

On my way to Rome

a report on six weeks at the WFP in Rome



Prologue

In 2006 I was given the chance to work in Rome for six weeks. Six weeks in the city where all roads lead to. During that time I kept a diary for both my colleagues at the World Food Programme as my colleagues at home in the Netherlands.

This is the complete story.

With thanks to the colleagues who talked me into going when I didn't have the nerve to go.

How it started

Some of you might already have heard this, some of you don't know anything about it yet. I'm being sent to Rome from June 25th until July 28th! I'll be working at the United Nations World Food Programme - WFP for short - in Rome!

HOW DID THIS COME AROUND?

The company TNT Express is doing a lot for the WFP. TNT Express is an important customer for Ordina. Now, they need someone with knowledge of Oracle Forms-applications. Since TNT Express couldn't provide for someone themselves, they asked whether Ordina could help them out. And since the company I work for, Vertis, is part of Ordina since January 1st this year, the question finally landed with us.

Our projectbureau then did some research as to who fits the requested profile and then my CV turned up.

WHAT WILL I BE DOING IN ROME?



WFP's task is to take care of food transport from where it is to where it is needed. For example, transporting european grain surplus to earthquakevictims. In order to keep track of what is where, and where it's going and when it will arrive there, they have an Oracle-Forms-application called COMPAS.

At the moment everybody has his own little oracle-database with his own COMPAS installation. Periodically all data is synchronized with Headquarters in Rome. This means it may take up to several weeks before all data arrives (if it arrives at all). And that means that you can be sure you never have all accurate and complete data in your system.. Now that is really becoming very irritating they came up with the idea of centralizing the whole system and offer COMPAS via Citrix as published application. Just like the ApplicationNet company does. Since internet connections in Africa aren't as good as they are here, this needs to be tested. Also some research needs to be done what changes COMPAS needs in order to accomodate this new architecture.

And in the weekends I'll be doing a lot of sightseeing! I never was in Rome before, so I'm planning to be touring all of the time. I'll keep a weekly report on my website for all of you to keep you posted of everything going on down south.

Traveling to Rome

SUNDAY, JUNE 25, MORNING.

My suitcase is packed, travel documents are ready and everything is tidy and clean. Ready to go to Rome!

My trip will take me by bus and train to Schiphol, where I will meet Ferry Spaan of TNT Express. We'll fly to Rome together. Since we're both staying at the same hotel, we'll also share a taxi after the flight.

The bus was right on time and the train also left on time. Up until Assen everything was nice and quiet, but in Assen lots of people boarded the train. All of them had been to the TT races the previous day. This gave a lot of noise. Some children were there, one of them had an MP3-playing mobile phone and she was playing house on it the whole time (just that one type of music i dislike...). The other one had an orange football-radio thing, which the whole compartment had to listen to. So much for a quiet Sunday.



Schiphol airport was already swarming with people going on holiday. Since I came out of the train not really feeling like myself, I took an elevator to the Panorama Terrace (of course!!). There I sat down to have a drink and after that I took some pictures. After that I went to check-in. Ferry sent me an SMS he was already at the gate. Arriving at the gate after check-in and security, we had to wait for some time. The plane was supposed to leave at eight-fifteen, but there were bad weather conditions above Germany. Because of this, flight routes didn't have their usual capacity. So in essence we were already in a traffic jam before we got off the ground.

In the end we left with a five quarter delay, so it wasn't that bad. Because of the bad weather conditions we had some turbulence along the way, it was bit of a bumpy ride.

When we finally landed and picked up our luggage from baggage reclaim it was after midnight. And then we found out we had to wait for a taxi. All other passengers also wanted transportation.

At that time, the only thing I wanted was to get to the hotel and get to bed! Since we both were very tired, we went to the hotel, checked in and went each to our own room for that good night's sleep. Finally.

My first week

MONDAY, JUNE 26

After getting to bed in the middle of the night it's hard to obey the alarm clock. Still, I'm doing it. Now I can unpack before breakfast (I have an appointment there with Ferry at eight-thirty). I'm not really allowed to have breakfast unless I pay, because it is not in my room rate. But I do it for this once. I didn't have a chance to get some groceries yet.



After that we walk towards WFP. I pay attention, because I walk have to walk this road by myself as of tomorrow. Fortunately it turns out to be very easy; I just have to walk down the street. At the WFP first I have to get a visitor's pass and after that we first arrange my real WFP-pass. With this pass I can just walk in and out without having to worry about going through security each time. At the entrance we bump in to Joachim Gröder. He will be my primary contact here. I think he's German because of his German sounding name, but he turns out to be quite italianized. Still, where-ever he's from he is a very nice person and all others here also are. Now to remember all those names and faces....

And I have to get to know the Compas system, figuring out what it's like now and figuring out what is wanted. It looks like Compas is an Oracle

Forms 6.0 application (or Forms 6i, I'm not sure about that yet). In any case, it's meant to track & trace where goods or commodities are sent from and to and when they arrive where and so on. Logistics, precisely my area of expertise.

In the evening Ferry gives me a tour of Rome. He's been here very often and knows his way around. After getting some groceries at the super market at Trastevere train station we take the tram to Argentina. I don't really remember which streets we took, but I do remember seeing the Pantheon (nice and cool inside!), Trevifountain and Piazza Navona. While we are in the city centre the Italian football-team has to play the eighth final in the World Cup. Once they won we immediately know. People cheer and bus and car drivers blow their vehicle's horn and suddenly the streets are covered with Italian flags. Italy has won alright!!

My first impression of Rome is indeed an old city, full of beautiful buildings and nice streets. However, everything isn't really properly maintained and in general doesn't look very tidy. I regret this because if everything was properly maintained the city would be even more beautiful.

