

## **A Few Simple Steps to a Less Waste Lifestyle**

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### **Abstract**

*Because we often hear that you can't change others but you can change yourself, I mean you cannot control what is exterior to you, but you can focus inside of you - to change the world, first it is us whom we have to change. While we get involved in big environmental projects, we can take a look what we do daily to reduce our impact on the environment. To reduce the amount of plastic waste is within everyone's reach, as it is an area where each one of us can work in order to reduce the global pollution, and the waste resulted from the disposable plastics represents one of the biggest problems related to the garbage produced by people in their everyday life. I am an architect, a visual artist and publisher; I am also working with children and their parents teaching a lifestyle closer and less harmful to nature. I have been living a "less waste lifestyle" in Cluj – Napoca for almost two years now. It has been easier than I thought and it brought me a lot of joy, advantages and revelations.*

### **Rezumat**

*Deoarece auzim adesea că nu îi putem schimba pe alții, dar ne putem schimba pe noi înșine, adică nu putem controla ceea ce ne este exterior, dar ne putem concentra în interiorul nostru, pentru a schimba lumea, mai întâi trebuie să ne schimbăm pe noi. A reduce cantitatea de deșeuri de plastic este la îndemâna oricui, fiind o zonă unde putem lucra fiecare la reducerea poluării globale, iar deșeurile rezultate din plasticurile de unică folosință reprezintă una dintre cele mai mari probleme legate de deșeurile produse de oameni în viața de zi cu zi. Sunt arhitect, artist vizual și autoarea a mai multor publicații apărute în domeniul artei și ecologiei; de asemenea lucrez cu copii și părinții lor, promovând un stil de viață mai apropiat- și mai puțin dăunător naturii. Am adoptat un stil de viață "cu mai puține deșeuri" în Cluj-Napoca de aproape doi ani. Este mai ușor decât mi-am imaginat și mi-a adus multe bucurii, avantaje și revelații.*

**Keywords:** plastic pollution, self-responsibility, self-contribution, self-awareness, education, ignorance

## 1. Introduction/ Argumentation



Picture 1. View in city neighborhood.\*



Picture 2. Inside the tree.\*



Picture 3. A walk in the park.\*



Picture 4. Riverside in a big city.\*

\*All photos belong to the author.

The purpose of this paper is not to offer many technical data, as you can find those on the Internet and I will include them in the bibliography. My paper aims at pointing out these aspects from a psychological and social point of view, by asking the question: "Why do we like so much to delegate responsibility or tasks to the others and why don't we take more care about our personal contribution in certain issues?"; it talks about self-awareness. Why do we choose to ignore what we see? We are living in a world where our inner self-reflection lacks and the exterior pursuit is abounding, though we would find the answer to most of the questions in ourselves.

Many of us, who were born in Romania before the 80s, can recall those years, when we used to go to the market with the textile bag, which we would wash at home, we collected the empty jars to put the compote or stew in them and we didn't even know about the existence of plastic packaging. Following the revolution in 1989, we were introduced to the avalanche of disposable plastics which we have included in our everyday life, without thinking about it, as they were something modern and good (?)... Life has hastened, we are always on a rush... but are we thinking where to?

If you ask why without plastic? To get the answer you don't necessarily have to know about the existence of the plastic soup in the ocean [1], or the plastic island [10], it is enough if you just go out and take a look at your neighborhood, the river in your town. It's fool with plastic isn't it? There goes our plastic, mine, yours...

Plastic is a material that has spread very quickly and it is used by nearly everyone, on daily basis. However, we haven't anticipated the impact it would have on the environment. Plastics are of several types, named with different codes [2]; some of them cannot be recycled at all [9], others can be recycled into inferior material, through a process called downcycling and in the end they will become something toxic that can no longer be used for anything. Namely, from a PET, you will never get another PET [2]. This means that almost all the items that we use daily, are cropping up into nature, day by day, polluting the waters, the soil, the oceans and so, the environment we all live in, which feeds us and our children and which will feed our children's children. While paper and glass can be recycled 100% and into the same material in terms of quality, plastic can be recycled into inferior and toxic materials or it cannot be recycled at all. So, it is preferable to choose packaging that does not contain plastic. If people were informed more often, then probably a third of the population would make more environmental friendly choices, which decompose without polluting or which can be recycled. This may bring you to reconsider your daily habits. So, what to do?

