

Zero Waste France, France and AIFEN, Shanghai

Report on EU-China NGO Twinning program

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The exchange between ZWF and AIFEN focused on the comparison of different systems of waste management and waste policies with the aim to enable both organizations to promote better solutions at the local or national levels and help them strengthen or renovate public awareness campaigns.

Isabella di Blasio, Zero Waste France

Between January 9th and February 24th, I was visiting our partner organization AIFEN in Shanghai.

Objective of the exchange

The main purpose of the exchange was to learn about differences and commonalities in waste management in France and Shanghai. AIFEN works mainly on kitchen waste and on waste classification. Consequently, the focus of my visit in Shanghai at AIFEN has been kitchen waste management and AIFEN's work with communities.

I was interested in:

- learning about China's waste management, in particular kitchen waste
- understanding waste policies and laws in China
- sharing information and data about French and European waste policies and management
- exchanging on ways of addressing the topic as a civil society organization
- strengthening Zero Waste France with international contacts and experiences

My exchange was divided in two major periods: the first one in Shanghai where I participated to AIFEN daily work and the second one in Beijing for meeting different NGOs.

Weekly meeting with AIFEN Team

My arrival at AIFEN in Shanghai fell on a Monday morning just in time for the team meeting. I had the opportunity to introduce myself and my work in France and get to know the AIFEN team. During all my time in Shanghai I had weekly meetings with the AIFEN team to discuss about my work at Zero Waste France and to ask them all the questions that I had. All my main aims and focuses have been analyzed and discussed with my exchange partner, Ma Xiaolu and her organization. I observed a genuine interest at AIFEN about my work and a real predisposition for team sharing and discussion.

Meetings and networking

AIFEN works with communities and other NGOs in Shanghai. During my time in Shanghai I had several meetings with different NGOs, communities and professionals who AIFEN works with.

Among all the meetings I had the great opportunity to meet Professor Marie Holder and to exchange with her on the role of NGOs in China in the waste fields and on the waste classification.

This meeting made me able to better understand the work of AIFEN with local communities.

I also had the chance to meet Twinning alumni Ding Peng from East-Lake Institute for Social Advancement, Wuhan Logos Consulting and Wuhan University Public Interest and Development Law Institute Wuhan. This made me able to better understand the political and environmental legal situation. This meeting was particularly relevant for me in consideration of some important legal reforms and law projects in China.

Moreover, I had three important meetings with Friends of Nature (FON), Greenpeace Asia and Center for Legal Assistance for Pollution Victims (CLAPV).

The meeting with Greenpeace allowed me to share experiences, knowledges and to network with one of the most important international NGO in the environmental field. I was able to compare Greenpeace's working method in Western countries and in China.

Friends of Nature is the most influential organization in Beijing working on urban solid waste. The meeting with Ginny, a fellow Twinner in 2015, from the «Urban solid waste management system» section permitted me to share with her my experience in Shanghai and to compare the situation in these two different and giant cities.

Meeting CLAPV was a really important meeting for my work as lawyer. I had a deep and important conversation with a lawyer of this NGO.

These meetings helped me better understand the environmental situation in Shanghai, Beijing and in China in general in terms of legal and grassroots actions against incineration, landfills and towards the increasing of a participated governance in environmental problems.

Workshop and interventions

During the exchange period in Shanghai, AIFEN organized a workshop and several interventions.

The workshop was a presentation on the Twinning exchange program between Europe and China. I was encouraged to talk about my work in France and about the situation in Europe. My partner Xiaolu Ma held a presentation on the month that she spent in Paris. Yi Ru from Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center was also present. She shared her experience in UK with the public too.

AIFEN regularly meets with the communities with whom they work. I participated in all the meetings during my stay in Shanghai, and thus was able to inform all their partners about my work in France.

Every intervention was different and modeling on the public. The public was in general really interested and often after my interventions I had different questions.

Future collaboration

During my period in Shanghai, AIFEN decided to collaborate with a Chinese company to create a new Zero Waste event project. Zero Waste France already has some experience in this field. Three large zero waste events have been already organized in France. The colleague in charge of the program asked me to participate in the first meetings with the company. After consultations with the ZWF bureau in Paris, we decided to start a cooperation. We invited Xiaolu Ma to come in Paris at the end of June to participate to the first Zero Waste Festival and we will have regular Skype meetings with AIFEN to continue helping each other and collaborate .

Impact

I am extremely satisfied with this exchange experience. First of all I was able to better understand the importance of China in the environmental challenges. Working in a totally different context made me aware of the limits and on the benefits of the European NGO system.

Another important benefit of this exchange has been the opportunity to spend a lot of time, formal and informal, with my Twinner Xiaolu Ma. Furthermore the AIFEN team integrated me in their daily work and in their daily life. They made my experience unique. I experienced this as a very positive intercultural achievement of our twinning team.

Ma Xiaolu, AIFEN

Main activities and products of the exchange

During my exchange, I took part in and obtained a thorough understanding of the work of Zero Waste France. In addition, I visited Zero Waste Europe and Zero Waste Italy. I took part in the 2015 Climate Conference in Paris (cop21), the GAIA (Global Anti Incinerator Alliance) annual conference and went to several cities in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and Spain to learn about their situations of garbage classification systems.

