

A Reflection of the Perspective on Global Issues and Sustainability Workshop

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In May 2018, I had the good fortune and opportunity to travel to the Otzenhausen, Germany to attend the Perspective on Global Issues and Sustainability Workshop at the European Academy (EAO). This trip provided me an opportunity to learn more about sustainability and how this is applicable to the field of human services and social work. The purpose of this summary to discuss some of the many things that our group was exposed to and how these elements will guide my future teaching and research.

Initially, when I learned of the opportunity to apply for this conference, my thought was that sustainability sounds interesting, but has no direct impact on my field of study. I thought that I would apply with the intention of meeting some faculty members in the larger KSU community. As a new faculty member, I found it challenging to get out and meet people and I thought this would be helpful with the secondary gain or learning more on a needed topic. Having previously served in the Navy, I was familiar with notion of sustainability having seen some approaches to recycling and resource acquisition twenty years ago, but I was certainly not up to date on any recent advances.

The Academy itself was a warm and welcoming environment. It is nestled within the small and picturesque town of Otzenhausen, Germany about an hour and a half from the international airport. The leaders of the facility were nice, and one could tell that they had a real passion for topic of sustainability and the many opportunities that exist internationally. Some of the topics that were discussed included: the European political structure, energy and climate policy within the European Union and Germany, water, the global population growth, and the future of food supply.

Of the topics covered, one of the most interesting was the topic of the European Political Structure. It was interesting to hear about the formation of the European Union, especially given the vote earlier in the year indicating that Britain planned to leave the union. This was also interesting because one could see how sustainability issues were being handled in comparison to what the United States was doing. Comparatively we appear to do much less, and our actions are not as intentional. We have not sought out alternative fuels and utilizing natural resources such as the sun, wind, and hydro power to the same extent.

Another aspect of the trip that I found very interesting was the various trips that we took. Of these, I found the solar park to be quite interesting, seeing how in addition to wind power that solar harvesting was used widely. It was great to learn about this and then as we travelled around the region, we could see where the practices were implemented. Another remarkable aspect was our travel day to the farm. The farmer that spoke shared a great history of the family farm and how his children did not want to be responsible for it after his retirement. As a result, he sold it to a couple that was interested in the concept of community farming. This was something that had not heard about but have investigated more since returning. The idea behind it, as noted by the farmer was that many types of food are grown on the various fields of the farm and then on a weekly basis individuals from the community; who have a paid share come and pick up their allotment of the various fruit and vegetables. Interestingly, the storage area for these items is a bunker from World War II, which remains at a relatively constant temperature. In addition to the fruits and vegetables, a family may also purchase a meat plan that includes a certain amount of beef, chicken and eggs. The farm had previously provided pork, as well, but were moving away from that venture.

In addition to the course work at the academy, our group was afforded the opportunity to travel to the different destinations, such as the farm, solar and wind farms, and the hydro facility. Some of the geographical areas according to my recollection included: Morbach, Zweibrucken, Longuich, and Luxemburg. We also spent a day and evening in Cologne.

The question of how this trip has influenced me is not an easy one to answer. One connection that I made regarding my professional training is that there is a lot of anxiety and even depression that accompanies how people think of the depletion of our natural resources. Additionally, people in Germany internalize this loss at a rate that seems higher than some. They seemed to be more accountable. Because of this inequality, the valuing of sustainability needs to be brought to prominence within my field and the community where I reside.

From a teaching perspective, I have been making an intentional note of issues related to sustainability and integrating these into our discussions. As an example, in my crisis class we discuss the impact of needing clean water and how some resources are scarce. Additionally, we have spoken of how traumatized some people feel because of depleted resources and changes to the environmental landscape. In addition to these teaching additions, I have begun working on a paper that I hope to submit to a journal for the National Organization of Human Services. This article would examine the role of sustainability within the field and how stress and anxiety are a major component and experienced more by some than others.

In conclusion, the trip to Germany had both a personal and professional impact. I have spent many hours over the past three months thinking about the things that I have learned and how these might have contrasted with previous thoughts. Further, I have begun setting the stage through my courses to relay some of the important information gained. I am appreciative of the opportunity that I was afforded.