




Youth 
Journey
to Damanhur



We, the “Fire Phoenix” learning group of the Escola da Esperança project, 6 youngsters aged 11-13 and 3 adults, made a road trip to Damanhur, a community in Italy, in February 2023. The entire journey lasted 3 weeks. Many of us had never been on such a big journey before and to be together for so long, so it was a new experience for all of us.

Damanhur is one of the few big communities of Europe and it’s known for its underground temples, which were profiled by some as “The 8th Wonder of the World.” We were very excited to see them. In Damanhur we made a project with their school and youth to learn about their community and way of life. We met new people and made new friends.



Benjamin, Educator

“Through our experience, we find that such journeys offer a unique richness into the learning process of the students that is difficult to create in conventional school settings. Such a journey - including the fundraising, pre-journey preparations and after work - becomes a big communitarian process that trains teamwork and motivates the students to meet new challenges.

The joy of being together on the road and the excitement of meeting other youth and cultures become part of the invisible classroom which goes on 24 hours a day.

One way to approach growth in self-awareness is meaningful contact with other ways of living - which leads to genuine curiosity of one’s own life circumstances. In addition, such journeys support the youth in feeling part of the global community.

When you offer youth projects that are dear to their hearts they gain more energy for going on with what else is needed for their learning. At the end of this school year most in this group will have to take eleven final exams at the local school our home-schooled kids are connected to. We believe this journey will give winds to their sails, as a group and individuals, to gain motivation and confidence for passing these exams.



The Preparation

To start our process, we went out for a week to a special place in nature that rests along the beautiful Portuguese coast. We used the time to learn about Italy and Damanhur, how to present our project to those we would meet, agreeing on community rules for the journey and getting a first impression for how it is to travel together.





Fundraising

In order to make this journey possible we needed 7000€. The next big step was to learn how to initiate and then hold a fundraising over a long arc of time in order to get all that we needed.

We opened the fundraising by presenting ourselves to the community of Tamera, explaining our plans for the journey. We immediately received a flood of support. For many of the teenies it was the first time speaking in front of a such big group of people.

For the weeks to come the students

and team were very busy – including afternoons and weekends - to create and host different funding events, like a “Cozy Fundraising Cafe”, a cinema evening for the neighborhood, a pizza afternoon and a carwash event in order to present the undertaking and receive support. Meanwhile we wrote letters to family members and friends. It was a big step of courage to learn to stand for what you want and ask for support. After 2 months of work we were able to successfully reach our fundraising goal. The resonance we received was amazing and we stay with a lot of gratitude for everybody who supported!





An insight into community with Barbara

Since this journey itself was going to be a big social endeavor amongst us and a journey that will take us to be with another big European community, the issue of how and why people live together was one of the first topics we brought to our pre-trip conversations. We invited Barbara Kovats, an elder of Tamera, to bring her many years of knowledge and experience of community building. In conversation she carried us through a wide and rich vista: the issue of community is not just about humans but one that concerns all forms of life that surround us, including animals, plants and even those we cannot perceive with our ordinary human senses.



Liam, 13

The topics we learned about were how to live in community, why people create community and how to live with animals and invisible beings. I didn't get everything but there was a topic that I thought was really interesting. It was the topic of the invisible beings because when I was smaller I sometimes saw them.



Alma, 13

I liked when we talked about living with animals, nature spirits, and invisible beings. We all shared stories of encounters with invisible beings.



Project time on food industry with Uri

When we started to discuss what kinds of community rules we want to agree to, many topics immediately popped up. The issues that had the most excitement in the beginning were not so much about how we want to treat each other and solve conflicts (this came later), but about media and food consumption guidelines. To the topic of food, some questions came: "Can we eat sugary foods? And how much?! What about potato chips? What about this fast food restaurants? What if our hosts serve us meat?" Of course we can't expect everyone to suddenly change their normal eating habits and sure not to always eat like health angels. It was also clear that there are many personal opinions about what is okay to eat and what not. To begin to answer these questions as a group we wanted to start with a common baseline of information.