The origin and development of Zero Waste in Europe

China is now facing a challenge of disposing the increasing amount of garbage, and Europe has the same problem. China is promoting waste classification but builds incinerators at the same time. However, in Europe a Zero Waste movement is developing. The difference lies in that China is now researching how to deal with the current garbage challenge, but the European movement advocates a reduction in the production of the waste from its origin and the creation of a circular economy so that the garbage can be reused as a raw material. The movement was initiated in a small town in Italy, where the landfills were overflowing with garbage. When the government announced to incinerate the waste, the local citizens founded the anti-incineration movement. One key figure during the movement, Rossano Ercolini, thought that the solution of waste problems is to reduce the production of garbage. From then on, the movement spread into more cities and countries. Until now, there are more than 300 regions and cities that have joined the movement to push forward zero waste.

The literal meaning of zero waste is “almost no wastes produced”. However, it costs a lot, even requires a kind of social revolution to realize the goal. As a parallel development, we

can witness the efforts done by governments, entrepreneurs, NGOs, scholars and individuals in Europe to the course of zero waste. A lot of successful cases can be found among them. These can bring many valuable information and experiences for promoting zero waste in China.

Visiting Zero Waste France, Europe and Italy

1. Zero Waste France

I spent most of my visit on comprehending the work and the local movement. In France, most of the garbage is incinerated. Residents are all complaining about dangers caused by incineration. Zero Waste France views their main tasks as spreading independent information, advocacy, working with entrepreneurs, local associations and local governments. During the exchange, I gained a deep understanding of the current projects and operation of Zero Waste France. I took part in the anti-incineration movement supported by the local government, the conference organized by Zero Waste France as side event to the COP21 and project discussion workshops.

Throughout my visit, I have found that Public Interest Organizations in Europe and in China vary greatly because of the difference in policies and national conditions. In particular, European organizations put a great emphasis on their independence. They never rely on governments and companies. Their operation capital mostly comes from the citizens that support their actions.

In promoting Zero Waste, AIFEN differs from them in that they focus more on practical community work. The French made great efforts in advocacy. They care about the related policies and laws. Then, they hand in reports and suggestions to related departments of the government. In order to support the anti-incineration movement, they created an anti-incineration network, provided law support, case studies, expert support, thus building a strong power for anti-incineration. They have also created the Zero Waste entrepreneur action network to integrate resources of all kinds to promote projects and policies. I was deeply impressed by their working style of action network. Linkage would not only enable the exchange of resources, but also combine those separated powers, which is essential to Public Interest Organizations.

2. Zero Waste Italy

Italy is the origin for Zero Waste movements, therefore it was a great opportunity to visit. In the small town of Kappa, the classification rate of garbage had reached more than 90%. Garbage classification no longer is a problem for the local citizens. They call for entrepreneurs to visit people's houses to collect garbage and supervise the classification outcomes. In Shanghai, the solution is difficult to carry out since residents live in densely populated compounds. If there are no visits, there are no supervisions. What impressed me most was that Zero Waste Italy had built Zero Waste research centers, recycling centers and short-chain shops. There are garbage disposing solutions other than simply garbage classification. This has provided me with inspirations.

3. Zero Waste Europe

Zero Waste Europe is located in Brussels and is the European Zero Waste umbrella organization. They mainly pay attention to climate change, waste and energy problems. Each local government that is willing to join them can apply. They draw up learning materials and constitute training workshops to exchange information from different regions and countries. At the same time, they provide policy advocacy to the EU. They would exhibit outstanding

cases available to the government to show that there exist better solutions than garbage incineration.

2015 Climate Conference in Paris (COP21)

I very much appreciated the chance to take part in the COP21 as well as in many waste management conferences. Firstly, the conference gathered people from all over the world who care about climate change. In the conference venue itself they even had various techniques and products relating to environmental protection such as the “pedaling phone chargers”, “pedaling-charged juicers” and so on. The conference organized by Zero Waste Europe, France, Italy and GIGA covered various topics including successful Zero Waste practice cases, concerning garbage junkman, composting techniques, composting situations and other topics.

GIGA Global Annual Conference

GIGA is a global network for Zero Waste actions. AIFEN has cooperated with GIGA several times already. Their annual conference gathers GIGA members from all over the world. During the five days of heated discussion, we reached a thorough understanding of the tactics and achievements NGOs had made in garbage-related topics as well as their problems and difficulties. These experiences would benefit a lot.

The current situation of garbage classification in other cities in Europe

During the exchange I visited Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy, and I also observed the garbage classification system and how it is carried out in different countries and cities. In different countries, even in different cities, the execution schedule varied greatly. For instance, Naples in Italy was just the same as most of the cities in China. The city is now facing a crisis with the increasing amount of garbage. However, most citizens had not realized it is such a serious issue. That is why people are not highly motivated when the government asks them to classify garbage. The government should from then on attach importance to advocacy and incentives.

Benefits and effects of the exchange

Via exchange and learning, I obtained a deeper comprehension of the significance and value of the Zero Waste movement and the available cases and solutions. These had expanded visions and methods for my own work, and had brought about more thinking and guidance for AIFEN. Europe has more experience and accomplishments than China in garbage disposal, which may be greatly beneficial to IFINE’s development.

I have gained a lot of knowledge on the working methodology and ideology of the European NGOs. Particularly, they have built an action network that can not only share the resources available, but also create a synergy. The different operation styles between European NGOs and Chinese NGOs also offered us great inspiration.

Through the exchange, we have built connections with Zero Waste France, Italy, Europe and GIGA. We will intensify our exchanges and cooperation in the future.