TUESDAY, JUNE 27

Finally, a network connection!. Now I can work some things out and put them down to (virtual) paper. And also send an e-mail to my friends and family reporting I had a safe journey. Yesterday I already picked up some scenarios I can detailize. Think of advantages and disadvantages for each scenario. And think about what has to be done in order to realize each scenario and what research I have to do. This way, I have handle on how to approach this impact analysis. Both Ferry and Joachim gave me loads of documentation yesterday. I can start by reading that and also I can do some sniffing around in Compas.

In the evening I go by train to Parco Leonardo. Looking out of the train window I notice some species of grass growing here. From the train it looks little, but walking past it reveals it's at least three metres tall. I don't know what species it is, it looks a little bit like bamboo.

At the Parco Leonardo is a big mall. It has two stories and lots and lots of shops. All kinds of clothes and shoes, but there's also a super market there. And what a super market it is: it's got exactly fifty tills. They sell everything from car tyres to bread and milk. I'm not used to such a big supermarket so it takes a while for me to find what I want. I also take a look at the other shops that are there. Just not too long, because apparently they close at eight and I also am getting hungry. This I really got to pay a second visit sometime!!

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28.

Now that I have a network connection I should start early. That way I can write down this story for you before starting my work. I'm now starting to get to know my way around. The building is organized in three triangles, called Yellow Tower, Blue Tower and Green Tower. They interconnect at the elevators. I really need some time to get used to these strange corners; I'm used to squares. For now I'm at the sixth floor of the blue tower. Later on I might move to the second floor of the yellow tower. For now I'm with the OTDF department. They're Compas' Business Owners. It may be more handy for some of my research to be close to the ADIC department. They're Technical Application Management.

For the moment I need all my time to put together a plan of action and a little project planning. Some things are really on a tight schedule, but since I only have five weeks for a lot of things to do this may just keep the necessary pressure up.

THURSDAY, JUNE 29

Today I'm finishing my action plan. This is kinds of difficult for me, to write everything down in the correct words and sentences. Luckily, english language isn't a problem for me. I created english documents before. Besides, at our company's network we have good dictionaries installed and those are also a big help. Today I got a real network account at WFP's network. So now I have two mailaddresses. I think I'll be using my own adress most of the time. Everyone has that one by now, giving everyone a new mailadress to mail to is only going to create confusion. Besides, that

WFP address will be gone once my five weeks are up; the Vertis address will stay. Now they have my Vertis-address they can reach me after those five weeks if necessary.

During the day I notice myself going into the right direction without thinking about it. Apparently I'm now starting to really know my way around. How much getting used will it take being back in Holland's square buildings? Will I keep getting lost all of the time adjusting to squares once again?

The work itself is going as it should for the moment. I find it difficult to walk to everyone and take notes of everything. Today however some people tell me I'm doing okay. Since everything is still so difficult for me this comment makes me very happy.



Ferry Spaan of TNT Express is leaving this afternoon for others projects in other countries. Secretly I don't like that very much, he was a big help these last few days and he is very pleasant company (and maybe I also don't like this because he's actually quite handsome. But there are others here who are handsome, so no worrying J).

In the evening i take the train to Trastevere and then hop on to tram 8 to Argentina. Arriving there I attempt to retrace the route we took Monday, but I only partly succeed. I manage to find the Via Cestari with its shops of priest' robes. Only now they're closed, so taking pictures obviously has to

wait. Now, if I go straight on, I have to end up at the Pantheon. I remember this correctly and indeed end up at the Pantheon. Unfortunately there I take a wrong turn, because after some walking I end up at the Piazza Navona. There are always a lot of artists there, just like the Place du Têtre in Paris and also there always are some live statues. I recognize the Charlie Chaplin, he was there Monday. Apparently this square is his usual spot. Since it is getting late, I want to get back to the tram stop. I'll probably need some time to do that. And I'm right about that. Just when I think I'm walking into the right direction, I come across a square called the Campo de'Fiori. I take out my map and finally know where am and where I have to go.

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FRIDAY, JUNE 30.

Everything is still progressing okay. Testing environment will be ready next Monday or Tuesday and I also finished one of my test scenarios. I only worry about the loadtest. I emailed my colleagues and got some tips, but all look rather time and moneyconsuming. First let's wait and see with what TNT can come up. They are also looking. In any case, every step taken is at least one in the right direction.

In the evening I'm going shopping at the Parco Leonardo. In a big electronics store there I find a little USB cable which fits into my photcamera. Now I can put the photos online I made this week!

My first weekend

SATURDAY, JULY 1

Well, what am I going to do today?

I decide to follow up on a tip Ferry gave me. If I take the train to Trastevere station and keep right, I'll be walking through a short tunnel and I will end up in a nice shopping street. When I actually go there, it turns out to be correct. I'll need some time to see all shops and stores!

Then I want to do some sightseeing.



I head back to Trastevere and take the train to Ostiense. If I walk north from there I should be at the Piramide and the Porte San Paolo according to my map. Correct again. I look around and take some pictures. Then I take a tram to go to Rome's city centre. Only this time not just to look, but also to take pictures!

When I finally get home, I don't feel like doing anything anymore. O well, I did do a lot of walking today. I get my camera and browse through all pictures I took today. And I think to myself: what am I going to do tomorrow?

SUNDAY, JULY 2

Today I start with train and tram to Largo di Torre Argentina. From there I walk east towards Piazza Venetia. There should be sight to go see and then I'll also be close to the Forum Romanum. Once I arrive at the Piazza Venetia, I'm very surprised: what a big building. This is a monument?? Italians don't think little, now do they? I see people walking on top of the building. Apparently you can enter it. I walk around the building and discover the entrance. Once I am on the building, there turns out to be an exhibition about the Italian army. Interested I walk through it. It's nice and cool inside. I think it's only a pity all descriptions are in Italian; I cannot understand one word of it.