For this we invited Uri from the Tamera community, a historian and activist who for some years worked in the area of local food production. Bringing his passion, he prepared a rich presentation to the topics of the modern food industry, sugar consumption, processed vs. whole foods, speciesism, the meat industry and its ecological impact and more. His wish was to wake us up to the importance of food choice, where we spend our money and the impact we have on other species and the planet through our daily consumer choices. Though we each still carried our own personal preferences, from the sessions with him we left more informed collectively to this issue which made it easier to establish clear guidelines as group for our journey.



Lucia, 12

What stayed with me from the lessons on the food industry with Uri were the facts that people who eat meat only eat the meat of animals they think not to know and wouldn't eat the same kind of meat of an animal with which they had an emotional connection with. And another was the fact that there are on one hand so many obese people in the world but on the other hand so many people dying of hunger (19,700/per day).

After several weeks of quite active fundraising, we managed to reach our goal a week and a half before our departure date. We used the remaining last days to prepare our travel bags and to prepare ourselves for meeting many new people. The night before we started our road trip we already came together, started to pack up the van and then had our first night as a travel group. The next morning, the 15th of February, we set off in the big white van heading East.



The Journey... starts with a road trip

Since this journey itself was going to be a big social endeavor amongst us and a journey that will take us to be with another big European community, the issue of how and why people live together was one of the first topics we brought to our pre-trip conversations. We invited Barbara Kovats, an elder of Tamera, to bring her many years of knowledge and experience of community building. In conversation she carried us through a wide and rich vista: the issue of community is not just about humans but one that concerns all forms of life that surround us, including animals, plants and even those we cannot perceive with our ordinary human senses.



Neo, 12

We went through Spain and France to the north of Italy. When we traveled to Damanhur we stopped at my grandmother's house in Andújar, Spain. The next day we woke up at 5:30 am. At 6 am we were already on the road. From Andújar we went to Perpignan, France. It took about 8-9 hours of pure driving to get there. On the road, we sometimes were very loud and sometimes very silent and sleeping with our music. In Perpignan we showered, cooked, ate, slept... The next day we arrived in Damanhur at around seven pm. Then - eleven days later - we went from Damanhur to Perpignan, from Perpignan to Madrid, and then from Madrid to Reliquias, Portugal.

Calculation of driving hours: $7+9+8 = 24$ hours, $8+9+7 = 24$ hours. Total: 48 hours of pure driving. Not including the driving time while we stayed in Damanhur.





First day in Damanhur

Guided Tour of Damjl Community Center with Celastrina.



Lucia

Right on the next day after we arrived we had a tour through Damjl, the community center of Damanhur, with Celastrina, who showed us the “open temple”, which looks like a Roman temple and an amphitheater, where they hold plays and meetings.

This tour gave us a first insight into the community and their culture. A Damanhurian way of life seems to be filled with many rituals that serve certain spiritual and social functions, give more meaning to life and build the glue that helps hold together their community. One such ritual she told us about was that of taking on an animal name. She shared with us much about her own animal name and how she got it, how she worked amongst her community members to earn it and then eventually stood before her entire community in a rowdy and playful debate arguing if she shall gain that particular name or perhaps another one some would say is more fitting. Out of the many rituals we heard about, the elements of humor and play seem to be involved in one form or another.



Lucia

“Celastrina also explained to us what the Game of Life is. It’s a group of people whose job it is to take care that there is change [if the community gets too stagnant], for example, they might call you on any day and ask if you would like to come on a journey the next day. She also told us about “Battles”: they are a way to resolve fights/arguments in Damanhur.

There is a story she told us, of the first “Battle” and how they came into being: At some point the founder, Falco, went on a journey through Italy with some other people, because he thought the people of Damanhur rely on him too much, not knowing where they would go next or when they would return. When they came back they had around 50 new people, mostly young people, who had very different ideas than the people that already lived in Damanhur. So they decided to do a Battle. Falco gave the new people the flag of Damanhur and told them that if they were able to keep it they could decide how to plan the future of Damanhur. Falco told the people who already lived in Damanhur that if they were able to get the flag they

could be the ones to decide. Around their house the young people put up a fence with bells on it. They had a party one evening. Meanwhile the people of Damanhur who felt betrayed by Falco went fully clothed in black on a tractor to the house of the new people. Something went wrong and the tractor went through the fence and into the house wall. Inside a very ugly fight started that was stopped by the only rule there was: if Falco blew his whistle they had to freeze. So, of course Falco blew his whistle, and everyone froze in place, in mid-fight, even with pulling hair. He walked in between them and said out loud, “What have you done? Look at yourselves.” After this, some gave back the pieces of hair belonging to the others and apologized.”



