

## Let's Do It & Wuhu Ecology Center

### Report on EU-China NGO Twinning program

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*With a common mission to resolve waste pollution, the two NGOs focused on community activities to promote Clean-Up Events, urban/countryside waste management, and activities around waste prevention, reuse and recycling. With the exchange they hoped to gain insight into each other's working environments, strategies and plans. The exchange also involved skill-sharing and training on event organization and waste management best practices.*

### Anneli Ohvril, Let's do It, Estonia

Between 10th of November and 15th December 2015, I was working with Wuhu Ecology Center (China) as part of the EU-China NGO-Twinning-Program.

#### **Objectives**

My objective in this program was to introduce the Let's Do it! network (113 countries) and the "one day cleanup model" as a tool to change peoples' minds about trash and illegal littering to China, and find a partner/s who starts the same movement in China.

I wanted to work together with Wuhu Ecology Center (WEC) to start a long-term partnership in order to share know-how and start with common projects. I was also interested to meet people from China Zero Waste Alliance (CZWA) network, where WEC is a member and one of the leading organizations.

Another goal was to acquaint myself with how the waste handling system in China works, what the challenges, good practices, what is the level of waste sorting habits etc. are. Also, I wanted to find good zero waste practices to share with the world.

#### **Twinning overview**

During my stay in China I visited Beijing, Wuhu, Nanjing, Shanghai and different places in Anhui province (Xidi and Bishan villages, Quíng Yi riverside etc).

Most important during my stay was the networking. I had an opportunity to meet different NGOs, community leaders, opinion leaders and specialists who are working on the topic of waste. It gave me a good overview about the situation of waste handling in China, what are the problems and challenges in waste handling and sorting from government, communities and people's side.

I learned how WEC and CZWA are working, and about their goals and strategies to achieve zero waste in China. Especially good insight I got about the incineration plants and problems that are coming among it.

I participated in the Zero Waste conference in Shanghai where there were a lot of presentations about good zero waste practices from China and an abroad. This conference was followed by the China Zero Waste annual meeting nearby of Shanghai where I brainstormed with members of CZWA about future plans and activities towards zero waste in China.

I also got the chance to introduce Lets Do It! network and “one day- all together” cleanup model. I gave 5 official presentations during my stay in China- in Wuhu, in Shanghai, during the CZWA annual meeting and in Beijing.

### **Activities**

#### **At the Wuhu Ecology Center’s office in Wuhu**

WEC, founded in 2008 has two main focuses: waste and local environmental issues. During my stay in Wuhu I made acquaintance with their work daily basis, learned about their most important projects, and also about the problems and challenges in their work.

WEC is monitoring incineration plants in China with the aim to increase peoples’ awareness about incineration and its impact on the environment and people health. The monitoring of incineration plants up to now is very weak in China. WEC administrates a homepage ([www.waste-cwin.org](http://www.waste-cwin.org)) where all the data about the incineration plants in China can be found. There were more than 300 000 visits on the page in the year 2015. WEC is also promoting the government to release a new emission standard for waste incineration. I learned that in the cities where local communities are against the incineration the readiness to start with waste sorting is much higher. The aversion to incineration plants is sometimes a good starting point for introducing a waste sorting system.

Another of WEC’s interesting projects deals with Mooncakes, aiming at reducing the size and amount of packages.

WEC is also playing the leading role in the China Zero Waste Alliance (CZWA), finding common goals, organizing annual events, and communicating activities among members.

#### **Action man walk/ River walk by Qing Yi**

I took part in a one-day action called “The Action Man/ River Walk (same word has double meaning in Chinese).

Qing Yi river is one of the side rivers of Yangtze river. The Action Man/ River Walk is a project with the aim to increase awareness about the importance of protecting this river from pollution, reconnecting people with nature and protect the local culture.

WEC organizes The Action Man/ River Walks every month. These actions consist of one day long walks among river and additional group activities such as bird watching, introducing local plants and insects, visiting local villages and people and observing their everyday work.

On a daily basis WEC monitors the river and its condition with the help of local groups and cooperating with local media about polluters (more on their homepage

<http://www.qingyijiang.org/>)

The goal of WEC is to build a homepage for this river covering culture, nature and pollution, for example the names of plants, birds and animals and where they can be found, people and their arts and crafts, places of pollution etc.

