

SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

Forum Synergies

Antonino Carpitella

Day 1 - 29/06/24

Arrived in Transylvania

The owners of "Gupa gard" were very kind to give me a ride from the airport to the place of my volunteering experience. When we arrived, they showed my accommodation surrounded by greenery where I could experience contact with nature and admire the wonderful sky in the evening without pollution.

Day 2 - 30/06/24

Market and local products

Andreas and Ioana made me visit the entire local market of "Salciua de Sus" to talk about the traditions, habits and customs of Transylvania through the explanation and evocative story of local products.

Day 3 - 1/07/24

Introduction to permaculture, story of all the green and agricultural areas of "Dupa Gard" with all its sustainable resources.

Andreas explained to me the basics of permaculture theory which involves a particular variation of agricultural practices. The activities always take place respecting the ecosystem, waiting natural times. He and his family are able to provide much of their food needs and also energy resources by observing these practices which in the long term are capable of improving the resilience and richness of the ecosystem concerned. "Dupa Gard" values biology, forestry and sustainable agriculture because they obtain better "natural" results compared to industrialized agriculture methods.

Introduction to the history of the places:

In Posaga de Jos and in other cities of Transylvania, there are statues in memory of Avram Iancu: Romanian lawyer, who lived between 1824 and 1872, who commanded the romanian army for the liberation of Transylvania in 1848. Moving on to history with the suggestive nickname of "prince of the mountains".

Contact with the school in Posaga de Jos:

This school was very interesting for me, as a teacher, and I was able to compare the methodologies of romanian school education with the italian ones.

Day 4 - 2/07/24

City of Turda

Andreas and Ioana showed me around Turda together with another volunteer from "Dupa Gard". It was very interesting because it is among the oldest and most important settlements in Romania with Alba-Iulia, Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara. All fascinating places full of history and legends where you can also glimpse some ancient European roots.

Salt mine

The salt mine is one of the most representative symbols of Turda. Every citizen is proud of it and its history, even the ancient romans valued the salt trade in the past and now the mine is a magical

place with tourist attractions with educational captions photos. Numerous hungarian documents tell of the strategic and commercial importance of this place, the main source of supply in the region. The mine occupies a particular place in the hearts of romanians because it was used as a refuge in the Second World War and it continues to represent in the common imagination a space of protection with a beneficial place for the community, guaranteeing its safety and health.

Slow food

We had lunch in the delicious Slow Food restaurant in Turda with tasty soups, local meats and desserts made with typical local products. Through food, I am continuing to experience the real flavor of "things" at zero distance; products with greater industrial processing do not have the same nutritional value. I met and talked much with the woman who directs this Slow food restaurant: like her, I met many women involved in organizing and managing many things in this region. This profile as working and entrepreneurial female you can find everywhere in the Transylvania region. I am happy to underline the connection between "Dupa Gard" with quality products and this kind of restaurants: in fact we sold the yellow zucchini freshly harvested from our field to the Slow food restaurant in Turda. Great networking and connection experience.

Calvin's Church

Before returning to "Dupa Gard", I was able to visit the Reformed Church of Calvin in Turda with Ioana. The first church in this place was Roman Catholic, built in the 14th century, dedicated to Saint Mary. This church is mentioned in an old papal tax register from 1332 as being run by the priest Pietro from "Antiqua Thorda" (Old Turda). I am doing studies on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in fact I like to find the enriching overlaps of the religious confessions of places because they tell the DNA of the population that lives there. The current clock tower, 60 m high, was built between 1904 and 1906 and became the emblematic symbol of the city of Turda.

Organization of the dissemination event

We worked on the graphics of the event and printed the posters, telling all the people we met about the innovative approach of "Dupa Gard" which involves international volunteers in the rural valorization of the region and in order to learn the true meaning of permaculture thanks to Forum Synergies' ambitious regeneration objectives.

