

C.i.A. 05

Workcamp in Tinos island



From 9 to 24 of July 2012



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INDEX

Introduction.....	3
The context.....	4
The accommodation.....	6
The work.....	7
Daily life.....	8
What I learnt as camplader in this workcamp.....	15

INTRODUCTION

From 9 to 24 of July the third workcamp of the nonprofit organization “Citizens in Action” took place in Tinos island (Cyclades islands, Greece), more concretely in Ysternia village.

The workcamp in Ysternia was the result of the fruitful cooperation between “Citizens in Action”, key people of the village and the Municipality of Tinos.



THE CONTEXT

Tinos Island is situated into Cyclades islands, in the Aegean Sea. With less than 9.000 inhabitants is known for his Panagia Evangelistria church, famous for the miracles.



The main source of income is coming from tourism and marble, and in the past from the work at sea. There are too many young people moving to big cities like Athens searching for new opportunities during the last years.

Ysternia village is located in the west part of Tinos Island. The village is divided in two parts, the main one in the mountains, and the other one in front of the sea, something that was common in the islands as a way to be safe from pirates.

The upper part and the down part of Ysternia have in total around 50 inhabitants during winter and 100 during summer, cause the people from the village come with the families during their vacations.



Both parts are very different , in the upper part is in the place where is the church and the houses of most of the people who usually live there during the year. The landscape has small white and blue houses, narrow streets without cars and it is common to see donkeys. There is just one bar and a small shop.



In the down part the landscape is totally different, there are more cafeterias and tavernas, two beaches and small port with few small boats of the people of the village.

Between them the only way to go is a road of 5 kilometers.

THE ACCOMODATION

The accomodaton was provided by the council, who host us in two different spaces. The main one was the previous doctor`s house, just under the church square. This place was used to cook and have the meals and was living the half of the volunteers. The other space was a small tipical house with a big open roof up where the other half of the people was living.



To prepare the meals we divided our team in "home teams", the home teams were a small group of volunteers that were changing every day, in order to help all of us and learn from each other. The main task of this team was to keep the places clean and prepare the meals for one day.

THE WORK

After several meetings between the villagers and the organizers the work plan was decided. The main task of the volunteers was to clean the path that connected the top of the village in the mountains, with the bottom on the beach. In order to bring back a way so the people of the village can go walking to the beach and come back.



The path was made with marmol rocks, that were with big green herbs between them. The work requires the use of hoes and shovels. The work required a lot of effort too, and the place didn't have any shadow, so we tried to start working as soon as possible in the morning, to stop in the hottest hours, and we combine the work in the path at mornings with different works inside the village at evenings.

DAILY LIFE

The workcamp began on the 9th of July with the arrival of the volunteers. During this day we entered the second house, offered by a villager. The house was for a long time close, so we decided to clean it with the volunteers who had already arrived to be ready when the last volunteers arrive. After presentations and explanation of the ground rules, the system of the home teams and the first days' home teams identification, the volunteers decided in which place they wanted to sleep and some of them stay in the roof talking and knowing each other.

The first "working day" we went all together to see the place, and to know the work that we would do during these days.

During these first days of work we were having the breakfast around 8 to 8:30 and we were arriving to the path around 9:00.

The first upper part of the path was made just with herbs and land, so was a place where we could see how the volunteers were using the tools and try to help them, was a good place too to start organizing the work and which tool should be first etc.



As we were finishing with some time before the lunch, and the weather was so hot to try to plan active activities around the village we decided to go to the beach when we were finishing the work, and the president of the village offer to bring us from the upper part to the down part in the back part of his car. As the path was so close to the houses we had the opportunity also to come back to the houses to relax or clean our clothes if someone wanted to go.

The beach was very quiet and perfect place where the people could relax in the sea or go for a coffee in a taverna.



During this first day we knew that one organization friend of “Citizens in Action”, Estia was in the island. This organization works with people with mental disabilities and has a center with different workshops and activities for them in Athens. This summer, as every summer they organize a small holidays for the people who assist to the center, in order to try to disconnect about the daily life and relax in the beach. As the president of the village offered us to organize a visit around the village we decided to combine with the users and workers of Estia and do all together. The president explain us the tradition of marmol and sea workers of the village and he opened the church for us to see the marmol decoration of the walls. After the visit and when we already had the dinner we went to have a drink in the tavern, in order to know better each other and start speaking about the work.

After the path, beach, lunch and siesta, we went to see our work for the evenings: the fountain of the village. This fountain needed to be cleaned and painted, but was a fresh work under shadow and not very tiring. At the same time, we knew that was the birthday of one of the volunteers this day, so the home team, together with the camp leaders, prepared a little surprise to celebrate her day.



After the first days the work started becoming harder, the path was with rocks and herbs between them, not just land, and the sun was hard. The motivation of the people started going down, the main opinion was that the work was hard and especially very hot.

After the dinner we had a small meeting and we used it to discuss all together how we will manage the free day and the working days. Finally we decided to start working earlier, in order to stay the hot hours out of the path.

About the free day, one of the camp leaders, Panagiotis explained us the options of free time that the island could give us, and as the volunteers were motivated to go around the island as much as possible we decided to work one day more hours, in order to keep the next day evening free to do an small excursion to other village. This became a good way to change little bit the daily life and to come again with new motivation to the path.

But the next day in the path some of the tools were broken!



And we didn't have enough to work all of us all the time. But in the afternoon, when we were working on the spring, we realized that on the floor, where we thought there was

only land and grass, there were some rocks that blocked an internal channel. Most surprising is that neither the president knew it, so we went to work with the intention of unlocking the channel and let the water pass.

