

GLEN INTERNSHIP REPORT 2016

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Picture1: Fighting climate changes, fighting global injustice, COP 22, Marrakesh, 2016

GLEN Home Organization: INEX-SDA, Czech Republic

Internship Number: 0720

Internship Title: Organisation d'un forum international sur la permaculture

Hosting Organization: Orange Bleue Maghreb

Internship Country: Morocco

Period of the Internship: September - November 2016

Summary

In autumn 2016, a Moroccan organisation *Orange Bleue Maghreb* hosted GLEN interns for the second time; this time a Czech participant was part of the tandem. The internship was a unique opportunity to experience Morocco during preparations for one of the biggest environmental events – the UN climate conference, so-called COP 22. A Czech-German tandem of interns (Eva Macková and Nicolle Zavaleta Delgadillo) took part in preparing a parallel permacultural event near Marrakesh, and in opening an educational garden in Casablanca. In addition to that, they had a chance to meet important actors in the field of sustainable agriculture in Morocco, France and Western Africa.

Shrnutí

Na podzim roku 2016 hostila marocká organizace *Orange Bleue Maghreb* druhý tandem stážistů programu GLEN, poprvé s českou účastnicí. Stáž byla jedinečnou příležitostí zažít Maroko připravující se na jednu z největších environmentálních událostí – klimatickou konferenci OSN, tzv. COP 22. Česko-německý tandem (Eva Macková and Nicolle Zavaleta Delgadillo) se podílel na přípravě paralelní vzdělávací akce zaměřené na permakulturu, otevření vzdělávací zahrady v Casablance a měl také jedinečnou možnost poznat aktéry v oblasti udržitelného zemědělství v Maroku, Francii a Západní Africe.

Introduction

Motivation for participation

As oddly as it can sound, I have never had a particular interest in travelling or participating programmes outside Europe before I actually started working in INEX – Association for Voluntary Activities (INEX-SDA). Therefore, I originally applied and started preparing myself for a GLEN internship in Belgrade, Serbia, so that I could pursue my long-forgotten dream of engaging myself in oral history. After my original internship had been cancelled for organisational reasons, I had to adjust my motivation and expectations accordingly. Working as an Outgoing Placement Coordinator at that time, which means being in everyday contact with volunteers wishing to volunteer abroad, made me realize that I have very little experience with global topics and using Global Education in the field of international volunteering, and no personal experience, whether volunteer or other, from the so-called Global South. And that is where GLEN came in and offered a unique opportunity to gain such experience, in the form of an internship and a series of supporting educational trainings. Therefore, the replacement internship in Morocco was supposed to enable me, on the one hand, to use and develop my communication and event management skills, and, on the other hand, get better understanding of what working with volunteers going to the Global South entails. Finally, I thought of my GLEN participation as one of the last opportunities to participate in a fully funded programme before I turn the age limit. In the end, I think I gained much more than I expected.

About My Perception of Morocco

The Kingdom of Morocco is a country located in the Maghreb region of North Africa and it is rather a well-known destination for Czech travellers. The media coverage of areas beyond the Euro-Atlantic region being rather low in general, you rarely get a varied and balanced picture of the country. If you help yourself with googling, you find yourself with news oscillating between two extremes – exoticization and negative reviews. Every country has its issues and so does Morocco, but let's bring more varied information on the table!

The autumn 2016 was not only about general elections being held, but mostly about the UN climate conference, so-called COP 22. To bring also some positive news, on the wave of green energy before the climate conference, Morocco introduced a ban on production, distribution and use of plastic bags, mosques across the whole country were fitted with solar energy in a government scheme and labelled as *mosquées vertes* (green mosques), the first city bike-sharing in Africa was introduced in Marrakesh right before the COP 22 and is still in operation. Hopefully, all these initiative will go on and will not prove themselves as being done only at the occasion of a high-level international event.



Picture 2: The Koutoubiya mosque, labelled green in October 2016, Marrakesh

About Orange Bleue Maghreb

I pursued my internship in an NGO called "[Orange Bleue Maghreb](#)" (OBM), a Moroccan branch of a network of an international NGO *Orange Bleue International*, founded in 2000 by Hassan Aslafy, the current director and president of the organisations, a French social scientist and innovator and a promotor of sustainable agriculture. The other branches operate in France (*Orange Bleue France*) and Burkina Faso (*Orange Bleue Afrique*), all together connecting Europe, Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa.



Picture 3: The OBM team in action at Journée du Climat (Climate Day) in Rabat, 2016

OBM has always engaged in a large range of activities, however, to sum it up, OBM focusses on promotion of sustainable agriculture and permaculture, and education related to this field, solidarity economy, social and economic innovations, and promotion of common heritage and culture in the Mediterranean region.

There were several landmark projects running I could observe during my internship, where OBM was involved to greater or lesser extent and in different roles:

1. Opening ceremony of the Ibn Al Awam Educational Permacultural Garden in Casablanca,
2. *Forum de la Terre* (Forum of the Earth), a three-day permacultural event in Skoura and Marrakesh,
3. *Femmes et agricultures durables* (Women and Sustainable Agriculture), a promotion stand in the COP 22 Green Zone, Marrakesh,
4. *Marchés paysans* (farmers' markets) held regularly in Mohammedia, Casablanca and Marrakesh.

