

ERASMUS+ Study Visit

**Protected Areas:
a playground
for the inclusion
of young people**



PROTECTED AREAS: A PLAYGROUND FOR THE INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Outcomes of the Erasmus+ Youth Study Visit realised in
Atri (Abruzzo, Italy) from 14th till 20th October 2024

Project realised by ARCI Chieti
Layout and graphic design: Eliana Colzani



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Introduction:

One of the results of the strong economic and social crisis that are affecting all Europe is that more and more young citizens are living in a condition of mistrust in the future increasing marginalisation and disregard for the society. In this framework, nature can serve as a fruitful "playground" in which to stimulate young people practical activities in order to increase their opportunities for citizenship, community inclusion and active involvement.

For this reason, in the last few years we focused big part of our work in supporting the development of all kind of protected areas in the Abruzzo region starting and/or consolidating interaction paths between the Natural Capital and young people by developing with them a set of good practices, modules and learning/working tools linking various aspects of sustainable Development.

The general aim of this 3 years activities is to realize an educational, cognitive, training and experiential path able to promote sustainable, inclusive and participatory development of young people and local communities. Main idea is to interact with 4 nature reserves and 2 National Parks in order to ensure the active involvement of young people in the management of protected areas under an infrastructural (signposting for routes, information panels, gardening, beekeeping), educational (manuals, dossiers, modules, dynamics) and communicative (audio-visual and graphic products, social media) point of views involving in this process the whole local communities and its different stakeholders (youth and youth organisations, municipalities, social enterprises, schools, environmental NGOs and institutes, etc.).

During the whole process, seven different activities (from seminars to Youth Exchanges) will take place both in Abruzzo and abroad involving directly almost 200 participants and 9 countries (both EU and Western Balkans) in order to achieve the several goals planned (e.g. to learn technical skills, increase eco life styles and responsible behaviour, develop critical thinking and new educational modules, support local community and Protected areas).

The project is realised within the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission and the Agenzia Italiana per la Gioventù with the support of the Abruzzo Institute of Protected areas. International partners of the projects are:

- **ARCI Chieti** - Italy
- **Estestvoizpitateli** - Bulgaria
- **Zdravo da Ste and Center for Environment** - Bosnia and Herzegovina
- **EDEN Centre** - Albania
- **APSD Agenda 21** - Romania
- **Slovenska agentura zivotneho prostredia** - Slovak Republic
- **Xeracion Valencia** - Spain
- **Young researchers of Serbia** - Serbia
- **Aventura marao Clube** - Portugal

The Study Visit:

The Study Visit was realised from 14th till 20th October 2024 in Abruzzo Region where 37% of the territory is protected due to the high valuable biodiversity (3 national parks, 1 regional park, 1 marine area, 14 state reserves, 25 regional reserves, 6 equipped parks).

The main aim of the Study Visit - thanks to interactive field visits (National Parks and Regional Nature Reserves), meetings with different stakeholders (Municipal Administrations, Environmental Education Centres, Abruzzo Institute for Protected Areas), working sessions and planning activities - was to explore, learn about and visit some interesting examples of positive interaction between environmental education, green/protected areas and opportunities for young people and their communities that have been developed in Abruzzo by Public Authorities, Associations and Social Enterprises.

Profile of participants for the Study Visit was represented by members of the NGOs, youth workers, activists, educators, volunteers from **Italy, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Albania, Slovakia, Serbia, Spain, Portugal and Romania.**

The activities and visits were carefully chosen to offer a wide and inspiring range of methodologies, tools and practices which can improve the level of intervention and give continuity to the activities that the partners carry out in their local communities and to make more effective and efficient the processes of participation and social inclusion that mainly concern young people.

During the Study Visit the participants were put into small groups, each acting as an 'Editorial Board', and tasked with documenting each of the field trips. Their reports have all been collected in this dossier.

Enjoy your reading!



