

## Personal report

### Volunteering experience – Giacche Verdi

#### Project Boschi per la Biosfera

22. 09. 2017 - 01. 03. 2018.

My name is Ksenija, I am a 22 year old student of Landscape architecture from Belgrade, Serbia. I found about this project through an e-mail from Serbian Association of Landscape Architects. The biggest motivation for joining the project was the opportunity for a hands-on experience in environmental protection and a chance to learn and help through travel and meeting new people.

I arrived to Sicily at the end of September, joining a group of European volunteers and easily settling in the living conditions and work routine in Giacche Verdi team. The whole of Giacche Verdi staff is a very positive, cooperative and helpful group - always there for questions volunteers may have and fully committed to providing a pleasant and productive atmosphere in the office.

To start off, in the beginning of October we participated in a workshop for the European environmental experts. During the week we visited important natural sites in Nebrodi and Etna national parks, discussed local environmental situation and exchanged ideas and experiences on environmental education. This was a very interesting opportunity to exchange with the experts in the field and widen our knowledge in a very interactive way.

By the end of October the Boschi per la Biosfera project has been fully prepared and entered schools. The project consisted of three phases. First, a class with the presentation showing importance of forests. As volunteers, we went to schools in Etna region with local environmental experts, presenting locations of natural importance from our home countries which got the children really interested and connected to the subject, and then involved them in the Boschi per la Biosfera presentation, showing significance of forests to our ecosystem, how we should treat and protect them. Second encounter was an excursion with children collecting acorns that they will later plant as well as learning about different plant species and how to recognise them. And third, the final excursion with children, planting the collected acorns, learning about importance of organically grown fruits, about species of birds and insects we may find in Sicily, how important they are and how we can help them in our urbanised world. At the end of excursion they answered our evaluation questions in order for us to estimate the progress of the project.



Class lesson with Boschi per la Biosfera presentation



Second and third encounter with the children

Recognising the local plants and planting of the acorns

The excursions were a crucial point in involving children in the project, a way to see for themselves how an insect house or a bird house is made, plant their own seeds, taste an organic orange, etc. As volunteers we practiced our teamwork, communication and teaching skills. Some of the nicest moments were when the children recognised each of the volunteers from previous encounters and connected to us, and above all when we saw with what joy they participate in lessons and games, how inquisitive they can be and happy that they planted a future tree.

One of the big successes of the project is Bio Parco Blue Garden in Mascali. The undertaking consisted of revitalising an abandoned green space in a neighborhood of Mascali and transforming it to an urban bio park dedicated to children and the residents of the neighborhood. After clearing up the area from trash and invasive plants, setting up fence, information panels, and the educational posts, a big excursion for children of Mascali schools was organised in January. Seeing the children on the day of opening happily interacting with the volunteers, fully enjoying the new space and learning options it provides was by far the biggest reward.



Third excursion in Bio Parco Blue Garden, Mascali.

Alexandra (on the right) and I explaining the importance of insect house

During the project I had the opportunity to photograph most of the occasions – excursions, workshops, work ‘behind the scene’, lessons, etc. I was part of the team responsible for the insect house, as well as the design team behind the Boschi per la Biosfera calendar and infographic.



In-between the work for the project our daily life ran smoothly thanks to the great team of volunteers. Living with a big group of people is usually not easy, but this was an exception to the rule. We made it fun and interesting, organising trips, cooking dinners together, making musical or game nights and generally living in a positive atmosphere. I would note that the living conditions of volunteers could be improved, mostly pointing out to heating and water systems. I firmly believe that giving the volunteers a better housing can significantly improve their mood, workdays and overall stay during the project. Life in Bronte is definitely specific and most of all, people are welcoming and warm – even though the weather may not be.



As the project has ended I leave Sicily content with the outcome of our work and with many new skills and knowledges. I think this was an invaluable experience, a great opportunity to learn about environmental education from first hand and I am happy to have meet so many interesting people with mutual love and respect for nature.



Bronte, 23. 02. 2018.