Day 5 - 3/07/24

We started the day on studying the "Dragon dreaming" method to explore the multiple personalities and emotions that live within us: it is a way to reach successful decisions together with a varied group of people. The site and the material is very interesting and well structured, also from a graphic point of view. I will certainly be able to use this method as a facilitator in erasmus projects or during particular lessons at school because it is truly engaging and leads to surprising results.

Andreas showed me a Romanian way of cooking aubergines that I didn't know, although we know how to cook aubergines in many different ways in Sicily.

We saw a documentary, directed by Ioana, about the story of her grandparents. After getting to know her better in recent days, I had an overview of her past and what it means to be born and grow up in Transylvania.

We spoke deeply about the topics to be covered during the dissemination event. We believe that one of the main points is the regeneration of rural areas thanks to the presence of international volunteers and professionals to continue the development and european mobility for young people and entrepreneurs to have more ideas to invest here in Romania.

Ioana told me about the Via Transilvanica. It is a long hiking trail, over 1400 km. It begins in Mănăstirea Putna, passes through 10 counties, over 400 communities and 12 UNESCO World Heritage sites and ends in Turnu Severin. The road promotes the cultural, ethnic, historical and natural diversity of Transylvania, Bukovina and Banat. Its conception is recent and is strongly inspired by the historic pilgrim paths and other hiking trails with the suggestive name of "The road that unites"; what makes this route unique (from most other european hiking trails) is its high biodiversity, the variety of natural landscapes, as well as the rural heritage and traditional lifestyle still preserved in Romania.

Day 6 - 4/07/24

Happy to explore to whole Transylvania thanks to Andreas and Ioana. We visited the cities and communities near "Dupa Gard" to raise awareness about rural development and invite people to our dissemination event on the objectives of the european network of Forum Synergies.

We sold the yellow courgettes in Baia de Aries. We distributed and attached the posters of our dissemination event in the most visible and transit places of Salciua (town hall, café...). We had an important meeting with the Ocolis tourist office: most tourists who come to Transylvania are sensitive to greenery and the relationship with nature; I was also able to visit the small museum connected to the tourist office where there are traditional clothes and objects from the region with a room furnished according to the typical taste of this place.

We also visited Rimetea where you can observe the interaction of the region's culture with Hungary. And after that we went to Aiud, its name (both romanian and hungarian) derives from Sant'Egidio. It is a very interesting city and is characterized by a fortress church at its centre.

Day 7 - 5/07/24

We explored the area around "Posaga de Jos". We visited a monastery and an orthodox chapel on the river. We collected yellow flowers to dry for tea: Andreas and Ioana shared with me the collection and drying method with the natural tea recipe.

We met Cristina in the afternoon. She is an example of an independent Transylvanian woman because she takes care of her relatives, loves to preserve and pass on the cultural baggage of her family's traditions. Cristina showed me many traditional Romanian clothes and the ancient recipe for cooking bread. She and her family have many lands and animals.

Day 8 - 6/07/24

I was able to see the entire procedure of preparing and baking bread according to the ancient romanian recipe. Ioana acted as mediator with Cristina's mother and me. It was interesting and important for me to learn about the different generations of women who pass their traditions on to their children. Cristina's mother has her own personal garden where Andreas explained to me other points of contact and coherence between the ancient type of cultivation and the most recent permaculture methodology respecting the ecosystem which can provide independent sustenance for entire families. Cristina's mother also has chickens near her house, in fact she is autonomous and self-sufficient in everything.

Day 9 - 7/07/24

We met Vlad, a young horticulture specialist. He and Andreas explained to me the combination of different crops to make the land more productive (ecologically way). They told me about grafting and the mutual benefit for plants: different seeds and plant groups guarantee better growth and life

in the field. In this way I was able to learn about many varieties of horticulture. Andreas and Vlad collaborated in organizing other workshops. The type of network that Ioana and Andreas are curating in this region of Romania is important for a fruitful collaboration with young entrepreneurs who are passionate about their territory.

Day 10 - 8/07/24

We visited the community around "Dups Gard" again and we met the new mayor, a recently elected woman.

