We come from Uganda and Germany. Most of us study or are in an apprenticeship. Some are already busy setting up start-ups. We have spent almost six weeks together. In September 2018, the Ugandan participants were guests in Berlin and Leipzig, and one year later the German participants flew to Kampala and Mpigi.

In 2015, 193 nations adopted a total of 17 goals to make the world a better place by 2030: equal opportunities for all, no poverty, no hunger, access to education, equal rights for men and women, comprehensive health care, responsible use of resources, protection of the environment and the oceans.

For our encounters, we focused on one of the 17 SDGs: SDG 12. The 12th SDG is about responsible consumption and sustainable production methods. In Mpigi, Kampala, Berlin and Leipzig, we met people who deal with recycling and upcycling, think about alternatives to plastic, protect valuable biotopes and fight against food waste. We had a lot of discussions, did not always agree, had different perspectives and came from various backgrounds. What some of us took for granted, others could not understand at all. We learned together and from each other, while having a lot of fun.

The Association for International and Intercultural Exchange (VIA) e.V. was founded in 1992. The association provides young people from Germany and all over the world the opportunity to participate in intercultural youth exchange programmes. The programmes give young people insight into the living and working environments of other countries and communities.

The Social Innovation Academy (SINA) is a unique, self-managed learning environment that enables socially disadvantaged young people to develop projects and thereby create jobs and income for themselves and others. Since its foundation, 185 students have attended SINA and 32 social and innovative companies have been created. In Nakivale in Uganda, a settlement in which 120,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Somalia have been living for years, similar initiatives have now been established. “Opportunigee” and “Unleashed” was founded by SINA graduates to show young refugees new perspectives.

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Regenbogenfabrik, Berlin

“...about the Regenbogenfabrik was the incredible political and social effort people put into the project. Good ideas sometimes need a lot of patience. The various activities offer an excellent opportunity to network within the neighbourhood. This is how a locally community is created.” - Rob

IDEAS NEED SPACES

“A person with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds.” - Mark Twain

Tapetenwerk, Leipzig

“I always find it very interesting when young people and artists are offered a safe working environment as it allows them to exercise their beliefs and ideas. Many young people use the Tapetenwerk to dedicate themselves to art, fashion or even creative furniture.” - Sairus

The TAPETENWERK in Leipzig was founded in 2007, in an old wallpaper factory from the 19th century which was closed back in 2006. Nowadays, young entrepreneurs and artists can find inexpensive spaces to develop their ideas and projects in the renovated factory. The Tapetenwerk also gives space for exhibitions, workshops and various events.

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Regenbogenfabrik, Berlin

“What impressed me most about the Regenbogenfabrik was the incredible political and social effort people put into the project. Good ideas sometimes need a lot of patience. The various activities offer an excellent opportunity to network within the neighbourhood. This is how a locally community is created.” - Rob

SOCENT HUB is an innovation and research laboratory, a co-working space and partly a citizens’ forum. On the premises, there are workplaces and conference rooms for young entrepreneurs to work from. Environmentally or socially compatible start-ups can grow and exhibit their ideas and projects at Socent Hub, such as the production of soaps, the rearing of bees or the distribution of honey. Additionally, Socent Hub organises workshops, training to guide start-ups through administrative challenges.

The REGENBOGENFAIBRiK is a self-administered neighbourhood centre, which was established in 1981 in an old industrial building. Today, the rainbow factory includes a kindergarten, a canteen, a bicycle repair shop, a carpentry workshop and a small cinema which is used for concerts, lectures or events. Within the Regenbogenfabrik there are no hierarchies. All decisions are made through consensus, which often leads to thorough discussions. However, the solutions that are developed are more supported by everyone involved.

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Societal entrepreneurship. In my perspective, it is trustworthy to work in the field of development cooperation. My activities here in Uganda which is why I aim for one Semester to study Food Science and Technology and now I am with Rob in India, looking forward to exchange our ideas and projects at Socent Hub, such as the production of soaps, the rearing of bees or the distribution of honey. Additionally, Socent Hub organises workshops, training to guide start-ups through administrative challenges.