Where have we been?



Our journey begins in Atri...



**Riserva Naturale
Regionale Oasi WWF
Calanchi di Atri
ATRI**

**Calanchi
di Atri**

...memories

Viaggio ai Calanchi di Atri



We finally arrived in Atri, a city hidden between mountains that seem to whisper secrets from centuries past. Its roads wind with ups and downs, reflecting life itself, leading us to spectacular views of the city.

But our destination goes beyond that: we seek the ravines, those mysterious landscapes carved by the slow dance of sun and rain.

The land unfolds before us like an ancient canvas, a work crafted by time, where the sandy and clay hills narrate the story of a planet in constant motion. Here, nature doesn't just exist but transforms and lives. This landscape isn't static. It is a living organism that breathes in sync with the earth.

tales &...

Our guide, Anna, accompanies us and serenely reminds us that here nature is not just a backdrop, but the protagonist of its own creation.

“

We walk along paths that seem to have been shaped by invisible hands, and each plant holds a tale: a deep connection to botany, magical thinking, and the ancient medicine of this land.

The day begins its farewell. The sky is covered with thin clouds, and the sun, hidden behind them, emits a white light that whispers the end of summer and the start of a new cycle. At the edge of this majestic landscape, we look up once more, recognizing the greatness that surrounds us. We close our day with the taste of ancient wine, prepared with the ancestral techniques of the region, accompanied by cheese made by the shepherds who live in these lands. With one last deep breath, we let the essence of Atri imprint itself on our memory.



THE WONDERS OF CALANCHI

The Calanchi stand in strong winds,
Where the sun sets,
And the rain prevails-
In Atri, the secret remains
Every crack holds a story,
Shared in whispers, in its own way.
The layers, now dry,
Sing a hymn of earth, of eternity.
Here, silence reigns, but beauty calls,
From rugged cliffs and quiet falls.
The feelings rise, nostalgic, strange,
Yet from the dust, a tale takes shape.

