

Sustainability Workshop at the EAO Summary  
by  
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Last May, I was selected to attend the Faculty Professional Development Program of KSU at the European Academy of Otzenhausen, Germany. Approximately 22 other faculty members from across a wide variety of disciplines were also selected. We all had differing opinions and life experiences, but to my surprise, we had a very amenable and cohesive group of eager “students.”

We arrived in Frankfurt and were met by Dr. Antje Schönwald, who is the department head for the Sustainable Development Program for the EAO. She gave us an overview of the program and introduced our first speaker, Dr. Klaus-Peter Beck, Chairman of the Foundation ASKO-EUROPA Stiftung. Along with Klaus Wiegandt, author of ***A Sustainable Future***, we discussed not only sustainability and its challenges but also the direction we should be turning our attention as a society. These men were extremely passionate and compelling in the sharing of their research. I knew I was in for an eye-opening experience from this first discussion.

On Saturday, Dr. Sebastian Zeitzmann was our speaker. He gave an incredible lecture on the European Union, a group of 28 countries that acts as one unit in the world economy with an official currency, the euro. This information was extremely interesting to me. I really did not know much about the EU. Dr. Zeitzmann told us about the system of laws that apply to the member states and about EU policies which affect trade, agriculture and development.

Following the EU lecture, Alexander Metternich, led us on a “field-trip” to the Celtic Circular Wall which was a very picturesque and interesting trek. The Celtic wall is on top of a hill near Otzenhausen, Saarland. Sculptures inspired by Celtic art connect the art center of the EAO with the historic site. The circular rampart was a strong deterrent, in times of war. We learned that there may have been a permanent settlement there.

On Sunday, after a delicious breakfast, we met Christian Synwolft, who presented a workshop on “Energy and Climate Policy in the EU and Germany.” We discussed the many influences that affect global climate change and the topic of deforestation. All of these issues are complex and interrelated and must be looked at in context with other major problems facing mankind. We discussed the fact that climate change is inseparable from population growth, energy usage and conservation. After lunch, we toured Energielandschaft Morbach, a solar energy landscape and wind farm. I learned about how wind turbines work and about environmentally friendly projects such as these.

After dinner, we would all meet for some social time downstairs in the bowling alley. We had so much fun learning how to play “Ninepin” a game much like bowling but with a smaller ball without finger holes. I was not very good at it, but I had a blast being with my KSU colleagues learning a new game.

Dr. Jennifer Gerend, from the University of Trier, came to the EAO on Monday for a discussion on water policies in the US and in Europe. She stressed that our oceans are being threatened by climate change that will have significant consequences for marine life and its ecosystem. She discussed small initiatives in which we all can take part, such as helping to eliminate the use of plastic straws and plastic items from our shorelines and beaches. I was surprised to learn that many plastic trash items degrade into dangerous particles that are mistaken for food and eaten by ocean organisms.

One of the most fun and interesting items on our itinerary happened on Tuesday, May 15. We enjoyed a lecture on Global Population Growth and the Future of Food Supply by Professor Dr. Susanne Hartard. Our fieldtrip that day included a visit to an organic farm in Zweibrücken. We had a guided tour followed by a break with good coffee, and Marillen and Nußkuchen baked by the farmer's wife. The farm has a very beautiful landscape with a pond and an old weeping willow tree right beside. We saw free-range chickens, organic vegetables and an herb garden.

That night we traveled to Longuich, along the Mosel River and had a wine tasting and dinner at Winery Schlöder. What a treat! We tasted 7-10 wines and had the owner of the vineyard discussing the wines and the history of the vineyard. It was a lovely evening. We also tasted a kind of flatbread with cheese and ham that is traditionally served between each wine course.

Our next day included a visit to Vianden, Luxemburg where we saw the inner workings of a Pump Storage Station. We watched a film on the making of this incredible feat of engineering. Seeing the massive computers that regulate this station was impressive. After this stop, we continued to Köln and had a spectacular guided tour by an excellent tour guide who gave so many personal illustrations about World War II. She explained about the refurbishing of the cathedral and about the culture there in Cologne. That night we had a proper German stammtisch of Wurst, Semmel and Senf – very delicious.

One of the last field trips was to Bonn where we met with members of Germanwatch. This group describes themselves as an “independent development and environmental organization which lobbies for sustainable global development.” Germanwatch survives on donations and fees from the members of the group as well as from foundations with like-minded goals. It was very inspiring to see these idealistic young people mobilizing to help the environment and marginalized people groups.

I feel so grateful to KSU and the administration for making this trip available to me and to others like me. I learned so much on a topic that is very important and will affect countless generations. Personally, my world has gotten smaller from this trip. I am motivated to inspire my students to recycle, conserve energy, walk more often, consider others on this planet, and do even small things that will make a difference. I was honored to be in that particular group of colleagues who were interested in learning about sustainability and a desire to find ways to effect change for the benefit of our children and grandchildren.

