

# Workshop in Sicily

2023. 9. 11~9. 21

## To begin with

In September 2023, our team, which is comprised of four students and one tutor from Kyushu University, embarked on a journey of a workshop in Sicily, Italy. We spent the first week in a town in the heart of Sicily for design proposals, following a week dedicated to an enlightening architectural tour across this beautiful land.

Along with the students from The University of Palermo, Pusan National University, Tongji University, and Vienna University of Technology, we all actively engaged in the design proposal for the small town. This collaboration facilitated valuable opportunities for international exchange, allowing us to take part in overseas presentations and experience diverse attitudes toward design. Throughout the tour, we dived into the rich tapestry of Sicilian history, culture, and agriculture, significantly enriching our understanding of this fascinating region.



From left to right: Tutor Nakamitsu, students Kumamaru, Tomoguchi, Edayoshi, Zhang

The workshop, comprising two different parts, served as a remarkable learning experience for all the participants. The first part focused on the design workshop, where innovative ideas were generated, while the second part involved an insightful architectural field trip. We are eager to share our experiences from the workshop with you through this report. We kindly invite you to delve into the details of both parts, this will help you to have a comprehensive understanding of our journey.

## Schedule

### Online Workshop

Week 1 7/24-7/28 Lecture

Lectures about Sicily and target site

Week 2 8/1-8/4 Lecture

Lectures about design methods in different countries

Week 3 8/7-8/11 Presentation

Presentation on target site and proposals

### On-site Workshop

9/9 Departure

9/10 Tour in Palermo

Heading to Valledolmo in the afternoon

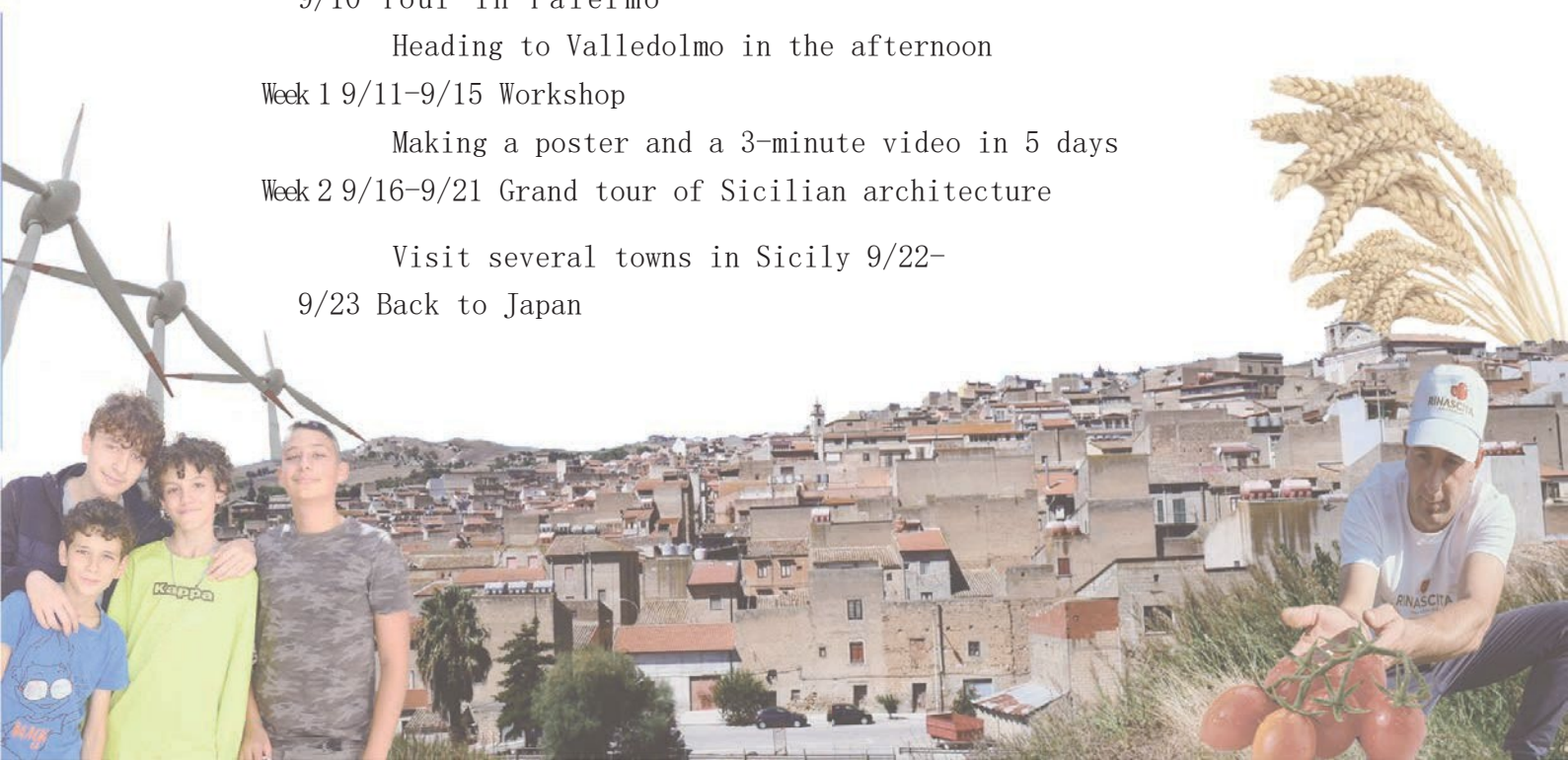
Week 1 9/11-9/15 Workshop

Making a poster and a 3-minute video in 5 days

Week 2 9/16-9/21 Grand tour of Sicilian architecture

Visit several towns in Sicily 9/22-

9/23 Back to Japan



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# 1. Workshop Introduction

The workshop was held in Valledolmo, a small town of approximately two-hour drive from Palermo, nestled in the mountainous terrain of northern Sicily. This town captivated us with its scenic setting and unique charm.



