



INTERVIEW POLONA ZAKRAJŠEK, PARTICIPANT IN THE RE.SOURCES PROJECT

Hi, my name is Polona. I am 24 years old and I'm from Slovenia. I did my bachelor in geography in Ljubljana. I'm currently staying in Prague for one more year, doing my master's degree in Forestry, water and landscape management. I have a diverse palette of interests, typical for a geographer. During the summer, I was doing field work in forest ecology and mountain forests.



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You were a participant in the Re.sources project, that is about what resources does it take to make a change towards sustainable development in the Alps. What are your personal resources for your commitment to environmental and alpine protection?

Polona: Well, one part comes from my love for nature and for Slovenian culture. Slovenians really like going hiking and into nature. We really are connected with our forests because about 60% of Slovenia is covered by it. So, I feel this type of connection with nature. And when you know and love something, you want to protect it. But it's not just about the natural resources, it's also about the human resources. There's also this aspect of community: When you feel included, you want to develop it and work with them.

When did you hear first about CIPRA and about the Re.sources project? Can you remember?

Polona: Yeah, I think I heard about CIPRA quite a while ago when I was studying geography and one of our professors was involved with CIPRA. There's this recurring event of CIPRA Slovenia, fire in the Alps. Two years ago, the main topic of it was protecting mountain forests and forest resources. So that sounded like a really interesting topic to me. I applied and three more people from my Student association group joined me. We really enjoyed the event. Afterwards my friend and I decided to become members in CIPRA Slovenia. Katarina from CIPRA Slovenia wrote us that there's this new project called Re.sources and if we'd be interested to join in. So I joined in December 2020 for the first two online meetings. Later I took part in the meeting in Biella in Italy in the summer of 2021 and 2022 in Innsbruck, in Austria.

You did a lot of activities in the project. Can you describe your experiences during the meetings and how the exchange with the other people was for you?

Polona: There were so many things going on that it's hard to even pinpoint a single one. But I think the best part is to meet so many new people and keep meeting them year after year in the project. Also, we were discussing topics about natural resources, about human resources. 2022 during the meeting in Innsbruck, we had a workshop on how to become climate fresh facilitators. It was a really interesting because first we took part as participants and then we were trained on how to facilitate the workshop for other people.

What is climate fresh about?

Polona: Climate fresh is a card game where a group of participants needs to find a solution for climate change step by step. The facilitator guides them through the game. On one side the cards are showing the scientific facts about climate change. The participants need to make the connection between causes and outcomes. For instance, how greenhouse gases relate to higher temperature. In the end you see on one desk the whole outline of how everything is connected.

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What do you take out of the project? What new things did you learn or take home?

Polona: I've been in the project for so long, a lot of things have happened in these two years. I noticed some of personal changes in how I see things different and how I interact with people and nature, where I see myself going in the future and so on. So, the project contributed to me on a personal level. I've been committed to work with nature before. But when you get to meet people and see that each of them comes from a different area in the Alps. They all have their own stories or they see

something that's happening in their area that you wouldn't even consider. And maybe their type of solution is a different approach than what you're familiar with. So it's really about exchanging different points of views, different practices, and that seems really valuable to me. This is extra knowledge that I'm not able to receive in classroom, even if we do field trips. The trans nationality of the project brings a lot more richness to your point of view. You get to meet people and make new connections and that's really important part of it. Also, all the workshops that were led, each of them brought some new insights.

Were you also able to bring in your knowledge and your study background?

Polona: Yeah, for sure. Even though I currently study forestry, I still feel like I'm a geographer and I will always be one. From that point of view, geography is a science where you just try to take everything in and make something out of that. You see a topic from all different viewpoints. It's interesting to see atopic from the side of nature and science and then the human activities and the community side and how everything interacts with each other. There are natural resources and human resources and they are interacting with each other all the time. So that's, what feels interesting to me.

And were there also things during the workshops that you didn't like so much? We are happy to get to get some feedback, so we can improve.

