

Taste Before You Waste

Fighting Against Food Waste and Creating Consciousness



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Introduction

Taste Before You Waste (TBYW) is an Amsterdam-based initiative focused on the prevention of food waste. It aims at raising awareness about the enormous amount of good food that is thrown away every day and informing people about what can be done to prevent this. Nine times a week “waste” food is picked up at grocery shops, supermarkets and farmers in order to give it a second chance by donating it to local charities, cooking with it for No-Waste Dinners or handing it out at the weekly Free-Food Market. Since the 20th of January I have been dedicating an average of 13 hours a week volunteering for this organization. It has been a busy, creative, varied and inspiring time in which I have learned a lot about myself and the society around me. During this period at Taste Before You Waste I have been the public spokesperson of the organization, speaking at several conferences, a radio show and during multiple interviews. Besides this, I have also been in charge of managing the volunteer schedule and finding replacements and new volunteers when needed. For the new TBYW website I have reviewed and edited articles to prepare them for publication. Furthermore, I have helped set up Taste Before You Waste’s first Folk kitchen, while also setting up a series of demonstrations to create consciousness. In this report I will concretize what my activities at TBYW have been, what they have led to and how this has positively contributed to the community. In addition, I will discuss the skills, insights and knowledge I have gained. Lastly I will evaluate and reflect upon my time at this initiative.

My activities, their results and their contribution to the community

On February 6, 2014 I travelled to Asturias, Spain and spoke at the Compromiso Asturias XXI Conference concerning food waste and its possible solutions. The conference has led to several

de PAROOL DINS DAG 18 FEBRUARI 2014

Amsterdammer van de dag
Luana Carretto (24) gaat
voedselverspilling tegen met het
initiatief Taste Before You Waste.

“Anderhalf jaar geleden zag ik een documentaire van Zembla over voedselverspilling. Ik wist er nog niets van toen, maar na afloop was ik erg verontwaardigd.”

Carretto liep de eerste de beste groentewinkel binnen vlakbij haar woning in Amsterdam-Oost. Een goudmijn. Er bleek bij meer dan tien groenteboeren animo te zijn om restanten weg te geven. Ook een supermarkt waarvan ze de naam niet kan zeggen, wilde meewerken.

“Toen ik merkte hoeveel voedsel dat opleverde, ben ik gaan nadenken over manieren om het te delen.”

De Regenboog Groep, een stichting voor verslaafden, daklozen en

mensen met psychiatrische problematiek, bood uitkomst: er was veel vraag naar het voedsel.

“Op het Amsterdam University College waar ik studeer, wilden ook veel mensen helpen toen ze het voedselverhaal hoorden. Tegenwoordig werk ik met 26 vrijwilligers die met een bakfiets eten ophalen bij de groenteboeren en supermarkt. Elke woensdag houden we een gratis markt. Binnenkort willen we een demonstratie op de Dam houden: we delen dan van alles uit: chocoladeletters, pepernoten en groenten. Vooral om aan te tonen hoeveel er verspild wordt na zo’n feestdag.”

Jiri Haanen



FOTOGRAFIE: MIEKE

online articles (Iglesias, 2014; “Jornada en favor de la alimentación sostenible impulsada por Compromiso Asturias XXI,” 2014) in which TBYW was mentioned very positively. The Asturias conference has made a good contribution to the organisation’s image as it was the first time for TBYW to be represented abroad. Furthermore, the conference has enlarged our reach, thus enhancing the chance of creating

Figure 1. Feature by J. Haanen (2014) in Dutch newspaper Het Parool, calling Luana the “Amsterdam person of the day”.

awareness, which is one of TBYW's goals. Another platform through which my activities have reached a broad audience is the TEDx AU College Conference held on the 5th of March 2014. Not only did my speech reach the public present at the conference, it also reached more than 1000 people online through the official TEDx YouTube Channel (TEDx Talks, 2014) and an innumerable number of readers through the newspaper article published in the Spits (Amsterdam Redactie, 2014). Besides all the media attention surrounding these conferences, TBYW has also had some attention of its own (Figure 1). The media coverage of the past four months has led to a direct increase in "likes" on our Facebook Page from 419 likes on January 20, 2014 to 713 likes today. Also, the views on our official website (www.TasteBeforeYouWaste.nl) have increased drastically, going from 4247 on February 1, 2014 to 7321 views today.