From this moment on they decided that neither group won, but Damanhur won. And they learned to cooperate. The ritual of “battles” continued in many different forms and is a way to gain self-knowledge and to solve conflicts in the community.



Neo

Some years ago they had a competition of art, called an “Art Battle”. One of the teams in one night, before the final evaluation, put up nine big stones, each 2-3 tons and 5-10 meters high. The next day they showed their art piece and won the battle.



Nelson, 11

She showed us some statues, for example, the one of Pan or other gods and goddesses. I really liked it, especially the pillars of the open temple, the fire altar composed of a crystal and stone. I also really liked the dragon statue. Over time this dragon statue had a batch of dragon eggs around it that later cracked open and let out some dragon cubs.



Daria, 12

Another interesting thing that Celastrina told us was a bit of a back-story of Falco. At the age of nine he threw a washing machine with his mind towards a guy who was yelling at his mom. I think it's really hard to believe this story but it was still fascinating. I was surprised to hear everything Celastrina shared with us because they somehow managed to be spiritual but also make things fun and interesting.



Liam

She also showed us a big outside stage with a lot of seats and in the middle of the stage at the bottom there was a really big crystal that is the fire altar. They use the crystal because it represents the inner fire that every human has within their body.







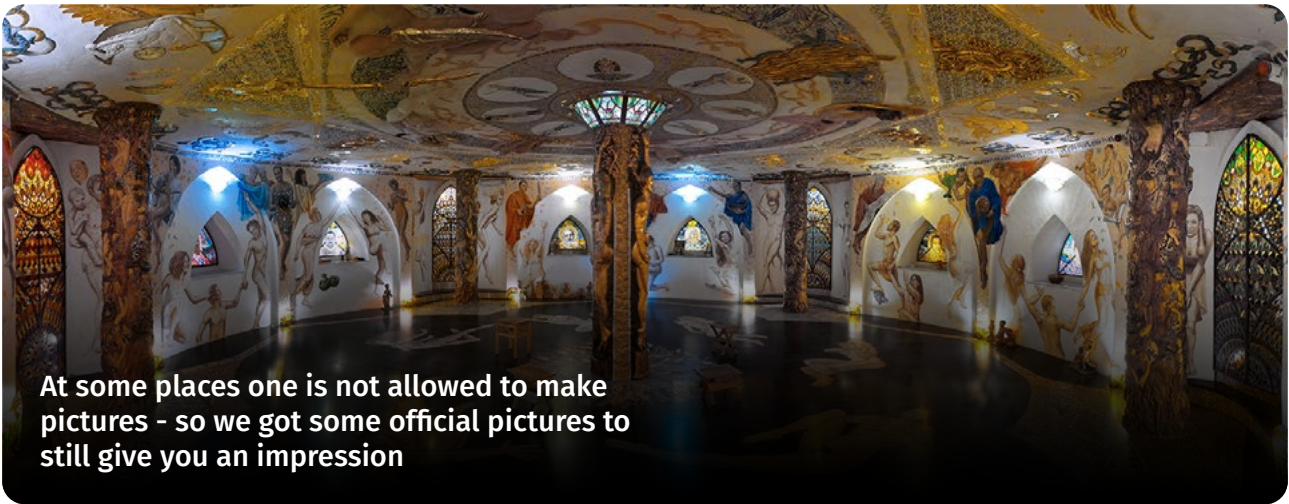
The Temples of Humankind



Daria

We visited the Temples of Humankind twice, the first time with Goura and Nandu and the second time with Nandu and Lucertola. The first time was more about seeing every room and learning about the history behind it, while the second time was more about music and really looking at the details. In the temple each room has a corresponding musical instrument, and when we went with Goura and Nandu we only experienced this in two of the rooms but we looked at all of the rooms, like: the Hall of Earth, Hall of Victory, Hall of Metals and the Water Room, etc. When we went with Nandu and Lucertola we didn't go to every room, but we got to look closely at stuff without rushing, and without receiving spoken information. In fact, we were silent the whole time, only

speaking to ask questions about the drawings. During this second time, they also let us lay down on the ground while they played the instrument of the room. I preferred the second time because I really think the drawings are amazing, and, as somebody that draws, I enjoyed just looking at them without having to concentrate on something else. Nothing can compare to the first time seeing the temples, I mean, it was really amazing, the art, the structure, also the fact that they built them in secret for sixteen years. The whole group was memorized. Some people said it was the most beautiful thing they've ever seen and even the loudest and most energized people of the group said they felt calm after entering the temples."





