

FINAL REPORT OF MY ERASMUS+ INTERNSHIP
IN GIACCHE VERDI BRONTE

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The projects

From my first workday on I was involved in the ongoing project “Frutti per la biosfera”. This environmental education activity focuses on climate change and possible actions that aim to reduce or combat CO₂ emissions in the long term, related to agriculture and sustainable food. The association Giacche Verdi Bronte realises this with the support of the Manfred-Hermesen-Stiftung foundation and the support of the German Ministry BMU with the European Climate Initiative (EUKI). Together with the other volunteers and workers of Giacche Verdi, I went to the middle school of



The recently realized school garden of Bronte.

Bronte and we planted a school garden together with the children. In the beginning, it was a challenge to tell the Italian kids what they should do and what not, but the communication got easier very fast, even better than with the adults. The activities with the children were not only planting and sawing: The volunteers who have joint the project already for a longer time discovered together with the children the soil, discussed the animals which live in our gardens and how we can actively help them. I was always part of these stations and it was useful that I had some background knowledge. Because of my ecological studies, it was easier for me to follow the presentation. After our garden in Bronte, we also went to schools in Adrano, Randazzo, Maletto, Biancavilla, Piedimonte and Mascali. In this way, I travelled a lot around the Etna and got to know many cities, schools and children. A few month later we came back to the school gardens with the children and collected the fruits of our work together. In fact, the school in Bronte installed a watering system so that in summer vacation nobody must water the plants. With success: the tomatoes and zucchini grew big and prosper.

But the planting of the gardens was just one part of the project. Furthermore, the volunteers made a presentation about the connection between climate protection and food consummation and hold it in the schools as a lesson. For this, I had to prepare a short presentation in Italian about myself, my hometown and my favourite dish. It was a nice experience to talk in front of the classes and they understood me and laughed about the fact that if you eat asparagus your pee smells strange.



Giacche Verdi Volunteers and primary school students of Bronte on the farm field of Claudio, a local farmer.

Another part of the Frutti project were the farm visits. Together with the classes we went to organically cultivated farms in the surrounding of the schools. The farm owners were showing the children what they have planted and how they care about it. I learned how you must cut olive trees and how you make biological pesticide out of sugar.

In the final phase of this project, we organized weekend markets where local producers sold regional products like seeds from ancient plant types or bread from typical Sicilian grains. The aim was to get attention of the people that live in the Etna region and let them conquest their potential when it comes to regional production and consumption.



Left: Self-made sign for our market. Middle: Selina (Germany) at the planting station. Right: Local fruits and vegetables.

Moreover, we always had to write reports about our activities in this project, we had to take pictures and create posters about nature educational topics. Through this I evolved my writing and creative working skills.



The children's forest "Bosco brignolo" in Spring.

But we also worked for the previous project "Boschi per la biosfera". In this project, Giacche Verdi has realized a growing forest on an abandoned dump. We volunteers took care of the little trees, for example cut the grazing weed ferlach (*Ferula communis*) and other plants to give the oak trees an advantage. Because fires are a serious problem in Sicily, we mowed the herbs in late summer. In my first week I already removed a big herd of sheep's out of the forest area. We worked together with boys pupils from the agriculture school of Bronte in order to bring them closer to nature and practical work and us closer to the local

youth. During this work I learned how hard it is to let a forest grow in an area that has contaminated instead of rich soil. But I think, that this hard work could be worth it in the future.

I also took part in preparing the next upcoming project "Humus per la biosfera". The idea is to show students the worldwide importance for organic soil material, how humus gets formed and how easy composting is, how humus is part of a healthy soil and what you can do with it. For this, I created the project logo and did research about easy methods to build a compost. I hope this project will be a success like the previous ones!

However, these projects have a wider context. Giacche Verdi and the Manfred Hermsen foundation want to create a biosphere reserve in the area around the Etna. For this, we want to raise attention for the topics which are important in protected areas like this. The population that grows up now should get used to a sustainable interaction with nature and the resources it provides.