Sicily Island



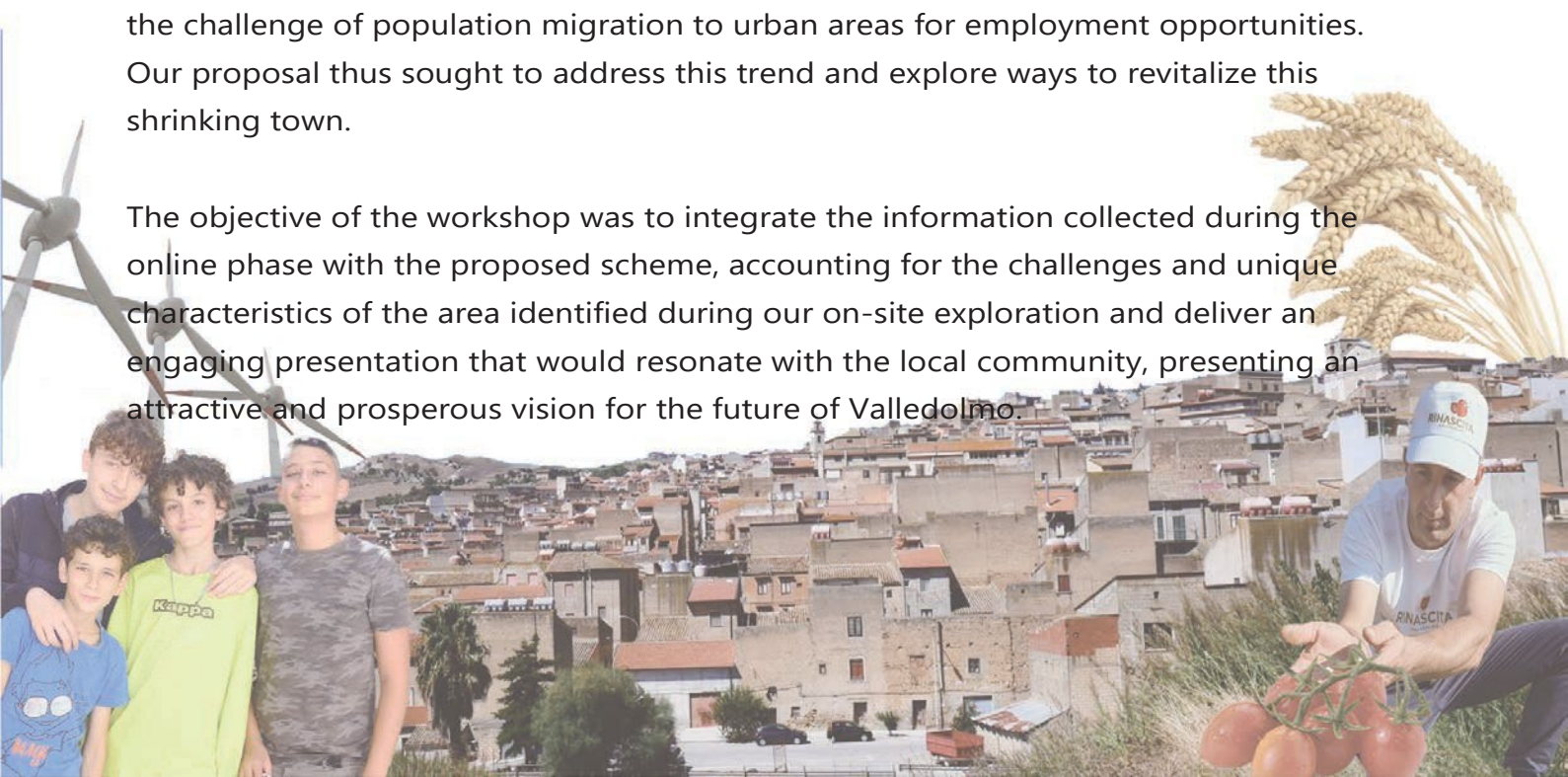
Aerial photo of Valledolmo

Our project focused on the renovation of buildings situated along the river in Valledolmo. The designated site, marked by a red frame in the figure on the right side above, was divided into five sections. During the online workshop, each university was assigned a specific area for further discussion.

The existing buildings on our site are mainly constructed with fragile materials like sandstone, with many already showing signs of deterioration. Given these conditions, our proposal leaned towards the construction of new buildings to ensure sustainability and longevity.

Furthermore, while Valledolmo had a thriving agricultural scene, the town still faced the challenge of population migration to urban areas for employment opportunities. Our proposal thus sought to address this trend and explore ways to revitalize this shrinking town.

The objective of the workshop was to integrate the information collected during the online phase with the proposed scheme, accounting for the challenges and unique characteristics of the area identified during our on-site exploration and deliver an engaging presentation that would resonate with the local community, presenting an attractive and prosperous vision for the future of Valledolmo.



## 2. About Sicily



**As the largest island in the center of the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily is a strategic point for transportation and trade, and is also known as the "crossroads of civilization" in the Mediterranean Sea due to the alternation of various powers such as Byzantine and Roman Empire.**  
**In 1861, it was incorporated into Italy.**

— the Window of World History

[https://www.y-history.net/appendix/wh0103-027\\_1.html](https://www.y-history.net/appendix/wh0103-027_1.html)

Sicily is an island encompassing approximately two-thirds the size of Kyushu. Italy is often likened to a boot because of its land shape. Sicily, situated in the southern part of Italy, is on the toe of this boot and boasts key cities such as Palermo, Catania, and Messina.