Outside I see a van or wagon selling water and bread. I walk there and buy something to eat, because it's already way past twelve. I head south around

the monument or whatever it is, and climb Campidoglio (Capitol hill). There I sit on a low wall to eat my sandwich.

After finishing my sandwich, I walk around the Capitol, because south of it should be the Forum Romanum. It is. Surprised I look down. Now it's clear where the Italians got their big-thinking from. My god, those Roman buildings were huge. I take some pictures and buy a souvenir. Slowly I walk down the stairs past all ruins. I take a lot of pictures.

When I'm satisfied about the Forum Romanum, I refill my water bottle at one of the fountains and walk south. That way I'll arrive at the Colosseum, my map tells me. I take a quick look around and decide to walk back towards a tram stop via the Circus Maximus. Because it's getting quite late and I am starting to feel hungry. At the Circus Maximus I'm surprised. I distinctly remember from the "Ben Hur" movie how it must have looked. Now it's one bare plain. Only a corner tower and a little part of the surrounding buildings have been excavated. In thought I can almost see Roman wagons racing around that corner.....

Second week

MONDAY, JULY 3

Upon getting up and looking in the mirror I notice I forgot to put suncream on a tiny little pot in my neck. It's all red there now. Despite the fact that I don't feel anything, I decide to keep an eye (and some suncream) on it these next few days

At work I'm continuing my research for authorisation and I'm harassing some people in order to get them to do what they promised to do. I feel like quite a drag, but it's the way things work so I just have to get used to it.

If I ask, the testing environment isn't ready yet. Apparently the import crashed over the weekend. Harald has restarted it and now it's just a matter of waiting until it finishes. Then later during the day I get an e-mail saying we can perform the satellite connection test on Thursday. This puts me behind schedule, but I've got a final date now and that feels like a big step forward!

TUESDAY, JULY 4



If I look out the windows I see it promises to be another hot day. I don't really mind today, as I will be in some nice air-conditioned buildings during working hours. I'm quite surprised actually at how I am reacting to the higher temperatures here. Usually I cannot cope with heat, at least not in the Netherlands. They say it's a different kind of heat here and it turns out to be correct. I'm not sure what exactly is different: I think humidity. In any case, windchill factor is a lot lower here than at home and as long as you drink plenty of water and stay in the shade there's no problem at all.

Today is real talking-day. By the time it's lunchtime I finished three mini-meetings already. The result of all this talking is that in the afternoon I am getting my first details. They'll e-mail me the official details, but now I can tick off one thing from list. Another step forward!

By the way, did I tell you the keyboards are different here from those at home? Most characters are in their usual places, but a few, like the quotation mark and the at are switched. This makes me type """" where I should be typing @@ and vice versa. By the time I'm used to this my five weeks are up I think.

In the evening I don't really feel like going out, but I don't really feel like staying home either. As a compromise, I decide to go to the Verde Smeraldo restaurant. It's right next to the hotel and I still have "eating a Pizza con Salsicce" on my to-do list. Ferry has recommended that one to me last week, but I didn't get to trying it yet. I look it on the menu and try to remember its spelling. I don't want to have too many stupid typing errors in my weekly report.

The pizza is indeed a good idea, because it tastes delicious.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 5

Italy has won from Germany with two against zero. When I watch BBC World this morning I see images of cheering crowds somewhere near the Circus Maximus. It scares me a little and I decide to check out when the world cup final is, so I know when to not be in Rome city centre. All those people drunk from Italian success and no doubt necessary alcoholics don't seem a really good idea to me. (now I wonder whether I should go to conquer my fears or something like that??).

At work I receive an e-mail from my Mummy. She doesn't have internet herself, but she was visiting two aunts of mine who do have internet. I enjoy reading it and immediately send a response. After that I start my work. As I'm busy, several points are added to my to-do-list. During the morning I have a conference call with home, being TNT and Ordina, and in this meeting another couple of points are added to my list. I've really got to tick off some of those points, there are some many right now!

In the evening I decide to go shopping at the Parco Leonardo shopping centre. While I'm there I remember I forgot to take my camera. I should at least take a picture of till number 50 in that very large super market. And if they allow it some pictures of the strange things they sell. At home supermarkets usually sell groceries, not tv's and car tyres.

THURSDAY, JULY 6



Today is the day of the great "satellite-test". I hop very much it will produde some usable results. And the satellite connection simply works well, because without a network connection we can forget about this whole centralization thing. I wouldn't know how to go about it without network. We start testing and Harald, Drago and me are very surprised about the good responsetimes we get. The systems reacts immediatly, it's almost

like being in Headquarters (which we actually are, but we pretend to be in the middle of nowhere at the moment). We are all very happy about that. The satellite-connection was my greatest worry. There are other difficult issues, but nothing we cannot solve I think.

At the end of the morning both Drago and Joachim invite me for an Out-of-office lunch. I don't know what the plans are, but since everybody's going, I'm coming too. I'm getting a ride with Joachim together with some other WFP-colleagues. Joachim turns out to be driving a cute and old little van (it's army-green and it looks like a sixties Volkswagen van but since I forgot to look at the brand upon getting in, I don't know for sure). We follow the road out of Rome and a couple of minutes later we end up at a small well hidden restaurant. First they bring us all kinds of different dishes with antipast and once we finished that they discuss in italian about the necessity of a secundo. Some people (like me) are already completely filled up because we ate too much antipasti, and some others want to have a second course. I don't understand the conversation, but it turns out they ordered some kind of mixed grill. I don't really feel like eating anymore, but I do try a few things which Joachim recommends me and they turn out to taste terrific.