What I found is that there were many illegal dumpsites along the river, littered by local residents because there is no waste handling system in countryside. So far WEC hasn't picked up any trash during their walks because they believe it has to be done by local people. We were discussing the possibility to organize cleanups near the river together with local communities/villages and invite also urban dwellers to participate. These events help to reconnect urban people with nature and introduce a local culture that is on the wane. For village people it is a possibility to clean up their environment and make them more proud about their homes, stop littering, and strengthen village community.

### **Presentation about LDI in Wuhu**

I held the first presentation on the LDI network and the one day cleanup model in a local community café in Wuhu. In the end I proposed the audience join the LDI network as cleanup organizer or regional coordinator. The presentation was followed by many questions and an active discussion about possibilities to organize this kind of events also in China.

### **Visiting local communities in Nanjing**

We spent two days in Nanjing where we visited local communities and participated in their waste collecting activities. These communities are pilot project locations where they try to educate people to separate kitchen waste from recyclables and bring them to waste collectors. They collect and separate organic waste, paper, plastic, electronics, metal, and hazardous waste. Moreover, they have implemented a bonus program where people can earn points based on the weight of waste they brought. People can buy different products from the community shop and pay for products with these points. The government is supporting these activities by paying for trucks and the office of the company who is organizing these activities.

The positive side of these actions is fun (something happening in the community), education (you get answers to every question you have regarding sorting waste) and the bonus system (you get bonus/ money for bringing recyclables). The problem of this kind of action remains the limited time when people can bring their recyclable materials. For the working population it is take part, as these actions are usually in the mornings of working days. Monitoring these actions I noticed that there are mainly older people taking part. But more important is to reach the young generation. So, it will be important to sync these actions with a permanent sorting systems.

We also visited the office of the company who is handling the recyclables materials and discussed about how to expand sorting habits in China.

### **Meeting with community leaders in Bishan and Xidi village**

There is a lot of waste lying around in the rural areas I visited, the reason being that there is no waste handling system in place in villages. Local people are used to simply dump their trash into the environment. We visited some local villages and met local leaders to find out about the possibilities to change people's minds about the waste and if the LDI one-day cleanup model could be a solution to change the situation in rural areas. Apart from discussing the waste issue we got an overview about the work and projects of different leaders and got inspired by their passion to contribute to local community life. One of them is now considering to start a cleanup project in his village.

### **Zero Waste and low carbon development forum in Shanghai**

During my exchange period in China I was also able to attend the Zero Waste conference in Shanghai. The conference was held at the Tongji University from 4th to 5th of December: two days full of inspiring key-notes and case studies from China and abroad. Participants and presenters included professors of the American college of St Lawrence, the president of the Zero Waste Alliance of Europe, staff of the San Francisco climate change project and municipal government zero waste project, the director of Shanghai Waste Management Office and many many more.

The most valuable contacts I made during this conference besides Chinese ones were from overseas - Paul Connett, who is dedicated on promoting the impact of incineration business, and John May, who is managing the waste in the city that is a good example how to move towards zero waste a city.

### **China Zero Waste annual meeting**

The CZWA annual meeting was held on 6th of December nearby of Shanghai in a farm. It was a very intense day full of different workshops about incineration, communication, lobbying and future plans of CZWA. I participated in brainstorming and also had a chance to give a lecture about LDI network, I was introducing a Estonian first cleanup case study and the LDI mission in the world.

### **Visiting waste sorting communities in Shanghai**

We visited Guangsheng Gongyu community and two other communities in Shanghai who are practicing waste sorting. I got an overview of the beginnings of the projects, what problems and challenges they faced, how it is working now and how it is financed.

So far every floor in high-rise buildings had a trash bin, which caused a bad smell and dirty environment, and there was no sorting. Now the pilot communities are having separate buildings outside with different trash bins for kitchen waste, hazardous waste, recyclable waste and non-recyclable waste. There is one community member who is taking care of waste station and helps people to sort the waste. This person got paid based on number of trash bins sent to recycle centers.