JOSEPHINE KIGGUNDU

“I always find it very interesting when young people and artists are offered a safe working environment as it allows them to exercise their beliefs and ideas. Many young people use the Tapetenwerk to dedicate themselves to art, fashion or even creative furniture.” - Sairus

Regenbogenfabrik 1981 (above) and today (below)

Josephine Nakiyimba

“I think it was great how the team from Socent Hub was so dedicated and enthusiastic. With their focus on „People, Planet, Profit“ they support good projects that have the potential to transform Kampala and the surrounding area.” - Clara

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Fabrics, cardboard, tiles, buttons - anything that would have otherwise been thrown away. Improvement stores, companies or even individuals donate decorative materials, to artists, childcare centres and educational institutions for a small fee. Home improvement stores, companies or even individuals donate decorative materials, to artists, childcare centres and educational institutions for a small fee. Kunst-Stoffe the ‘Central Office for Reusable Materials’ is a non-profit association which exists in other cities. “ - Lukas

Kunst-Stoffe, Berlin

"Berlin would like to become a ‘Zero-Waste’ city one day. This is quite an ambitious project, considering the amount of waste a big city produces. Projects like Kunst-Stoffe show what would be possible if everyone thought more creatively about recycling" - Rob

"Places like Kunst-Stoffe are not only practical and useful, but also stimulating. Given the variety of materials, one can think of many possible uses. And it’s certainly not just for artists" - Jan

"I was surprised by how many useful things were collected at Kunst-Stoffe. I thought it was mostly worthless stuff. Instead, one could find wooden boards, metal bars, picture frames and polystyrene blocks. Other collection centres should also exist in other cities". - Lukas

"Projects such as Kunst-Stoffe promote creativity. It would be great if there was a law in Uganda that would encourage big companies to not throw away their remaining materials, but to donate them to initiatives that could make something new with them." - Kisu

"I like the fact that waste can be given a new life through creativity. This prolongs the lifespan of plastic, while drawing attention to the cause": - Sainus

"Reducing plastic waste while supporting local school children is a great initiative. However, I am still skeptical. I don’t know if it makes sense to fuse the soft plastic tarpaulins into hard plastic that will take longer to decompose. I also have my doubts as to whether the products are particularly durable, because I’m not sure whether the threads used can hold the hard plastic together well": - Reynard

PLASTIC WASTE

“Up to 13 million tons of plastic waste is dumped into the sea every year. At least 150 million tons have already accumulated” Greenpeace

REFORM AFRICA transforms plastic waste into waterproof, affordable and stable bags and backpacks. The big plastic tarpaulins, mostly packaging from wholesalers, are collected by women, which provides them with income. At Reform Africa, the plastic is sun-dried and the various plastic layers are ironed onto each other, creating a variety of patterns. The tearproof material can then be processed. Most importantly Reform Africa’s aim is to provide schoolchildren with a cost-effective alternative to expensive satchels. In order to be able to sell the bags to the children, they are also offered at a higher cost in tourist markets.
SUSTAINABLE BUILDING

“The incredible art and creativity, which is expressed in these drawings, brings joy. You immediately see that they come from a passionate architect. They combine local technologies with modern ideas and create extraordinary pieces of work.” - Tonny

“Visiting the office of the famous architect was very revealing. Besides the introduction to his projects in Burkina Faso and Uganda I was very impressed at how important it was to the firm that the people in these rural communities contribute to every part of the planning process. This is the only way that projects like these can be sustainable.” - Rob

“The method of combining traditional architecture with modern, yet simple techniques to, for example, improve ventilation- or irrigation systems has convinced me.” - Jan

The MASAKA RECYCLING INITIATIVE (Eco Brix) is a company, creating interlocking bricks out of old plastic bottles and containers. Within the Masaka community, they developed a giant collection system, where residents can sell their collected plastic bottles for a small fee. Compared to common paving bricks, plastic bricks have several advantages: they are 30% less expensive than common paving bricks, and they’re lighter and easier to transport. Additionally, the Masaka Recycling Initiative created an informational campaign for schools to educate young people about the environmental damage of plastics, and to create more awareness about recycling opportunities. During holidays, students support the collection of old plastic bottles while earning pocket money.