VASILE BIANCA MARIA
ROMANIA



Place and contacts

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Associazione l'Istrice
ATRI

**Associazione
l'Istrice**

Wild herbs

and their use in the kitchen

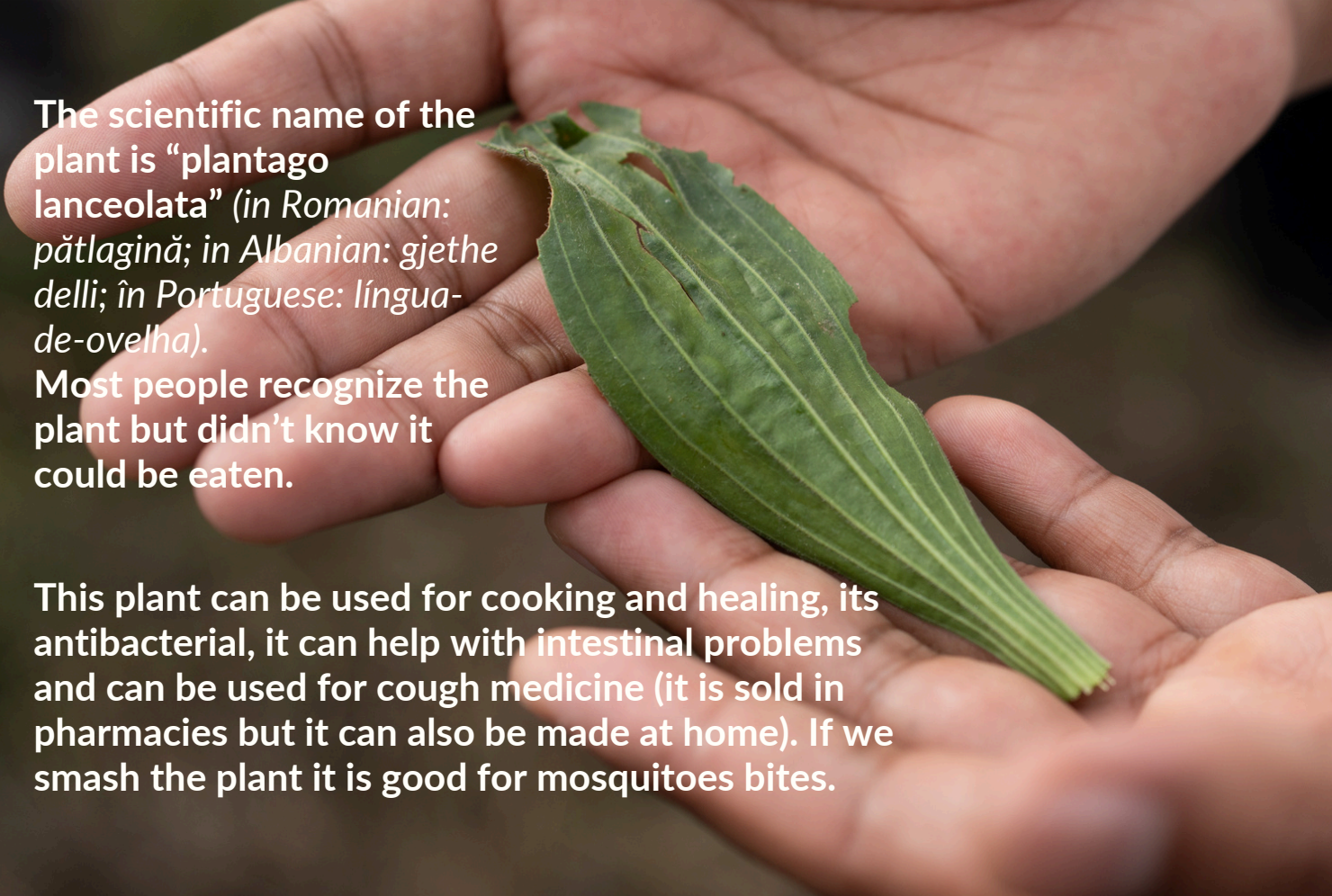
Workshop at the Calanchi of Atri

This workshop is done by the Associazione L'istrice in collaboration with the local mental health center. The project was presented by Antonella, and it has been happening for 3 years.

Their purpose is to recognize wild herbs that can be used for different things like cooking and medicinal ends. The association has made a book - Herbarium - where they documented the characteristics of the plants and their uses. They make different types of workshops, and the one we attended was pesto making.

We all stood in a circle and introduced ourselves and got to know each other and where everyone came from.

After all the introductions we went into the nature where Antonella showed us the plant we had to search for and we would be cooking with.



The scientific name of the plant is “plantago lanceolata” (in Romanian: *pătlagină*; in Albanian: *gjethe delli*; în Portuguese: *língua-de-ovelha*).

Most people recognize the plant but didn't know it could be eaten.

This plant can be used for cooking and healing, its antibacterial, it can help with intestinal problems and can be used for cough medicine (it is sold in pharmacies but it can also be made at home). If we smash the plant it is good for mosquitoes bites.

Let's make PESTO!

Antonella showed us how to pick the herb you need to pick it with no roots and leave some leaves on the plant, so it can regenerate.

The best time to pick it is during spring or autumn, when there is little sun or early in the morning. It is a tough herb, it needs to be smashed to become softer and release its proprieties. We then had a moment to observe and collect.



We started the process of making pesto with already washed plants in water and soda. The pesto is made with half-moon knives or a butcher knife (it can be made with a food processor or a blender but it tastes better if we take the time to make it slower by hand).

The different knives presented different challenges according to the sizes. You know you are doing well when the herb "sings". Everyone had the chance to try and use the different knives, some with more success than the others



Afterwards we just added salt, olive oil, toasted and chopped walnuts (it can also be made with almonds or peanuts) and just like that we have a delicious pesto.

