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Sustainable Urbanism – China

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Sustaining Survival in China

* Essentials to bring
  + Passport, ISIC card, wallet(with a small amount of money US money), your phone if you are using it to stay in touch with loved ones.
  + Comfortable clothes that apply to the weather, at least two pairs of shoes that you can tear through,
  + Contact cards of chaperones, contact cards of someone that you can rely on in China.
  + Something to record the trip. Camera, recorder, journal, etc. My camera was the most essential thing I brought on the trip.
* Contacting Family
  + I took my smartphone and Ipad. I never had any issues connecting to wi-fi and there was plenty of time for the students to connect. Other than contacting family, stay off your electronics!
* Getting cash
  + Get a debit card or at least contact your bank to make sure you can withdraw money overseas from whatever card you use.
  + Bring some US money with you for just in case
  + I took out smaller amounts of cash (600 Yuan’s) proportionally to everyone else and felt secure with this amount of cash on me.

It finally hit me that we had landed in China, as we were walking through Beijing’s incredible airport. It was enormous, colossal and it felt like all of Beijing’s 20.18 million citizens were ogling over the 23 Americans stumbling through the airport. We finally left the airport, hopped on a shuttle and that’s when the massive expanse of the city set in. Beijing is huge. You look around at all the people, cars, bikes of every kind, carts, the infrastructure already built and currently being worked on. You see the 10 cranes working on the 10 different apartment buildings where entire neighborhoods are being created over night. From the beginning of the trip to the end of the trip the things I just listed were what I focused on; people, transportation, infrastructure and air quality. What I learned sustainability wise on topic varied widely and I will try to summarize what I learned for all four.

From the get go I felt like the average person in Beijing was rather sustainable and I attribute most of this to cultural reasons. For most people a bike, scooter or the transit system is their means of transportation. Most people live in small living quarters. Compared to the US, the energy per square foot used is much lower than that of the US. The general population lives in cities now which is a much more sustainable practice. There are no individual water heaters; rather they use solar energy to heat their water. In some places you can only use hot water at certain times. These are the sustainable practices that jumped out at me after two weeks. Now there are many different reasons, culturally, and governmentally mandated, that help push these sustainable practices along.

In both Beijing and Jinan there were similar public transportation systems. Both cities systems relied heavily on bus. Beijing had a very good subway system but it was only for a small portion of the city. Both cities had terminals were the bullet and connector/sleeper trains could come through. Both cities general public relied heavily on bikes, electric and pedal, and an assortment of scooters. The car population is growing exponentially as the middle class and upper class are created in cities across China. The transportation systems are for the most part rather sustainable, except for the rise of the cars that are hitting the road. The car situation in China is what is calling a large portion of the pollution.

The infrastructure that was being built in Beijing and Jinan was quite remarkable. I am not sure about the sustainable efforts that are being made with all the construction but I am guessing it’s a pretty dirty industry. It just seemed as if in Beijing they were just…..building, everywhere. I still wake up most mornings, picturing walking outside our hotel in Beijing and looking at the massive expanse of highway being built. I have a feeling I will forever remember the unreal amount of construction being done throughout the portion of China we saw.

The air quality situation in Beijing and Jinan while we were there was very good in proportion to what they experienced during their winter. The national holiday saved our butts, because it got a lot of cars and other industries to either shut down or slow down. I have rather sensitive lungs there were two very vivid moments I remember my breathing situation being uncomfortable. The second morning in Beijing, Ben Koontz and I got up early and explored. The air was very dirty that day. With all the construction, cars, pollen and everything in between, my lungs were not happy that morning. Also, when the group went to the power plant, whatever was brewing in the air, my lungs were not happy about it. All in all though, the air quality situation was very pleasant.

My favorite part of the trip was the interaction with the students from the different universities. My most vivid memories all involved students from either BJUT or Shandong. Staying in the international dorms at Shandong was an incredible experience. Not only were we in China, but w were meeting kids from around the world. It was very cool that Fay and Stella tagged along with us for a couple days. You got a very good insight into the life of China when can speak with locals your age. I also would like to hit on the group taking the bullet and sleeper trains. I had always wanted to ride a train and those were two amazing experiences. They were so much fun and it really shows, if done right, a train system works effectively with a large population. All in all it was a remarkable trip. I would like to thank all the professors for putting up with me. For the first year, you guys put together an amazing trip.