

Skylar Volunteership Reflection

Coming to EcoPeace Middle East at the beginning of the summer of 2016 I had a veritable storm of priorities for what I wanted out of the summer blowing around in my head. While working at EcoPeace my goal was to also conduct research for my master's thesis on the securitization of water resources in Jordan. While I didn't yet know exactly how these two priorities would fit together, I knew I wanted the experience of working more or less regular hours in an office environment where I could learn by engaging with professionals who dealt with Jordan's current water challenges on a daily basis, and where I would need to practice a wide variety of skills. When I began working at EcoPeace's Amman office at the end of May I did not have a clearly defined set of responsibilities or long term projects to which I needed to commit myself for the duration of my volunteership. This flexible arrangement turned out to be the best possible setup for me because it required me to work on a variety of different projects, exercising different sets of skills while also occasionally doing odd jobs for other people around the office.

A very large percentage of my work for EcoPeace focused on multimedia projects. The most prominent of these was a video that I helped shoot and produce, dealing with the significance of the Jordan River baptism sites as points of contact and transboundary cooperation between the Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian environmental professionals and student water trustees that participate in the Good Water Neighbors program. This was enormously useful to me in developing a variety of skills. First, my supervisor Eshak Alguza'a made me responsible for shooting all of the video footage from the Jordanian side of the Jordan River Baptism site, and so once we got to the site and started the activity, I had to constantly and quickly--and through no small amount of trial and error--figure out the best positions, angles and techniques to best capture the event we were there for. Although I had some videography experience before, it had been a very different kind of event and required a different thought process from this one. The event in question that took place that day at the Jordan River, was an opportunity for youth trustees from many of the communities in the Good Water Neighbors Program to come together across the Jordan River and sing a song called "We will change it" proclaiming the deep importance of water and how essential it is to share it in an equitable and conservation-minded fashion among their communities. The point of this video was to briefly educate its viewers about some of the key challenges that EcoPeace and the surrounding communities face in rehabilitating the river while at the same time showcasing the transboundary relationships of the Good Water Neighbors Program participants and coordinators and their willingness to work together toward common goals. This was something that I got to experience as well to an extent through working jointly with interns in the Tel Aviv office to combine and edit all of our collective footage and information into a powerful and cogent video that the EcoPeace delegation could take with it to a very special presentation that some of the students and coordinators would be doing in Berlin in the following weeks. While not always easy or clear (as coordinating between various groups in various offices can be challenging in any circumstance), I felt like I was getting to experience a small part of the triumphs and challenges that full time staffers at EcoPeace experienced in the course of their everyday work with counterparts in the other offices.

In addition to video shooting and editing, I also worked on a variety of small, sometimes recurring, tasks including editing of English language documents, Arabic to English translation, working on a conference presentation, drafting a blog post and sponsor report about the results of the EcoPeace group's July trip to Berlin for the 2016 Berlin River Camp, as well as choosing and arranging photos for the Sharhabil bin Hassneh EcoPark's visitor cabins (where I also helped repair a bridge). Engaging in this diverse variety of activities was incredibly enriching because it not only pressed me to use a fairly diverse set of skills, but it also brought me into contact with a number of different staff members at the Jordanian and Israeli offices whom I would not otherwise have interacted as much without this diverse series of projects. In conclusion, I suppose I would say that as with all experiences that help you to grow, I was left wanting more; more time to practice my Arabic and get to know the staff of the Jordan office, more time spent attending meetings that brought all three national offices together equally, more time to visit and get to know the staff in Tel Aviv and Bethlehem--the latter of whom I unfortunately had little to no interaction with, and finally more time just to be in Jordan overall learning about its hydrological challenges and what EcoPeace is doing in all three riparian entities of the Lower Jordan River Basin in order to overcome these challenges. My time at EcoPeace has been all too brief, but it has inspired me not to step back from the difficult environmental and political challenges of water scarcity in the Lower Jordan River Valley, and instead to continue to work for a better regional environment and better lives for all those who live in it.