

TESS Article – Jean Marc Pace Ricci

Following the completion of my BSc. In Earth Systems at the University of Malta I debated entering the working world or furthering my education. I do not regret the choice I made; in January 2018 I caught a flight to study in The Netherlands, and over 2 years later I'm still here!

I opted for an MSc. In Forest and Nature Conservation with a Management Specialization at Wageningen University and Research. The course offers three tracks (ecology, policy, or management); choosing the management track offers a 50/50 balance between the natural and social sciences. This allowed me to take courses as diverse as Restoration Ecology, Forest Ecology and Management, Communities and Conservation, and Environment and Development.

My MSc. Theses project was a joint project together with Kimberly Merten (also a TESS awardee) focusing on the synergies we should strive for within the agricultural and forestry sectors for which we were both awarded a 9/10. The MSc. Program also included a four-month internship which I conducted in Ethiopia. My task was to design, conduct, and report the scoping and feasibility study for an innovative and entrepreneurial project - the cultivation of an edible algae (*Spirulina* - *Arthrospira* sp.) as a means of addressing malnutrition and increasing female employment.

The balanced approach between the two disciplinary fields suited my learning style very well and I am now equipped with a broad toolkit for management roles within the environmental and development sectors. The theses project and internship were also very valuable experiences giving me some tangible experience in both academia and project management. The degree was carried out following the award of a Tertiary Education Scholarship Scheme Scholarship and I graduated *cum laude*.

Beyond my fruitful academic pursuits, the city of Wageningen, the Netherlands itself, and the ability to travel across mainland Europe with ease provided me with uncountable experiences and fond memories. I am immensely grateful for the support this scholarship scheme provided me with, I have broadened my horizons and developed as a person. I now look forward to finding my niche within the environment and development sector, making a living while contributing to the betterment of environmental sustainability and social wellbeing.