Damanhur School



Nelson

On the following Monday we met with their school where we had a tour of their forest with Lepre. He showed us their little clay-brick spiral made by the children. If you walked in it and then back out you could then enter the gnome village with clay houses made by the children of the Damanhur school. He also showed us their “flying classroom” and tipi. I thought their classrooms were a little cramped and squeezed. Though their classrooms were cramped, their flying classroom, a big net in the open forest, was spacious, enjoyable and fun. I liked most the flying classroom and their forest.

After this amazing tour we played some games with them to get to know each other better.







The Sacred Forest



Liam

In the afternoon we visited and learned about the Sacred Forest of Damanhur. Nandu told us about the Sacred Forest. The Sacred Forest is uphill from the underground temples. The forest is the outside part of the temples of Damanhur. The project of the Sacred Forest is about forty years old. When Damanhur bought the land the forest was not in good condition. Many of the trees were sick and dying, and also the whole forest was a big plantation, and it wasn't a beautiful place. That's why the people who took care of the forest planted a lot of different trees. Now it's a real forest in good condition. Nandu also took us to the "Mother Tree" where she said, "Go greet the tree, sit down and then you can ask her questions." First I (and I think also the others) was confused because it's just a tree and how should one be able to ask a tree questions. But after a while just looking at the tree I asked the tree how old she was. After two seconds I got a number in my head. It was 300 and something. The amazing thing was that later I asked Nandu how old the tree was. She said, "Three hundred and something." So I was very surprised and amazed that the tree gave me a true answer.

Nandu also told us about amazing stories about inviting aliens into your

bodies and also that through the Mother Tree one can communicate with whales. These things are so amazing and are one of the most interesting things I've ever heard in my life.





Porta della Terra – the farm of Damanhur



Alma

On Wednesday we visited Porta della Terra - the big farm of Damanhur where they produce a lot of their food: vegetables, fruits, meats and honey. We went there, with some kids of the school of Damanhur, where Gnu, a farmer, showed to us and explained the place. He also explained a bit about their water situation. In the region there has been less rain falling and they are finding ways to adapt. He brought us to the bees and there we saw that each bee hive has a selfica (which is a technology Damanhur invented to contain and move energies) to help the bees heal from

certain diseases. This part about the bees was the most interesting part of the whole farm tour, because I'm attracted to issues around bees and the Damanhurians try to find ways to keep them safe. After this, we saw how they raise cows, sheep and goats. While we were there, two cow calves arrived and the farmers closed them in a small cage together. Some of the other school kids tried to touch and poke the animals. I didn't like to see this because the young cows seemed scared and annoyed by this.



Communication with Plants



Daria

On Thursday we had a class about plant communication with the 5th grade of the Damanhur school. In that class the teacher started by showing us a presentation about what it is and how it works. Afterwards she took us outside to talk with a tree. In the presentation she talked about the fact that in order to fully talk with plants you need to connect with all of your senses. They have a device they use for one way of listening to the plants. It uses electromagnetic resistances to work, similar to a lie detector. The changes in resistance is translated to musical notes. I would have preferred if we would have just done experiments with the device. That topic is really interesting to me but I think it was a little too much talk, amongst the humans.





The Nial and Organization of the Community

One activity we did along with the others from the Damanhur school was to be in a circle and hear about the community structures and social organization of Damanhur. In this circle we were together with the current “Nial”, two elected representatives of the community who act as something like the mayors of Damanhur, keeping the overview of the social and organizational movements of the community. We adults found this talk very interesting and would have loved to continue into more depth. By this time, especially after such a full itinerary throughout the week, our kids were less than enthusiastic to get more content input, especially through translation, on a topic that doesn’t naturally reach their current interests. One of the most inspiring aspects of this talk was that one of the current Nials is a man in his late twenties who grew up in the community. He was awake and vital, determined to help his community develop further into the future.