## **2. Solutions**

Metal, glass, paper can 100% be recycled and, therefore, we can try to buy our drink and food in metal, glass, paper, or in your our package.

Due to the causes mentioned above, several cities, states or isolated people have begun to do something about it, coming up with ideas. Regions such as France, San Francisco, New York have started to ban the usage of plastic flatware and containers of the casserole type [3, 4]. Moreover, shops have opened where you can find all the products in bulk, so you can buy them in your own recipients (no packaging) in Germany, France [5]. The European Union voted a restriction on the usage of plastic bags and demanded that the member countries do something about the plastic bags in the following years [6]. Furthermore, the bio-plastic has been invented and it exists [7], it was also started a petition (Change.org by Trey Highton) calling for graphic warning labels to be placed on water bottles, similar to those now on cigarette packaging [8] etc.

## **3. A few practical ideas for doing your daily shopping environmentally friendly**

In the following lines, I will write a few practical ideas for a way of doing your daily shopping with a smaller amount of resulted unrecyclable waste, adapted to city life in Romania. I think an easy step to begin with would be to get rid of the following objects in our lives: plastic cups, plastic casseroles and plastic bags.

Maybe it will surprise you, but they are difficult and usually cannot be recycled, (depending on type and region) [9]. This means that if you choose to use them, then do that with the knowledge that you are going to let them for your children's children to inherit and, in the meantime, they will kill probably a few animals (in the North ocean, most of the animals have plastic in their stomach) [10, 11, 12], poison your water and your soil. Plastic materials decompose in hundreds of years, releasing toxic chemicals during this entire period. This gets into your children's water, food and so on. Almost every single plastic that has been ever made is still there. Even the plastic that is burned continues to pollute as it generates a toxic ash, which cannot be integrated in the environment, also the burning procedure generates a lot of toxic gases. And was it worth? For using it for a few minutes? Put the advantage and disadvantage in balance.

Even worse is that our children watching us will do the same, without knowing the consequences, which concern them especially, and they trust us.

How can you get rid of it in your everyday life? You can easily find alternatives always and everywhere, maybe what you need is a bit of preparation and exercise before you go out or travel:

Going out at festivals, city center etc.:

We can use a plastic cup with a lid from a durable kind of plastic or a glass, metal or durable plastic bottle and take with use in our purse or bag all the time. So, if we want to drink a juice in the park, or at a festival, maybe a beer on tap, we can just ask the sellers to fill them up for use. And this is easy! I don't use plastic bags either. I always have a textile bag in my purse, so if I want to buy fruits or vegetables I use it. So, with these two easy steps, we can avoid to produce tens of plastic bags and cups per week.

If you want to take further steps, here are some tips for the weekly shopping:

When you are coming back from mall or grocery, you have big and full bags anyhow. So the only disadvantage you would have is that you also have bigger bags on the way to the grocery. I bring durable plastic bottles with big lid for the farmers' milk that I buy from the milk machine, a box for strawberries, another for cheese from the farmers, and a jar for sour cream. I shop mostly from the marketplace, but you can buy olives and a lot of stuff from big shops also, where they sell in bulk.

Diapers:

A "normal" diaper decomposes in 450-500 years. One mother uses for a child much more than 3650 diapers in two years, which means a huge amount of plastic that remains in the nature for further generations, unless it is burned producing a lot of toxic gases. You can use biodegradable diapers or textile diapers or combine them. For example, in the first month, when you are breastfeeding, you can use textile diapers and to continue with disposable diapers from a biodegradable material. A lot of Romanian mothers started to use textile diapers because of the costs, the benefits for the baby and also ecological reasons. There are a lot of Facebook groups where you can change ideas, and learn about how to use them. You can find biodegradable diapers in shops in Romania in the main cities only, and only a few people know about them, or order from the Internet.