The most important and time consuming task I have had during my volunteer period at Taste Before You Waste has been managing the schedule of all the volunteers. When I started, there were only about 20 volunteers working for the organisation. Their tasks were picking up the unwanted food at the neighbourhood stores and either delivering them at the charities we



Figure 2. The organic vegetables handed out on the first Free Food Market organized on the Dam Square.

work with or bringing them to me for the Free Food Market organized on Wednesdays. The organisation has grown drastically over the past four months; we now have 40 volunteers working for us on a regular basis in four different teams, namely pick-up and delivery, activism, cooking and writing. The activism team has been set up by me to conduct a series of Free Food Markets and demonstrations during which unwanted food is handed out for free (Figure 2). This activity positively contributes to the community by raising awareness surrounding food waste, directly reducing the amount of food wasted by handing it out on the street and creating the possibility for the less fortunate to get healthy vegetables and fruits for free. The new cooking team has been set up because we got offered the opportunity to organize a Folk kitchen at Community Centre the Meevaart twice a week (Figure 3). The Folk kitchen has given us a platform to tell our story and expand our reach even further. However, it is also beneficial for the community in the sense that it

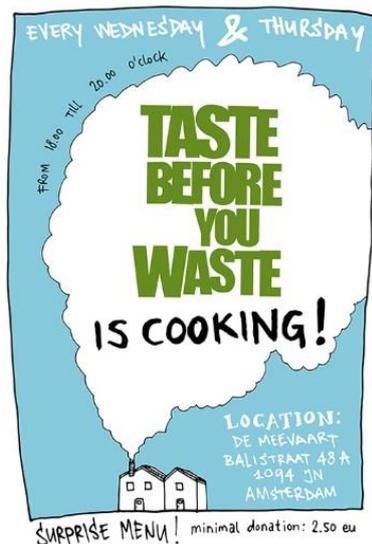


Figure 3. Poster, promoting the Wednesday and Thursday cooking sessions at Community Centre the Meevaart.

creates the possibility for people to go out for dinner for a price as low as 2.50 euro. In a neighbourhood such as the Inidische Buurt with many of its inhabitants living on a tight budget this is a much appreciated opportunity. Furthermore, Community Centre the Meevaart seems to be a good place for networking, as many neighbourhood initiatives have their base in the centre and workers from the municipality visit regularly. Yet another of the activities I have been in charge of is supervising the creation of the new TBYW website and reviewing the articles before publishing them. Due to several setbacks, the website is taking longer than expected, but hopefully it will go online on the first of June. The new website will have a lot of information on food waste including a great variety of recipes and tips for the

reduction of food waste at household level. This will contribute to creating consciousness in the community and helping its members save money by reducing their waste.

Skills, insights and knowledge gained

It is interesting and very important to think about how to properly communicate environmental and social issues like food waste to the general public. I am doing a Major in Social Sciences and a Minor in Environmental Sciences. I have learned a great quantity about what we can improve in our society and how we could treat our environment better. But, none of the AUC courses I have taken covers the manner in which we should communicate these solutions to the general public. Fortunately, one of the most important insights I had during my time at Taste Before You Waste was that not only love (as the Dutch saying goes), but also consciousness goes through the stomach. Both the Free Food Markets and the evenings at the Folk kitchen have shown that when one makes people taste a delicious meal, and then tells them that what they just ate was actually classified as waste, they are usually shocked. Their predetermined schemas of what waste should be does not synchronize with what they just tasted. It creates an uncomfortable situation, but it does trigger people to want to know more information. Instead of preaching about food waste to a public that is not interested in the subject one ends up talking to a public that is eager to get their questions answered. I am grateful for this insight I have gained, because I believe that it complements my AUC curriculum choices.

A second very important insight I have had is that one of the most important skills for a good career is the ability to sell oneself and the beliefs one stands for. Not only is it important to be able to communicate my beliefs in person, but also in writing. Apart from that, the way to communicate a certain message is highly dependent of the public that the message has to be communicated to. Answering to questions during a telephone interview is completely different than answering them in person or in writing. In all of my AUC courses I have been obliged to give presentations and write papers, however the setting and the public has always been the same. Moreover, the goal has been the same, namely getting a good grade. My tasks at TBYW complement and build upon the skills learned at AUC because they have given me the opportunity to practice my communication skills through different media, with different publics and for different aims. At the conferences I have not only bettered my presentation skills, I have also improved my networking skills. Answering questions for newspaper articles, the Fun X radio show and during the Free Food Markets has enhanced my ability to defend my position when only given little time to think about my answer. Furthermore, having to write several proposals when searching for a location to hold the Folk kitchen has helped me to really sell TBYW and what it stands for. I have had to meet up with people from the municipality and several community centres in order to convince them that we were the best project for that location. This is a skill that we do not learn at AUC, but that is crucial for one's career.