While Antonella cooked the pasta, we tasted the pesto with bread. We were quite surprised with the taste, in a very good way.

The members of the mental health center then presented us with a song inspired by a visit to the Calanchi.

Finally after all the hard work, we had a very tasty lunch of pasta with pesto.



The Black Chicken of Atri

While we waited for our lunch, we saw the Black Chicken of Atri, known for its luminous dark plumage.

Adriano told us about their history and his efforts to increase their numbers in Atri.



Black Chicken

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Bor sa cc hi o

A stylized map of the Borsacchio area, rendered in shades of blue. The map features a network of white lines representing roads and a winding white line representing a river. A white dot marks the location of the Borsacchio Regional Natural Reserve. The text 'Riserva Naturale Regionale del "Borsacchio" GIULIANOVA' is written in white, sans-serif font, positioned to the left of the white dot.

Riserva Naturale
Regionale del "Borsacchio"
GIULIANOVA

WINGS AND ROOTS:

A conversation with a Bird

Our starring guest tonight is one of Abruzzo's most beloved feathered tourists, the famous **Fratino**. He will tell us more about his summer home and what makes Borsacchio so special.







Welcome, Fratingale, and
welcome back to Borsacchio.

I know that you love our
beaches and I'd like to ask
you what it is that you
find most attractive here?

Well, to start with, we Fratingales love to
nest on the dunes.

Unfortunately, they are disappearing because in
many places people clean the beaches. In this
way they inadvertently destroy the dunes that
we call home.


I see.
And could you tell us
more about your sandy
home?

The basis of the dune is formed by pieces of driftwood that are thrown out on the beach by the sea. They form a natural barrier that stops the wind from blowing the sand away and in this way make the beach narrower.

Perhaps you'll be surprised to learn that actually it is the wind that destroys the beaches, and not the waves, as many people think. The sand accumulates around the driftwood, and its rotting tissue provides nutrients for many plants which in turn become food for animals or provide shelter for them.

I see.
But earlier you mentioned that
people clear away the dunes.
Why is that?

It happens quite often because people like the beaches to be clean
and flat in order to enjoy the seaside. Also, some of them want
to build high big houses where human tourists can come and stay.
And the dunes stand in their way...



And do you have
other neighbours than
the humans here?

Oh, yes. The dunes are a cozy oasis for many plants for instance *Verbascum niveum garganicum*, *Salsola calli*, *Echinofores spinosa*, *Rucola selvatica* and many more.

As for animals, some of the more interesting species here are the loggerhead sea turtle, the red fox (who is my enemy), and the sea gulls. And in the sand you can also see the heart-shaped shells of the *Acanthocardia* mussels.

Frattino, coming back
to humans, you mentioned
that some of them clear the
beaches and the dunes to
build hotels.
Are all humans like this?

Fortunately, no. There are ordinary people like Micaela the secretary, Marco the insurance agent, Antonio the pensioner, who fight for our rights and try to win back a portion of the beaches for our benefit.

They are called 'volunteers' and they dedicate some of their free time to managing and protecting the dunes, so that people, animals and plants can live together in harmony.

The oasis they have created for us is called 'La Riserva di Borsacchio'. And this autumn a very interesting thing happened: a group of young people from every corner of Europe flew over here to study the inhabitants of the dunes and to draw us. They created a lot of beautiful materials that present us to the public and tell people more about us.



DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Local people call *Echinofoora spinosa* "carotina di mare" which means "carrot of the sea".

It can be marinated with olive oil and vinegar and used as a dressing.

FUN FACT

Verbascum niveum garganicum is known as 'the sailor's toilet paper'.

Its leaves are big and soft and they can be used as... well, toilet paper.



MUSHROOMS IN THE SAND?!

Yes! You remember that the dunes form on top of rotting driftwood?