As we walk back to the parking lot in order to get back to work, I notice the clouds in the air. Suddenly I realize I miss the rain. Would it really be raining the next couple of hours?

FRIDAY, JULY 7

The alarm clock rings. I open my eyes and look to the curtains. They look like no sun is shining right now. Now I am awake. No sun? Later, when I'm dressen I open the curtains and notice it's raining. And by the looks of the streets it's been raining for some time. Then vaguely I can hear thunder. Wow, not just a show but an actual thunderstorm! At the reception of the hotel they have umbrellas, but I don't take on. I want to enjoy the rain on my way from home to work.

At work I draw up all curtains. From my desk this gives me a great view at the thunderstorm. Some fifteen minutes later the weather starts getting worse. When it's raining, it's raining alright! It's raining cats and dogs

right now! Half an hour later it deminishes and another hour later the sun is shining again. Beautiful songs don't last long.

As far as my impact analysis is concerned, I'm trying to work out some functional-design-like things. Once that is done, I can start trying to estimate how much time (and therefore, money) it will cost to actually design and build it. Hm. I don't think I know enough yet. I get my trusty notebook and start interviewing people. That helps. Now things are much clearer and I can write down my first (well, actually it's Harald's and Daniela's but okay) hour-estimations. This feels like another step in the right direction. It's nice to close up the week like this.

Second weekend

FRIDAY NIGHT, JULY 7

I decide to go in to Rome. Since I really want to take pictures inside the Pantheon, I decide to wear something decent. It's a church after all. I am lucky and get to take some pictures inside the building before it closes. At least I assume it's closing; something is shouted in Italian and suddenly everybody starts to walk towards the exit. After that I take a quick walk towards the Trevifountain. It's fun to sit and watch people at the Trevifountain (or "going monkeywatching" as my friends and I usually call it). People of all nations, religions and cultures visit Rome. And yet, when they're at the Trevifountain they all behave the same: take pictures and throw coins in.

Then, as i am watching I feel a raindrop. I look up to the sky and see loads of very dark clouds



. Hm. If this is going to be a shower just as the one we had this morning, I'd better get indoors. I decide to walk back to the Pantheon via the Galleria. That way, if I'm caught by the rain I have two places along the way where I can shelter. I hear a thunder rumbling far away. Later on, when I'm close to the Pantheon I see a lightning flashing and right after that

I'm scared half to death by the incredible loud thunder that follows it. That lightning obviously struck something. Quickly I walk down the street towards the Pantheon.

SATURDAY, JULY 8

Today I want to catch a glimpse of Vatican City. When I'm waiting for the tram a girl at my side of the street gets into an arguments with a girl on the other side of the street. She crosses the street and they start a fight (a real feminine one: biting and scratching and pulling each others hair; why do women fight like that?). A boy from my side of the street crosses the street and joins the fight. He kicks the unfortunate girl in her belly a few times. It must have really hard because it's really hurting her. That's not fair: two against one and boy against girl on top of that. Bystanders are starting to interfere and the boy quickly runs from the scene. A whole group of people now leave the tram stop, dragging him along. I still don't know what has been going on but I'm glad the tram is arriving and I can get out of here.



Upon arriving at Saint Peter's square I notice lots of tourists hanging around. I look a little closed and notice they're all in **very, very long** line to get into Saint's Peter. That disappoints me; I was looking forward to it, but I don't really feel like queing up for who knows how long just to see some oversized church. I take some pictures of the square and relax a little. When I take one of the streets I see a sign point towards the Sixtine Chapel. Maybe there I can take a look. But again I'm dissappointed: this line is even longer!! I walk past the queue and see a tram stop. Since I don't really feel like walking anymore I board the tram. I'll see where it'll stop.

The tram turns out to have a stop just north of the Piazza del Popolo. Since this square is quite prominently in Alexandre Dumas' novel "Count of Monte-Christo", I get out and take a look. I walk around the square and take some pictures. Then I take one of the streets and go window-shopping. Finally I arrive at the Piazza Venetia. I take a quick look at the Forum Trajanus after some pictures I slowly walk back to the tram-stop. My feet tell me this was quite enough for one day.

SUNDAY, JULY 9

So what's on schedule for today? Wait, I remember: I wanted to take a look at the Via Appia Antica. In Roman times this was **the** entry to Rome. It was even so famous it is in the Asterix-comic quite frequently. I'm very curious how it's two-thousand years after Asterix.

It's a nice and quiet walk.



I enjoy the absence of cars, scooters, buses. I take some pictures along the way. Then I finally end up at the catacombes of San Callisto. I decide to buy an entrance ticket and wait for a tour in a language I understand. You can only visit the catacombes with a tour guide. Once we're underground I can see why, it's a very big maze downthere, It's easy to get lost here. The guide tells about the time this burial site was used and explains early christians had to hold all of their religous ceremonies here. In the Roman Empire they were forbidden. When we get out of the catacombes some three quaters of an hour later I have to get used to the high temperatures again. Down in the catacombes it was so nice and cool. After I'm used to the heat again I go to the bus stop. I decide to into the center for a while, "monkeywatching" at the Spanish Steps and catching a sunray or two. I have to get back with a little more tan than I had when I came to Rome.

Third week

MONDAY, JULY 10

Italy has won the world cup last night. Through penalties. I hear so this morning on BBC World. I came as far as the end of the actual game last night, which ended in 1-1. I guess this news means I can expect lots of sleepy people at the office!

