

Final Report

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Antecedent to my involvement in Taste Before You Waste, my impression of their initiative in creating awareness about the underlining issues surrounded by food waste in the Netherlands was one of awe and respect. Living in a prosperous country, often it is forgotten that the basic privileges that we are bestowed with are taken for granted. My primary understanding of this organisation had been understandably founded on a superficial level, I understood the cause and I had heard about the projects they had pursued through peers of mine who had been volunteering and from the organisation's weekly updated posts on social media. Taste Before You Waste collects food from local supermarkets and farmers that can no longer be sold to consumers. The purpose of this was so that these specific products (that were still edible) could be redistributed to the public. I had primarily been aware of this because Amsterdam University College students would partake in their initiative by using the products that had been provided in the dorms; alike my fellow college peers this too was my first direct interaction with the organisation. Essentially, my interest began to grow because of the prevailing presence of Taste Before You Waste's initiatives within our local community and its close involvement with Amsterdam University College. Inspired by this, I spoke with the organisation's founder in the hope that I could also partake in this organisation and optimally interrelate it with my field of studies in Law.

My hopes had been fulfilled, after the interview it was discerned that my role would be to research and explore the ways in which Taste Before You Waste could solidify its stability as an organisation by becoming recognised as a legal entity. My legal knowledge prior to undertaking this role was not extensive, however, I was motivated in uncovering the ways in which one could circumvent the legal processes and Dutch regulations regarding the issues surrounding food distribution, catering and becoming a non-governmental organisation. Having a legal academic background propelled me into firstly exploring the EU regulations on food safety and security as most of these laws, to my understanding, has been transposed into the Dutch Constitution. By understanding the foundations of food safety laws felt initially promising, however, I quickly gathered that as I delved deeper into research the obstacles that had to be undertaken in establishing the organisation as a legal entity was inevitable. It was clear that my expectations underestimated the complexity of the law and this was further enhanced by the lack of information that had not been provided by academic articles and legal documents. Nonetheless, I continued to pursue alternative options in order to reach the goal in detecting how other organisations, similar to Taste Before You Waste,

had managed to or who were also dealing with the alike legal hurdles. This mainly consisted of exchanging emails and phone conversations with non-governmental organisations and restaurants, such as InStock and members of the Food Surplus Entrepreneur Network who dealt with food that could no longer be sold to local consumers. Positivity remained central to my outlook within this research process. After recognising and reaching the first hurdle in attempting to discern in which ways Taste Before You Waste could circumvent laws that could potentially limit their initiative to distribute and cater these unused and edible products to the local public. It was made apparent that after speaking with the mentioned organisations they too were undergoing the same process in trying to overcome the legal hurdles.

What seemed to be like an endless cycle of not knowing what to do, I began to neglect my focus in the specific laws regarding food safety, but instead I solely narrowed the scope of my research towards how Taste Before You Waste could become a legal entity. Attention turned towards alternative opportunities that could ensure it to become a stable organisation. The two following options were considered; first, to only become a legal entity, this meant that Taste Before You Waste would have to decide on becoming a non-profit and non-governmental organisation that would have to contribute to society by paying taxes, second, to become a student society/ association at the Amsterdam University College or Universiteit van Amsterdam. The founder was resistant in pursuing the latter option for the purpose that Taste Before Waste was desired to be a local organisation that any individual within Amsterdam, or for that matter, the Netherlands, could volunteer and participate in their projects and goals. The organisation was determined to remain geared towards not only involving university students.

As part of my research, my role was outlined in the following steps. Firstly, I had to uncover the requirements expected by the Chamber of Commerce in establishing Taste Before You Waste as a legal entity, this included discerning which particular taxes had to be paid. Secondly, I had to distinguish and suggest which legal forms were appropriately suitable in filling out. This entailed in writing legal documents that were needed to subscribe to the Chamber of Commerce. These steps were outlined concisely and facially seemed to be an effective direct approach in accomplishing the organisation's legal goals. However, there were limitations that both the founder and I were not expecting. As a student I have no legal standing nor do I have any experience in dealing with and constructing legal documents. Also I lack proficiency in the Dutch language which became a confounding factor in writing the desired legal document. This forced the founder to contact an acquainted legal advisor. This contact

was beneficial because this meant that they could provide a professional opinion on what actions Taste Before You Waste could take. Despite the drawbacks, I still felt like I had contributed because I did manage to allocate which taxes and which legal forms were necessary for the organisation to deal with. This may have been a small contribution however; there was an extensive amount of time and effort put into finding all of this information and this was reflective during the research process.

In conjunction with the above research, since the founder was also communicating with a legal advisor it made it easier for Taste Before You Waste to find its way towards reaching its legal goals. However, it took a lot of effort in convincing the advisor because they had primarily suggested that becoming a legal entity would not be suitable or appropriate for Taste Before You Waste. The reason surrounding this was because the legal process was complex and would restrict the organisation in continuing all of its projects. However, based on the fact that this year, since this organisation has exponentially become prominent within our local community of Oost Amsterdam, the shift in attitude of the advisor changed. The legal advisor, in addition to what my research had been uncovered for, suggested that the best option would be to register and subscribe to the Chamber of Commerce in Amsterdam in order to become a legally recognised entity. Currently, Taste Before You Waste is wholeheartedly embracing this option so that they can continue to stretch their goals without the concern that their involvement in food is in violation of Dutch Law.