Well, fungi love rotting wood, so some of them grow even in the sand around the dunes! Mushrooms like this are called psammophila.



LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES!

Salsola calli is a dry, round bush used as a replacement for tumbleweed in the spaghetti western movies from the second half of the 20th century.

DUNES?!

ARE WE IN SAHARA?

Well, the dunes in Abruzzo are not like the big desert dunes that we've seen on TV in Sahara and other deserts. Here they are much lower and they are covered in plants! And it takes them around four years to grow.

WANT MORE?

If you want to know more about fraterno and the dunes in Borsacchio, come and visit the Reserve. Here you can find some useful information:

www.guidedellariservaborsacchio.it



FUN FACTS!



Place and contacts

Riserva naturale del Borsacchio

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A white outline map of Italy is positioned on the left side of the image, set against a solid olive green background. The map shows the entire country, including the mainland and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.

Centro visitatori “Paolo
Barrasso”

CARAMANICO TERME



Parco Nazionale della Maiella

Monte Amaro



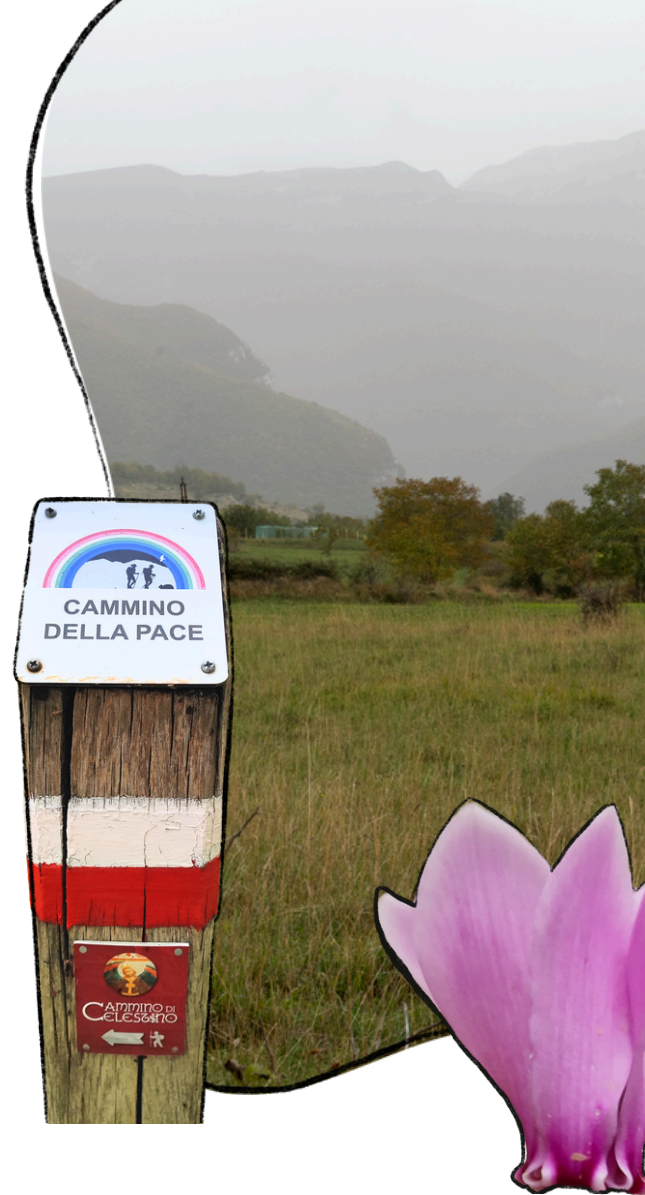
Parco Nazionale della Maiella

AREA: 741 square km

HIGHEST PEACK: Monte Amaro 2793m

You don't need a ticket for Maiella NP, but it is very smart to register before you start your trek. Maiella NP provides around 1000km of hiking trails in the mountain and around 500 km of mountain bike trails. If something happens, someone can help you, if registered. Also, like that, you help with statistical data information for the park administration. Maybe the best start can be the Visitor Center in Caramanico. They can provide you with information and maps.