Masaka Recycling Initiative

“We really liked the project of the Masaka Recycling Initiative because it has an inclusive approach and offers youth and people with disabilities the opportunity to make a small income. The project shows that recycled products can also be affordable. However, we are not completely sure of the extent with which the interlocking bricks emit microplastics if cars and trucks pass over streets made out of plastic bricks. It is a good initiative to cope with current plastic challenges, but we also hope that in the future it would not be necessary anymore because by then, plastic bottles will have significantly decreased.” - Raymond & Lukas

Kéré Architecture, Berlin

“The head is round so that thinking can change direction.” - Francis Picabia, painter and graphic artist

Diebedo Francis Kéré considers construction as a social task and advocates for resource-efficient architecture. His buildings in different African countries are famous. He particularly works with traditional materials such as clay, and his distinctive, raised roofing structures provide natural ventilation and temperature control. The architect works with the community to plan and design the houses and rooms that are meant for them to live in. Diebedo Francis Kéré received many international awards for his architectural designs. During our visit to his office in Berlin, Kéré Architecture, we were presented his projects, drawings and models in more detail.

Bottle Houses, Mpigi

The BOTTLE HOUSES at SINA were designed and built by Upcycle Africa, an initiative which was born within SINA. The bottles replace bricks, which have to be burned for days. This needs a lot of fire food and contributes to deforestation. For the Bottle Houses, thousands of plastic bottles are collected and filled with soil. In addition, the cost efficient houses are durable, can save the heat and are earthquake-proof. Upcycle Africa constructed houses in different parts of Africa and, thereby, created job opportunities for women and youth in rural areas.
OSTMOST is a 4-year old Berlin based company that produces juices and cider from fruits of orchard meadows. Three quarters of German orchard meadows have been lumbered since intensive monoculture practices have conquered agriculture and its markets. The meadows, with their high-stem fruit trees, are biotopes with a biodiversity comparable to those of small rainforests. While small orchards can inhabit up to 5,000 species, on monocultural fields only about 1,000 species survive. However, care and harvest of the biotopes is an ornate procedure. The prices of its products can therefore hardly compete with prices from conventional production.

To keep farmers in charge of the traditional harvest, Ostmost met them halfway and established a fair and regional value chain. Farmers get paid double to those of small rainforests. While small orchards promotes fair trade and a living ecosystem. Avoiding the middlemen by reaching the farmers directly and their marketing strategy. “The idea of replacing monocultures with mixed cultivation is important because it promotes species diversity and creates space for a living ecosystem. Avoiding the middlemen by reaching the farmers directly and paying fair prices sounds plausible to me, because it promotes fair trade and a circular economy.” — Sairus

OSTMOST es una empresa berlinesa de 4 años que produce jugos y sidra de frutas de praderas de huerto. Tres cuartas partes de los prados de huerto en Alemania han sido deshecados desde que las prácticas de monocultura intensiva han conquistado la agricultura y sus mercados. Los prados, con sus árboles frutales de alto tallo, son biótopos con una biodiversidad comparable a los de pequeños bosques de selva. Mientras que los pequeños huertos pueden abrigar hasta 5,000 especies, en los campos monocultivos solo sobreviven unas 1,000. Sin embargo, la atención y la cosecha de los biotopos es un procedimiento ornato. Los precios de sus productos no pueden competir con los de producción convencional.

Para mantener a los agricultores con el cultivo tradicional, Ostmost los encontró a medio camino y estableció una cadena de valor justo y regional. Los agricultores reciben el doble al precio de los pequeños bosques. Mientras que los pequeños huertos promueven el comercio justo y un ecosistema viviente. Evitando a los intermedios al llegar directamente a los agricultores y pagando precios justos suena plausible para mí, porque promueve el comercio justo y una economía circular.” — Sairus
Kimuli Fashionability, Mpiigi

SSUBI DESIGN upcycles waste into jewelry and uses materials that can be found everywhere. Susubi Design has rediscovered the Bark Cloth, a fabric that has been extracted for many hundreds of years from the bark of the Mutuba fig tree, which grows mainly in Uganda.