We continued to work on involving people and online for the "Forum Synergies" presentation event on day 13. I was also able to see many places where Ioana recorded her documentary about the life of her grandparents and the rural community: I recognized the place where it was possible to wash clothes like an ancient natural washing machine, thanks to Andreas who showed it to me.

Day 11 - 9/07/24

We visited the city of Alba Iulia. It was an interesting opportunity to gain further knowledge of the area. I saw and verified the great historical connection between Romania and Italy through the ancient presence of the Roman Empire: walking in the evening near the walls of the city of Alba Iulia, I felt I was in Italy and not abroad because the Romanian architecture is inspired by Roman taste.

We met a volunteer from "Dupa Gard", Ionela Beldean lives in Alba Iulia and she participated in the training course on new technologies in Sicily. My scholarship was an important training opportunity because, thanks to Andreas and Ioana, I visited Transylvania and met many people everyday to exchange ideas and integrate our different skills.

Day 12 - 10/07/24

After our visit to "Alba Iulia" in the morning, Andreas and Ioana told me about the particular village of "Ciugud" where the municipal administration has invested European funds for digital development: now this small community attracts entrepreneurs and IT experts from all over the world.

We met two entrepreneurs who deal between wood and computer design. Octavia and Lucian, architects after college, artists before, sculptors over time, carpenters by chance, founded the ȘEZI brand in 2014. They take care and decide the shape of furniture and wood through computer programs and in this way they can create unique products for their customers with traditional Romanian designs. It was very interesting to see how the profession of carpenter today can be developed and evolve into innovative scenarios with new job prospects.

Day 13 - 11/07/24

"Dupa Gard" organizes excursions and workshops to raise awareness about permaculture. I went on an excursion with Iona and an international volunteer from America. I enjoyed exploring the mountains around "Dupa Gard" and I will always remember the landscapes and views immersed in greenery and crossed by rivers. I learned so much during my scholarship because Andreas and Ioana integrated perfectly the training and the collaboration of international volunteers: they are an example of resilience in a rural context and they are activating a process of community development through their ideas and intelligent involvement of international energies.

Day 14 - 12/07/24

Another volunteer from America has arrived in "Dupa Gard". We went to visit a neighbor who has many animals and is completely self-sufficient: a further example of a female entrepreneur, animal breeder, point of reference for the community for many products such as eggs, milk and cheese.

Andreas helped me complete the video to be shown for the scholarship presentation event with photos and videos of all the activities carried out during my stay in Romania.

Day 15 - 13/07/24

We arranged the space for the scholarship and documentary presentation event in the Poșaga de Jos school. I met many people from the community, thanks to Ioana and Andreas, and it was exciting to see them again participate in this event where we talked about development opportunities in the rural areas of Transylvania through Erasmus funds, internships and international volunteers. The contact with nature and the authentic human relationships that "Dupa Gard" takes care of are an educational incubator for young people and for the promotion of new ideas and innovative international projects.

The event was an opportunity for the community to come together and an important moment of reflection for those who want to train through European mobility or those who want to accredit their company or association for international projects and contacts. Andreas and Ioana are trailblazers on the issues of permaculture and sustainable development, they know they have the support of many motivated and interested people from Poșaga de Jos and Transylvania.

Day 16, 14/07/24

Andreas and Ioana were really kind in driving me to Cluj-Napoca because I had my flight early the next day. They knew the city very well and we were able to visit the most characteristic places together. Cluj-Napoca is one of the most important cities in Transylvania with its university that attracts students from all over the world.

I was happy to spend all this time with Andreas and Ioana for this interesting training opportunity thanks to the "Forum Synergies" scholarship. The type of formal and non-formal training is a treasure with international understanding experiences like these, learning to live in places out from your comfort zone. I was happy to tell this opportunity for personal growth to my colleagues at Oikos, active for integral ecology in the Mediterranean, the Antonianum University of Rome and the Canakkale "Onsekiz Mart" University: only transversal learning and discussion between sensitive people can truly improve our lives and the world around us.