

## REFLECTIONS ON THE WCO CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

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“There is something very curious that happens with Japanese bamboo, it is not suitable for impatient people.”<sup>1</sup> Even when you seed, fertilize and water it, during the first few months or even years, nothing appreciable happens.

However, from a certain moment, and in a very short space of time, the bamboo plant grows a few metres. During the first years of its apparent inactivity, the bamboo is generating its own root network, which will allow it to sustain its growth that will show after several years.

“(…), in everyday life, many times, we want to find quick solutions and rushed triumphs, disregarding the fact that success is simply the result of internal growth, and that it takes time. Likewise, it is necessary to understand that on many occasions we will face situations in which we believe that nothing is happening. This could be extremely frustrating.

In those moments, that we all have, remembering the growing cycle of Japanese bamboo, and accepting that ‘as long as we don’t give up’ and surrender because we cannot ‘see’ the result that we expect, there is something happening inside (…).”<sup>2</sup>



The WCO Career Development Programme (CDP), which I attended in the 2012/13 period, transforms into a fascinating opportunity for all Customs officers who have an ambition to achieve the development of other countries, including their own, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.motivacionysuperacion.com/2010/07/la-historia-del-bambu-japones.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ídem

their development as a professional and as a person. This programme includes it all... even the opportunity to harvest your own bamboo!

The WCO is the most respectable authority for Customs administrations all over the world. It becomes the dreamed entity; even unreachable for some. The ones who have the chance to visit the Secretariat's facilities or participate in an event organized by the WCO are considered special and even blessed. There are very few who have had the chance to visit, but there are many anecdotes that cross the globe.

Its professional technicians and experts are known as 'scientists' in the Customs field, coming up with solutions and producing documents that can be adapted to any Customs reality in any part of the world. Their capability is timeless in solving different problems, and universal in addressing all Customs' issues and topics.

The CDP is one of the keys that allows a Customs officer to reach one of his/her dreams, or even to reach the WCO. What does reach the WCO imply? Not only 'know it' from a close perspective, but also discover all the opportunities that it offers. The first thing to know about the WCO is the freedom that it offers to create and do things.

To become a chosen candidate for the CDP, known as a Professional Associate (PA), implies above all, to have the right attitude, with proactivity being the best. This one will persist in the 10 months that are full of challenges. That is why it is necessary to take risks and forget what we have left behind, and instead, decide to get to know the unknown and have the desire to get to know yourself.

It will be necessary to accompany this experience with different interests. What does this mean? You will no longer think in terms of just one country; instead, your motivation will now be directed towards all Members of the WCO. Helping, contributing and collaborating in the Customs development of other countries will be a fundamental aspect, which will guide your objectives.

Choosing, at first, your favourite topic, or topics, is the starting point to begin exploring the knowledge that Members of the WCO have, enabling you to come up with ideas that will contribute to the implementation of best practices around the world. Then, it will be the commitment of each PA to push him/herself to explore other areas.

Creativity and enthusiasm are fundamental ingredients. They are necessary in the permanent contact that a PA has with his/her expert tutor and other WCO officials, and can lead to a pool of opportunities that enable a PA to learn more about other regions, which is a whole new universe.

There are many challenges. The fight of trying not to leave your comfort zone, and the permanent fears, however, it is all worth it. The CDP is a WCO programme that enables us to obtain a different view of the Customs world, and which provides us with a contact network as well as additional abilities that can be put to good use in our own administration.

To accept the importance and responsibility that a PA has, is another important thing to mention. Experiencing how a worldwide organization operates and understanding that the task and role of each staff member determines it, while comprehending that each one

represents one administration and one country are basic reflections that should be known, predominantly by those who decide to choose this programme

There are many experiences 'lived' inside and outside the WCO. The opportunities are not just what was mentioned above. They also involve living in other countries, in an environment where we know no one. It is then that we gain a different perspective, and notice a greater openness among PAs. What was left behind, or what one has or wants, can be better valued and assessed.

Independence is another element of the CDP. Without a doubt, there are many moments of reflection that the programme offers to each participant. The growth is internal and reaches different areas, both personally and professionally.

Finally, the opportunity to know the richness of Japanese culture, allows the PA to live this experience in such an interesting country, with its history of growth and development. Learning its best practices and its advances complete the pool of tools that the CDP offers to each PA when he/she returns home.

Life changes, growth is inevitable, but through this once in a lifetime experience... I chose to be a Japanese bamboo.

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