At the office I notice everyone is indeed quite sleepy. Obviously they were all out celebrating last night. Joachim also. Despite his plans of going to the celebration of the Italian football-team tonight, he insists on going to the beach first. It's only twenty or so minutes away from WFP. At first, everybody wants to come along. During the day however, there are some cancellations and finally it's only Joachim, Ferry (who walks in halfway the afternoon) and me. We're going anyway and it's lovely at the beach. In the evening it's not as hot as during the day, so for us North-Europeans this time of day has a nice temperature. During the day it's simply too hot. We're sitting at a terrace of some beach club or so. It looks like the movies with parasols and everything. Combined with the music they play, it gives and wonderful exotic feeling. I feel like I'm on holiday.

Down the beach we notice all kinds of activity. We look at it. Apparently there's a movie being shot there and they're rehearsing for a scene. A moment later they are going to shoot it. Music is turned off and everybody has to keep quiet. Once they're finished, the music is on again.

All of this time Joachim tries to talk us into going to the celebrations tonight. I don't think it's a good idea to go, I'd rather watch the whole thing on television. I don't know what Italy is like, but in the Netherlands these things usually end in riots. Ferry seems to have his own doubts; he thinks we cannot get back to the hotel afterwards because of a lack of taxis. In the end Joachim drops us off at the hotel. I think it's for the best, once I've eaten it'll be late enough as it is.

TUESDAY, JULY 11

According to BBC World this morning it was a gigantic party last night. More than one million people went to the Circus Maximus to celebrate the Italian football-team. This means even more people will function on auto-pilot today. And that turns out to be correct; everybody at the office needs even more coffee than yesterday. This amuses me a lot, because I don't have to suffer from anything.

Since some test reports were supposed to be in my inbox yesterday and they didn't come, I decide to make some phonecalls. Immediately this has effect: the first e-mail I receive less than one hour later. Good!. I process the information immediately. Now I can officially tick off one item in my planning. Furthermore, I'm still wrestling with the loadtest. TNT has been researching some tools, but they turn out to be too expensive. WFP itself is working on one or two ideas, and I think I'll start some research into a tool that was recommended by one of my Vertis-colleagues. It looks quite usable and for WFP the good news is this tool is freeware.

In the evening we decide to go into Rome. Ferry has some shopping to do and I'll accompany him. I usually am happy going into Rome alone, but someone to talk to is a very welcome change. We stroll through the city centre, and Ferry succeeds with almost all items on his list. Only the winery is closed when we finally find it. He just has to go for that another night. For the moment it's time to go to the hotel for the both of us.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 12

Today I continue my Swingbench-research. This tool actually seems to be very handy. Since there are six PL/SQL procedures I can use to program my own statements, it looks like there's just enough time to do a loadtest before my impactanalysis must be finished. Today Joachim and Ferry secretly shortened my time with one week: they want to have a final draft by Monday 24th. Then they can send it to their management before the presentation. So now I'm going to have to do a presentation. I'll just keep it far from my mind for now and tell myself it's not scary, then I hopefully will succeed.

THURSDAY, JULY 13

O dear, Thursday thirteenth. Will this really be just as unlucky a day as Friday thirteenth?

Well, I just have to see what this day will bring me. In the morning things are still looking quite positive, both the conference call with TNT as the meeting with some WFP-colleagues that is on today's schedule.

The problems arise in the afternoon. I still cannot get this Swingbench tool running no matter what I try. I ask a Vertis-colleague via e-mail, but he doesn't know the cause of the problem either. I think it's some kind of a configuration problem. Probably one of the necessary files is missing, or of the wrong version. And now to figure out which file it is. I end up seeking contact with the tool's builder, hoping he can help me. It's thirteenth alright!.

FRIDAY, JULY 14

I hope things will today be better than yesterday. In my e-mail this morning is an answer from the Swingbench-developer. This helps me just enough to continue my quest and during the morning I finally get this tool running. Yippee!! I try a few simple benchmarks to confirm it works and report to Alain I got it running and I'm ready to start coding the loadtest-statements.

Meanwhile, Joachim and Ferry are reviewing the first draft of my impact analysis. This should get me loads of comment; I never had to do such a big impact analysis before. Those little ones I did back home were peanuts compared to this. I just hope their comment will help me further along the way to a decent document.

In the evening I go to Rome's city centre and stroll through the streets. I look in stores and windows. It's sale everywhere now. It's not until I'm back at the hotel that I remember I wanted to stroll along the Tiber river.....I have to do that next time I guess.

Third weekend

SATURDAY, JULY 15

I am awake quite early, but don't get out of bed until late. Now that I saw the most important sights, I wonder what I feel like doing today.

I take the train to Trastevere and walk through the tunnel to do some window-shopping in that street I went to two weeks ago. Unfortunately for me and luckily for my wallet I don't find anything worth buying.



I doubt between walking to Argentina or going by tram, but when I go around the corner the tram is at the tram stop. So tram it is. I run and just manage to catch it. At Argentina I want to go to Piazza Venetia and from there to the Corso. That's a very long shopping street. I saw lots of bits and

pieces of that street these last three weeks, but now I want to walk the full length of it. And then back again on the other side. I also want to look around for one or two souvenirs. And I want to take a look in that Disney store halfway somewhere.

It turns out to be a long walk indeed, and because I stroll (and also because I divert to the Trevifountain) it takes even longer. When I look in an window, I see handbag I like. Must be expensive, almost everything is expensive here. Just to be sure, I check the price. Fourhundred euros. Expensive indeed.....

SUNDAY, JULY 16

Once again I take the train to Trastevere station, not knowing what I'm going to do. I take the tram to Argentina and walk via the Piazza Venetia to the Corso. Maybe I can walk to Villa Borghese. Maybe not. I sort of liked that relaxing Saturday, I could turn that into a whole weekend of relaxing. And then visit all sights for one last time next weekend (which will be my last).