“In the past, the bark cloth was mainly used to make clothes in many cultures, but today it still plays an important role in Uganda. It is very durable and its colour and texture is reminiscent of leather. It can be used to make bags or purses. A 100% renewable natural product” – Linda

“I believe that everything that has to do with fashion cannot be sustainable at all. There are always new ideas and trends. What happens when upcycling is no longer chic and trendy?” – Tony

FAST FASHION

“Each year, 1.3 million tons of clothing are disposed of. Only about half of the clothing donations are reused.” – Greenpeace

Green Fashion Tour, Berlin

“I believe that upcycled products should be available to a wider range of potential customers, not only for fashion purposes, but also to potentially stimulate some rethinking of the traditional use of clothes and other items. There is no need to get rid of clothes once they don’t look nice anymore” – Rob

“Of course, we want to have more sustainability in the fashion industry, we need to change the message of advertising from a persuasive one to an informative one. This would promote fair trade. Clothes should be sold at a higher price so people are encouraged to recycle their clothes rather than dumping them” – Monica

KIMULI FASHIONABILITY produces clothes, bags, and wallets out of old sugar bags and wasted packaging, in combination with African fabrics. They employ and train mainly people with disabilities in order to generate a positive environmental and social impact.

“The inclusion of disabled people in the production of fashion is a unique approach which made a few people in Uganda think about it. I learned that disability is not inability, and everyone has different talents and is capable of doing something.” – Josephine

“There is always a thin line between fully recycling waste and green washing. Some of the materials Kimuli is upcycling are imported from foreign countries, such as rice sacks.” – Klara

Ssubi Design, Mpiigi

“I think it’s a pity that Ssudi Design mainly manufactures products for tourist markets. In my opinion, it would be more sustainable to design products that are needed within the community and to enable a local resource cycle.” – Lukas
URBAN GARDENING

The PRINCESS GARDENS are a self-organized urban gardening project in the Berlin district Kreuzberg. One group had the idea of creating an urban garden, to make nature more accessible to citizens and to create a space where you can learn and try new things. In July 2009, the area was cleaned from debris and rubbish. The first 100 beds were planted. They were mainly vertical vegetable and herb beds made out of collected and donated materials such as old wooden boxes. Twice a week, everyone is welcome to join in the gardening. In the small restaurant, which was created in a discarded container, visitors can enjoy a fresh meal made out of vegetables and herbs from the Princess Gardens.

During a visit at the TUMWEMBAZE Fruit Farm we were explained the method of sack-gardening. The idea is simple: you fill large sacks with soil and pebble stones. The pebble stones must be placed vertically in the middle of the soil, while the bottom and sides are filled up with soil. In the filled sacks you cut several slits and put seeds or small plants where you created holes. There is even space on top of the sack for plants to grow. This is, for example, how you can grow useful plants such as salad, pepper, cabbage, onions and spinach. The pebble stones in the center of the sack make sure that water and air can spread in the whole soil.

“I didn’t know that it was possible to garden in buckets and sacks. It looks really simple, so everyone could try it, no matter how much space you have. I hope that this idea spreads across Uganda, especially in those cities, where very few people have a big garden.” - Tryphine

“I was really impressed about the many possibilities of this cultivation method. It is easy to implement and can be used everywhere around the world. In growing cities, sack gardening can contribute immensely to food security.” - Linda

Tumwembaze Farm, Mityana

“We should know more about our food than we do about the lives of our celebrities.” - Urban Gardeners Republic

“After a long ride on the subway and many walks through a loud city, you immediately get the impression of being out in nature and relaxed by entering the Princess Gardens. I think about what this concept would mean for Uganda, a country where when you plant, everything grows immediately. I’m imagining the stressful Kampala, which would have enough empty space for urban gardening.” - Joan

“(...) I’m always impressed by how destroyed and abandoned public places can be turned into something so beautiful. I think it is important to create more of these places to offer the possibility for people to reconnect with nature.” - Leo

