

Final Report

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Community Project

Taste Before You Waste, Amsterdam, Netherlands

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Overview of Community Project

Taste Before You Waste is a non-profit organisation that aims at reducing food waste. They collect perfectly edible food from shops that no longer want it because it's not suitable for the shelves anymore (of course according to the supermarket standards). But since the biggest share of food waste happens at the consumer level, they also aim at educating the public, through workshops for adults and children, and by sparking some conversation during their weekly events, such as the Community Dinners, Food Cycle Markets and Free Food Markets.

My role inside the organisation was of social media coordinator. I was in charge of keeping the material on the website and Facebook updated, I wrote newsletters and emails to be sent on an ad.hoc basis to a list of subscribers the organisation has. Although under close supervision, I was given a certain level of independence and I felt that my suggestions were greatly valued. I worked with Luana and Sophia to make some improvements on the website, for example making the calendar and the blog section more visible, to have a greater level of accessibility and improve on potential engagement from the public.

More specifically my work consisted of publishing material on the website (I did not write the material myself, they have other volunteers doing that, but I was like the editor-in-chief). At the same time, I promoted the material posted on the website on Facebook. Here, I also created weekly events and invited people to participate. I tried to reach more and more people by joining different universities groups, on which I shared Taste Before You Waste's events. I managed the page on Facebook and answered messages whenever possible (sometimes there were questions about matters I wasn't informed about, in which case Luana would answer). For what concerns the website, I also re-formatted all the sections on it (it had been up for a few years but a cohesive look was lacking because different people had been working on it, so I standardised all the material according to guidelines Luana gave me). I had to be aware of all the activities that were happening inside the organisation and publicise them on our social medias. I participated in the weekly meeting where progress and potential new projects were shared and discussed.

It is clear how my work inside the organisation had immediate and concrete outcomes which allowed the organisation to run smoothly. Creating the events, sharing material from the website, was aimed at getting people interested so that they would take part in the weekly events and share their experience with others. Whenever we had special guests at the Community Dinners (a side program to the dinners where people would come to tell about interesting green projects like the Green Living Lab's initiatives or worm composting) I would research them and promote their participation in the event. The constant sharing of articles or news was also aimed at keeping people

interested and aware of green alternatives or solutions to every day problems (a section of the website is dedicated to how you can make food last longer or how to make the most of ripe fruit. For example, different vegetable should be conserved in different ways and not all of them are good for the refrigerator, so I published a how-to article about it). The ad-hoc emails were for different reasons: at the end of November, Taste Before You Waste was looking for new volunteers and people to take on a community project or internship with them in the spring, and I printed and distributed flyers to spread the news. I also recruited people from different universities in Amsterdam through social media.

All these and similar activities had an immediate outcome and provided a concrete service to the organisation. Without a social media coordinator the organisation would not work. They need people to know about what they are doing, and these days social media is the most immediate way to get the attention of a lot of new people, or to remind those who already love Taste Before You Waste about what the organisation is doing and when, and to keep them interested with new material and new green projects.

Skills, Insights and Knowledge Gained

I definitely learned a lot more about just how much we waste. I was aware of industrial pollution and waste, but I had never realised before that consumers are actually those who created the biggest problem. I was made a lot more aware of my daily choices when it comes to the food I buy and where I buy it. So in that I feel I have become a better human being and more respectful of the environment and its resources. But I also learned how to design a website and publish material that is both informative and appealing. I kept the mailing lists updated and sent material that was given to me by the coordinator. Although I was not writing the main blog pieces, I did have to do a little bit of creative writing when it came to introduce the material (for example, there were longer blog post for which I wrote a short and catchy entry to get people to read the main article). I had to proof read the material and make sure that everything was ok for publishing. I obviously had deadlines to respect and it was expected of me to be able to meet the targets they set in terms of how many people were responding and getting involved. So I learned some basic marketing skills as well as I was to “sell” Taste Before You Waste and its activities to the public.

I also worked with them on some of the extra activities and volunteered for a workshop with children, and whenever children are involved one has to bring the best out of themselves and be patient, interesting, and understand how to approach the group to get the best out of them and make them understand how their actions will have an impact on the world. Some might think that a workshop for kids is quite easy, but I feel the pressure of having to be a good example, and an exciting one also. Because the point is that they have to want to do better, and not feel it like a stupid imposition. The workshop was definitely an important part of my time and Taste Before You Waste as it was a big source of reflection.

The learning outcome that are linked to my experience at Taste Before You Waste are mostly related to my engagement at local and global levels, and my personal and social responsibility. I think that the main take away from my experience with Taste Before You Waste was working for a righteous cause, engaging in worthwhile discussions about resources and their misuses. I now feel like it is my social and civic responsibility to keep spreading the word about waste and the impact it has on the environment. And I have found myself more and more interested in the issues related with mismanaging of resources and pollution: I am now trying to avoid plastic as much as possible, I try to avoid food with multiple packagings (sometimes there is plastic and paper wrapping which is just crazy), I refuse to buy single vegetables wrapped in plastic foil as it is totally unnecessary,

and I am recycling more and more. Taste Before You Waste is a perfect example on how you can start talking world issues from you own littler world.