The third insight I gained contradicts my high school history class in which I have learned to attribute inventions, creations and change to one person alone. My time at TBYW has taught me something different: in order to facilitate change in our society, society itself first needs to change and since society consists of more than one person, more than one person should be seen as responsible for the change. Working at TBYW has made me realize that in order to change our society people have to work together. This is especially true when talking about environmental problems as they are often global problems that concern us all. Amsterdam is a multi-cultural city and the Indische Buurt is well known for the high percentage of foreign inhabitants (Straat Info, 2014). When volunteering at TBYW I have had to collaborate with people from different backgrounds. This has not always been easy, but I learned that communication and respect is the key to successful cooperation. My personal goals in life have always been related to my dream of contributing to a better society, better referring to a more social and sustainable one. TBYW embodies my goals and aims for the future, as it is both focused on achieving a sustainable environment and improving people's lives in society. I feel that volunteering at this initiative has brought me one step closer to my dream and thus has positively contributed to my personal learning outcomes. Moreover, this experience has also contributed to the AUC learning outcomes as mentioned on the AUC website (2013): I have had

the opportunity to enhance my communication and leadership skills, I have been engaged both on a local and global level and I have participated in constructive public discourse against food waste.

Evaluation and reflection

I believe that I have delivered good work, however I did notice that the quality of my own work improved drastically as the time passed and I gained more experience. This is most visible in my networking skills. The conference in Spain was my first one, I did not know what to expect; I was nervous and a bit shy. This resulted in me not making optimal use of the networking possibilities at hand and I ended up going back to Amsterdam without having made any valuable connections. At the TEDx conference I did things differently; I printed out business cards beforehand, I approached most of the speakers personally, and I talked to as many visitors as possible. This resulted in the recruitment of new volunteers and a new partnership with a charity. Another thing I struggled with in the beginning was dealing with volunteers that did not meet their commitments. However, this also improved with time as I started being more clear with the volunteers about the importance of them meeting their commitments. From my supervisor at TBYW I got the impression that he was very grateful for the amount of hours I put in to the project and the therefrom resulting quantity of work that got finished. Furthermore, he told me that he was very happy about the fact that he could count on my work always being done on time. Lastly, I feel that he noticed that I sometimes struggled with keeping my patience, especially concerning the volunteer shifts, but luckily this improved towards the end of my volunteer period.

Most of the expectations I had when writing my Community Project application were accurate. However, the legal affairs turned out below expectations. When I arranged my volunteer period at TBYW I was told that I would be involved in the legal affairs of the organisation, more specifically I would help out with subscribing the initiative at the Chamber of Commerce. Unfortunately, after the first two meetings with the legal consultant it was decided that it was better to wait with the subscription until the organisation was bigger. It is a pity that this was decided, because I would have been very interested in experiencing the whole process. However this was made up for by the possibility to be in charge of the meetings surrounding the Folk kitchen, which turned out better than expected. When I was given the task to find a location for TBYW to cook with the requirement that the monthly rent could be no more than 100 euros per month I thought this would be impossible. But, I am proud to mention that after several meetings with different locations we found the perfect kitchen that we can use free of charge. Another of the highlights of my period at TBYW was Dennis' supervision. He is 10 years older than me and has a lot of work experience, especially in

management and organisation. So, when I struggled with the volunteer schedules he took his time and helped me find a suitable solution. On top of this, he is the most patient person I know, which, as I came to understand, is a true virtue, especially when working with volunteers. Overall he was very clear in his instructions, however due to the fact that he had no experience in finding cheap locations to cook he could not really instruct me how to do it. Luckily a few hours of internet search turned out to be very enlightening.

My experience at TBYW has taught me multiple lessons. One of them was learning that the Dutch saying “Nee heb je, ja kan je krijgen” exists for a reason. Liberally translated it means that one should always try before letting doubts about a possible ‘no’ stop one from trying. Taste Before You Waste exists because we tried and got a ‘yes’, multiple actually. We got a ‘yes’ when asking the grocers to give us their waste food for free, we got a ‘yes’ when asking people to help us and we got a ‘yes’ when asking for a kitchen to cook in without being able to pay for it. I have learned that as long as I try, the possibilities are endless. However, another even more valuable lesson I learned in the past four months, is that this saying is very much bound to Western countries and to people with a certain type of education. The people from the neighbourhood who come and eat at the Folk kitchen, because they cannot otherwise afford a healthy meal have shown me that even in a Western country like the Netherlands one does not always succeed when trying. Unfortunately we live in a society where people do not always get the same opportunities and I feel privileged to be able to share mine.

In short, I am very grateful to have had the possibility to spend time volunteering for Taste Before You Waste. I believe my activities have helped the organisation to grow further, to expand their reach and to create consciousness. On top of that, I believe that TBYW, with its strong link to the community and with its goal of creating a more social and environmentally friendly society has been a good match with my AUC curriculum, my own and AUC’s learning outcomes. This experience has enriched me as a person and I strongly believe it has equipped me with valuable insights, knowledge and skills that will aid me in my future career.

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