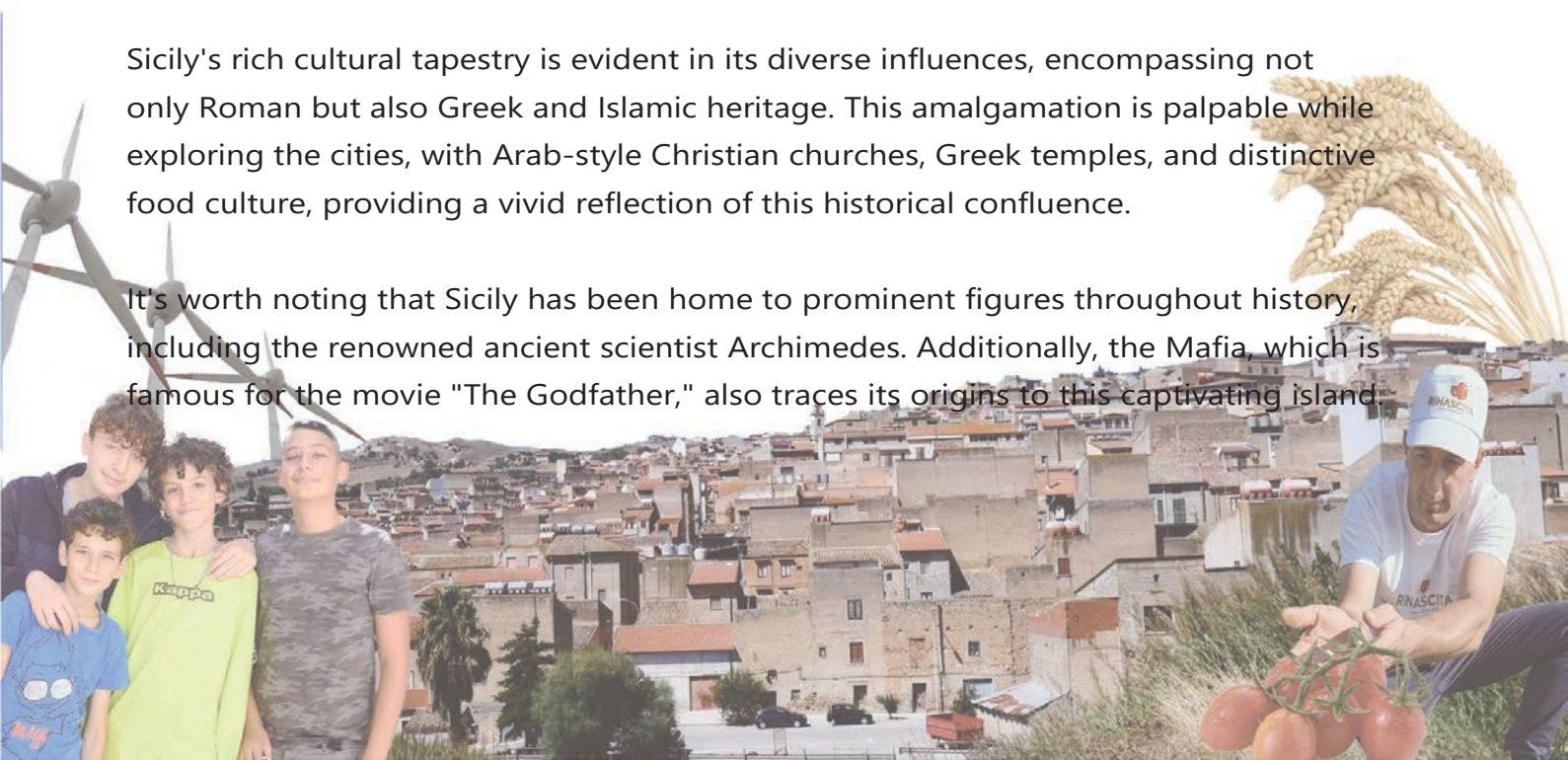
### Trinacria

The symbol of Sicily, known as "Trinacria," holds significant cultural meaning. Its three feet represent the three capes of Sicily, while the ears of wheat symbolize fertile soil and prosperity. Interestingly, the central figure is said to depict Medusa.

Being an island in the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily features hot summers and mild winters along the coast. However, its mountainous terrain results in snowy weather in some areas. Valledolmo, the site of the workshop, is situated at an altitude of about 800 meters above sea level, resulting in freezing nights even in September.

Sicily's rich cultural tapestry is evident in its diverse influences, encompassing not only Roman but also Greek and Islamic heritage. This amalgamation is palpable while exploring the cities, with Arab-style Christian churches, Greek temples, and distinctive food culture, providing a vivid reflection of this historical confluence.

It's worth noting that Sicily has been home to prominent figures throughout history, including the renowned ancient scientist Archimedes. Additionally, the Mafia, which is famous for the movie "The Godfather," also traces its origins to this captivating island.



