

Final Report: Community Project at Taste Before You Waste



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Introduction

Taste Before You Waste (TBYW) is an Amsterdam-based initiative fighting for the prevention of food waste (Carretto, 2012). I decided to work on the organisation's Public Relations, as I thought this could be an effective measure to make its point of view heard by a greater audience. So, for the last four months, from the beginning of September until the end of December I have been investing an average of 10 hours of volunteer work per week as a PR-Manager for TBYW. I mainly focussed on keeping the organisation's Facebook page up-to-date, posting regular engaging articles or news on food waste, reporting on TBYW's upcoming and past events through Facebook or the newsletter which I launched and finally recruiting new volunteers. In this time I have learned some media-specific knowledge, information on food waste and more generally the workings of activism. Apart from these facts and skills, it has also helped me define my desired role within society, which will help lead my career and even personal choices in future.

My activities and their results for the organisation and community

My tasks, as set out by my Community Project Supervisor within TBYW included: "keeping TBYW's social media accounts up to date; researching, writing and distributing press releases to targeted media; keeping an eye on TBYW's media coverage; devising and supervising photo and filming opportunities; writing and distributing the newsletter; supervising and distributing flyers, poster etc; communicating TBYW's events through social media, online agendas and press; and any other activity that I think will benefit and promote TBYW externally" (Baranic, 2014).

My experiences were just as diverse in practise as they sounded from the outset, but differed slightly. One of my first activities was transferring approximately 500 contacts and their personal information from Excel-sheets into the TBYW's mailing contact list. In this way it will be much easier to find a required contact in future, as they are all organised in folders referring to respective occasion. I also used the first week to get acquainted with the relevant documents and photo albums in order to co-manage them in the time to come, so they would be archived in the google account and will be available for publication or other uses whenever needed.

My next big responsibility has been to keep our community of followers informed about our activities and development at all times. When it came to events such as the Samen IndischeBuurt Festival, the TBYW 2-year anniversary and many more, I would announce the events on facebook in advance, keeping our followers updated as our preparations progressed. On the day of the actual event I took some pictures - or asked fellow

volunteers to do so in my place - which I would later post on Facebook and archive both on our Facebook photo albums with a brief description, as well as in our Google albums. Furthermore, I made sure to post relevant information and announcements on our organisation or other food-waste-related organisations locally and internationally on our facebook page at least 3 times per week and changed the appearance of the TBYW Facebook page. These changes served the purpose of keeping our existing followers engaged and up-to-date, but also to attract new members to this community. We successfully increased our number of followers from about 800 at the beginning of September to 1200 by the end of December. Another way in which I tried to broaden our reach was through the introduction of a monthly newsletter. I did this by using the MailChimp website to design and develop the template. The Newsletter includes an introduction of two volunteers every issue, a review on past events, announcements of upcoming events, recruitment of volunteers and additional information on recent developments in the fight against food waste. In order for the newsletter-receiving community to grow, I advertised its sign-up sheets extensively and embedded it on the Facebook page. By the end of my term we have a 108 newsletter recipients.

Further, I suggested to start weekly meetings for the core group of TBYW. These were held at the Academic Building of AUC on Wednesdays from 10:00 until at least 12:00 and often lasted on until the late afternoon, depending on that week's work load. This greatly benefited the internal communication between the volunteers in key roles and gave me a fixed time and space to work on my projects. Of own initiative, I also wrote a Mid-Term Reflection for my Community Project Supervisor informing about my past and future activities. In my opinion these are beneficial to a community projecter's productivity and progress and experience on the whole.

In order to recruit more volunteers and therefore grow as an organisation, I wrote a short text and shared broadly within our facebook and mailing community at several points during the course of my Community Project. During my time in PR for TBYW, the organisation also launched the new website tastebeforeyouwaste.com. I have since been in contact with the website's programmer, considering some improvements and additions to the website. However, these are yet to be worked on collaboratively. As I enjoyed writing catchy phrases to promote the idea of saving food in my facebook posts, Luana suggested I came up with a new slogan for TBYW. At the time it was: 'A world with 0% food waste, wouldn't that be nice'. I created a word map with appropriate words for TBYW, but finally consulted the members of the weekly meeting. Together we came up with the slogan: 'Taste Before You Waste: Serving awareness on a plate'.

On the occasion of the AUC Community Project Market, Heleen Prins and I represented TBYW with a range of informative materials on the options of conducting Community

Projects with TBYW. As a result, not only did we gain at least one new community projecter, but we also had the opportunity to share TBYW's message with many students and a number of entrepreneurs.

My final accomplishment during my term at TBYW was coming up with an idea for a TBYW-app and presenting it at Sparc's pitch contest and winning the votes of both the panel of judges as well as the students present at the event. As of January, so after the end of my Community Project, I will be getting together with the programmers of Sparc in order to collaborate on a app which will inform about conservation, preparation and sharing of food. This will be a great way to reach a larger audience and bring benefits to the community.

