

Reflection essay for Sustainable Urbanism trip in China

Preparation for travel, local or international, is a rather relative thing. It depends highly on one's lifestyle and intention at the destination. Having had quite some experience with international travel, I knew I wanted to pack light bringing with me only the essentials. Not knowing the laundry situation, I chose 14 outfits, each for the 14 days we were to be in China and bath essentials that would last that long. I was very satisfied with my packing and it worked out rather well except bringing along a roller suitcase instead of a duffle bag would have been more handy. Traveling between cities proved a physical challenge as I had to tote my bag around.

As aforementioned, lifestyle plays a big role in what to carry, communication or money issues. With limited information on the security level, I chose to leave all my valuables in my apartment in Cincinnati. Worry about the safety of passport was occupation enough. Though, there were no incidences while we were there, I preferred to eliminate the possibility. This did mean that I did not have a device to communicate with friends and family, however my lifestyle allows for me to be away for two weeks without having to communicate.

Most transactions in China are dealt in cash. One needs to be prepared for this. Assuming propensity to impulse purchases, one should carry around 500 yuan during days you might visit a market or make good friends whom will lend you some cash until your next ATM trip. I found it cheaper to withdraw from an ATM than to exchange money at a bureau. It depends highly on your bank in USA. If it is a major bank one should be able to withdraw at any working ATM, however with a smaller, local bank accessibility might be limited to only the major banks in China. In past years, USA has dealt with e-waste through disposing them in landfills, incinerators, recycling or the more environmentally friendly, reusing. However, the most popular e-waste disposal method has been exportation to less developed countries, with 90% of e-waste produced in USA being 'dumped' in China.

Sustainability in any society involves how well they take care of their environment to make it sustaining. This majorly deals with how they handle their waste and its effect on the environment, be it sanitary waste, e-waste or otherwise. China is yet to achieve this especially with waste from their motor running industries. That being said, there is a lot of potential, especially if awareness is more spread out. I looked at e-waste, generated locally in China and imported from the "west".

As an emerging issue, e-waste is yet to have an absolute global definition. The scientific community agree that e-waste comprises of any electrical and electronic appliances that is no longer in use. Governments define e-waste in different ways. The defining factor here being the components of e-waste. The government of China is yet to recognize household appliances as e-waste, which is particularly interesting as

approximately 47% of e-waste in Western Europe is composed of household appliances, both small and large. Expanding the definition, making it all inclusive, would allow better allocation of resources to the treatment of e-waste. This was one of the issues addressed by professor Li Jinhui of Tsinghua university as a challenge faced in the management of e-waste. Companies dealing with appliances not recognized by the government as e-waste have limited to no resources making them less effective.

Part of management issues that coincides with as a collection issue are local government barriers. This are political boundaries created around counties, rural and urban areas. Proper coordination of collection becomes a problem due to jurisdiction roles. All the politics involved has seen the informal sector being more prosperous in dealing with e-waste. Government red tape involved in registration and obtaining permits are discouraging the almost 200 companies dealing in the recycling of e-waste. So much that, of all these companies only 64 are properly listed and registered to receive funding. The rest simply do not meet the strict requirements set up by the Ministry of Environmental control. This makes it easier for the common man, to pick up a tricycle, collect waste door to door, set up shop and earn a living reclaiming valuable metals for resale to manufacturing companies, since they do not have to go through the strict and long registration and are small scale eliminating the need for strong financial support. A large informal sector does imply consequential challenges, herein limited capacity, low material recovery rate, limited facilities and low skill topping the list.

China's potential for sustainable urbanism is quite high in my experience. Despite the challenges faced in different sectors, I felt an excited energy for more sustainable cities. The scholastic society is definitely aware of the issues that need attention and are working towards it. From the universities to the parastatals we visited there seemed to be a recurring theme of sustainability. It might have been situational, as we sought these departments out, however the awareness was overwhelming and encouraging to my anticipation for a more sustainable China. Despite, the awareness within the scholastic and governmental societies, there is a gap within the citizens. Citizen consciousness / resistance was a challenge cited by almost every department we visited. Ranging from the architects, to whom citizens preferred less sustainable materials since they are cheaper, to environmental engineers, to whom citizens were not effectively aware on how to properly dispose of their electronics. In comparison to my experience in USA and Kenya, the awareness level of the citizens, though not effective as of date in China, has a higher potential or rallying up the citizens towards sustainable cities and lives.

This was a wonderful learning opportunity that had the perk of cultural enrichment and has definitely motivated me to pursue more study abroad classes. For me the class only picked up on arrival to China. To change this, I would recommend a thorough introduction to Chinese culture and basic language skills from the first class. Even if this means weakly quizzed vocabulary words-for extra push, I would have appreciated

knowing simple phrases like “excuse me or how much.” Since study abroad is interactive learning, I would also suggest the pizza party be closer to the first class to create good rapport between students before departure. For smoother operations in China, I would suggest expectations of the students be outlined before departure. Just like UC international gave the orientation so should the instructors on what they expect from students be it behavioral or otherwise. Splitting the days in China between lectures and sightseeing might be more effective to avoid overwhelmingness and to maintain excitement and attention. I would also arrange it so that presentations made by UC students are relevant to the audience. Giving scientific talks to an urban planning audience was not productive for either groups. I would suggest a split, so that scientific talks are given at Tsinghua and architectural talks are given at BJUT. I did feel short changed and that I would have received a better response from the audience in Tsinghua (environmental engineering students) compared to planners in BJUT.