In autumn 2016, OBM was also looking to expand their activities, originally based mainly in Casablanca, to the Marrakesh region (e.g. finding a lot for a new urban permacultural

garden; start a series of cultural events and publications focussed on *al-Andalus*, a common European-African Muslim heritage etc.).

What I think is important to note here is that OBM had a rather loose organisational structure in comparison to what I had known from the Czech Republic and Europe. There were no employees, to my knowledge, except for its founder and president and his assistant. In addition to that, there were two groups of *amis* (friends) of the organisation, based in Casablanca and newly in Marrakech, working on concrete projects (e.g. the permacultural garden in Casablanca, farmers' markets etc.) or just offering each other support and inspiration in their projects. Having personal networks is a necessity in Morocco, especially when it comes to creating one's own project or simply finding contacts. For the purposes of this report, I will use the term "adherent", which probably expresses best the relationship with the organisation; as I'm not familiar with that fact that the institute of an official membership would be established in this NGO.

In autumn 2016, OBM officially had an office in Casablanca, a room kindly provided by the *El Ghali Cultural Centre* where the permacultural garden was located. Most interactions occurred, however, on-line (using a closed Facebook group, a WhatsApp chat, calls or emails) or in person, in cafés or adherents' homes. At the same time, the possibility of opening an office in Marrakesh was being considered, with the aim to create two regional centres with different agenda. This is also why me and my tandem partner were asked to settle down in Marrakesh.

The Internship

My involvement

In early September 2016, I arrived in Morocco in the eve of one of the most important Islamic holidays, *Eid al-Adha*, also called the "Sacrifice Feast". Taking into account the extremely hot summer, Eid, and the general elections held at the beginning of October, the overall everyday tempo in the whole country at that period was rather moderate. This also meant that our internship started off rather slowly. For the first month of the internship we

were mostly getting to know the area, getting familiar with adherents of the organisation, their farms and projects, and the field of sustainable agriculture in Morocco in general.

The original aim of the internship was to create a PR/communication plan for an event, in the end called *Forum de la Terre*, as well as preparing invitations, being in charge of logistics and organisation of the event. Unfortunately, there had been several changes prior to our arrival in Morocco. Firstly, it was not clear till the second half of October whether the event itself would take place at all. As all off-programme events during Paris COP 21 were cancelled by authorities due to security reasons the previous year, OBM was worried that the same could happen in Marrakesh. Secondly, OBM was only one of the three organisations preparing the forum, and unfortunately, it was not always involved in decision making. This resulted, among other things, in hiring a professional PR/event agency taking over the agenda originally intended for our tandem. Even though the forum eventually took place and we were involved to some extent (sending invitations, preparing bios and photos for the event brochure, taking photos or welcoming visitors).



Picture 4: Meeting of the OBM team in Casablanca, 2016

My tandem partner and I were each given a replacement tasks on which we worked individually throughout October before the COP 22 and *Forum de la Terre* started. I was working on a mini-study dedicated to the *al-Andalus* heritage in Marrakesh, and my tandem partner was researching the possibilities of starting historic/sustainable tourist tours as a source of income for the organisation. In addition to visiting different farms almost every week, we attended meetings with our coordinator and/or adherents of OBM once a week or once every two weeks. In general, I spent most of my time working at home, occasionally at cafés or at the library of *Institut français* to change the working environment, as there was no office at that moment where we could work.



Picture 5: Ibn Al Awam permacultura garden, Casablanca, 2016

The busiest period for us was the end of October and beginning of November when we, first, participated in the opening of the permacultural garden in Casablanca, and then helped at a promotion stand in the Green Zone of COP 22. The Ibn Al Awam garden in Casablanca was a “baby” of the Casablanca OBM team. The official opening was a cherry on top of a cake after working for a few years almost purely on voluntary basis and enthusiasm of a dozen of people to create a space where people, and especially children can learn the principles of

permaculture and sustainability in general. I wish I could have been involved in this project more, but it stays in my heart and I get at least regular updates on Facebook.

Being a highly watch international event, COP 22 put a lot of pressure on everyone in Marrakech. Not only organisers and authorities, but also participating NGOs, initiatives, visitors, and finally inhabitants of the city. Running from 7th to 18th November 2016, COP 22 brought thousands of people from all around the world to Marrakesh. Me, my tandem partner and several other adherents of OBM had the change to be part of a common stand called *Femme et agricultures durables* (Women and sustainable agriculture), together with two other Moroccan NGOs (*Terre et Humanisme Maroc* and *Le RIAM*) who were as well involved in organising the *Forum de la Terre*. We were promoting this event to visitors, collecting email addresses for invitations, providing technical support to colleagues and guest speakers at the stand. Every day there were several guest speakers, mostly women, who were presenting their sustainable projects (organic farming, eco-friendly accommodation, upcycling waste etc.). We also took photos and created content for the Facebook page of OBM each day during the COP 22.