Srdjan Vukasinovic – Serbian visitor



In the last 10 years the number of tourists in the national park has increased. We live in an era of cheap outdoor equipment. People go to sports shops, buy the cheapest clothes, and think they are well prepared for the outdoors. But there are many accidents in the mountains. That is why we put panels about proper equipment at the beginning of each trail.

Maurizio Monaco – Head of planning and source management in Maiella National Park.



Maiella National Park gives such exciting opportunities for the inclusion of young people!

Visiting Maiella National Park Research Center can be so interesting for people of all ages. There you will find The Paolo Barrasso Visitor Center, Nature and Archaeology Museum, Educational Center, Animal Rescue Center and so many facilities for training and outdoor activities.

Also, 150 young people from all over Italy take the chance for one year of voluntary internship through the Universal Civil Service program every year in the National Park. People with different experiences and backgrounds get the opportunity to practice real job tasks, build capacity, and help their professional orientation.

Yana Gocheva - Bulgaria.

Shepperd modeled the land near the villages in the national park. In the second half of the 19th century, there was a demographic explosion, so people had to move to higher altitudes. First, they had to clean the soil out of stones, so they could use it for agriculture. Then they built stone walls or stone shelters, called „tholos“. The walls served as terraces, borders, or fences. The shelters (capanne) could be 7-8 metres high and have 2 storeys. The oldest shelters are around 200 hundred years old. Some of the stone walls and dry-stone houses are now being restored.

Paolo Persico - an employee of the national park.



Caramanico Terme is a small town known for thermal baths. The spring „La Salute“ is famous for its sulphurous water which helps with digestion and kidney functions. When we entered the streets of town, we immediately smelled the specific smell of rotten eggs. We also tasted the water, it was fine, but you cannot drink more than 0,5 liter per day.

Veronika Parickova – visitor from Slovakia

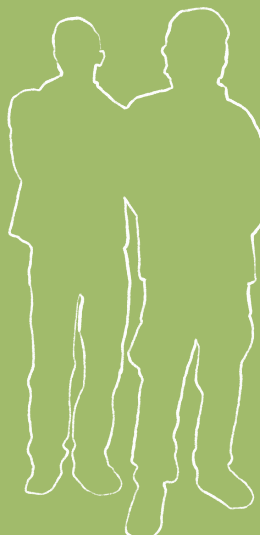


Sustainability of the National Park

As mentioned above it is worth noticing that today only 40 people are responsible for all the needs that are requested for managing one national park of this size. When it was established 60 people started to develop all necessities for good management of the park. As years went by, funds were diminished and it is an important question for the people and the Government, do we need Maiella National Park?

Millions of tourists and local communities in and around National Park, confirm their need. It is very much up to the Government if they have the understanding and knowledge to make the right decisions. Young people are interested in working and give their effort and knowledge for the sake of the Maiella National Park.

Critical overview by Tihomir Dakic





Place and contacts

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Rur abi lan dia



Rurabilandia
Fattoria Didattica e
Agriturismo Sociale
ATRI

Rurabilandia

A Day in a Dream of Abilities and Heart

When we first heard about Rurabilandia, it sounded like a place where dreams bloom alongside olive trees and vineyards. But as we spent the day there, it became clear that it's so much more than that.

Rurabilandia is a place where **abilities — not disabilities —** take centre stage, and where the true beauty of humanity shines in every smile, every gesture, and every shared meal.

The farm, nestled on a peaceful hectare of land, is a haven where 40 individuals with disabilities work hand-in-hand with 20 professionals. Together, they run everything — from tending the fields, to serving food, to preparing homemade dishes that fill the hearts of visitors with warmth.