I found it a good idea to communicate on trash bin, where exactly the waste is going for recycling.

### **Visiting NGO Friends of Nature in Beijing**

The NGO Friends of Nature (FON) is one of the oldest environmental NGO in China, established already in 1993. They gave me an overview about their projects, waste handling and sorting system and its challenges in Beijing. Very interesting was the introduction of the FONGAIA school, located in the same building. The school is holding practical lectures and programs for children and their parents about nature and its functioning.

One of FON's pilot projects is promoting waste sorting in different communities in Beijing. During their actions they collect recyclable materials from residents. They have created an interesting bonus system to motivate people to participate in waste collecting activities, similar to the one in Anhui. This gave me the idea to propose the same system to countries in the LDI network who are only about to start waste sorting. People who are bringing recyclable materials earn points that can be used as currency they can spend on products from community shops.

FON's second pilot is about home composting in apartments. They are handing out materials, share know-how, teach and motivate residence to compost.

At FON I also met very committed and passionate mountain cleanup organizers, who have been organizing mountain cleanup events for 10 years. Mountains around Beijing are popular among people, especially in autumn when hundreds of people go to the mountain site to enjoy colorful leaves, but unfortunately leave their trash there. To cleanup a mountain is difficult due to long distances, high amplitude and risks to harm the environment during the cleanup. This movement is 100% based on volunteers and the promotion is only via social media. Despite the wonderful project, the problem remains that they are picking up trash but people still continue to litter. We discussed how they can make a stronger impact and change people's habit or increase awareness about the environment. I introduced the LDI network and our one-day cleanup model as one possibility to start to solve this problem.

### **Meeting with leader of Kunshan community in Beijing**

While in Beijing, I also had the chance to meet an official from Kunshan community. Kunshan is seen as one of China's leading cities in waste handling and sorting. Kunshan is located in the Yangtze River Delta, which is the most economically developed area in China, and a satellite city in the greater Suzhou region. With a population of 1.647 million (by 2010), Kunshan is growing very fast and there are evident problems between old permanent residents who care about environment and new-comers who interested more in making money. Funnily, the waste sorting and handling has proven as one effective way to make old residents and new-comers to communicate with each other. That practice was a very nice example how waste sorting is solving a social problem.

### **Meeting with Leave no trace team in Beijing**

Another very inspiring meeting took place in the office of FON with a team member of Leave no trace (LNT). LNT is an international movement aiming to increase people's awareness and responsibility about the environment. It is the most widely accepted outdoor ethics program used on public lands.

LNT teach people through different education programs and activities of all ages how to enjoy outdoor responsibly. LNT is organizing cleanup events with up to 150 people

(maximum number of people in order do not harm an environment during a cleanup) and tracks down people who are responsible for burning trash in mountains.

They have found that one sort of people who litter are professional hikers, because often the illegal dump sites are in places reachable only for professionals. I suggested to start a co-operation with clubs of professional hikers to educate together people who are going to mountains.

### **Presentations in Beijing**

I gave two presentations about LDI in Beijing. One was organized by Nature University<sup>1</sup>. My presentation was followed by the presentation of Mao Da, who gave an overview about the illegal waste dumping and waste burning in Beijing.

The next presentation was organized by the China Green Student Forum. That presentation was followed by long discussion about the possibilities to carry on similar projects in China.

### ***Conclusion and plans for future cooperation***

The twinning project facilitated a very good overview about the waste situation in China, including waste sorting, littering, incineration and peoples' habits and insights about that.

LDI doesn't just organize cleanups- a massive cleanup is a tool to change peoples' habit about waste and littering. The Let's Do It! World movement can be seen as a groundbreaker, that prepares citizens and communities for zero waste. Therefore it was very important that we understand peoples' behavior and attitude concerning waste, and build a strategy on that.

The most important result of twinning was a real cooperation between WEC and LDI in order to start a LDI movement in China, starting with organizing a regional or country-wide cleanups followed by different actions towards zero waste society.

We are looking forward to deeper cooperation in the field of zero waste, to exchange know-how, contacts and organize common projects.