### 3. During the Workshop

On September 10th, our international group assembled in front of Palermo Central Station at 8 p.m., ready for our journey to Valledolmo. After a tiring bus ride of about 2 hours along the mountainous road, we reached our destination by 11 p.m. Despite the late hour, the warm welcome we received from the townspeople, including the mayor, left a lasting impression. We seized the opportunity for a group photo before heading to our accommodations.

Curiosity led to our inquiry of why the local kids were outdoors at such a late hour. Their response revealed the close bond of the town, emphasizing that everyone knows each other, creating a sense of safety even during the late hours. Interestingly, the lack of Wi-Fi at our accommodation presented a unique challenge. The stone wall structure of the house also obstructed our connection to the data network. However, the town thoughtfully provided us with a workspace equipped with Wi-Fi, becoming the hub for our presentations and breakfast sessions throughout our stay.



## Day 1: Beginning

Leaving the inn, we made our way to the workspace. The morning of Valledolmo greeted her guests with a slight chill, but the crisp air and the breathtaking view of endless mountains at the end of the street added to the tranquil ambiance.



The workspace itself was a renovated old vaulted building. Given the town's uneven topography, it seemed that part of the building was embedded in the ground. Its distinct features captivated us, notably the stone structure characterized by thick walls and minimal openings. This architectural style resonated with what had been talked about in architectural history class, resembling the timeless charm of old European structures.



The workshop unfolded with an opening ceremony, featuring professors from Pusan National University and The University of Palermo. The workshop's theme, "Valledolmo Paradise 2030 -Living the Transition-," was clearly emphasizing a pronounced social dimension. This prompted us to contemplate how we could contribute to the city's appeal through software rather than architectural hardware.

Following the opening ceremony, we embarked on an insightful tour of the site, receiving detailed explanations about the current state. As a participant in my first international workshop, the initial uncertainty about the destination was quickly replaced with a sense of familiarity during the site survey, reminiscent of my experiences in Japan. Touching the buildings made of sandstone and stone allowed me to feel their fragility and absorb the unique atmosphere they exuded. This hands-on experience underscored the charm of participating in overseas workshops — the opportunity to gain profound insights into different cultures and environments.



↑ Opening ceremony



↑ Site field trip



↑ Discussion



## Day 2: Fun and Learning in Harmony

Our proposal was made under the instruction of Professor Chung from Pusan National University. We were deeply grateful for his invaluable support throughout the workshop, from developing the proposal to refining our presentation.

The second day of the workshop was dedicated to extensive discussions on our proposals. Drawing from our preliminary research and insights gained at the tour after the opening ceremony, we discovered parallels between Valledolmo and Japan, both count on agriculture as a primary industry and a trend of youth migrating to urban areas in search of employment. Given Japan's firsthand experience with issues like a declining birthrate and an aging population, we felt uniquely equipped to understand these challenges.

Motivated by a desire to revitalize Valledolmo, our proposal took a targeted approach, focusing on children as key contributors to preventing population outflow. Recognizing the significance of early attachment, we envisioned engaging children with the town from an early age, fostering a sense of connection and a commitment to contributing to its future. In the midterm presentation, our team proposed an architectural concept aimed at providing children with firsthand experiences in agriculture, a distinctive feature of Valledolmo.



↑ Instruction from Professor Chung



↑ Refining our proposal



↑ Mr. Marco Coico's Lecture



In the afternoon, we were lucky to have Mr. Marco Coico, who's only 23 years old, give a lecture on urban renewal through culture and art. Mr. Marco Coico currently serves as the vice president of Le Vie dei Tesori, a renowned event that unveils the charms of Sicily and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors from across Italy. It is so remarkable and inspiring that Mr. Coico has been actively propagating Sicilian culture at such a young age.

