

foodwaste.ch, Switzerland & Shanghai Green Oasis, Shanghai

Report on EU-China NGO Twinning program

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The unnecessary waste of food is a great challenge for both China and Switzerland. While alone in Shanghai an estimated 1'200 tons of food are destroyed every day, around 2,3m tons are thrown away in Switzerland every year along the entire food value chain. Wasting food is not only a waste of resources but bears many ethical questions, given that almost a billion people in China and Europe suffer from under- or malnourishment. Foodwaste.ch and Shanghai Green Oasis entered in this exchange in order to compare the challenges regarding food waste and other food related issues in their respective countries.

Markus Hurschler, co-founder foodwaste.ch, Switzerland

I visited Shanghai from September 5 to October 10, 2015 and spent my time working with Shi Jinwen of Green Oasis on their new project „Green Food Bank“.

Objectives of the exchange

I came to Shanghai with the following objectives for my exchange time:

- To personally learn about the Chinese food system in general and about the approaches to deal with food waste in particular
- To support the Green Food Bank with experience, contacts and best practice from Swiss food bank to further develop the food bank in Shanghai.
- To strengthen foodwaste.ch with international contacts and experience in order to further our approaches towards the topic in Switzerland

These areas were particularly of interest to my exchange:

- Knowledge & data exchange (studies, sources, organisations). Compare & understand the challenges in the respective countries.
- Exchange on ways of addressing the topic as a civil society organization
- Exchange knowledge on different areas of action
 - out-of home consumption
 - private households
 - food industry

- agriculture

- Exchange knowledge on regulation and management of waste/resource streams
- Exchange on the influence of consumer behavior and the ways of civil society organisations to take influence on sustainable consumption patterns.

Activities

My arrival fell on the time of the China-side workshop with the entire exchange group, which was a great start into the program.

The week after we dedicated to trips to the field, getting to know the operations of Green Food Bank as well as some networking with other organizations. We then managed to find time with the entire team of Green Oasis to commonly work on developing the Green Food Bank and exchange on food banking experiences in Switzerland and Shanghai. The exchange concluded with a series of meetings.

Knowledge sharing

Food waste as a topic is difficult to grasp as much of it happens behind the stage of the food value chain and private households. I spent a lot of time with my Twinning partner visiting sites, local markets etc. in order to share knowledge and cultural challenges on this topic and hence to understand how the topic is dealt with/or not dealt with in China.

We got involved in the logistics of the food bank by actually picking up food from their partners in the food industry and delivering food to the outlets. I hence gained an understanding of the size and development of the food bank as well as their main challenges.

Team workshop

After some difficulties finding time with the rest of the team of Green Oasis we managed to hold a common workshop on the development of food banks based on best practice in Switzerland. We initially identified major challenges of the Green Food Bank project and I then prepared a workshop and some content which I drew from my contacts in Switzerland (the CEOs of Tischlein deck dich and Schweizer Tafeln).

Major contents were

- Fundraising strategies for food banks
- Enlarge food donations from food companies (establish contact to Tesco UK in order to get through to Tesco China)
- Software to make food transactions more efficient for food donors (based on a current project of Schweizer Tafeln in Switzerland)

Networking

The Twinning exchange was rich in networking with other organisations and relevant stakeholders and individuals.

Among the most important meetings was the opportunity to hold a presentation on food

waste to a Toastmaster's group of around 25 people in Wuxi and discuss the topic with the attendees on an individual and professional basis (many people professionally worked in the food industry or governmental offices related to sustainable development).

Meetings with the China Youth Climate Action Network in Beijing enabled me to better understand how food waste in the out-of-home sector is being dealt with. At the same time I provided them with insights into European studies on this topic in order to help them set up a new study among students on a university campus (mandated by WWF China).

A more broad exchange could be arranged with a representative of JUCCCE. I gained very detailed insight into the cross-relations of sustainability and health in Chinese diets – particularly regarding children.

Other meetings included site visits in NGO clusters in Shanghai, informal visits of volunteers and on another occasion attendance in a roundtable on the participation of NGOs in the One Belt, One Road project.

Impact

I have personally grown much more aware of China as an international actor on the stage of environmental and social challenges as well as the role China's civil society will have to play in addressing these. I have learned a great number of things about this otherwise very distant country – geographically and culturally. The programme has hence produced an ambassador for the Chinese civil society and this also spilled over to my team in the time Shi Jinwen visited us in Switzerland.

The exchange has not brought an immediate project output. It has, however, opened the doors to information, contacts and knowledge how any future project in or with Chinese civil society actors will have to be designed. It has provided our team the prospect of working internationally with colleagues in China – an idea formerly unknown to us. We are also currently looking at international frameworks that could enable us to set up a project idea. As always such a project requires sufficient financing and hence financing partners.

Future

The first future follow-up has already been implemented when we organised a half-day event around food system challenges in Switzerland with around 40 attendees. A Chinese visiting scientist at a Swiss university presented challenges around crop production and pesticide use in China and an industry representative presented the use of fortified rice in rural China as one strategy against malnutrition in China. Food waste was a topic at the side in the discussion rounds.