Picture 6: We would like to invite you to Forum de la Terre, COP 22, Marrakesh, 2016

The peak of our internship was the weekend of 12th do 14th November 2016 when the long-awaited *Forum de la Terre* took place. After being involved in the preparations about two weeks prior to the event, the event itself was rather relaxing for me and my tandem partner because most of the tasks were left to the agency and colleagues from the other two organisations. My tandem partner took photos, I helped at the entrance and was available for the guest speakers and was ready to do urgent small tasks. In the end, there were about 200 visitors who came to this three-day event starting at the University of Cadi Ayyad in Marrakesh and then moving for two days to an agroecological farm and training centre in Skoura called *CIPA (Carrefour des initiatives et pratiques agroécologiques, Crossroads of Agroecological Initiatives and Practices)*. There were various lectures on different environmental topics, ranging from sustainable agriculture and economy to permaculture, healthy nutrition and life style, given by Moroccan and international guest speakers who came to Marrakesh at the occasion of the COP 22.

Challenges

There were many challenges I had to face during my internship. Though when I look back at them now, I must admit that I consider a lot of them to be a result of my “European”, middle-class mindset. Wishing to be centre of attention, to be taken care of, to have things structured. But I do not see much I could have done differently in the past, to me this awareness only comes with the transformation process that GLEN offered to me.

Lack of structure and support from the host organisation was probably the biggest challenge I had to face. Not being able to work in the office or a different kind of a stable communal space, not being able to discuss my tasks on regular basis and get feedback was quite frustrating for me. I realized that I really enjoy team work and that it gives me a lot of energy I need for my work. Unfortunately, unlike for most of other GLEN participants, our tandem did not work as a kind of a safety net. Because of me having to change internship, me and my tandem partner did not go through the pre-departure trainings together, but each of us in its own programme group. This, I believe, weakened our potential bond. Luckily, I could talk about my frustrations with my other flatmate (an OBM assistant) and another friend of mine (a Czech Erasmus student), which helped me a lot in dealing with them.

In general, I wish our coordinator had been more available on the spot and less in France for us to clear out what our tasks were; I wish the cooperation between the three organisations preparing *Forum de la Terre* had been less difficult; I wish there had been fewer technical issues at the COP 22, and most of all I wish there had been more tangible results of our internship and that our individual tasks had not ended up in a drawer. I was aware of the fact that should my level of French, which was the main communication language for us, have been higher, things would probably have been a lot different. On the other hand, all of this did not prevent me from meeting wonderful people and learning about their amazing projects, their perseverance and enthusiasm.

Results, learning effects, experience

Most applicants interested in the GLEN programme think that it is all about the three-month internship. Most GLEN alumni know it is that it has much more than the internship itself. And I can honestly say that I feel that now I am only at the beginning of my learning process that GLEN triggered. Furthermore, as of now it is fully up to me how I make use of my experience. It is a great opportunity, but also a great responsibility.

To sum it up, three months barely allow you to get to know your area and get the idea of what is going on. In this short period of time, I was proud of inventing a small “Create your own permacultural garden” card game for children; contributing to *Forum de la Terre’s* brochure; learning more about permaculture and meeting people for whom permaculture is a life style. For the first time, I also felt how real climate changes can be for many people. For the first time, it was not just someone else’s problem. I also realized how important it is to be in a direct contact with your farmer and that farmers’ markets are not only about buying food, but also about meeting people and creating a community. In addition to all that, I became more aware of the importance of religion in everyday life. Something that is quite uncommon in the Czech Republic.

At the same time, I already started working on my GEA¹ during my internship, by collecting sounds and interviews. I took my inspiration in the concept of field recording already before coming to Morocco and I took a step further with interviewing inspirational people from the field of sustainable agriculture. The whole project, *Sounds of Morocco*, started taking shape several months after I came back to the Czech Republic. On 11th April 2017, I opened a month-long audio-visual exhibition at the premises of *Alliance française de Brno* at the occasion of the *Bonjour Brno Festival*, a festival of francophone culture. Having received a small funding from *Alliance française de Brno*, I created 10 panels (5 sounds, 5 interviews) with following goals:

- create a unique universe of sounds and visual incentives,
- motivate people to perceive their own environment with their ears and to map their surroundings in a more subjective and emotional matter,
- share inspirational stories from different parts of the world, focussing on sustainable agriculture, in order to motivate people to become interested in this topic at a local level,
- show the students of French the diversity of this language.



Picture 7: Interview with Bénédicte Traoré from *Orange Bleue Afrique*, Marrakesh, 2016 (Photo credit: Aude Martin)

¹ Global Education Activity

The response of public was quite positive, including the local Maghreb community who came to the opening night. Hopefully, the exhibition will be soon on display in other French alliances and on-line.

Interesting links:

Some photos from the exhibition ([Facebook](#); [an article in a students' blog](#))

Ibn Al Awam permacultural garden in Casablanca ([Facebook](#))

Orange Bleue Maghreb ([website](#), [Facebook](#))

Marché Paysan Marrakech ([Facebook](#))