“(...) I think that urban gardening can be showcased to raise and strengthen awareness for organic farming, nutrition and the value of green spaces in cities.” - Rob

Princess Gardens, Berlin
Then the motor was connected to the bicycle...
More than 10 years ago the small soap manufacturer MAISOAP in Berlin Friedrichshain was invented. The owner’s initial motive was to relieve her daughter’s skin disease. As a chemist, she started to create soap in her private kitchen and improved formulas and products until she finally opened her own small business. The soaps mainly contain eco-friendly ingredients like essential oils and natural scents like lavender, green tea or aloe vera. Wrapped in brown paper, they become a plastic free alternative to commercial drugstore shampoos and body washes. In Berlin and surrounding communities, Maisoap has become more and more popular.

“Plastics are used in many cosmetic products. From our bathrooms, the plastics are discharged through the waste water to the local sewage treatment plants. Micro plastics can be found in all depths of the sea; it has been found in shells, worms, fish and sea birds.” – BUND, German environmental organisation

Uganics is a young start-up based in Uganda, fighting malaria through a natural, long-lasting mosquito repellent soap. Common methods to avoid mosquito bites are often inefficient. Mosquito nets can only be used during sleeping, while sprays often consist of many chemicals and are vastly unaffordable. This is where Uganics aims to fill the gap by offering a simple product which is easily accessible, and can be used daily for washing clothes and showering. Uganics is using organic essential oils, which are locally sourced and grown by rural women farmers. The soap is sold to pharmacies, hospitals and the rural community, but also to hotels and tourists. For them, the soaps are a little more expensive so that they can be more affordable in local trade.

“Every year almost 500,000 people die of malaria worldwide. 90% of those infected live on the African continent.” – World Health Organisation (WHO)

“Living a life in harmony with nature is crucial for me when it comes to sustainability and our future. I was very impressed by the fact that the owner has held on to a vision for 10 years but has also developed it further and remained true to herself. Her passion is what runs her business, which makes me trust and believe that it’s sustainable”. – Joan

Uganics, Kampala
INKOTA, Berlin

“It is quite shocking that even large, well-known companies do not have sufficient information about the circumstances under which their products are actually manufactured. Therefore, we think we should measure a company’s performance by considering their own knowledge about the supply chain. But even if they can provide details about it, there is no guarantee that human rights will be respected in the production of clothing.”

- Lukas

“I think everyone should take individual efforts towards sustainability. But we also need organizations like INKOTA in Uganda because they encourage mass awareness and advocacy towards a change in the fashion industry. Governments, big fashion businesses and consumers must think about how waste, exploitation and environmental damage can be avoided in order to build a fairer and greener world.”

- Monica

CIVIL SOCIETY

„Civil society - that’s the citizens. Through their involvement in initiatives and citizens’ movements, they shape policy „from below“. They formulate their interests ... And they volunteer to work for society“

Centre for Civil Society Development, Germany

INKOTA is a member of the Clean Clothes Campaign, which was founded in 1990, and today reminds companies and politicians in 16 European countries of their responsibility. Even though the vast quantities of textiles are produced in different continents, the catastrophic conditions are similar: violation of human rights, failure to comply with basic social and work safety measures, no minimum (living) wage, dangerous exposure to chemicals, and environmental hazards at work. INKOTA works with many partners in countries all over the world to create a better and fairer clothing and production value chain.

NAPE (National Association of Professional Environmentalists) is a Ugandan NGO dedicated to research on and the publication of environmental and social impacts of the huge palm oil plantations on Bugala Island, one of the Ssese Islands in Lake Victoria. Bugala, with its capital district Kalingala, used to have a rich rainforest with a vast amount of animal and plant species. For the cultivation of palm oil trees, many thousands of hectares were deforested in the last couple of years due to an increasing domestic and international demand of palm oil products. Another plantation is currently in development on a neighbouring island. This results in the displacement of people, less land for the local food cultivation and production, contamination of Lake Victoria with pesticides and a massive destruction of local and regional biotopes. So far, there is a small but growing movement of environmentalists in Uganda with NAPE at its heart.

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