## **Yue Caixuan, Wuhu Ecology Center (WEC), China**

From October 5<sup>th</sup> to November 10<sup>th</sup>, I participated in the EU-China NGO Twinning Program, and stayed in Estonia with my Twinning partner organization Let's Do It.

My main objective to participate in this program was to learn how waste management systems are run in Europe, and how to mobilize people for waste sorting in communities. I

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<sup>11</sup> Editor's note: Nature University with exchange fellow Mao Da was also participating in the 2014 EU-China NGO Twinning. Anneli and Mao Da met at the program's capacity building workshop in Berlin in October 2014.

also wanted to find out if there were waste management models that can be shared among the China Zero Waste Alliance (short as CZWA) or related laws that could also be promoted in China.

I want to obtain a better understanding on Let's Do It's "one day cleanup model", how to motivate so many people for joint action and how to change their conception of civil activities. WEC may also build a long-term partnership with LDI.

### **Twinning overview**

During my stay in Europe, I have visited Tallinn and Tartu in Estonia, San Sebastian and Barcelona in Spain, Berlin in Germany. I got insights into the LDI network, participated in the Organic Workshop in Spain, the Twinning program's capacity building workshop in Berlin.

The most important knowledge I've got from the exchange to Europe is about the waste management systems. I visited many communities, plants, professor, officers and had interesting discussions with them. I got an overall understanding on Europe waste management system, as well as a better understanding on the difference between Europe, Estonia and China's regulation on waste management.

Organic workshop in Spain show us the community of zero waste can exist and running well. Kitchen waste can be 100% separated from other waste and composting well in plant. I also met members of ZWAE and specialists on organic waste.

Exchange workshop in Berlin lead me a better view on media history and policy of Germany. I also have a better understanding on Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Better understanding on LDI's "one day cleanup model". I also had the chance to show our work in China to ZWAE members and the public in Estonia.

### **Activities**

#### ***At the Let's Do It! Office in Tallin***

LDI was developed from a nation-wide clean-up event that took place in Estonia in 2008. They managed to gather 50,000 people and cleaned up nearly all the illegally dumped waste from forest in only 5 hours. After that great movement, LDI's video of the clean-up has been spreading to many other countries. People in other countries start have the plan to copy this movement and clean up their own country, so LDI start to have their goal to clean up the world with the help of other NGOs.

During my stay at LDI, I also participated in their preparational meeting for the annual gathering conference which will happen in November 2014, in the Philippines; their meeting for LDI's plan of next 3 years; a meeting with the LDI marketing manager, Head of HR, international coordinator, coordinator for China, one of their board member and also had the chance to participate in their office party with many other NGOs' workers together.

#### ***Zero Waste Europe's Workshop in San Sebastian, Spain***

From the 13th to 15th October, the Zero Waste Alliance Europe held an Organic Waste workshop, the workshop had three parts, skills and knowledge sharing, visiting on zero waste

sites and sharing among zero waste members from different countries. Knowledge sharing in the meeting focused on kitchen waste, the whys and hows of composting and case sharing from France and Italy. I also had a chance to sharing problem in China and CZWA's work on solve these problems in the workshop.

Visiting zero waste sites was the greatest part for me. I had a chance to view a local zero waste community, including their composting plant and second hand shop. The Hernani community started their zero waste project in 2010, originally fighting a local incinerator. The community has a door to door collecting system. A collecting company will come and transport different kinds of waste separately to different plants. They also have two working systems on composting, one is composting within the community, and one is transporting kitchen waste to a composting plant. The existing composting plant has only limited capacity and seemed in a bad condition with too much odors and no drainage system, but on the bright side it seemed to me that the organic waste there is quite pure and they can even sell it to market. Also, they will open a new plant in 2015 with a capacity of 9000t/y to solve these problems.

#### ***Visiting waste pickers in Barcelona, Spain***

I was also invited by the organizers of the organic workshop and leaders of Waste Pickers Alliance South Africa to visit waste pickers in Barcelona. Waste pickers in Barcelona mostly come from Africa, they often feel discriminated by local governments. The group of waste pickers aims to unite have a dialogue with these governments. Waste pickers in every country are mostly vulnerable groups, they are also the groups who deal with waste directly, they may also have great influence on zero waste if well educated.

