

Erasmus+ Project Report- Palermo

Monday

At about 8:30 we all met in the square which was outside a part of the school and the historic cathedral and everyone introduced themselves to one another. Once we had all arrived, we all took a short walk down the long thin street to the other part of the school where we were doing the activity. When we got to the school we were taken to a hall where we all sat, and the Italian teachers did a short speech and welcomed everybody to their beautiful city. We were then split into smaller groups with at least one person from Italy, Spain, Croatia, Germany, Finland and England in each group, so everybody had the chance to hear all the other countries work they had prepared. Each country had prepared a presentation on migration, so we all got to see the challenges different countries face in terms of migration and how it's dealt with and whether it's similar or different to our own country. All countries had also written about an author they liked and admired the work of and presented this to their groups. Everyone had also individually come up with a poem they thought portrayed a clear, strong and important message and read them out and in groups we discussed the importance of these messages and going forward how they would play a part in our lives and affect us.

In the afternoon, once we had finished the activities in school, we all went out for lunch in Palermo. We went to burger restaurant and ate the most enormous burgers. After we had eaten, we got the chance to walk around the city and get a taster of their way of life and how different it is to cities near us. We all found that nearly everything about Palermo was different from the food and architecture to the traffic.

In the evening we all did different things with our host families.

Tuesday

In the morning, we visited the 'Astalli Centre'. This is a non-governmental organisation that focuses on the integration of immigrants into society. We had a talk, tour of the building and a Q&A session at the end where a wide range of questions such as what further work is done in collaboration with other organisations; what are your personal motivations for volunteering at the Astalli Centre; and what is your vision for the organisation in the future?

The services delivered by Astalli are divided into two tiers - primary and secondary. Primary services include food, with a breakfast run every morning in the centre, Italian language lessons, clothing and legal help to obtain a range of identification and permits. Secondary services include further Italian language lessons, culture lessons, a job centre and recently, help to find permanent housing.

For me this visit showed how a welcoming attitude, often lost in the UK, is shared by many of the citizens of Palermo. It also demonstrated how, as humans, we should help each other in any way possible way to secure a safe life for us all.

In the afternoon, we had a tour around the Count Federico Palace by the Countess. This displayed the diversity of the history of Palermo through architecture and storytelling. On the first floor, almost every room is from a different historical period with each showing the distinct styling of the time. This made the tour feel like a corridor through Palermo's history, showing all influences from Arabic to European.

Wednesday

Wednesday was the day of 'Itastra' - a university of that teaches Italian. We had a talk with migrants who had moved from all over the African continent to find themselves in Palermo, often without the Italian language as part of the skill set. They showed us how the University had helped integrate with Italian society as well as letting them let their creative instincts run wild. After a tour around the building we left the adults and headed into the backstreets of Palermo. We visited the infamous Ballaro market that snaked between many of the city's backstreets. This allowed us to view the competitive nature of the salesmen who shout at the top of the voices to try to sell their products.

After lunch, a swift tour around the city's historic streets opened my eyes to the fascinating architecture Palermo had to hold. This included the Arabic side to the cathedral as well as the many individual chapels within it. What I found most interesting about this tour was how the centre of the city was classified to be anything between the two arches- one by Foro Italica and one up by the Cathedral. This road also featured a crossroads at the centre where the other city centre road bisected it gaining access to the theatres and train station. What I find cool, is that they have carefully planned to have all the major areas of the city centre so accessible from one main street.

Again, we had an evening free, yet prior planning provided us with the opportunity to go to the beach, Mondello. It was a lovely evening where we went in the sea, sat and sang songs and took some memorable photos as a group. For me this was the best evening as we could unwind and just have some fun doing things us Cornish guys do at home anyway- use the beach.

Thursday

On Thursday we all woke early in order to meet at the bus stop near the school at 7:30am. At 8:00am, once all the teachers and last stragglers had arrived, we departed on a 2 ½ hour long trip to Agrigento- a leading city of Magna Graecia during the golden age of Ancient Greece. Upon arrival we were introduced to our tour guide who promptly began the tour of the historic temples on the hill facing the modern-day city. For 3 hours we trekked across the hill-top learning about the restoration process the temples and artefacts are undergoing as well as using the perfect day for weather for some stunning photos: of the temples and as a group (see below) . For me, I thought it was fascinating to see how the Ancient Greeks had designed the temples to withstand the natural conditions such as Earthquakes by reinforcing the bases and pillars. Of which, it was incredible to see how many pillars remained after so many years left to Mother Nature herself thus the clever design.