While window-shopping I walk north along the Corso, stopping for a capuchino and brioche at a McDonalds along the way. While I'm there I also use the toilet. Hm. Obviously my digestion isn't really coping with that pizza I ate last night. That almost looks like diarrhoea. Not exactly what I want. I decide to skip the park and stay near to restaurants and toilets.

Luckily for me, it doesn't fall through, although I do remain very sleepy during the day. I sit in the shade of the Pantheon for a while, watching an actor dresses as an ancient Roman centurion. You can get your picture taken with him for some cash. There's lot of actors like that all over Rome, also at the Spanish steps and the Colosseum.

I sort of stroll through the streets. Now that I gained some sense of direction, I can do that without getting lost, as I did in the beginning. I almost never carry a map anymore. I don't really need it, except when I want to find some specific shortest route to somewhere. I even buy some souvenirs today. I hope they'll like them back home.

Fourth week

MONDAY, JULY 17

Today I'm going to start working on all that comments of the reviews last week. I read it and realize it'll be a large amount of work, besides the others I'm supposed to do this week. Anyway, the comment is very useful and I start with the easy ones. Some things are about formulation. It obviously has to be a lot more formal than I initially wrote down. After I modified that I decide to rewrite the introduction and start thinking about a management summary. These two things seem the most difficult for me. I already disliked summarizing at school and never did it since.

Nevertheless I now have to do it.

After lunch I stop by Alain and Barbara. The news is good, they know which statements to code and Alain starts working on coding them thus that I can easily incorporate that into Swingbench. Once that's done we should be able to test it from the laptop and if that works we can setup the actual test. I agree to stop by Tuesday morning to check on progress. I very much hope to get it done this week

TUESDAY, JULY 18

Today is good news because Alain reports first scripts are finished for me to put into Swingbench and test. I do so and run the tool. It actually works!! I'm very glad with this and immediately e-mail Alain the good news. I decide to stop by tomorrow morning to confer with him. While he's finishing on the scripts I could install Swingbench on the server. That way, we could test the setup tomorrow afternoon and do the real thing tomorrow evening or Thursday evening.

Also, Joachim and I started to think of a base storyline for the presentation. Joachim offers to actually make the powerpoint presentation, so I can focus on my other activities. That presentation was supposed to be next week, but since people aren't available next week it was decided to do it this Friday. I don't really like the idea of doing a presentation, but I have to

in this case. Fortunately I don't have to do it on my own, Joachim will support me in this.

In the evening I suddenly feel like going into Rome's city centre, so I take the train and tram to Trastevere. I stroll through town, each time I do that I like it more. Nice streets, and all those people to watch. Monkeywatching is always the funniest thing to do :) When I get hungry I decide to do a McDonalds just for this once. No ice cream for me this week.

Speaking of ice cream, did I already tell you that they sell ice cream in the WFP cafeteria? Joachim very much likes a particular one, it's called Cucciolone. It's sort of a chocolate bar with ice cream inside. Made by a company that has the same logo as back home Ola does. I checked out Ola's website, but cannot find it. Apparently they're not sold back home. Pity.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 19

Joachim must have started terribly early this morning because I find an email in my inbox he sent at five-thirty this morning. I stop by and discover he has the entire powerpoint thing ready for Friday. I'm very impressed. In the meantime I have to do some research into Oracle licensing. With the help of one of my Vertis-colleagues I can actually understand Oracle's licensing and get some realistic figures. Only my head is now completely dizzy with numbers. Joachim suggests we go out for lunch. We go to the Bosch building next door and have a slice of pizza. They have a terrace so we can sit outside in the shade. And we all like it very well.

At lunchtime we're starting to experience the downside of Joachim's desire to work this morning. He used up all his energy already and doesn't seem to have any left, he's kind of moaning and groaning his way through the afternoon. He talks about going home early. I think that's a good idea, because usually he goes home very late, while starting at eight-thirty in the morning.

THURSDAY, JULY 20

This morning Ferry is very much back from two days off. Within ten minutes I get four emails in my inbox. I'm glad with them because it means some more information on the costs and benefits calculations. If we state how much it will cost, managers are bound to ask the question how much they will earn by investing. So it's a good idea to try and calculate that also. And I'm finding that very difficult, because how the hell do you know how much time who is going to save where??? And once you do know that, how do you convert that to money? Topping that, people at WFP who should be able to help me on that one are all on holiday :(.

At the end of the morning there's a lunch discussion; we end up going for sushi at the Commissary. So this will be my first time eating with chopsticks. I'll probably make a mess of it, but I'll try anyway. Joachim explains me how to use the chopsticks and I manage to actually eat all of my sushi in an orderly fashion. Joachim is a good explainer.

In the evening I go to Parco Leonardo. At one of the fast food restaurants at the first (second for Americans) floor they sell some kind of Coca Cola bottle. It'll be a nice addition to my collection. When I get to the hotel I put it at the cabinet so I can proudly look at it from time to time.

FRIDAY, JULY 21

I get up and realize my headache is gone. It's been gone since yesterday afternoon. Strange. Yesterday morning it was still there, growing heavier with the hour. Until it was decided to change the agenda for today's presentation (they're now calling it a briefing). The most difficult subjects for me disappeared from the agenda, I now only have to talk about those things that are clear up until now. Apparently I worried more about that than I thought I did. At work I drink a cappuccino (wonderful invention by the way) and think about the loadtest that's scheduled for today. I'm having difficulty realizing we're actually going to do it, we've been working on this for so long. Later in the day I get a phone call from Alain telling me we need to have a meeting with ODTF about the load test. Now. Otherwise we cannot do it.

Damn

The boys and girls from ODTF are unavailable because in less than half an hour from now we have that presentation scheduled. And after that we're supposed to do the load test. Now what? Well, you guessed it: no load test. It just was too good to be true.