#### ***Getting to know package recycling systems***

During my stay in Tallin, I had had a chance to visit Tallinn's bottle recycling system with recycling machine, store house, plant for make bottles be new products.

Tallinn is the capital city and also the biggest city in Estonia, with more than 100,000 inhabitants. A recycling system was build because according to Estonian law all companies have the responsibility to recycle at least 60% of the package waste of their products. If they can't meet the standard, they will be fined a great amount of penalty money. With this law, companies in Estonia founded an organization to run recycle systems. The system includes recycling machines in big shopping center, temporary store houses, trucks for transportation, plants for dividing different bottles, as well as for the reuse and remake of new products.

In every shopping center, there's recycle machines for plastic bottle, can and glass bottle. People can bring bottles to the machine, exchange a ticket for money, to be used in shopping market or customers can press a donate button to support poor children. The machine will scan a recycle mark on the bottle and divide them into three kinds automatically. This system, only accept bottles with recycle mark on it, cans for alcohol are not accepted even if they are the same material. This part puzzled me, as China accepts every kind of plastic bottles and cans, if they are made of recyclable material, they can be recycled.

Estonia has a law on waste stating that every house should sort their waste into kitchen waste, residual, and paper or even more sorts. They will at least have 3 big dustbins. People



have to pay high fees to the collecting company based on a household's waste volume. That also means that if they are collecting bottles and bring them to the recycling system, they can get money back and save the waste collecting fee. This clearly motivates people to do recycling. But the system is still facing the challenge to have more people participating. What's good is that 94% bottles have been collected by the machines and they already have 850 recycling sites all over Estonia. Nearly all the companies can meet the government's standard of 60% package waste being recycled. The government also plans to have stricter standard in the future.

China and Estonia have quite a different situation in terms of recycling. China has millions of informal recyclable materials buyers and huge plants to deal with all different kinds of waste. People don't have to pay high waste fees and they don't need to bring recyclable materials far away for recycling, which would make recycling machine useless like those in Estonia useless. But the one thing we can and should learn from this system, is that the government should push companies' duty to recycle their own product waste, especially plastic package. In that situation, companies will be more concerned about the design of package for easier recycling.

#### ***Plant for Plastic package waste***

I also visited a plant for plastic package waste. The plant buys mixed and even dirty plastic from Estonia, Sweden and Germany. Their technology is simple but valuable. Gathering all the mixed plastic and it into small pieces, then transferring the pieces into a big boiler, melting them into liquid. This way they can produce plastic boards that can be used as floor panels or even chairs and tables. The good part of this technology is that it doesn't need any washing of the plastic, and the plastic does not even need to be pure. This is very important as no washing means no liquid pollution will produced during the whole process.

#### ***Learning about waste related policy***

I was able to listen to the Estonian Environmental Minister's lecture on her view on different environmental issues and their future plans. She clearly showed the government's appreciation of the environment, and their awareness of the importance of fewer cars for the climate change, the waste problem of oil shale. I also asked several questions about monitoring plants and their plan on waste sorting. One parliament member in the environmental sector even showed me their plans on waste management.

#### **Conclusion and plans for future cooperation**

The Twinning program had shown me different sides of waste management in Europe, including laws, policies, communities, recycling systems, organic composting plant, recycle plants, waste incinerators and so on. I also found the different administrative systems and social habits lead to a big difference in China's and Europe's NGO action. These differences, especially laws, policies, waste incinerator systems and difference of waste components, will be a good contrasting basis for making suggestion to the Chinese government and promote a better system. Waste management systems in Europe, especially recycle systems,

will inspire CZWA with more thoughts on developing a sustainable waste management system.

Another great result of the exchange is that it has led to CZWA's clean-up plan for 2015. The program brings the Let's Do It! model to CZWA members. Their model has inspired members to plan a joint clean-up action in 2015. Thus, WEC and LDI will have a lot of communication on how to prepare the action. WEC will help LDI to find long-term cooperators in China. CZWA will also give LDI more suggestions on how to model their plan of zero waste country model.

**More detailed information is given in the long reports of the twinning partners. Anyone interested can contact the Stiftung Asienhaus staff/China program to receive more information.**