As I could build an extensive network in Shanghai with other twinning organisations as well

as other non-twinning related stakeholders we can well imagine to continue cooperation or design an international project around our topic. Particularly the organisation of Zuozhi , Yun Nan Pesticide Eco-alternative Centre, was very interesting to me. The planned visit to Kunming during my stay in China unfortunately could not be realised owing to a lack of time.

Personal evaluation

I am personally extremely satisfied with the exchange and the way this project enriched our organisation. Even if the immediate tangible outcomes for our work cannot be specified easily it has been beneficial for us in many ways.

First and foremost it has become clear to our entire team that without the Asian countries in general and China in particular none of the global environmental challenges can be solved. As European NGO we do have some lead civil society work and there are great benefits in working together on common topics. This is by no means an easy or obvious task as the concrete challenges – relating to food waste or not – are extremely different in Europe (Switzerland) and China.

Another major benefit of this exchange has been the great amount of informal time spent with my Twinner. Such opportunities are rare and bare the potential to gain great insight into a topic, country and culture. I was lucky enough to have a Twinner with enough time to dedicate to me for which I am very thankful.

Jinwen and me did a good deal of managing expectations right at the beginning which – I think – helped us to openly speak about what we are satisfied with or not during and after the exchange. I experienced this as a very positive intercultural achievement of our twinning team.

Shi Jinwen, Green Oasis & Green Food Bank Shanghai

Shi Jinwen visited foodwaste.ch in Switzerland from October 3rd to November 11th 2015.

Overview

Shanghai Green Oasis is a ten-year non-governmental organization focusing on natural education. But from 2012, we realized the big problem of food waste in China and wanted to do something to change it, so we started the “Green Food Bank” project.

There are more than 1000 tons of food destroyed in Shanghai everyday. At the same time, there are more than 200,000 people in Shanghai in great need. We aim to build a bridge to connect the leftover food to those in great need.

From 2014, we start our food bank project, collecting in total 30 tons of food and redistributed it to over 2000 families in one year.

Objective of the exchange

My objective was to introduce the first Food Bank in China and exchange on different ideas of how to set up this organization and ways of operation with Food NGOs in Switzerland and bring this kind of precious knowledge back to China.

It was a great experience to work together with foodwaste.ch, Switzerland. I was invited to communicate with the CEO of one of the biggest Food Bank in Switzerland, which was an amazing opportunity.

For myself, it was a good opportunity to learn how the food system and works in Switzerland and from the different workshop both in China and Europe, I heard different ideas of Food climate and social research.

Activities

During the period of exchange, our main activities were:

- Team Meeting in Bern, Switzerland
- Trip with CEO of the Biggest Food Bank in Switzerland, Winterthur, Switzerland
- Food Industry Exhibition, Basel, Switzerland
- Meeting Green ZheJiang in Rome, Italy
- Workshop in Hangzhou
- Workshop in Brussels

Workshop on Climate change, social and environmental justice in Brussels, Belgium

It was the first time for me to come to Europe, which made me feel very excited. Despite all the discovered differences and the jetlag, the workshop that followed my arrival was very interesting.

The guest speakers were experts of their area, which gave us a good chance to think on a more global level (instead of just one's own country level).

We heard presentations on "the The European debate on TTIP and global impacts of free trade agreements " as well as "Migration and refugee crisis – current political concepts and solutions". I found all these topics are very interesting, and they gave us some ideas for a practical level.

We also had the chance to talk about the benefits and challenges of the exchange project, which I hope could make the project better.

At the foodwaste.ch office in Bern

It was really a wonderful time working with the whole team and living in Switzerland.

After finding the suitable chance to meet the team in the office in Bern, we started the firm team meeting with all the members

Firstly, we introduced the process and result of the work last week and the plane for the next week. Secondly, we made a planned for my activities and tasks, including attending the Food Industry Exhibition to learn more about food system in Switzerland and visiting the Food Bank in Winterthur.

Visiting the biggest Food Bank in Switzerland, Winterthur

Tischlein Deck Dich is the largest Swiss Food Bank. I had the opportunity to meet its CEO, Alex, who showed me around the offices in the building, the warehouse and told me about their methods of fundraising:

Case1: For some companies, who are not food companies but also want to contribute, they have different ways to take part in. For example, a big truck company lent the Food Bank trucks to help them redistribute the food to the logistic centers. The Food Bank printed their logo on the trucks to show they are ethical companies, and they also could write this case in their annual reports to enhance their reputation. This case works very good until today.

Case2: Food package in Switzerland is not free, it costs one Swiss Franck which regarded as a symbolic price. This shows the food is valuable instead of free, to make people agree the value of Food Bank. What is very interesting is in the end the amount of the symbolic money is not small.

Food industry exhibition, Basel, Switzerland

At the Food Industry exhibition, foodwaste.ch had an information desk where they introduced their idea of food sustainability, inviting more members to join us. I learned that in Switzerland many people in the food industry have a strong sense of against food waste since many people came to our desk and asked to be members.

Future

We are planning to keep in touch with Markus and his organization and see whether we have more opportunities to work together. We will can share our knowledge through emails and Skype calls.

I am also planning to build an extensive network with the other twinning organizations as well as other non-twinning related stakeholders, particularly the organization of Food Bank in Switzerland.