Whilst I was focussing on my assigned research, I partook in weekly meetings so that I could be aware of the organisation's current pursuits, such as, catering for the TedxAUC event and Restaurant Day. For me, this was important as it meant that I could communicate with the other volunteers and the founder not only about my own research but to learn about the other roles involved in the organisation. This allowed for discussion in which we could all advise each other on what steps we could possibly take in order to achieve our individual goals. In addition to this it granted me the opportunity to partake in different activities, one of which I particularly enjoyed was Restaurant Day. This event occurs annually, it allows individuals or organisations to "pretend" to be a restaurant for a day with the aim to cater for the public. For Taste Before You Waste, this was an opportunity to additionally spread their motivation in educating the local public about their goals as an organisation to reduce food waste. Being involved in this project definitely brought things into perspective; working in a team was a pleasure particularly because my academic studies mainly focused on individual projects focused on theoretical law. The end result of this event was successful in the sense that

people from the local community were interested to participate and uncover information about the overall goals of Taste Before You Waste. The event was based in Flevopark and despite the weather not being in our favour, as it had been raining, the vision of the event came to life. This consisted of successfully assembling tents that had been decorated by the volunteers and the distribution of catered food was well received. All in all, what I had gathered, and what had fundamentally surprised me about myself was not only experiencing the sheer enjoyment of having been involved in planning an event, albeit stressful to some extent in that assembling the “restaurant” was time consuming, but also having witnessed the final accomplishments of our efforts.

Initially, I was nervous that my contributions to the organisation would be null. I had never participated with such a pioneering and down to earth community project; however, the founder had convinced me during my interview (before my involvement) that this sentiment was usually felt by most volunteers. This comforted me and allowed me to feel that I could participate at ease despite having barely any experience in this field of community work. Because of my involvement in this organisation, I felt that I had gained personal growth in taking on responsibilities in conjunction with studying at university. At times I had struggled with the issue of being consumed with stress because of the amounting work I had been confronted with during the semester. However, what I believe this experience has taught me was to become patient with myself and learn that by incorporating and organising my research on behalf of the organisation into my daily routine would be in favour of fulfilling a personal sense of equilibrium. What I am most grateful for was that during this experience, the founder was willingly able to support me and continued to inspire me to overcome my frustrations particularly in the initial stage of research as I had struggled to find substantial information that could be used beneficially for the cause of achieving legal status in Amsterdam.

Furthermore, the insights gained from this experience, in regards to the interrelation with my academic background in law, is that the relationship between studying law and actually trying to correspond with it as member of an organisation was completely different from what I primarily had expected. I felt that having studied the law theoretically it would have provided me with an advantage, and whilst, to an extent it did, in terms of understanding the foundational structure of a legal system, my unfamiliarity with Dutch national laws on food safety and registration regulations on becoming a legal entity became a limitation. This forced me to come to the terms that it was necessary for me to converse with individuals

(from similar organisations) who were in the same position as I was. This was in order to gain insight on different perspectives and the methods adopted in order to circumvent the legal obstacles in achieving their cause. Nevertheless, this experience had allowed me to venture out of my own comfort zone both academically and personally.

Another example that was also essential to my learning experience in volunteering with this organisation was that it had enabled me to become acquainted with a new culture, so to speak. I refer to this organisation as a culture in a positive way in that it embraces an alternative outlook of life in general. I managed to gain insight on how it was like to be involved in something that differed from my academic experience. Working for a goal for the benefit of an overall framework, which ultimately aligned with other member's roles, provided me with an innate sense of belonging. This sentiment propelled me, to what I believe to be, more outspoken during the discussions in our meetings. This suggests to me that one of the most fundamental skills that I have learned is to have confidence. This in effect has improved my overall attitude towards my studies in that it is easy to get overwhelmed from pressures that result from the academic environment. However, my involvement has allowed me to evade and relieve those pressures by also exerting my efforts in to something different that also aims to develop the consciousness of local communities. In regards Taste Before You Waste, these efforts were to encourage individuals to assess how certain types of food are treated different based on their aesthetic.

Overall, having the opportunity to become a member in this organisation has inspired me to continue participating in alternative opportunities after I finish my studies in July 2015 and move back to the United Kingdom. Reflecting upon my experience, I wish to continue the endeavour to be involved in organisations whose primary purposes will allow me to interact with local communities and simultaneously work towards challenging underlining issues, like reducing food waste, that are inherent within our social systems. This for me has given a self-fulfilling purpose that ultimately has contributed to a sense of personal growth. In retrospect, I would like to believe that my contributions to this organisation were to satisfy and relieve the founder from having to divert her attention from potential future projects by researching on how to become a legal entity. Whilst I have previously discussed that my expectations may have underestimated certain obstacles that were to be faced during my research, I am confident in stating that all in all they have been met on a general level. The personal expectations that have been fulfilled is that, firstly, I enjoyed my experience as a member in this organisation and participating in successful events that have extensively been planned.

Secondly, the contributions of my role have to an extent influenced the organisations' movement towards finally becoming a legal entity. This is expected to be achieved within the coming months of this summer.

I am grateful to the founder and to all of the volunteers who have embraced my involvement in this journey and that have allowed me to participate in activities that have sought to promulgate Taste Before You Waste's initiative to bring awareness about the issues of food waste in Amsterdam. Even though there were many obstacles that had to be overcome, which subsequently influenced my role in the organisation to change, I feel that my involvement in the organisation did contribute in achieving something very inspiring. Once the documents are sent and are approved by the Chamber of Commerce, Taste Before You Waste will have transformed into becoming a legally recognised non-governmental organisation. In my perspective, this is a paramount achievement.