

REPORT

Theme: System of Swedish waste management

Prepared by Irina Letyagina, the intern of 2018 year



Situation with waste management in Russia has been the focus of my professional interest since 2014. Having to face similar issues many years ago, Sweden eventually became one of the world-leading countries in this field. From the very beginning, I was wondering about this success story and the implemented strategy. It is always great to learn from the best existing practices and since we know that Sweden has done a truly great job in the environmental care and waste management, I was extremely happy when I got a letter from Disa Hastad confirming my acceptance as a fellow of the Sverker Åström Foundation.

During these months, I acquired a lot of priceless knowledge on waste management system in Sweden, understood the Swedish culture better and even shook The King's hand.

First of all, it was much bigger than just a research about waste management. With the support from the Sverker Åström Foundation, my cultural experience became richer. I had a very stereotypical vision about this country fuelled by mass media and gossips. During my stay, Sweden opened itself for me as a very welcoming country, where people know how to negotiate and make compromises to achieve best results. People pay their respects to any kind of job and citizens feel themselves equal to each other.

With kind guidance from locals, I learned about places and events that a regular tourist would otherwise never reach. For example, Gunnar Johansson, journalist from Expressen, told me and

other fellows about a very special “dog island” near Drottningholm, The King's castle, where dogs can walk without leashes. I was lucky to visit that place during celebration of The King's birthday, when all dog owners were able to join the event with their pets. I was so happy to meet the King personally during celebration and to shake his hand after I gave him my birthday wishes. It was also very inspiring for me to see how close politicians and the Royal family are to the people, willing to listen to their nation.



I participated in the Easter celebration, organized by Disa. I would also like to mention how interesting it was to see the old royal castles and churches, because an experience provides deep understanding of the historical context and conditions under which the country and its culture were developing. Now, I can clearly see that historically Sweden and Russia have a lot in common when it comes to architecture, governance system, ecosystem management and art.



One of the questions that I wanted to find answer to during my stay was how Swedish people developed and maintained their love and respect toward nature.

I visited a non-governmental organization “Keep Sweden Tidy”. There I learned the history of eco movement around the country, how it was created and why the government decided to promote environment-friendly attitudes. On the one hand, it was the decision of politicians. However, it was also fuelled by the people’s support, as Swedes are well-known for their love to spend time outdoors.

I learned about volunteer movements in Sweden. Some of the ideas were truly inspiring. For example, there are opportunities for non-professional school sport teams to get sponsorship for their competition trips.

I participated in 2 programs of Naturvardsverket, Swedish Environmental protection agency: with Georgian and Russian waste managers.

During my stay together with Nadezhda Maslova from Naturvardsverket and Georgian waste managers, I visited biogas plants in Gävle. It was a very intense one-week program with a great mind-changing experience.

The main principle of recycling nowadays is to avoid mixing organic waste with other materials like paper, plastic, textile etc. Otherwise dirty materials lose their values on the market or even become unrecyclable. But organic waste can be transformed the resource for production of

fertilizers or bio diesel. So, in Sweden citizens separate organic waste, which ultimately goes to compost or gets recycled to biogas at specialized facilities.

It is an important part of circular economy to bring back resources to the market. It was, indeed, great to see the biogas facilities and procedures of waste management. We visited small biogas facilities at a small private farm, as well as large biogas plants that produce fuel for local transportation. In addition it was very interesting to learn about procedures of recycling dirty oil from harbors.

With the Russian delegation, I participated in the launch of a collaborative project between Sweden and Russia. Nowadays, Russia is starting to develop its own system of waste management, and Sweden helps to organize separation and collection of hazardous waste and old refrigerators to Nizhniy Novgorod and Volgograd region. It was very interesting to learn how to launch an international waste management project receiving support from the Ministry of natural resources. And, above all, it was an amazing networking experience for me.

It was very useful to learn about recycling of electronic waste as well. Especially, because producers in Sweden are responsible for the goods even after they are turned to waste. So, I wanted to know how Sweden, the country in which consumption of electronic equipment is very high, managed to solve this issue. So, I met up with El-Kretsen, an association working with electronic waste management. They explained me how the system of producer responsibility works, how they create infrastructure for collection of electronic waste in the whole country, how they work with recyclers and general public.

