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Sustainability Collaborative staff members and graduate students were selected to participate in UNLEASH Innovation Lab.



UNLEASH participant Jenna Riemenschneider tries a sustainable snack made with wax moth larva. (Courtesy Jenna Riemenschneider.)

October 04, 2017

George Washington University staff and students were among the participants in the [UNLEASH Innovation Lab \(https://unleash.org/innovation-lab-2017/\)](https://unleash.org/innovation-lab-2017/), where young leaders from around the world gathered in Denmark to create scalable solutions to the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals \(http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/\)](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/).

The 11-day event involved 1,000 participants from 129 countries, among them GW students Autumn Hullings, Michael Orrill, Rolando Murgas and Stephanie Westhelle and [Sustainability Collaborative \(https://sustainabilitycollaborative.gwu.edu/\)](https://sustainabilitycollaborative.gwu.edu/) staff members Ariel Kagan, senior program associate, and Jenna Riemenschneider, senior research assistant.

Participants were each assigned to a group focused on one of the lab's seven topics: information and communications technology, food, energy, health, sustainable consumption and production, urban sustainability or water.

<http://fortune.com/2016/04/18/eating-bugs-insect-protein/>.

Ms. Riemenschneider's team won. "We took wax moth larva and ground that up into almost a pâté, and then we put that with grated carrots, grated zucchini, tomato paste, tamari and ginger and served it on Danish rye," she said. "It was actually pretty good."

Participants then broke into small discussion groups at [folk high schools \(http://www.danishfolkhighschools.com/about\)](http://www.danishfolkhighschools.com/about)—adult residential schools located throughout Denmark—to get new perspective on, and brainstorm solutions to, sustainability issues of the moment. Ms. Kagan and Ms. Riemenschneider were in a group that included entrepreneurs, academics, a woman training in Holland to develop sustainable dairy production in her native Indonesia, a Kenyan fashion designer and a hydroponic farmer from the developing island nation of St. Kitts.

"Small island developing states have a lot of issues—with water scarcity, with food production, with malnutrition and climate change adaptation," Ms. Kagan said. "Hydroponics is a really good solution for all of those issues, but [our teammate] was having a hard time finding people to invest in his business."

The man had come to UNLEASH hoping to find funding for his own work. But the group decided they could do something bigger: a training program to increase overall investment in the hydroponics sector.

"There aren't a lot of opportunities in life to just hang out with such a varied group of people and talk about the big ideas for four days nonstop," Ms. Kagan said. "We got to dig into the issues and come out with some big potential solutions."

They also had a chance to see sustainability initiatives in action. Denmark, which is [considered a global leader in sustainability \(https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/denmark-collaborative-culture-sustainability\)](https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/denmark-collaborative-culture-sustainability), was "the perfect host country," Ms. Kagan said after returning to the United States from the summertime visit to the Scandinavian nation. Bike lanes are omnipresent, wind turbines [are setting records \(https://cleantechnica.com/2017/02/24/denmark-generated-enough-wind-energy-power-power-needs-wednesday/\)](https://cleantechnica.com/2017/02/24/denmark-generated-enough-wind-energy-power-power-needs-wednesday/) for electric generation, and motion-sensor lighting and low-flow toilets are the norm. And local and national leaders have prioritized the issue: Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Crown Princess Mary of Denmark and the mayors of Copenhagen and Aarhus were among the speakers to address UNLEASH.

For Ms. Kagan and Ms. Riemenschneider, the experience was symbolic of the kind of collaboration that will be necessary to address the sustainable development goals, which are a cornerstone of current sustainability thought and education. (GW's own Introduction to Sustainability course, redesigned two years ago, is now structured around understanding all 17 of them.)

"[One of the goals] is partnerships, and UNLEASH is such a cool idea because it's the embodiment of that," Ms. Kagan said. "It's bringing together so many people from so many backgrounds, and we especially saw a lot of youth stepping forward to take ownership—many of them from developing countries."

News

[GW Students Sort Recyclables for 2017 Eco-Challenge \(/gw-students-sort-recyclables-2017-eco-challenge\)](#)

March 13, 2017

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