Fourth and final weekend

SATURDAY, JULY 22

I get up and after getting dressed I first do some laundry. In these past weeks I enjoyed the debatable pleasure of discovering I'm allergic to the hotel's detergent (which is actually very annoying when I'm trying to sleep) So now I do my own laundry, that I'll get through the dya without any itch.

In the train to Trastevere I think. My last Saturday here. What am I going to do? I decide to try the park again. Last week that wasn't very much of a success. After a capuccino I walk to the entrance of the park. It's lovely. And large. It's a pity I forgot my camera, I could have taken some nice pictures here. Also it's nice and not so hot in the shade of the trees. With all those little fountains around there's also plenty to drink.

When I finally saw enough of the park I walk down a road that turns out to run past the Trinita dei Monti church. I walk down the Spanish Steps and go to the Trevifountain. I'd like to sit there for a while. And maybe throw in a coin. I already did that last week, but maybe more coins will help more. You never know :)

SUNDAY, JULY 23

My last free day in Rome. I don't really feel like anything special, so I decide to relax today. I go to the city centre and shop around for a bit. Today I'll check out all souvenir-stores. Until now I skipped them, thinking I would get to that later. Today however there is no later. And also I check out all market stalls. The legal ones that is. They sell everything and anything, it's fun to look around. There are also a lot of illegal sellers here, they sell all kinds of fakes of things like Dolce&Gabbana and Coco Chanel. I don't buy anything there (not that's it's worth buying anyway). They told me that if you get caught, you have to pay fivethousand euros fine. Those illegal sellers are always on the run from the police. Like the other day one ran away. I wondered what was wrong, until I saw the police going after them.

Summarized, I don't really do much today. Just one last look at all the things here, thinking I'll probably miss them:)

Fifth and last week

MONDAY, JULY 24TH

My last week already. Including today I now only have four days to finish it all. So first let's see what I still have to do in those four days. A big number one is of course the load test. That's going to happen this evening. I hope this time it will not be cancelled. During the day I confer with Alain and it turns out there's a plan-B, just in case.

During the afternoon Ferry walks in. A couple of minutes later Joachim comes up with the idea to go somewhere after work, sort of a goodbye party. We have some ideas as to where to go, but decide we like the beach best. And probably it's the easiest, because Tuesday and Wednesday the whole world is coming to Rome to talk about Lebanon. The only thing I know for sure is that the American Condoleezza Rice is coming. The rest of the Italian news broadcast I didn't understand too well.

In the evening we do the long anticipated load test. 100 users is okay, 200 is also okay, but 250 is too much for the current configuration. We run into some memory error and I'm very pissed. Now we first have to deal with this before we can continue. I really hoped we could go further than 200 users.

Later that evening Ferry and I are having dinner in the restaurant and he tells me Martin thinks the presentation last Friday went very good. And this cheers me up again.

TUESDAY, JULY 25

We're still planning on going to the beach tonight. Secretly I'm having second thoughts because tonight we're going to do a third attempt to finish

the loadtest. And if that takes until seven o'clock again, there's no time left to go to the beach. Besides that, Italian television is forecasting rain tonight, so the beach may turn out to be a bad choice anyway. Well, we'll see.

When I check the things-still-to-do-this-week I discover I can tick off quite a few things on that list. The only things that are still open are the cost-benefit-analysis and the loadtest. I'm going to process the test results of last night first. That way I can also see what results I'm expecting tonight. After that I work with Ferry on the cost-benefit-analysis (actually, he does the work and I look over his shoulder in an attempt to learn something). Ferry is also very skilled in excel-use. I try to remember some simple tips and tricks which will come in handy in the future. Now I really see how powerful excel can be when you know how to use properly.

The loadtest isn't going too well. We run into the same error as last night. After some more testing we are able to draw some conclusions nevertheless. It is not the result I hoped for, but it's a result! Too bad there's no time to go to the beach anymore. Instead, Joachim drops Ferry and me off close to the Santa Maria di Trastevere.

In that area is a very beautiful piece of Rome, and Ferry knows a good chinese restaurant there. We eat noodles, shrimp and peking-duck. Only, I never saw that peking-duck served like that. That few times I had it it was just some sort of roast duck. This is very different. These are slices of duck on top of white "strings", which turn out to be coconut. A dish of pancakes and vegetables is added. Since I don't get this all, I decide to have a drink first. That way I can watch how Ferry eats it and just do it exactly the same. You have to roll the slice of duck together with some vegetables in a pancake and eat that with your hands. It looks like a wrap. I think it's funny and try it. I like the taste of this very much!!

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26

This morning first I'm going over the results of the load test of last night. And I have to update my action plan. While I'm working on that, Ferry is sweating over the cost-benefit-analysis. I'm very glad he's doing it, I really don't know where to start on that one. Clearly I still have much experience to gain.

And then it arrives, a little bit sooner than I expected: I'm finished. Everything that must be written down had been written down and everything that should be researched has been researched. Now I only have to clean up and say goodbye and that sort of things. Nice chores for tomorrow...

THURSDAY, JULY 27

Today is my last WFP-day. We have three meetings. At home we seldomly have meetings, but here we have them all the time. These three are all three "last-day-last-things-wrapup"-meetings. And of course I still have to thank everyone for their support and cooperation.

During the morning we watch the RTL4-news broadcast from last night. There's an item in there about the food convoys to Lebanon. It also has an interview with someone from WFP. I watch the interview and see the WFP-logo on trucks and bags. I feel very proud to have been part of this. That's what it's all about: feeding people.

Upon lunchtime Joachim thinks I should decide where we'll go, since today is my last day. I decide we're going to Bosch. That way Ferry can join us before he is off to the airport. And I like it best to have everyone come along. Besides that, they have a terrace at the Bosch-building, so we can sit outside in the shade and relax.