Marriage

After our time with Nial, we had an interesting conversation with Capra who explained about the different types of marriage in Damanhur. First, there are civil marriages that celebrate the love between people. Then there are esoteric marriages, which seem to have a much deeper and more spiritual aspect to them, carrying much more weight in the commitment as this kind of marriage serves as a container for both spiritual growth amongst the people who make the commitment as well as being an element of stability and continuity that the wider community can rely on. Whatever the type of marriage, the commitment lasts only for one year. After the first, fifth or 40th time, couples can choose to continue again and again, each renewal of commitments with another ceremony.



Presenting Ourselves to the Community



Liam

On that evening Damanhur invited us to one of their weekly community meetings where they asked us to present ourselves and to talk about Tamera. The meeting was in a big hall/room. Everyone from our group presented themselves, saying how old they were and their names. We kids said one thing we liked the most or what was the most interesting part of our time in Damanhur. The others and I were pretty excited because we talked in front of around fifty people and live cameras. Benjamin, Juliane and Silvano spoke more about Tamera. The next day we were in the newspaper of Damanhur.



Clay Trees



Neo

We went to the school to learn and play with clay. We learned how to thank our hands, to say hello to them, etc. We went to the forest next to the school to have contact with a tree. Then we made an invented tree out of clay. Afterwards we had to search for faces and beings in the clay tree we had just made and we formed them even more into faces. We also went outside to get some natural elements in order to add to our tree clay sculpture. I really liked that day because I like playing with clay.





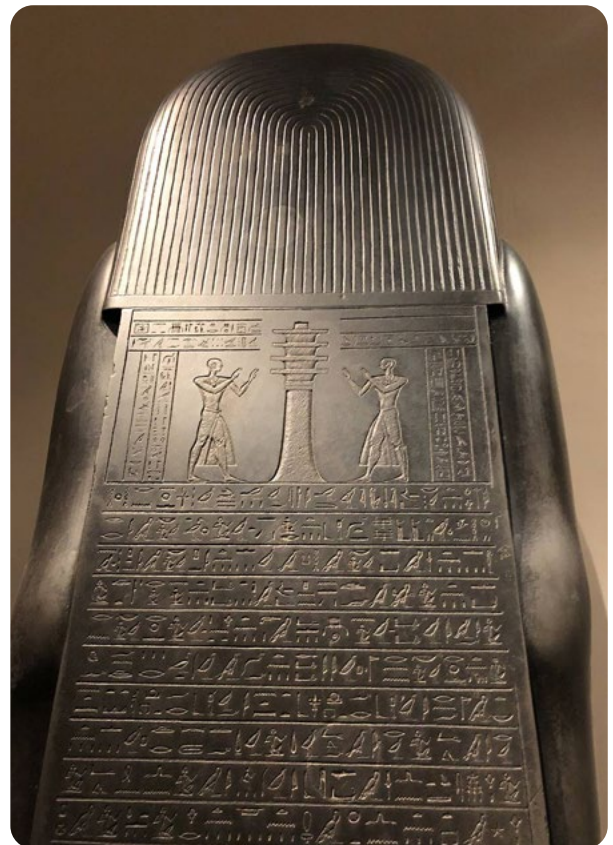
Day Trip to Turin



Nelson

On Friday we went with the 6th grade of Damanhur to Turin, a city 50 km North of Damjl.

It was great there. We went to the second largest Egyptian museum outside of Egypt. In this museum there were papyrus scrolls of 19 meters, tiny sculptures, tombs, mummies, skeletons, and more. It was very detailed and with a lot of content - too cramped for such small rooms. From my opinion it was a very peculiar, astonishing, mind-blowing and superb museum.







Our hosts - Dendera and Magila



Alma

Dendera and Magila are the two nuclei [groups of people living together in a communitarian way] where we stayed during our time in Damanhur. During this time we had two evening campfires where we got to know some of the people who live there and how they live in those two nuclei. The two nuclei are very close to each other, less than fifty meters apart.

