of hard physical work but the effect was always impressive. We transformed overgrown and littered sites into empty fields ready to welcome the pupils – our little gardeners.



Preparation of sites for school gardens in Adrano, Fiumefreddo and Bronte with Karl, Benjamin, Fabiane, Anna, Paula, Selver and Betül

The outdoor classes were the most challenging ones for me because they required interaction with the kids in Italian (it is obviously not easy to answer the questions that you do not even understand well). In most of the schools I conducted the animal station, with Pheline or Fabiane. We explained about the garden animals, their behavior in the winter, presented houses for animals (constructed by the volunteers before) and talked about why animals like hedgehogs, bats and insects are our friends and how we can support them. The kids were lovely – interested in the topic, eager to share their stories about the animals and very cooperative. It was a very enjoyable activity.



The animal station conducted together with Pheline and Fabiane in various schools and a group picture with pupils and Giacche Verdi volunteers in a middle school in Bronte

The work by the project Frutti per la Biosfera was a very enjoyable experience. But also a demanding one because we had to “manage” big groups of children, even more than 15 kids per group. Sometimes they were very distracted and some of the kids did not pay too much attention or the opposite – they wanted to do everything themselves and did not let the other kids see the houses. That is why we needed to look for ways to organize our work well, in order to make this activity both educative and enjoyable for the pupils. The language issue was also challenging. I got these tasks assigned even though at the beginning I did not feel ready for that. It was stressful but I just had to manage so I did manage and everything ended up well.

I always eagerly participated in the trips, especially to the other side of the volcano (in Piedimonte, Linguaglossa or Fiummefreddo) because it was a chance to spend some time outside, interact with children and visit some new places (beautiful views on the volcano again!). I also spent around a week living in a house for volunteers in Piedimonte and I enjoyed it a lot. I had a chance to visit this lovely town, change the environment for a bit and also the house itself was much newer than the one in Bronte. Unfortunately, later on Giacche Verdi stopped renting that house so when we were working in that area we had to commute (even every day) from Bronte.

On Friday, March 15, a big environmental event was organized all around the world – Global Strike for Future, forming a part of the movement Fridays for Future initiated for by the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. In order to support this important event, we also prepared our banners saying #GlobalStrikeForFuture Giacche Verdi. That day, after our Frutti per la Biosfera presentation, we explained to the pupils in the elementary school in Piedimonte the importance of initiative and activity of kids and teenagers for the improvement of the climate. It is not only the law makers and politicians that can make changes. Our everyday choices, for example regarding acquisition of food products and means of transport, really matter and make a difference.



Our contribution to the Global Strike for Future – with Fabiane, Iris, Selver, Emir, Selina and children from Piedimonte

Fiumi puliti

Fiumi puliti – Clean Rivers, was another nice project. Together with Anna (the coordinator from Piedimonte) and the volunteers from that branch of Giacche Verdi, we conducted classes by the river Fiumefreddo for elementary school kids, explaining them about the river environment, namely: plants, animals and water. My part was usually plants – I conducted that activity together with Zino (an expert on eatable plants), mostly supporting him and adding some interesting information about the plants that we can find around the river and in the water. Once I also helped Paula to conduct the animal station where together with children we looked for water insects and birds around the river.

I liked this project a lot because the spot was very nice – a lovely river right by the beach. In order to prepare myself to this project, I learnt about the plants growing in the river environment. Moreover, the kids were very interested – they were asking many questions and were actively participating in the classes. It was a very enjoyable activity.



Plant station conducted with Zino and a group picture with the participants of Fiumi Puliti and the volunteers: Tobia, Paula, Selina and Fabiane

Riciclaggio & riuso

Once I visited an elementary school in Mascali with Natalie and Fabiane to help the Piedimonte team with a recycling activity that they conduct every month. We cut used plastic bottles to make bird feeders and the pupils decorated them. We did not know what exactly we are supposed to do with the children, so the first minutes were confusing, but with some confidence and creativity we managed to organize the activity and at the end it was very nice. Moreover, a few times we helped the Piedimonte volunteers by their reuse activity in the senior center. From all the tasks assigned during the internship, it was my favorite one because it was relaxing, artistic and did not require much interaction in Italian language that I am still not confident enough with. I painted an old flower vase and the girls helped to paint a table. Both of these objects are supposed to stay in the center, to serve the local inhabitants.



Reuse activity with Paula, Anna, Selver and Fabiane

Additional activities

Beside of the already described projects, we had some additional activities, like removing *Ferula cummunis* from various lands for the safety of the horses that are kept there.

As a part of the internship, we also visited archeological museums in Randazzo and Maletto and an archeological site in Maletto where we were explained about the impressive history of this region. Even though the museums are small, they expose valuable objects, dating back to many centuries before Christ. These were very interesting and educative activities that let us understand better the historical and cultural richness of this area.

The whole Giacche Verdi team was very friendly to me. My favorite person was definitely Gino – our boss and a great friend who always made me laugh and made me feel welcome here. I could not imagine Giacche Verdi without him. Stefanie, Andrea and Julia were always here for us, ready to explain us everything and help us in case of any doubts or problems. I always enjoyed a lot the work with Anna – the coordinator from Piedimonte. Also the other people cooperating with Giacche Verdi that I had a pleasure to meet – Eva, Salvatore, Zino, Marco, İlkay and Rossella – were always very nice and friendly. They form a great team and it was a pleasure for me to be a part of this group.

