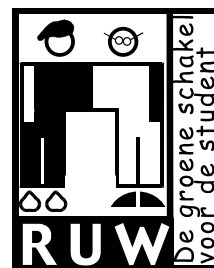


Food packaging and Cradle to Cradle Solution – a workshop.

By Karoline Smiech

The theme of this Cradle to Cradle event organized by RUW on the last day of March was Food and Waste. Two speakers gave their presentations – Ljiljana Rodic-Wiersma, a specialist in solid waste issues and Ulphard Thoden van Velzen who from Agrotechnology and Food Science Group at WUR.



The evening started with a dinner – Food. “Despite last C2C event which taught us that Waste = Food this time we are not going to feed you waste”- jokes RUW coordinator Ruben Borge. A pile of waste though was to be seen in the corner of the room – packaging of products used to prepare the dinner. The aim was to help participants of the workshop visualize and realize relation between food we consume everyday and packaging waste we produce alongside.

Fist presentation, given by Ljiljana Rodic-Wiersma, acquainted the audience with current practices regarding the management of packaging waste. What was probably surprising to many, we learned that the Netherlands produces more than EU average of packaging waste, main elements of the waste stream being paper, glass, plastic and metal cans. Significant problems are related to PE bags which in many countries are simply thrown away somewhere outside. Very often they end up in drains along roads and pile up there, blocking water drainage. This is known to have caused floods in India, Bangladesh and Uganda.

Legislation Framework of EU contains Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive from 1994 which aims at prevention and recycling. “However, when you take a closer look at the directive, you will notice that it lacks concrete prevention target. As for recycling target, the directive was revised in 2006 and the goal of 55% of solid waste recycling was set to be reached by 2008”- informs Ljiljana.

What should enhance re-use or recycling of packaging waste in the continuously rising price of crude oil which in turn affects price of virgin plastic material. Value of waste paper and metals scraps is already known to people which is often proven by metal elements like railways being stolen.

The lecturer seems to be very enthusiastic about the future of C2C designs. She stresses that it should be build on already existing infrastructure and facilities and there must be sufficient communication with consumers. The power lies in the design of products – “Materials could be successfully used again if they were designed so, i.e. either biodegradable or in pure chemical form connected to each other in a way that enables easy disassembly” – finishes Ljiljana.

The second presentation let the audience look at packaging from a slightly different perspective. Ulphard Thoden van Velzen: “You can’t say packaging is >bad<. It is needed. It makes sure you food is safe, healthy and tasty. The challenge therefore will be not to get rid of food packaging but to mitigate consumer safety and little

environmental impact. Besides, packaging of food is responsible for only a small part of this impact”.

Why C2C appears to be so attractive in the context of food packaging then? Well, it has much to do with consumers’ perception. Consumers see the packaging waste they produce, they are threatened by ideas of being flooded by “waste mountains”.

Once again the audience is presented with shocking facts – research shows that we can find substances like motor oil, pesticides or urine inside recycled bottles! Does that mean that recycling of food packaging poses threat to our health?

Ulphard suggest that new designs of food packaging be pursued like bag-in-box containers or yoghurt cups with rigid carton and flexible lining. He also puts forward post-separation of plastic waste from the waste stream as being more appropriate than pre-separation (i.e. at the source, by consumers). Of course the human factor plays here an important role – we should go for solutions that are convenient for people.

As usually, C2C evening leaves us with new ideas and new questions knocking to our minds. Fortunately, there will be opportunities to try to express them in public during coming events organised by RUW. Soon we will be able to have a closer look at the potential of C2C concept in developing countries and participate in an excursion to an energy producing greenhouse. Can’t wait!