Alma, Daria and Lucia slept in a room in the Dendera community house and Neo, Nelson and Liam stayed in a hut that belonged to Magila. Juliane, Benjamin and Silvano stayed in other smaller huts connected to these nuclei. We frequently used a building called the Agora. There we ate our breakfast, did our homework, had meetings and sharings, etc.





After all the activities we would train ourselves in writing reflections and sharing in the group. The kids were amazing and the group grew more together every day, taking care of each other. In between the big events there would be sweet moments where they'd be playing all together on the floor, snow-fighting, laughing, teasing each other.



Alma

We had a tour of the living area by a woman who lives there who is named Macaco. She showed and explained to us the different houses people lived in, for instance, the house that turns with the sun and another home built in the trees, a tree house. We had some conversations with Aninga, Elide and Picchiu, residents of Dendera who were our main hosts for our time in Damanhur, where they told us some of the origin stories of Damanhur and how they personally arrived to this community. A highlight of mine was the evening time where we, the younger ones, could meet each other, have fun and chill before going to bed.





Evening Experiences

Most evenings we were invited into different nucleus in the community. At the end we had visited 15 different Nucleos and were able to see the different qualities each had.



Lucia

Twice we ate at the Tial nucleo with Capra (the woman who organized our program in Damanhur), Armadila (Capra's husband), Migla (a very friendly and understanding young woman), Carlo, Zela, Naima, Matilda, Dingo and others. The second time we were there Dingo told us some very interesting stories which contain Falco, Dingo himself, time traveling, dimensional portals and aliens.



Mountain Trip

On the last day, snow had finally arrived...



Lucia

On the day before we left we went to a mountain one hour's drive from Damanhur and went sledding! For Alma it was the first time in snow. After one hour of sledding we had a very nice creamy hot chocolate with whipped cream.

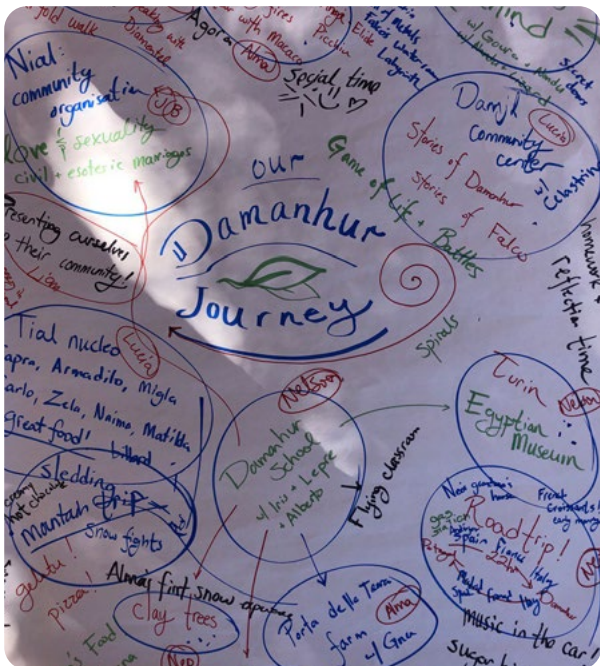




Going Home

Just as the snow arrived, we departed, again embarking on the three-day journey across Western Europe.

After arriving back in Portugal we took another 2 days for resting and sharing amongst ourselves. During this time we took time to gather these impressions and our thoughts. This report is the result from this harvest time.



Thank You!

Grazie mille!

What an experience we had together. Returning with inspiration we wish to continue the exchange with Damanhur. We could see how the kids grew in this experience, as well, how the group and team work grew, the ability to speak in public, to learn that you can reach a dream when you put the according effort into it. We came home with lots of impressions of the spiritual world and our possibilities of communication, with a broad insight into another community's life and much more.

We want to give a huge Thank You to so many people helping us to make all of this possible!
We want to thank everyone who donated - big and small amounts. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Thank you especially to all family members - grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, caretakers of the children.

We want to thank the community of Damanhur and especially Capra, Iris and others of the school of Damanhur for the immediate resonance and for organizing the stay for us. We want to thank our hosts, Aninga, Elide and everybody else at Dendera and Magila. Thank you to all our guides throughout the different places in Damanhur. All the beautiful people we could get to know, we wish you well!

We want to thank our team in Escola da Esperança project for all the background support and holding the learning spaces while we were gone.





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