Bottled water: There are some regions where the tap water is not suitable for drinking. If a person drinks two liters of water per day, multiplied with the number of habitants, that means a lot of plastic bottles... You can drink tap water if it is good, filter tap water with filter cans, go to a spring to refill your bottles or try to buy bottled water in glass bottles; almost every company in Romania has this possibility. If you are in a region where the tap water is not good, try to refill your bottles from water machines and not choose to use single plastic cups.

Breastfeeding your baby can save you from producing a great amount of waste and, last but not least, it can save you a lot of money that you would otherwise spend on powder milk as well as on feeding bottles, sterilizers, etc., not to mention the advantage that a mother's milk provides an excellent immunity to the child, guarding him from numerous diseases in the first years of life, but not only. Unfortunately, because of the lack of information or, even worse, due to the misleading information received sometimes even from pediatricians, some of which have not even read the recommendations of the World Health Organization, in Romania, only 12-14% of women

breastfeed their babies [13], and for a very short period of time. The Romanian State, instead of investing into informing about and supporting breastfeeding, provides free powder milk.

It is neither necessary to buy all the new plastic toys that have appeared on the market. The children equally enjoy those that are borrowed or received from older children; actually, it is the physical presence of their parents, which matters most to them.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Some of vegetarians choose not to eat meat because of spiritual reasons and think that harming other living creatures lowers their vibration and you can do this only by ignoring what you are actually doing. I think using single use plastic also increases man's level of ignoring. It is interesting that a part of these people don't mind to use tens of single use plastic objects/ day, though these objects are actually killing maybe more animals then they would if they ate meat.

I think it is a sign of civilization and humanity to limit the producing of unrecyclable waste, out of concern for the human being, animals, nature and out of respect for the future generations. Firstly, it depends on us to limit their usage in our lives, especially since it does not require great sacrifice, but, in exchange, using them is a true sacrifice. More important than to select wastes is the concern about producing them.

City councils should put a tax on the bags in the markets, not pretend that they are not hygienic if they do not have them; there are a lot of senseless rules and few of those are really helpful.

Even if they put together your garbage again after you select it separately, I still think that the selection dumpsters have a great advantage: that they put you face to face with the amount of garbage that you produce. Just throwing away wouldn't make you to realize it. Watching our eco footprint will make us more self-aware, more careful with others, with nature, it will make us look more to the inside then the outside, because that's where all the answers are. To love means not to destroy and to think about what the world would look like in 20-30 years, when you may be old and your babies, grownups. Mothers have a great influence through the direct example they give their children and their education, which is very important. Using Mahatma Gandhi's words: if you want to see a better world, you have to begin changing with yourself. Why do we have expectations from others if we are disturbed and worried about our children's future, when we can begin to change our habits today?

Today is a great opportunity; start making changes in your daily habits starting today! You may think: I will do this, but what is the point, since the others don't do it? And the others think the same. Great changes come from a few people...

#### **5. Personal contribution to the domain**

Little children best learn from imitating the adults. Concerning the waste issue, however, by looking around them, the children hardly have whom to learn from, as the grownups are not educated in this aspect, so that the importance of educating the next generation becomes thus even greater.

I would like to invite you to join and share your experience, ideas of waste-free shopping anywhere in Romania on the group I created, "*Mai puține plasticuri*" [14] on Facebook, or learn more about my activities in Cluj-Napoca for the little ones and their parents at the baby club I run [15]. I am

working with preschool children and developing an alternative educational program called “Green First Steps” [15], for groups were we have activities that bring us closer to nature and workshops with subjects like: story telling about the marine life, a one week experiment with a biodegradable product and a plastic one, pretending shopping with a textile bag, learning about choosing from different possibilities of drinking water. I also do research every day and speak with people of different ages, occupations, social status, planning to compose a quiz about how many people are well informed about where their packaging ends and what difference it would make if they were better informed. I believe education is very important in changing our behavior as part of the ecosystem.

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