And then at last, the moment I feared a little: saying goodbye. I shake hands and say goodbye personally to everyone with whom I worked. I know already I'll miss WFP.....

Traveling back to the Netherlands

Today I have to go back home. My suitcase is packed, and I check all cabinets and drawers one more time to be certain I didn't forget anything. Then I proceed to check-out. I'm not looking forward to that, because I doubt whether they got the message the invoice should be sent to Ordina, instead of me paying it myself. Just to be sure I kept a creditcard apart with sufficient limit left to pay the bill.

Once I get to the reception it turns out my fears were correct. In their way they know nothing about that invoice-agreement and they want me to pay. I'm arguing about it but since that doesn't help I decide to pay and try to view it as a good lesson learnt. The receptionists behave like someone with the IQ of a banana with the flu and I don't know enough Italian to do anything about it. Fortunately I got an extra dividend last week that matches this bill. At least it doesn't have any financial consequences for me.

Still, I'm very angry with those receptionists (although I realize they can't help it having only 1 brain cell) and decide to not let them dial a taxi, but to walk to the Holiday Inn. There's always a whole bunch of taxis there. And I'm right, I get a taxi that takes me to the airport. During the ride I try to calm myself down. Just take into account next time the hotel doesn't know how to deal with invoices I tell myself. At the airport I check in and go through security. Ferry warned me there could be huge line at Italian security, but right now it's very quiet. At least this part of the trip is going okay. I take a last cappuccino and go to the changed gate.

Now I get to the boring part of the story: everything now proceeds according to plan. The plane leaves right on time, we have a good flight and land on Schiphol airport fifteen minutes ahead of schedule. When I'm at luggage reclaim I dial my Mommy. She'll want to know that I landed okay.

I like hearing her voice and reluctantly hang up when the conveyor belt starts moving. All in all I have my suitcase back within fifteen minutes. I buy a train ticket and something to eat and drink in the train.

Boarding the train, I run in to dutch manners. Obviously I have to get used to that again after five weeks of Rome. I try to get my suitcase into the luggage rack, but fail since the suitcase is too heavy. Three men are around and they all three have an "i-don't-want-to-be-involved" expression on their faces. I decide to ask one of them. He does not appear to feel like helping me, but when I ask him politely he doesn't want to say no either.

Once we arrive at the end station I get up and a gentleman who got on in Amersfoort offers me to help me with my suitcase. Apparently they still exist, real gentlemen!

I take a taxi home and notice I didn't miss anything here. Once I'm home I put my feet up, turn on the telly and try to get used to being home.....

Epilogue

Today I'm back in the Netherlands for a week. That's a good opportunity to look back. What do I think of the assignment? And of Rome?

THE ASSIGNMENT

When I started I felt like I could not do it in a million years. So much to be done in so little time!. On top of that this was my first big analysis. I did small ones before ("what happens when this mandatory field becomes optional") but never something this big.

Despite the fact that I didn't feel like I could do it, everybody else firmly believed in me. Everybody thought I could do it. Summarized everyone believed in me except me (apparently I have a tiny problem there). ☺).

Looking back I can safely say everybody was right and I was wrong. I can do it. I proved that doing this impactanalysis. I'm very proud of what I've done too. And adding to that I discovered I actually liked doing it. Because we wrote a decent action plan first, during the analysis I only had to follow that action plan and tick off all actions mentioned in there. That made it a lot easier not to get lost. It was not until everything came together at the end that I started to really realize how big the centralization project will be!

I clearly felt how important it is to first think of what you're going to do. What are you going to do, and when and how? And then create an action plan or plan of approach for it. Of course you know it's important because

everyone says so, but there's definitely a difference between knowing something because it's been told, or knowing something from experience.

Furthermore, I liked the researching part of the assignment. I'm a curious person, so the more I dove into it, the more curious I became as to what everyone thought of it, and whether or not it would actually be possible. And how exactly centralization should be done.

And finally, when I started I wanted to finish it also. Not the easy way, but the correct way. Quality. When I do something, I don't want to just do it, but I also want to do it right! They say that's because I'm a capricorn, but I don't really believe in astrology. I think I got that from my daddy, he's exactly the same.

Now all it said and done, I reach the conclusion it was simply a terrific assignment. I was working in a very special organization, with fantastic colleagues! I hope I ever have the chance of doing something like this again!

THE CITY OF ROME

“Afrika starts at Rome”. This is a known proverb I've been told. Now that I've been there, I can see where it comes from. And I can confirm it's true. Some roads and buildings are very badly maintained. And then there's also possibly illegal North-African people selling definitely illegal stuff like fake Coco-Chanel.

Another thing I discovered is that Italians work different from Dutch. A fine example of this is McDonalds. In a dutch one staff is always running back and forth behind the counter in order to serve everyone as fast as possible. In an italian one staff is walking very relaxed and slowly here and there to gather all parts of your order. I can't really understand how they do it, I'd go crazy doing that.

On the other hand, Rome is a very beautiful city. You can feel the history. Every five metres or so you trip over yet another monument. And every building has some kind of story, which I could read in a little book I bought for that purpose. Buildings in my hometown also have stories, but they don't go that far back. And of course the roman buildings are far prettier than the ones back home.

Rome is also a fun city. It's great to just walk the streets, have some dinner somewhere or do some window-shopping. Or have drink at a terrace and just watch all the people walking by. There are all sorts of wonderfully different people in Rome! Fashion-conscious Italians, fashion-nitwit-tourists (now that's the group I belong to). They all walk the same streets and watching all those people is fun. It never bores me to watch people

In those five weeks I spent there I got to know Rome as a beautiful and special city, and it's fun to be there. Rome is a city of which the pro's easily outweigh the con's. I have to go back there sometime!