The same day, after the dinner, we met in the tavern of the village Dimitris, a sculptor who was preparing an exhibition in the old school of the village. He told us that he was so overwhelmed with the cleaning work and that he had few time, so we decided to propose to the volunteers to help him in the previous day of the exhibition. The volunteers decided to do it so they started the next morning cleaning the school after a private tour for the exhibition made from Dimitris himself. The people were motivated to work and especially after knowing the meaning of the sculptures and in the evening we could enjoy the opening, with music and dinner.



The next day was Sunday 15, the free day. We decided that the free day we could plan something, but if the people wanted to do something different they could do it. The people who didn't see the capital yet we took the morning bus and we arrange the ferries to come back of the people who didn't take them, we visit the church and some of the people went to the beach while some other went to buy souvenirs, we had the lunch there and we came back early enough to prepare barbecue in our village, with steaks and tzatziki.



New week and come back to the work in the path, after two days break the volunteers and one of the camp leaders went to work in the path while the other camp leader and two girls of the home team of this day were preparing traditional Korean food for the lunch. After this day, some of the groups of the next days ventured to cook the traditional dishes of their country as Russian, Spanish, Dutch and Taiwanese! As the people who were working in the path, finished working in the spring at the evenings, the spring was totally changed and the channel totally unblocked, and better than this, the president of the village was very happy with the work we have done.



After this spring... came other spring! This one with vegetation everywhere, and more fresh. During these days, two friends of one of the camp leaders came to help us, and to try to do a small documentary about our workcamp, the idea was to do interviews of all the participants, to show the work we were doing and our daily life.

The days were passing, and with them Nikos was bringing us to new beaches, always new and always better than the previous. On Wednesday 18 finally we went after the

work on morning in this spring, directly to take the bus and go to Pyrgos, a village near Ysternia with tradition of marble. There we could visit the museum, have lunch and go to the beach.

We finished the spring in the next day, one day after, as we didn't have where to work at evenings, the president of the village bring us to another beach, and the idea of finishing the path was more and more near for the volunteers. We already finished the path, but we needed to review it.



Finally, on 21 Saturday, we finished!

All the team went to the down part to celebrate it, even the people of the home team, we entered in the beach and we celebrated it with raki, offered by Panagiotis. The volunteers were exhausted but proud of their work, and happy of finished it. And the camp leaders of course too!

Next day was the last day of some of us, who were leaving soon because the fly and this staff, as was the last day together we decided to spend it in a big beach, with some bars. We took frappes, swam, and had a rest, and while we were in one of the bars the owner invited us to a big watermelon full of drink to give us the congratulations of finishing the path. We had never seen him before, and the place where we were was quite far from our working place, so it was very pleasant to know that the people of the entire island were appreciating our work.



WHAT I LEARNT AS CAMPLEADER IN THIS WORKCAMP

This workcamp meant a great challenge for me as it was the first time I was camp leader in a large group, and in a place that I didn't know.

Moreover, in contrast to the previous workcamp, we had to reach a specific goal, which was to finish the path, and many times the tools were not sufficient. On the other hand, I didn't know Greek, so I couldn't communicate with the villagers, and the president, key actor of the project, so that the other camp leader had to make that part for me and afterwards translate it.

I found particularly difficult to work on the path with the volunteers, and especially to motivate them properly. The path was very hard work, and I also found it very difficult to carry out the role of camp leader when some of the volunteers had much more experience than me in this task.

At first I thought that could act very flexible, but this made the volunteers work less than they did accompanied by the other camp leader. Seeing this I decided to be stricter, but with this the volunteers were feeling unmotivated. Finally I reached a kind of equilibrium, but I think I still have many years of experience to do it as my partner.

I felt as a difficulty that the people was coming from very different backgrounds and different type of motivation, but finally and after time that the workcamp take place something that I was feeling as difficulty turned in something positive. I think I learnt where I was making the mistake, and I tried to motivate people even if they were coming for very different reasons.

I think that how to motivate the people is very important for my daily life and my professional future, and I think I learnt more about it during my period in Santorini workcamp. This workcamp gave me the choice to see not only different ways of how to motivate the group, but also to see how the volunteers were reacting with this motivation, speaking openly and telling the feelings about this in the same level, as volunteers.

For me was a big challenge too to learn to deal with some kind of macho attitudes. I think the idea of be somehow responsible of one group made me more cold blood in this situations, even if I don't know if I did it well letting them through or if I really should have started a conversation with the volunteer in question.

In the same way I think I learnt about the workcamp is how to deal in tension situations. To keep calm, in order to give to the group more tranquility and to think with cold mind before I act.

On the other hand, the idea of have people that are not from the same age, or doesn't speak English, or comes from totally different backgrounds is something that at first time I felt too as a difficulty, but that after, and after I add more experiences in Santorini workcamp, I totally change my way of thinking. At first time I was afraid of the good integration of all the people in the team, but after these experiences I can recognize that all people find their space inside the group according their character, no matter if they doesn't speak English, if they have very different age than the medium age of the rest of the group etc.

And have variety of people, as much as possible is something that make more rich the group, that teach the volunteers how to help each other and be more open minded.

I think I always remain with many questions about what might have been the work camp if I had acted in a different way, if I had known all along what I learned at the end etc. But I think that the meetings with the other camp leader and saw how he was acting helped me during the process, I think he guided me from the experience and I learned a lot with that.