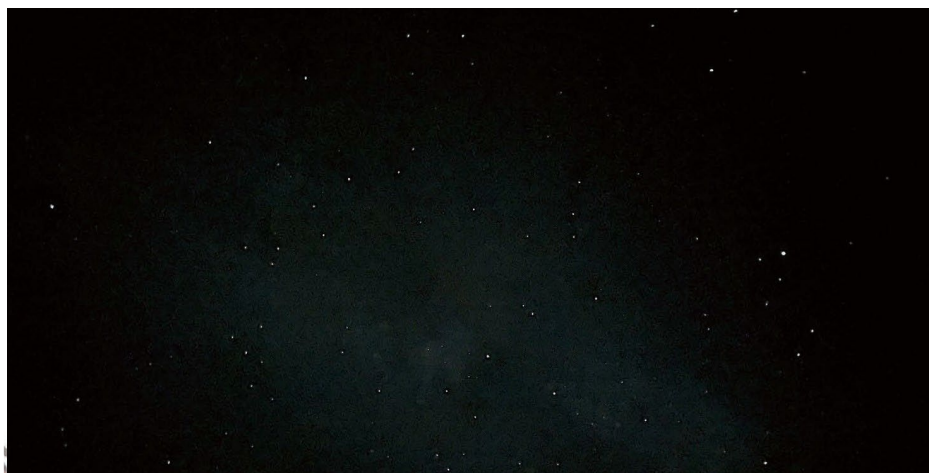
Following the lecture, we were invited to a tour of a local farm. The day concluded with an impromptu party at the farm after the discussions about initiatives of local agriculture. While we enjoyed ourselves at the party, the impending midterm presentation the next day and our unfinished materials still caused a degree of anxiety. I couldn't help to ask the other teams about their progress during the party.

Their responses sounded just as uncertain as I do, but however, filled with laughter. Strangely, this brought me a sense of relief. It served as a reminder of the importance of seizing the day and maintaining a healthy balance between work and leisure. This insight became a mental note for me, underscoring the significance of embracing both aspects for a more well-rounded experience for this trip.



↑ Panorama of Valledolmo

↓ Starry night



## Day 3: A Toast to Midterm Presentation

This morning we were dedicated to finalizing materials for the upcoming midterm presentation at 3:00 p.m. During this crucial phase, our workshop attracted the attention of local students who dropped by the workspace for a field trip. The curiosity towards Asian countries made the Chinese team and our team inundated with questions from the students.

Guided by Professor Chung's advice on the significance of a compelling title, our final proposal was "New Kids on The Block." Originating from the name of an American boy band from the 1980s, the title proved to be successful, arousing laughter from the audience during the presentation. Beyond its impact, the title seamlessly aligned with the essence of our proposal — aiming to boost immigration and relieve population outflow by involving local kids. To conclude the presentation, a sketch by Mr. Tomoguchi was displayed on the screen, earning praise from the crowds for its enlightening depiction of stimulating the imagination of the future. Consequently, we decided to make this sketch the main point of our presentation.

We had the opportunity to visit a local winery after the presentation. Over glasses of delicious white wine, we learned about some commendable sustainable practices they took, providing a delightful respite after the intense presentation session.



↑ Working on design



↑ Local high school students



↑ Midterm presentation



## Day 4: Night of Sicily

As the deadline for final materials submission came closer, the workload intensified compared to the mid-term presentation. With only one day remaining to make the poster and video, the four of us efficiently divided the tasks among ourselves.

Before lunch, Professor Woo from Pusan National University, who had joined us later in the day, delivered a fascinating lecture on the history of Pusan. He shared his insights into the population outflow to other cities and provided an overview of Pusan's townscape, characterized by numerous mountains.

Following the lecture, we spent most of our time refining our submissions. On this day, all the teams found themselves working through the night. As mentioned before, the workspace was characterized by thick walls, and even in the daytime, the lighting was dim and we were just so preoccupied with our work that barely noticed the second sunrise during the process.



↑ Professor Woo's lecture



↑ Working on design



# Day 5: Fleeting Hours and Enduring Moments

Before we noticed it, morning had arrived, marking the final day of the workshop. The deadline was by noon but unfortunately, none of the teams managed to submit the materials on time. Our team, in particular, faced disappointment as the audio issues on our video, compelled us to present it in an incomplete state while other teams completed and submitted their materials after the deadline.



