

ISCES 2012

International Student Conference on Environment and Sustainability

Shanghai – Tongji University

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Description

The ISCES is a student conference organized jointly by UNEP and Tongji University. This year around 200 students from all over the world took part to the event. The majority of participants were already studying in China, but a relatively large number (including Pascal and I) also came from abroad for this occasion. The Conference is about bringing together young students from different disciplines, and different cultures to share their views about sustainability, and to have some insights about this issue from a chinese perspective. More particularly, this year's focus topics were :

- Water and ecosystems
- Future cities, green multi-modal mobility
- Green economy and youth employment
- Green economy and design driven innovation
- Urban and Rural integrated development

Participants chose their topic of interest during registration and were then divided into 5 groups, with respect to the 5 topics.

Accommodation and reception in Tongji

Participants from outside stay at international students apartment located on Tongji University Campus and can be accommodated there longer if they want to extend their stay after the conference. Participants receive a booklet containing all the indications how to get there. Reception is done by local students. Meals can be taken at the canteen (free).

Accommodation in and transportation to Chongming island

Day 2,3 and 4 were held at Chongming island. Transportation was done by cars and lasts a few hours. Participants from all groups were accommodated in a hotel in Chongming island, meals were also taken there in the morning and evening.

Content

- Day 1 :

During the first day, participants got to know each other, icebreaking activities and campus visit were on the program in the morning. A movie of last year's conference was showed, and introduction about this year's conference was given.

In the afternoon, a formal opening and welcoming statements were made by the Chairman of Environment and Resource Protection Committee of National People's Congress of China, the President of Tongji University, Deputy Director of UNEP DEPI.

Then inspiring keynote speeches were given by

Dr. Achim Steiner(video message), Under-secretary-General of UN,Executive Director of UNEP

Dr. Bindu N. Lohani, Vice president of Asia Development Bank

Dr. Klaus Toepfer, Former Under Secretary General of UN, Former Executive Director of UNEP

Prof. PEI Gang, President of Tongji University

The speeches were followed by a panel discussion from key representatives from the Global Universities Partnership on Environment and Sustainability (GUPES). The aim of this partnership is to promote the integration of environment and sustainability concerns into teaching, research, community engagement, the management of universities including greening of university infrastructure/facilities/operations, as well as to enhance student engagement and participation in sustainability activities both within and beyond universities.

- Day 2 :

Participants checked out from their apartment in the morning and were asked to join their respective groups. I was placed in the group : Urban and rural integrated development. We had two lectures. The first one was about Agriculture, Historical Landscape and Local Development: Patterns and Case-Studies from the Mediterranean Region from Stefano Piastra (Fudan University, Institute of Historical Geography, Shanghai / University of Bologna) and the second one about planning and Sustainable Development of Chongming Island from Dr. DAI Xiaohui, Tongji University.

We then had a presentation of the program for our groups for the following days and an introduction for the group work.

In the afternoon, we went to a field trip. We visited parts of the english colonial area of Shanghai where we visited some old renovated buildings used now as shops, museum, bars,... We went then to Chongming island and visited the Museum which explained us the master plan to transform the island into a green island.

- Day 3 :

We had more visits on Chongming island. We visited some eco-buildings where new innovative technologies were implemented and a newly urbanized area in which farmers were relocated. We had the opportunity to talk to the farmers and to the local population to know their opinion about the whole projects. We then visited a constructed wetland, where the waste water from a treatment plant was used to grow plants and could be treated in the process.

In the evening we started preparing a presentation about our group work and field trip. We prepared a presentation about the Master plan for the transformation of Chongming island. It included a SWOT analysis about the project and some recommendations and suggestions from our part to implement the project in a sustainable way and to take into account social aspects in the implementation.

- Day 4 :

We checked out from the hotel and went back to Tongji university. In the afternoon, each group presented their group work to the other groups. The presentations were followed by a closing ceremony where the 10 best posters that each participant made and submitted together with the application file were awarded. We then had a closing dinner and party.

Learning outcomes and personal feedback

The most enriching outcome that I could take from this conference, was to have some insights about sustainable development from a chinese perspective. It was really interesting to discuss with all these people from all these different countries about these issues. I was especially enthusiastic to talk with chinese students. It was really interesting to know their point of view and to confront our opinions about environmental and political issues, especially about the chinese government and its environmental policy. We debated a lot about the different perceptions that we have in Switzerland and there in China and it really enabled me to reconsider the situation by seeing the problem from a different angle. It helped me to better understand the position and the role of China with respect to environment, society and economy.

The most interesting thing was to interact and share perspectives with students from such different origins, cultures and backgrounds. During these 4 very intense days, I was struck to see how such strong connections could be built so fast. All the periods in between the different events (coffee break, lunch, long evenings, bus journeys,...) were to me the most fruitful.