In the last weeks of my internship we had classes of Italian language organized in the office – by the Italian volunteer Cristiano. It was a great support for us – the volunteers that definitely do not master the Italian language, to learn some more vocabulary and speak more grammatically correct.

Thanks to the cooperation of Giacche Verdi with Pro Loco – a group of locals organizing events and taking care of the tourists in the city, I had a chance to visit (together with a few people on a civil service in Pro Loco) a beautiful historical school – Real Collegio Capizzi with its impressive library and 2 churches as well as the Pinacoteca Nunzio Sciavarello.



The archeological site in Maletto and one of the most beautiful books in the library of the Real Collegio Capizzi

ACCOMMODATION AND FREE TIME

During my internship, I lived in a flat upstairs from the office so arriving to work was taking me around 20 seconds – a great advantage of this accommodation. I shared the room with Fabiane and for the first weeks also with Susanne. In the other room there were Betül and Server and then – Natalie and Iris. Since each volunteer comes and leaves independently from the others, the composition of the group was changing often. The house was very nice, with a big balcony and a living room – perfect for group activities. During the winter months it was very cold inside so we were using heaters with gas bottles to warm the rooms up in the evenings. Otherwise, it would not be possible to stay there.

The whole experience of forming a part of this international team was very nice. In total, during my internship, I worked with 16 volunteers from Germany, Turkey, Brazil, France, Spain and Italy. They were all lovely people and great friends. We spent so much time together – cooking (unlike me, most of the volunteers were great cooks), eating (way too much), making movie nights, going out at night and making trips around Bronte and further away.



The countless dinners together

Sicily is a beautiful island. During my stay here I managed to visit many nice places such as the towns around the volcano: Piedimonte, Linguaglossa, Rangazzo, Adrano, Fiummefreddo and Paternò. I also went, among others, to Catania, Siracusa, Noto, Taormina and Castelmola. All these cities and towns are very pretty, rich in history, ancient monuments, magnificent Baroque architecture and impressive museums.

I could not forget to mention the Sicilian nature. The island has beautiful mountains and coast. The differences of altitudes (and consequently – temperature) are so big that in the winter within an hour you can have a snowball fight and have a bath in the see.

Bronte itself is a nice town with some pretty places. The biggest attraction here is definitely Etna. Piano dei Grilli, above Bronte, is a perfect place to visit the former craters and to hike close to the volcano. Also the river Alcantara below the city is picturesque and perfect for walking trips. I

visited some of the cities on my own or with a friend that visited me, but I mostly traveled with the other volunteers. It is best to visit places by car because there are no train connections on Sundays – only short one day trips on Saturdays are possible. Also, to many spots it is (almost) impossible to get by public transport. I was very lucky to have a chance to visit some beautiful places with volunteers Karl and Cristiano who had cars and were inviting us to join their trips.



Our little weekend adventures



Some of the nicest cities I visited: Taormina, Siracusa, Castelmola, Paternò and Catania

SUMMARY

The last three months were a very nice experience for me and I will be looking back on them with a big smile. I made good friends, visited beautiful places, tried delicious meals and improved my Italian. I learnt a lot about the Sicilian nature and improved my interpersonal skills thanks to constant cooperation with the Giacche Verdi employees and the other volunteers. I learnt how to work with children and adjust my behavior and the information shared to different age groups. This internship taught me also how to organize my work efficiently and how to act confidently even if I miss that confidence

Finally, I would like to thank all the Giacche Verdi volunteers for forming such an important part of my experience in Bronte. Beni – for joining my philosophical disputes in Bosco Brignolo and our adventures in Piano dei Grilli, Betül – for helping me with all the fire issues and for being such a lovely, caring and humble flat mate, Cristiano – for Shotgun, fragoline, banana, fazzoletti and for showing me the most beautiful spots around, Emir – for the unfinished theories, scientific talks, wanted and unwanted selfies at the dinners and for the fun facts for today, Fabi – for your night storytelling, dobranoc, for our cakes and pies production in your house and for our Sunday visits to cafés (solo 2 dolci!), Piccola Iris – for the most adorable “true true” and “it’s so interesting!” that I have heard and for our girls talks, Karl – for all the unwanted car jumps while passing under the bridge, giving me a chance to celebrate my birthday in the sea, for pistachio cream and for turning on the second fire that simply saved us during those hard winter nights, Natalina – for being such a great dog mama to Bengi and for showing the real girl power and independence, Pheline – for the lovely brunches, solving the disputes about the UNO rules, for mastering the animal station and making me master it after your departure, Sally – for the best Turkish dinners and adjusting the spiciness level to the delicate mouths from the North, Selina – for Panda playlists, Piedimonte fruttivendolo, the best guacamole and l’arte (I totally buy this rhyme!), Susi - for introducing me to all the Giacche Verdi life and showing me the park Villa Comunale by Life Caffè that became my favorite place in Bronte, and finally Viki – for the friendliest and most welcoming smile that I wish I have had a chance to see for longer than just my last 10 days.

Grazie, Giacche Verdi. È stato un grande piacere.