After our tour we were taken to 'Giardino della Kolymbethra', part of the FAI in Italy. We ate lunch in the orangery before being shown around the gardens. This garden boasts having its citrus groves still

being irrigated in underground aqueducts that were built in the 5th Century. This opened my eyes to how intelligent the Phoenician Colonizers were to design something that still works 1500 years later. Once the tour was finished here, we proceeded to leave for Palermo. However, we detoured to Pirandello's house- the famous Italian dramatist, novelist and poet. This house held the history of Sicilian literature and displayed clearly to us how powerful words and stories can be. Also, on the way home we stopped off to view the sea from atop a cliff that also gave sight to chalk-white cliffs below.

The evening was given way to free activities that our hosts could utilise. For example, some went into the city centre to experience Palermo's rich party culture whilst others chilled back at their houses after a long day.



Agrigento
Temples



Giardino della
Kolymbethra

Friday

Friday followed a similar format to Monday's schedule. Meeting at school at around 8 o'clock started a morning of international group work. In these groups, we were tasked with having to write our own poem about Europe and our values in the European community. Each poem had plenty of ideas poured into them and by the end of the morning when the poems were read out and judged by the teachers. Each and every poem contained a different sole message, with the winning poem having a message that was conveyed with a technical structure. After the winning team was awarded; a selection of poetry books containing poems from a range of Italian poets. The food fare followed with dishes from each Italian host. The pasta was great, and the desserts were fabulous with flavours some of us had never tried before. Once we ate, we bode our goodbye to the school and as a group headed to Foro Italico by the port. Here, we relaxed on the grass and played football and volleyball whilst beneath the once-again scorching sun. This afternoon showed that beneath all our differences, each representative from each of the countries were the same deep down and in fact we can enjoy our time together regardless of language barriers and differences. The evening was once again a free one, where some of us roamed the City's streets for the last time, danced on the piazza's and indulged in gelato in brioche.

One lifestyle aspect that all four of us struggled a bit with was the late evenings and early mornings. We were amazed at how late we hit the pillow (often early morning) yet were still expected on the

other side of the city only 6-7 hours later as well as having to account in transport and getting ready in the morning.

The experience of being amongst packed bars late at night was still there. What struck me was how these said streets were not rammed with drunk people, as would be the case in towns and cities in the UK, but instead a feeling of enjoyment without getting carried away. The attitude wasn't relaxed and candid but more respectful of what you were doing- quite the opposite of the western binge-drinking attitude. With this in mind, it did feel safer to be strolling the lit streets upon an evening because you knew, regardless of the fact you were a stranger to the area, that nothing scary or hair-raising would happen as a result of alcoholic misuse. Yes, I imagine that drink was consumed in vast amounts across the city but not due to the intent of getting drunk; more pleasurable.

What struck myself hard, was how welcoming the Italians that were and weren't involved in the project were. At each and every café, restaurant, bar, shop or public area there were no apparent feelings of discomfort or bad feelings towards us as non-Italians. For example, in many cafés we visited the waiters/ waitresses would try and make the experience of using their shop as easy and comfortable as ever such as helping us to get enough seats, patiently waiting whilst we tried to translate what was to offer there or even in one case go to the extent of using their mobile phone to translate their Italian into English so they could still communicate with us. A big part of this being the language barrier that almost disappeared through this communicative and friendly approach. An effect of this being that we would all like to visit Palermo again due to their openness and the strive for comfort and a relaxed environment.

Something that surprised many of us was the Sicilian culture that was rich in each Italian there. They were not openly proud of being Sicilian but also confident enough to discuss their flaws. This ability to self-criticise especially interested me as it made me think: what would our country be like if we could critique ourselves and own up to mistakes, willing to improve whilst still boasting our positives. This was insightful and very interesting to us.

To summarise the week in a short space is impossible as the week produced so many anecdotes, adventures and self-discoveries. A lot of us agreed that the week in Palermo had taught us many life lessons, some more hard-hitting than others such as discovering who we really were. Most importantly the week forgot differences between the different countries and allowed to explore the Italian/ Sicilian culture that had so much meaning behind everything that was built and developed in the local area.