



Fortunately, we won't be hungry.. as message from Croatia, 1.4.2020



I'm writing this message from Croatia, to be precise from a small village on the Cres & Lošinj archipelago

Franjo Toić, young farmer, participant in the Scholarship programme 2019, 1.4.2020

Thanks God, I had the opportunity last year to experience the positive vibes of the Forum Synergies scholarship, before all this crazy situation came, and nowadays, I'm immensely grateful for such an opportunity! So that's how I've seen the message from ANRD (<http://forum-synergies.eu/article677.html>) on the FS website and I feel to comment.

Yes, indeed, this time we are living now is crazy, but I think the worse has yet to come. I may be quite young, but as in most rural areas around the world, we have a big number of elder people in the village that lived in more "dark" and depressive years that we are now in, and all of them nowadays say almost the same: "Fortunately, we won't be hungry, because we can always grow something or manage here on the countryside, but the ones closed in 30m² of concrete in the city - they are really poor even if they are rich!" I can only agree with this statement nowadays, because with the strict government measures we have in Croatia, it is hard to get out if you live in a city, and I wouldn't imagine how it is to be stuck in a small flat!

To be precise, our government decided to close everything few weeks ago and there are big limitations to travel from one place to another. Here on the island where I live, we are quite used to this kind of isolation, because as an island we tend to be "unavailable" for traffic many days per year due to weather limitations, and sometimes we are also having issues with electrical power grid or with internet connections. But still, with all this problems, life on the island is almost a paradise, and that can be felt nowadays. People now don't meet in groups, and while all the coffee bars are closed, the families go together for a walk in the forest, go to the beach, some of them even started to search for a piece of their land to restore and to grow vegetables. (Un)fortunately back in the 70s & 80s, people on the island figured out that it is easier to rent apartments for tourists than to work in agriculture or any industry, and nowadays we have on the

island more than 90% of direct or indirect income out of tourism - which is a tragedy! In the beautiful landscape of the island, where people had the olive trees, or gardens, new generations decide to put cement and build apartments for renting while removing any trace of previous agricultural existence and cultural heritage of the island (like dry wall technique /pierre seche /murri a secco). So last 10 years, most of the villages near the seaside were becoming "devastated" by such modern buildings that are "living" only in the summer period.

But, (un)fortunately the COVID19 came! Suddenly, a lot of people started to think what now, tourism is vanished this year for sure, local municipalities and government are trying to provide some measures to support the economy, but still, there won't be enough money definitely, so people are panicking! They realised there won't be "easy money" this summer and the worse will come in next 1-3 years (in economy). Finally after decades, the rural areas became very popular last few weeks, when people started to realise, that maybe there will be a situation that it won't be enough food in the supermarket so it would be better to seed something and renew that garden from their grandfather they had somewhere in the countryside! It is funny though, to see that people tend to think "normal" and rational only in crisis. But who can define normal? 10 years ago it was normal to destroy the garden and make an apartment house on it, nowadays it would sound almost like a crazy thing to destroy a garden so you can grow your own food.

As a person living on the island, I can confirm we don't have problems to connect and communicate between us, with or without this COVID19 concern, because it is a small community (Cres 3.000, Lošinj 8.000 people) and we know everything and everyone, with or without use of social networks. So, people that really need help or can provide help can be easily linked. Regarding the current situation, many people from urban city areas last few weeks decided to plant or grow something in the garden - for the first time in their life! And they kept calling me or my friends from rural areas (villages) that have some experience so we can advise them what to do. It is a noble thing to do, to teach somebody how to be self sustainable (or at least try to). From the economic point of view, it is a bad thing, since if you teach somebody to grow their own potatoes, you lose potential customers, but if you look at this situation as a human being, you can only be happy and proud for teaching somebody something. I also notice often that people in rural areas tend to think more on this second way of philosophy, and they are more happy and more satisfied by helping somebody. If Maria Theresa (Habsburg dominion) thought only about greedy money, she would never write the law to plant fruit trees near the public roads so passengers and travellers could eat and refresh themselves for free. Such idea should be more popular nowadays where there is a big pressure of money for wealth status in society.

But, less philosophy now. If we talk about the current situation how to help each other, I see a couple of points. First of all, for communication we should definitely use digital ways of connections, even though in the rural areas and especially on the island we are very safe even with person to person connections (since it is hard to get sick if the virus is not introduced on the island). Then, every family farm should provide some extra products they have to some kind of local online market platform, where it could be easily acquired and transported to the customers. And finally, education for free for all those who are interested in any kind of agriculture. Seeding, planting, grafting, beekeeping, lunar calendars and so on, everyone should know at least something and that could be easily done in the elementary school for an added class hour or for adults. Those are 3 common ideas in my opinion that can be used nowadays to "survive" all this mess that is going around. At the end of this message, I can only say that I'm not afraid of this COVID19 disease, I'm more horrified and very afraid of the society lack of knowledge and common sense which is a worse part that will come, and we should try to change that by education. When people started to search for a "better quality of lifestyle", they've left behind all the nature rules and we should try to restore this by any means necessary. Also, I've seen around social networks a great meme going on which I will use for this end "The one that plants tree knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life!".

Stay cool, stay rural!