Skills, insights and knowledge gained

These last 4 months have been an extremely insightful time for me, both academically and personally. I have gained knowledge in social media communication; this can be useful in most fields of work that work with community-building, which I am interested in. I have learned how to use Facebook for an organisation or company rather than a personal account. Furthermore, I have used MailChimp as a program for designing and developing the newsletter and familiarised myself with the many functions of a google plus account. I have been able to work on my (re-)presentation skills, for example for the pitch contest. But apart from these media-specific skills, I have also gained insights about how it is to be involved in a small-scale, non-profit organisation.

When applying to universities before the beginning of my studies, it was very important to me that my future university would reflect my point of view. Therefore many of AUC's learning outcomes actually overlap with my own. Reflecting on my community project, I think I have been able to develop in many ways. I have gained much appreciated knowledge on food waste and more generally environmental and humanitarian activism. Concerning academic skills, I have improved my problem-solving skills within a group as well as an individual when dealing with unexpected events. My dutch language proficiency has also benefitted through reading food-waste-related articles and writing posts and event summaries in dutch. As I spent a lot of time working independently without direct supervision, I also practised my ability to plan work and to use time effectively. As far as interdisciplinary skills go, the subject of food waste in itself is very interdisciplinary, incorporating fields from earth sciences over economy, agriculture, inequality to cultural differences. Learning skills refer to the attitude as well as skills for lifelong learning and this time with TBYW has given my platform to meet people I would not have otherwise and taught me that there are infinitely more people to meet and

lessons to be learned. As Public Relations lay within the field of Communication, it is not surprising that communication skills were of great relevance to my Community Project. It was necessary for me to be able to represent the organisations views orally at every event as well as in writing for the online community afterwards. Engagement at a local level is what TBYW essentially aims to share with the rest of community, on the long rung to save human lives as well as the earth of our planet, a global goal with local execution. Finally personal and social responsibility have been addressed in the constructive public discourse that I have actively tried to promote through my work as a PR-manager. The promotion of a cause, such as reducing food waste, requires openness to innovative ideas and the willingness to speak out about what has to be changed.

In terms of the relevance within my AUC curriculum, the community-orientated nature of Taste Before You Waste is definitely in line with my major in social sciences. More specifically, I am following courses in the tracks Psychology and International Relations. Both fields of interest are in some way related to my position in Public Relations for Taste Before You Waste: Communication perhaps in the most obvious way focusses on the media and its effect on society. It explores the differences in effect of different forms of media, which have experienced myself. Psychology, is of interest in the context of this Community project, as it helps to grasp how individuals or the public respond to certain kind of representations and what therefore could be a particularly appealing way to attract people's attention. TBYW does this for example by serving meals cooked from food that would otherwise have been wasted, in order to intrigue and prove a point to the general population. Within the field of International relations, I have found it particularly striking, how important the use of social media has become for the success of grassroots initiatives. Whether in political counter-movements or as, in this case, a movement against food waste, social media is crucial to reach as many people as possible in a short amount of time. In summary, I feel that I would greatly benefit from the opportunity to promote a cause that I am passionate about, while learning about the practical applications of things that I have been learning throughout my AUC curriculum so far.

Evaluation and reflection

Overall, I believe I have delivered good work and commitment to TBYW. Whenever guidelines and deadlines were set, my work was accurate and timely. Most of the time, however, my task were defined more freely in terms of desired outcomes. This freedom gave me the opportunity to be creative, as for example in the designing of the newsletter and the writing of regular posts on social media accounts. Further, I enjoyed and in my opinion succeeded in harmonious and constructive team work with the other volunteers.

From my supervisor I got mainly positive and always constructive feedback. I have greatly appreciated working closely with Dennis Baranic, Marjolein Tilmans, Hanneke van Tol, Heleen Prins and especially Luana Carretto. They are an active and motivating team to work with and Luana, as the founder, is an inspiring source of experience, commitment and determination.

Having had experience with working for TBYW occasionally even before the start of my Community Project, my expectations did not differ greatly from my daily activities. One lesson, however, that I did not expect to learn about myself during my community project, is that I truly enjoy writing in an engaging way and could imagine developing my skills as a writer further in whatever organisation or corporation I will be working for in the future. Apart from that, I have realised that I much more enjoy taking on a position of leadership, if the outcome is for the good of the community, instead of the financial benefit of a company. Yet another revelatory instance during this time was when we, the key-role volunteers, had to come together for a 'crisis meeting' and reorganise ourselves in order for the organisation to continue to be productive. For a few weeks there had been delays and slow progress, but as soon as we got together and addressed the issues together, our motivation skyrocketed and our improved communication lead to heightened productivity. Therefore this taught me that addressing problems directly is always the best way to maintain a relaxed atmosphere between co-workers and solve the problems at hand.

This Community Project is also valuable for my future plans, as I am extremely interested in local and social entrepreneurship as a possible future career choice. More specifically, working with TBYW has made small companies and grass roots organisations even more attractive to me. I enjoyed working in an environment, in which a small group of people are working together for the benefit of the community. In this context, morality is becoming an increasingly important aspect to consider in my future career choices. Investing time into a project is so much more rewarding when it serves a cause that you believe in.

References

Carretto, L. (2012). About. Retrieved on December 20, from www.tastebeforeyouwaste.com.

Baranic, D. (2014). Letter of Acceptance for Community Project in Public Relations.