Together with Martin Seeger, CEO of El-Kretsen, we went to the special center in Arboga, where one can quantify presence and consistency of metal, plastic and other materials in electronic waste. In addition, we visited the facility of Sims Recycling Solutions, where all types of old electronic waste get dismantled, separated and recycled to materials again. During these visits, I developed some ideas on how to organize collection of electronic waste in my own country.

I was very happy to participate in waste management course for master students at KTH university (Kungliga Tekniska högskolan). It was great to acquire a systematic knowledge about waste treatment in Sweden, learn about laws and regulations, diving into technical details of incineration and recycling.

After the course I decided to learn more about incineration in Sweden. It is a sensitive topic, because around the world there are so many contradictors of burning waste, because of toxic ash and air pollution. I visited company Sysav and their incineration plant in Malmö. During that study visit I observed the process of energy recovery: preparation of waste for burning, taking care of ash after the incineration, filtering and establishing connections with heating systems. I recognized how many manipulations one should do with the waste before the incineration and thereafter, to treat it properly in order to minimize negative effects on the environment.

Twice I visited Återvinningscentral in Västerås. Both visits were very useful. I observed how to organize a recycling center for citizens and businesses, how to handle different waste streams. Finally, it was great to see how to organize a place for collection of bulky waste: construction waste, refrigerators, cars etc.

Also, I had a very productive conversation with a school department about environmental education. It starts from the kindergarten, where youngest children get their first lessons on waste separation and then continue to learn about upcycling, recycling, reusing. Sweden is truly doing a great job promoting environment-friendly mindset at all levels. Everyone participates in waste management, even youngest Swedish children. Also, it was very interesting to know how Sweden cares about old landfills by creating ski resorts and golf fields after reclamations.

In Sweden, companies participate in different associations that represent their interests. Avfall Sverige supports producers of goods during realization of extended producer responsibility. By visiting this organization, I learned how a legislative tool of producer responsibility helps to maintain proper management of different wastes: newspapers, papers, glass, packaging, tires and cars. It also helped me to understand the whole system of waste management better and in a broader perspective.

ReTuna is a mall where all goods are second hand. I went there to learn about their business model and the upcycling process. We met with one of the managers of ReTuna and she told me about the idea of the mall, how it was created, how their shops generate income and what happens with goods that no one wants to keep. It was interesting to know about this kind of social project with a clear idea: we don't need to create new things until the old ones are still good enough.

Waste management is a very creative process even if it does not look like this at first glance. In Eskilstuna, one of the recycling facility uses the mechanical optic sorting. It means that citizens should separate their waste in bags with different colors: green, yellow, red, orange, pink, blue. Every color works for different kind of waste: paper, metal, organic, textile, etc. After the collection, all bags are getting automatically separated by machines based on their colors. On this plant, I also learned about other opportunities and strategies of waste separation. It means that there are so many options for how one can organize waste management that give you the way to be more creative and effective by doing things differently.

Before this visit, I was very unsure what steps we should do to create the system of waste management in Russia, it was a very frustrating feeling, because I did not see so many good examples. But during my stay in Sweden, I saw so many practical solutions that could be implemented in Russia, and now I truly feel myself inspired and even more enthusiastic than I was before!

I believe that idea of Sverker Åström was brilliant from the start. It is the best way to know about people by living with them and learning from them. I realized that, in fact, Sweden and Russia have so much in common, discovered the Swedish way of living, many parts of which I now want to implement in my own life. And, finally, I acquired a truly priceless practical knowledge, highly relevant for my profession, which I would never be able to get from books and articles. I am very grateful for this program to the Sverker Åström Foundation and to Disa Hastad personally. It gave me motivation to raise the standards of welcoming and to trust even more in the power of knowledge.

I wish all candidates for scholarship a lot of inspiration and wonder about Sweden!

With Best Wishes,
Irina Letyagina