

Study Abroad Report

As part of the obligation of receiving a Study Abroad grant, the following is a report of my experience during my trip with the Forest Resources Technology class from April 12 to April 28, 2009.

As someone who has been involved in forestry for over 30 years, I have never stopped enjoying learning about different facets of forestry. My experience prior to going to Europe was very much limited to British Columbia, so it was with excitement and great anticipation I looked forward to seeing what forestry practices were like in the two countries we were to visit, Hungary and Italy.

In Hungary, with Professor Laszlo Jager of Sopron, we visited many different forests, small villages as well as a few cities. Through various tour lectures, I learned that only about 18% of Hungary has forest cover, and that current forest practices include reforesting agriculture lands. Similar to BC, most of the forest lands are government owned. As such the forests that do exist there are managed very intensively. The majority of the forests are comprised of broadleaf species such as Turkey oak, and Bakony beech, and that conifers are not considered to be native species. Due to the forest composition and structure (mixed species, multistory stands); harvesting practices are primarily single tree or group selection. Wood production is also similar to BC in that the primary end usage is lumber, veneer, fiberboard, particle board, pulp and paper, and plywood, to name a few. On the other hand, timber is also harvested for biofuels on a much larger scale than in BC. Of interest is that the forests are very accessible to the public, with many trails through the forests linking one village to another. We actually walked between towns on a few occasions.

In Italy, I learned that in contrast to Hungary, the forests are owned by former farmers (60%) that have three hectares/firm and the rest is publically owned by local communities and municipalities. There is a very strong control on the forests by the public such that forest practices are carefully controlled and restricted by specific forest management. We saw many signs in the forests indicating restricted activities. Surprisingly the most common use for wood is biofuel. Wood for lumber is mostly imported from nearby Austria, and other countries. We saw such wood at a sawmill owned by the father of one of our exchange students (Nicola Casolla) from last year.

We visited several small towns where forestry is the primary industry. Some of the forests were predominately broadleaf species (chestnut, oak, beech) with short rotation harvesting and coppice regeneration as the method of reforestation. In other towns such as Asiago and Tambre clear cutting is not allowed in the coniferous stands, so selection and shelter wood systems are utilized. In Vallombrosa we saw a magnificent stand of Douglas fir, whose seed came from British Columbia approximately 80 years ago. The trees were absolutely stunning in size and quality. However, where many non native commercial species are currently growing native species are being reintroduced once the non native

trees have been harvested, except for those forests kept for historical or aesthetic purposes. We walked the Arte Sella, an International exhibition of Art in Nature where the exhibits, found along forest trails, depict the many other uses of wood in Italy. In Val di Fiemme, in which the town of Cavalese exists, we visited both a wood processing plant that supplies hot water to the homes, and a violin manufacturing plant. Wood for lumber is mostly imported from nearby Austria, and other countries. We saw such wood at a sawmill owned by the father of one of our exchange students (Nicola Casolla) from last year.

In both countries, I was amazed at how well the forests were looked after, the consideration balancing socio-economic values. The public appear to treat their forests with respect and are willing to share the uses amongst various parties. Having said this, my impressions are based solely on what was presented to our group. It was also interesting to learn about the history of forestry as it has a much older history and goes back to medieval times and religious control of the forest land base.

The experience was incredible. Aside from the forestry aspect, I got to see how what it is like to live in Hungary and Italy. It was very different that what I had anticipated. Both countries are quite prosperous and very modern, and that riding bicycles and walking are huge modes of transportation, no matter what the age of the person. I enjoyed meeting the local people and found their hospitality simply wonderful. I plan on going back to some of the villages we visited to stay longer and hopefully participate in forest management.

I cannot say enough about my experience and look forward to utilizing the knowledge I gained in teaching students and in promoting forestry at Vancouver Island University.

Thank you once again for this incredible experience.

Sincerely

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Forest Technologist/Instructor