

Report for the Scholarship stay of Niels T.

at După Gard in Romania

Niels was our first volunteer coming with this Scholarship Program, however not our first overall volunteer. După Gard is a permaculture project started in 2017 by Ioana Joca-Pohl and Andreas Pohl. We aim to promote a lifestyle in the countryside that combines the positive aspects of modern life with traditional and sustainable techniques – many rooted in permaculture, understood as a wholesome design science. Since last year we started hosting volunteers in order to expose young people to this way of life we see as a possible solution for many of the problems human society is currently facing, prominently including climate change and all associated challenges. With Niels we planned out a more specific and structured program, with several trips outside of, but also an in-depth introduction on-site of our project. We collaborated with a number of locals to give an authentic insight to the life in the Transylvanian countryside: a beekeeper, a homestead farm where we experienced how to make butter, a slow food restaurant where we sell produce to, a little shop in Cluj we also cater to, we joined a traditional ceremony at the monastery, visited a farmers market and saw how an old woman in the village prepares a traditional polenta dish in her outside kitchen.

We as hosts got a valuable insight into Niels studies of Environmental Engineering, and were very excited to hear that Permaculture even made it into the curriculum (though only marginal). It gives us much motivation to see, that there are motivated young professionals working with a similar mindset on a better future for us as a species, and for the planet as a whole. Niels communicated very directly and therefore we could adapt the program accordingly to his interests where needed. He was very curious during his stay, enthusiastic to learn as much as possible, and it was also for us a valuable experience. His stay really motivated us to continue hosting volunteers. And since it was our first Scholarship participant, we also had the chance to develop a plan for future volunteers we can follow, or at least use as a rough structure. Also a feedback of you at Synergies Forum would be appreciated in this context, so we can also adapt it further to what you imagine to be a perfect program.

Niels definitely took lots of information and inspiration with him during the stay. He was the perfect volunteer, and I am sure he will use his experience from here in his professional and personal future. Maybe we could even give him a little push into the direction of permaculture - which isn't an easy road to follow, but on the long term imho one of the most rewarding ones.

Since it was our first year of participation, we started out very excited. But since we got all necessary information from Synergies on what we should offer and provide, we dived into this experience with much confidence. It turned out to be what we expected: a mutually fruitful stay, which we hope to experience again in the years to follow! One thing I would find especially

interesting would be a better connection also between the hosts. With Niels we came up with the idea of having an online meeting for the volunteers to review their experience, maybe also with the possibility of hosts to attend and learn from other places, where surely many things are done differently. Also hosts visiting other hosts would be something interesting for the future maybe.

In conclusion it was a huge pleasure to having had the opportunity to participate in this program, to host Niels and to learn and share experience on the way. Hopeful for an equally motivated volunteer next near, fingers crossed!