↑ Team China

↑ Team Korea

↑ Team Austria

↑ Team Italy

The presentations unfolded in the sequence of the Chinese, Japanese, Austrian, Korean, and Italian teams. While hardware-focused proposals were prevalent across all teams, the presentation videos from different teams showcased a range of styles, utilizing Google's voice function, playing recordings, or incorporating subtitles for explanations. We opted for an oral presentation, but the language barrier became apparent, making it challenging for the audience to fully grasp the point of our presentation. Numerous points of reflection emerged after the presentation, such as the realization that subtitles could have enhanced understanding, or incorporating more music to elevate the presentation's enjoyment factor.



↑ Team Japan

An awards ceremony followed the presentation, and our team was honored with an award of Sustainability & Context. We proudly display the beautiful trophy in our Global Development office and extend an invitation for you to share a moment of pride with us. Without a moment's rest, the festival started. What was interesting was that the festival in Valledolmo coincided with the ending of our workshop. Around 11 p.m., fireworks lit up the night sky, accompanied by the lively presence of musicians and a procession featuring the statue of Maria Addolorata parading through the town. We were just drowsy at the beginning due to the late hour, but the sheer novelty of our first overseas festival and the vibrant atmosphere eventually drew us in. We ended up fostering connections through lively conversations at a bar, where the residents, professors, and students from other teams came together until the early hours of 4:00 a.m. This impromptu gathering put a memorable ending to our enriching experience in Valledolmo.



↑ Awards ceremony



↑ End of the workshop



↑ Parade and statue



↑ At the bar



## 4. Field Trips during the Workshop

### Farm (Day 2 of the workshop)

The first destination of the field trip during our workshop was a farm managed by a cooperative known as "Verbumcaudo". Upon our arrival at the old fortress, which featured a spacious courtyard, we were greeted by expansive fruit and vegetable fields surrounding the area.

The land where the farm now stands had a dark history—it was formerly under the control of the Mafia. The Mafia, originating from farm managers taking up arms to protect their lands, gradually evolved into a ruthless organized crime group, exploiting peasants in the process. To steer away from the influence of the Mafia, Verbumcaudo initiated large-scale farming on this reclaimed land. Their commitment extends beyond organic and sustainable farming. Verbumcaudo also actively contributes to the local community. Their project aims to generate employment opportunities for young people, encouraging them to remain in Sicily by participating in the agricultural sector. This initiative not only sustains organic farming, a labor-intensive and time-consuming endeavor but also fosters community growth with the collaborative efforts of many individuals.



↑ Enjoying fresh tomato in the farm



↑ Vast farmland



↑ Cincin!



## Winery (Day 3 of the workshop)

Our next stop was at Tasca d'Almerita, a winery with an astonishing history spanning over 190 years, making it the oldest winery in Sicily right now. Tasca d'Almerita proudly owns five vineyards in Sicily, and our visit focused on their home vineyard, Regaleali.

Similar to the earlier farm, Tasca d'Almerita is committed to sustainable practices. They actively work on reducing production and transportation costs by promoting solar power and utilizing lighter glass bottles. Moreover, the winery employs a strategy of using 100% local grapes and ensuring that over 80% of its workforce is local. This emphasis on local production for local consumption has not only contributed to the revitalization of local communities but has also created more job opportunities.

Through these two enlightening tours, we gained insights into Sicily's unique Mafia history, the challenges of population outflow to urban areas, and sustainability concerns—issues that parallel those faced in Japan. Witnessing the Sicilian responses to these challenges offered valuable perspectives on community revitalization and increased employment opportunities through sustainable practices.



↑ Scenic view from the winery



↑ Introducing the winery



↑ We love the wine!