But there was also a component of interdisciplinary skills, I think that this experience gave me the possibility to reflect upon the complexity of environmental issues and how so many different player can influence the outcome. We have the social pressure and the desire to live an easy and careless life, but at the same time it is clear that environmental issues can no longer be ignored. However, our society cannot simply stop consuming as this would have catastrophic consequences so the point is that we have to consume better, in a smarted way. We should change the way we use our resources, turn to more sustainable alternatives. It is impossible to force our extremely consumeristic to stop consuming, but it is not impossible to teach people how to consume differently and more efficiently, while at the same time teaching the young population to do better than their fathers.

On a very practical level, the constant need to keep the public relations side of Taste Before You Waste update and running smoothly, alongside an intense semester of studying meant that I was forced to improve my organisation and efficiency.

I am already in my last year so this community project did not have a great deal of influence on my curriculum choices since I had already planned my upcoming courses. But I can see that my internship has taught me skills that will benefit me in my academic life: I will be doing my capstone evaluating an economic model, and this will happen through a website that uses various inputs to calculate which areas of the railway system need more attention. My newly gained familiarity with the backside of a website will definitely give me some advantage for this work. Also, I am interested in possibly doing a Masters in resource management, and this idea was definitely influenced by working for Taste Before You Waste.

I think that my community project complemented my AUC curriculum choices as it inspired me to be better, and gave me a cause to believe in. My academic curriculum is mostly made up by very theoretical subjects (economics and mathematics) and I had missed those social science subjects that deal with ideals, ethics, and social issues. (Economics can spark some similar discussions when it comes to what role it should play in our society and how or by how much it should be regulated, but those are discussions that come a little after the more basic study of models, which is what I have mostly been doing and is more common in a Batchelor). So I have been happy to be confronted with environmental problems and their link to society.

Evaluation and Reflection

I am happy with my work at Taste Before You Waste. I found a very serious and hardworking group of people, but the tasks I was assigned turned out to be less straightforward than I was expecting. There is a lot of work that goes into being always on top all the activities and knowing what is happening all the time. I thought I could just create a Facebook event, but I quickly realised that to make an interesting and catchy post I had to know all about what I was posting to be able to provide a quick and meaningful summary, so a lot of unexpected research and readings (which turned out to be very interesting though). I think Taste Before You Waste is content with my contribution: I did what was asked of me at the best of my abilities and tried to do a bit more whenever I could, so even if I might not have been a media savvy and marketed them as well as someone else could have done, I think I met their expectation.

I would not use the words “better” or “worse”. I had no bad moments were I wished I was not doing my community project with them, it was overall a very positive experience. I think that what made so interesting and fun as well, was the fact that it is a non-profit founded and ran by students. This made it a very relaxing environment for me because, although I had expectations to

meet, it felt like there was always the possibility to openly discuss possible problems. During midterms and finals for example, the team was very understanding and would not give me extra tasks to complete in addition to the fundamental up-keeping ones. So the working environment was definitely a pleasant surprise. The people I interacted with were motivated and hardworking, but at the same time flexible and open to discussion.

I think that Luana and Sophia do a great job in guiding the new people that start working at Taste Before You Waste. Since they were AUC students as well, they know that the school is serious about the amount of hours the community project should take, so they use an app called Toggle which keeps track of how much time you work on a project, so that they know when they can give you more things to do or whether you are doing your weekly hours. They are also always ready to try and do better: they started to make a very detailed guide of how all the tasks should be completed, it helps so all the new people that come and work for them can be productive right away. Yet, since the guidelines were mostly made by Sophia and Luana, sometimes I felt like things were not specified because obvious to them, but not obvious to me. For example the kind and size of the font used in the official communication, the code of official colour, and similar small things.

Another realisation I had, which I was not expecting, is that the fact that they rely mostly on volunteers and that there is a quick turnover of people, forces them to be very focused also on small details they ideally shouldn't have to worry about (like the ones I have mentioned above). I feel like this prevents them from growing as quickly as they could. They always have to get new people who work with them for six months and then change. So they were very good at following me and understood the requirements of my community project perfectly, but then I also felt like they were maybe too good at creating internships and community projects for their own good.

A lesson I learned outside the learning outcomes was, quite simply, marketing. And in that, how to look at different groups of people and trying to understand what they wanted to get out of a very short interaction on Facebook. Either you catch their attention right away or you won't ever get it, so it is important to have a strong first impression. It may sound trivial, but the use of pictures and wording have a tremendous impact. A post without a picture would have significantly lower attention (when managing a page, it is possible to have access to a few statistics about how many people have seen the post, clicked on it, liked it, shared it and so on). I also learned that social media are "cruel". It was hard to produce material that would interest people because they do not want to read about what is bad, or what they are doing wrong. Millions of "likes" go to silly videos and not to well written articles about important social issues. Change the platform one might think. But the point is there, there is no real viable platform that potentially reaches a similar number of people so Taste Before You Waste is forced to be on Facebook. But Facebook is not where it should be, and neither is Twitter, or Instagram or Snapchat and so on.

Although Taste Before You Waste is a small charity with a large amount of young people, it has a professional atmosphere and it gave me a first taste of a true work environment. I honestly do not really know how it will influence my future career goals, but I think it definitely contributed in my desire to work for something worthwhile. I do not just want to be successful, I want to be successful doing something that will benefit others rather than just myself. I think it made me more of an idealist.