Polona: Well, there's people coming from all different countries, so sometimes language barriers can be a thing. If not everyone is fluent in the same language, sometimes subgroups form and people just start talking in their mother tongue. Another thing it's just the length of events and their size. I think it was done quite well. But sometimes if the event is short, like just one overnight stay, it feels strange to come. If you're traveling a really large distance and then you just stay there for two three days. So, I guess it could be nice if some of the events could be slightly longer. But then on the other hand, if that's during the school year, I don't think I could join, because then I would be missing my classes. I guess it's always type of balancing that it's long enough that people actually get to connect with each other and get to know each better.

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Is there something that you wish for in the future? What would you be interested in for future projects.

Polona: I would be interested in trying to connect a project with some sort of direct action. We are discussing a lot of topics. But I think that the people who decide to come there, they're usually already aware of the issues, for instance climate change or biodiversity loss. Of course, you learn something new each time, but there's this gap between knowing what the issues are and putting them into some sort of direct

action. So that's something I would be really happy to see more of. That's also something that bothers me in the scientific world. We know so much about the background, we know how things are working, we have the knowledge. But there's this problem with knowledge transfer. It's like raising public awareness, but then putting it into action and making a change in that aspect.

Job Shadowing at CIPRA International:

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Now I want to talk about the job shadowing you did at CIPRA International in Liechtenstein. How did you hear about the job shadowing program and why did you apply?

Polona: During the first meetings of the Re.sources project I learned that there will be different opportunities to do job shadowing. So at first I applied to go to the IUCN Congress that didn't happen in the end (*because of Covid; editors note*). But I always thought it would be really interesting to go to CIPRA International, because that's the main organization that holds together different types of projects. And it's in Liechtenstein. So it were both aspects of me being really curious about how it looks like in CIPRA International and also about the country itself. I thought of applying before, but I never really found the time for it. When there was the last call for job shadowing until the end of July. And I was thinking 'I either do it now or I'm going to regret not doing it'. So I applied.

And what did you do at CPA International? Were you able to use your skills?

Polona: I was actually kind of worried that I would not be able to do that. But I did work in an administration or office job before. I thought, I can at least do something in that area. But when I got there, I was welcomed really nicely. There were many people coming in from all the different national CIPRAs and it was just full office. So I guess I got a really good week to come to Liechtenstein. First I was going through the report for the Re.sources and the activity we did in Innsbruck project and another youth project. Then I was working on proposal for another project and could brainstorming some ideas with the project manager. So, it was really nice to be able to do different things and get an insight into how projects are led from the beginning to end. It was interesting to get an insight into this aspect.

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What new things did you learn during the work?

Polona: I got an insight how projects are led, financed and how you apply. When the project starts you have a certain scope for small changes. Also, I got an overview in working with Erasmus Grants. It was really nice to meet all the people that work in the office and to put a face to the name and to see how office dynamics work. As a person who is still in the education process, it's always nice to see how work life can look like after you finish your studies.

You said you were curious about Liechtenstein. So how was it to be there?

Polona: A really nice thing was that I got a bicycle provided. Actually, I was staying in Austria and had the opportunity to cycle ten kilometers to work. The nice thing about the job shadowing is that we got all of our expenses reimbursed, so I didn't need to feel worried about any of that. It was so nice to just take a bicycle in the morning and cycle from Austria to Liechtenstein to the office over all the fields on cycling paths. It felt kind of a fairytale, to be honest, and I really enjoy cycling. I was able to go a bit around Liechtenstein and in the afternoons, I was hanging out with some people that were also working in the office, some interns. So, I feel like I got a really nice experience during my week in Liechtenstein.

Would you recommend job shadowing to others and why?

Polona: Yeah, I would definitely recommend job shadowing to others. There are also different opportunities, we had the option to go to any other national Citra for 3 to 7 days. Joining Cipra International for a week felt really interesting to me and I had a great experience. I would really highly recommend this one, because it was really interesting to get an insight into how an NGO works on an international level.

Interview by Maya Mathias, Communication Manager, CIPRA International