

LUGO Alumni: Alida Volkmer

“If there is a future, it will be green.”

Petra Kelly put into words wonderfully what I came to realise during my time at the Leiden University Green Office (or for short LUGO). Being an alumni as of August 2019, I can see how formative my year at LUGO has been. But let me start at the beginning.

Part of the reason why I decided to study at Leiden University was the possibility to join student boards. I wanted to have an engaged student life which was difficult at my undergrad university. When I arrived for the orientation week of my masters program I was not disappointed: there was a plethora of clubs and societies to join of which the Green Office stood out to me. I remember always being at least somewhat ecologically minded (my dream job when I was 12 was environmental minister). I also did what many people do to reduce their environmental footprint like avoiding plane travels, recycling and eating less animal products. Those things were a good start for me, but finally, when I came to know LUGO, it was easier to engage on a deeper level with the topic of sustainability. I went to events organised by LUGO



and Green Keys which were fun and informative at the same time, such as presentations on waste reduction, a documentary on plastic or vegan potlucks.

In summer 2018, I got the chance to join LUGO as a coordinator, which was a dream come true - I would be working with sustainable-minded people, engage others and do something good for this world ... and I would be paid to do so. Though my work was a lot of fun, my original amazement was relatively short lived. I had a motivated team working with me, but I soon learned that that wasn't enough to make the future green.

This is something my time at LUGO has taught me: even if you want to make a change, there is bureaucracy, inefficient communication and differences in opinions that can slow down progress. Many people I met during my coordinatorship were excited about sustainability, but some others were not. Some people had the power to make the university more sustainable, but thought we were doing fine. Meanwhile, I learned more about the climate emergency and got the pressing feeling that no, we are not doing fine. I wanted to see more change and decided to dedicate my career to sustainability, which was a rather unexpected change considering that my masters focused on health and clinical psychology. Fortunately, my engagement with student boards like LUGO has shown employers how important this issue is to me. I am sure that without my working experience as a green office coordinator, finding a PhD with a sustainable focus would have been immensely harder.

LUGO gave me the tools and platform to engage more with sustainability. It also showed me how much more there is to do at a moment when others began to realise this, too. During my time at LUGO, I saw the rise of movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion. This gives me hope, just like the existence of large PhD projects do, like the one I am now a part of: together with 14 other PhD students, I will investigate wind energy and social acceptance (and it is going to be awesome). With such movements and projects including green offices, it is easier to believe that there will be a future, and yes, it will be green.