The scent of fresh cheese, tomatoes, and olive oil floats through the air, reminding everyone that this place is about growth, both in the earth and in the soul.





Walking around the farm, you can see the goats and donkeys grazing lazily under the fruit trees, while workers quietly hum as they go about their tasks.

It's not just a job for them; as Vanessa, one of the operators, told us:

“Lavorare qui è come se non fosse un lavoro... ti cambia il modo di vedere la vita.” Working here is like it's not even work. It changes how you see life.

She started as a waitress and now helps run the farm's daily activities, finding in Rurabilandia a purpose that goes beyond the ordinary.

There's something magical about the sense of belonging that fills the farm. Each worker here contributes in their own way—whether it's Alisa, who spends her days painting and playing soccer, or Samuel, who pours his heart into his art, particularly coloring. There's a deep sense of pride in everything they do, whether it's serving a table from start to finish or growing vegetables in the garden. It's the small victories that add up to something truly special.

And then there's the restaurant. Visitors, like Fabio Di Girolamo, don't just come for the food, though it's delicious.

Fabio comes for the people. “They transmit positivity, joy of living, love; this is truly beautiful,” he told us with a smile. Sitting down at one of the wooden tables, you can feel the love in the air, the sense of community. Fabio comes here every Friday, not for the cuisine, but for the climate of togetherness and hope. It's a space where those who have less are often the ones who give the most.

The PAST...

The farm's story goes back to the selfless passion of Domenico Ricciconti, a man ahead of his time, who poured his heart and fortune into creating a better world. Though Ricciconti's life ended tragically, his spirit lives on here, in the laughter of the workers, in the smiles of the guests, and in the olive trees that still stand tall.

Some say his spirit even watches over the farm, helping its workers navigate their challenges.

... and the FUTURE

Rurabilandia is also about dreaming big. One of their most touching aspirations is the creation of a house called "After Us," a place where the workers can live when their parents can no longer care for them. It's not just a project—it's a promise, a beacon of hope for the future. And the community is rallying behind it, with local authorities taking notice and offering support.

But at the heart of Rurabilandia is a simple belief: when people come together and believe in themselves, they can achieve the impossible...

Creating, TOGETHER

Before we left, we took part in one of their workshops—learning how to bake bread. It was a simple recipe: flour, water, salt, and yeast. But as we kneaded the dough alongside the workers, it became clear that this was about more than just bread. It was about connection, about working together to create something nourishing, both for the body and the spirit.



Rurabilandia is a testament to what can happen when we focus on abilities, not limitations. It's a place where every individual, no matter their challenge, can find a role, a purpose, and a sense of pride. And as we walked away, hearts full and minds inspired, we knew that Rurabilandia is not just a farm—it's a living, breathing example of how beautiful the world can be when we nurture our abilities and our dreams.

As we left Rurabilandia, we found ourselves reflecting on the strength of the human spirit that we had witnessed. In a world often focused on what we can't do, Rurabilandia quietly but powerfully reminds us of all that we can do. It is a place where abilities shine, and dreams are woven into every seed planted in the soil. And in that simple truth, there is so much beauty.

But to truly understand what makes Rurabilandia so special, you have to see it for yourself. **Come visit, walk through the gardens, meet the people who make this place thrive, and sit down for a meal at the restaurant.**

The food, grown on the farm and prepared with love, is only a small part of what you'll take away. It's the joy, the connection, and the shared hope that will stay with you long after your visit.





WANT MORE?

See this amazing video,
a record of the best memories from
this unforgettable experience!

Place and contacts

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- Parco Nazionale della Maiella
- Rurabilandia - Fattoria Didattica e Agriturismo Sociale
- Centro di salute mentale di Atri
- Associazione “L’Istrice” di Atri
- Vinum Hadrianum Atri

We are all just human beings:
for this reason it is possible that this dossier contains
mistakes and inaccuracies.

Feel free to write us to:
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please, quote the source.

Thank you.
2024

