

Green City in Africa

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home organisation: Inex-sda (Association for Voluntary Activities)

host organisation: NABU (Nature And Biodiversity Conservation Union)

internship: Bahir Dar, Ethiopia 15th July-7th October 2013

Summary

The internship took place on the lakeshore of the biggest ethopian lake Tana. You can find there hippos, alligators and many our birds who are coming to overwinter. The nature of the lake is very important on the global level and in danger at the same time. The german organisation NABU tries to protect it, the aim is to establish the UNESCO biosphere reserve here. The participants stayed in the biggest city on the lakeshore which will become part of the reserve. They focused their work on the city and tried to find the sustainable ideas which could make the city more “green” and friendly for the nature. There was a close cooperation with local partner, who helped to get all informations and guided them through the process. The job was about meeting with different stakeholders (urban planners, waste managers, social workers, university, etc) which are existng in the city and provided data and became cooperators. The result of the project was a “green city concept” - a teoretical document with practical advises, which was presented and discussed with different experts. The participants got the trust and maximal support from the host organisation and had freedom in the creativity and personal approach.

Projekt se konal na pobřeží největšího etiopského jezera Tana. Najdete v něm hrochy, krokodýly a řadu našich ptáků, kteří sem přilétají přezimovat. Příroda jezera je tak velmi důležitá na globální úrovni a zároveň velmi ohrožena vlivem lidské činnosti. Německá organizace NABU se snaží jezero chránit a vytvořit zde přírodní rezervaci UNESCO. Účastníci pobývali v největším městě na břehu jezera, v Bahir Daru, které se stane součástí rezervace, a zaměřili se na toto město. Snažili se najít nápady pro jeho udržitelné a “zelené” fungování. Místní partner byl dobrovolníkům nápomocen úzkou spoluprací, poskytováním informacím a vedením v průběhu projektu. Práce byla o mnoha setkáních s různými odborníky (urbanisté, úředníci, sociální pracovníci, profesori, atd.), kteří ve městě

působí a stali se součástí projektu. Výsledkem byl "koncept zeleného města" - teoretický dokument s praktickými radami, který byl prezentován a diskutován s městem a odborníky. Celkově projekt nabídl dobrovolníkům nezávislou práci s důvěrou a maximální podporou hostující organizace, se svobodou v tvořivosti a přístupu.

Introduction

The title of the internship was „Green city concept for Bahir Dar“. This topic motivated me to apply for the project as my profession is architect and I prefer „nature principles“. Finally I successfully went through the selection procedure, participated in two GLEN seminars and felt ready to go. I stayed in Ethiopia for three months with my german and french colleagues. The host organisation NABU is a german non-governmental organisation which acts in many countries all over the world. The main interest is the nature protection. Cooperation with NABU and its local officers – our colleagues was one of the most beneficial experience I got with GLEN.

Main Part

Ethiopia is the east-african country with a deep history and rich culture. Christianity came to here in the 1.century after Christ from the Arab peninsula. You can visit many old churches and find the Tabernacle with Ten Commandments in one of them. The dominant religions are orthodox Christianity and Islam. The believers follow the traditional biblical habits as fasting every wednesday and friday which is the same for Orthodox, Muslims and Jews. Because of following the old calendar, ethiopians count the date and time in a different way. During the project we celebrated the New year on Septemebr 11th and entered the year 2006 although my calender shows 2013. The time counting is quite logical as the day starts at 6am our time, simply when you get up.

Called „the roof of Africa“ the country is situated on the high plateau with the average elevation 1500-3000m above sea level. The positive effect is the climate is not as hot as you may imagine. Sometimes I felt more cold than hot, especially in the raining season. The nature is beautiful in the national parks, you can see the beautiful birds and mammals as the vegeterian baboon monkey in the mountains. Unfortunately outside the reservations the landscape looks a bit poor and sad. The first mark you will notice is the lack of trees. If there was 40% of forests covering the land 100 years ago, it is only 1-5% nowadays. This

huge deforestation highly affects the ecological stability and together with the population boom growth becomes a threat for the country.

Ethiopia is officially Federal Democratic Republic although many ethiopians see their democracy quite critically and will smile ironically while talking about it . It is one of the two african countries which has never been really colonized and the people are proud of their uninterrupted development and culture history. The country has been called very safe for tourists although is recommended to be careful as always by travelling. The poverty is obvious and you can expect people asking you for the money on the street. The ethiopians are kind and hearty people in general and love communication. African and arabic cuts of the jib make the slim ethiopian woman very beautiful.

Our project was situated in Bahir Dar, the west-north city on the waterside of the Lake Tana. The lake is the source of Blue Nile river, it's a habitat for many mammals, birds and plants and the biggest lake in north-east Africa. The strategic position makes the lake vulnerable. Intensiv agriculture, wetland's destroying and erosion highly affects the waterbody and the nature of the lake. Thats why the german organisation decided to protect the lake and establish the UNESCO biosphere reserve.