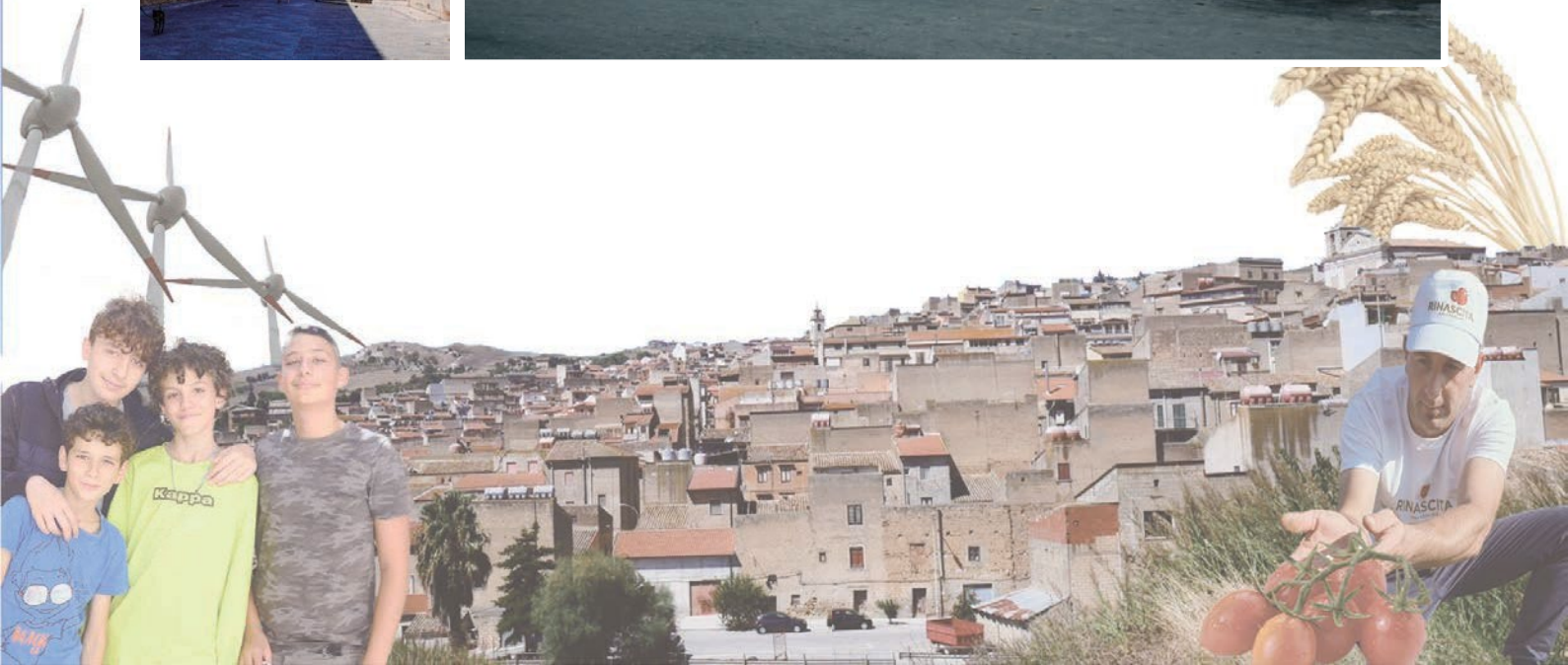


## 5. Lovely Photos

The night we arrived at Palermo at 12p.m.



First day in Palermo



Food in Valledolmo



## 6. Summary

So how do you feel about this trip through our experience?

To me, the experience of the Sicily workshop was incredibly enriching and eye-opening. Over the two weeks, we gained not just language skills through conversations, but more importantly, developed an international mindset, deepening our understanding of cultures distinct from our own in Japan.

The workshop provided a unique platform where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds collaborated on shared tasks, fostering mutual understanding and strengthening bonds. This aligns with Sicily's reputation as the "crossroads of civilizations," a characteristic evident in our collective experience of immersing ourselves in Greek, Arab, and Roman cultures. It felt like experiencing multiple journeys within a single workshop.

Beyond cultural exploration, the workshop prompted contemplation of international issues, drawing parallels between Sicily and Japan. Common challenges, such as population outflow to urban areas and a decline in the agricultural population, allowed us to witness Sicily's innovative solutions exploiting the region's history and characteristics. This, in turn, sparked reflection on Japan's current situation. The workshop on-site form provided unparalleled opportunities to engage with local people through their food and culture, leaving a profound impact not only on our proposal but also on our outlook for the future.

I sincerely hope that this experience inspires you to participate in overseas workshops, as it truly broadens perspectives and fosters invaluable growth personally and professionally.

THE END