A little ranger talking about the fox on the "Bufo Bufo"- path.

Environmental education projects such as "piccole guide" can contribute to achieve this goal. The little rangers are a group of 9 to 14-year-old children in the village Santa Domenica Vittoria who meet in their spare time to inspire other children of their age with the local nature. They not only explain the flora and fauna of the Nebrodi Mountains, but also the cultural highlights such as old water mills and traditional legends. To open the "Bufo Bufo"- path, the first environmental education path in this area, we organised a tour where the "piccole guide" talk about the natural specialities in front of their classmates and other children.

But also, beyond the environmental education work I did exciting work in my internship. For example, the cleaning actions, taking part in conferences or creating a cartoon against plastic pollution.

Because in its roots, Giacche Verdi is an association for civil protection on horses, we also worked on a horse fair in Militello. There we saw all the typical horse types of Sicily. One of my highlights was the "Traversata". This one-week trip on horses through the Nebrodi Mountains is organised from Giacche Verdi. As I am already an experienced horse rider, I became the unique opportunity to ride together with the participants on different horses, when their owners wanted to repose a day.



Left: Riding in the Nebrodi Mountains on the Traversata with Rosella (Italy). Middle: With Fabiane (Brasil) and Fabio (Germany) on the horse fair. Right: On the Traversata with Nino (Italy).

The everyday life

Of course, 2000 km from home life is a little bit different. Because of this I had a little, let's say culture confusion at the beginning of my internship. I was wondering about the inhabitants, taking the car wherever you go (even just to your neighbours house), the abstinence of planning things that more than 5 minutes in advance, eating dinner in the middle of the night and ice cream for breakfast, a language that sounds nice by everyone else but you are not able to speak it, holy messes and catholically processions every day and how important this can be for a community and that it is not self-evident that there is no plastic garbage anywhere you go.

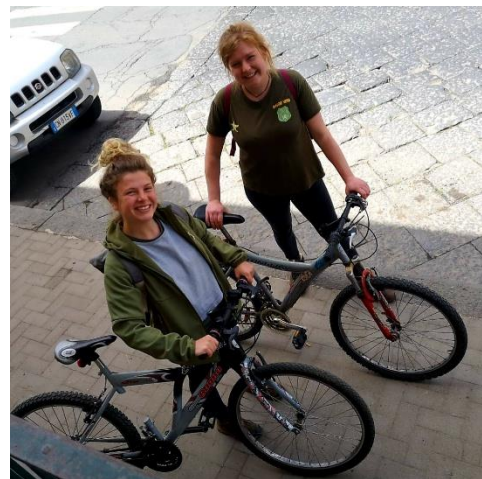
I tried to take the good parts for myself, getting used to the things I can not change and change the bad pieces as much as possible.



Growing basil on the balcony.

Together with the other volunteers, we started self-made projects to create plastic free products like floor cleaning agents, deodorant, toothpaste or mosquito spray. To consume less from supermarkets, we grow our own vegetables and herbs on the balcony and in the garden behind the office. Because you can not just live from tomatoes and basil (although it is delicious!) we went to the market every week. There you can not buy anything certified organic, but the hope remains that the small farmers will be more environmentally friendly than the big ones

(and if you take your own bags, you do not consume plastic bags). Whenever it was possible, we took the bikes for short trips or the little train around the Etna for longer travels. Because the tap water does not taste very good, instead of buying water in plastic bottles, we took it from the fountain around the corner of our house (and gained some muscles too).



With Selina and the bike to work.

Maybe it is harder to be sustainable in a country that is not Germany, but it is definitely possible.



Left: Selina and Pheline (Germany) return from the market. Right: Mostly local and regional fruits and vegetables.

The free time

Because I could write so much about the adventures that happened and the friends I met in Sicily, but that wouldn't even begin to be enough to describe anything, I just show some pictures.





In the end, I just want to say...

Grazie! Thank you! Danke! Obrigada! Teşekkürler!

... to everyone who was part of my internship and made it a very special time in my life.