The local NABU office in Bahir Dar welcomed us warmly and offered us the guesthouse next to the office to stay there. We visited first the NABU headquarter in Berlin before leaving to Ethiopia and got the main informations about the project. There were five local colleagues in Bahir Dar, forester, natural resource officer, tourist expert, accountant and driver. Later the project coordinator from Berlin came. All the colleagues were always open to help us. At the beginning we discussed our expectations and aims of the project, they provided us some data, arranged the first meetings and showed us the city and the lake.

The „green city concept“ was the title of our 3-months internship. The main goal was to find some sustainable ideas for the Bahir Dar city, which will become part of the UNESCO reserve, so we didn't focus on the lake only. The task was submitted in an open way, so we got the freedom to decide which direction we want to go. First of all we needed to get informations about the city and know which initiatives exists already. We focused on political plans, waste management, nature protection, social initiatives, urban development, local economy, urban agriculture, energy resources, existing projects and education. We learned every day something new from this multidisciplinary task. My

german GLEN-partner was student of energy engineering and the french one student of agriculture, so we composed a diverse team with different knowledges, experiences and approaches. After one and half month of meetings and data collection we closed the first part of the project. The next task was finding the concrete steps what to improve in the city. Each of us focused on some topics according to our backgrounds. We finalised the work with writting the document and presenting it to all the people we met.

The cooperation with the host organisation was fruitful on the professional and human level. We got the maximal support from them. The only difficulty was at the beginning because of the very open and non concrete submission. We felt that we don't have enough informations and we can not start properly. The process of getting all the data was slow. One of the reason were our expectations and experiences as we're used to come to the bureau and get everything we want. The situation here was different, the first meeting looked more as a friendly talking and also data holding system was less sophisticated. We lost some motivation with the slow start. Later we got understand the local situation more and we took the „freedom“ as a space for creativity.

The cooperation in our GLEN partner team looks analogical. It took us around one month to find our own roles in the team, to understand our ability, to agree on the project process and outputs. We dealt with the culture shock in different personal ways. We always solved the challenges with discussion and mutual understanding. Although I found our personalities different and distant at the beginning, after some weeks we learned how to work together effectively and live under one roof in a very friendly atmosphere. So I felt very pleasantly in our team and enjoyed the staying together. The free time and weekends we spent usually together, made some trips or met our friends.

The output of the project was a 100-pages document we wrote and presented. During the project we thought a lot about what we can really bring and improve in the city. Sometimes we doubted of our impact. We had many ideas and ambitions but little was possible to manage in three months. Making the city more sustainable is a longterm process for few decades. We felt weak we can not see the effect soon. The local society will go through long process to achieve the change which will come step by step. We understood the local context, our abilities and accepted we did maximum we could. We can not change the world immediatly as much as we want but we could start the change with some less visible acts. We discussed with many local people and exchanged experiences and

knowledges, they learned from us, we learned from them. We accepted we are not able to change the physical conditions of the city but we knew we can affect the people's mind . We understood it would be wrong to consider our way of thinking to the only right option and we tried to understand the local limits as well as advantages.

Conclusion & perspective

I find the whole GLEN project successful and beneficial for myself. I learned a lot already on the GLEN seminars with the nontraditional way of education and thinking cultivation. The stay abroad naturally brought some challenges and dealing with them is exactly the point of learning process. Fortunately there were no big problems, we stayed healthy and were lucky with the host organisation. One of the challenge is the team cooperation - working and living together. Being openminded, tolerant, patient and know own potency is the right way how to deal with the colleagues. The job was a big school of communication. It wasn't only about improving english language, it was about how to communicate with highly placed people, politics, how to ask and get informations, how to cooperate. It cultivates the language and teaches assertive behaviour. For all of us it was the first travel in „black Africa“. The own experience is the only way how the see the things with the context more objectively than the media show us. Opening eyes is the natural side of travelling.

After coming home I felt very strong. Seeing own skills and potentials strenghten my personality. I felt much more confident to make the Global Education action than before. I managed two kinds of actions. First were some presentations in different cities in Czech Republic for public and students. The second one was the book's gathering for the ethiopian university. I asked the people to donate the educational books in english language. The promotion runs on social network successfully. After collecting 40kg of books the transport was arranged, I was lucky with the sponsor who made it for free. Two months after coming home I returned back to Ethiopia. I started cooperation with the Bahir Dar's University which was my personal initiative. I received the books and handed them to the University, the Architecture Department. The staff was very happy for this present which will enlarge the local library and bring more informations to the students.

I'm happy I could make this experience and I feel a big gratitude. I can definitely recommend this kind of experience to everyone.