

ISCES 2012

International Student Conference on Environment and Sustainability



Shanghai, China

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Tongji University / UNEP

Shanghai

United Nations Environment Programme



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ISCES is...

The International Student Conference on Environment and Sustainability (ISCES) is an annual event co-organised by Tongji University and UNEP in Shanghai. It was held first time in 2011, followed by a further conference in 2012, sustaining the event on an annual base.

During the event nearly 400 undergraduate, graduate and PhD-students from more than 35 countries come together to experience Shanghai's local green economy, visit local eco-industry, attend keynote speeches, discuss and last but not least meet young enthusiastic colleagues from all over the world and various educational background.

A poster competition is framing the four-day-event. It consists of poster displays with posters designed by each participant and a poster voting throughout the conference. This poster competition aims to provide a platform for sharing personal visions and insights from studies or research of each among the large number of participants.

In addition the 2012 issue of ISCES played the role of a preliminary event for Rio +20 which took place shortly after the ISCES 2012 Shanghai.

The Global Youth Tongji Declaration released at the closing ceremony of the conference shall formally promote the intentions of the conference and its participants. This year's declaration was disseminated in Rio +20 together with a booklet of ISCES 2012 posters.

The four days programme of the conference consists of various keynote speeches, field trips, short workshops and social activities giving chance to sozialize, share ideas and insights with colleagues and extend personal networks.



poster display



Shanghai

The four days ISCES 2012...

The first day was reserved for ceremonial activities such as the “icebreaking” gathering, poster display and the opening event which united three conferences in one event: the student conference ISCES, GUPES (Global University Partnership on Environment and Sustainability) and Asia Pacific Leadership program on Environment for Sustainable Development, three conferences that took place simultaneously at Tongji University.

Delegates from all the three conferences held speeches, pointing out the importance of sustainability and foresighted planning. Regrettably, visions and clues what this would/should mean in practice were missing a bit among the numerous greetings and ceremonial welcomes.

However, after the ceremonial start was survived well, the welcome dinner marked a great highlight of the first day. Besides the opportunity of tasting plenty of delicious Chinese dishes from a rich buffet it offered a great chance to meet other participants, to chat and dive into interesting discussions in a laid-back atmosphere!



ISCES 2012 opening ceremony

Days two and three were devoted to field trips. For these two days of field trips we split up into different thematic groups, which had to be subscribed preliminary. The ISCES 2012 covered six panel topics:

- Urban and Rural Integrated Development
- Future Cities Green Multi-Model Mobility
- Green Economy and Design Driven Innovation
- Green Economy and Youth Employment Opportunity
- Water and Ecosystems

Within the thematic groups the field trip covered site visits in Shanghai and Chongming Island, where we stayed for a night.

The Chongming Island is about 40km northern of Shanghai and covers approx. 2/3 the size of Kanton Zurich. An existing master plan covers large scale urban development of residential and business facilities. The Island currently has a population of about 200'000 and is characterized rural. Within a few years it will provide home for more than 900'000 residents. The Chongming Island masterplan promotes sustainable development, including several nature reservation projects.

I was part of the thematic panel “Urban and Rural Integrated Development”. Our group visited different development projects both in rural and urban context. On the urban side we visited the Bund Development, consisting of different interventions that deal with restoration of historic, British imperial urban fabric along the river-side. Interestingly, restoration seems to be just a young custom in Shanghai. It strongly follows the fashion of western transformation analog e.g. London Bricklane or Zurich West - just forced: By implementing directly chic boutiques into former warehouses, the natural process of gentrification is skipped.

On the rural side we visited the Chongming Planning Exhibition Hall (a pompous exhibition especially to display multimedia shows about the masterplan). Furthermore we visited different built parts of the masterplan, a water treatment plant and a green building.

Interesting about the fieldtrips was to experience China’s incredibly strong contrasts between...

...the high level of academic knowledge and technology vs. underdeveloped implementation...

...strictly state-directed economy in rural developments vs. wealth-driven developments in cities...

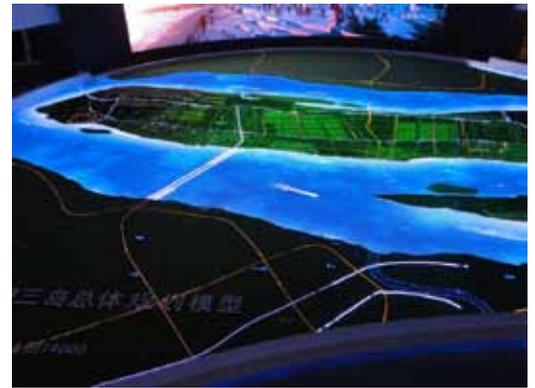
...promotion of “green” vs. implementation of sustainable technology... etc.

A key example in that respect was the visit to a “green building”, supposed to be the local pride of a green building technology showcase. In any case a piece of well stage-managed promotion for green architecture.

However, slightly disappointing to many of us participants turned out to be the effective energy balance. The building is run by 50% renewable energy only (the other 50% by “traditional” energy...). Given that, it seemed not surprising, but definitely questionable that photovoltaic is the major feature of such a building, since Chongming Island / Shanghai have a very humid climate with lots of fog and very little sunny days. In that context visual presence of photovoltaic is still more important than output efficiency (therefore the solar pannels cantilever 1.5m from the roof edge: in order to be noticed from the street).

The fourth day started with workshops within each thematic panel to wrap up insights from the field trips and to prepare a short presentation about. The afternoon, back to Tongji University, was devoted to the closing ceremony which involved i.a. presentations of each team about their field trips and conclusions as well as the awarding ceremony of the best posters.

A great farewell dinner completed the four day conference, giving a last chance to meet up with all the participants of the ISCES 2012.



Chongming Planning Exhibition Model



farewell dinner

Reflections on ISCES 2012...

The ISCES is a great opportunity to experience Shanghai's local green economy, which probably can be seen as trendsetting for China, since Shanghai currently is one of its most progressive cities however many of China's urban areas are about to boom a lot. To "experience Shanghai's green economy" to me meant to learn understanding a green economy's potentials and its current failures in a context so much different from Switzerland/Europe. The context was the most key experience. It meant to be confronted with simultaneousness of extremes in absolutism and liberalism, to be confronted with scales, speeds and contrasts beyond anything known from European context. Therefore this conference is a great opportunity to get out of the well-developed Swiss context of "Green Economy" which is determined by both high awareness and state of the art technology. The field trips, even though in just a short period, provide a broad insight in Shanghai's local sustainability development. The chance to meet and talk to local researchers, leaders of the projects and sharing perception with local students complements the site visits well.

These fieldtrips conducted the most interesting part of the conference. Some keynote speeches and input lectures framed the conference. Nevertheless most of them were widely focused on promotion and crisp appearance, though lacking in concrete clues or deeper explanation of a topic. The conference may not meet expectations to learn a lot about specialist knowledge about Sustainability in lectures and workshops. The duration of four days only is quite tight for workshops beside the field trips. In addition, the conference unites participants from various geographic and professional backgrounds, bringing in different previous knowledge. Nevertheless, even more it is interesting to meet up with enthusiastic people from all over the world, having different academic background to share ideas and views!

Actually, in that part I see a great benefit from the conference: The programme of field trips and ceremonies was well arranged to provide enough space to meet and discuss among participants in informal atmosphere (e.g. during welcome dinner, farewell dinner or when travelling in the bus for site visits. This made the conference also happen in smaller groups in addition to the formal events in the large collective. Altogether ISCES 2012 was a great experience meeting enthusiastic and competent young academics in the interesting context of booming Asia!

